Going for Growth
New Education-Housing Partnerships to Stabilize Families and Boost Student Achievement

BY BENJAMIN FORMAN AND CAROLINE KOCH

One out of every six school-age residents in Massachusetts lives in a Gateway City.* Unfortunately, too many of these youths fail to complete high school, and too many of those who do finish do so without the basic skills they need to be successful as they seek higher degrees and credentials. In an economy with few jobs at family-sustaining pay for those without specialized skills, the success of these students is critical to the economic growth of Gateway Cities, their regions, and the state.

Boosting the educational achievement of Gateway City youth will certainly require sustained focus on improving the schools that serve these communities, as 60 percent of all schools in Massachusetts deemed failing by the state are located in these 11 cities. Although there are exceptions, it can be difficult for Gateway City schools to produce dramatic gains in student performance by acting independently.

The Gateway City experience with the state's landmark 1993 education reform law shows the limitations of a schools-on-their-own strategy.[1] Education reform doubled aid to local school districts and set high standards for results. These changes led to impressive achievement gains statewide. But for all its accomplishments, educa-

tion reform has not been able to close the achievement gap so that a student's chance for success does not depend on his or her zip code.

Part of the challenge has been the increasing concentration of poverty in the state's urban areas. Since 1993, the share of students in the average Gateway City district who are low-income has grown from less than half to nearly three-quarters. With such high concentrations of low-income youth, providing the additional support that schools must offer to close the achievement gap requires capabilities that extend beyond the resources of Gateway City school districts. Helping more Gateway City students succeed is going to require bold cross-sector efforts.

An example of the type of partnership needed is collaboration between education and housing agencies to develop and implement innovative strategies to reduce student mobility.

The challenge of large numbers of students changing schools during the school year is widespread across the Gateway Cities. In just these 11 districts, nearly 30,000 students transfer into or out of public schools during the academic year. This churn is harmful to both mobile students and stable students in the classrooms they enter and exit. It also undermines current reform efforts

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* MassINC's term for 11 midsize cities that have traditionally served as economic centers and escalators to the middle class for regions outside of Greater Boston.

Figure 1

Average churn rates for Gateway City public school districts, 2008-2010

Gateway City District Average = 20%
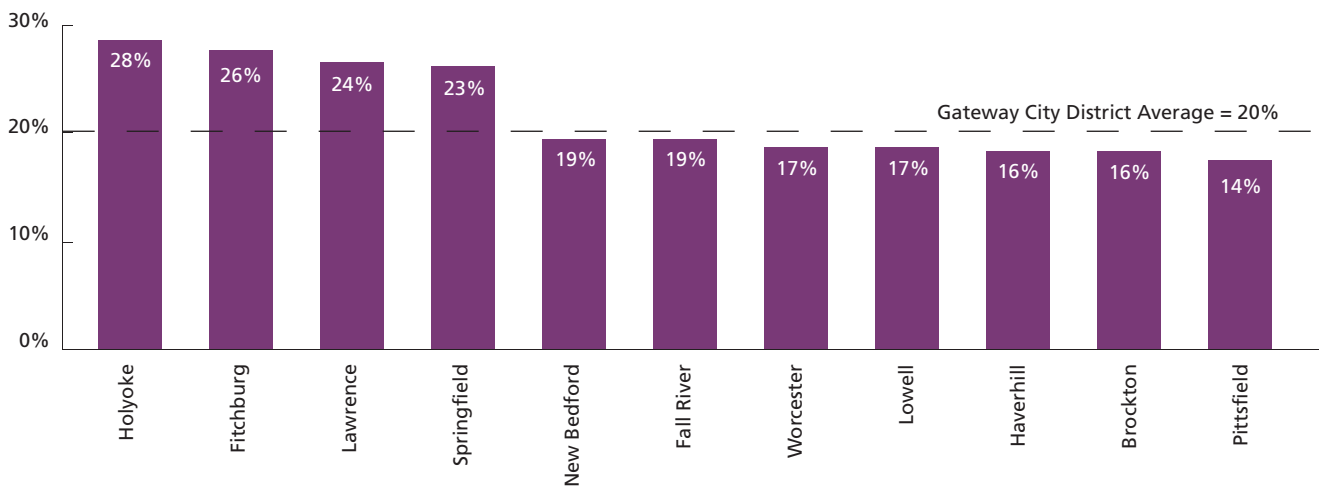
Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

centered around standards and accountability—the difficult task of measuring teacher effectiveness becomes even more challenging when teachers instruct a significant number of their students for only part of the school year.

While students change schools for many reasons, housing insecurity is responsible for a large share of the student mobility in Gateway City school districts. Most low-income families served by schools in these communities lack savings and credit that they can fall back on to make rent and mortgage payments when they are laid off, a family member becomes ill, or they experience some other adverse economic event.

Neighborhood instability is another housing-related driver of student mobility. Many Gateway City schools draw their students from distressed neighborhoods, where crime and other undesirable conditions mean families are especially likely to relocate.

While there are very few examples of

housing programs explicitly designed to reduce student mobility, there are a number of evolving areas of housing policy that could provide cornerstones for new housing-education partnerships focused on stabilizing mobile families.

For instance, state and local governments in Massachusetts are working together to reduce housing insecurity with an ambitious redesign of the way services are provided to homeless families. If this new approach succeeds, many of the most transient Gateway City students will have more stable housing. With a special *Moving to Work* waiver, Massachusetts also has an opportunity to revamp the way it provides certain federal housing subsidies to low-income families. Innovative policy changes could

help more families with school-age children secure quality affordable housing.[2]

At the federal level, a strategic effort is underway to link urban school reform with new initiatives focused on strengthening unstable neighborhoods. Through programs such as *Choice Neighborhoods, Promise Neighborhoods*, and *Sustainable Housing and Communities* federal agencies are coordinating investments to build "opportunity-rich" communities

Housing insecurity is responsible for a large share of student mobility in Gateway City schools.

that recognize the fundamental linkages between housing, neighborhoods, and schools.[3] These initiatives seek to break down the deep divisions among government agencies and promote innovative integrated efforts. While they provide models, federal resources are severely limited. To stabilize neighbor-

hoods and reduce mobility, states will need to build their own cross-sector programs.

This policy brief examines the student mobility challenge and housing strategies to address it. In the pages that follow, we detail the incidence of student mobility in Gateway Cities and its relationship to neighborhood conditions (Section I); describe the impact of mobility on students and their schools (Section II); catalog areas of housing policy that could be adapted to reduce student mobility (Section III); and present near-term recommendations for Gateway City housing and education leaders working to address this challenge (Section IV).

