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UCSB STUDY FINDS THAT STUDENT MOBILITY ADVERSELY AFFECTS LATINO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

For California Latino teens, even one school change doubles the odds of their dropping out before completing high school, according to University of California, Santa Barbara researchers in a study released today.

"We are not saying that all moves are bad, but in our study ('The Hazards of Changing Schools for California Latino Adolescents') we found that the consequences of non-promotional school changes were profoundly negative," said Katherine A. Larson, a researcher in UCSB's Graduate School of Education.

The issue of student mobility has not received much attention from educational researchers, practitioners or policymakers," added Russell W. Rumberger, professor of education. "We felt it was particularly important to examine the effects of moving around on school performance, because California has a highly mobile population."

Larson, Rumberger, and three graduate students focused their study specifically on Latino teens and their families because Latinos are the largest and fastest growing segment of the state's population. They found that among Latino secondary students, 89 percent of those who made no school changes graduated from high school, compared to 63 percent who made one school change and 60 percent who made two or more.

The researchers also discovered that disciplinary problems predicted school mobility among Latino students, but not among other white students (non-Latino). Latinos who misbehaved in eighth grade were 58 percent more likely to change high schools compared to those who did not. In contrast, misbehavior did not predict school changes for other white students.

"We believe these results support the notion that nonacademic factors play a role in how much a student moves, especially for Latinos," said Rumberger. "It also raises the issue of whether schools respond differently to particular student groups."

"We were not surprised by the high rate of incidence or the negative consequence. What was surprising were some of the reasons," added Larson. "One of the more significant findings is that only half of the students changed schools due to a change in residence."

Compared to non-Latino white students, the researchers found that almost twice as many Latino secondary students changed schools without changing residences. And they were changing schools within the public school district, not to a specialized school, but to an identical comprehensive high school. The decision to switch schools ranged from a desire to change school programs to disciplinary reasons.

"And interestingly, the students were the ones who made the decision to change schools, not their parents," Larson continued. "Sixty-one percent of Latino parents reported that the decision was made by the teens, compared to 38 percent of non-Latino white parents."

The researchers---Larson, Rumberger, and graduate students Gregory J. Palardy, Robert K. Ream, and Nina C. Schleicher---examined the incidence, causes, and consequences of student mobility, particularly during high school, using longitudinal data for two samples of California students. The first was a group of eighth-grade students who were surveyed over a six-year period from 1988 to 1994; and the second was a group of low-income, urban Latino seventh-grade students who were first studied over a six-year period from 1990 to 1996. A companion mobility report on all California teens and high schools will be published early next year.

Their study was funded by the UC Latino Policy Research Program, administered by the California Policy Seminar, a University of California program that applies UC research expertise to state policy. A summary of the study is available by calling (512) 643-9328. The complete report is available for \$7 from the UC Berkeley

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