

REVOLVING DOORS OF NEBRASKA SCHOOLS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY
OF NEBRASKA SCHOOLWIDE TITLE I SCHOOLS AND SYSTEMATIC
PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS
OF HIGHLY MOBILE STUDENTS

by

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Under the supervision of Professor Jody Isernhagen

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The purpose of this study was to identify practices implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools to address the needs of highly mobile students. Schools identified for the study were analyzed in terms of the primary causes of student mobility, district support for practices that led to successful transitions for highly mobile students, and mitigating factors that caused the practices to be implemented. A mixed methods study was conducted. An online survey was conducted based on best practices, which were identified and broken down into eight main sections—enrollment; academic placement; student placement; classroom connections; family connections; unique needs; school/community connections; and exit transitions.

Using both quantitative and qualitative designs, this researcher studied practices currently being implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools. The online quantitative survey captured the perceptions of the participants with follow up qualitative interviews enriching and extending the results of the survey.

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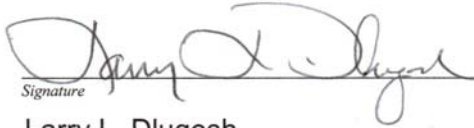
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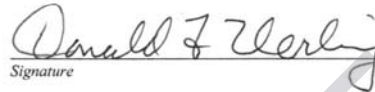
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Student mobility has long been seen as a problem removed from rural areas and communities with seemingly stable populations. However, data indicates that a high percentage of student mobility is now found in many settings, including small towns as well as in the urban setting (Rumberger, 2003). Student mobility factors arise from a variety of issues, ranging from socio-economic constraints to migrant employment for families (Paik & Phillips, 2002). The result for a highly mobile student is that he or she may enter school at varying points throughout the school year, from the first week right up to the last days of school. The educational impact of a high mobility population affects the incoming student as well as the students in the new classroom (Addressing the Causes and Consequences, 2002).

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify practices implemented in Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools to address the needs of highly mobile students. Schools identified for the study were analyzed in terms of mitigating factors that caused the practices to be implemented, the primary causes of student mobility, and district support for practices that lead to successful transitions for highly mobile students.

For the 2007-2008 school year, there were 220 Schoolwide Title I programs identified in Nebraska, and of those 220 schools, 211 were at the elementary level (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2007b). A Schoolwide program permits a school to use funds from Title I, Part A and other federal education program funds and

resources to upgrade the entire educational program of the school in order to raise academic achievement for all the students (Archived Information, 1996). Opportunities provided by Schoolwide programs are designed to assist schools, districts, and states in raising the achievement level of all children, but particularly those who have always been the intended beneficiaries of Title I--poor children, low-achieving children, migrant children, children who are neglected or at risk of dropping out, and limited-English-proficient children. Title I focuses on a results-based accountability approach for reinforcing this commitment. This approach is designed to provide the public with information on how schools and districts are doing in raising the achievement of different groups of students (Archived Information, 1996).

A comprehensive plan, required for Schoolwide Title I schools, must be developed within a one-year period of a school obtaining Schoolwide status (Archived Information, 1996). Comprehensive plans must address the needs of all children in the school, but particularly the needs of children who are members of the target population of any federal education program whose funds are included in the Schoolwide program (Archived Information, 1996). A *Schoolwide Plan Peer Review Rating Rubric and Annual Review of Schoolwide Effectiveness* rubric is used in the review process to determine if all required components are in place (Appendix E). Section 7 of the rubric focuses on a required transition plan and indicates practices must be put in place to help mobile students transition between grade levels and between buildings.

The focus of this study was centered on the following section of the peer review rubric as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1

Schoolwide Title I Peer Rating Rubric – Section 7

7 §1114(b)(1)(G) Requirement: Transition plan Evidence: The school assists and supports children and students from one educational experience to another through activities that are planned, implemented, and assessed.					
	Required (1point)	Proficient (2 points)	Advanced (3 points)	Points	Missing
7.2	Activities assist students to transition between grade levels and buildings.	A defined written process, which includes interpreters, visitations, and other resources as needed, provides for numerous contacts between the child, parent, and school service providers.	Transition plans are implemented and evaluated, by involved parties at affected levels, to determine effectiveness at all grade levels and include, when appropriate, college and career awareness and preparation and/or integration of vocational and technical education programs.		
7.3	A plan has been developed to orient new students to the school.	New student orientation involves students and family members, and when appropriate, interpreters, visitations, and other resources.	An orientation program is used to familiarize students and family members to school programs and community educational resources.		
7.4	The schoolwide transition plan reflects an awareness of cultural needs of new students.	The transition plan reflects a willingness to understand cultural differences of students and families.	The transition plan provides for accommodations based on cultural needs.		