I. Student Mobility in Gateway Cities

Building an education-housing strategy to reduce student mobility begins with developing a nuanced understanding of the problem and how it differs in communities across the state. While the data required to fully analyze student mobility are still incomplete, information released recently by the state helps sketch a basic portrait of the disproportionately high incidence of student mobility in Gateway Cities.

In the average Gateway City district, one in five students enters or exits a school during the course of the academic year. With more than a quarter of students changing schools during the year, Holyoke has the highest mobility rate. The Fitchburg, Lawrence, and Springfield districts also have exceptionally high student turnover (Figure 1).

While the data available encompass much of the current foreclosure and

Figure 2

Churn rate trends, 2008-2010
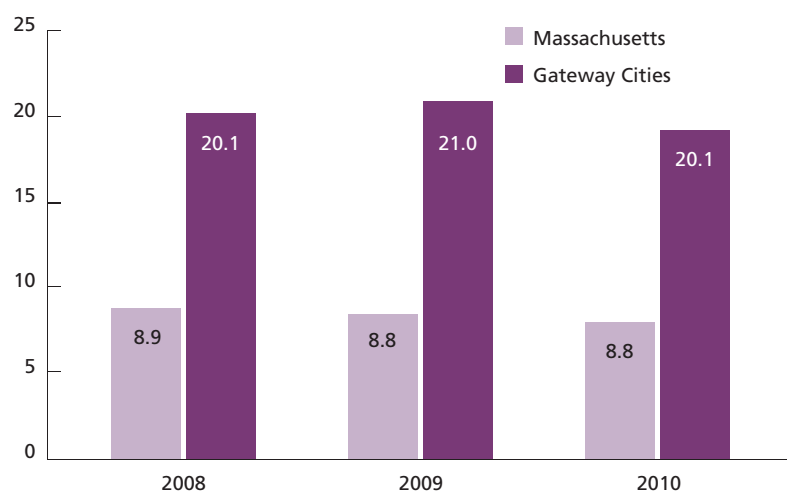
Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

Table 1

Distribution of Gateway City schools by average churn rate, 2008-2010

CITY	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS			SHARE OF SCHOOLS		
	<10%	10 TO 25%	>25%	<10%	10 TO 25%	>25%
Brockton	0	14	3	0%	82%	18%
Fall River	1	10	1	8%	83%	8%
Fitchburg	1	3	4	13%	38%	50%
Haverhill	2	10	3	13%	67%	20%
Holyoke	0	3	6	0%	33%	67%
Lawrence	0	16	10	0%	62%	38%
Lowell	1	19	1	5%	90%	5%
New Bedford	1	21	5	4%	78%	19%
Pittsfield	5	5	2	42%	42%	17%
Springfield	1	16	27	2%	36%	61%
Worcester	7	25	12	16%	57%	27%
Gateway Cities	**19**	**142**	**74**	**8%**	**60%**	**31%**
MA	**900**	**606**	**214**	**52%**	**35%**	**12%**

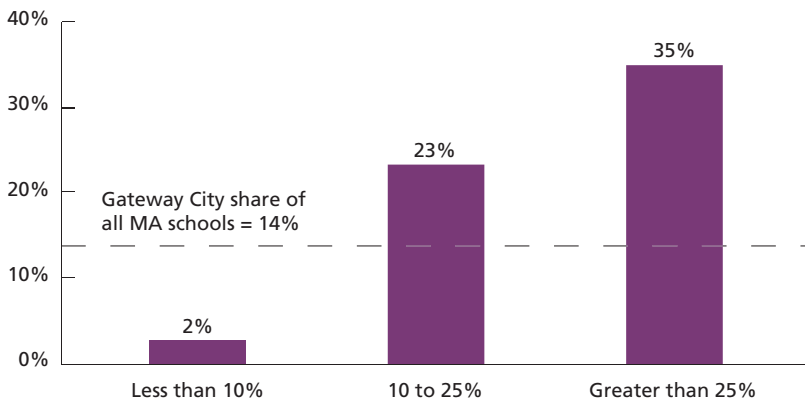Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

economic crisis, the first year (2007-8) provides a snapshot of mobility before the downward spiral. Across the Gateway Cities, churn increased only by about one percentage point in 2008-9, while falling slightly in other Massachusetts communities. In 2009-10, mobility rates declined statewide, including by about two percentage points in Gateway Cities (Figure 2). These patterns suggest student mobility in Gateway Cities is a persistent, deeply rooted issue.

In some Gateway Cities, a handful of schools struggle with exceptionally high mobility rates; in others, the challenge is more pervasive. For exam-

Figure 3

Share of schools located in Gateway Cities by average churn rate, 2008-2010

Gateway City share of all MA schools = 14%

Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

Table 2

Total Number of Student Transfers and Average Churn Rate

CITY	AVERAGE CHURN RATE[1]	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS TRANSFERING IN OR OUT	REDUCTION NEEDED TO REACH STATE AVERAGE
Brockton	16.2%	2,663	-1,180
Fall River	18.8%	2,002	-1,044
Fitchburg	25.5%	1,447	-936
Haverhill	16.4%	1,237	-560
Holyoke	28.0%	1,864	-1,265
Lawrence	24.1%	3,262	-2,044
Lowell	16.8%	2,406	-1,115
New Bedford	19.2%	2,631	-1,398
Pittsfield	14.3%	937	-347
Springfield	23.2%	6,392	-3,916
Worcester	17.4%	4,362	-2,110
Gateway Cities	**20.0%**	**29,204**	**-15,915**
MA	**9.0%**	**87,550**	**–**

Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

ple, only five of New Bedford's 27 schools have very high churn rates (over 25 percent). In Brockton, just three out of 17 have high churn. With 21 schools, the Lowell district has just one with very high churn (Table 1).

In other Gateway Cities, very high student mobility rates are more widespread across the district. Two-thirds of the schools in Holyoke have very high mobility. In Fitchburg and Springfield, half or more of all public schools have churn rates over 25 percent. While Worcester has a relatively modest district-wide churn rate (17 percent), the city still has 12 schools that struggle with exceptionally high levels of student mobility.

Gateway City schools shoulder a large share of the student mobility challenge. The churn rate for the average Gateway City district is more than double the statewide district average (20 percent vs. 9 percent). The Gateway Cities are home to approximately 14 percent of schools in Massachusetts, yet they represent fewer than 2 percent of schools with low student mobility. Schools with moderate and high churn rates are disproportionately concentrated in Gateway Cities (Figure 3).

