Student Mobility in Kansas City

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In 2015 Turn the Page KC hosted a summit on student mobility in the Kansas City metropolitan area, which encompasses Kansas City Public Schools and 20 other school districts, including Grandview, Hickman Mills, and North Kansas City. At the summit, researchers reported that a fifth of students in the area moved schools in 2015 for reasons unrelated to grade promotion. Consistent with national research, they found that students of color, lower income students, and those who are homeless all experience higher mobility rates. The researchers also found that more mobile students had lower test scores than students who moved less. In this issue brief, we build off these prior findings to look at student mobility in a subset of the Kansas City metropolitan area.

This brief examines student mobility only in public schools operating within the boundaries of Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS). Using five years of data on students attending district and charter schools inside KCPS boundaries, we find:

- As students progress from kindergarten to 12th grade, **about half** leave the system altogether.
- Student mobility rates inside KCPS boundaries are **higher** than those in the metropolitan area and state. But the rates are **similar** to those in St. Louis.
- The majority of student mobility within KCPS boundaries involves low-performing schools: **65 percent** of student mobility happens either between schools that perform **10 percent** or more below the state average in English and math, or involves students moving from a higher-performing school to a lower-performing one. Still, 20 percent of movers "traded up" between 2013 and 2016, switching from a relatively lower-performing school to a relatively higher-performing school.

Since the 2015 mobility summit, leaders in Kansas City have been working on the city's student mobility problem. For example, the Kansas City Eviction Project has analyzed the relationship between student mobility, achievement, and housing evictions to better understand the problem. The Family Stability Initiative of United Way of Greater Kansas City has supported families with case managers, short-term financial aid, and help to negotiate with landlords to reduce mobility. Turn the Page KC has worked to streamline record transfers that can slow down re-enrollment after students move. Recent community meetings about chronic absenteeism signal the city's continued interest and commitment to improving the stability that students experience in school. And in February 2019 the city announced a groundbreaking data-sharing agreement between KCPS and local nonprofits to ease information-sharing between sectors.

The picture of students leaving the system, mobility, and school performance that emerges in this brief shows the importance of continuing these efforts to deal with student mobility. In addition, the results suggest the need to increase student *retention* alongside these efforts.

Students Leaving the System

As students progress from kindergarten to 12th grade, about half leave the system altogether.

In addition to moving between schools within KCPS boundaries, some students may leave the system entirely to attend school in a surrounding district or a different state. Figure 1 looks at students leaving the system altogether by tracking a single cohort of students from 6th grade through 10th grade, beginning in the 2012–13 school year. As the figure shows, by 10th grade over half of the students in the cohort were no longer enrolled in a public school within KCPS boundaries.

FIGURE 1. Only About Half of 6th Graders from 2012–13 Stayed Enrolled in Schools Within KCPS Boundaries Through 10th Grade

