ON THE MOVE – STUDENT MOBILITY
AND THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
College of Education

May 2011
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Several people have made significant contributions and sacrifices for the completion of this culminating project. I appreciate all those who have given me support through their encouragement and great patience. Academia is something I thoroughly enjoy, and I have grown tremendously throughout this educational process.

With me, family is first. My husband, Rick, displays an amazing amount of patience with me and the endeavors I take on. He has always been by my side throughout our joys and sadness in our lives. Rick’s support was admirable when I decided to return to school in 1989 to pursue a teaching degree which started with an Associates, Bachelors, Masters, Administrative Credentials, and now Doctorate of Education Degree. His love and support runs deep, and I am blessed to have him in my life.

Our daughters and their families, Lindsay (Michael and Claire), Erica (Ben, Steven, and Emily) and Kelly, were always there reminding me of what we instill upon them: Always finish what you begin! Keep the commitment! I thought it was important for them to never give up, and they have reminded me of the same. Their love and support keeps me going. Not to be forgotten is the angel in our lives, our daughter, Sara. Her spirit lives on and her husband, Jeff, is still part of the family.

Without Washington State University making the decision to branch out to Vancouver, I would not have had the opportunity to continue my education. It was in 1990 when I first started at WSU, and I have grown academically as the university has grown in size.

When acknowledging those who have been instrumental in this writing process, the first person who deserves great honors is my WSU chairperson, Dr. Paul Goldman. His patience and
guidance has been insurmountable throughout this journey. He allowed me the room to handle what came my way in my personal life, from the birth of three beautiful grandchildren to the death of two family members. Then, when the time was right, Paul would send an email to remind me that he was still there for me.

Dr. Gay Selby is the reason why I have a successful my career today. I thank her for the guidance during my administrative coursework and the conversations about decisions in my career. She encouraged me to take risks and face “change,” and I grew tremendously because of her encouragement. Gay has provided me with the strength to know there are many doors in my life, and it will always be exciting to know which one opens for me.

Another person who has guided me in this process is Dr. Susan Finley. Her class was the beginning of my doctorate program and was foundational to this study. It is because of the student mobility research I completed in her class that I felt compelled to continue the passion that I have for this population. Susan encouraged me to continue writing, and her praise has been empowering.

This study could not have been completed without the Jackson Heights’ staff and students. Their willingness to share their experiences and perceptions with me is appreciated, and they give this topic the depth for understanding student mobility.

There are countless more people who have been supportive during this journey. Family and friends alike were encouraging in many ways. The support and energy derived from those around me leads me to the completion of this study. Our family believes that faith, family and friends help us through our challenges in life.
ON THE MOVE – STUDENT MOBILITY
AND THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Abstract

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May 2011

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A growing problem for urban schools is the students who move numerous times throughout the year from school to school whether in the same district or a neighboring district. Little is known about the mobile students’ experiences when entering a school community and what the staff’s perceptions and responses may be of this mobility. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of mobile students’ experiences and staff perceptions of mobile students within the school community. Using data from interviewing nine mobile students and twelve staff members from a Washington urban middle school, this case study examines how a school community’s practices align with mobile students’ experiences. The results vary with some students adjusting to the community with much more ease than others who struggle to feel a part of the school community. All students were concerned about their social adjustment and making friends. A majority of the mobile students were failing their classes. Staff members’ interview responses also varied with some staff members sharing the strategies they use to integrate new students, some staff members say they integrate new students but do little, and other staff members who would rather have the new students “fit in” and follow the classroom expectations from the start. This study highlights the importance of reflecting on the mobile
student population, their adjustment to the school community and what support systems are in place to meet the needs of these students.

Student mobility greatly affects the development of relationships with teachers and peers, continuity in curriculum and student learning, and regular attendance; however increased efforts are needed to be made in implementing strategies to build a welcoming school community and to reduce the negative effects of mobility. Such efforts and recommendations include professional development opportunities for staff, effective and efficient records transfers, multi-layered instructional programs, consistent curriculum and instruction, Welcome Centers, peer mentor program, Family Resource Centers, and other means to connect with students and their families.
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Dedication

For my daughter, Sara Jo Backous Mielke,

who accomplished so much in her short life.

1978-1999
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

While the mobility of children is often a reflection of underlying family issues such as shortages of affordable housing, changes in marital status, or unemployment, it is the schools that must face the difficult challenge of meeting the educational needs of children who change schools frequently (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994, p.2).

Knowing every child by name and need becomes a difficult task for educators when children frequently move. Individualizing instruction to meet the needs of students often contributes to increasing overall school performance, however raising student achievement scores is one of the predominant challenges facing education policymakers, administrators, and teachers today. Educators value special programs and curriculum that are designed to meet the needs of many children, yet schools must meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as regulated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to keep the funding. Raising achievement scores and improving schools requires a closer examination and increased understanding of factors that influence performance in schools. Some of these factors include the quality of teaching, curriculum, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and student mobility. While many of these factors have been investigated and recommendations of improvement have been made, the impact of student mobility on academic success has left many educators puzzled. How does student mobility impact the academic progress of students? How does the school community of staff and students assist in the welcoming and adjustment process for students who enroll during the school year so they feel ready to learn?
This research reviewed information relating to the factors underlying why students are mobile, how a school community responds to mobile students who enter their system, and what implications mobility may have on students’ academic progress. Interviews with mobile students from an urban middle school gave insight on whether students who enrolled part way during the school year connected to their new school community and how long their adjustment may have taken. These mobile students were provided a voice as they shared their perspective on their mobility and their entrance into a new school community part way into the school year. In addition, some of the school’s teachers, para-educators and administrators were interviewed to capture their perspective on how student mobility impacts their school community and the possible implications mobility may have on decision making and practice in the school.

Many educators, especially in urban schools, are aware of the challenges that student mobility creates in their schools and classrooms. With eleven years of teaching in one of the highest student mobility rated elementary schools in the district, I became very concerned about the students entering and exiting my classroom. As one student moved away, another moved in to stay for only a month. I felt as if I had a revolving door. I found that the constant movement of the students who entered and exited the classroom strongly influenced the classroom environment. As a teacher, I found my response to student mobility may have greatly impacted the classroom community. Mobile children can interfere with a teacher’s ability to organize and deliver instruction. The U.S. General Accounting Office (1994) indicates that teachers may find it difficult to assess the needs of such new children, determine their past educational experiences, and provide instruction that builds on these experiences. These tasks may be especially difficult when many new children enter the classroom throughout the year,
often with no advance notice. Children may be exposed to curriculums that vary greatly across schools and districts, and they feel lost academically.

Frustration sets in as a teacher’s energy is focused on “catching up” the new student, only to have him leave in a few weeks or months. Eventually, the continuous classroom interruptions or “revolving door” may introduce negativity to the classroom environment and less conducive to learning for all students. Often times, stable students are idling along while the teacher’s focus is directed toward the newly enrolled students. The balance of the teacher’s attention between stable and mobile students may play an important role in the consistency of all students’ learning and maintaining a positive learning environment. Eventually, there may be a “flattening” of curricular pace and schools with high mobility rates continue to lag behind their stable counterparts (Kerbow, 1996).

**Previous Study**

The inspiration of this study stems from a smaller case study I conducted during Spring 2002 within my own fifth grade classroom in the highest mobility elementary school in the district. This arts-based qualitative inquiry was designed to reflect upon the perspectives of a teacher and her students and how students are accepted and feel when they enter a new classroom for the first time.

This prior research was conducted over a three-week period during the last part of the second trimester of school. Four classroom roster changes were made within those three weeks by adding three new students and having one of those three leave. Seven of the 22 fifth graders had attended only one school since kindergarten whereas another seven of the 22 students moved into the school this school year. The students in my classroom had the opportunity to
formulate and express their views on their mobility through literature, art, math, and writing activities. It was through their paintings that the mobile students were most freely able to illustrate their feelings about entering a school for the first time. Likewise, the non-mobile students were able to express how they felt when students joined their classroom. A variety of feelings were expressed by all the students including sadness, happiness, fear, and nervousness.

Noticing how students might “fit” into the classroom community both socially and academically will assist in a smoother transition for all concerned. Eisner (1998, p.66) states, “In classrooms, knowing the history of the situation, something about the teacher and the school and the values that are regarded as important in the community can help us to notice and to interpret what we have noticed.” Teachers assess new students’ social and academic needs from their moment of entry into a classroom, and they interpret these initial assessments to design personalized instruction for the students.

An important part of being an educator is taking the time to reflect on teaching practices. This inquiry led me, as the teacher, to reflect and adjust educational goals for building relationships that quickly bonds new students with my classroom community. Eisner (1998, p. 114) challenges educational researchers by asking, “Does it [research] contribute to the improvement of education?” In answer to Eisner, some researchers (Finley et al., 2000) feel that “reflection enhances research in much the same way as it enhances teaching practice” (Finley et al., 2000, p.8).

Now, as an administrator in a middle school with a high mobility rate, I find student mobility becoming a puzzling dilemma as budgets and funding are tied to student numbers and students’ standardized test scores. Administrators in high mobility rated schools may find their
full-time-equivalent (FTE) numbers rather fluid and unstable. Many times teaching staff is added or deleted as student numbers fluctuate. Educational leaders scramble to locate and promote “best practices” to maintain or increase student achievement scores while their population appears to be constantly changing. A large part of an administrator’s role as an educational leader is to cultivate and nourish a learning community that is conducive to academic progress. The learning environment is built upon visions and goals that are created and all stakeholders including students, staff, parents, and the neighboring community are encouraged to embrace these visions and goals. Leadership response to student mobility sets the tone for the entire school community response. Superintendent Steven Webb (2007) shares his views with the school administrators, “All kids have three basic needs: to feel safe and secure, to feel loved and a sense of belonging, and to feel competent and capable. Community building is essential in creating the type of classroom climate, expectations and norms that begin to create the context for those needs being met” (Webb, 2007, p.1).

The urgency of improving student achievement is forefront in most stakeholders’ minds as it is the focus of the national school reform and school funding. High stakes tests such as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is used to gauge student progress. The WASL recognizes academic progress in 37 subgroups but unfortunately does not recognize the mobile student population which creates some difficulty in analyzing the impact of student mobility. Students may enroll the day the test is administered and enrollment dates are not recorded on the test. When reviewing the student demographics and enrollment/withdraw records, one may determine that student mobility and poverty may include many of the same students.
The pressure of highly publicized state assessments such as the WASL drives the need to move quickly to close the achievement gap and to make adequate yearly progress. The urgency and pressure to close the achievement gap may cause educators to develop tunnel vision that is focused solely on teaching academics causing them to overlook the need to build relationships that promote a safe, comfortable learning environment that is conducive to student learning. Jonathan Kozol (2005) shares that the tests control more than a quarter of the school year. With that in mind, one may conclude that schools are teaching to the test, not considering the “whole child” and his individual needs.

The brief amount of time for teaching new concepts may affect learning for mobile students. A student may join a class midway through a school year with little or no connections to his new community. Most mobile students will not be ready for the academic aspects of their new environment until they feel like a member of the school community through a social support system based on building relationships and meeting the student’s basic needs of feeling safe, loved, and competent. There is not a prescribed amount of time that will automatically make the mobile students’ adjustments successful. A mobile student may be extremely unhappy about another move. A teacher’s response to her new student and the student mobility in her classroom greatly influences the other students’ responses and cultivates the learning environment. If a teacher expresses frustration and discontent with the arrival of a new student, the students will pick up on her response and respond similarly. A student will settle in and be ready to learn when he feels safe and secure in his new environment.

A teacher’s knowledge and skill of teaching also influences the mobile students’ adjustments to the learning community. Even though many districts have standardized
curriculum, each teacher paces the lessons and adjusts the rigor for each class causing confusion and frustration as a student enters a new school. As a student moves from district to district, curriculum varies causing more of a setback to a student’s academic growth. Teachers are challenged with assessing new students’ knowledge and making connections in the curriculum while trying to fill any gaps for these mobile students.

A review of “best practices” for educators with regard to mobile students was examined in this study, but more importantly this study unveiled theoretical assumptions about social life and social support systems among staff and students in school communities. As a student enrolls in a school for the first time, many people are involved in the process including the office clerks, secretary, teachers, administrators, para-educators, and the stable student population. This research addressed the responses to and support systems for mobile students at both the school and classroom levels where strategies may or may not have been implemented. In addition, this study examined the similarities and differences between highly mobile students and poverty students. This investigation unveiled what an entire school community can establish to assure that mobile students have every opportunity to be academically successful.

**Statement of the Problem**

A school community that is based on meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of all students will more likely experience success. Academic success seems to be the measuring stick for school funding and one predictor of overall financial success in a person’s life. With academic success being held with high regard, educators are faced with the challenge of meeting all students’ needs even those who are in their classrooms for a short
while.

Although educators are provided opportunities to continue training in their specialized curricular areas, there appears to be a heightened need to be trained in successful classroom and school social support systems to create an emotionally safe and nurturing environment that is conducive to learning, especially for mobile students. Are teachers willing to add one more thing to their plate by focusing on students’ adjustment to their classroom in addition to assessing their curricular knowledge? Do they view student mobility in negative terms which ultimately affects their teaching, classroom environment, and school community? The U.S. General Accounting Office (1994, p. 9) shares teachers’ frustration,

When children enter classrooms after the beginning of the year, teachers may prejudge them unfavorably. Teachers in schools with high proportions of children who change schools after the beginning of the year indicated that these school changes disrupt classroom instruction, and teachers must spend additional time on non-instructional tasks. Teachers may not have the time to identify gaps in such a child’s knowledge; moreover, these gaps may grow as the child is left on his or her own to make sense of the new curriculum and its relation to the one at the previous school.

It may be that teachers’ own assumptions about students who are mobile may need to be challenged to create classrooms that are more responsive to all students’ needs. This may be a difficult change for some teachers to be more proficient and responsive to mobile students’ needs.

In addition to a teacher’s affect on a mobile student’s adjustment into a school and classroom environment, other students affect the ease of the welcoming process. What
messages are mobile students receiving from the other students as they enter the already established classroom environment? Do mobile students feel welcomed, secure, and safe among their peers? The acceptance of one another is a valuable social skill that students may need to be taught above and beyond the curriculum and carry with them into college, career and life.

The need to accept and respond to student mobility within the school community is becoming more apparent as mobility rates rise. In general, society has become increasingly mobile with jobs taking families to different locations and lack of employment displacing other families from their neighborhoods. In 2005, Oregon schools experienced nearly 18,000 students transferring into a new school following winter break (Hammond & Melton, 2005). The generations of stability have passed, and we are encouraged to learn to accept change even in our schools and classrooms.

**Purpose of the Study**

With society becoming increasingly mobile, schools may be experiencing an increase in student mobility. The ebb and flow of student populations may be an issue that many educators are not prepared to handle. Teachers may find themselves with increased numbers of English Language Learners and Special Education students within their classrooms as mobility increases. In addition, the continued pressure to increase student achievement to maintain school funding may create tunnel vision as educators focus intently on getting through the curriculum and not focus on the “whole child.” This focus may end up creating more of an academic deficit than gain because a student’s emotional well-being, self-esteem and sense of security is not nurtured which may cause him to be unmotivated to learn. The purpose of this
study is to gain insight into the school community’s acceptance of and response to students who enroll part way into the school year and how mobile students’ academic progress may be affected by their mobility.

The intent of this study is to empower educators to continue to reflect upon their school community and the academic and social adjustments that students have to make when they enter the community throughout the school year. Some may feel they already respond positively to mobile students and understand the mobile students’ limitations and needs while others have not even considered the impact of mobility on the school community. Then again, there are those who frown upon new students entering mid-year. Is the possible negativity toward mobile students based on the interruption in the classroom and/or the affect they may have on adequate yearly progress on a high stakes standardized test? The teacher’s heavy sigh or rolling of her eyes sends a negative message to all students when a new student enters the classroom. Are teachers and administrators overlooking the groundwork that needs to be established to welcome a mobile student into the classroom and school community? What do teachers and administrators say about their work with mobile students? Are they tolerant of these students?

In addition to examining the teachers’ and administrators’ views on student mobility, this study reveals the mobile student’s perspective on entering a new school’s environment. How long did it take for them to build relationships and feel a part of the community? Was it difficult to make friends? What was most difficult about entering the new school community? Mobile students may feel “ready to learn” once they feel welcomed, socially secure, and accepted by their teachers and peers.
What can be done to improve a school system to assist in mobile students’ adjustments to a new school and promote student learning? The purpose of this study was to examine a middle school’s practices with mobile students as they enter the school community. This study sought perspectives from the mobile students, teachers, para-educators, and administrators with regard to how a student is welcomed into the school community along with how a mobile student’s academics may be affected by changing schools. The results of this study may prove valuable to others in the field of education as they examine school communities and mobile students.

**Methodology Overview**

This ethnographic case study is based on the mobile student population at Jackson Heights Middle School, an urban public school in the state of Washington. This school had the highest mobility rate for middle schools in the district and was “in need of improvement” status with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction due to not making adequate yearly progress in some of the state’s standardized test categories. Students, teachers, para-educators, and administrators were individually interviewed to gain information surrounding student mobility, factors underlying mobility, and mobile student’s academic progress. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes each and notes were taken along with being recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After transcribing the interviews, the data was sorted by reoccurring themes. The triangulation of the data was completed through the different perspectives gained by interviewing four different stakeholders in the Jackson Heights school community: administrators, teachers, para-educators, and students. A more detailed explanation of this study’s methodology may be found in Chapter 3.
Moving Forward

Education is constantly changing as it is modified to meet the diverse needs of the students. As research continues to address the many factors that affect student learning, it will broaden perspectives and may cause educators to take time to reflect on their school community and improve their classroom practices. As this research progressed, implications and assumptions surrounding mobile students were revealed, discussed, and reflected upon with the intent to impact educational practice.
CHAPTER 2
FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING

The following literature review begins by exploring the definition of student mobility. Next, a review of the factors underlying student mobility will be followed by a review of literature about the impact of mobility on student academic progress. A portion of this literature review illustrates how classroom teachers and educational leaders address student mobility within their environments. The characteristics of an effective school community in relation to academic success will be discussed in the final section of this review.

Defining Mobility

Mobility is movement. Webster’s New World Dictionary (1998) describes mobility as “moving, or capable of moving or being moved, from place to place” (p. 870). Student mobility figures measure how often a student changes schools. Because a definition has not been standardized beyond the obvious “students changing schools” commonality, researchers have designed a wide variety of parameters within their definitions and calculated differing formulas in student mobility figures and rates. This lack of standardizing a definition and the creation of various formulas presents difficulties when comparing one mobility study to the next. Some form of mobility rate is typically reported by school districts. These rates, however, are not often comparable across districts because different formulas as well as time frames are used for their calculations (Kerbow, 1996).

Generally speaking, the term “mobile” may be agreed upon as meaning “movement.” It becomes more controversial when researchers attempt to define “highly mobile.” Many studies calculate the mobility rate by the total of new student entries and withdrawals during the school
year divided by the total opening day official enrollment (Fowler-Finn, 2001). Some studies hold a broader definition by providing evidence that changing schools once in a three year period has an impact on standardized tests (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003). Other studies claim that students who are highly mobile move six or more times in the course of their K-12 education (Walls, 2003). Additional studies use “stability rates” instead of mobility rates hoping to gain a clearer meaning of the level of mobility in a school by separating out the entry and exit statistics (Kerbow, 1996).

Once mobility rates are calculated by districts, very different phenomena may be at work in schools with the same mobility rate. Kerbow (1996) explains the one school may lose a number of its students who are replaced by new transfers during the year and have the same rate as a school that loses a small percentage of its students but gains in enrollment during the year. In the first scenario, a continued flow of new students move through the school’s classrooms. There may not even be a core group of stable students who remain over several years. The second school is more likely to have a consistent base of students who are joined by those newly enrolled.

School districts join researchers in varying their definitions and parameters of mobility. This study used school district’s definition of students being mobile if they have been enrolled in a school for less than an entire school year (partial year). Even though this is the figure that the district uses most often in their publications, they have the capability of tracking a school’s mobility rates over an extended number of years. They have been unable to successfully track individual student mobility rates due to inadequate transfer of student records from district to district. For the purpose of this study, I aligned the definition of student mobility with the
district’s definition: a student enrolled for less than an entire school year or a partial year.

It is important to clearly establish the definition of student mobility when gathering and analyzing mobility data. Research results may vary accordingly to the different definitions and parameters being used. In addition, it may be difficult to compare one school district or research study to another when student mobility is not similarly defined.

**Causes and Characteristics of Mobility**

Academic success is desired by all educational stakeholders, especially with school funding controlled by whether a school makes adequately yearly progress on standardized tests or not. However, funding should not stem on a child’s gap in his education due to frequent changes in schools. Each student, whether mobile or stable, deserves personalized instruction that meets his own needs for academic growth; however the NCLB school reform expects all students to succeed despite the obstacles that may block their academic success. These obstacles may include emotional, physical and mental factors that may prevent students from learning. The U.S. General Accounting Office (1994) argues, “Unless policymakers focus greater attention on the needs of children who have changed schools frequently—often low-income, inner city, migrant, and limited English proficient (LEP)—these children may continue to be low achieving in math and reading, as well as to repeat a grade” (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994, p. 1). The negative relationship of student mobility on performance and standardized test scores is troubling.

Success on standardized testing is particularly troublesome in urban schools where student mobility is more common. Inner city students are more likely to change schools frequently (Walls, 2003). A child living in an urban area may move only a short distance, yet
move into a new school in the same district or even a neighboring district because of the densely populated area, whereas a child in a suburban or urban area may move several miles and still attend the same school. Many urban schools find themselves exchanging students. The U.S. General Accounting Office (1994) indicates one-fourth of third graders in inner city schools have changed schools frequently, that is, have attended three or more schools since first grade. In comparison, only about one-seventh of children from rural or suburban areas or from small cities or towns have changed schools frequently. Frequent moves from school to school put students, particularly poor urban students, as well as their teachers, at a disadvantage (Fowler-Finn, 2001). Previous research has not focused on intra-district mobility that occurs within urban settings (Kerbow, 1996). Such patterns of mobility may likely have different consequences compared to moves into other settings such as military families and families who moved more than 50 miles (Kerbow, 1996).

A decline in achievement is associated with mobility (Kerbow, 1996). In addition, highly mobile students are twice as likely to repeat a grade (Walls, 2003). It may take four to six months for mobile students to recover academically from a transfer, and they are half as likely to graduate from high school as their non-mobile peers (Walls, 2003). Students who move only once will most likely take a few months to adjust, making up any deficient and return to a “normal” achievement; however, this is not the same experience for students who experience multiple changes in school. The adjustment period becomes extended across years and several different schools. Kerbow (1996, p. 20) compares the academic differences between mobile and stable students,

Mobile students’ achievement growth is less than that of their stable counterparts.
These differences increase as the number of school changes accumulates. Students experiencing numerous moves fall further behind their stable counterparts as their education progresses. The gap is approximately one full year of growth by the sixth year for those students who change schools four or more times.

