

Changing Schools, Part 3: Student Mobility Within and Between Districts in Texas and the Houston Area



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Students who move between schools in the same district often have different experiences than students who move into an entirely new school district. Changing schools within a district allows students to stay embedded in the larger district structure and their student information often follows them in real-time, as schools within districts have efficient ways of sharing information across campuses (Kerbow, Azcoitia, & Buell, 2003). Alternatively, students changing districts have new structures and cultures to adjust to, as well as possible delays in their student information following them to their new school. This can leave students without services and accommodations they might otherwise receive sooner (Xu, Hannaway, & D’Souza, 2009). This brief examines the prevalence of these within-district, between-district, and non-Texas public school system moves in Texas and the Houston area.

Research Questions

Student mobility in Texas and the Houston area during the school year

- How much student mobility took place within school districts, between school districts, and outside of the Texas public school system?

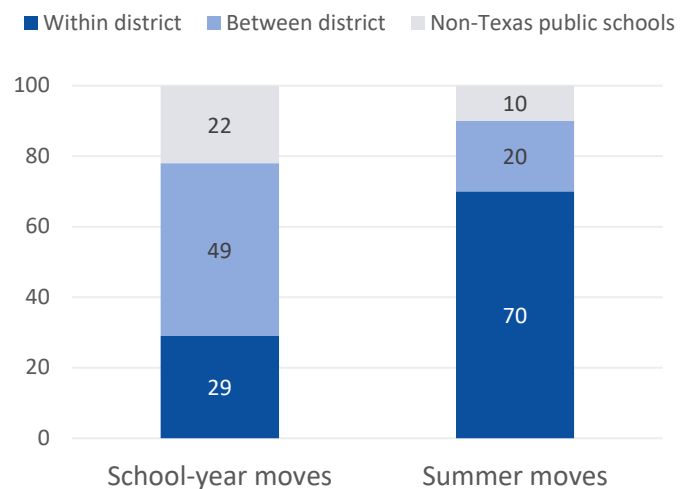
Student mobility in Texas and the Houston area during the summer

- How much student mobility took place within school districts, between school districts, and outside of the Texas public school system?
- Were student mobility patterns the same for structural and non-structural changes?

Key Findings

1. During the school year, the most common type of move was between districts.
2. During the summer, more than two-thirds of moves stayed within district
3. Different patterns emerged for students who made structural moves versus students who made non-structural moves over the summer.
 - Almost 90 percent of summer structural moves stayed within district.
 - Roughly 40 percent of summer non-structural moves stayed within district.

Breakdown of moves entering Texas public schools during the school-year and summer



Study Purpose

In a series of research briefs, the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) examines and describes the amount of student mobility in Texas, with particular focus on Houston area public schools. This third research brief provides an overview of how much mobility takes place within districts, between districts, and outside of the Texas public school system. Other briefs in this series are outlined as follows:

- 1) Student mobility during the summer months
- 2) Student mobility during the school year
- 3) **Student mobility within districts versus between districts**
- 4) Patterns of student mobility by subgroup (e.g., race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage status, and English language learner status)
- 5) Overall churn and net mobility of students in Houston area public schools

Key Terms

Within-district move – when a student changes schools but stays within the same school district

Between-district move – when a student changes schools and goes to a different school district

Non-Texas public school move – when a student changes schools and goes to or comes from a school that is outside the Texas public school system (e.g., private school, homeschool, religious-affiliated school, or a school in another state or country)

Structural mobility – when a student changes the school they attend because they have completed the terminal grade at that school (e.g., the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school)

Non-structural mobility – when a student changes the school they attend for a reason other than completing the terminal grade at that school (e.g., a student switching from one elementary school to another, from one middle school to another, or from one high school to another)

Houston area – a selection of school districts serving students within the Houston city limits and surrounding areas: Aldine Independent School District (ISD), Alief ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Houston ISD, Katy ISD, Klein ISD, Pasadena ISD, Sheldon ISD, Spring ISD, and Spring Branch ISD.

Data

This research brief uses Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) six-week attendance records from the 2010-11 through 2016-17 school years to describe student mobility taking place within-districts, between-districts, and with non-Texas public schools in Texas, the Houston area, and other metropolitan areas in the state. The brief includes data separately for school year and summer mobility, and breaks down summer mobility into its structural and non-structural components. For more details on the data and measurements used to calculate school-year mobility, summer mobility, and structural and non-structural mobility, please see Appendix B in the supplemental document.