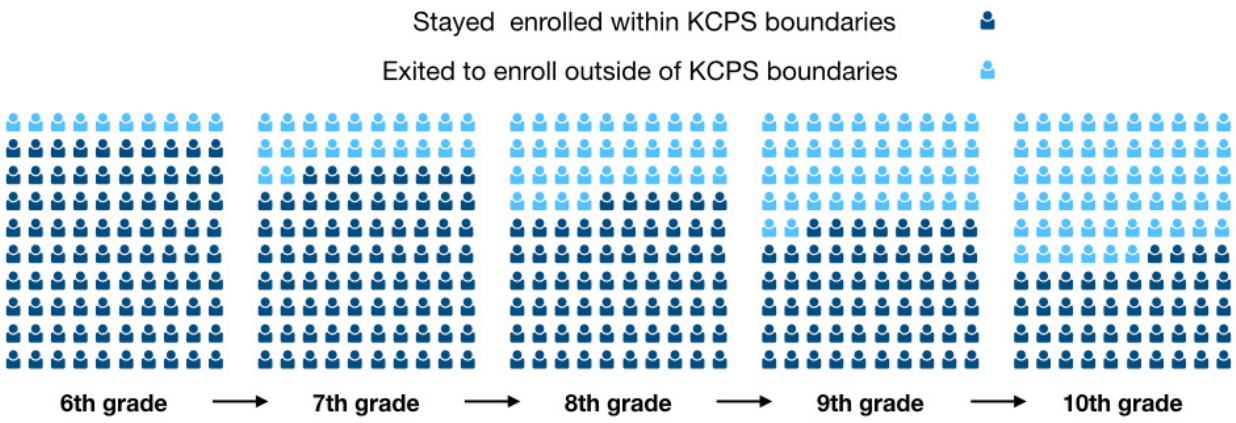
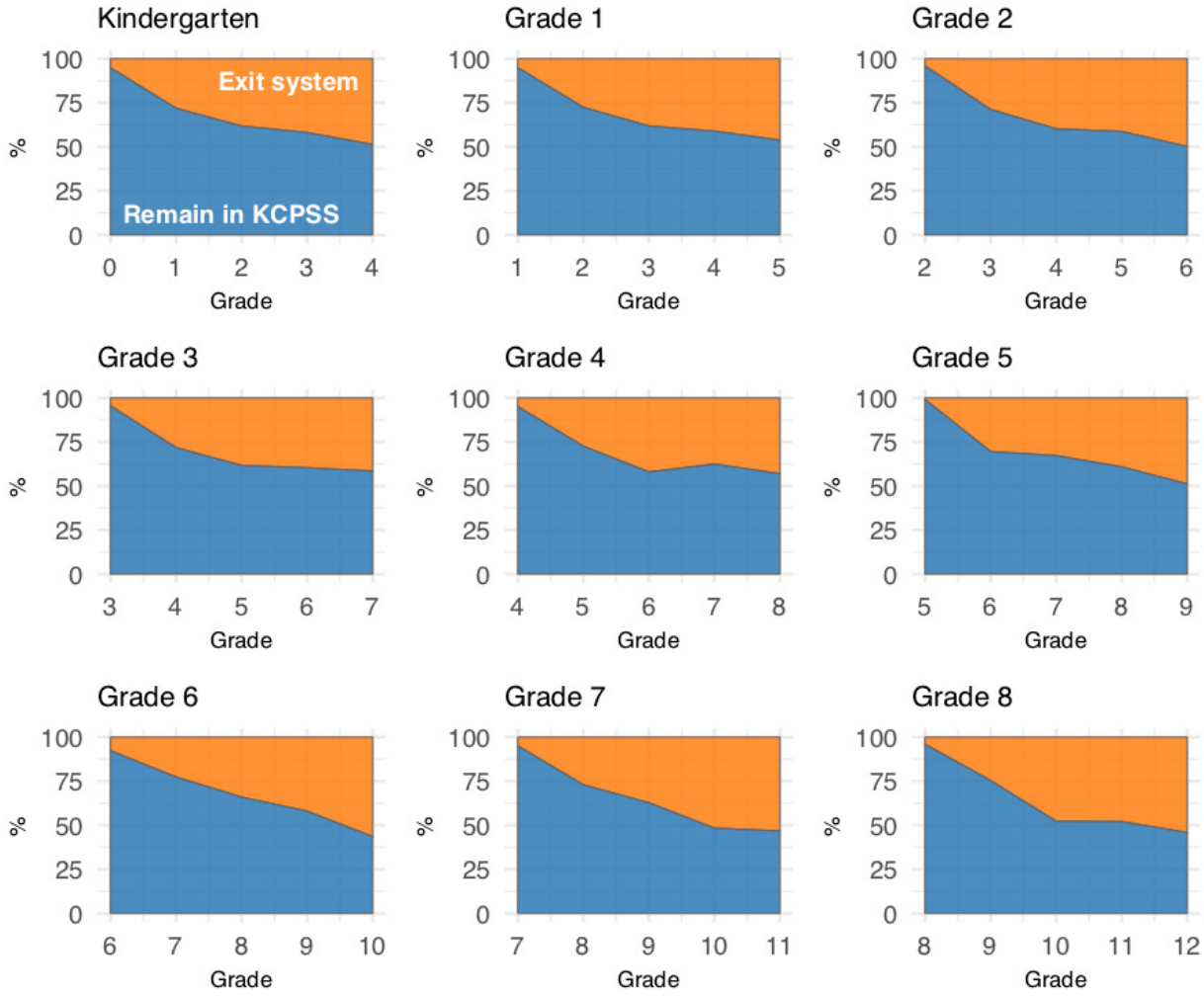


Figure 2 suggests that the pattern in figure 1 is not confined to a single cohort or grade span. It shows system exits for nine different cohorts of students between 2011–12 and 2015–16. As the figure shows, whether we start tracking students in kindergarten, 1st grade, or 6th grade, almost half of the cohort leaves the system five years later. The figure also suggests that the system faces more significant attrition at key transitional points, such as moving into 6th grade, and moving between 9th and 10th grades.