A mobile student’s social support system within the school community is interrupted when leaving one school and entering another. Educators and schools play a critical role in helping students adjust to their new schools as changing schools may be extremely stressful. Teachers tend to emphasize building relationships more following extended school breaks as research shows that students and schools benefit most from stability at the beginning of the school year and after winter break when the community-building process takes place (Nakagawa et al., 2002).

Many mobile students are living lives filled with disruptions that negatively impact their daily attendance at school and their ability to learn. Highly mobile students include the children of migrant workers, military families, immigrant families, and homeless children, youths and families. Demie (2002) indicates there are three factors that may help in understanding the nature of highly mobile students: eligibility for free school meals, English language fluency, and ethnic background. Children who attend inner city schools or are from low-income families are more likely than others to change schools frequently (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). Of third graders from low-income families (income less than $10,000 per year), 30 percent have attended more than one school in the previous two years compared with 10 percent from families with incomes of $25,000 or more (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). Often their home situations are faced with domestic violence,
unstable work, and high poverty (Walls, 2003). Such students tend to be of lower socioeconomic status, with unstable housing and family situations (Nakagawa et al., 2002; Demie, 2002). The instability of their lives leaves students and families focused on day-to-day survival and unfocused on long-term goals involving academics. Because mobile students may have personal and family situations that contribute to their mobility, studies may need to take into account those prior characteristics in order to determine whether mobility itself is the cause of lower achievement.

As Walls (2003) points out poverty is one factor underlying student mobility. Likewise, research shows that mobility is a common phenomenon that disproportionately affects students in high-poverty schools (Smith, Fien, Paine, 2008). When examining poverty as an underlying cause of mobility, it may become difficult to determine whether it is factors of poverty or factors of mobility that impact a student’s academic progress. Both affect student learning. The U.S. General Accounting Office (1994) addresses student mobility and academics by indicating that of the nation’s third graders who have changed schools frequently, 41 percent are low achievers (below grade level) in reading, compared with 26 percent of third-graders who have never changed schools (Table 1). Similar results were found in math (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). As noted in Table 1, as the number of schools attended increases, the percentage of below grade level reading students also increases. Therefore, the more a child changes schools, the larger the possibility she will be below grade level. There is an interruption or disconnect with the curriculum from one school to the next which may cause students to fall behind. In addition, the social adjustment to a new school environment may cause a delay in learning.
Table 1  
*Mobility and Reading Level of Third Graders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Schools Attended</th>
<th>Percentage of students below grade level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 or more schools</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Dunn’s (2003) research found that a student who moved at least once in a three year period has a score of 2.5 percentile points lower than a similar student who did not move. This research shows that mobility almost certainly hurts a student’s academic performance. Dunn indicates that students learn better when exposed to a cohesive course of study that reinforces and builds upon previously learned concepts. Synchronized or standardized curriculum assists in some academic loss when a student transfers within a district.

When sorting out mobility from poverty, one must remember that many mobile students are from poverty homes, and children from poverty homes tend to struggle academically. Numerous studies have shown childhood poverty to be highly correlated with poor performance in academics, lower IQ scores, and an increased risk of dropping out of school (Jones, 2007). When poverty children experience mobility they may miss key concepts in their education which are prerequisites for higher order skills, especially in math (Kerbow, 1996). They may leave one school learning one concept and enter another that is on a completely different concept. Students who experience high mobility and poverty have a greater academic disadvantage than students who attend only one school.

In addition to poverty, race has been used as an indicator for student mobility and
academic success. The U.S. General Accounting Office (1994) found that third-graders who are Native American, Black, or Hispanic are more likely to change schools frequently than those who are Asian or White (Table 2). However, these differences are less related to race or ethnicity than to differences in income (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). While some schools focus solely on closing the achievement gap on race, Tough (2006) shares that many people wonder whether focusing on race is the most useful approach. He suggests that perhaps schools should concentrate on correcting the academic disadvantages of the poor students (keep in mind the difficulty in deciphering poor from mobile students in urban schools). Tough indicates that there has been evidence that poor children fall behind rich and middle-class children early, and stay behind, but researchers have not been able to isolate the reasons for the divergence. Payne (1998) supports Tough’s findings that poor children are more likely to suffer developmental delays and damage than non-poor children regardless of their race or ethnicity. Payne asserts that children raised in low-income families score lower than children from more affluent families do on assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage likely to change schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Table 2

*Table 2: Nation’s Third Graders by Race Who are More Likely to Change Schools*

Deficit Theory

Poverty begins to affect the academic achievement of children during infancy. Intensive research on language acquisition of children in poverty, working class, and professional families conducted by Hart and Risley (1995), shows that language acquisition differed sharply by socio-economic class and the gap opened early. By age three, children whose parents were on welfare had vocabularies of about 525 words, whereas children of professionals had vocabularies of approximately 1,100 words. (Table 3) The children’s I.Q. correlated closely to their vocabularies. Hart and Risley conclude that the size of each child’s vocabulary correlated most closely to one simple factor: the number of words the parents spoke to the child which varied by class. With the number of words a child hears increased, the complexity of the language increases (Hart & Risley, 1995). In the professional homes, parents averaged 487 “utterances” to their children each hour and children in welfare homes heard 178 utterances per hour. Rothstein (2008) shares that poor children are not exposed to complex language and large vocabularies and, in general, are not read to aloud as often as children from middle class and professional homes. Several hours of preschool could not “undo” what the children lacked in language for their first three years.

Table 3
Vocabulary by Age 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Household</th>
<th>Number of Words Spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language acquisition is the foundation to knowledge and eventually academic success. Hart and Risley’s study also compares the number of encouragements to the number of discouragements heard by children. By age three, the average child of professional homes heard approximately 500,000 encouragements and 80,000 discouragements. In contrast, the welfare children heard approximately 75,000 encouragements and 200,000 discouragements. (Table 4) By examining Hart and Risley’s study, one may conclude that children from professional households are given more encouragements which may enhance their language acquisition and vocabulary development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Household</th>
<th>Number of Encouragements</th>
<th>Number of Discouragements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Language development is one deficit that low-income children start school with. Rothstein (2008) indicates other experiences or lack of experiences may inhibit intellectual growth. Their parents have low-wage jobs and are more frequently laid off, causing family stress as many fall behind in rent and forced to move. Stress around financial strain may cause more arbitrary discipline (Rothstein, 2008). The neighborhoods in which these children live and walk through to school have more crime and drugs and fewer professional adult role models. More often, children of poverty live in single-parent families and get less adult attention, fewer cross-country trips, music or dance lessons, and organized sports leagues to
develop their ambition, cultural awareness, and self-confidence (Rothstein, 2008). These disadvantages contribute to the achievement gap between low-income and middle class children.

As Tough (2006) indicates, the knowledge gap widens as children enter school. In his study, the poverty families were more mobile than the working class and professional families, losing continuity of instruction. The significant difference has educational leaders asserting that an “equal” education is not good enough for these mobile, poor students. Tough (2006) indicates that students who enter middle school significantly behind grade level need a better education than most American middle-class students receive, because they need to catch up.

Providing an equitable education rather than an equal education takes in factors such as student demographics and academic progress. Not all children have the same needs as they may have academic deficiencies or “holes” in their education that require interventions, however high standards must be kept while filling these “holes.”

The deficit theory should not be used as an excuse to justify different academic expectations for students and to set lower academic standards for mobile or poverty students. Students must be given the high expectations, and it is the responsibility of the educators to respond with interventions and individualize instruction so students can reach these goals. Gorski (2008) claims that the deficit theory is the most destructive tool in the culture of classism. This classism is wide-spread and well documented (Kozol, 2005). In education, we often define students by their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Gorski (2008) explains that the deficit theory takes the attitude that poor people are poor because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies rather than from gross inequities. He further shares, “Deficit
theorists use two strategies for propagating this world view: (1) drawing on well-established stereotypes, and (2) ignoring systemic conditions, such as inequitable access to high-quality schools, that support the cycle of poverty” (Gorski, 2008, p. 32). Children of poverty must overcome gross inequities to learn. Cooper (1998, p. iii) also elicits the need to break through the deficit theory mindset,

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high-expectations instruction which the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures.

Hidden beliefs and rules are embedded in the deficit theory. Middle-class norms and hidden rules of the middle class often inhibit many educators’ understanding and expectations of poverty students (Payne, 1998). In addition, mobile and/or poverty students may have their own hidden rules and must be taught the rules that will help make them successful and school and work (Lareau, 2000). What might educators be doing to shed their own middle class values so they might understand the needs of these students?

Rothstein (2008) argues that the effects of socioeconomic disparities must be acknowledged and is a vital step in closing the achievement gap. He claims, if two groups of students were sent to equally high quality schools, the group with greater socioeconomic disadvantage will have lower than average achievement than the fortunate group. Of course, there are exceptions to each group of students where there may be some high-achieving disadvantage students outperforming middle class students. These exceptions are rarely
noticed as the achievement gap is based on average achievement of students from disadvantaged and middle class families together.

Poverty intertwines with mobility and is difficult to separate when examining the impact on student learning. As previously stated, many highly mobile students are living in poverty, and their situation gives them a disadvantage in learning. Their deficits upon entering school should not cause academic expectations to be lowered. Instead, interventions that respond to the students’ needs should be put in place to fill the gaps in their learning and seek academic success.

**Leading the School Community**

The key to addressing student mobility and academic success is the establishment of a school community that invites all students to learn. Unfortunately, there appears to be an unclear consensus on understanding the hows and whys of various notions of school community (Westheimer, 1995). When examining student achievement, reflection on best practices in teaching and effective leadership gives insight to successes and improvements within the community. The success of a school is typically measured by student performance on standardized tests such as the WASL. This measure of accountability places a tremendous amount of pressure on school leaders as they strive to build a community that makes adequately yearly progress as outlined in the NCLB policy. Even though Richard Elmore (2005) suggests that the introduction of performance-based accountability has changed the demands in leadership, he clarifies the misconception that schools were not accountable before performance-based accountability. He claims that schools are always accountable regardless of the policies they operate under.
Elmore’s theory of improvement is based on internal accountability where all stakeholders are involved in the process instead of external accountability with a “top down” approach. Improvement is a continuous developmental process that requires different types of knowledge and skills at successive developmental stages. As internal accountability develops, schools become more effective as organizations (communities) rather than groups of individuals. Elmore stresses that “agency” or “locus of control” occurs when moving from a culture where the work of the organization is the sum of the work of the individuals to a culture in which the work of individuals is shaped by collective expectations, values, and commitments. (Elmore, 2005)

School improvement comes from practice as well as process and is rarely a linear process. Elmore (2005) shares that accountable leadership focuses on the development of internal accountability where people in schools primarily learn values and expectations through practice. Educators have to gain access to knowledge through professional development opportunities and assimilate that knowledge into their practice. They must learn to do new things to improve student learning and improve their schools’ performance. Teachers demonstrate to those around them that they are willing to be lifelong learners. Elmore also stresses that leadership is distributed according to expertise and around focused problem-solving in the organization. Shared leadership opportunities provide a sense of invested belonging to a community. (Elmore, 2005)

Westheimer (1995) addresses successful school communities and the importance of nurturing a sense of purpose and affiliation in the students. This sense of purpose must be embedded in the community. Westheimer offers an overview of the five most common
features of a school community: shared beliefs, interaction and participation, interdependence, concern for individual and minority views, and meaningful relationships. The social interdependence of all stakeholders in the school community begins with a shared philosophy that is nurtured by the community members. Westheimer argues that schools must provide a sense of connection and purpose so learning can take place. It is through social interactions and association that members of the community satisfy their need for attachment and social bonds. Perhaps with the building of relationships and connectedness, mobile students adapt to the new school community quicker and feel safe to focus on their academics.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) stress that professional learning communities represent the best hope for creating an environment where all students can learn and for sustained school improvement. The transformation of the traditional school environment into a results-oriented, knowledge-based community requires four building blocks—mission, vision, values, and goals. School stakeholders ask: What is our goal/purpose? What do we hope to become if we are true to our purpose? How must we behave in order to make our shared vision a reality? What specific and measurable steps must be taken to reach our goals? The development of a school community places a greater emphasis on relationships, shared ideals, and a strong culture that is critical to school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Stephen Covey (1989) stresses to start with the end in mind as goals are formulated within a learning environment.

The “end in mind” may require a philosophical change as the needs of highly mobile students are brought to the forefront. Behind the process of change and the building of a school community, is the leader who has the quest to do what is right. The school community must have leadership that is deeply embedded into the system (Serbiovanni, 2001). Leaders must
have a better understanding of the problems they face, get a handle on managing the problems, and learn how to live with the problems to produce change. The notion of educational leadership coincides with Sergiovanni’s belief that leadership that counts is far more cognitive in orientation than it is personality based or rules based. Idea-based leadership has the greatest potential for generating and achieving mission, vision and goals. Sergiovanni suggests a little less management and more community building through shared values and ideals that provide a moral source of authority. He stresses that connections are important to building community. Being connected to others and being connected to institutions we value is a way to become connected to ourselves, to know that we belong and count for something. Sergiovanni stresses that community satisfies the needs that teachers and students have to be connected to each other and to the school, helps everyone focus on the common good, provides students with a safe harbor in a stormy sea, builds relationships, enhances responsibility, and supports learning. The “safe harbor” within the school community will provide an opportunity for all students to succeed including highly mobile students. (Sergiovanni, 2001)

Sergiovanni (2001) emphasizes the need to build social capital within the school environment. Students and their families view social capital as evidence for a caring community. This may be the key to “hook” highly mobile students into the school community. Very often, much more emphasis is placed on the process of changing a learning community to adhere to federal and state goals and guidelines rather than the substance of change itself. Sergiovanni stresses the need to build relationships that enhances responsibility and supports learning. All stakeholders (staff, parents, and students) must construct meanings from shared philosophies that lead to common purpose and have meaningful conversations with one
another. Sergiovanni believes that leadership is embedded in ideas that encourage us to respond from within and become self-managing. Instead of “follow me”, the emphasis is on following commitments, promises, obligations, validated research, sound principles, and agreed upon standards. Westheimer (1995, p. 88) states about one school, “Mills’s teachers share a collective responsibility to the school and its students and a commitment to a collective mission and ideology that transcends to daily practice.” Similar to Elmore’s (1998) locus of control theory, Sergiovanni (2001) suggests that it is the focus on the shared values and goals that will lead educational change.

If the academic success of all students (including highly mobile) is a school community agreed upon goal, are the staff members being guided in that direction? Despite the need for all stakeholders to be sharing the same values and goals for the educational environment, the educational leader is still responsible for guiding his staff. Glickman (2004) stresses that the supervision of teachers needs to include a self-reflection model to promote teacher growth rather than mere compliance. The delicate issue of self-reflection leading to sharing values and goals is addressed by Glickman. Self-reflection and reflection of the school community and best practices help gauge whether goals are reasonable and being obtained. Reflecting as an individual and an organization may be a proactive means to align with the mission, vision, and goals which is developed and embraced by all members of the school community. This self-reflective process allows teachers to initiate their own professional development geared to improving instruction that leads to student academic progress. Teachers must be role models as continuous learners and effective collaborators in order to teach the students the same. (Fullan, 1999).
In the development of goals, the community must move beyond mediocrity as we are reminded that “good is the enemy to great” (Collins, 2001, p. 1). A school with a highly mobile population may raise the question: Are we meeting the needs of our highly mobile population or are we satisfied with their current performance? Collins (2005, p. 8) writes that “almost any organization can substantially improve its stature and performance, perhaps even become great if it conscientiously applies the framework of ideas we’ve uncovered.” Collins and his team developed a framework of concepts that have three broad stages: disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action. In his monograph, Collins describes disciplined people as being first and foremost for the organization’s cause, and their performance must be assessed relative to mission, not financial returns. Collins writes that “true leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to” (Collins, 2005, p. 13). The community will uphold the mission and vision even with the change of leadership.

The notion of “disciplined thought” stresses that one must lead with questions, not answers (Collins, 2001). Collins discusses the need to confront the brutal facts about the organization without blame. One of those brutal facts may very well be lack of academic progress of highly mobile students. This issue can no longer be swept under the rug! Collins shares three intersecting circles that illustrate the following attributes of the organization: what it is best at, passionate about, and what best drives the resource engine. In social sectors, the resource engine is shifted from being an economic engine to a resource engine and includes time, money and brand. In his monograph, Collins reminds us that in social sectors, money is only an input, and not a measure of greatness. Reputation is built upon tangible results and emotion of the heart so potential supporters believe not only in the mission, but in the capacity
to deliver on that mission (Collins, 2005).

The momentum of improvement and excellence continues to build as disciplined action produces a “flywheel affect” (Collins, 2001, p. 257). Success breeds more success and people like to support winners. Similar to Glickman’s (2004) suggestion to practice reflection to improve the learning community, Collins (2005, p. 1) suggests a culture of discipline where stakeholders are asked, “How effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources?” Collins shares that great organizations clearly differentiate between their core values (which will never change) and operating strategies and cultural practices (which endlessly adapt to a changing world).

Moving school communities from good to great requires shared values and discipline. This may require a change in philosophy and practice. Time is clearly a factor as change never happens in one fell swoop. Many times change brings discomfort that stakeholders must face. Westheimer (1995) insists that dissenting voices are drawn out in legitimate spaces, such as meetings and planning sessions and not in hallways and parking lots. Discomfort is a condition of creative problem solving. Fullan (1999) illustrates the breakthroughs that occur when we begin to think of conflict, diversity and resistance as positive, absolutely essential forces for success. Fullan claims there is no “silver bullet” theory for change as the change process is too intricate and organic to be captured in any single model. Each organization has its own needs. There should be a delicate balance maintained between too much and too little structure and learning occurs on the edge of chaos. Fullan (1999) warns that leaders should not try to micromanage change through lots of rules, rigid structures and formal channels of communication. He believes that a system should be set up with people based learning framed
by a few key priorities.

Even though there is no magic formula or “silver bullet” in moving a school community from good to great, Kotter (1996) answers the question about why some changes take effect and stay around for a while and why other changes come and go like the wind. He shares Collins’ (2001) belief that we should face the brutal facts and not allow too much complacency within the community. It may be time to take a serious look at the mobile population within a school and how these students impact the school community. As the school’s population changes, the vision may need changed. The power of vision is often underestimated and obstacles may block the vision. Vision and strategy are developed once a guiding coalition of people identifies the crises or major opportunities for change. Kotter indicates that new approaches must be anchored firmly in the culture to produce change. Schools need to make sure these approaches become the “way things are done.” Kotter reminds us that many times learning communities overlook the short-term wins that should be recognized on a regular basis. These short term wins substantiate the efforts and empowers the stakeholders within the organization. Collins (2001) illustrates the empowerment of short term wins through the “flywheel” which builds momentum within the community.

As school demographics change, so will the needs of the school community. The one-size-fits all approach to building a school community may not meet everyone’s needs. Similar to most students, highly mobile students need a community enriched in social support networks which are developed through reflection of practices and guidance of staff and leaders. Change may evolve through the development of a common vision and will cause discomfort to some and empower others. A community that is enriched with a strong social support system will
uphold each member as they strive to move from good to great and meet the needs of their students.

The encouragement of best policies and practices for highly mobile students must be guided by administration. Creative and flexible administrative policies have a tremendous impact on the transition of mobile students into a new school (Oregon Department of Education, 2000). A major role change for administrators was brought about by educational reform that focuses on teaching and learning (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). School administrators are charged with being instructional leaders and the keeper of the vision. They must cultivate and maintain the social support systems within their schools. Administrators are no longer managers but facilitators of reform (Datnow & Castellano, 2001) and must address the needs of all students through policies, programs, and practice. Such practices that administrators may put into place include strategies that reduce the negative effects of mobility. Palik and Phillips (2002) suggest strategies like professional development to increase staff awareness, identification of families in need, newcomer programs, efficient records transfer, supportive attendance and disciplinary policies, and outreach to parents and families. According to the Oregon Department of Education (2000, p. 38), schools with high levels of mobility should have programs to welcome and support students and their families as schools play a critical role in helping students adjust to their new school. These include:

- Preliminary school visits to meet teachers and tour the school before meeting other children
- Newcomer picnics or other occasions to build social networks
- Sponsors to act as guides and first friends for individual students and/or their
families

- Mentors, adults who act as the student’s advocate
- Peer support groups where students find security with others who have similar backgrounds
- Parent support groups where parents can connect with other new families

The needs of highly mobile students must not be ignored and staff perceptions on mobility may need to be analyzed within the school community. Nakagawa et al. (2002) surveyed 174 principals whether they considered students moving in and out of their school to be a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or little to no problem. Thirty four percent considered mobility to be a big problem, 42% considered mobility to be somewhat of a problem, and 24% thought mobility was little to no problem. Principals’ perceptions reflected the rates of mobility. School leadership and school improvement often addresses building a community that provides a social structure that feels safe and is conducive to learning. Leadership is not left in the hands of one person (principal) as school staff is invited to share impressions of leadership and commit to teacher leader roles (Datnow & Castellano, 2001) to further develop a social support system that should address all students’ needs.

**Mobility at the Classroom Level**

“Individual teachers may not be able to increase funding, change class size, or remedy conditions that place children at risk, but they can have a critical impact on students’ feeling of belonging” (ODE, 2000, p. 26).

The social support system within a school morphs from an administrator’s vision to a classroom teacher’s practice. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE, 2000) researched
and published information on how schools and teachers can help students connect to schools by building systems within the school that support children who are at-risk whether from the lack of support from home, serious academic deficiencies, language barriers, mobility, and other challenges. Educators play a critical role in building an environment that protect and nurture students’ strengths rather than responding to their deficits (ODE, 2000). These students need an environment where they are able to successfully adapt and connect in times of adversity. Sagor (1996, p. 38) suggests students must become resilient and confront the overwhelming obstacles that get in the way of their learning. In order to build resilience in students, educators must structure opportunities into their daily routine that leave students optimistic about their educational and personal futures. These key experiences are:

- Competence: provide them with authentic evidence of academic success
- Belonging: Show them that they are valued members of a community
- Usefulness: Reinforce feelings that they have made a real contribution to their community
- Potency: Make them feel empowered

Many teachers may already use techniques and experiences for building resiliency and optimism in students; however, Sagor (1996) stresses the feelings of competency, belonging, usefulness, potency, and optimism must result from authentic experiences. Assemblies, classroom posters and happy face stickers have not been known to change students’ attitudes toward school or create optimism about their personal futures.

A student’s self-image can be profoundly impacted by infusing the classroom and curriculum with resiliency-building experiences (Sagor, 1996). As illustrated in Figure 1,
Oregon Department of Education (2000, p. 3) uses Sagor’s resilience theory as a foundation and provides suggestions under each of the key experiences that students must have to feel connected at school. Students (especially students who are at-risk) need student/teacher personal connections to feel connected to the school community. A feeling of connectedness is imperative for students who are at-risk including those who are mobile. Changing schools is extremely stressful for children because it disrupts their sense of belonging (ODE, 2000).