Aggregate figures of mobile families demonstrate the degree of effort required to solve this challenge. Nearly 30,000 students transfer into or out of Gateway City Schools during the academic year. To bring mobility rates down to the state average, Gateway Cities would need to stabilize nearly 16,000 students. Springfield would have to reduce its total by almost 4,000 students. Lawrence and Worcester would each need to reduce their mobile student populations by more than 2,000 students (Table 2).

The success of efforts to reduce mobility at a local level through housing strategies are contingent on the extent to which mobility is associated with moves within the district and students exiting the district mid-year. Unfortunately, the data do not provide a sense of how much churn is related to students moving within districts versus students moving between them. It is possible to break the churn rate down to a ratio of students entering the district to students both exiting and switching schools within the district. In most Gateway Cities, there are just slightly more students entering than changing schools and exiting, which suggest local action can be effective. In Holyoke and Fitch-

Figure 4

Ratio of students entering to students exiting and moving within the district, 2008-2010
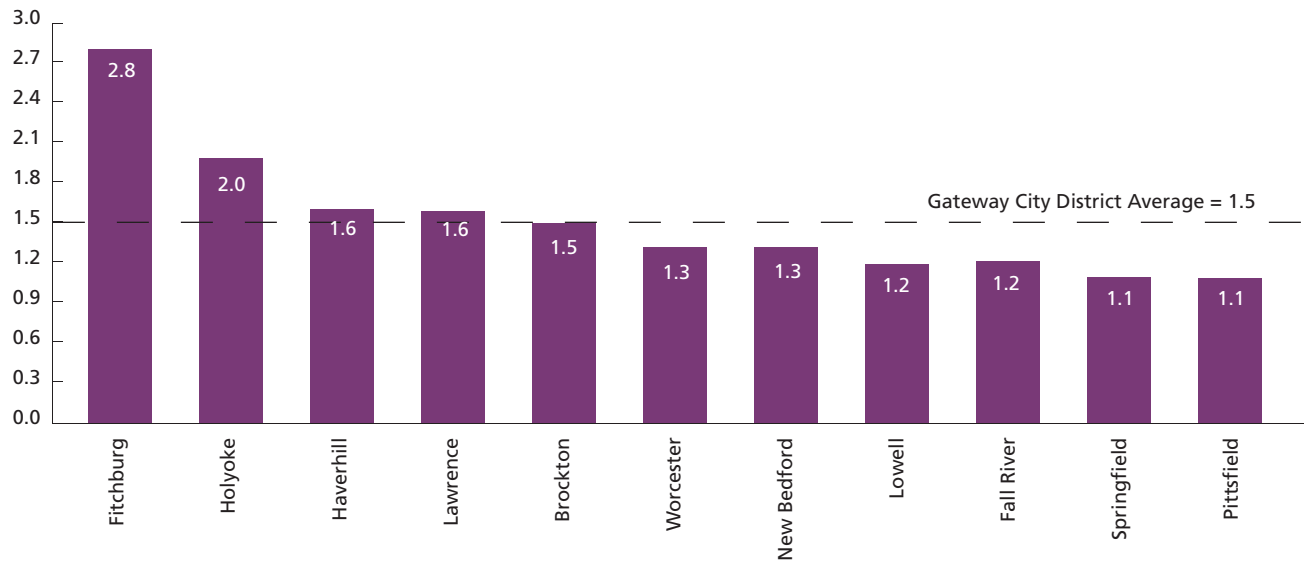
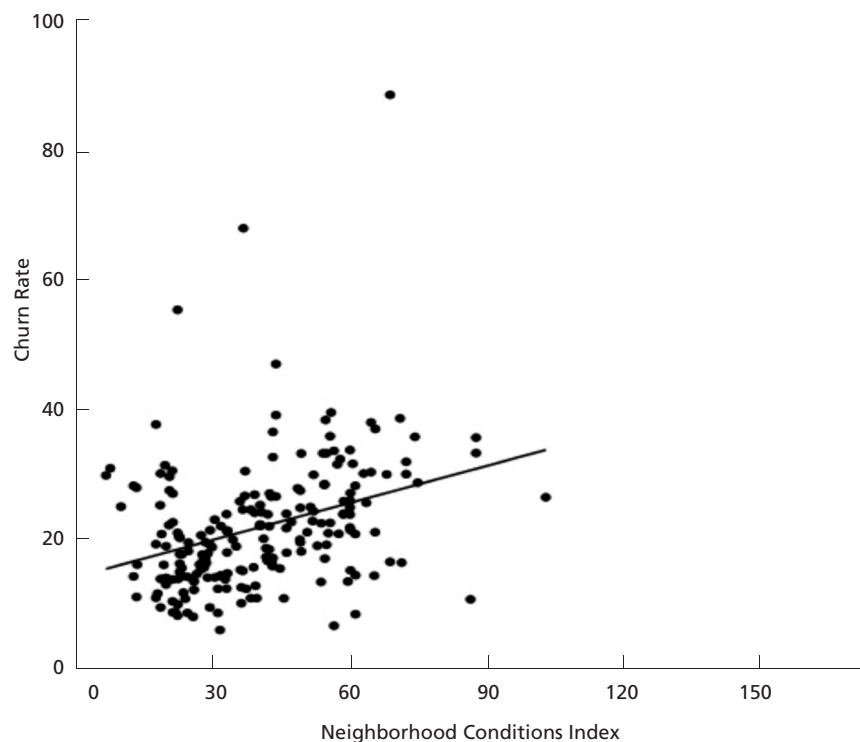Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

burg, the impact of local action alone may be more muted. In these cities, the ratio of students entering to exiting and moving within the district is unusually high (Figure 4).

Student mobility in Gateway Cities is driven at least partially by neighborhood conditions. To develop a better understanding of the relationship between neighborhood conditions and student mobility, we crated an index using data from the American Community Survey.[4] This Neighborhood Conditions Index (NCI) includes five components: percent of residents with income below the federal poverty level; percent of housing units vacant; percent of housing units owner-occupied; percent of households living in the same home one year ago; and gross rent as a percentage of household income.