FIGURE 2. Almost Half of Any Cohort Tracked Left the School System Five Years Later



Student Mobility Rates

Student mobility rates inside KCPS boundaries are higher than those in the metropolitan area and state. But the rates are similar to those in St. Louis.

The figures in this section show the percentage of public school students who moved schools within KCPS boundaries between 2012–13 and 2015–16 for reasons unrelated to grade promotion (researchers sometimes call this type of student mobility "nonstructural").

Figure 3 shows that the percentage of students switching schools in district and charter schools ranged from between 25 percent and 30 percent in 2012–13 to around 25 percent in 2015–16. In 2011–12, charter schools had higher mobility rates than KCPS district-run schools. But rates in the two sectors appear to have converged by 2015–16.

Figure 4 shows that while mobility rates inside KCPS boundaries are higher than rates in Missouri, they are comparable to rates in the state's other large urban center, St. Louis. The rates in figure 4 are also slightly higher than the rates in the Kansas City metropolitan area highlighted in the 2015 summit (around 20 percent).

FIGURE 3. Percent of Students in Kansas City Who Switch Schools, by Sector, 2013 to 2016

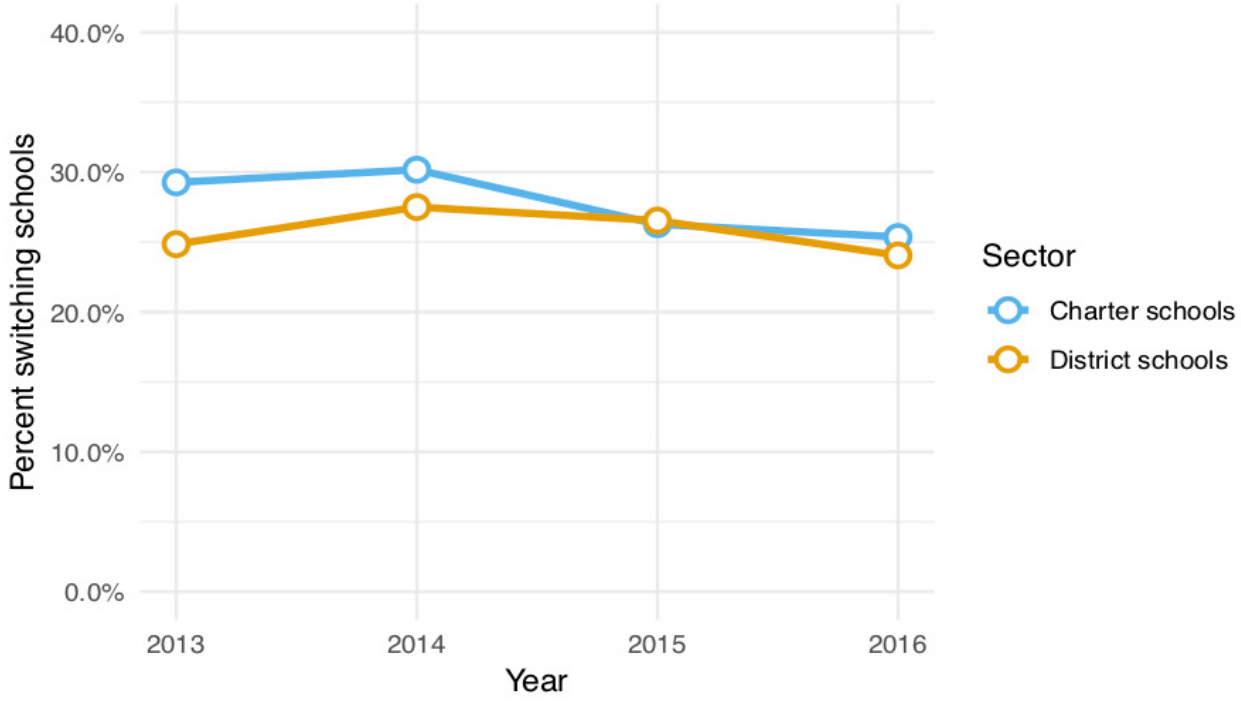
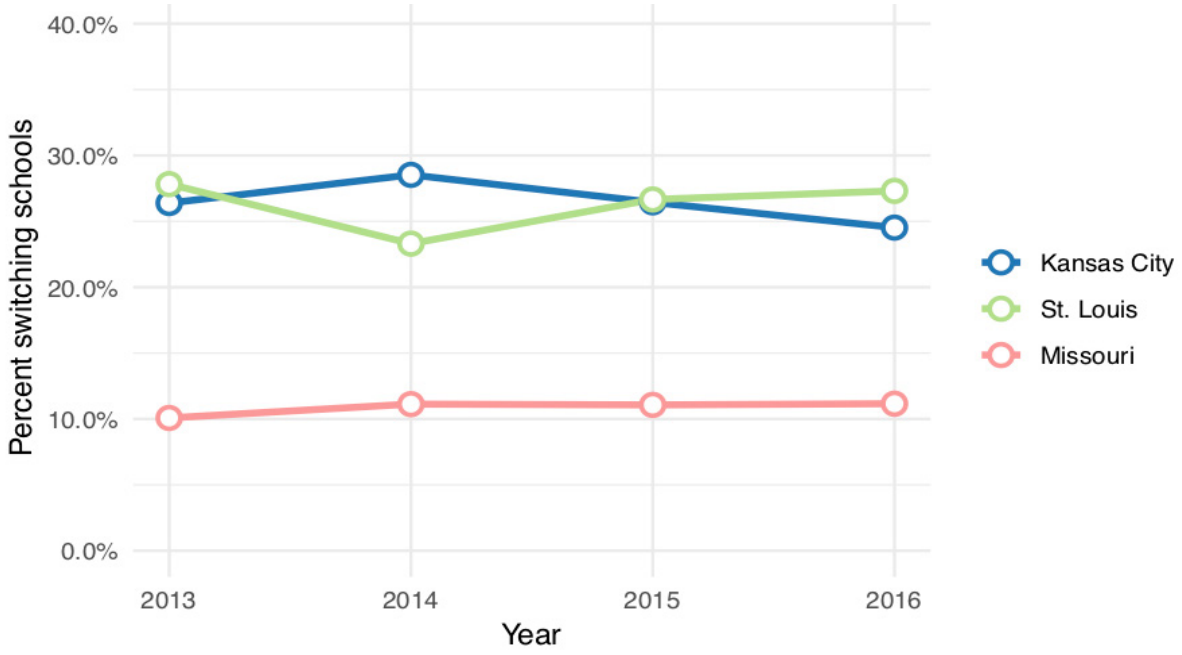