Key Findings

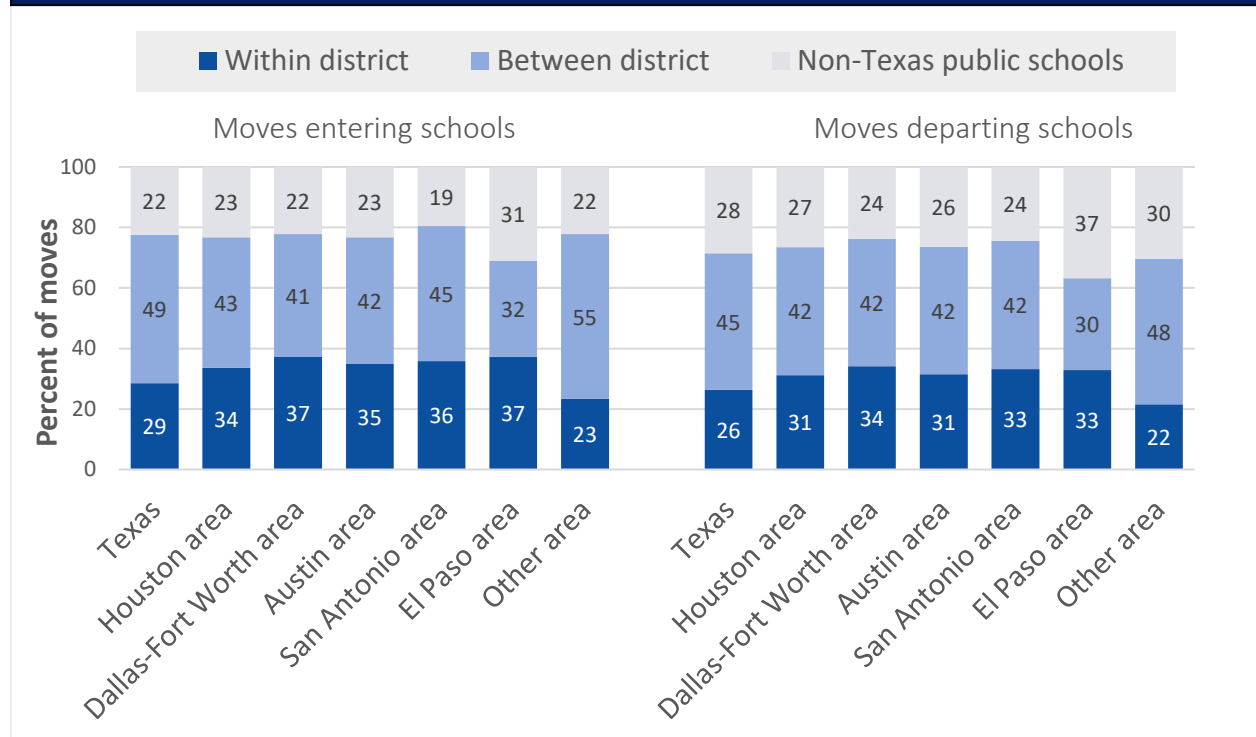
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During the school year, the most common type of move was between districts.

School changes made during the school year most commonly took place between school districts. In the Houston area, 43 percent of moves entering schools during the school year came from another Texas public school district. School year mobility that stayed within the same district was less common. In the Houston area, 34 percent of moves entering schools came from another school in the same district. Even fewer moves involved schools outside the Texas public school system. Only 23 percent of school year moves in the Houston area involved non-Texas public schools. This pattern was consistent across most geographic areas.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentages of within-district, between-district, and non-Texas public school moves entering and departing schools. For this figure and all figures on the following pages, the left graph shows the percent of moves entering schools by their origin, and the right graph shows the percent of moves departing schools by their destination.