The analysis revealed significant correlation (r=.44, p<.01) between a school's
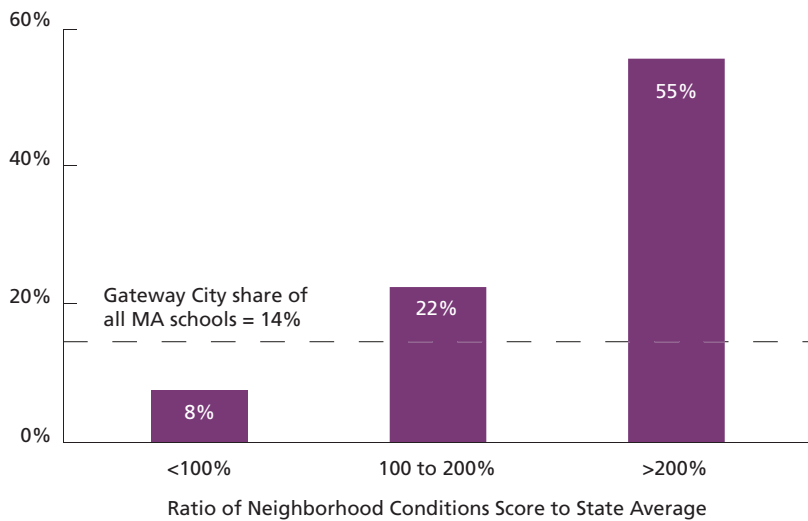
Figure 5

Relationship between school churn rate and neighborhood conditions

Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education

Figure 6

Share of schools located in Gateway Cities by neighborhood conditions, 2008-2010

Source: Author's analysis of data from the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education and the American Community Survey

mobility rate and the NCI for the Census Tract in which a school is located.[5] This statistical relationship is displayed graphically in Figure 5, a scatterplot of the churn rate and the NCI for each Gateway City school.

More than half of all schools located in highly unstable neighborhoods— defined as double the statewide NCI average—were located in Gateway Cities (Figure 6). On average, these 37 schools had churn rates 34 percent higher than the Gateway City-district average and more than double the average churn rate across all Massachusetts districts.

A closer view of the data makes plain how neighborhood instability relates to churn. Lincoln Elementary School in

Springfield provides an example of a school working in the midst of profound neighborhood instability. More than half of residents living in the school's Census Tract are poor. Twenty-five percent of the neighborhood's housing stock is vacant. Only 19 percent of residents own their homes, and the median household spends 45 percent of its income on rent. This high rent burden undoubtedly contributes to residential instability. A third of the neighborhood's residents moved within the last year—a ratio identical to the churn rate for students at Lincoln Elementary.

II. Causes and Consequences of Student Mobility

An extensive body of research catalogs the causes and consequences of student mobility. These studies suggest housing insecurity and neighborhood instability are responsible for a large share of student mobility in low-income urban areas. As described below, the harmful effect student mobility has on both families that move frequently and schools that serve high concentrations of transient students shows why this issue merits special focus from state and local housing leaders.

Causes of Mobility

Residential moves are the primary driver of student mobility. The largest national study to look directly at this problem found that 70 percent of all school moves were linked to a change in residence.[7]

Families relocate for a variety of reasons, but survey data are revealing. Respondents report that residential moves are more often associated with

TRACKING MOBILE STUDENTS

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides measures of student mobility beginning with the 2007-08 school year. DESE publishes the number of students who were continuously enrolled in public schools and districts, as well as the number of students who transferred into public schools and districts after the beginning of the school year. The most complete indicator of mobility calculated by the department is the churn rate, which gives the number of students who transferred into or out of schools or districts as a percentage of all the students enrolled in the school or district at any given time during the school year.

This analysis relies on the department's churn rate data for all non-charter schools and districts. To reduce outliers, only schools with three years of mobility data were included in the analysis, and the figures reported represent three-year averages of churn rates for schools, districts, and the state, unless otherwise noted.

housing issues than changes in work or family structure. Figures from recent Census surveys show that about half of all households that change residence in Massachusetts relocate for housing related reasons. The state's low-income families are particularly likely to cite housing as the primary cause for a change in residence (Figure 7). For low-income families making relatively short moves (within the same county), housing explains two-thirds of all relocations. And short moves make up three-quarters of all the relocations made by low-income families in Massachusetts.

From an education standpoint, it is important to distinguish between moves that result in improvements in school quality and moves where students switch to another low-performing school. After all, a lot of this residential mobility could simply be the result of families seeking to improve their circumstances.

One recent study that examined residential mobility in 10 urban neighborhoods found that nearly half of all families with children that move can be classified as *churning in place*. While there are some *up-and-out movers*, who improve their living conditions by relocating to higher-quality neighborhoods, they represent less than a third of all families in the study.[8] This finding is supported by other research, which suggests that, while families who change school districts generally move to a higher quality school, moves by minority families do not lead to improvements in school quality.[9] Given the limited housing opportunity in Massachusetts and the state's highly segregated schools, it is likely that the mobility of low-income minority families in Gateway Cities

Figure 7

Reason for moving by ratio of family income to the federal poverty level, 2007-2010
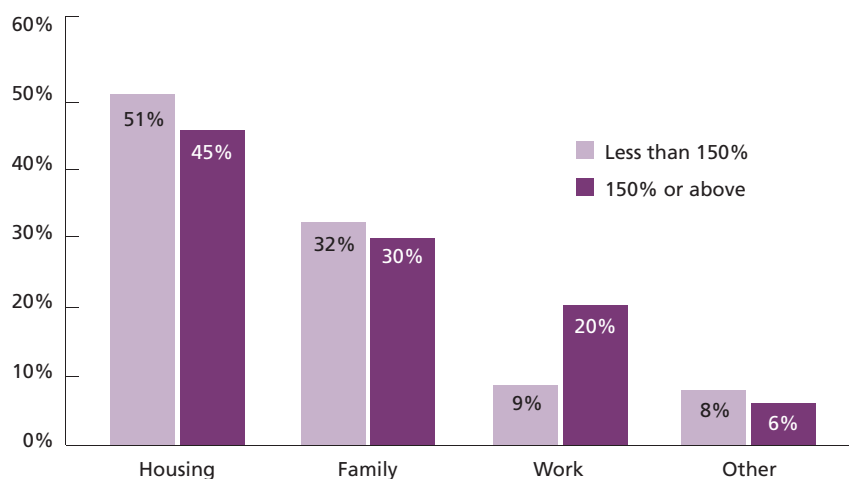
Source: Author's analysis of March CPS data, 2007-2010

corresponds to a similar pattern.[10]

Research conducted by the Rennie Center in a sample of 11 schools across six Gateway City districts offer further evidence that these moves are often unplanned and related to housing insecurity. When asked to describe the most common reasons students enter and exit their schools, school and district staff cited, among other factors, poor housing quality, inability to pay rent, eviction, foreclosure, and movement into and out of temporary housing.[11]