Educators have a critical role in helping mobile students become resilient and cope with the shock of moving; however, the challenge for educators is to minimize the amount of time mobile students take in adjusting to a new school. The sooner mobile students feel connected to others and the procedures in their new classrooms and school, the sooner they can move on to academics. Right from a student’s entry into the classroom for the first time, a small gesture such as pronouncing the student’s name correctly can make a student feel more welcome (ODE, 2000). Teachers who show personal interest in their new students and give them the opportunity to create positive identities for themselves will accelerate the student’s adjustment to the new environment. In addition, teachers must provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning styles, academic strengths, and personal interests while maintaining high expectations (ODE, 2000).
Connections within the School Day

- **Nurture a Sense of Belonging**
  - Keep schools as small as possible
  - Create schools within schools
  - Develop advisory groups
  - Promote positive peer relations
  - Cultivate caring student/teacher relations
  - Involve all parents and guardians
  - Build connections to the community
  - Provide special help for highly mobile students

- **Nurture a Sense of Competence**
  - Hold high expectations for all students
  - Provide opportunities for authentic learning and assessment
  - Develop thinking skills for life

- **Nurture a Sense of Empowerment**
  - Help students become more self-directed
  - Provide opportunities for students to work together
  - Promote meaningful participation in policy and decision making

- **Nurture a Sense of Usefulness**
  - Organize service learning projects
  - Give students roles in helping their peers

Figure 1. Source: Oregon Department of Education, 2000
The Klamath County Schools discovered that when they provided opportunities for students to adjust to their schools, students increased their academic performance. The Klamath County Schools experienced the highest rate of second semester enrollment in the state of Oregon (Hammond & Melton, 2005). Educators indicate that Klamath children typically change schools midyear because their families are struggling financially, get evicted, money woes force them to move in with relatives, their parents get divorced, or they are placed in foster care. Despite the students’ hardships, the teachers and schools in this area try to make sure students aren’t thrown off balance by the turnover. Two schools in Klamath County, Ponderosa Junior High and Fairview Elementary, welcome new students and get to know them both academically and personally from Day One. Both schools provide individualized help and strive to fill in the holes in these mobile students’ academic backgrounds. One strategy used by these teachers is providing help in math and reading for an hour before or after school every day. (Hammond & Melton)

When students enroll into a school that provides the experiences of competence, belonging, usefulness, and potency Sagor (1996) has suggested, they will begin to feel optimistic about their education and their future. This optimism will then be perpetuated by family members who feel their children are in supportive school community.

**Addressing Mobile Families**

Once it is recognized that student mobility may impact student and school performance, strategies to address the affects of mobility on the students and the school community must be established (Demie, 2002). Schools that create caring, safe learning environments tend to incorporate the development of positive relationships with students and families. Creating a
social support system within a classroom and school community assists in building an environment where students will take risks to learn. Many highly mobile students experience a feeling of isolation after a move which causes their attendance and performance to decline (Walls, 2003). Fowler-Finn (2001) shares that mobile children tend to hesitate to invest in long-term thinking about their relationships, school efforts and future education. It is believed that personal involvement will only result in additional pain when relationships are inevitably broken again down the line. The mobility of students disconnects the long-term relationships and follow-up necessary for the best learning to take place (Walls, 2003).

Options to overcome the affects of student mobility include the opportunity for students to remain in one school throughout the year (Fowler-Finn, 2001). Busing may be provided for students in these typically temporary situations similar to the required busing of homeless students to remain in their school of origin under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (Walls, 2003). Unfortunately, only students who move within the district would benefit from a busing program or a curriculum unification program (Dunn, et al., 2003). In his research, Fowler-Finn finds additional practices that were implemented to assist in addressing the needs of student mobility and academic progress in the Wayne Community School District. These practices are based on creating a warm and friendly school atmosphere by honoring new students and easing their transition. The district engages the entire school staff in welcoming newcomers without drawing unwanted attention to them. Additional practices continue to focus on relationship building among mobile students, families, and school staff.

These personal connections are not directed toward the students but include their families. Many programs and practices may be established to help families including access to
counseling services and adult education classes. In their study of schools in Phoenix, Arizona, Nakagawa et al. (2002) surveyed 174 principals regarding their perception on mobility in their schools, what community building practices and programs are implemented, and how successful are their schools at building community. The results of the survey indicated that despite the efforts made to involve mobile parents in the schools, the attempts did not translate into greater family involvement though one should not assume that parents are unable or unwilling to be involved. Principals noted that a lot of parents go where the jobs are and are uprooted before they become connected to the school community. In addition, parents who are more likely to be mobile are less likely to initiate and follow up on contact with the school due to differences in economic resources and cultural capital (Nakagawa et al., 2002). It was found that in “get to know each other activities” parents at schools with higher levels of mobility are less involved. Nakagawa et al. (2002) also found that the initial interaction between schools and mobile families may be less than welcoming despite the fact that schools with high mobility rates are more likely to offer access to services that will help families be part of the community. Occasionally, the efforts put in to developing a welcome learning community do not produce the desired results. Family-school relationships should be empowered, and families should be provided opportunities to be involved in school activities and decision making opportunities (Nakagawa et al., 2002). “Without the interaction in common activities, schools cannot begin to create the meaningful associations that may lead to greater school stability” (Nakagawa, et al., 2002). This will create a feeling of ownership, acceptance and sense of belonging in the school community which may result in a longer commitment to the neighborhood school.
The social support system developed within schools should incorporate more than just the student. Lareau (2000) suggests that teachers should recognize the obstacles to some parents and diversify strategies for parent support in the system. Lareau warns that teacher expectations can be influenced by the actions or lack of actions of the parents. Educators must communicate at the parents’ level of understanding and not use educational jargon. Finally, Lareau suggests building the social support system by recruiting the family in a “snowball effect” and getting the relatives involved as well. Kozo (2005) adds that once parents get to know each other and the members of the school communities, stereotypes fall away, and they develop a positive perception of the learning environment. A collective effort in developing and maintaining a school community must be a joint effort that involves participation, interaction, and interdependent relationships within the community (Westheimer, 1995). The joint effort of all members of the community strengthens the social support system for everyone, including the highly mobile students.

**Society’s Response to Mobility**

“It is harder to convince young people they can learn when they are cordoned off by a society that isn’t sure they can” (Kozol, 2005, p. 37).

It is difficult for schools to address mobility on their own. Nakagawa et al. (2002) notes that although schools may create programs that could stabilize their mobile population it is unlikely that school community can be built in the absence of larger community supports. This effort may involve policy changes to create school renewal and stability. A school-community partnership with the city government creates a common goal of school improvement. Many schools are creating partnerships with businesses and organizations to increase their financial
and human resources so more needs are met. The school district has many partnerships with community members including the Rotary Club and the Lunch Buddy Program. This program connects community members with students who need additional moral support in the school setting. Many businesses support this program by allowing their employees to take a longer lunch and check in on a student once a week. The students look forward to their buddies coming to school and positive relationships begin to grow. “Building community at the school site is one important factor, but it must be done in conjunction with the building of other resources and relationships within the larger community” (Nakagawa et al., 2002, p. 123).

Student stability can no longer be taken for granted. Any attempt at educational reform will be defeated unless it takes student mobility in to account (Nakagawa et al., 2002). School communities must recognize that students are becoming more mobile and set systems in place to support them while continuing to meet the needs of all students. Kozol (2005) reveals that equity must be provided for each student in our system ranging from financial resources to time spent with each child. Additional attempts must be made to build a school community that is welcoming and safe to all families, especially those who are mobile. Understanding the context and needs of the people in the school community is vital in building a safe and positive learning environment. Every student, whether stable or mobile, should be known by name and need.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative Research

This study relied on qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the behaviors of the school community and mobile students and to analyze the reasons that govern these behaviors. In putting together this qualitative case study, I used methods outlined by John Creswell (2003, p. 18) who defines qualitative study as:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Consideration was also given to well-known case study researchers such as Robert E. Stake (1995), Helen Simons (2009), and Robert K. Yin (1984) who have written about case study research and suggested techniques for organizing and conducting successful research.

In order to understand peoples’ perspectives, qualitative researchers empathize and identify with the people they study (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). As a qualitative researcher, I was seeking to gather information on the perspectives of staff members and students with regard to the school community and the impact of student mobility within the community. In probing for understanding, the nature of this study led me to interview staff and students in their natural setting to gain a better understanding of the meanings they attach to the effects of student mobility. Meeting face-to-face with an in-depth interview will assist the researcher in understanding the informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as
expressed in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Participants, Selection Process and Interview Structure

Mobile students and the school staff were the primary data sources for this study. Jackson Heights Middle School (grades 6-8) was purposely selected as the school to investigate as it is an urban middle school with the highest mobility rate in a school district that serves nearly 22,000 students. Since the 27% mobility rate was above the other five middle schools in the district, I felt the Jackson Heights staff may have put thought and planning into responding to their student mobility. I chose what Patton (1990) coins as “purposeful sampling.” He asserts, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). My goal was to gain a deeper understanding of student mobility and the school community by capturing the participants’ knowledge and perception of student mobility at the time of the interviews. As an associate principal in the same school, I maintained a critical distance in participating in conversations during this research that would alter staff and student perceptions. In addition, I clearly identified and planned out the ethical procedures in selecting the school, staff and students for this study along with the release of the information (Simons, 2009).

In designing the interview questions, I focused on the interviewees’ experiences within the framework of the school community. Even though there has been little research as yet into the relationship of student mobility and the school community, Feyisa Demie (2002) from her study, *Pupil mobility and educational achievement in schools: an empirical analysis*, inspired me to go directly to the people affected by student mobility and ask about their experiences. Many of Demie’s survey questions from her research guided the creation of my interview
questions. Even though Demie contacted only school principals for her research, I felt it was imperative to gain an understanding of the mobile students’ experiences by interviewing them. All interview questions were designed as open-ended which allowed for elaboration, depth, and the possibility of follow up questions.

After choosing the school and acquiring district permission to conduct research, I began to consider the selection of the participants. To capture the highly mobile students, I relied on the school’s registrar who processes all student enrollment and withdrawals in the school to provide me with enrollment information. The district’s demographic guideline of “student attended part year” was used in the selection process in identifying mobility. In the selection process, I decided to refrain from interviewing 6th grade students as they had most recently transitioned to a new school when they entered middle school as a 6th grader. From the list of new students, I focused on 7th and 8th graders who were new to Jackson Heights part way through the school year. At the time of the study, I took an enrollment list of nearly 75 new 7th and 8th grade students who enrolled after the first week of school and found 20 students who met the criteria because nearly half of the students had already withdrawn. I had access to what school they previously attended but did not have access to the number of schools the students had previously attended. This made it difficult to determine whether the students had moved numerous times or just this once.

Student confidentiality was stressed as parent and student permission was secured. I met with twenty 7th and 8th grade students who were interview candidates and explained the purpose of the interview, the interview format, and gave them the parent informed consent form. Of the twenty parent consent forms sent home with the students, ten were returned. I
interviewed nine students because the tenth moved away before our interview could be completed. All nine of these students were aware of my position as associate principal and recognized me from interactions in the cafeteria and other supervision duties.

The focus of this study was on the mobile students’ perspectives on their mobile experience and their entry and adjustment to a new school. Interview questions were related to the students’ life history, mobility, social support systems, and academics. (Appendix A) Each interview was conducted in my office and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. It was important to make sure the students were relaxed and open to responding to the questions. That is why opening questions were designed so they could share about themselves and forget that they were in the associate principal’s office which is typically connected to discipline. I was attentive to my own responses during the interview including facial gestures and body language while being aware of the students’ posture and gestures.

Teacher perspective was valued in understanding the impact of student mobility within the classroom. Similar to Demie’s (2002) research, I wanted to understand the challenges and the perspectives gained by working with a mobile student population. Of the 47 teachers, I met with a representative random sample of 8 teachers to explain the purpose of the study, any risks involved, and secure consent and arrange interview dates and times. These interviews were conducted in my office and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. There was an attempt to seek the teachers’ understanding of student mobility and what they do to meet the needs of these students as they enter the classroom. How might they build a welcoming classroom environment and maintain academic rigor when students enroll and withdraw so much? (Appendix B) Due to time constraints, classroom observations were not part of the data
collection for this study, however since I worked in the same school and supervised some of the staff who were interviewed, I had built relationships with the staff and observed them at work. It was clearly communicated to the staff that they are to respond with honesty to the interview questions as this was not part of their evaluation. Despite our relationships, I was pleasantly surprised with many of the interview results as the data began to separate into themes and categories.

In addition to teachers, I was curious about the information that I might gain from the para-educators (staff assistants or classified staff) who work directly with the new students on their first days at Jackson Heights. I obtained consent and interviewed two para-educators as part of the staff interviews using the teacher interview questions. (Appendix B) They, too, were encouraged to answer with honesty as this interview was not part of their annual evaluation.

Two administrators were interviewed which rounded out the twelve staff member interviews. I explained the purpose and format of this study to the principal and an associate principal prior to receiving their consent to the 20 minute private interview. Their interviews also focused on their initial understanding of student mobility and how it might affect leadership decision making within the school. How might school administrators guide teachers to a changed vision or goal that may include mobile student? These interviews were an attempt to capture the administrators’ view on what their staff might be doing to welcome new students and how the students may feel when entering Jackson Heights. In addition, I wanted to know what they, as administrators, might have in place to welcome new students themselves. Since I was one of their peers, I reassured the anonymity of the research location and interviewees, and
I encouraged deep thought into sharing their opinions. (Appendix C)

Teachers, para-educators and administrators were asked similar questions to capture their perspectives relating to mobility, social support systems, academics, and life history. Many of the open-ended questions allowed the sample of the staff to elicit their views on the subject and to elaborate on their experiences. “In-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information-rich” (Patton, 1990, p.171).

Each interview was audio recorded; however I took notes on my laptop during the interviews in the event the recording equipment failed (Creswell 2003). The doubling up on recording information allowed me to more easily transcribe the interviews into notes. In addition, I decided to transcribe my own interviews as it is important to plan in advance whether a transcriptionist is used (Creswell, 2003).

**Data Analysis**

After transcribing each of the interviews, I began to analyze the results and separate the information into common themes that rose from the results. I began the process of analyzing, interpreting, and making meaning of the data as the results were sorted. When examining the teacher interview data, I looked for selections that supported teachers’ awareness of the impact of mobile students in their classrooms and whether they adjusted their welcoming and teaching strategies to meet their needs. I was also interested in whether the teachers neglected the students’ demographics and mobility in their teaching. For example, some teachers may individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student whereas others may focus on students’ deficiencies and place the burden of academic success solely on the students. In addition, I attempted to measure the development of relationships between teachers and
students to justify the impact of relationships on student learning.

When designing the administrators’ interview questions and evaluating the results, I was looking for awareness of the impact of student mobility on the school community. For example, are the school leaders aware of the factors that impact mobile students and their learning? I was interested in finding how an administrator may know how classroom teachers connect with mobile students and whether anything is done differently for students who are enrolling mid-year. In extrapolating the results of the administrators’ interviews, I looked for the administrator’s belief and role in building a welcoming, supportive learning community for all students. In addition, I was interested to know whether administrators themselves were personally welcoming and supportive to new students. I was pleasantly surprised with the administrators’ perceptions and responses.

All stakeholders in an educational system may have an effect on a student’s academic experience; however the students’ perspective on entering a new school was the main focus of this study. I was looking for commonalities among the student interview results that gave insight into how they were welcomed and supported in a new school and whether this made a difference in feeling a sense of belonging and preparing them to learn. A wide-range of anxieties may get in the way of a newly enrolled student’s learning: Will I be accepted? Will I make new friends? Will my records be transferred? Will I know what I need for my classes? (Walling, 1990). First impressions were a measurement that paved a roadway to even more in-depth conversations about entering the school for the first time. Students’ first impressions were also generated from factors outside of the school such as how may moves a student has made or the reasons for moving. Student data also gave insight into how quickly students were
able to build friendships and make connections with their teachers. Another goal was to seek whether students’ were aware of the impact that mobility may have in their academic success. These student interviews gave the students a voice in sharing their experiences as they entered the school and the classroom. It was important to understand what students think and need in order to serve them better in the learning community.

In addition to staff and student interviews, documents and data relevant to the study were collected for review and to understand the context of the school. With Jackson Heights Middle School being a school in need of improvement, the OSPI conducted a School Performance Review at Jackson Heights in October 2007. As part of this process, data was gathered to review the school based on the Nine Characteristics of Highly Performing Schools and sorted into four categories: Vision, Mission Leadership; Supportive Learning Environment; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Professional Development; Equitable Opportunity. Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered through the process of surveys, interviews, focus groups, document reviews, observations, and state test scores for this OSPI report. All stakeholders including staff, parents, students, and district office personnel were given an opportunity to have a voice in this review process. A review of this data will provide additional insight to Jackson Heights Middle School’s community and its effectiveness on student learning. For the purpose of this study, these documents were examined within the context of student mobility. The Jackson Heights School Improvement Plan and Action Plans were reviewed to capture the vision and mission of the school and to understand the agreed upon areas of academic concerns that the staff wished to address.

Gathering information through interviews and additional documents for this case study
assisted in constructing conclusions around the issue of student mobility and the school community. A holistic picture was created through the interviews and examination of student demographics, school/classroom social support systems and academic success. My personal experiences as a student, parent, teacher and administrator naturally filtered the interviews and the data results (Creswell, 2003), however every attempt was made to remain objective in reviewing results.

The next chapter will provide details that will assist the reader in visualizing Jackson Heights Middle School. School building, staff and student data and profile information will be discussed. The interview results of the students are in Chapter 5 and the staff results are in Chapter 6. I have grouped participants in common categories in the chapters based on their experiences and perspectives that rose from the data.
CHAPTER 4
JACKSON HEIGHTS MIDDLE SCHOOL STAFF AND STUDENTS

To set the stage for the reader, I have created a visualization of Jackson Heights Middle School and its staff and students. In this chapter, I have provided a description of the school and the people within. In doing so, I have included information on the school building, student demographics, state assessment results, programs offered, and staff. Much of this information was derived from the district website, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website and my own position as an associate principal in the building. In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of staff and students who were interviewed for this study, some questions addressed their life history.

School Profile

The selection of Jackson Heights Middle School for studying student mobility was a purposeful selection because it had the highest mobility rate of all six middle schools in the district. I wanted to uncover how a school community with 27% mobility rate handles the ebb and flow of students. Jackson Heights is an urban school in the state of Washington that sits on a large parcel of land near the low income housing projects, a local cemetery, and luxury homes. Its original structure was built as a junior high school in the 1950s and additional buildings were built in the 1980s along with a major remodel of the existing building. At that time the district changed from a junior high model with grades 7, 8, 9 to a middle school model with grades 6, 7, 8. The district’s central office was positioned next door to Jackson Heights until it was razed in the 1980s. A community indoor swimming pool was put in its place which
has provided a location for district swim practices, swim meets and has expanded Jackson Heights’s physical education into providing swimming for the students.

A feature of Jackson Heights is that the staff seems to take great pride in their Welcome Center. The staff felt the need to make connections with new students and ease their transition to a new school; therefore in 2000 a Welcome Center was formed. This center was designed to house new students for two to three days prior to being immersed into their new classes. This provided time for academic assessments in math and reading to assure appropriate class placements, creating their schedules, reviewing the handbook, and getting orientated to the school campus and personnel with the help of para-educators and peer mentors. New students are provided with the opportunity to meet many of their teachers and review their syllabi prior to entering their classrooms. This Welcome Center was developed to ease new students’ anxieties as they entered the Jackson Heights school community and allows teachers time to prepare for a new student in their classroom.

One of Jackson Heights’s unique characteristics or policies is its strict dress code which requires students to be dressed in plain clothes of their school colors (red, black, gray, white) and jeans. This dress code was approved by the school board to be a two year pilot, and once the data showed that discipline was reduced and grades improved since the implementation, the school board approved continuation of the dress code. No other school in the district has a dress code like this. The Jackson Heights’s staff generally believes that this dress code provides a safe and orderly environment and equity among all students of all economic levels. A clothing closet was set up at the school to help those who could not afford new clothes that align with the dress code policy. Donations from local churches and foundations have been
contributed to this clothing closet. These donations have been especially helpful for new students at Jackson Heights who could not afford to change their wardrobe to comply.

The six and a half hour school day at Jackson Heights starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. Students may begin arriving a half hour before school starts to have breakfast. Each student has seven class periods each 45 minutes long and a 30 minute lunch break. Teachers instruct students for six of the class periods and have one 45 minute preparation period each day in addition to their 30 minute lunch break. Teachers are required to arrive to work 30 minutes before school starts and may leave as early as 30 minutes after school ends.

Jackson Heights has many opportunities and programs that support student learning and promote academic success. It is one of three middle schools in the district with honors/challenge classes for high achieving learners. Many of the students in the honors/challenge program have been together since elementary school and had to apply and pass a test to be accepted. Once accepted, families must provide their own transportation unless they live within the school’s boundaries and ride on a bus or walk. On the other end of the academic spectrum are the programs that focus on students with disabilities. At the time of this research, there were three self-contained classrooms at Jackson Heights, two which were Life Skills classes. One Life Skills class was comprised of students who had Down’s syndrome and severe mental retardation, and the other class had students who functioned at a higher level and were able to participate in some classes outside their Life Skills classroom. In addition, there was one Structured Learning Center class which was designed to assist students with social emotional behavior disorders. Each of these three classes had no more than 12 students each. The district’s Special Services Department determines who is placed in these classes.
Many students were from outside Jackson Heights’s boundaries, however transportation is provided for students in these Special Education programs so they may receive specially designed instruction in the least restrictive environment.

Jackson Heights’s academic support system appears to shine within the programs supported by the school personnel. The AVID program, Advancement via Individual Determination, is a national program that teachers are trained to implement specific learning strategies that have been proven to be successful in preparing students for college. AVID students are selected through a recommendation and interview process, and they have an AVID elective class with rigorous curriculum to support them. Jackson Heights’ staff also promoted the Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA) which is a national program that offers after-school academic enrichment that helps to build a pathway to college and careers in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. The English Language Learner (ELL) program is for students who are learning English as a second language and assists students in reaching academic standards through specific classes focusing on English acquisition.

Jackson Heights’ staff provides academic classes in reading and math that are tailored to the needs of intensive, strategic, benchmark, and advanced learners. Students may choose to expand on their creativity by choosing electives in many areas including Visual Arts, Choir, Band, and Orchestra. Students may pursue personal interests with classes in Leadership, Spanish, Journalism, Yearbook, and Technology Exploration. Spanish, Algebra, Geometry, and Washington State History courses give students a jumpstart on fulfilling their high school requirements.

Extracurricular activities are essential in building self-confidence and a sense of social
support for students (Walling, 1990). After-school activities at Jackson Heights include athletic and academic options for all students. Sports for seventh and eighth grade students range from basketball, volleyball, wrestling, swimming, football, and all grade levels may participate in track in the spring. Even though transportation is not provided for practices, many students still sign up. Students who are failing two or more classes are put on academic probation and must show improvement in their grades to participate in the sporting competitions.