For the purpose of this study, Section 7 of the rubric indicated that student mobility is an issue that is relevant to the overall academic achievement and social-emotional adjustment for students in Title I schools (Archived Information, 1996).

Therefore, by identifying this population of Schoolwide Title I elementary schools as the

research target, the study assumed the educational programs of such schools were impacted by student mobility and the expectation existed for specific practices to be implemented to address the needs of mobile students.

Finally, recommendations were made for Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools for implementing practices to address the needs of highly mobile students as identified through the follow-up site interviews, in fulfillment of Schoolwide Title I requirements as outlined in the Title I Peer Review Rubric, Section 7 (Appendix E).

Quantitative Research Question

What practices and procedures were used to transition mobile students into Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools, with the intention of connecting students academically, socially, and emotionally as systematically as possible as defined by current best practices?

Qualitative Research Question

What were Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools doing to systematically transition highly mobile students?

Context

Title I is the largest federal program in K-12 education (Archived Information, 1996). It has evolved over the past 30 years into its present form, allowing schools with at least 40% of poor children to use those funds to upgrade an entire school in order to raise the academic achievement levels of all children. This regulatory change that allowed flexible use of Title I funds as opposed to targeting only qualifying students for academic assistance, reduced the fragmentation of programs and allowed schools to integrate

services based on both the needs of the Title I students and other students within the building. The number of Title I schools eligible to run a Schoolwide program has increased significantly over the past 10 years due to changes in eligibility factors as well as rising numbers of disadvantaged students in some school districts.

The intent of Schoolwide Title I funding was also to ensure the involvement of parents, community members, teachers, and administrators in the decision-making processes of the school, while maximizing funding and program options to improve student learning (DiGiorgi, 2001). School improvement plans were a central component that guided the efforts and initiatives designed to raise student achievement. Accountability factors are present in yearly reviews of the improvement plans which are measured against the Title I Peer Review Rubric (Appendix E). Feedback is provided from state Title I representatives and ongoing progress must be documented and reported.

Schoolwide Title I programs are supported by research that indicates all children's performance can be negatively affected when high levels of poverty are present. For students to meet high standards, all instructional programs must be supported, not just those addressing the needs of lower performing students. Teachers in successful schools have high expectations for all students, and when an entire school is implementing change initiatives, even the most disadvantaged students can achieve (Popp, 2004).

Because Schoolwide eligibility is based on the percentage of disadvantaged students, it can also be said that students from this same group may experience a higher rate of mobility than students from higher socioeconomic groups (Salley, 2004). Student

mobility is defined as movement in or out of a given school during the course of the school year. There is a large body of research that supports the impact of high mobility on student achievement, with a variety of causative factors (Addressing the Causes and Consequences, 2002). While work is being done to ensure the quality of instructional programs is well in place, some of the accompanying symptoms of the qualifying groups may be overlooked when schools are planning effective programs to meet the academic needs of students in Schoolwide Title I schools. Reading and math programs are overhauled, additional personnel may be hired, and new instructional practices may be implemented. However, what is often overlooked are the practices and procedures that need to be in place to help highly mobile students make the initial transitions into school successfully and the instructional programs to be received once they begin school (Easing the Impact, 1997). Little research is available in terms of the relationship between rates of student mobility and procedures that are put in place to address those specific needs in order to provide for a child's academic, social, and emotional needs as they make the transition to a new school. Guidelines exist for best practices in helping schools assimilate mobile students into a new school. However, a strong connection does not necessarily exist between high numbers of mobile students and the number of specific components that should be in place.

There are schools that have realized the needs of mobile students and as a result, have made specific changes to accommodate those needs. This study sought to find those schools that existed in Nebraska and examine the practices that had been implemented.