The Impact of Mobility on Students

A large body of peer-reviewed research documents the consequences of residential mobility for students who change schools. While it is challenging to isolate the impact of mobility from other factors that often accompany it (i.e., divorce, poverty, limited English proficiency), studies that have attempted to disentangle effects find that student mobility exacts its own costs.[12]

Research on school performance shows that students who move frequently have lower test scores.[13] They are also more likely to repeat a grade and less likely to graduate.[14] There are many explanations for how mobility impacts achievement. Studies demonstrate that moving results in lost time in the classroom. While the impact of a move is modest, it can add up for students who relocate multiple times. Families with young children are particularly mobile.[15] When students get behind in the acquisition of basic skills, the effect accumulates over time.[16]

Other researchers point to the importance of relationships and the disruption in social networks associated with school moves. Studies of youth social development reveal the important contribution of peer social networks.[17] Mobile youth report having fewer and less supportive friendships.[18] There is also evidence that the parents of mobile youth are less likely to know their children's friends and the parents of their

friends.[19] Studies suggest this can have real consequences in terms of engaging in deviant and violent behavior.[20] The Rennie Center's research in Gateway Cities reinforces evidence of the degree to which mobile students experience social isolation. A small sample of incoming students overwhelmingly reported joining new classrooms as an unhappy and unwelcoming experience.[21]

Social network disruptions may at least partially explain some of the public health impacts associated with residential mobility among children and adolescents. Medical researchers find higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems, including substance abuse and depression, among transient youth.[22] Mobility has also been connected to increased teenage pregnancy rates.[23]

The Impact of Mobility on Schools

At an administrative level, the demands associated with enrolling and assimilating new students absorb resources that would otherwise go to other efforts. While these findings were not confirmed by the Rennie Center's research in Gateway Cities, other studies suggest that in schools with high rates of mobility, teachers report lower levels of professional collaboration and less focus on pursuing innovative instructional approaches. At the classroom level, teachers faced with constantly incorporating new students are forced to repeat material, slowing the pace of instruction for all students.[24] And there is at least anecdotal evidence that mobility leads to teacher burnout and attrition, further destabilizing the school community.[25]

This disruption clearly has an impact on stable students. While the quantifiable reductions in achievement are small, the cumulative effect on learning for students attending high turnover schools over multiple years can be substantial. A recent study of Texas students, for example, found that the disproportionate number of minority students attending schools with high turnover explained 14 percent of the state's 7th grade black/white test score gap in mathematics.[26]

Social network research also finds that the impact of student turnover extends beyond the mobile population. In schools where many students are recent movers, all students have fewer friends and parents who have met their best friend or that friend's parents.[27]

The Rennie Center's interviews corroborate many of these findings. Superintendents described how mobility taxes administrators already straining to serve a student population with many unique needs. And teachers relayed a variety of ways in which mobility disrupts and reduces classroom instruction.[28]

III. Housing Policy

While there are very few examples of housing programs explicitly designed to reduce student mobility, there are a number of developing areas of state and federal housing policy that could have implications for new strategies to reduce student mobility with housing interventions. This section provides context to inform discussion around three of these evolving areas: homelessness policy, housing voucher policy, and neighborhood revitalization policy.

A. Family Homelessness Policy

Massachusetts public schools enroll more than 50,000 homeless students.[29]

Family homelessness has grown rapidly in recent years.

Combined, the 11 Gateway Cities educate approximately 20,000 homeless children.[30] Studies have shown that these students have the highest rates of mobility.[31] They move frequently to live with relatives and friends, and some must turn to the emergency shelter system, which often can only accommodate them with housing outside of their communities.[32]

Family homelessness has grown rapidly in recent years. In Massachusetts—the only state in the country that guarantees shelter for homeless families—this growth has had a large fiscal impact. In FY 2011, the state spent $160 million providing shelter for homeless families, up from $46 million in FY 2001.[33]

This direct spending figure does not account for the indirect costs of homelessness, such as poor health outcomes among a population heavily dependent on subsidized care. By identifying these associated costs, and pointing to research demonstrating that emergency shelter is often more costly than providing access to stable subsidized housing, advocates for reform generated a wave of activity that has led to innovative

approaches to end family homelessness in communities across the country.[34]

State Efforts to End Family Homelessness

In 2007, Massachusetts embarked on its effort to redesign the way the state approaches homelessness. This work began with a special commission and a newly reconstituted Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, charged with implementing the commission's five-year plan to end homelessness in Massachusetts by 2013.[35] The state's new approach focuses on prevention, to stop as many people from losing their housing as possible; rapid rehousing, to move people from crisis to stable, permanent housing; and asset development, to help families develop greater long-term self-sufficiency and housing security.[36]

The state has completed, or is in the process of implementing, major components of this plan, including:

- Rewriting shelter contracts to reimburse service providers based on their success moving families quickly to permanent housing;
- Moving the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to better coordinate the state's housing resources with the needs of providers seeking to house homeless individuals and families; and
- Developing regional networks to coordinate early warning systems, establish referral services, and perform outcome evaluations.

With these structural reforms in place, the state is now working to build a new family homelessness delivery system. The centerpiece of this redesign will be

a program called *HomeBASE.* HomeBASE will provide flexible prevention funds to help families avoid shelter. For those who lose their housing, HomeBASE services will help secure long-term housing placements. These housing resources will be available to eligible families for up to three years. During this period, families will receive stabilization services to help them move toward self-sufficiency.[37]

Local Efforts to End Family Homelessness

Over the last several years, Gateway Cities have also been actively building local and regional plans to end homelessness. The strongest plans involve measurable outcomes, implementation timelines, taskforces, and dedicated funding sources.[38] More specifically, these community-driven strategies identify housing units available to rapidly rehouse families, and call for data systems to track the availability of these units and provide case management to

families receiving assistance. Most Gateway City plans also contain asset-building language, although these sections tend to be less well developed.[39]

The Gateway City strategies demonstrate a strong local commitment to work collaboratively with regional partners to end homelessness. They are, however, largely dependent on state and federal programs, for which funding is still uncertain. Many of the prevention and rapid rehousing programs administered over the last several years were supported by federal stimulus dollars. As the state moves away from shelter and toward the HomeBASE model, funds will become available that previously paid for shelter services. However, to the extent resources are required to support HomeBASE above the current level of shelter spending, these funds must still be identified from new state and federal sources.