Jackson Heights maintains a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club which provides after school bussing to their facility. Students are mentored through socially appropriate activities, and the club has a homework center where students are helped with their academics. A newly created teen center attracts the middle school students to the club. All of these after school activities and programs motivate students to stay on track with school.

When describing a school, it seems to be an initial response to describe the building, programs, and classes within. The next part of this chapter describes what may be considered the most important part of a school, the people within. I begin with describing the student population and follow with a description of the staff.

**Student Profiles**

At the time of this research, Jackson Heights Middle School had 771 students enrolled in grades 6-8. The percentage of students receiving Free or Reduced-Priced Meals peaked at 70% which was the highest percentage of the district’s six middle schools. Of the 771 students, 14.6% received Special Education services ranging from Learning Support reading, math, writing, and study skills classes, Speech Language therapy, and/or self contained Special Education classes such as Life Skills and the Structured Learning Center. There were slightly
more girls than boys at Jackson Heights at the time of this study, with 50.8% and 49.2% respectively. White students were the highest percentage of the student population and Hispanic was second highest with 63% and 16% respectively.

A closer look at the student demographics gives a deeper understanding of Jackson Heights Middle School. As displayed in Table 5, Jackson Heights’s student population is diverse, mobile and living in poverty. For the purpose of this study, I focused particularly on the students who were enrolled for only part of a school year or 27% of the population.

### Table 5
**Jackson Heights Student Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Percent of Total Students (n=771)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled part year</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced-Price Meals</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as primary language</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish as primary language</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian as primary language</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other primary language</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI Website, 2008)*

Student academics were measured by various means including formative and summative classroom assessments, Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) which is an assessment done on the computer, and the Washington Assessment on Student Learning (WASL). The WASL is one standard measure that school personnel can use to measure the students’ academic progress and is a state standardized assessment so schools may be compared to the state average. As displayed in Figure 2, the students at Jackson Heights
produced the following results on the Washington Assessment on Student Learning (WASL). It is interesting to note that even though the desire is to increase the percentage of students passing, in 2007-08, student achievement decreased in Reading and Math while increasing in Writing.

According to Jackson Heights Middle School’s 2008 School Performance report the students met Adequate Yearly Progress in 29 of 37 categories on the WASL. The school did not make AYP in these categories: All Students in Math, Black Students in Math, Hispanic Students in Math, White Students in Math, Special Education Students in Reading, Special Education Students in Math, Low Income Students in Reading, Low Income Students in Math.

*Jackson Heights 7th Grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning Trend.*

![Graph showing 7th Grade Statewide Assessment Trend](image)

Figure 2. Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (OSPI Website, 2008)
Due to not making adequate yearly progress again in 2008, the school became categorized in the Step 5 stage of school improvement. This places Jackson Heights on the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s list of “schools that are in need of improvement” and begins a three year OSPI School Improvement Process. Being in Stage 5 of improvement meant that OSPI stepped in and provided Jackson Heights with a School Improvement Facilitator to assist in increasing student academic performance. Close examinations of programs, the School Improvement Plan, and teaching practices were completed this first year by means of surveying the stakeholders, forming a School Improvement Team, and providing professional development opportunities for the staff.

To paint a broader picture of the Jackson Heights school community, it may be interesting to take a glimpse at student behavior in addition to their academics and demographics. As an associate principal at Jackson Heights, my job was primarily focused on student discipline. I would estimate approximately 80% of my work schedule involved either student discipline or student supervision. District discipline data shows that student behavior improved in the past year with a decrease in suspensions from 27% in 2006-2007 to 17% in 2007-2008. There were 3 expulsions in 2006-2007 and 0 expulsions in 2007-2008. Most of the staff claims that their increased focus on connecting to each student along with the new dress code are responsible for the decrease in suspensions and expulsions at Jackson Heights.

Staff Profile

Jackson Heights’s staff is notably friendly and collegial compared to the other middle schools where I have worked. The energy and eagerness to work as a team seems to be evident in this young staff. They meet regularly in Professional Learning Communities, review
common assessments, and lesson plan together. Because of Jackson Heights’s high poverty rate and student mobility, it appears to be a less than desirable school for experienced teachers to request to work at. This may be due to the extra effort needed to meet the needs of students who may not have as much motivation or support from home. The younger teachers who just completed their degrees seemed to be happily employed, energetic and eager to work. When the staff agrees to take on new programs such as AVID and evaluate their teaching through PLCs, there seems to be very little resistance. Typically, any resistance to change seems to come from the handful of veteran teachers on staff; however the positive energy from the majority moves the resistors in a positive direction.

Table 6

*Jackson Heights Teacher Information*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Years of Teacher Experience</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers with at least a Master’s Degree</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who meet NCLB HQ definition</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI Website, 2008)*

At the time of this research there were 95 staff members who included teachers, secretaries, staff assistants, custodial, counselors, and specialists. On average each teacher is responsible for the learning of approximately 160 students each day. Of the 47 classroom teachers the average years of teaching experience was 8.9 years with 74.5% having earned at least a Master’s Degree. At the time of this study, four teachers were obtaining their National
Board Certification. As seen in Table 6, it was reported that 98.6% of Jackson Heights’s teachers were highly qualified to teach their curricular areas in a high poverty school based on No Child Left Behind criteria.

The majority of the staff at Jackson Heights strives to connect with the students and to build relationships that encourage student learning. This extends to building connections with families and community members for meeting the students’ needs. The Jackson Heights staff spends many hours beyond the school day to supervise sporting events, provide tutoring, meet with parents, and provide learning opportunities for the students. The Evening of the Arts is one example of how Jackson Heights’s staff provides opportunities to connect all students to the community by showcasing the band, choir, and visual arts classes to the public. The eighth grade Culture Fair which is a required 8th grade project allows students to share a part of their lives with others through a social studies project that ends in an evening event and a culminating display. In addition, effort was made to connect with the English Language Learner families by hosting three Spanish/Russian nights during the year. These nights were designed to inform the families of programs and services available to students and families along with providing information on the state assessment and graduation requirements. All of this is presented by teachers and administrators with the help of Spanish and Russian interpreters.

I have observed that the Jackson Heights staff appears to honor the mission statement which is visible throughout the building and in the work at Jackson Heights. Posted on the walls and within the School Improvement Plan, the mission statement expresses a sense of community that is felt by those who enter the school: “Our mission at Jackson Heights Middle
School is to make a connection with students academically, socially and with parents, staff and community members to create opportunities for a successful future.” This mission stresses the importance of making connections or building relationships with all stakeholders to promote student success. It is what guides the staff. The staff can be seen in their doorways greeting students as they enter their classroom, visiting students in the cafeteria during lunch, coaching sports, and attending extracurricular activities. The principal, Richard Moore, felt so strongly about the mission that he had “Make a Connection” printed on T-shirts and gave one to each staff member. As staff members wore these shirts, it sent a message to all that connecting to students was important.

**Summary**

This chapter provided insight into the Jackson Heights community illustrating the building, programs, students and staff. The visualization of the community allows the reader to connect with the life within. In the next two chapters I will introduce the specific people who were interviewed. Chapter 5 shares the results of the student interviews. The students were grouped by dominate traits as a result from their interview data. The results of the teacher interviews are provided in Chapter 6, and the teachers are also categorized by likenesses. In Chapter 7, I pulled together similarities and differences between students and teachers as their experiences and perceptions are compared and contrasted.
CHAPTER 5

STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR MOBILITY

This study is about the students who come into Jackson Heights Middle School part way into the school year, particularly the students who have changed schools several times since kindergarten. I interviewed nine of these students during the last eight weeks of the 2008-2009 school year. The interviews focused on their social and academic adjustments in a new school community, and this chapter presents their experiences in their own words.

In Chapter 2, I discussed characteristics of mobile students and the factors which may cause their mobility, and in Chapter 3 I discussed the participant selection process. In this chapter I share specific student responses to their entry into the Jackson Heights Middle School community. Common themes rose in the students’ understanding of their own mobility during their interviews. Failing grades, feeling lost, lack of friendships, and overall disconnectedness are just a few areas that many of the students who were interviewed had in common. It is found that children who moved once or more in the course of each school year may feel like they have never belonged anywhere (Walling, 1990). Divorce, changing custody, homelessness, and moving to save expenses were common causes of these students’ mobility. Many mobile students tend to be of lower socioeconomic status with unstable housing and family situations (Kerbow, 1996).

In this chapter I share a small segment of each student’s life history, and how the student adjusted to moving to a new school during the school year. Students’ ages, grade level, and the number of schools attended will be the opening descriptor for each student. Keep in mind that the student who does not move during his elementary and middle school years would
typically attend only two schools since kindergarten. The students in this study exceeded that number.

It is interesting to note that eight of the nine students moved only a slight distance prior to enrolling at Jackson Heights, typically across the boundary lines from their previous school either in the same district or out of district. Only one student from this study (Kylie) moved into Jackson Heights from out of state. Another interesting point, as illustrated in Table 7, is that four of the nine students had attended Jackson Heights once before during their middle school years. Nakagawa et al. (2002, p. 9) described these students as city migrants as she states, “These are students who, for various reasons, move short distances—from school to school within a district or between neighboring districts—and do so many times throughout one school year.”

When analyzing the interview data of the nine students, I noticed there were two main categories they may be sorted into: failing grades and passing grades. Failing at least one class will place a student in the failing category. As I somewhat expected the nine students divided into each of these categories with more students failing than passing their classes. Based on their 2\textsuperscript{nd} Trimester Report Card, six students were failing and three students were passing.

Prior to sorting the data, I had anticipated that even more students would be failing their classes due to their interrupted education. It is also interesting to note that all students who returned to Jackson Heights were currently failing academically. I had not expected this result especially assuming that returning students are familiar with the school and would be able to adjust into the learning community more rapidly. In addition, more students failed who moved within the district than those who moved into Jackson Heights from outside the district. Wright
(1999, p. 346) supports this result in his study, “Low achievement scores were associated more highly with internal mobility (students moving within the school district) than with external mobility (students moving into or out of the school district).”

Table 7
Jackson Heights Mobile Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Failing</th>
<th>Passing</th>
<th>In district</th>
<th>Out district</th>
<th>Returning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolbe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glenda</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinella</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first six students that are shared with the reader are those who were failing their classes at the time of the interview. Two students, Kolbe and Quinn are the only students with failing grades who had not attended Jackson Heights before. The other four students in this first category, John, Glenda, Shannon, and Jennifer had failing grades and had previously attended Jackson Heights.

**Kolbe: 14 years old, 8th grade, 7 schools since Kindergarten**

As he entered my office for the interview, Kolbe brushed his long blonde hair out of his eyes, lifted his head, and we made quick eye contact. His outward appearance was tidy and well groomed with clothes that were within the dress code guidelines. He seemed to be calm as
he sat in a chair across the table from me, occasionally running his hand through his hair as he answered questions.

Kolbe shared that he felt uneasy on his first day at Jackson Heights. It was four months into the school year, and he moved from another middle school within the district. It was an emotional transfer as he was struggling with his parents divorce and having to move away from his father. He did not feel ready to make new friends when he worried about his parents so much.

During his first couple days, Kolbe was in the Welcome Center which he felt was helpful in getting to know the school. The next day, he nervously started his classes and began to feel intimidated and afraid. He heard name calling in the hallways and felt it was directed to him. “A large amount of students just don’t like me and the work is much harder here.”

When asked about what he likes to do, he immediately said “listen to my iPod.” He elaborated by sharing that it is a way he can escape. He does not like sports or after school activities and admits that he does not do any homework. Kolbe claimed that he had pretty good grades, however when he begins to describe each of his classes, he is slightly enlightened by his own admission. “I get mostly Bs, but not doing well in science. Probably an F. Math is hard, but my aunt is tutoring me. I was failing in my old school, but not so much now.” Either he was unaware of his grades or did not want to share, because when I checked his grades on the student information system, he had three Fs.

Kolbe acknowledged that changing schools seven times since kindergarten did affect his education, however as I tried to get him to share more in depth on how his academics may have been impacted, he was more focused on the social aspects of the move and the ability to
make friends or not. Kolbe claimed that the most difficult thing about coming to Jackson Heights was that he was with people he did not even know. With his parents’ recent divorce and a new school community, Kolbe seemed to feel alone and disconnected when he arrived. He was not sure how he could move forward. It may be interpreted that perhaps Kolbe needed to experience the feeling of acceptance and adjustment to the community before he could move on to academics.

**Quinn: 13 years old, 7th grade, 5 schools since Kindergarten**

Times were tough and money was tight for Quinn and his father, so they moved to a government subsidized apartment within Jackson Heights’s boundaries to save on expenses. The new apartment was just across the district boundary line from his previous school so it required registering at a new school. Many students call the neighborhood that Quinn lives in the Housing Projects and seem to associate a negative connotation with living there. Quinn lives with his father and has no other siblings.

Quinn is easily spotted at Jackson Heights as he is taller than most middle school boys, and his well groomed style is noticeable. His darker blonde hair is cut short and his clothes are appropriately fitted for his frame. Quinn’s teachers have expressed that he is pleasant to others and has not had any behavior incidences. He is typically quiet in the hallways during passing time and not one who shouts to get others’ attention. As he answers the interview questions, Quinn does not look down toward the table while he talks like most of the students did, he has eye contact while he is talking to me. His slight stutter did not inhibit his communication. I wondered if he was comfortable with adults because he was the only child in his household and perhaps associated with adults more than children.
Quinn seemed ready to leave his last school and eager to share his experience about entering Jackson Heights. He says, “The kids and teachers were not friendly there. It’s much friendlier here. The Welcome Center worked well in helping me adjust and I don’t think I would change anything!” Perhaps Quinn became socially adjusted more rapidly than others in that he claimed he made friends quickly. “I was kind of shy and made a lot of friends. Sometimes I found people and sometimes they found me!”

Having been at Jackson Heights only a couple months at the time of his interview, Quinn praised the adults because they helped him catch up. “I think here, I get a lot better grades, and the teachers left it up to the kids to get to know each other. The teachers are nice here.” He burst with pride in sharing that it took only a couple days to make new friends. When asked how he thought he was doing academically at this new school, he appeared to be unaware that he was failing his history class. “Probably Bs, Cs, and a couple As.” As he compares his previous school with Jackson Heights, Quinn states, “The curriculum is different but way better here.”

Being a little more outgoing than other students, Quinn shared that he participates in track at school, and at home he loves to do outdoor stuff like ride bikes with his dad or walk on the trails near his apartments. While indoors, he likes to type on mySpace and play games on his computer. He did not share any home activities that involved other students his age, therefore it appears that he likes to be with his dad or be alone with his computer.

We wrapped up our conversation with discussing what could be improved with the welcoming of new students at Jackson Heights. Quinn continues his positive outlook, “The Welcome Center worked well. I was in there the first day and got to go to my 7th period class.”
I also got a tour of the school. I don’t know anything that you could change. The teachers and students are friendlier here.”

**John: 12 years old, 7th grade, 6 schools since Kindergarten**

Of the nine students interviewed, John is the longest continuously enrolled student at Jackson Heights. He had been at Jackson Heights since the third day of this school year. Similar to the other students, we had exchanged greetings in the hallway and at lunch many times prior to the interview. In fact, we were able to connect a few times when his disruptive behavior warranted an office referral. Despite our previous interactions, he was reserved about expanding and providing details in his interview responses. His family consists of mom, stepdad, and younger brother, and they moved to “find a better place.” Unlike many of the other mobile students, John was home schooled part of the previous year before he enrolled in Jackson Heights. His parents chose to home school him after he had continuous behavior problems in his sixth grade year at Jackson Heights.

John was “psyched” about attending Jackson Heights again especially after being home for almost a year. He was excited about meeting other students, but was worried about not being liked by them. He shares, “It was hard because I didn’t know anyone.” He immediately signed up for football. His worry about friendships quickly dissolved as he enjoyed making friends right away. In fact, he shares that he enjoyed friendships the most about school and found a community of friends in his band class.

Prior to being home schooled in 6th grade, John had all As in his academic areas. He discloses that he is currently failing three classes (History, Science, and P.E.) and getting As and Bs in the rest of his classes including Honors English. He claimed that he is failing
Science because, “The teacher hates me.” In addition to his academic struggles, John has had several suspensions this year due to his disruptive behaviors in the classrooms and physical contact with other students. John had a few incidences of pushing other students and became identified as a bully. At one point, he was involved in a fight with another student. This type of behavior was happening in 6th grade, which is why his parents decided to home school him.

John feels that the adults were helpful in his adjustment to Jackson Heights. Since he came on the third day of school, he claimed that it did not feel the same as when he had changed schools in the middle of the school year back in his elementary school days. He indicated that it may have been more helpful if he could have been taken around to all his classes and given a tour before he had actually started attending the classes.

Jennifer: 14 years old, 8th grade, 10 schools since Kindergarten

Like John, Jennifer had once attended Jackson Heights and has returned. She is rarely seen at school without her hair pulled back into a pony tail which emphasizes her round face. Jennifer typically wears jeans and an over-sized T-shirt to hide her large frame.

Being one of four girls, Jennifer, her mom, and sisters moved into the Jackson Heights boundaries from another middle school within the district. Jennifer has two older sisters, one who had graduated from high school and one currently attending high school, and one younger sister in elementary school. “I love to pick on my little sister,” Jennifer shares with a smile, when she is asked what she likes to do at home. She also likes to text, play board games, play on the computer, go shopping, and swim when she is not in school. She likes to hang out with her friends and whatever her mom does, too.

Jennifer had been previously attended Jackson Heights and moved back in January of
her 8th grade year. She claims, “In 6th grade when I came to Jackson Heights, I was new. I was shy and people found me. When I moved away and came back, it was pretty easy to reconnect with my friends. I kept in touch with most of my friends.” Jennifer admits that the dress code was the most difficult part of returning to Jackson Heights. “It was hard to go to different stores to buy what was required to wear.”

Even though the middle schools were in the same school district, Jennifer shares that the curriculum was really different,

At the other middle school, teachers would let you turn in your work the next day, but here the teachers won’t let you turn in the work the next day, so I had to learn to keep my work and turn it in as a packet. That is harder than turning in each day. Actual stuff we were learning was different. In my social studies class we were studying slavery with a huge project, and here we are learning about the American Revolution. It was different. In science, we were learning about cells at my old school, and here we are doing something completely different.

Jennifer realizes that she is struggling with her academic success. She discloses that she is failing four of her seven classes. She knows that her excessive amount of absences and behavior issues has affected her success, too. She had been suspended for fighting and has had detentions for disruptive classroom behaviors. Jennifer is below grade level in reading and math. When asked whether changing schools has affected her education, she replies, “Yes. I did better in 6th and 7th grade, but came back and ‘puff’! The moves made it worse. Like if you move a lot in one year, you start losing friends and trusting people. It affects what you learn because one school could be harder than another.”
Jennifer is open to suggesting improvements in welcoming new students into the Jackson Heights community. She suggests, “Not make the dress code so strict, and we should have lockers. Have a mentor program, like in the 6th grade. It could be on Tuesdays so a bunch of girls could meet in the counseling center and help each other. Have small groups meet and build friendships.”

**Glenda: 14 yrs old, 8th grade, 7 schools since Kindergarten**

Also a return student to Jackson Heights, Glenda arrived back during her 8th grade year. Glenda is not shy about talking with students and adults. Her smile attracts others to stop and talk with her. She is not afraid to express her opinion with an elevated voice whether it was invited or not which occasionally got her into trouble. Due to financial hardships, Glenda needed help with clothing that followed the dress code guidelines. We were able to assist her and many other students with clothing.

Glenda was excited to go to Jackson Heights because her sister attended the school. “It wasn’t hard leaving my old school, because I knew I was coming back to Jackson Heights.” She feels that it was easier coming back to a school than going to a new school where you do not know anyone. Her typically outgoing self turns shy in those awkward situations in an unfamiliar school community. She shares that it took only about a week to make friends after returning to Jackson Heights and to get reacquainted with her old friends from two years ago.

Glenda is a young lady who seems to have a lot of turmoil in her life. Her moves usually resulted from family crises and survival. For example, this latest move was a result of her parents going back to Mexico, and she was left to her older sister’s care. Glenda respects her sister (who is 19 years old) and enjoys hanging out with her and going to the movies with
their friends. At the time of her interview, Glenda was staying with a friend instead of her sister. She states, “My personal life is really messed up, but school is okay. My personal life is really hard to deal with.”

Academically, Glenda is a bright student who is placed in benchmark and honors classes but does not seem motivated to apply herself. She knows this about herself, “I just can’t concentrate that much because of my personal life.” When asking about her grades, Glenda admits she is failing all her classes. “You know how I moved and stuff, I just gave up.” Glenda knows that her mobility has affected her education, “What’s the point of trying when there are only a couple months left of school? You know when your grades go back to zero, I didn’t want to start all over again.” She shares that her sister tries to encourage her to stay in school, since she dropped out herself. Her sister tells her, “You’re smarter than me!”

Deeper into the interview we discuss the differences in the curriculum between her last school and Jackson Heights. Glenda focuses on science and math in her reply stating, “Albany was ahead like in science, but in math they put me in a lower class that was easy. When I took the placement test over there, I took it really fast. When I came back to Jackson Heights, they were barely starting what I did in science at Albany, but they put me in the higher level math class. Other than that, they had pretty much the same topics at both schools.”

In helping students transition better into Jackson Heights, Glenda shares that the adults are really helpful and admits, “Most of it was my fault because of my attitude. Like when I have bad days, some really bad days.” She suggests that the new students in the Welcome Center should be allowed to go to the lunch room on their first days to get acquainted with others. Then they wouldn’t feel so lonely when they leave the Welcome Center. She also
suggests that Leadership students should go into the Welcome Center and talk about the school. Students can get information from other students, rather than always from adults that way they can make connections with people their own age.

**Shannon: 14 years old, 8th grade, 8 schools since Kindergarten**

With an excessive amount of absences, truancies, and detentions, Shannon was struggling in school. She had a tendency to get herself into disciplinary situations when she failed to cooperate with the adults. When she was at school, her clothes seemed to be dirty and stained. As Shannon sat for her interview, she seemed to be admiring the writing on her hands and arm that she did earlier in the day with a marker.

As seen with many mobile students, Shannon, her parents and little sister moved just across the district boundary from her previous school halfway through the school year. Shannon discloses that they did not like the landlord and wanted to get out of there. Similar to other mobile students, Shannon attended Jackson Heights last year and is now moved back within its boundaries. Even though she did not move a long distance, she did move from one school district to another district, so the curriculum may have differed more than if she had moved within the same district. There appeared to be benefits for Shannon in moving from Jackson Heights to another school and back again as it seemed to help Shannon pick up where she left off with Jackson Heights friendships. Shannon states, “When coming back, I made friends. I was nervous coming here because I really didn’t know how people would react with me coming back.”