Figure 1: For all geographic areas except El Paso, school-year moves primarily took place between districts



Source: Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) six-week attendance records file, 2011-12 to 2012-13 through 2015-16 to 2016-17 between school years

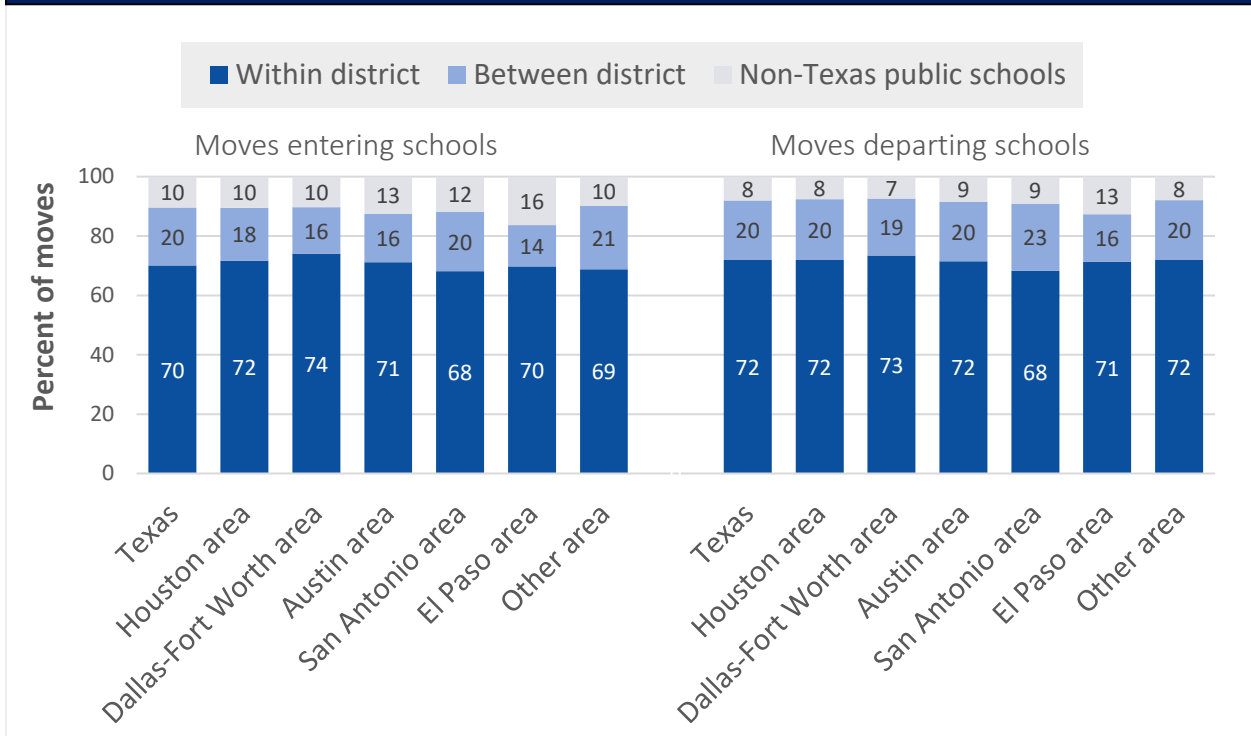
Key Findings

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During the summer, more than two-thirds of moves stayed within district.

Overall, school changes made during the summer took place within school districts. Fewer summer moves took place between school districts, and an even smaller amount took place outside of the Texas public school system. For example, 72 percent of summer moves entering Houston-area schools came from another school in the same district, 18 percent came from a school in a different district, and 10 percent came from outside the Texas public school system. This pattern was consistent across geographic areas (Figure 2).

Figure 2: In all geographic areas, summer moves mostly took place within districts



Source: Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) six-week attendance records file, 2011-12 to 2012-13 through 2015-16 to 2016-17 between school years

