

Local Government Advisory Commission
September 11, 2012
Governor's Chambers
Boston

At this meeting, I presented a report on the status of students who are mobile and transient and the impact on public school districts. The report is posted here.

MEMORANDUM

To: Local Government Advisory Commission

From: Mary Jo Rossetti, Somerville School Committee
President-elect, MA Association of School Committees

Date: September 11, 2012

RE: Issues Regarding Mobile and Transient Students

Over the past few years, the issues of serving students who are mobile and transient have come to light. In particular, mobile and transient students are those children who move between schools and districts during the year. In Massachusetts some students move several times per year. This migration within districts, the state, to different parts of the country or world poses several problems for the educators and schools who serve them.

There are several reasons for student migration. They include:

- Relocation of the family to accommodate the employment of one or more members of the household.
- Multiple relocations for those migrant workers who follow job opportunities, especially around the tourist season.
- Family deployment by the armed forces.
- Family custody issues, including separation of family members following separation and divorce.
- Immigration in and out of the United States.
- Temporary migration such as visitation to family out of state.
- Homelessness.

There are obvious social and economic issues at play that present special challenges to educators. In those districts where children move several times during the year, educators remain responsible for the academic achievement levels of their students. As a result, educators in one community may be responsible for the overall achievement of students who have been present in their classroom, school or community for only a short time. Districts with high percentages of mobile students must overcome this obstacle while they remain fully accountable for the performance of the children.

What is of particular concern to School Committees and educators in general is that students at social and economic risk are dependent upon a range of state and community services from what we call the "Children's

Services Safety Net” and are the focus of work of the Readiness Cabinet. However, only public schools and teachers are subject to sanction when students do not succeed.

The social and economic implications for these students have been studied in Massachusetts. Dr. Mary Bourque, Superintendent of the Chelsea Public Schools, is one of the nation’s leading experts on this phenomenon. The Rennie Center has also completed a report on this topic.

We are also very pleased that the MA Education Stability and Success Task Force has also looked at student mobility as part of the effort to support children at risk. Several recommendations are in development to support children in socially vulnerable predicaments that do not include parental employment or normal immigration factors in mobility. This task force will expand the vision for mobile and transient students in its recommendations relative to foster children (who are often overlooked among the transient and mobile population), and children in social and emotionally distressed families.

The highly mobile students in the classroom are in need of academic support and many times social emotional supports as well. Highly mobile students frequently arrive with multiple at-risk indicators of which high mobility is one; highly mobile students are frequently also low-income and second language learners.

We are more optimistic than in the past years, and Massachusetts is ahead of other states in recognizing the issues.

As a result of our advocacy, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to compile data on mobile and transient students. This was a change to the Education Reform Law in June 2010.

In 2011, at our sponsorship, the National School Boards Association membership voted to make mobile and transient students a priority for federal study and funding.

We are aware of the work of the State Auditor who has called attention to the unfunded mandate from the requirement that school districts pay for transportation costs of homeless students who attend classes in other communities. This is meaningful relief.

Health Care for All will provide more students at risk with insurance and medical services. This is a major advance.

The new educator evaluation system, presents an opportunity for educators to target the needs of high need students when establishing goals. Further, under the new five year Massachusetts waiver, the accountability system has been adapted to prioritize closing the achievement gap rather than the counterintuitive Adequate Yearly Progress system of the original law.

Still, educating mobile and transient students is hard work and requires special tools and resources. And please be reminded that mobility impacts ALL students, not just the mobile students in a classroom.

Our goals continue to be the following:

- We urge the state to study the issues of mobile and transient students to track the time and expense of serving children at risk that go beyond the normal bounds of the foundation budget. (NSBA, at our urging, is supporting a national, longitudinal study of transient students.)
- We support a Foundation Budget adequacy study in the hope that the expense of mobile and transient students will be incorporated in a revised model. (A cost analysis of the intervention needed to close the academic gaps that result from frequent moves from school to school.)
- We continue to urge state education regulators to accommodate the special demands of mobile and transient students in devising sanctions against school districts that confront unique requirements in serving a student constituency at high risk. For example, we suggest creating a level of student mobility in districts or schools such as a) hyper-mobile, b) moderately mobile, or c) stable. We should acknowledge that this status is a significant factor in performance, and, at minimum, we support recognition of this factor.