Shannon was able to adjust to being at Jackson Heights by being in the Welcome Center for three days before going out to her classes. Typically a student may be in the Welcome
Center for two days; however Shannon’s course placement was a little more difficult due to her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and additional testing needed to place her in the appropriate classes. Once she was in the classrooms, she felt the adults were helpful but felt uncomfortable and did not like being pointed out in class. Shannon shared that when teachers said, “Go help the new girl,” it was the most annoying part of being new.

As we discuss her academics, Shannon shares that it was easier at Jackson Heights because of the smaller classes; however she was aware that she was failing some of her classes. “I’m not doing really good.” She indicates that the other school had larger classes and harder work. Even though she originally shared that she liked smaller classes, Shannon shares frustration about being in smaller classes, “I don’t want to feel slow in smaller classes and stuff. My friends are in bigger classes and stuff.” It appears that she did not understand that she had three Learning Support classes (Special Education Reading, Writing, and Math) which are smaller than general education classes. She never really addresses the actual learning component of her classes, and she tends to fixate on the number of students in her classes. This changes a little when I ask her whether moving from one school to another affects her education and she explains, “It will be harder for you to get into what they are doing and things may be way different. You don’t know what they are doing and will be lost for a while.”

Much like the other students interviewed, Shannon does not participate in after school sports or activities. “I had Leadership in one of my classes at my old school and I did volleyball and basketball in my elementary school.” She enjoys her friends and lunch time the most about school, and her favorite subject is math.

The previous section discussed students, Kolbe, Quinn, John, Jennifer, Glenda, and
Shannon who had failing grades in at least one class at the time of their interviews. All of them except Kolbe and Quinn had been students at Jackson Heights some time prior to returning, however there was not any evidence that may have suggested their return to Jackson Heights directly played a role in their failing grades. Perhaps their failing grades were due to their excessive absences and behavior infractions that may have greatly interrupted their academic progress. All six of these first students had attended several schools since Kindergarten which may have also left gaps in their learning. Being an equal number with three boys and three girls, there did not seem to be a gender that dominated the failing student category, however all the boys who were interviewed were in the failing category. My initial thought was that highly mobile minority students are more likely to be failing however the first six students were Caucasian except Glenda who was Hispanic. Demie (2002) asserts that other factors such as gender, prior attainment, ethnic background, and economic disadvantage may also affect student performance. When students have many factors that would typically give them an academic disadvantage, it is difficult to filter out one factor alone that may affect their learning.

In the next section, I will share the interviews of the remaining three mobile students, Mary, Quinella, and Kylie who are grouped together due to their passing grades based on their 2nd Trimester Report Cards. It is interesting to note that Kylie had failing grades until her placement was changed to the Structured Learning Center. Now she is passing. Though one may assume that mobility is a factor in and of itself that negatively impacts students’ academic performance these students contradict that assumption. Their passing grades are one indication that these three students may have been engaged in their learning.

Interestingly, of the three students with passing grades, Mary and Quinella changed
middle schools from within the district boundaries, and Kylie moved into Jackson Heights’ boundaries from another district. None of these students were previously enrolled at Jackson Heights, they were all first time enrollees in the school. Two students moved only a short distance and changed schools, whereas one student, Kylie, moved into Jackson Heights from Colorado. (Table 7)

Mary: 13 years old, 8th grade, 6 schools since Kindergarten

When I first saw Mary, her hair was short with bright blue streaks making stripes throughout. She wore fishnet stockings, layers of dark clothing, and calf-high boots. She enters my office for the interview with a bright smile and seems to feel comfortable and confident, not nervous.

Mary enrolled at Jackson Heights shortly after winter break. Her family did not make a physical move at this time, but Mary chose to switch schools. She left the district’s arts school to go to her neighborhood school, Jackson Heights. Mary does not elaborate on why she chose to leave the arts school, but when she shared that when she first arrived at Jackson Heights, she felt mad because she missed her old friends. Worse of all, she had to get new clothes because of the dress code. “I just got new clothes and then couldn’t wear them when I went to Jackson Heights!” Eventually, she makes friends as “kids who have been here came to me, and we made friends.” In addition, Mary elaborates on her first days at Jackson Heights, “The Welcome Center drove me crazy!” She did not like being in there with sixth graders and taking placement tests. She states that they also needed a tour of the school. As far as making connections with other students, Mary shares, “It’s up to the kids to make their new friends.”

Mary’s confidence during the interview aligns with her academic success. She is in
honors English, Literature, Science and History classes along with high school level Algebra. At the time of the interview, Mary had As and Bs in most of her classes and a C in Algebra. She appears to want to substantiate her lower grade as she claims, “Mrs. Anderson in Algebra does math tests all the time. If a couple kids get the information, then she thinks we all get it and moves on.” Mary shares that English and Literature are better here and not just 20 spelling words each week. She claims that her grades were worse before coming to Jackson Heights. “I like school now.”

Mary became involved in the Flag Team and marched with the band in a local parade. She also expressed her beliefs with a group of students who were protesting against the dress code during school hours and was truant from her classes. That incident was Mary’s only behavior infraction while at Jackson Heights.

**Quinella: 14 years old, 8th grade, 7 schools since Kindergarten**

Unlike the mobile students who came into Jackson Heights with fear and frustration, Quinella appears to be more positive about her move. She came from another middle school within the district but had not attended Jackson Heights before. When Quinella was introduced to me as a new student she seemed to be a friendly and confident young lady. Her manners and respect were pleasing as we exchanged introductory greetings and information. “Pleased to meet you” coupled with a firm handshake and smile created a positive first impression of Quinella.

Prior to coming to this school district, she was in Portland Schools. She states, “I wasn’t sad or happy about coming to Jackson Heights. I was missing my old school, but Jackson Heights had some old friends here, too.” In fact, Quinella feels that the Welcome
Center was rather boring because she was ready to be with people she knew who had moved from her other school, too. She appears to be a student who respects school rules and does not need detailed information on the handbook.

Quinella’s adjustment to a new school may have stemmed from her supportive family. Her family (mother, father, younger brother) found a better place to live which meant changing schools. Her parents’ involvement in her education seemed to be apparent as they already attended one conference with Quinella’s teachers to check on her progress. Her move was at the beginning of her 8th grade year and she became involved in sports and activities right away. Quinella participated in volleyball, track, leadership, and became a mentor to the sixth grade students. She shares that the most difficult part of leaving her last school was missing her friends and teachers. Quinella’s own adjustment to a new school seemed to help her be more sensitive to others who are new in her classrooms. She shares, “When they are in my classroom, and they are sitting by themselves, I go and talk with them.”

She appeared to work hard academically and has two As and the rest Bs at the time of her interview. When asked whether her mobility affected her education, Quinella replies, “Kind of. Like, when you go to a different school you are put in lower classes, and they might be doing something different and have to catch up. Classes could be really different.” She shares that her previous school was really big, and the teachers were not as strict. “They let us get away with stuff. Maybe it’s the dress code here, but kids get in more trouble here.” When comparing the learning between her last two schools which were in the same district, Quinella says, “They were on different stuff in math and I had to get caught up. History was different, too, and I had to get caught up. The Science WASL was hard. I never did that before.”
Despite the differences, Quinella has a drive to figure it out and try her best.

Quinella shares that she likes being involved in school, and she is currently applying for an Associated Student Body (ASB) position for her freshman year in high school. This process is completed during a student’s last couple months of their 8th grade year.

**Kylie: 14 years old, 8th grade, 10 schools since 1st grade (did not attend Kindergarten)**

Another student with apparent turmoil in her life, Kylie came to Jackson Heights from Colorado during her 8th grade year just one month into the school year. Unlike the others who were interviewed, she had experiences of moving from state to state instead of just across school boundary lines. Her first day was frustrating because she was asked to turn her T-shirt backwards, because of the inappropriate picture on the front and the Jackson Heights dress code requires plain clothing. “I don’t know why the dress code is still there when it is causing a lot of problems. People make fun of the group I hang out with even more. I don’t like looking like the other people.” She began to display what seemed to be her strong will from the moment she stepped into the Welcome Center. She was upset that she was housed in the Welcome Center as she said, “I usually get a schedule and go when I attend a new school.” She was so determined to be on her own that she left the Welcome Center without permission.

Kylie seemed to show signs of resistance and anger at school. During the interview her 5’7” frame was slumped in the chair with her feet up on the chair next to her. It appeared that she had written something with markers on her jeans. She had recently cut her own long dark hair leaving a long section in the front which contrasted with the extremely short section she made in the back. She said that she just wanted to cut her own hair, so she did.

Kylie’s mother was in jail in Colorado, and her relatives did not know where her father
was. Kylie shared that she and her older brother recently moved in with her great aunt who recently gained custody of them. She claimed that they hardly knew her aunt when they began living with her. When she entered Jackson Heights, she was placed in general education classes and refused to do any work. She was failing her classes. About a month later and several office referrals for disruptive and failure to cooperate behaviors, it was discovered that she was supposed to be in a self-contained classroom for a social emotional behavior disorder. The academic record transfer from her Colorado school was not as efficient as most record transfers. Her great aunt was unaware of her placement in Colorado, therefore when she registered her at Jackson Heights she did not indicate that Kylie had an IEP and received any Special Education services. Fortunately, we were able to get her processed and into the appropriate Structured Learning Center program, which happened to be at Jackson Heights. She did not have to change schools for the appropriate placement. Once she was placed in the appropriate Special Education setting, Kylie’s academics improved.

Kylie went from failing grades to passing when she entered the Structured Learning Center program. Writing and reading were her favorite subjects. She shares that changing schools so much affected her math, “Because when I was in the third grade, I was learning multiplication and I still don’t know that because of the moves.” Even though she admits that her math skills were affected, she boasts, “But one thing is, I’m still a better writer than most kids!”

Kylie seems to be aware of her behaviors and her struggles, yet is not connected to counseling because it takes weeks to get into the local providers who accept welfare and state custody patients. Unfortunately, most highly mobile students do not get connected quickly or
just about the time they begin going to counseling, they move and need to start over with the process. When Kylie is asked whether the adults were helpful when she entered Jackson Heights, she shares, “The adults were nice. It wouldn’t have helped if they did anything different because I’m a horrible person.”

Summary

The last three students had passing grades at the time of their interviews and seemed to have a few common factors that may have positively impacted their academic progress. Kylie’s number of absences and office referrals far exceeded the other two students, yet she was passing her classes. Her passing grades seemed to be primarily due to her being in the Structured Learning Center which is a self contained classroom where she received specially designed instruction for her IEP goals. With Kylie’s information aside, the other two students in the passing category had fewer discipline referrals and absences that may interrupt learning. Mary and Quinella had attended fewer schools than most of the other students except Quinn. Perhaps their fewer number of absences, discipline referrals and number of moves were a factor in their passing classes. (Table 8)

Table 8 summarizes all nine students’ indicators which may have had an impact on their learning. Besides indicating whether the students were passing or failing, their race was listed as predominantly white, and their attendance rates were generally poor. All three of the boys were failing, three girls were passing and three girls were failing. There was a fairly equal divide between students having either one or two guardians in the home; however Shannon is the only student who was living with both biological parents which one may believe would be a more supportive environment. I was amazed to find that Shannon was not only highly mobile,
but she had excessive absences and several discipline referrals for the three months she was at Jackson Heights. The number of schools attended since kindergarten ranged from four to ten for the nine students. It is interesting to note that the attendance rate for the months at Jackson Heights was generally lower for the failing students than the passing students. With Kylie’s information aside since she had changed placement into a Structured Learning Center, the number of discipline referrals were greater for those students failing than those who were passing.

In addition to the factors in Table 8 that may affect student experiences and learning, I will discuss student attitude in Chapter 7 and how it may have impacted their entrance into a new school. All of the mobile students in this study were part of the Jackson Heights Welcome Center process. Some students seemed to have already given up and decided it was too late for academic success, while others tried hard to fit in both academically and socially. A key factor in this attitude difference may be due to parent involvement and awareness. It appeared that when parents were involved in meeting with teachers and showing interest in their child’s education, the child seemed to adjust with less anxiety and more success. This was especially true with Quinella as her parents met with her teachers, and Quinella seemed more acclimated to a new school. In addition, once Kylie’s great aunt met with Jackson Heights’ staff and she was made more aware of Kylie’s needs, Kylie’s adjustment and academic growth improved.
Table 8
Jackson Heights Mobile Students' Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Grades Pass/Fail*</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Guardian in home</th>
<th>Moves since kindergarten</th>
<th>Months at J. H. ***</th>
<th>Attendance rate for time at J.H.</th>
<th>Discipline Referrals while at J.H.</th>
<th>Receives Special Education Services</th>
<th>Involved in after school activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolbe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>mother &amp; stepfather</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>sister**</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>mother &amp; father</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>mother &amp; stepfather</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinella</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>mother &amp; stepfather</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>great aunt**</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Failing* defined as not passing one of more classes

**Students may qualify as homeless as defined by McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act

***Number of months students have been enrolled at Jackson Heights Middle School

Note: Interviews were conducted at end of school year.
Friendships seemed to be a predominant concern for all nine students. Either they were upset for leaving friends and/or worried about being accepted by others in a new school community. That feeling of acceptance appeared to be desire according to what the students shared in their interviews. The students’ experiences were each unique, yet had some commonalities especially in the social acceptance aspect of entering a new school.

The information from the student and staff interviews may be used to further examine how the school community embraces and integrates mobile students. What might the staff have in place to support the mobile students? Nakagawa et al. (2002) found that schools that are experiencing high levels of mobility are making many attempts to build community though more programs does not necessarily mean that more attempts are made to recruit mobile families into the learning community.

Chapter 6 will share the staff interviews on student mobility. Similar to the students, the staff will be separated into categories that surfaced and developed from the interview data. Chapter 7 will have additional discussion and make connections with the staff and student interviews. It will conclude with recommendations on what might be done to improve the understanding of the mobile student population and the school community.
CHAPTER 6

STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT MOBILITY

The purpose of this study is to examine the school community and what the community might do to welcome mobile students so they are set up for success. To better understand the learning community, interviews were conducted with twelve adults who work at Jackson Heights. Teachers, para-educators, and administrators were selected to be interviewed to add depth to the study in getting more perspectives. I purposely selected to interview more than teachers so I might be able to compile a school-wide perspective of the mobile students’ entrance into the school community. Patton (1990) asserts that information-rich cases for study come from the logic and power of purposeful sampling selection.

One of the purposes of interviewing Jackson Heights’ staff members was to gain an understanding of the Jackson Heights community’s response to student mobility. Staff members are faced with time constraints in getting to know each student and have difficulty in reaching their families. On the average, most Jackson Heights’ teachers teach 160 students divided into six 45 minute class periods throughout the day. Forty-five minutes may not be an adequate amount of time for teachers to cover the curriculum and spend time building relationships with new students. Perhaps, that may be why many teachers rely on student peers to assist in acclimating new students to the classroom and the school. Many staff members may face the difficult challenge of meeting the needs of every student whether the student is high achieving and stable or has learning disabilities, learning gaps, or mobile. As difficult as this may seem, some find that students who value themselves and feel valued and respected by their teachers are more likely to become academically engaged and successful in school.
Some staff members are sensitive to the importance of integrating new students into their classrooms and other staff members do not seem to recognize the need.

The staff interviews offered an opportunity to learn staff beliefs about and responses to the general issue of student mobility and helped me understand how they approached working with students who entered their classrooms during the school year. Staff members’ perceptions may affect a new student’s acclimation to their classroom environment through their communication. LeRoux (2002, p. 38) stresses, “No education can take place without interpersonal communication.” In addition to interpersonal verbal communication, staff members may unintentionally communicate through their body language. Staff members may have preconceived notions about mobile students and may not expect them to be successful members of the school community. Some staff members may believe the more mobile a student is, the less connected he will be in school. It may be that teachers communicate, either verbally or through their body language, disappointment when their classroom is disrupted with a new student. Teachers may send an unintended message to the new students that they do not have time for them or value their presence as they often rely on the help of other students in their classroom to help the new students adjust to the classroom.

Some comments coming from the staff interviews were similar for all staff members. Many of the twelve staff members who were interviewed remembered having professional development in the areas of poverty and at-risk students; however they could not specifically recall training in the area of mobile students. Many staff members were also unclear about whether and how the school administrators were connecting with new students.

For this chapter, I have grouped the staff members together under three categories as
illustrated in Table 9. The first category includes those who clearly talked about integrating mobile students. Those staff members are Leanne, Linda, Kristi, and Jane. The second grouping category is based on staff members saying they integrate the mobile students; however their responses appeared to show that they do minimal to integrate them. Joan, Beth, Traci, and Richard are in this category. For those staff members who appeared to value their classroom structure and did not express a need to integrate new students above and beyond learning the classroom structure, I created the third category. Anna, Dan, Mary, and Hannah are in this category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clearly talks about and implements integrating</th>
<th>Say they integrate but appear to do little</th>
<th>Values structure and does not recognize need to integrate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leanne</td>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>Anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Dan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristi</td>
<td>Traci</td>
<td>Martha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Hannah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of their responses, one might assume that the first four staff members who will be discussed appear to understand the need to make connections with new students. During their interview, these staff members clearly talked about how they intentionally integrate the new students into their classrooms or the school community. They seem to make an effort to do more than introducing themselves and handing off the integration to a peer in the classroom. They seem to understand what they can make a big impact by showing personal interest in new
students and giving them the opportunity to create positive identities for themselves (Walling, 1990). Staff members will be listed with their name, years of experience, and position held at Jackson Heights. Teachers will also have their subject areas identified. It is important to note that two of these first four staff members work in the Welcome Center which is specifically designed to successfully integrate new students into Jackson Heights.

**Leanne: 2 ½ Years Teaching Experience, 7th and 8th grade Math**

Leanne’s friendliness and warmth appears to attract others to her. Her willingness to help other staff members coincides with her willingness to improve her own teaching. She is involved in a math Professional Learning Community and has enough energy after a school day to coach sports at Jackson Heights despite just having her first child. Even though the Jackson Heights dress code was created for the students, she has chosen to be an example and follow the dress code as a teacher.

“The students, the staff and putting kids first are what I enjoy most about working here,” Leanne said as we began the interview. Leanne teaches all levels of math in the 7th and 8th grades and maintains a grade book with 168 students. When asked what she thought were the challenges that students face in school, she responds with deep insight,

The challenges that some of our Jackson Heights students face are living in poverty, gang affiliations, having to watch siblings at home rather than attending school, having to be self-sufficient at age 12, having a place to do school work, having school be a priority at home, students taking on adults’ responsibilities as well as the “normal” challenges of peers and academics.

Leanne believes that the Welcome Center does alleviate some concerns that new
students may have about where things are located and getting acquainted with the building. She claims that most students are nervous; however the staff is very warm and welcoming. Leanne also feels that the students do a nice job in making new students feel welcome at Jackson Heights. Being involved in activities and sports helps students build friendships more quickly and become more connected to the school.

When asked how a student’s mobility impacts his learning, Leanne answers with a passionate perception,

The rate of mobility of a student has a huge impact on students’ learning. I have had students in the past who have been to 3 to 4 schools that school year and are completely lost because there are many “holes” in that student’s conceptual knowledge. Even if students move around in the district, the different timelines that curriculum is presented creates holes as well. Also, the student never really has a chance to be a part of the learning community. The more mobile a child is, the less likely that student is willing to invest in the classroom and the school.

Leanne’s belief that it is difficult for a student to catch up ultimately depends on the student; however for mobile students, it is especially difficult to catch up in math. She claims that if students never master multiplication, it greatly affects their mathematical progress. “Without multiplication or division, it is extremely challenging to learn other key skills like fractions, ratios and proportions, area, volume, and equations.” It is difficult for students to catch up in such a progressive subject like math, especially when they have holes in the foundations of mathematics.

When Leanne knows she is getting a new student, she makes an attempt to read their
folder and have a conversation with the student while they are in the Welcome Center. She might ask where they are from, what are their interests, and whether there is anything she might need to know about them. In her questioning, she asks what the student was learning in his old school in math. Like many other teachers, she provides a peer mentor in the class to help with procedures and expectations. Leanne believes that communication is important in getting to know a new student.

Linda: 13 Years Teaching Experience, Special Education and General Education Language Arts Instructor

Linda appears to always be cheerful and positive. She makes an effort to say hello to all those around her and ask how they are doing. Linda teaches the below grade level students in both Special Education and General Education language arts. Some may feel that these are the most difficult students to teach, but Linda seems to show great pride in engaging her students in their learning. In addition, Linda makes herself available before school, after school and during lunch to provide help for struggling students.

Linda’s role as a Special Education and General Education teacher did not seem to affect her perception of mobile students when compared to the other staff interviewed. She might see the same students for Special Education Language Arts that a Math teacher has for math. Linda believes that the challenges that students must face are beyond the school environment. Economics, family dysfunction and emotional needs are not met at home for many children, Linda claims.

The highly mobile student’s learning is impacted because of his moves. “There are holes in the curriculum, not being able to focus, no connections with the school environment,
and illness (either real or psychosomatic) all get in the way of student learning,” Linda shares. Students can catch up on their learning if they are willing to come in before school, after school, or at lunch. “A few moments in the classroom is not enough time to catch up,” Linda says with confidence.

Linda suggests that improvements must be made in helping new students in the Jackson Heights community. “Students could be targeted and assigned to teachers. They could take them under their wings and check in on them. Perhaps a peer mentor can be assigned for their lunches.” She uses classroom strategies such as candy rewards, high fives, and other motivational cues and praise to connect with students in her classroom and to get them to interact with others. Linda claims that trust is a factor in students connecting to the school. The more trusting students become the more ready they are to settle in and learn. Linda suggests that if students are not trusting and are more emotionally disabled, it will take longer for students to be connected. A teacher needs to put in more time and energy to those students to help them get connected.

**Kristi: 9 Months Para-educator Experience, Welcome Center Coordinator**

Kristi came to Jackson Heights shortly after the school year started because of an opening that needed to be filled. I was the one conducting the interviews for her position and felt she would be able to connect to the students in the Welcome Center. Her Hispanic background was also an asset for Jackson Heights as more Spanish speakers were enrolling. Kristi was the youngest candidate for the position, however the strongest in qualifications.

Being the main person in the Welcome Center who greets and works with new students, I found it important to interview Kristi. She enjoys working with the students and being one of
the first people the new students come in contact with at Jackson Heights. Kristi takes her position seriously as she helps students make a smooth transition into the school. Kristi thinks that most students are scared when they enter Jackson Heights and shared,

Day one is tough for most students. It’s always scary to start a new school, especially when the school year has already begun. However, every time there is a new student, I like to take 15-20 minutes first thing in the morning to talk with them and help them feel more at ease. And it usually works. Communication is extremely important. Students need to feel like they can trust you and believe that you are here to help them succeed. Taking the time to really listen and observe the students is crucial. Frequent breaks are taken in the Welcome Center and we play games, draw pictures or just talk. The responses from the students are amazing!

The Welcome Center gives the students a safe place to be when they first enroll at Jackson Heights. Kristi shared that new students are too shy or too embarrassed to take breaks and would rather stay in the Welcome Center. However, once they come back from lunch most of the students are excited because they have met a new friend or found someone from their previous school. After 1 ½ to 2 days in the Welcome Center, the new students are eager to get into their classes because they have met new friends.