Identifying resources to deliver the asset building programs needed to help families achieve self-sufficiency is par-

MCKINNEY-VENTO AND HOMELESS STUDENTS

Reauthorized as part of the HEARTH Act of 2009, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act protects the rights of homeless students to ensure they have access to an appropriate public school education. Under the law, all districts are required to assign a McKinney-Vento liaison. Liaisons assist with enrollment and connect homeless students to appropriate services. They also work to reach the many unidentified homeless students with unknown and unmet needs.

Reducing student mobility is one of the central goals of McKinney-Vento. The law guarantees homeless students' enrollment in their school of choice. If this is their school of origin, the act entitles the student to transportation. The cost of providing this transportation is split evenly by the sending and receiving district. Federal McKinney-Vento funds are subgranted by the state to districts, but these resources are generally not available to defray transportation costs. In some cases, a district will spend significantly more transporting a student than it would cost to provide a family with stable subsidized housing.[41]

ticularly critical. From job training and affordable child care to quality financial counseling and other asset building supports and services, existing capacity is limited. Without these systems and supports, there is real question whether the HomeBASE three-year housing subsidy will be adequate to provide families with greater stability.[40]

B. Housing Voucher Policy

For low-income families struggling in the state's high-cost real estate markets, housing vouchers that subsidize a portion of the rent for private apartments are the largest source of housing assistance. Research shows that these housing vouchers stabilize low-income families and reduce residential mobility.[42] However, the supply of housing vouchers is not adequate to meet demand. More than 90,000 residents in Massachusetts are on waiting lists to receive a housing voucher; families with children make up two-thirds of these lists.[43]

Because of this large gulf between the number of families eligible for housing vouchers and the funds available to provide them, administrative agencies face tremendous pressure to manage the program fairly and efficiently. To stretch this resource, some jurisdictions are experimenting with time limits and work requirements. With these restrictions, they hope to move work-able recipients toward self-sufficiency, allowing them to redirect vouchers to other eligible households.

Moving to Work

In the late 1990s, through a demonstration program called Moving to Work, HUD gave a small number of housing agencies additional flexibility to test this

new approach. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) was one of these lead agencies. DHCD designed a small pilot program with nonprofit partners that provided case management services, financial literacy training, and funds for approved self-sufficiency activities (e.g., transportation and child care). Families in this program could deposit any of their voucher stipend not used towards rent into an escrow account.

While this program was never rigorously evaluated, there were some positive signs. Administrators reported that over time families used less of the stipend towards rent and more towards the escrow account, and were thus better positioned to remain self-sufficient upon graduation from the program.[44] There is also some evidence that families in the program increased their earning over the first three years significantly more than households receiving traditional vouchers.[45]

Targeting Vouchers to Mobile Families with School-Age Children

Partly due to this success, in 2008, DHCD renegotiated the HUD waiver, transferring the vast majority of its portfolio—nearly 20,000 vouchers in total—into the Moving to Work demonstration program. The revised waiver allows the state to redesign the delivery of housing vouchers to serve more eligible families.

In making changes, there may be new opportunities to tailor programs to the needs of specific populations.

Given the state's current focus on closing the achievement gap, highly mobile families with school-age children is one segment that may merit this special treatment. The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, in collaboration with the Lynn Public Schools, is already piloting this targeted approach. With a very small pool of Moving to Work vouchers, they have established a model called the Highland Scholars program. The joint effort seeks to boost student achieve-

Highly mobile families with school-age children may merit special treatment.

ment by increasing housing stability and parental involvement in the schools.[46]

Unfortunately, like the state's first Moving to Work pilot programs, this project has not been rigorously evaluated. In order to make a case for directing the state's limited housing vouchers to a special program with new time limits and work requirements, there will need to be compelling evidence that these resources produce impressive results in terms of student achievement.

Indeed, careful evaluation may reveal flaws in this model. While traditional vouchers have been shown to stabilize families, Moving to Work vouchers offer a lower level of housing assistance in order to provide services. The more limited rental assistance, combined with the time limit, may increase mobility, rather than reduce it. On the other hand,

there are reasons to be optimistic, especially in Gateway Cities, where rents are relatively low and present less of a barrier. If Moving to Work vouchers can boost participant income and increase housing stability, this model could prove to be a highly effective strategy to reduce student mobility.

C. Neighborhood Revitalization Policy

For schools that draw students from distressed neighborhoods, student mobility is driven by both economic hardship and economic gain. Families living in these communities are very low-income and more likely to lose their housing due to financial pressures; these families also tend to move out when their economic circumstances improve, making mobility rates for these schools especially high. Fittingly, the solution to improving the quality of these neighborhoods and reducing residential turnover is often a strong school.

School-Centered Neighborhood Revitalization

Over the last decade, cities around the country have begun to experiment with school-centered neighborhood revitalization. To upgrade distressed neighborhoods, blighted housing is replaced and an appealing new school is built to help attract and retain residents in the revitalized community.[47]

Because of the scale of the transformation needed to stabilize struggling communities, this approach is complex and requires significant public subsidy. For these reasons, most school-centered neighborhood revitalization projects have been driven by large federal investments. HOPE VI, a federally funded

effort to redevelop severely distressed public housing, has supported some of the most notable examples.[48]

Based on the success of HOPE VI, the Obama administration is working to transform the federal effort into a broader revitalization intervention that goes beyond public housing and makes more direct connections to urban school reform. Unfortunately, this new program, Choice Neighborhoods, is likely to remain very limited given the constraints on federal funding. However, this work will place a spotlight on the school-centered neighborhood revitalization approach.

Other Openings to Pursue School-Centered Neighborhood Revitalization

While Gateway Cities may not have access to the resources to pursue full-scale school-centered neighborhood revitalization, the state's new education reform law gives communities an opportunity to pursue a variant that integrates a new school with local neighborhood revitalization plans. The law lifts the cap on charter schools and provides the authority to open semiautonomous in-district Innovation Schools.

By combining efforts to establish these new schools with state and federal housing stabilization resources, Gateway Cities have new tools to implement school-centered neighborhood revitalization strategies. Some examples of this approach are already underway. In Springfield, for instance, Veritas Preparatory will open in 2012. Located in a former school building, this new charter will contribute to the city's strategic plan to revitalize the South End neighborhood.

These new opportunities are prom-

ising, but to be successful they will need considerable support. Coordinating collaborative strategies is a difficult undertaking, and many school centered neighborhood revitalization projects have failed to produce results.[49] Success is often contingent on a strong partner (e.g., a large employer, university, or foundation) operating outside of the school system with a long-term interest in the well-being of the community.[50] Moreover, policies must work to support neighborhood revitalization objectives. For example, school assignment rules —which lead to the busing of students or require charter schools to recruit city-wide—often run counter to plans to utilize new schools as neighborhood assets.