FIGURE 4. Percent of Students in Kansas City Who Switch Schools Compared to St. Louis and Missouri, 2013 to 2016



Mobility and School Performance

The majority of student mobility within KCPS boundaries involves low-performing schools: 65 percent of student mobility happens either between schools that perform 10 percent or more below the state average in English and math, or involves students moving from a higher-performing school to a lower-performing one. Still, 20 percent of movers "traded up" BETWEEN 2013 and 2016, switching from a relatively lower-performing school to a relatively higher-performing school.

Figure 5 looks at the relationship between student mobility in KCPS and school quality in three ways. First, the line chart on the left breaks out the overall mobility rates by school performance relative to the state, by year for four years (2013–16). The results in the left panel show the majority of nonstructural moves are between schools performing below the state average (the line at the top). Second, the donut chart in the middle shows that, across those four years, half of all students made a least one nonstructural change (between 2012–13 and 2015–16). Third, the donut charts on the right show types of moves averaged across all four years of data: 20 percent of all nonstructural moves resulted in students attending a relatively higher-performing school (top donut) and about 16 percent resulted in students attending a relatively lower-performing school (bottom donut). The vast majority of moves were between schools with similar relative performance levels.

FIGURE 5. The Relationship Between Student Mobility and School Quality: Three Views

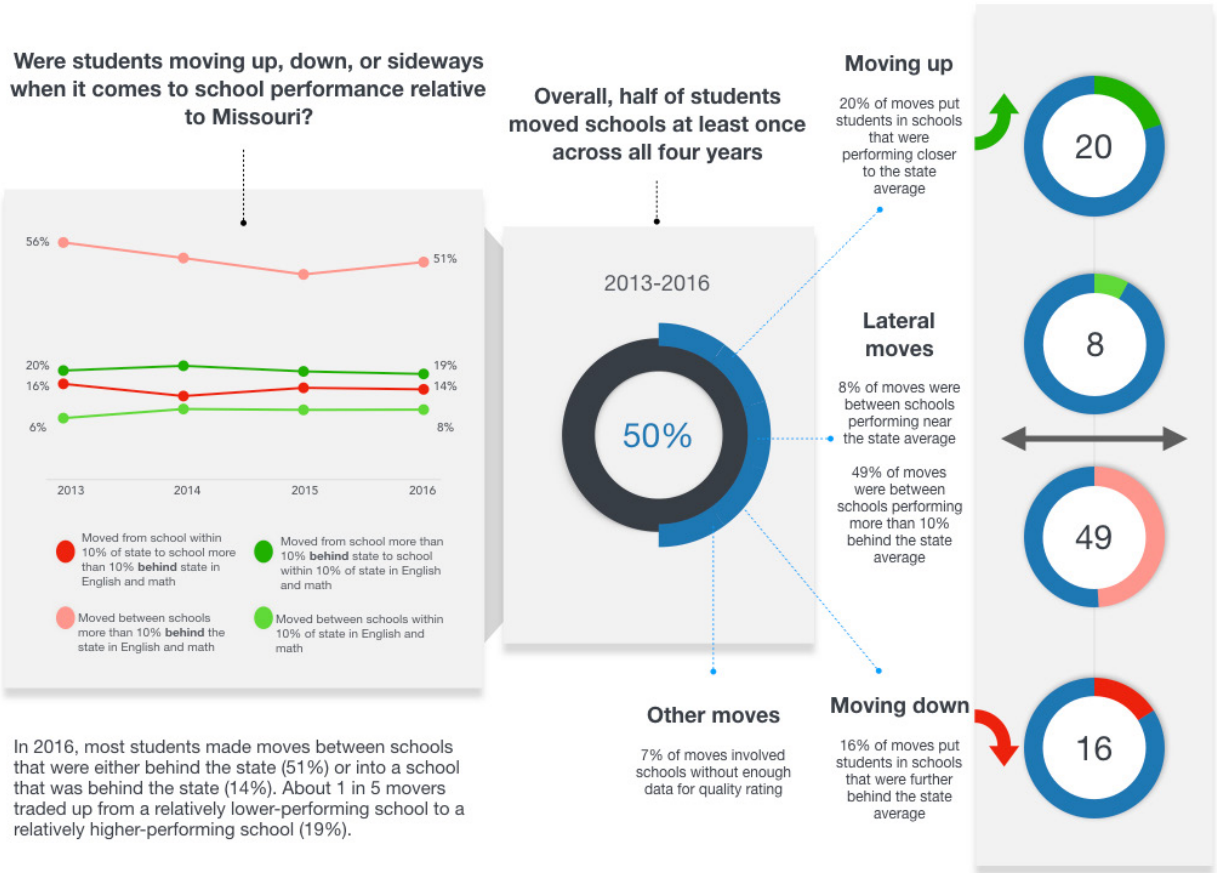
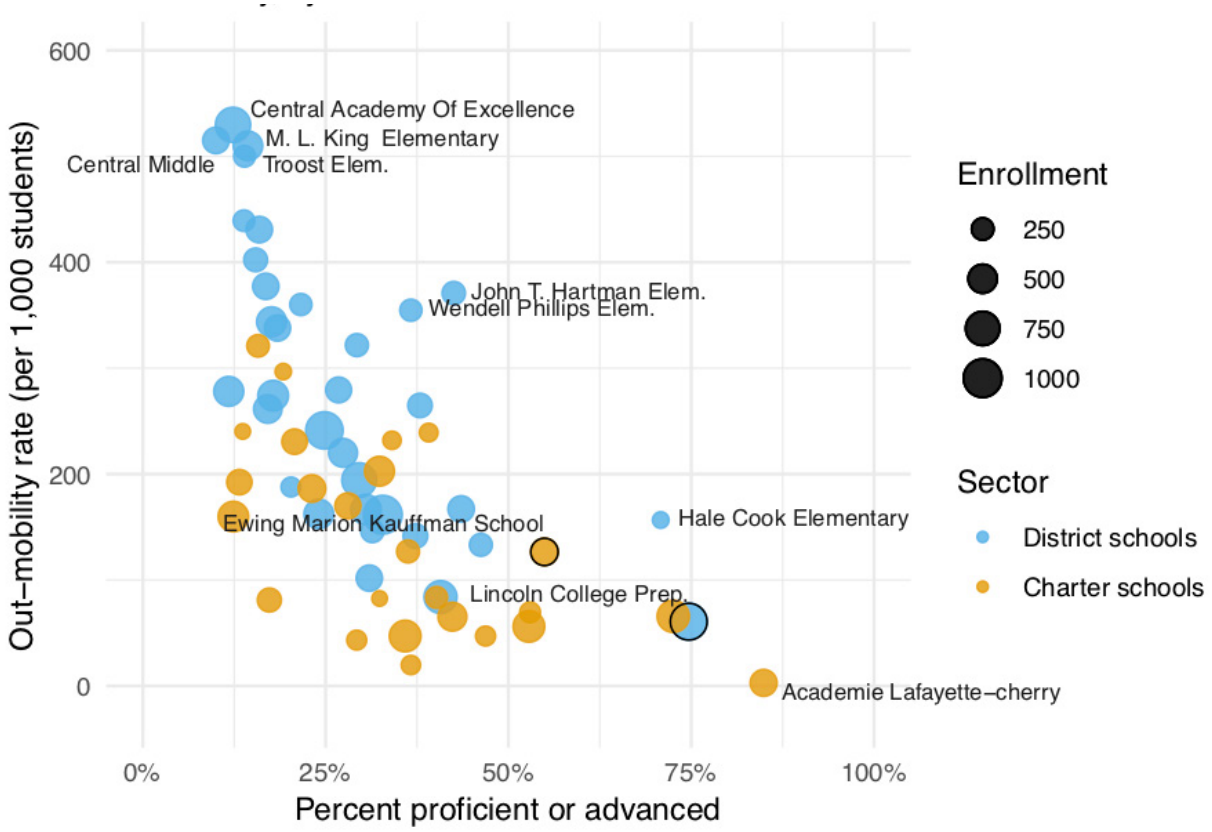