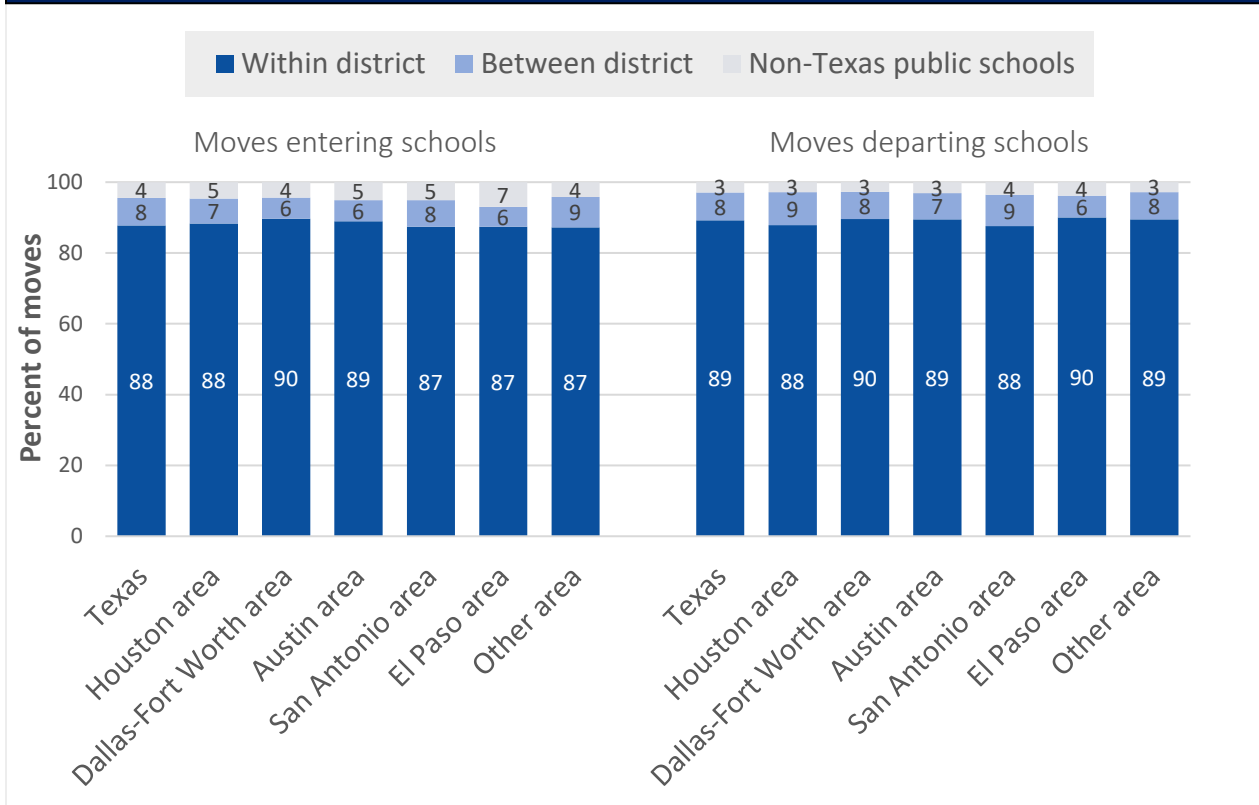
Key Findings

Summer mobility patterns differed for students making structural moves and students making non-structural moves.



During the summer, nearly 90 percent of structural moves took place within district, and this was consistent across the state (Figure 3). During these classic transition points, such as the change from an elementary school to a middle school, the bulk of students and their families opt to remain in their district.

Figure 3: In all geographic areas, structural summer moves overwhelmingly took place within district