IV. Recommendations

Massachusetts only recently began tracking and reporting data on student mobility. While there are frequent references to the student mobility challenge in reports on housing policy, the field has yet to focus on formulating a direct response. Given that this discussion is still in its infancy, it is clearly premature to put forward a concrete plan of action. But this is no reason for complacency. As detailed below, there are a number of areas where educators and housing leaders should join forces to highlight this problem, advance our understanding of the issue, and promote strong outcomes in evolving areas of state housing policy that could have profound implications for student mobility.

• **Follow the Rennie Center's recommendation to develop the Readiness Passport and incorporate individual indi-**

cators of student mobility. In 2008, as a component of his education strategy, Governor Patrick convened the Commonwealth Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet. The cabinet, modeled on similar efforts in other states, was charged with creating a statewide child and youth data reporting system, or Readiness Passport. Among other objectives, the data system would facilitate smooth transition for students moving between schools.[51]

This data system is a critical component of efforts to address student mobility. Currently, measures of mobility are only cataloged as churn at the school level. Individual-level indicators are needed to identify highly mobile students. Rhode Island, for example, tracks students with excessive mobility (three or more enrollments in one school year) as an early warning indicator.[52] This information would give districts a way to identify students who may need additional support and connect them with targeted housing services.

• **Advocate for homeless families.** As the state works to implement Home-BASE and honor its commitment to end family homelessness, educators should provide a strong voice for these under-represented children. Teachers serve on the frontlines of the family homelessness

crisis. They have made both personal and professional contributions to these students, and they know better than most when their families are struggling. By staying on top of the effort to end family homeless and supporting effective public policies, educators can play an important role as advocates for students that face severe housing insecurity.

• **Pilot Moving to Work voucher programs designed to stabilize families with school-age children.** Given the strong relationship between housing instability, student mobility, and education outcomes, the state should use the flexibility afforded by its Moving to Work waiver to pilot programs targeted to highly mobile families. To develop a true understanding of the intervention's impact, these pilots should be evaluated using control groups that include families with traditional housing vouchers and families that receive no vouchers.

• **Support school-centered neighborhood revitalization.** Schools in severely distressed neighborhoods will struggle with mobility until the underlying neighborhood conditions are addressed. The state can support school-centered neighborhood revitalization by giving charter providers serving these com-

munities waivers that allow them to target neighborhood residents specifically for enrollment. The state should also explore avenues to encourage communities to create innovative schools by linking neighborhood revitalization funds to these efforts. This type of reform would be well suited to efforts to revise the state's only neighborhood revitalization tool, the Urban Renewal Program, which is outmoded and in need of major reform.[53]

• **Develop strategies to address schools located in highly unstable neighborhoods.** The foundation of the 1993 Massachusetts education reform law was an understanding that all students are entitled to attend schools with adequate funding. In the same vein, we should recognize that students have a right to attend stable schools, where high rates of churn do not impact negatively upon the entire population. The state must act aggressively when neighborhood conditions make stability impossible to achieve. In these circumstances, the buildings should either be closed and students reassigned to more stable schools, or ambitious neighborhood revitalization and housing stabilization efforts should be undertaken.

Notes

[1] See Dana Ansel and others, "Incomplete Grade: Massachusetts Education Reform at 15" (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2009).

[2] Moving to Work is a demonstration program that provides state and local housing agencies relief from federal regulations to design and test strategies that use federal dollars more efficiently, help residents find employment and become self-sufficient, and increase housing choices for low-income families.

[3] See Deborah McKoy and others, "Opportunity-Rich Schools and Sustainable Communities" (Berkeley, CA: Center for Cities and Schools, 2011).

[4] The Neighborhood Conditions Index includes five components: Percent of residents with income below the federal poverty level; percent of housing units vacant; percent of housing units owner-occupied; percent of households living in the same home one year ago; and gross rent as a percentage of household income. These data were obtained from the American Community Survey five-year estimates (2005-2009). Index values were normalized using Z-scores and the index was scaled to 100. To obtain schools more likely to draw students from their surrounding neighborhoods, only K-8 schools were included; charter schools, vocational schools, and technical schools were excluded. The full statewide sample includes 1,344 schools for which full data were available.

5 Because this analysis is not able to control fully for school choice, busing, and other school assignment policies, it likely that this correlation underestimates the full impact of neighborhood quality on student mobility.

6 For a full summary of DESE mobility measures and methodology, see "Student Mobility Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools," accessed at http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/mobility/0710.pdf.

7 See Russell Rumberger and Katherine Larson, "Student Mobility and the Increased Risk of High School Dropout," *American Journal of Education* 107 (1998).

8 Claudia Coulton and others, "Family Mobility and Neighborhood Change" (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2009).

9 Eric Hanushek and others, "Disruption Versus Tiebout Improvement: The Costs and Benefits of Switching Schools," *Journal of Public Economics* 88 (2004); Stefanie Deluca and Peter Rosenblatt, "Does Moving to Better Neighborhoods Lead to Better Schooling Opportunities?," *Teachers College Record* 112(5) (2010).

10 Nancy McArdle and others, "Segregation and Exposure to High-Poverty Schools in Large Metropolitan Areas" (Boston, MA: diversitydata.org, September 2010).

11 Lisa Farmularo, "A Revolving Door: Challenges and Solutions to Educating Mobile Students" (Cambridge, MA: Rennie Center for Education Policy and Research, 2011).

12 Studying mobility is complicated by the many covariates associated with residential instability. For instance, some moves are triggered by a desire to place students in higher quality schools, changes that will likely have a positive impact. In large national data sets, many movers are students from military and high income families relocating frequently for work. This subset may have advantages that offset the impact of changing schools. For these reasons, there are numerous studies that find limited effects associated with student mobility.

13 Eric Hanushek and others (2004); Judy Temple and Arthur Reynolds, "School Mobility and Achievement: Longitudinal Findings from an Urban Cohort," *Journal of School Psychology* 37(4) (1999); Zeyu Xu and others, "Student Transience in North Carolina: The Effects of School Mobility on Student Outcomes," CALDER Working Paper 22 (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2009).

14 Shana Pribesh and Douglas Downey, "Why are Residential Moves Associated with Poor School Performance," *Demography* 36 (1999); Nan Astone and Sara McLanahan, "Family Structure, Residential Mobility, and School Dropout," *Demography* 31 (1994); Scott South and others, "Student Mobility and School Dropout," *Social Science Research* 36 (2007).

