

# School outreach program may reduce African-American student mobility

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Outreach programs that build relationships between families and schools may reduce the number of students who change schools for reasons other than grade promotion, according to a new study from researchers at Rice University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Columbia University.

The researchers used data from a five-year study that examined the [negative consequences](#) of students changing schools for reasons other than grade promotion and the impact of an outreach program designed to enhance relationships between families and [school](#) personnel.

The study found that the outreach program reduced mobility of African-American students by 29 percent. The program had no significant impact on other ethnic groups.

"There's a substantial amount of evidence suggesting that [student mobility](#) poses serious problems for the students who change schools, as well as their schools, teachers and even peers who do not change schools," said Ruth López Turley, an associate professor of sociology at Rice and director of the Houston Education Research Consortium.

"Although some types of school moves can have positive effects, most are associated with a range of negative outcomes, including lower test scores, grade retention, low self-esteem, trouble fitting into schools, dropping out and event adult substance abuse."

Turley acknowledged that the outreach program might have little impact

on students whose families are moving for economic or personal reasons. However, she said, if students are changing schools because of dissatisfaction with their current school, the program can have a significant impact on some groups.

"Reactive moves occur in response to negative events and are more common among minorities and disadvantaged families," Turley said. "And they are the type of move most frequently associated with harmful consequences. Outreach programs can help develop [trusting relationships](#) between families and school personnel and make it less likely for students to move because they are dissatisfied with their educational experience."

The study, conducted between 2008 and 2012, targeted first-grade students and their families in 52 elementary schools in Phoenix and San Antonio. Twenty-six of the schools were randomly selected and offered an outreach program called Families and Schools Together (FAST), an intensive eight-week, multifamily after-school program designed to empower parents, promote child resilience and improve relations of trust and shared expectations within families and among parents, families and school personnel. Data were collected during the participants' first-grade year, with follow-ups at the end the second year and a final survey at the end of the third year.

The cities and schools were selected because of their high proportions of Hispanic students and students eligible for the national school lunch program. Approximately 15 percent of the participants were Caucasian, just over 70 percent were Hispanic and nearly 10 percent were African-American, with less than 5 percent a combination of other racial or ethnic groups. The study is the first of its kind to investigate the effects of FAST on school mobility, Turley said.

The authors hope the study will encourage more attention to be paid to

the issue of school mobility, which Turley said affects not only student outcomes but also the effectiveness of school outreach programs that often incorrectly assume the students will remain in the school long enough to benefit.

"If similar school-based programs can promote social capital among parents within a school community and reduce mobility, this could benefit many [students](#) and schools," Turley said.

Jeremy Fiel, a Ph.D. student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Anna Haskins, a postdoctoral research scientist at Columbia University, co-authored the study, which will appear in an upcoming issue of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

**More information:** [aer.sagepub.com/content/early/ ...  
31213499962.abstract](http://aer.sagepub.com/content/early/.../31213499962.abstract)

Provided by Rice University

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