Figure 6 provides a different look at mobility and school performance, capturing the relationship between average out-mobility and school proficiency rates for schools. The results show a negative association between out-mobility and proficiency rates: lower-performing schools tend to have higher mobility and higher-performing schools tend to have lower mobility.

Figure 6 also shows that the relationship between out-mobility and proficiency holds in district schools (blue dots) and charter schools (orange dots) alike. While it is tempting to assume the relationship between the two variables is causal—for example, high mobility causes low performance—that would be a mistake. The relationships here are too complicated and the data too limited to draw that conclusion without further analysis (the cause and effect could, for example, run the other way: lower performance may lead to higher mobility).

FIGURE 6. School-Level Mobility Rates and Performance: Kansas City, by Sector



This scatterplot covers school years 2012–13 through 2015–16. The horizontal axis represents the average percentage of students in each school that scored proficient or advanced on a combined reading and math proficiency measure, across all years of data. This figure includes only schools with elementary and middle-school grades. We exclude high schools since high school students take different tests (EOC), which are not comparable to those taken by students in other grade levels (MAP).

In summary, this brief builds on the 2015 mobility summit in two ways: by tracking mobility over a longer period of time and by focusing on the subset of schools located within KCPS boundaries. This additional vantage point (both in time and place) reinforces the findings from the 2015 summit and underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to reduce student mobility in the city. At the same time, the findings suggest something new: Kansas City's mobility problem is not just a matter of students moving between schools. Part of the problem is that many students are leaving the city altogether to enroll in schools elsewhere.

Data Source

The charts in this issue brief are based on de-identified student-level data from a five-year period spanning 2011–12 through 2015–16. These data were provided by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in April 2018. The data contain information about the schools in which students were enrolled and their performance on state standardized tests. In a given year, a student may have attended one or more schools. The data indicate how long (i.e., the number of days) a student attended a particular school. The data do not indicate when a student attended that school. This can make it difficult to assess the ordering of schools attended by each student. However, by determining whether a school attended in a given year by a student was also attended by that student one year before or after, we are able to assess the extent to which students' schools within and across years are accurately ordered. The result provides a more accurate account of the number of switches students make.

About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

CRPE is a nonpartisan research and policy analysis center at the University of Washington Bothell. We develop, test, and support bold, evidence-based, systemwide solutions to address the most urgent problems in K–12 public education across the country. Our mission is to reinvent the education delivery model, in partnership with education leaders, to prepare all American students to solve tomorrow's challenges. Since 1993 CRPE's research, analysis, and insights have informed public debates and innovative policies that enable schools to thrive. Our work is supported by multiple foundations, contracts, and the U.S. Department of Education.