Kristi willingly shares her opinion that one of the biggest challenges that students face was peer pressure from their friends for drugs, sex, or pressure to be someone you are not in order to fit in. She give an example of how students are completely different when they are one-on-one than when they are influenced by their friends. She recalls,

A few months ago there was a student protest at our school and some of the kids that
were involved in this protest had gone through the Welcome Center. These students showed me different sides of themselves while they were in the Welcome Center. They scored extremely high on their assessment tests and many of them established great goals for the remainder of the year, yet they were involved in a student protest. After the protest, I had the opportunity to talk to one of the students about her actions, and she was ashamed that she had let peer pressure come in the way of her succeeding at Jackson Heights. She decided that she was going to re-evaluate who she was hanging out with.

Since Kristi is not with the students in their classrooms, she bases her perception of how students adjust academically by her experience in the Welcome Center. “Overall, I think students do well catching up with their work in their classrooms. We always tell the students that if they feel overwhelmed, they can always come back to the Welcome Center because we are here to help. I can’t recall one student coming back into the Welcome Center for help.”

When Kristi sees students who she had helped transition into Jackson Heights walking down the halls or at lunch, she always asks them how they are doing.

Like the other teachers, Kristi believes an improvement can be made in welcoming students by having a student committee come to greet the students. Perhaps student ambassadors could be assigned as mentors and give the students tours of the schools and eat lunch with them. Kristi feels this would make the new students’ transition even easier.

Kristi finished out the school year as the key person in the Welcome Center, however moved on to a different job outside the school system. While working at Jackson Heights, she was also employed part time at an insurance company and was offered a full time position that
included increased pay and benefits. She mentioned that it was a difficult decision because she likes to work with the students; however she needed a year round income.

**Jane: 4 Years Para-educator Experience, Classroom Assistant and Welcome Center**

As a para-educator, Jane enjoys the luxury of having variety in her schedule and being able to independently manage her time daily. She is assigned to a Learning Support classroom for part of the day and works in the Welcome Center while Kristi has lunch or is on a break. Jane appears to be energetic and has a willingness to help others whether an adult or student. She enjoys working with students and finding something in common with each one and states, “Sometimes just sharing a smile confirms that a connection has already been made.”

Jane has firsthand experience in welcoming new students while working in the Welcome Center. She believes there was a fast connection when two or more new students are in the center together because once they start classes, they recognize each other in the hall or at lunch. “Some students who were against the move or had to move from dad’s house to mom’s house seem more introverted and a connection takes longer.” Jane always tries to sit around the table and have the students talk for a few minutes about their favorite sport, favorite TV show, and other safe topics so there can be connections made with one another. Jane feels it sparks conversation and assists in getting to know one another. She listens attentively and participates in student conversations as she tries to make connections with them. These connections may be with one another, with other students, or with the school community. Occasionally, two new students may be in the Welcome Center and choose to sit at two different tables and never interact. The adults do not try to force them to interact as they prefer to sit quietly by themselves. Jane believes that communication is important and can discover
more about the students with the “Who Am I?” paper that they write in the Welcome Center.

Peer pressure or poor peer relationships are challenges that Jane believes students are faced with. She also shares that students tend to bully one another with put-downs or making fun of others, and they have a difficult time handling it. Students are also faced with academic struggles. Jane feels that the lack of parent involvement or interest is demonstrated by sending their children to school without school supplies.

As far as a student’s mobility affecting his academics, Jane believes that if a student’s environment is more stable, more learning will occur. “If a student is moving from school to school, I think it affects the student’s attitude and the desire for learning dwindles.” She continues by stating, “Perhaps a student is moving because of a discipline issue from another school, the student’s Jackson Heights experience will begin negatively.”

Jane feels that students may only be behind for a little while after they enter Jackson Heights. “I can’t imagine a teacher piles the homework on for a student to catch up! I would hope that a teacher takes a little extra time and prepare a packet or teams them up with a peer for catch up.” Jane recognizes the challenge that some students must have when they are placed in new classes and feel lost for a while. It could be that their previous school had not covered that material yet or it is a repeat of what they have already learned.

“The more receptive the staff and other students are, the more welcomed new students will feel,” Jane shares. “I think students spend a certain amount of time observing how class runs, and then they start to feel more comfortable. For the most part, I think all staff are encouraging and accommodating to the new students.”

The next four staff members, Joan, Beth, Traci, and Richard, acknowledge the
importance of integrating new students into the school community however they seem to implement only minimal strategies. These staff members are aware of new students and usually greet them and find that pairing them up with another student is adequate. The actions of the school community may be the turning point in creating a positive or negative learning path for a student (Walling, 1990) and these staff members may not be aware that more could be done to create a positive experience for the mobile students. Two of these staff members are administrators who are not as directly involved with new students, but admit more should be done to integrate new students into the Jackson Heights community.

Joan: 28 Years Teaching Experience, Data Literacy Facilitator, Reading Teacher, Welcome Center Teacher (1 class period)

Nearly close to retirement, Joan appears to maintain a level of energy to get a job done. Her position at Jackson Heights allows her to interact with all the new students. She works in the Welcome Center and oversees the student assessments and placements along with teaching a Literature Focus class. Her perception of student mobility seems to be built upon first impressions as she is with the students for an average of two days. She feels that the Welcome Center has made a huge difference in student comfort level for new students entering Jackson Heights. “Some students make friends in the Welcome Center before they attend any classes! However, this is a friendly school and most students are readily accepted.” She feels that peers can befriend a new student or a teacher can use one-on-one time for background information. “New students meet the office staff when their families register them, and sometimes the administrators say hello to the new students.”

Being a Data Facilitator, Joan evaluates student data on a regular basis. In her findings,
she concludes, “The more mobile a student is, the lower his skills are….in MOST cases.” She feels that this is due to parental support and the lack of motivation for students to succeed in school. “They tend to have a ‘Why try?’ attitude. They also have no place to study at home as many live out of plastic bags as they travel from apartment to apartment, avoiding the rent.”

As far as catching up in academics, Joan claims that for reading it is not difficult to catch up unless the students are entering a specific reading program like *Language! or Read Naturally*. Joan is most familiar with reading curriculum and cannot speak to catching up in other curricular areas.

**Beth: 4 Years Teaching Experience, Literature Focus, 7th grade Literature, 6/7/8 grades Challenge/Honors Social Studies**

Beth is fairly new to the teaching profession; however her peers tend to regard her as being knowledgeable about student learning. She is the leader of the Language Arts Professional Learning Community at Jackson Heights. Beth seems to desire to continue her own education as she attends conferences and workshops that focus on student learning, and she will soon start her National Board Certification program. As a teacher-leader role, Beth has provided professional development lessons on strategies that promote student learning during staff meetings.

Perceptually, Beth appears to be much more attuned to her students and their situations. She is labeled a “relationship person” by others on Jackson Heights’s staff. Beth shares that she enjoys the challenge of working with students whom she could connect with. She expresses that her understanding of mobile students’ challenges runs deeper than lack of parental support or student attitude. She states,
The challenges faced by students entering Jackson Heights run the gamut. First, many of the students I work with enter lacking necessary skills to make them successful at school. Students seem to have missed significant chunks of instruction. Many of my Literature Focus students really are smart children; however, they are lacking in one or two specific areas which prevents success in reading. Students are constantly dealing with challenges that carry over from their home lives: unstable environments, physical and mental abuse, poverty, parents who work long hours, and responsibilities that should be left to their parents.

Beth is aware of Jackson Heights’s high mobility and claims that because of Jackson Heights’ high mobility, many students have attended Jackson Heights previously or they may know students from other schools they have attended. This makes their transition a little easier. Beth claims that teachers and peers work hard to help students acclimate to the classroom. “I think when students first enter Jackson Heights they feel intimated by the population. After spending a few days transition from the Welcome Center, I think some of their anxiety is alleviated.” Similar to other teachers, Beth makes a point to introduce herself to new students and pair them up with peers within her classroom for a couple of weeks.

Despite Joan’s perception that reading is a subject that a student can easily catch up in, Beth claims that it is difficult when new students enter her Literature Focus class. This is a strategic level (below grade level) reading class and the students often read novels which are extremely difficult to catch up in. In addition, Beth claims,

Student mobility affects learning in a variety of ways. First, a lack on consistency prevents the development of connection with staff, peers, and a school community.
Next, students moving often will miss significant chunks of instruction. What is happening in one school may not match up with a student’s new school. Many students are subjected to tests for placement and when pieces of learning are missing, a test may not give an accurate representation of that student’s real capabilities.

Beth concludes that she feels Jackson Heights’ staff is doing the best they can with the resources they have. Her only suggestion would be that the district standardize and align the curriculum better so those who move within the district may have a smoother academic transition.

**Traci: 1 Year Associate Principal, 7 Years Teaching Experience**

As a single parent, Traci appears to be torn with the balance of family and work. Having been hired from another state nine years and placed at Jackson Heights for her entire career, Traci is away from immediate family and has quickly learned to connect to others around her. This experience may have helped with her understanding and connection with the students. She enjoys the diverse population and believes, “People need to be here for the kids, and if you’re not here for the love of that, then people should not be working here.”

Traci feels that many of Jackson Heights’s students’ challenges are circumstantial, and they attend school without all their needs met. “There is that delicate balance of teaching students academics and teaching them life skills.” Another challenge that students and schools both face is the hurdle of getting the families involved in their education. “Students experience a disconnection between their own families’ education and theirs, or there could be a language barrier so the families cannot support the education system.”

A student’s social and academic connections are vital to school success, according to
Traci. The Welcome Center is place designed so the students can come into Jackson Heights and get acclimated before jumping into the classroom settings. Traci explains that it is a place they tour the school, meet other students, get copies of their syllabi, and be prepared to enter the classrooms. “I feel they are less anxious about coming to Jackson Heights after being in the Welcome Center.” Traci continued by stating,

When I was a classroom teacher, I made a point of stopping by the Welcome Center to meet my new students before they enter my classroom. I made a point to go over my class syllabus with the student. I had new student packets in the Welcome Center so it had all the references that I used, so they could add that to their binders. So when I referred to a certain page, they could look at that and not be lost. I would have other kids stop by and I tried to make sure students would buddy up with them at lunch. I’m not sure if other teachers do that. That might be a conversation that we need to have with teachers.

Traci continues with her perception on how students connect with others once they arrive at Jackson Heights. “Building friendships depends on the students. Outgoing students may connect easier than others. It all depends on their personality and the number of times they have moved whether they are used to it and how many skills they have in their bag!” Traci emphasizes that some students may not want to get connected to a new school and friends, because they may turn around and leave again. “I think it’s more of a survivalist-type attitude.”

Academically, students are greatly affected by their mobility according to Traci, and it impacts their learning. She claims that there are gaps in their education. “By moving around,
they may be missing large concepts. Not every school is teaching the same concepts at the same time and not all curriculums align.” Once again, Traci emphasizes the importance of whether a student is connected or not and whether they are going to move again. This plays a part in students engaging themselves in their learning. Students may not want to invest in making an effort, if they have had experiences of mobility. “It’s hard for kids to come in the middle of a project, and so many of our classrooms do many classroom projects. So, if we give the new students the end target and the mastery skill, it could be better in catching them up. Sometimes it can be so overwhelming and intimidating to enter a classroom that is moving right along. There has to be things in place to assist the new student in catching on.” Traci stresses that stable students make good peer-leaders who can assist in making connections for the new students. “When students are teaching their peers, they are learning as well. It reinforces their own learning as they explain it to others.”

Despite the fact that many of the classroom teachers shared that they had training in poverty (specifically Ruby Payne), Traci was unaware of any professional development opportunities that may provide strategies that work with poverty or mobile students. “It is an area we need to look into,” Traci stressed.

As a school leader, Traci feels that administrators should be modeling and reiterating the school vision on the forefront. Making connections with students is the message that Traci wants to be sure to model to others. As an administrator, she makes a point to greet new students as they come through the office area and continue to check on their progress when she sees them in the halls, classrooms, and lunch room.

As far as improvements that could be made, Traci that when she started at Jackson
Heights, all teachers were asked to leave a folder of information about their classes and who they are in the Welcome Center and were asked to stop in and meet the new students. Traci is unsure this is being done, perhaps due to having a lot of new staff since then. “Perhaps we more effort can be made in getting teachers in to introduce themselves instead of meeting the student for the first time when he enters the classroom.” If teachers want, they can create a WebCam introduction of themselves and their classrooms. In addition to getting the teachers into the Welcome Center to meet students, Traci feels that a student-to-student mentor program would help new students connect to Jackson Heights more quickly.

Richard: 8 Years Principal Experience, 5 Years Teaching Experience

Richard’s experience in the field of education began as a teacher in another city which led him into the field administration and being hired for Jackson Heights Middle School principal. He still lives in the other city with his wife and two daughters so his commute is longer than most at Jackson Heights. One may consider Richard to be an effective leader in leading change within a school in need of improvement as he continually provides the focus on making connections with students that will improve student learning.

As the leader of the school, Richard holds the big picture view of the workings within the community. He enjoys working at Jackson Heights because of the people who are there and that the people come with by and large the right attitude. Richard shares that they are there for the kids, which is the same reason he is there.

Richard recognizes that students are faced with many challenges these days whether they are mobile or not. He claims,

Many of our kids come in with a defeatist attitude where they feel they can’t do
something. Particularly in the society they are growing up in where they’re so used to instant gratification. Kids believe, ‘If I can’t do it today, or the next hour, then it’s not worth putting the time in to actually do it.’ Kids see the moment, not the long term.

A student’s attitude usually becomes more negatively intensified when they are mobile. Richard feels that a normal student response whenever they are in a new school is, “I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to leave my other school.” Students instantly put up a wall to protect them and begin to compare their new surroundings with their old school, whether they liked it there or not. Richard claims that the Welcome Center alleviates much of the anxiety of new students because they are not treated as just another enrollee, but adults are willing to sit down and get to know them. “Students have a more difficult time becoming connected at Jackson Heights if they come into the school with a preconceived notion on what it is going to be like in a new school,” Richard claims.

Student learning is affected by their mobility, Richard shares. He believes that there are gaps that begin to develop as students move from place to place and curriculum differs. Students will soon have an educational foundation that looks like Swiss cheese. Because of these “holes,” students need to catch up. Richard says,

I worry about the kids who don’t have interventions in place, particularly in math and reading. I would like to think that we would get our kids where their gap starts. When adults miss multiple days of work, they play catch up on their own time and not during the days they are back to work. So why not have a vehicle to catch kids up much like many other systems. Like year round systems with sessions in between so they are not trying to catch up with all the other learning going on around them at the same time.
The students who were there the day before are teaching the review for the class to the students who weren’t there. They help catch them up with the short term losses.

During the interview, Richard emphasizes the importance of making connections with the new students so they would have less anxiety and be ready to learn. He, personally, tries to make a practice to meet the students in the Welcome Center, and the Welcome Center Coordinator makes the office area part of the students’ tour and introducing them to the administrators. Richard puts the students first, for example, “When the kids are with parents, I will introduce myself to the student before I introduce myself to the parent.”

Despite what is presently practiced at Jackson Heights at welcoming new students, Richard believes there is room for improvement. He feels as a leader he is responsible for modeling the behaviors he would like his staff to do. “They need to see us as administrators to support great teaching and best practices.” Richard believes that the staff is already looking differently at student learning since OSPI has stepped in with a facilitator. Greater focus is on student learning.

As far as improvements that could be made with welcoming new students, Richard feels that technology could be helpful. Teachers may want to update their web pages so students can read the syllabus and find out more about the school, their classrooms, and teachers on the school’s website. In the meantime, Richard states that we could do a better job with communication between the classroom and the Welcome Center. In addition to creating means to provide syllabi and introductions, Richard feels that student mentors would make a good addition to the welcoming process. He did not know what that would look like, but it is something to consider.
The final category of staff members, Anna, Dan, Martha, and Hannah, appear to uphold the structure and formality of their classrooms more than the integration of new students. They acknowledged that new students enter their classrooms and they may greet them or use cooperative groups to integrate them; however they seemed to turn the focus of their interviews to maintaining organization and structure in their classrooms. I was unable to capture any of these staff members’ responses to how they may address the emotional or social support needs of the individual students who enter throughout the school year. These staff members appeared to believe a new student’s adjustment to the classroom environment is when they follow along and fit in with the functions and structure of the whole class. Walling (1990) encourages knowing each student as individuals because the feeling of alienation can impact their academic, social, and emotional learning. I was interested in finding out if the teachers in this category were able to engage new students in their learning.

Anna: 5 Years Teaching Experience, 7th grade English/Social Studies, 6th grade Social Studies

Anna believes strongly that education is a privilege and students must conform to the classroom structure. Her classroom management appears to be one of no warnings to students and many referrals to the office. Despite this belief, she feels that the challenges most new students face when they come to school is the navigation of appropriate relationships with others. “As 7th and 8th graders, I think the greatest challenges relate to the social dynamics of being a middle school student regardless of gender. The focus tends to move from parental influence to peer influence, which for many students is far greater than many adults realize.” This becomes more difficult when the student is highly mobile. Making new friends seems to
be fairly easy for new students based on lunch schedules, common classes, and seating
arrangements according to Anna’s perception. “I have tried to match new students up with
students I think they would have a few things in common with who will take them under their
wing.” She personally makes an effort to introduce herself, shake their hand, and talk to the
new students about themselves as they become a part of her classroom. She tries not to
pressure them into jumping right into the academics.

Filling in the gaps in learning can be problematic; however Anna claims that it depends
upon the subject. “In English or Social Studies for example, we have a lot of discussions that
would help a new student fill in the gaps of what he or she may have missed. As long as a
student can relate to the material/subject on some level, I don’t think catching up is an issue.”
Interestingly, only two of the mobile students interviewed were in Anna’s class at the time of
their interview, and both students were failing her class.

Anna believes that mobile students would be more successful if they come in and accept
the teachers’ support and the follow the expectations of appropriate conduct. “I think the new
students who arrive with behavior issues connect sooner or more with administration than new
students who arrive prepared to be a positive member of the school community.”

Similar to what many of the new students believe, Anna feels that the Leadership
students or ASB students could have a more active role in welcoming new students. Perhaps
set up a mentoring program where students are connected to students.

**Dan: 12 Years Teaching Experience, 6th grade Social Studies and Language Arts**

Dan went back to school later in life to become a teacher as a second profession. He is
near the age of retirement; however he has not taught the number of years needed to receive
retirement benefits. Dan enjoys coming to work because of the students. He believes that students face many challenges in their lives, starting with their home environment. “It seems to me that many of my students come to school with a defeated attitude often times either subtly or overtly encouraged from their home environment especially their parents.” He notes that students are obviously nervous when they come to a school for the first time.

Dan expresses his frustration and his perception on the affect that student mobility has on student learning,

There is a huge impact on learning with regard to mobile students. The students who have come into my classroom during the second half of the school year are doing poorly academically. Many of these students have moved more than once this year and many have moved due to problems somewhere else. I believe this has had a negative affect not only on them, but on the students who have been here all year who have to endure some of the “baggage” these kids bring into the classroom. For me, it is much more difficult to “figure out” how to deal with a student’s issues when they arrive in the second half of the year when we are in the middle of the most intense academic part of the year. Students do not have a “frame of reference” to draw from if they try to be successful. It is a big challenge to try to find the time to “catch them up” on the things they need to know in order for success on the work we are doing in the class. Most of them were not motivated to catch up.

In replying to how he makes connections with new students, Dan claims that if a student is not motivated in his class, he pulls them out and has a straight talk with them about his expectations. “I talk very straight with them about how I expect them to act and that they
won’t get a lot of chances to misbehave before I start removing them from the classroom.” “I also make sure that I encourage them to just try to fit in,” Dan states.

Even though Dan shares his perception with regard to student mobility, academics and how students should behave in his classroom, he does not mention teacher strategies in connecting with new students. He appears to believe that administrators do a better job than teachers, “I’ve noticed often times these kids are really in need of someone they can count on and the administrators are able to get through to them better than the teacher due to the fact that the teacher is pushing to get projects done and is not able to give the kind of attention to these students.” Dan appears to value getting through the curriculum and perhaps underestimates the teacher’s ability to connect with students.

The interview ended with Dan expressing, “I think we do a good job in handling student mobility. We get a lot of practice at it. We try to make the kids feel accepted, we bend over backwards for the needy ones who are struggling to function in the classroom. I think we try to avoid enable their behaviors for the ones who are saddled with serious issues.”

**Martha: 10 Years Teaching Experience, 8th grade Math**

Martha appears to believe in the importance of math for her students. She shares that she strives to get through the necessary curriculum to prepare students for high school, yet she is unable to meet with students beyond the school day due to her two young children at home. Martha and her husband are both educators, and she is involved state legislative issues that support the field of mathematics.

In responding to first question of the interview, Martha is eager to share why she likes working at Jackson Heights. She expresses that the family-like atmosphere, caring staff, and
the “whatever it takes” mentality are a large part of the community and why she enjoys working at Jackson Heights. She shares that we provide a lot of emotional support for our students, however could improve in our academic support. In connecting with students who enroll during the school year, Martha welcomes them into her classroom, shows them the organizational system she uses and gives them extra credit assignments to try to fill the gaps that inhibit their success in the current area of study.

The Jackson Heights students face many challenges according to Martha, including poverty, chaos at home, language barriers, low academic skills and little academic help or emphasis coming from home. Perhaps parents are not capable of helping their children with 8th grade Math curriculum. Martha stresses that students who move a lot tend to show up with extremely low skills. “They are tested by the Welcome Center and it’s not unusual for a new student to score several years below grade level in math and reading skills. Sadly, the 296 districts in our state currently make individual curriculum decisions so kids that are on the move tend to miss out on a lot of important material.” Martha also mentions that she has had students placed in her lower level classes that had test scores that should have put them in Algebra. “It is sad for the kids who are capable of doing much more during their time at Jackson Heights.”

Once students are placed in Martha’s math classes, they have a difficult time catching up. Martha claims,

Students usually adjust to the routine and begin to get on board with the current unit of study by the end of their first month in class but will never catch up with the material they have missed, leaving them venerable to falling further and further behind. I am
hopeful that national standards and assessments in the core content areas will begin to address this tragic situation over the course of the next decade.

Martha perceives that the students are shocked when they first move into the Jackson Heights community. “They say our school is different from their previous school experiences. Many hate Jackson Heights at first, but once they adjust to the environment, they flourish and seem to love being here!”

**Hannah: 3 Years Teaching Experience, Math Teacher and Math Coach**

Hannah walks with a fast pace as she carries her detailed lesson plan from her office area to the classroom. Her neatly combed hair and precisely creased slacks show the care she puts into orderliness. She appears to successfully handle more than most as she is not only teaching one period of math but coaching others in math for the remainder of the day. In addition, she was completing her administrative internship this year which involved time in the office completing discipline, supervising games and events, and general supervision on campus. Heather and her husband were going through the adoption process of being accepted and receiving their first child.