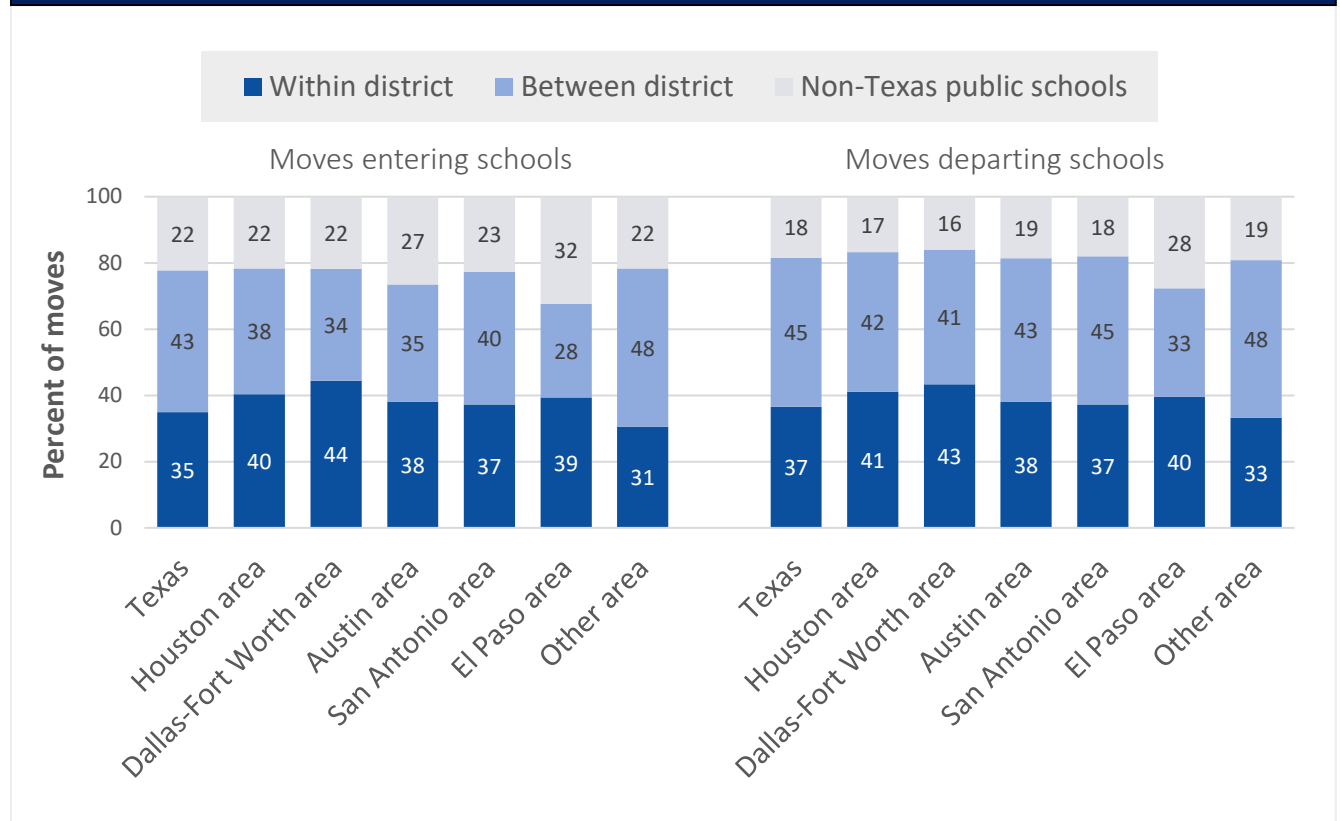


Source: Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) six-week attendance records file, 2011-12 to 2012-13 through 2015-16 to 2016-17 between school years

Key Findings

In contrast, a higher percentage of non-structural summer moves crossed school district boundaries or left the Texas public school system. For example, 38 percent of non-structural moves entering Houston area schools came from a school in a different public school district. This percentage is much higher than the 7 percent of structural moves entering schools in the Houston area that came from another public school district. This pattern was consistent across all geographic areas (Figure 4).

Figure 4: In all geographic areas, a higher percentage of non-structural summer moves were between districts, compared to structural moves



Source: Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) six-week attendance records file, 2011-12 to 2012-13 through 2015-16 to 2016-17 between school years

Conclusion

Summary

During both the school year and summer, the percentage of student mobility that was within-district, between-district, and with non-Texas public schools was similar across the state of Texas, the Houston area, and most other major metropolitan areas. During the summer, when most students were making structural moves, the majority took place within districts. During the school year, there was more variety in the types of moves students made. A little less than one-third of students who moved during the school year stayed within their district, as the majority either changed districts or left the Texas public school system altogether. Interestingly, students who moved during the summer, but whose move was non-structural left for other public school districts at a rate similar to students who changed schools during the school year.

Recommendations and Policy Implications

Students who move schools during the summer have different experiences than students who move schools during the school year. The study supports this by demonstrating how students who move during the summer tend to stay in their school district, while students who move during the school year tend to leave their district. Previous research shows students' educational experiences are impacted when they change schools, and that this is especially the case when a move is more disruptive (such as when changing districts).

To support mobile students, school districts should ...

- **Be aware of these patterns of mobility.** Students who enter a school in the middle of the school year from a different school district or from a non-Texas public school may need additional guidance and/or monitoring to ease their acclimation into their new environment. Students who make non-structural moves often are reacting to life and/or family-employment circumstances and are possibly at more risk of falling behind than other students.
- **Facilitate the sharing of information** for students who cross district boundaries.

References

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About HERC. Focusing on the most pressing challenges facing the region, the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) is a research-practice partnership between Rice University and 11 Houston-area school districts. HERC aims to improve the connection between education research and decision making for the purpose of equalizing outcomes by race, ethnicity, economic status, and other factors associated with inequitable educational opportunities.



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