



CHILD WELL-BEING SERIES PART 1 OF 3

Bouncing Between Homes

Hypermobility and its impact on children’s education and communities at large

Based on Metzger, M. W., Fowler, P. J., & Swanstrom, T. (2016). Hypermobility and educational outcomes: The case of St. Louis. Urban Education. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0042085916682571

Low-income families living in disinvested areas are more likely to live in unstable housing. Their living situations are often characterized by overcrowding, disrepair, and decreased affordability and safety (Metzger, Fowler, & Swanstrom, 2016; Skobba, Bruin, & Yust, 2013; Desmond, 2016). Such families move frequently, not necessarily to better their situation, but because circumstances offer no other choice. Financial stress forces families to make housing tradeoffs – sacrificing quality, security, and livability in exchange for affordability (Crowley, 2003; Metzger et al., 2016). This results in insecure housing situations for many low income Americans (Schafft, 2006; Skobba et al., 2013).

This excessive residential mobility or housing “churn” experienced by families in precarious socioeconomic circumstances is called *hypermobility*, and it has far-reaching effects on children, their parents, schools, and communities. This brief will highlight the problems that results from hypermobility including those related to health and educational outcomes for individual children, the schools they attend, and communities at large.

Background

Hypermobility disrupts attachments of place which are particularly valuable for low-income children and their families. Connections formed in underserved communities help residents access the resources needed to navigate daily life. Research shows that low-income families rely on community-based social networks to a greater extent than middle class families in order to fill the gaps left by inadequate access to essential resources and to build the social capital needed to mitigate crises and ultimately improve their quality of life.

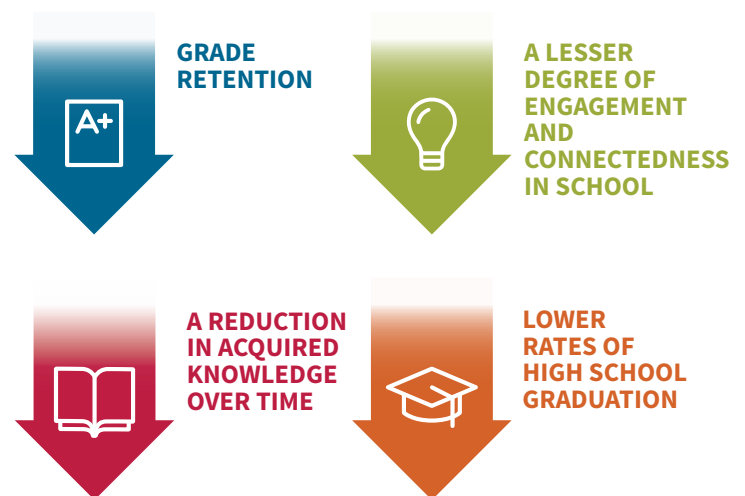
Educational attainment and performance

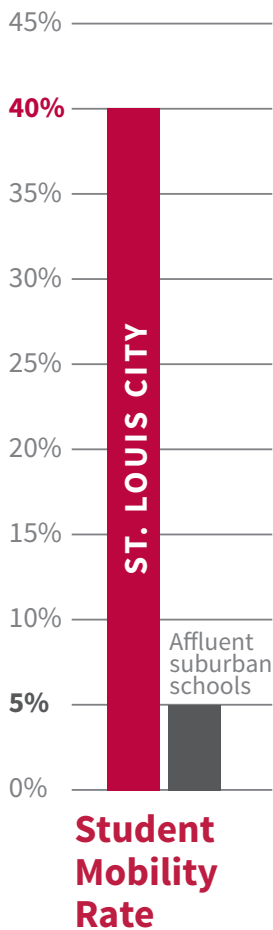
For children, these attachments of place are often centered in the school community. Trusting relationships with

teachers and a strong network of peers contribute greatly to child well-being. When families move involuntarily and children must change schools midway through the academic year, these connections are disrupted, resulting in poor developmental and educational outcomes (Crowley, 2003). Because attachments take time to form, mobile children are also less likely to stay in one school long enough to reap the benefits of established relationships. Frequent moves and school changes put children at greater risk of social isolation and can cause socioemotional problems that extend into adulthood and inhibit productive learning.

Research has consistently shown a correlation between hypermobility – indicated by residential and school displacement – and poor educational outcomes (Crowley, 2003; Ziol-Guest & McKenna, 2014). See figure below.

Effects of residential displacement and school changes





Some school districts are more impacted by hypermobility than others. For instance, the student mobility rate in St. Louis City's school district is 40% (meaning that 40% of students make at least one school transition during the school year), compared to less than 5% in affluent, suburban school districts in the St. Louis region. In schools with high levels of hypermobility, the heightened risk for disengagement and detachment common to mobile children can spill over into the larger school environment, effecting mobile and non-mobile children alike (Crowley, 2003; Schafft, 2006). Teachers and administrators must support students in transition. Peer group dynamics are impacted by the chaos of frequent coming and goings, which undermine the development of strong peer relationships and may negatively affect the learning environment overall.

Policy solutions to hypermobility must include the increased provision of high-quality, affordable housing. Nationwide, only one in four families eligible for housing assistance receives help paying the rent (Poethig, 2014). In order to stabilize families, schools, and communities, governments must prioritize the provision of housing. Solutions include increased supports for affordable housing development, as well as increased funding for tenant assistance such as the federal Housing Choice Voucher program. These sorts of investments in housing will see positive returns ranging from child development outcomes to broader school and community impacts.

References

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Hypermobility and Health

Mobile children are also more likely to be exposed to toxic environments shaped by chaos and community violence, further threatening healthy development. Parents' ability to engage in supportive parenting is undermined by the stresses of poverty and hypermobility (Crowley, 2003). Since mobile children are time-limited in their ability to form strong connections with teachers, the development of psychological defenses such as coping skills may be compromised, leaving them more vulnerable to the negative repercussions of trauma and toxic stress. Parents are likewise less able to rely on social connectedness in their communities as a means of support and practical assistance.

Policy Implications

Poor and working class households with unstable housing utilize an array of disjointed community social service programs in order to get their needs met (Fowler & Schoeny, 2017). Because hypermobility by itself does not meet the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development or school district criteria for homelessness, hypermobile families typically do not necessarily qualify for housing services provided by the homeless service system or for homeless supports provided by the school system, although they may benefit from referrals and some direct services offered by the schools (Metzger et al., 2016).