Of the staff interviewed, Hannah seemed to be the least descriptive in her responses. Her short responses may have been due to her overall directness, or she felt there was a time constraint while doing the interview, or she may not have had an elaborate understanding of the topic of student mobility and the school community. She seemed to share key points in answering some of the questions but did not expand with details.

Hannah recognizes that the Jackson Heights students have a diverse set of needs, most of which are not academically related. “Poverty, abuse, homelessness, and neglect are
becoming more of the norm and it makes the instruction more challenging because those needs must be met before any true learning can occur.” However true this may be or not be, schools are still challenged with making sure every student learns.

Socially, mobile students have opportunities to make connections according to Hannah. Making connections with other students and the teacher can be done through cooperative learning. “It enables the student to have an active role in developing those relationships.”

In asking Hannah about how mobility impacts learning, she argues that mobility impacts students socially and academically.

Students who move often become less and less inclined to put forth the effort needed to connect with others. I think we are becoming more deliberate about creating opportunities for students to connect. Academically, deficiencies develop in students with high rates of mobility because there is no continuum to build a foundation upon.

Hannah expands her response that schools could do a better job with the mobile students by providing commonality in the curriculum for students. She suggests that schools be “on the same page” instructionally to alleviate gaps in a student’s education when the student moves from one school to another especially within the district.

All twelve staff members who were interviewed expressed that they enjoyed working at Jackson Heights primarily due to the people there. All of them consider Jackson Heights’ community as a welcoming place for new students, and most contribute this to the Welcome Center. Even though the staff members think Jackson Heights does a good job at welcoming mobile students, their responses to mobile students as they enter their classrooms appears to differ. As previously discussed, four of the staff members attempted to make connections
through conversation with the new students as they entered their classrooms. These staff members appeared to continue making connections beyond the first day, by taking time to find out more about the student and asking about their previous school, curriculum, and interests. This group of teachers usually assigns a peer mentor or buddy to assist the student in the classroom when they are not available to help. The second set of staff members shared their beliefs that they were successfully integrating mobile students into their classrooms; however, their responses did not elaborate on their efforts beyond an introduction at the doorway and possibly a peer buddy assignment to the new student to help catch them up. The final staff grouping was those who responded more in the direction of maintaining their classroom structure as a new student enters. Their responses did not mention the need to integrate new students beyond fitting them into the structure that is already in place and to move forward with the curriculum. This group appeared to be concerned about the amount of time it takes to integrate new students into their classrooms.

**Summary**

Perceptions differ from person to person, however many common themes rose from the Jackson Heights staff interviews and were separated into three categories in this chapter. Staff members were either being deliberate about integrating the new students into their classrooms, or talked about integrating and did little, or valued the classroom structure and time therefore not considering integrating new students. I attempted to determine if staff members’ responses to mobility may predict a student’s success. The deliberate action to facilitate a quick integration of new students will assist in their academic and personal success (Walling, 1990). Therefore, one might predict those teachers who were deliberate about integrating new students
may have provided more opportunities for the new students to be successful.

Chapter 7 will take a deeper look into the staff perceptions and student experiences. I will also expand on the possibility of whether a staff member’s response to mobility predicts a student’s success. I will compare the staff and student perceptions as related to topics that rose from the interview responses. This may create a deeper understanding of how effective a staff member’s response may be to integrating a mobile student into the school community. I will then provide recommendations and strategies on how school communities might generate more success in integrating and connecting with mobile students and their families.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interviewing staff and students assisted in capturing their perspectives of student mobility and the Jackson Heights Middle School community. In this chapter, I continue to summarize the student experiences and the staff perceptions. Both the students and staff had common topics that appeared to surface in their interviews, and I compare their perceptions by topic such as initial responses of both students and staff, friendships and belonging, communication, catching up, parent involvement and student learning. I discuss these perceptions and attempt to compare similar or contrasting responses between student-to-student, staff-to-staff, and student-to-staff.

The final section of this chapter provides recommendations that have had some success at other schools with welcoming and integrating mobile students into the learning communities. These recommendations include professional development opportunities for staff, making connections with students, effective and efficient records transfer, multi-layered instruction supports, consistent curriculum and instruction, welcome centers, peer mentors, family resource centers, and parent involvement.

Initial Responses

LeRoux (2002) indicates that effective education starts where the learners are. Mobile students’ experience of entering and exiting schools highly impacts their learning. Many times their emotional stability is shaken up by the reasons for the move which may be compounded by the challenge of being in a new school. Shannon says, “I was nervous about coming here. I
really didn’t know how people would react to me coming back.” Kylie shared that she didn’t like Jackson Heights, Jennifer said she was scared and shy, and Mary said she was mad about coming to Jackson Heights. Kolbe wanted to keep his old friends. On their first day while they harbor nervous feelings and feel disconnected, students are immediately being assessed in reading and math so they can be placed in the appropriate classes. Staff member, Martha, responds that many students hate Jackson Heights at first and need to adjust before they can flourish.

Some mobile students seem to feel defeated before they even attempt to be a part of the school and are not able to concentrate or give any effort in trying. Some students wonder why they should even try when school has always been temporary in their lives. Glenda is one student who admits that she did not even try, “You know how I moved and stuff? I just gave up.” Jackson Heights Principal, Richard, recognizes Glenda’s lack of effort, “If there’s a lot of moving in a student’s life, and it’s not just their first move or second move, they may feel disconnected as far as why get settled, why connect to a place, if I am going to leave again? I think it’s more of a survivalist’s type attitude.”

With the pressure of staying on target with the curriculum and preparing students to meet state standards, teachers may find it difficult when new students are placed in their classes during the school year. Their lesson plans and routines have been interrupted. Anna feels, “As a teacher, it takes a lot of extra time and energy to acclimate students to the classroom procedures and expectations which takes away from instruction for the classroom base of students.” Many times a student walks in with the backpack full of supplies that the office has provided and struggles to hide his nervousness. The teacher may be torn as she wants to spend
time to comfort the newcomer, yet the lesson must go on. However difficult it seems for a teacher to keep moving along in the curriculum and maintain the structure in the classroom as the third category of teachers prefer, students like Shannon say, “I was lost for a while. I had a hard time figuring out what they were doing in my classes.” Walling (1990) recognizes the time constraints, yet emphasizes the importance of assisting in a mobile student’s adjustment in a new school. It is a challenge for educators to minimize the time that highly mobile students spend in adjusting to a new school. Teachers may feel that this may seem like a worthless investment because just when the student has begun to fit in, circumstances may force the family to move again (Walling (1990). when the student has begun to fit in.

The difficulty of students adjusting and figuring out what was going on in their new classrooms may be reflected in the grades that students earned. Table 10 shows the three categories of teachers: those who intentionally integrate new students, those who talk about integrating but do little, and those who value and strive to maintain classroom structure. The table also shows the students who were failing and passing at the time of the interview which was shortly after the 2nd Trimester report cards.

Kristi, Jane and Richard were not classroom teachers at the time therefore would not be grading students. In addition, not all students were in classes with the teachers who were interviewed and would not show any grades. Interestingly, the lowest grades were with the teachers who value structure over intentionally integrating new students into their classrooms. One may conclude by the information in Table 10 that staff members’ responses to mobility may predict a student’s success.

Despite the differences in academic progress, the staff’s perceptions on how the
students feel when entering Jackson Heights were similar in many ways to what the students shared. Eleven of the twelve staff members express that students were scared, anxious, unmotivated, nervous, noticed, and mad when they enrolled at the school. Martha says, “Students are shocked when they enter our school! They say our school is very different from their previous school experiences.” Contrasting the other staff members, Jane feels that most students feel comfortable about moving to Jackson Heights. She shares, “The students who are very personable seem to be included quicker than the students who might be more quiet and shy.” Most of the students had similar responses to the majority of the staff stating that they felt nervous, sad, confused, and disconnected when they entered Jackson Heights. Some students like Jennifer had mixed emotions, “I felt sad and happy when coming to Jackson Heights. I missed my old friends but Jackson Heights had some old friends that I saw again.” Occasionally there is a student like John who is “psyched” and excited about a new school. To some students like John, a new school may appear to be a fresh start for them.

The staff appears to agree that the Welcome Center alleviates and soothes a lot of the students’ anxieties as a new student. Linda states, “Students feel scared when they first move into our school, then start feeling safe. The Welcome Center helps to organize them and get them started and acquainted with the building and the staff.” Quinn, who came enrolled from out of district, the Welcome Center was okay, whereas Kylie, who came from out of state, didn’t really know if it was helpful. For returning students such as Glenda and Shannon, they felt that they did not need the Welcome Center and claim they would have done fine without being in there. Staff members like Traci feel that the Welcome Center is the place that initial relationships and connections begin for new students. Students can get to know their classes
and teachers through the syllabi and discover the school grounds before they are on their own.

Traci also pointed out that some teachers make an attempt to go into the Welcome Center to meet their new students prior to their entry into their classrooms.

### Table 10

*Jackson Heights Student Grades with Staff Categories*

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### Friendships and Belonging

A predominant concern of most of the mobile students who were interviewed was the desire to belong and make new friends. One student, Shannon, clearly states, “Making friends...
was the most difficult thing about entering a new school.” Another student, Kolbe, was torn as he left his old school, “I wanted to keep my old friends.” For most of the mobile students, it appeared that their sense of belonging to a community was lost when they left their school and entered Jackson Heights. Mobile students may have a more difficult time acquiring the sense of belonging because their past experiences of changing schools have shown them that their investment in making connections with others may not last. They want to be in a group where they are supported, respected, and feel a sense of belonging. According to the Oregon Department of Education (2000), “Children who don’t belong, who feel anonymous, isolated, or neglected, will disengage from the contexts where we hope to influence them, leaving us powerless to affect them either academically or socially” (ODE, 2000, p. 13) As discussed in Chapter 2, students must have experiences every day in order to leave school optimistic about their education and personal futures. Sagor (1993) claims each student must be provided with a resiliency antibody which he defines as a set of attributes that provides people with strength and fortitude to confront the obstacles they face in life. “We can do this by providing them genuine feelings of competence, belonging, usefulness, potency, and optimism through powerful, repeated, and authentic school experiences and by critically examining the results of our efforts” (Sagor, 1993, p. 38).

Jackson Heights’ staff, especially the four staff members who make an effort to integrate mobile students into their classrooms, express that it is important to build a sense of belonging for highly mobile students even though it is unclear how long they may be there. Linda feels she creates a classroom environment where students are given the opportunity to build a sense of belonging through her motivational cues, words of praise, and candy. She
strives to reward students with their attempt to participate in her class and says the students’ names every time she calls on them so others may remember who they are, too. Linda says she attempts to build a social support system in her classroom so students feel safe to learn. In contrast, some teachers like Dan, indicate that students have a sense of belonging when the fit into the structure and routines of his class.

Following their concern and desire to make friends in their new school, most students felt that the strict dress code also made it difficult to belong to Jackson Heights. Quinn states, “The dress code was the most difficult. I had to go shopping for different clothes. I hate to go shopping!” Mary said she was mad because she just bought new clothes that she could not wear at her new school. John and Jennifer both indicated that the dress code was the most difficult part of entering Jackson Heights because it is hard for them to go shopping. The students were worried about fitting in, and not having the correct clothing made it difficult to be a part of the school.

Despite their potential differences in how the sense of belonging may be defined, both the students and staff may feel frustrated with investing time and energy into a relationship when it may be severed in a short time. Traci feels that students who move frequently do not connect to school easily because they may be uprooted again. As a student, Jennifer shares, “If you move a lot in one year, you start losing friends and trusting people.” Because of the in-and-out nature of the mobile population, teachers may find it difficult to invest a lot of time and effort into building a relationship. Perhaps their own values get in the way of discovering who has entered their classroom and what their needs may be. For example, Dan shares how he handles new students who may have past behavior issues that do not align with his classroom
structure, “I talk very straight with them about how I expect them to act and they won’t get a lot of chances to misbehave before I start removing them from the classroom.” Students in this situation may decide to act out because it may get them the attention they desire. LeRoux (2002) claims, “Often students achieve and behave according to how they perceive themselves to be through the eyes of others. The teacher is such a significant person in the lives of students” (LeRoux, 2002, p. 47). Therefore, if a teacher appears to express lack of confidence and does not maintain high expectations for his students, the students will perceive themselves as someone who is not able to be successful in school.

Communication

“Communication is important in building relationships and to promote learning,” Beth shares. Teaching and learning is accessed through communication whether verbal or non-verbal, and teachers should be sensitive to the potentially problematic outcomes of communication in a diverse classroom (LeRoux, 2002). Students from different backgrounds, cultures, and socio-economic status interpret and respond differently to what a teacher says and does in the classroom. When a teacher knows a new student is about to enter her classroom and notices the student has attended several schools in the past, her response will communicate a welcome message to the student. Whether intended to communicate agitation, delight, or frustration, her body language and verbal remarks will be interpreted by the new student. Sixty percent of social meaning is through non-verbal communication (LeRoux, 2002). When a highly mobile student enters a classroom with a teacher whose perception of student mobility is less than favorable, the teacher may believe she is welcoming the student to her fold as introductions are made at the doorway, however her swift wave of her hand to show the student
where to sit and her brisk walk back to her station with arms crossed in front may send a message to the student that he is interrupting the class. Staff members from the second category in Table 8 such as John, Beth, Traci and Richard may feel they are welcoming new students however may need to pause a moment to make a deliberate effort in integrating new students. For example, Jane feels that just sharing a smile and taking a moment to talk confirms a connection with a new student. Leann also makes a point to go beyond introducing herself to new students. She spends time communicating, finding out more about them and what they have studied. She also feels that if everyone has strong communication about new students and their progress, it would be helpful in finding out how to support them.

Communication is two-way. Similar to a student interpreting the body language of his teacher, the teacher should be able to interpret and gain a perception of what the student’s comments or body language is trying to convey. “Unintentionally, body posture may convey different messages to the alert and sensitive teacher who is constantly on the lookout for these subtle clues and non-verbal communicative messages” (LeRoux, 2002, p. 44). School personnel may need to be aware of the non-verbal messages that students relay to others around them. Student postures such as head on the desk, slumped in chair, curled up in a coat, or staring off in the distance are some cues that some staff seem to respond to and try to reconnect and engage the student. Hannah shares, “We are becoming more deliberate about creating opportunities for students to connect.” The teacher who takes time to greet a new student and who spends time building relationships may become more aware of a student’s body language and message he is relaying. Jane asserts, “The more receptive staff and other students are, the more welcomed new students feel. Students spend a certain amount of time observing how
class runs and then they start to feel comfortable.” It may be assumed that effective educators are competent communicators, and many are able to connect will all of their students despite the adversities the students may bring with them. Many times this builds a relationship of trust so students feel safe to learn. Kristi capitalizes on communication with sharing her belief, “Communication is extremely important. Students need to feel like they can trust you and believe you are here to help them succeed. Taking the time to really listen and observe the students is crucial.” Being careful in communicating with students and knowing their comfort level is important as Shannon shares, “I didn’t like it when teachers point me out in class and said, ‘Go help the new student.’”

The principal, Richard, believes that Jackson Heights is unique because adults are willing to sit and talk with students. Kristi and Jane mentioned that they do just that. They sit and talk with each of the new students in the Welcome Center and find a connection with the new students. Kristi and Jane feel this will relieve some of the student’s anxiety and start building relationships. In contrast, teachers like Dan and the three other staff members who prefer maintaining classroom structure appear to believe that a smooth transition is when new students come into the classroom, follows the expectations, and fit in right away so teaching is uninterrupted. He shares that anyone who cannot do that will be sent out of the room.

**Catching up**

Nearly every staff member and student who was interviewed expressed their view on “catching up” students academically. As discussed in Chapter 2, Tough (2006) shares the disadvantages that poor children have from birth including language acquisition. Students who are mobile and living in poverty have disadvantages from their start. Most staff members share
a concern that students will have difficulty in catching up. As a math teacher Martha shares, “Students usually adjust to the routine and begin to get on board with the current unit of study by the end of their first month, but will never catch up with the material they have missed, leaving them vulnerable to falling further and further behind.” She provides extra credit assignments to try to fill in the gaps that may inhibit their success in the current area of study in math. Quinella, who came from another school within the same district, shared, “My other school was on different stuff in math and history. I had to catch up.” Student experiences seemed to agree that curriculum was different in their new school. Jennifer states that the history curriculum is really different, Mary shares that science is easier at Jackson Heights, John mentions that the curriculum is slower, Kolbe says that there is much more work in math, and Jennifer admits that one school could be harder than another.

How do we meet the academic needs of these mobile students? Hannah claims, “I would say it is impossible for kids to catch up. Educators must quickly diagnose and fill the holes of knowledge that develop as a result of mobility.” Dan recognizes the difficulty in catching students up, “It is a big challenge to try to find the time to catch them up on the things they need to know in order for them to be successful on the work we are doing in class.” As a para-educator point of view, Jane shares, “I can’t imagine a teacher piles the homework on for a student to catch up. I would hope the teacher takes a little extra time and prepares a packet or teams them up with a fellow peer for catch up.” Time seems to be a factor in catching students up academically. Linda recognizes, “A few moments in class is not enough time to catch up. If a student is willing to come in before school, lunch or after school, he is able to catch up more quickly.”
One might expect that all staff members might find it to be a huge struggle to catch up students in the curriculum, however surprisingly some staff members feel catching up is not an issue. As the Welcome Center Coordinator, Kristi believes, “The teachers play an important role and they do a good job of helping the students come up to speed with the rest of their classmates. Overall, I think the students do well catching up on their work in their classrooms.” Catching up is not an issue in Anna’s classes as she claims, “In English or Social Studies, we have a lot of discussions that would help a new student fill in the gaps of what he may have missed. I don’t think catching up is an issue.” In contrast, Leanne admits, “Even if students move around in the district, the different timelines that curriculum is presented creates holes.” Hannah supports Leanne and shares, “If schools were on the ‘same page’ throughout the district, mobile students can have a certain level of commonality in their transitions.”

**Parent Involvement and Student Learning**

There are many stakeholders who may assist in a child’s educational success: student, staff, parents, and community. When one of these stakeholders are absent in a child’s life, it may be more difficult for the child to succeed. Jackson Heights staff seemed quick to point out the importance of parent involvement in a student’s education. Joan believes that students lack motivation because they do not have the parent support toward education. Dan’s perception echoes Joan’s as he expresses that students come to school with a defeated attitude that is often subtly or overtly encouraged from their home environment, especially parents. Beth points out, “The lack on consistency in their lives prevents the development of connecting with staff, peers, and a school community. Students are constantly dealing with challenges that carry over
from their own home lives: unstable environments, physical and mental abuse, poverty, parents who work long hours, and responsibilities that should be left to adults.” Anna points out one challenge at making connections with parents, “Some new students do not have working phone numbers to get a hold of parents.”

Educators may need to be encouraged as they review the affects of mobility and some of the generalizations that have been proven false. For example, Anna shares, “If your housing is unstable, your grades tend not to be a priority.” Some educators may feel that poverty parents are uninvolved in their children’s learning because they do not value education. Gorski (2008) argues against this myth,

Parents are less likely to attend school functions or volunteer in their classrooms not because they care less about education, but because they have less access to school involvement than their wealthier peers. They are more likely to work multiple jobs, to work evenings, to have jobs without paid leave, and to be unable to afford child care and public transportation. (Gorski, 2008, p. 33)

Gorski claims that schools should not overlook these considerations when seeking parent involvement. When staff members feel that parents do not want to be involved, they may want to investigate the factors that prevent them. Ruby Payne (2008) suggests that parents may not know how to support their child’s learning. Generally speaking, as written in many school improvement plans, most schools encourage and value parent involvement. Many school personnel believe that school involvement should be accessible to all families, and parents need to feel connected and encouraged to be involved (Gorski, 2008).

Most of staff and students who were interviewed mentioned that frequent moves do
affect students’ education with most students struggling to fill in the gaps. Some educators may be quick to blame the student’s lack of academic success on the family’s life style. Hannah shares her thoughts on outside factors and student learning, “Our students come to us with such a diverse set of needs, most of which are not academically related. Poverty, abuse, homelessness, and neglect are becoming more of the norm and it makes the instruction more challenging because those needs must be met before any true learning can occur.” Mary also claims, “Students enter with challenges such as poverty, chaos at home, language barriers, low academic skills and little academic help or emphasis coming from home.” When team meetings fall into the trap of discussing outside factors that impede learning, the conversation generally focuses on issues that educators may not have any control over. It may be more productive to focus on what we have control over as educators and not give countless numbers of reasons or excuses for the lack of student success. Gorski (2008) asks that we respond when colleagues stereotype students or parents and educate one another on how to meet the needs of these families.

Occasionally, some mobile students like Quinella come into a new school and seem to be empowered to be successful. As discovered in the student interviews, it appeared that the students who adjusted quickly and successfully seemed to have family support and involvement in their education. As discussed in Chapter 5, Quinella’s family made a point to conference with her teachers to find out more about her classes and the teachers’ expectations. Teacher, Beth, shares, “Motivation is lacking because students do not have parental support toward education.” It seemed that most students and staff members agree that parent support is important to student learning. Many staff members appear to be discouraged by the lack of
parent support in their children’s education; however during their interviews few if any staff members elaborated on how they might improve their own practices with new students and their parents. This may be due to the lack of knowledge and skills needed to recognize what strategies could be used to involve parents and students. Anna offered a suggestion that requires parents to meet with teachers prior to the student starting. She feels this would provide contact information and circumstantial information that may be needed to support the student.

For various reasons, some parents are not involved in their children’s education. This leaves us with the question: How can students succeed without parent involvement? Educators can provide opportunities to build resiliency in students (Sagor, 1996) along with fostering techniques to engage students that will empower students to be successful. Cooperative learning opportunities, service learning projects, and authentic engagement and assessments provide students with a sense of belonging, usefulness, competence and optimism (Sagor, 1996). There is a notion that schools could require new students to be involved in extended day activities or community service projects because they may make connections with others more easily. Through these experiences, students will generally become adjusted to the learning environment and begin to experience success.

The overall degree of involvement in welcoming and integrating new students and their parents into the school environment seems to vary between Jackson Heights staff members, however all nine of the students who were interviewed shared that the adults at school were helpful, nice and good to them as they entered Jackson Heights. Quinella claims, “The adults were helpful when I came to Jackson Heights. They teach new kids the rules and how to do stuff.” The students’ first impressions come from registering in the office, and Jane feels that
even the office staff is very welcoming to the new students. Overall, the Jackson Heights staff appears to have a positive outlook on what they have established and implemented for their incoming students, however do not seem to address what might be helpful in getting parents more involved.

The previous section wove together student and staff responses to specific topic areas that rose from their interviews. The next section of this chapter will discuss recommendations and strategies that have had some success in integrating mobile students at Jackson Heights and other schools. These recommendations include: professional development, making connections, effective and efficient records transfers, multi-layered instructional support, consistent curriculum and instruction, welcome centers, peer mentors, and family resource centers and parent involvement.