An assumption is often made that highly mobile students are the same as migrant students. Migrant students are defined as those students whose parent/guardian is, a migratory fisher, dairy worker, or agricultural worker, and has moved from one school district to another in the preceding 36 months for a parent to obtain temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 Title I sec.1309 (2)). In certain locations migrant students account for a large part of the mobile student population, but this does not hold true for all areas (Clark, 2001). Other causes of mobility were linked to military families, socio-economic constraints and poverty, and changes in family structure due to death, divorce, incarceration, or blended families (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003).

Because of the requirements of the Schoolwide Title I plan, it was anticipated that some Schoolwide Title I elementary schools had put exemplary measures in place to meet the needs of highly mobile students, and had done so because of identifying student needs or acquiring new knowledge which suggested some practices should be implemented in order to meet the needs of this population. While many schools have larger populations of highly mobile students, effective practices are not necessarily put into place even when it is evident that the need exists to do so. Mitigating factors may be finances, lack of personnel, lack of adequate knowledge to implement effective measures, or inability to initiate changes to meet the needs of students. Other prohibitive factors could be an unwillingness to implement procedures and practices to meet the needs of highly mobile students based on racial prejudice, denial of the problem, or the belief that such procedures are meaningless because students are not present long enough to benefit

and will simply move to another school (Fisher, Matthews, Stafford, Nakagawa, & Durante, 2002).

To identify schools using exemplary practices, an online survey was administered to Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools and used to identify schools that fell into the category of those that had implemented procedures and practices to address the needs of highly mobile students.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study the following terms apply:

Schoolwide Title I School—Schools with a poverty rate of 40% or above are eligible to choose a Schoolwide status for discretionary use of Title I funds.

Targeted Assistance Title I School—Staff, materials, and equipment funded by Title I used only for Title I participants as identified through needs assessments or automatic eligibility.

Mobility—The Nebraska Department of Education defines mobility as any student who enters or leaves the district between the last Friday in September and the last day of school. These are students who enter/leave from either within the district or out of the district. Each child is counted only one time.

Student mobility—Students moving from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next school level.

Migrant student—A student may be considered to be a migrant student if either the parent or guardian, or the child or child's spouse, have been employed within the past three years or are currently employed in some form of temporary or seasonal agricultural

or agricultural-related work such as: planting or harvesting crops (vegetables, fruit, cotton, etc.), transporting farm products to market, feeding or processing poultry, beef, or hogs, gathering eggs or working in hatcheries, working on a dairy farm or a catfish farm, or cutting firewood or logs to sell.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—Jan. 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. The act contains the President's four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

Transition—The process of intake and acclimation of a mobile student when changing from one school to another within a school district or to a new school district.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledged various limitations of this study.

1. Since only Schoolwide Title I elementary schools in Nebraska were chosen for this study, the results cannot be generalized beyond the parameters of this state.
2. The findings of this study were limited to practices and procedures put in place to transition mobile students into Nebraska Schoolwide Title I elementary schools.
3. Demographics of mobility rates as well as the causative factors of mobility may change over time and do not remain fixed. There are schools that have experienced large influxes of immigrant populations, resulting in procedures

quickly being put in place because of overwhelming needs and large numbers of students making transitions into the school. However, over time, those needs may change in nature, and may become less urgent because the immediacy of the problem has passed. Likewise, there are schools that experience constant rates of mobility due to being located near military bases where families come and go on a regular basis.

4. Financial resources in school districts may have limited the ability to put some practices and procedures in place such as hiring additional staff or adding additional program options.
5. Teacher participants who are responsible for implementing many practices and procedures for highly mobile students may be limited.
6. Collection of research was limited to the willingness of principals completing the initial survey, thus limiting the number available for follow-up interviews.
7. Data collection was done primarily through survey research and survey items may have been misinterpreted using this approach.
8. Qualitative data may be subject to a variety of interpretations from the readers.
9. The study was limited because schools may have wanted to appear to have effective practices put in place, but in reality, their effectiveness is difficult to judge unless one is part of that school system over time and can see the actual effectiveness of the implementation of such procedures. In other words, it looks effective as part of a written plan but is ineffective in actual application.