15 Jason Schacter, "Geographic Mobility: March 1999 to March 2000," Current Population Reports (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2001).

16 David Kerbow and others, "Patterns of Urban Student Mobility and Local School Reform," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 1(2) (1996); David Kerbow and others, "Students Mobility and Local School Improvement in Chicago," *The Journal of Negro Education* 72(1) (2003).

17 Mary Gifford-Smith and Celia Brownell, "Childhood Peer Relationships: Social Acceptance, Friendships, and Peer Networks," *Journal of School Psychology* 41(4) (2003).

18 Anne Hendershott, "Residential Mobility, Social Support, and Adolescent Self-Concept," *Adolescence* 24 (1989).

19 Scott South and Dana Haynie, "Friendship Networks of Mobile Adolescents," *Social Forces* 83(1) (2004).

20 Dana Haynie and Scott South, "Residential Mobility and Adolescent Violence," *Social Forces* 84 (1) (2005); Robert Sampson and others, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," Science 277 (2007).

21 Farmularo (2011).

22 T. Jelleyman and N. Spencer, "Residential Mobility in Childhood and Health Outcomes," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 62 (2008); David Woods and others, "Impact of Family Relocation on Children's Growth, Development, School Function, and Behavior," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270 (1993).

23 Kyle Crowder and Jay Teachman, "Do Residential Conditions Explain the Relationship between Living Arrangements and Adolescent Behavior," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004).

24 Kerbow (1996).

25 See Lynette Holloway, "Turnover of Teachers and Students Deepens the Troubles of Poor Schools," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2000.

26 Eric Hanushek and others (2004).

27 South and Haynie (2004).

28 Farmularo (2011).

29 "Homelessness in Massachusetts Public Schools" (Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2009).

30 DHCD's quarterly shelter reports to the state legislature show 40 percent of children come from Gateway Cities. While this estimate may slightly overstate the number of Gateway City residents, because DTA catchment areas include surrounding communities, this ratio is similar to other comparable indicators. For instance, Gateway Cities represent 45 percent of the state's welfare caseloads. Also note that while Massachusetts provides services to only 10,000 homeless children annually, a large majority of families who lack stable housing are not served by public programs.

31 Past studies of homeless children show they have higher rates of student mobility than other children from low-income families. For example, see Ann Masten and others, "Children in Homeless Families: Risks to Mental Health and Development," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61(2) (1993). While the federal McKinney-Vento Act (2002) sought to stabilize homeless children by guaranteeing transportation to their school of origin, students often choose to attend the school closest to their new housing arrangement. In interviews conducted for this project, family homelessness was referenced frequently as a common cause for student turnover.

32 According to the most recent data, approximately 40 percent of the families applying for shelter in the 10 DTA offices located in Gateway Cities were housed outside of their local DTA office's catchment area. See "EA Legislative Report" (Boston, MA: Department of Housing and Community Development, September 2010).

33 Culhane and Byrne (2010); "Preliminary Analysis: The Governor's Fiscal Year 2012 Budget" (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, January 2011).

34 See Jocelyn Apicello, "A Paradigm Shift in Housing and Homeless Services," *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal* 3 (2010).

35 The commission was co-chaired by state representative Byron Rushing and housing undersecretary Tina Brooks. See "Report of the Special Commission Relative to Ending Homelessness in the Commonwealth," December 28, 2007.

36 Donna Friedman and Ghazal Zulfiqa, "Massachusetts' System Redesign to End Homelessness: An Overview and Assessment" (Boston, MA: UMass-Boston, 2009).

37 Commonwealth of Massachusetts EA Reform. February 2011.

38 The National Alliance to End Homelessness suggests these four factors are critical to successful implementation. See "A Shifting Focus: What's New in Community Plans to End Homelessness" (Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009).

39 Asset development includes the support services, job training, and financial education programs that give low-income families the tools they need to increase their economic stability.

40 For example, see "Boomerang Homeless Families: Aggressive Rehousing Policies in New York City" (New York, NY: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2010).

41 School of origin is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled before moving. See "The McKinney-Vento Act at a Glance" (National Center for Homeless Education and others, 2008).

42 See Gregory Mills and others, "Effects of Housing Vouchers on Welfare Families," (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2006).

43 "Moving To Work Program Annual Plan for Fiscal Year 2012" (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, 2011).

44 "Report to Congress: Moving to Work, Interim Policy Applications and the Future of the Demonstration" (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010).

45 A graduate student reviewing the experience of 53 Boston MTW participants found they increased their earnings 82% more than regular voucher holders. While the regular vouchers holders do not represent a rigorous control group, it should be noted that at baseline, those awarded regular vouchers had earnings comparable to those receiving MTW vouchers. See Pedram Mahadavi, "An Evaluation of the Department of Housing and Community Development's Moving to Work Voucher Program," Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, June 2009.

46 Friedman and Zulfiqa (2009).

47 Jill Khadduri and others, "Reconnecting Schools and Neighborhoods: An Introduction to School-Centered Community Revitalization," (Columbia, MD: Enterprise Community Partners, 2007).

48 Khadduri and others (2007).

49 For example, Boston's Orchard Gardens Elementary has struggled since opening in 2003. Built as a component of the Orchard Park HOPE VI redevelopment, Orchard Gardens is now included on the state's list of the 35 lowest performing schools.

50 Jill Khadduri and others, "Community Developers' Guide to Improving Schools in Revitalizing Neighborhoods," (Columbia, MD: Enterprise Community Partners, 2008).

51 See Jill Norton and others, "Toward Interagency Collaboration: The Role of Children's Cabinets," (Cambridge, MA: Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, 2009); and "Massachusetts Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet Statewide Integrated Data Sharing System Strategic Plan," (Boston, MA: Public Consulting Group, 2009).

52 Visit ridatahub.org. The website, maintained by the Providence Plan, incorporates data from state and federal agencies serving Rhode Island youth.

53 See Benjamin Forman "Going for Growth: Promoting Residential Reinvestment in Massachusetts Gateway Cities," (Boston, MA: MassINC, 2009).

Going for Growth policy briefs describe smart, evidence-based approaches to help Gateway Cities realize their promise in the Commonwealth's 21st Century economy. Visit massinc.org to dowload the first three reports:

Going for Growth Promoting Business Investment in Massachusetts Gateway Cities

Going for Growth Promoting Residential Reinvestment in Massachusetts Gateway Cities

Going for Growth Promoting Access to Wealth Building Financial Services in Massachusetts Gateway Cities

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