**Recommendations**

School improvement often requires taking a microscopic view at the school’s demographics to determine the needs of all the students, including highly mobile students. Even though this study focuses on 7th and 8th grade mobile students, their academic progress, and how the school community addresses their needs, the implications of this study may reach well beyond these boundaries. In moving from good to great, a school community and district may want to consider taking a closer look at who they serve and how they meet their needs. The school personnel’s cultural competency assists in understanding and working with the diverse population within our schools. Periodically, visions and goals may need to be updated and realigned as staff experiences and student demographics become more diverse in our schools. “While effective education for the 21st century should constantly adapt to the needs
and changes in society in order to stay relevant, it cannot fail to pass on to the next generation the attainments, foundations and benefits of human experience” (LeRoux, 2002, p. 38).

One factor that may impede student success is student mobility. This study encourages schools to reflect on the mobile student population and their adjustment to the school community. Schools may then evaluate what support systems are in place to attempt to meet the needs of these students and possibly their families. Paik and Phillips (2002, p. 12) suggest,

Additional strategies to reduce the negative effects of student mobility include professional development of school staff; identification of families in need of services; newcomer programs to help students become accustomed to a new environment; effective records-transfer policies; supportive attendance and disciplinary policies; outreach to parents and families regarding programs, policies, and services offered by the school community.

**Professional Development**

Professional development opportunities for school personnel may provide a broader understanding of the effects of student mobility. This research may promote the need of additional staff training in the areas of student mobility and social support systems. As noted by many of the Jackson Heights staff members who were interviewed, they did not have any professional development on student mobility. Demie (2002, p. 213) suggests,

Some schools are already using a wide range of different initiatives such as staff training on issues of mobility; parental involvement; devising guidelines on mobility issues; statistically analyzing and tracking pupil performance to inform policy; and new forms of class or pupil organization, including the introduction of setting, language
support for bilingual mobile pupils and literacy and numeracy initiatives.

Professional development opportunities that focus on student mobility and poverty need to take place at the district or school level to increase the awareness and to provide strategies that work. Jackson Heights’s staff interviews showed that four out of twelve staff members had some training in children of poverty, but it had been years ago. The newer staff members were not familiar with the poverty training and none of the staff members could recall any professional development that addressed the mobile student population.

Awareness generally strengthens knowledge and understanding. It may be time to seek opportunities to further educate our staff with regard to student mobility and what can be done as a school community to improve their learning. Professional development does not always have to be in the form of lectures and book studies. Educators may need to become more familiar with our students’ and families’ lives. Perhaps providing opportunities for field trips into the neighborhoods that feed into the school would generate a clearer understanding of the students and their families. This may be done by riding the school bus with the students, eating at local restaurants, shopping at local stores, or going to their churches. Families may feel a connection forming between school and home when they can visit with educators outside the school walls.

**Making Connections with Families and Students**

Connections with families and students can be made within and outside the school walls. As mentioned in the previous section, educators can make connections by going into the neighborhoods that feed into the school. Schools make countless efforts to provide events for parent involvement, however little may be done to go into the neighborhoods to make
connections. Schools may be able to build trusting relationships more quickly, if educators are willing to meet families in their neighborhoods and making themselves accessible to all. This may be done by meeting at local churches, laundry mats, or recreation halls for events or conferences. Inviting people from their community into the school is also a strategy to make a connection with families. Guest speakers for classrooms and assemblies or school volunteers can be those who live within the school boundaries. Eventually, relationships will be formed and families may be more likely to attend more school events.

Making connections is supported through strong lines of communication. Sometimes email and websites are not effective when wanting to communicate with families therefore sending information home or regularly calling parents will give opportunities for connecting. Because of their own experiences in school, lack of child care, or transportation challenges, families may be reluctant to come to school events. However, families may be more inclined to come to school events once relationships are formed. Administrators may want to consider engaging highly mobile families in opportunities to comment on and to recommend changes to the school (Nakagawa, 2002). Making connections may empower families to invest in a commitment to the school.

Besides making connections with families, teachers may need to be supported in their effort to connect and build relationships with their students in a timely manner so they are successfully integrated into the classroom and ready to learn. As noted in Chapter 6, the Jackson Heights staff responses separated the staff equally into three categories of connecting with students and integrating students into their classrooms. Some staff members clearly talked about and implemented strategies to integrate new students, other staff members talked about
welcoming new students but seemed to do little to integrate them, and the third group seemed to be more focused on maintaining the structure of their classroom where the new student needed to fit in.

Jackson Heights’ principal, Richard Moore, made an effort to support staff in their efforts to build relationships by promoting a school-wide commitment to connecting with the students. The Oregon Department of Education (2000, p. 5) finds that,

Overwhelmed, change-weary teachers can be just as disengaged as their students. Administrators can create an environment that supports teachers’ resilience by demonstrating high expectations and trust, promoting caring relationships among colleagues, and providing ongoing opportunities for small groups to reflect and make decisions together.

Richard felt strongly about promoting caring relationships and a school-wide commitment to making connections with students, and he had T-shirts made for each staff member that said “Make a Connection.” These shirts were just one reminder of the positive difference teachers might make with connecting to their students. Most of the staff seemed to follow Richard’s lead and made an extra effort to know their students. The associate principal, Traci, supports this effort as she shares in her interview, “It comes down to whether they [students] are making connections and whether they are going to connect to engage in the learning.” Linda also stresses the importance of making a connection, “No connection with the school environment impacts their learning.” Hannah feels that the staff needs to make a stronger effort at making connections with students as she shares, “Students who move often become less and less inclined to put forth the effort needed to connect with others.”
Effective and Efficient Records Transfers

Anxiety levels rise for both the mobile student and the staff as they enter the school for the first time. To assure appropriate student placement, Jackson Heights spends time to conduct a preliminary and efficient assessment of the students in math and reading by means of the Measurement of Academic Progress tests on the computer. These assessments are a one-time measure that is completed on a students’ first day when students are anxious, nervous, and unsure about their new school. The results in these conditions may not be as accurate as hoped however student class schedules are needed to be made. Despite these assessments, previous school records should be reviewed for IEPs, standardized test scores, previous courses, and other pertinent information that may affect the placement of the students. This calls for effective and efficient records transfer. Many times records are not quickly received by the new school sometimes taking two to six weeks and these records may not be comparable across districts and states (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994); therefore it is recommended that someone be assigned the duty to call the previous school to gather information about the student’s academic experience (Smith et al., 2008; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008). At the time of this study, Jackson Heights did not have a designated person to call previous schools. This procedure could prevent a student from having a schedule change once she is in classes and it is discovered she needs Learning Support, honors classes, or, like Kylie, a Structured Learning Center placement. It appears to be difficult to be a new student with a schedule of seven different middle school classes and teachers, but to have to change those classes after a week is even more problematic. The goal would be to get the students’ schedules right the first time, if at all possible.
The Bethel School District in Eugene, Oregon has implemented an enrollment plan that does just that. Student records often do not transfer to the new school for days or weeks and the teachers have difficulty with the appropriate level of instruction for the students. They put a team together to create questions that would be helpful in transitioning new students into their schools. Smith, Fien, and Paine (2008, p. 60) suggest the following questions during a brief interview with the previous school,

1. What are the student’s academic strengths?
2. Was the student in any special program at your school? (for example, speech/language services, English language development, or academic support services)
3. Did the student have any attendance problems while at your school?
4. Do you have any academic concerns regarding the student?

In addition to asking questions about students’ academic placement and needs, I suggest inquiring about their discipline record with their previous school and what types of behaviors were intervened. Perhaps this will help alleviate or become proactive to similar behaviors in a new school as administrators know whether additional supervision or interventions would be useful to keep the students in school. Behaviors do get in the way of learning, and students usually act out for a reason whether it is expressing hidden anger or frustration or just needing peer attention and gratification. Gathering information on a student will assist in gaining an understanding of the student and will be a proactive way to provide support to meet the student’s needs.
Multi-layered Instructional Support

This study empowers administrators and educators to review their demographics and align goals and practices to meet the needs of all students. Jackson Heights teacher, Martha, claims, “We need better placement and remediation programs to help serve these students.” A school wide, multi-layered instructional support should be implemented in all schools, especially those with high mobility rates. The most successful schools acknowledge the problem and implement school wide systems that provide instructional support for all students, including students who move into the school midyear (Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008; Paik & Phillips, 2002). The district that includes Jackson Heights Middle School has implemented district-wide learning pathways for reading and math which allows for a multi-layered instructional support. Students may be in intensive, strategic, benchmark, or advanced pathways to meet their academic needs and be provided individualized instructional support. In addition, the Jackson Heights’ Professional Learning Communities provide the staff with time to reflect and act on the belief that all students have the ability to reach their potential. Common assessments and shared lesson plans guide teachers in making sure students are appropriately placed and learning. Richard, the school principal, shares, “I worry about the kids who don’t have these pathway interventions particularly in math and reading.”

The multi-layer instructional support may assist in meeting students at their academic level and possibly assist them in catching up. High mobility has been found to affect academic performance at all levels (Demie, 2002). This may lead to the task of differentiating instruction and meeting students at their level. Smith, Fien, and Paine (2008, p. 61) suggest that schools use a multi-tiered instructional plan with flexible grouping of students to assist in
differentiating instruction for all students. They claim,

To address the instructional needs of mobile students who are at risk, schools can increase the amount of instruction time, decrease group size and use instructional programs that are specially designed to catch students up to grade-level expectations. It is essential that instruction for these students incorporate proven strategies.

At the time of this study, Jackson Heights was implementing a multi-layered instructional program in reading and math which allows for flexible groupings so students may be instructed at their appropriate level.

Despite this multi-layered program, Jackson Heights staff still struggle with catching students up as addressed earlier in this chapter. Hannah admits in her interview that it is impossible to catch students up, however other staff members like Linda and Leanne have offered to spend extra time with students, pair them up with peers, and provide curriculum materials that will assist in catching students up academically. Despite her apparent belief that it is impossible to catch students up, Hannah was instrumental in establishing a Lunch Bunch setting where students who need help in math can come in for help during their lunch. Kristi, a staff member, feels that the teachers do a good job helping the students come up to speed with the rest of their classmates. Kristi works in the Welcome Center and has offered to help students who get into classes and need to catch up, however students have not taken advantage of her offer and come to the Welcome Center at lunch. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Klamath County School teachers used one strategy to address the academic gaps in mobile students by providing help in math and reading for an hour before or after school every day (Hammond & Melton, 2005).
Consistent Curriculum and Instruction

Another recommendation may be that districts have consistent curriculum and instruction throughout the schools. “Having similar instruction programs, assessment systems, and expectations at all schools provides a consistent program for students, makes program placement easier for teachers and enables schools to align screening and progress-monitoring activities as well as professional development” (Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2002, p. 62). Even though a school district adopts a standardized curriculum, teachers may choose to complete one unit before another or spend much more time on one unit than another; therefore students within the same district are on a different curricular schedule. Jackson Heights Middle School is in a school district that has adopted standardized curriculum; however the teachers within the district are inconsistent about when they complete the units. Leanne shares, “Even if students move around in the district, the different timelines that curriculum is presented creates holes in student learning.” If students transfer from within the district, their transition would be easier if teachers were teaching from the same sections of the curriculum. Most students who transferred from within the district mentioned that their old school and new school were doing something different in most of their classes. As displayed in Table 7, at the time of this study three out of five students who transferred in-district were failing. Both Quinelle and Jennifer transferred from the same middle school within the district and enrolled at Jackson Heights. Even though the district has adopted standardized curriculum, both students claim the curriculum is really different between the schools despite being middle schools within the same district. Quinelle shared that her other school was doing different curriculum in math, and she had to catch up when she moved to Jackson Heights. On a grander scale, Martha, one of the teachers
interviewed, hopes that the math curriculum will become standard throughout the state and eventually the nation. She believes that students could expect to be learning the same concepts at the same time any other student in that grade level would be.

In addition to consistent curriculum within school districts, one might also consider meeting with neighboring districts to assure a smoother transition for students in relation to curriculum. Perhaps district administrators could meet on a regular basis to discuss the transitions and whether the curriculum aligns between the districts. This may be helpful because many of the mobile students move across district lines and back.

**Welcome Centers**

Jackson Heights staff recognized the need to provide a program or system that helps new students transition into the school and classroom and created the Welcome Center. The new students attend the Welcome Center for two days on average. During that time they are assessed in reading and math to determine class placement, cover the school rules and procedures, read through teachers’ syllabi, take a tour of the school, and meet their teachers. To assist in transitioning new students, Paik and Phillips (2002, p. 12) suggest,

Programs to welcome new students and their families can facilitate a smoother transition for the student; provide an opportunity for preliminary academic assessment and placement; foster positive interactions among students, families, and school staff; help parents understand school policies and goals; develop home support systems for learning; encourage family involvement with the school and decision making; and provide families and students with access to useful information about the school and community.
Welcome Centers similar to what Jackson Heights has implemented assist in integrating new students into a school by allowing them time to become familiar with the building, people and procedures. All of the staff interviewed stressed that the Welcome Center was very helpful for the new students. Joan states, “The Welcome Center has made a huge difference in student comfort level for new students entering Jackson Heights.” Most of the students who were interviewed agreed that some of their anxiety was relieved by being in the Welcome Center their first couple of days at Jackson Heights. They became more adjusted to their new community.

Welcome Centers should be designed with the intended outcome for the student in mind. Warning should be made to having Welcome Centers become a “holding tank” for students to determine whether they will be staying at the school or quickly moving on. Kylie claimed, “The Welcome Center didn’t really help me. I usually get my schedule and go.” In addition, recently enrolled students could be giving feedback or help design what new students need when they come into a school. One area of growth that perhaps Jackson Heights may want to explore is providing activities that will hook the students in to the school community such as encouraging involvement in lunchtime groups or extended day activities. Some students may come out of the center with a less than favorable impression if they are bored and waiting to attend their classes. One additional area to consider is expanding the Welcome Center to make stronger connections with the families; however some schools in the district have developed Family Resource Centers to promote family involvement in the school. These centers are discussed later in this chapter.
Peer Mentors

Another area that Jackson Heights may consider expanding that other schools have found successful is the use of existing students in transitioning new students. Mentors or tour guides were suggested by a few students made as another way to help new students get to know the school. Jackson Heights has a peer mentor program currently with the eighth graders mentoring sixth graders; however it can be expanded to work with any grade level new student. Paik and Phillips (2002, p. 12) mention, “Some newcomer programs use buddy systems to pair up a new student with an existing student who can help navigate the new building, schedule, and rules.” When Jackson Heights’ mobile students were asked what could have made their transition better, some students suggested involving existing students. Glenda suggests, “You could have the leadership kids go in the Welcome Center and talk about the school.” Another student, Kylie, mentioned that a tour of the school with another student would have been helpful. The possible creation of a student ambassador program where student leaders rotate the responsibility of introducing new students to Jackson Heights may fulfill this area that students felt was lacking. Dan suggests, “The student leadership class or A.S.B. officers could take a more proactive role in welcoming new students. I think a student mentor program would be helpful for new students.”

Some of the Jackson Heights teachers indicated that they use a peer mentor in the classroom so the peer can help the new student acclimate to the classroom. Traci says, “Stable students can be good mentors for the mobile students. You want to keep them moving along with the curriculum, but teaching peers will assist in their own learning.” In addition, Traci recalled when she was a teacher she would make sure the new student was with a buddy at
lunch time. Linda also suggested the use of a peer mentor as a lunch buddy as a way to make
connections with others. Beth and Leanne also share that they try to pair up new students with
someone in the classroom who can help them with the expectations and routines for the first
couple of weeks.

In pairing up students to be buddies or mentors to new students, one might want to
consider using students who are mobile or fairly new to the school community. In doing so,
these mentors will be more aware of what the new students need to know and help overcome
some of their anxieties. Students who have been at the school for a long period of time may not
understand the new students’ feelings and needs as well as students who recently went through
the experience themselves.

In expanding the concept of peer mentors a school may also want to consider a Student
Advisory Board. New students may be encouraged to be members of this advisory and are
given the task of improving the welcoming process for incoming students. Many times,
hearing from the students themselves will generate ideas that keep procedures student-centered.

**Family Resource Centers**

Connecting with students is the first step to connecting with their families, and parent
involvement in schools has been noted to be a strong indicator of children’s achievement and
attendance (ODE, 2000). At the time of this study, the Welcome Center program was primarily
designed to transition new students into Jackson Heights however expanding this program to a
Family Resource Center may assist in increasing parent involvement. This may be a space in
the school where families feel comfortable to come into the school and learn more about the
school and possibly receive assistance in getting some of their needs met such as clothing.
food, and connections to services within the city. Smith, Fien, and Paine (2008) suggest that such a center should have materials in multiple languages and be lead by a person who can effectively explain the school’s programs. That person may also be a family liaison that periodically checks in with each new student and family and create a bond with the school community. It has been discovered that, “parents who are more likely to be mobile are also less likely to initiate and follow up on contact with the school” (Nakagawa et al., 2002, p. 120). Promoting parent involvement requires establishing a climate where parent involvement is actively solicited, and where parents feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed (ODE, 2000). Parent involvement is especially crucial for middle school and high school levels when parents generally become less involved.

At the time of this study, the school district had Family Resource Centers in five high-poverty elementary schools. Due to these centers, the administrators of these schools have seen an increase in parent involvement, student achievement and daily attendance. Families have access to a range of support including academic and early learning programs, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement. In addition, families have access to computers and obtain help with food and clothing needs. Eventually, middle schools, like Jackson Heights, may find it beneficial to create Family Resource Centers for their population.

Payne (2008, p. 51) claims, “It is essential to create a welcoming atmosphere at school for parents.” In doing so Payne (2008, p. 51) suggests asking ourselves questions about the kind of experience parents have when entering the school community such as,

1. How are parents usually greeted? With a smile, a command, a look, or the parent’s
1. What is the ratio of educators to parents in meetings? Six educators to one parent?

2. Is the language used in parent meetings understandable, or is it “educationese”?

3. Are parents often asked to make interventions they do not have the resources to make?

4. Do parents realize that people at the school care about their children?

Smith, Fien, and Paine (2008) also suggest establishing ongoing, effective communication with families who recently enrolled at the school. In addition to recommending a Family Resource Center, Smith, Fien, and Paine (2008) suggest scheduling a parent conference within a few weeks of the student’s enrollment. Anna strongly suggests that a parent conference be required for new students. At that time parents and teachers can discuss the child’s progress, instructional plan, and goals. Conferences should be initiated by the teacher or school as the parents who are more likely to be mobile are also less likely to initiate and follow up on contact with the school (Nakagawa et al., 2002). Additional strategies to promote parent involvement include: parenting classes, frequent and positive messages from teachers, volunteer opportunities, and decision-making opportunities such as school councils and the Parent Teacher Association (ODE, 2000).

Counseling, adult education programs, and home visits are other services that may be generated from the Family Resource Centers. Nakagawa et al. (2002, p. 119) research shows, “Those schools that perceive mobility to be a big problem offered more opportunities for parent involvement and were more likely to have community partnerships than were schools that perceive mobility to be less of a problem.” Though, Nakagawa et al. (2002) found that it was
not the number of programs that got the parents involved, it was the ability to creating meaningful associations with families. Families who have created meaningful associations with the school community may make more of an effort to stay in a neighborhood where the school has built a welcoming relationship with them.

**Summary**

Schools, especially urban schools like Jackson Heights that are experiencing high levels of mobility are making attempts to build a supportive school community. Despite the efforts to create meaningful relationships with students, many times they are not at a school long enough to benefit from the efforts. Student mobility greatly affects the development of relationships with teachers and peers, continuity in curriculum, and regular attendance; however increased efforts are being made in implementing strategies to reduce the negative effects of mobility. Such efforts include professional development opportunities for staff, preliminary and efficient assessments of new students, efficient records transfer and enrollment plan, multi-layered instructional programs, academic support systems, district standardized curriculum, Welcome Centers, peer mentor programs, Family Resource Centers, and other means to connect with students and their families.

People formulate beliefs and perceptions from their experiences. Communicating and sharing their experiences with each other may expand their understanding and acceptance of one another and assist in establishing systems that promote student learning. “While effective education for the 21st century should constantly adapt to the needs and changes in society in order to stay relevant, it cannot fail to pass on to the next generation the attainments, foundations and benefits of human experience” (LeRoux, 2002, p. 38).
Findings from this study may be used to generate and implement strategies in making connections with mobile students and their families. It will promote additional research on the topic of student mobility and the school community. The impact of mobility depends on such factors as the number of school changes a student may have, when they occur, the reason for the changes and the student’s personal and family situation (Rumberger, 2002). Research shows that mobile students may be affected psychologically, socially, and academically from changing schools (Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008; Demie, 2002; Nakagawa, et al., 2002, U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). The results of this study and others like it can be used to guide improvement in all schools no matter what the mobility rate. In addition, studies on this topic may be used as professional development and in teacher training programs so educators become more familiar with the affects of student mobility on student learning and how the school community may welcome mobile students and utilize strategies to provide a safe, caring learning environment. Student mobility will not cease and educators need to understand how to integrate new students into their classrooms and school community in a welcoming manner.
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Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. How old are you? What grade are you in?
2. What do you like to do most when you are not at school?
3. What do you enjoy most about school?
4. What sports or extra-curricular activities are you involved in at school?
5. How are you doing academically in school? (i.e. average grade)
6. How many schools have you attended since kindergarten? How many middle schools?
7. How long have you been at this school?
8. Thinking back when you first arrived at this school, how did you feel about moving to this school?
9. What was most difficult about changing to this school?
10. How long did it take to make new friends when you first came to this school?
11. How did the adults at this school help you feel welcome?
12. How is the curriculum similar or different at this school when compared to your last school?
13. Did moving from one school to another affect your education? Explain.
14. What could be done better by everyone at the school to help new students?
15. Who is the principal of this school?
Appendix B

Staff Interview Questions

1. What is your current position at this school?
2. How long have you worked here?
3. What do you enjoy most about working here?
4. What challenges do the students face at this school?
5. How do you think students feel when they first move into our school?
6. How long do you think it takes for students to connect (build friendships) with their peers after they move into the school?
7. How might a student’s mobility impact his/her learning?
8. How difficult is it for new students to “catch up” on what is being taught in the classroom?
9. What strategies do you use to connect with the new students in your classroom?
10. How does the school leadership connect with the new students?
11. What professional development opportunities have been offered that provide strategies that work with mobile students?
12. What could be done better by everyone at the school to help new students?
Appendix C

School Administrator Interview Questions

1. What is your current position at this school?
2. How long have you worked here?
3. What do you enjoy most about working here?
4. What challenges do the students face at this school?
5. How do you think students feel when they first move into our school?
6. How long do you think it takes for students to connect (build friendships) with their peers after they move into the school?
7. How might a student’s mobility impact his/her learning?
8. How difficult is it for new students to “catch up” on what is being taught in the classroom?
9. What do you think the teachers do to make connections with new students?
10. What strategies do you use to connect with the new students in your school?
11. What professional development opportunities have been offered that provide strategies that work with mobile students?
12. How do you encourage/guide your staff to follow the vision of the school?
13. What could be done better by everyone at the school to help new students?