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RESEARCH BRIEF
Research Services

Vol. 0605
February 2007

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MEASURING STUDENT MOBILITY -- DISTRICT AND ZONE

Calculating the Mobility Index

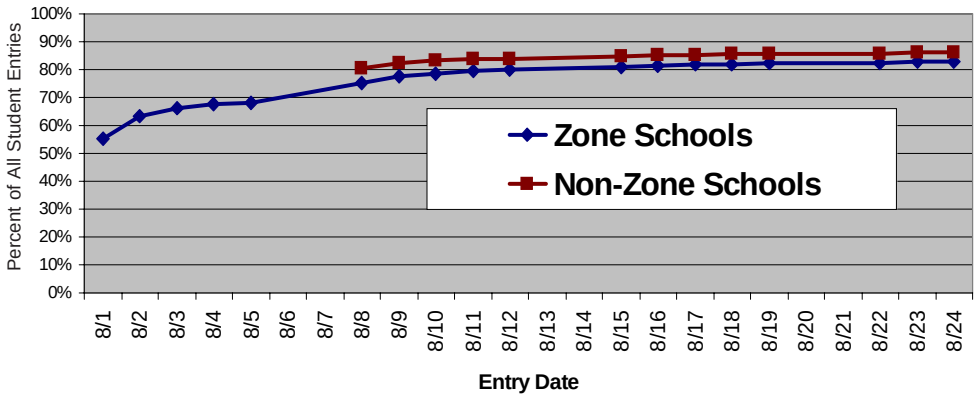
The Student Mobility Index is designed to be a highly sensitive statistic of classroom disruption. The idea behind the statistic is that **any** student entries or exits to and from a classroom during the year, over however many days, contribute to a disruption of instructional continuity and obstacle to institutional organization. This kind of student movement can have a negative impact on the moving student as well as all other students in the classroom. In practice, the degree of impact is affected by the percentage of moving students and the collective length of missed classroom time.

Typically, the Student Mobility Index is calculated starting from the first day of classes for the school year. However, there appears to be a considerable amount of "trickling in" of students during the first week of classes. Any student entering a few days late during this first week gets counted as a "mobile" student and increases the mobility rate for that school.

It may be assumed that it takes a week or so from the start of classes to settle in for the teacher and the students, and late entries during this first week, although potentially troublesome, may be of less relative impact on classroom continuity. Thus, adhering strictly to the definition of the mobility index as starting from the first day of classes, while reflecting real disturbance, may have a tendency to inflate the statistic and the inferred effect.

This is especially true for Zone schools. These schools had a starting date one week earlier than regular schools for the 2005-06 school year. However, student entries during that prelude to the regular school year were particularly low in the Zone schools.

School Entry Trends for 2005-06



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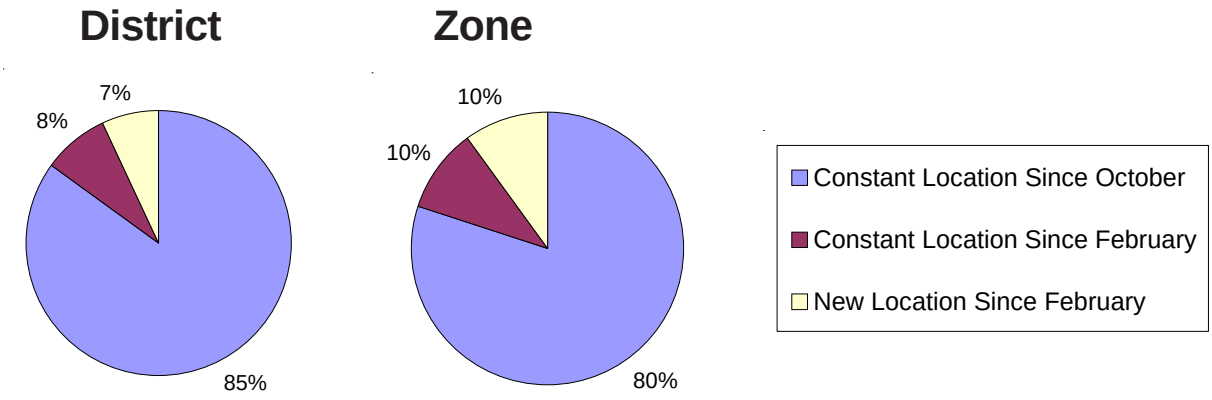
This trend is clearly evident in the previous graph of student entries. Only 55 percent of the eventual total student body entered the Zone schools on the first day of classes, as opposed to over 80 percent for the regular schools. This percentage rose quickly over the first week for Zone schools, but still remained behind rates for regular schools. The Zone school entry rates, while never quite matching the regular school rates, only became stable and comparable one week later, at the time of the start of classes for the regular schools. Including this prelude week in the calculation of the Mobility Index will have a severely unfavorable impact on the appearance of mobility in the Zone schools.

Alternative Measures

There are a number of alternative ways of measuring student mobility, each with its own valuable perspective. One measure is not more "correct" than another – merely different, and together provide a broader and deeper view of the concept of mobility. One such type of alternative measure is the Stability Index.

Rather than looking at the students that move from school to school, counting each movement as an indication of mobility, the Stability Index focuses on those students who stay in one school location for the majority of the school year. In other words, it reports the percentage of students for whom the instructional environment remains relatively constant. Specifically, stability can be represented as the percent of students in the same school locations between three different reporting times: the October FTE count, the following February FTE count, and the following June FTE count. It is worth noting that these are counts across points in time for a truncated school year and a great deal of student movement and consequent disruption may not be captured by an index calculated in this way. Although the statistics may not count students who moved in and out of locations before, between, and after the reporting periods, the statistics do provide a rough indication of the constancy of the student body.

One way to present the stability indices is to graph the percent of students in the June FTE count that were in the same location since October and February. Below are the graphs for the District and for just the Zone schools.



For the 2005-06 school year, the Stability index for the entire district between October and June was approximately 85 percent – a rather impressive degree of steadiness. For the Zone schools the index is closer to 80 percent. Although these stability statistics may understate the true level of day-to-day disruption, one can still infer a high degree of stability for even the Zone schools through the course of the school year.

An examination of student mobility will be the focus of an upcoming Information Capsule which will be prepared by Research Services. This document will report by-school mobility rates and will review the educational literature regarding the topic. It will focus on strategies in use nationally and at the state level to cope with and ameliorate the effects of student mobility.

All reports distributed by Research Services can be accessed at http://drs.dadeschools.net by selecting "Research Briefs" or "Information Capsules" under the "Current Publications" menu.