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# A Qualitative Study Of School Transiency Among Students With Disabilities

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# A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL TRANSIENCY AMONG STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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## Abstract

This qualitative multi-phase study explores the impact of school transiency on students with and without disabilities through interviews with teachers and administrators in six school districts in Vermont. The goal of the study is to describe the effects of school transiency on the education and socioemotional development of students with disabilities, expose the causes of school transiency, and provide guidance to educators on mitigating the impact of these factors on student growth. Repeated interviews were conducted with 11 teachers and administrators between 2017 and 2020.

This research was primarily focused on determining whether students with disabilities are more likely to experience academic loss due to school transiency. The findings suggest that the individualized education planning process (IEP), afforded to students with disabilities, provides them greater protection and insulation from the effects of transiency than their non-disabled peers. The IEP was strongly related to increased continuity of learning for students with disabilities. The findings detail how collaborative interdisciplinary teams are particularly beneficial to transient students with disabilities. Similarly, interviewees identified the important role that parent advocacy has on student success.

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# Chapter 1: Transiency and Disabilities

## 1.1 Introduction

This study seeks to examine the impact of school transiency on students with disabilities. School transiency is defined as movement from one school to another during the school year for reasons other than school promotion (Morgan, 2008). My dissertation is comprised of the three following components:

Phase 1: In my initial research, I interviewed 16 teachers and administrators in 2017. This research replicated earlier studies by Lash and Kirkpatrick (1990) and Coley and Kull (2016), but with a focus on systems in Vermont.

Phase 2: A research attempt to interview 16–20 students aged 12–21 who had experienced school transiency, and a parent for each student. This research was unsuccessful. I was unable to identify any students who were willing to participate in the study and only two parents expressed interest, despite significant efforts to encourage their participation.

Phase 3: In 2020, I again interviewed the teachers and administrators originally interviewed in Phase 1 in 2017. This interview series was developed to obtain their insights as to why they believed parents and students did not respond to interview requests and how trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact students.

In the initial phase of this research, I worked with other researchers to create a mixed-methods study (Killeen, Nugent, & Olofson, 2017). My portion of this research was to conduct a qualitative study in which I interviewed 16 public school teachers and administrators working in several school districts across Vermont. We posited that the

residential and household factors that stimulate school transiency likely differ between student populations with greater academic and learning challenges. The literature has indicated that a decrease in household wealth and socioeconomic status results in a greater loss of social and academic learning opportunities among transient students and that their ability to participate in these learning opportunities when they are presented also decreases (Coley & Kull, 2016). Transient children and youth, particularly those from poor and low SES households, are more likely to be disenfranchised by changes in schools than their more residentially- and school-stable peers. Previous literature has demonstrated a delay in the educational benefits of instruction due to differences in academic alignment between school districts, as well as evidence of a delay in the development of social skills among students who have experienced transiency. Furthermore, students with learning challenges may experience significantly different and possibly negative effects in these vital growth areas (Coley & Kull, 2016).

My research on this topic focused on responses to what was considered by school professionals and students and their families to determine effective practice in supporting transient students with atypical learning needs. In this study, I posited that students who present as new school enrollees may require substantially different adult interactions in the school intake and registration processes and also present different attendance patterns to non-transient students, although the impact of transience may be both positive and negative. Thus, these groups of students likely experience classroom teaching differently. Therefore, a secondary objective of this research was to understand how school personnel and their procedures contribute to these differences in educational experiences for transient students with disabilities.

Based on the first phase of my research, I proposed a closer examination of school transiency to develop intervention strategies through interviews of students and families. I noted that despite two decades of research, no study has directly addressed the impact of transiency from the perspective of students and parents. My goal was to explore the many facets of student transiency and the factors that contribute to the school experiences of transient youth. I intended to meet with students and parents to ask questions that would explore how environmental conditions and household structures of transient families contribute to the education of their children. I sought to investigate how relationships with teachers and peers are affected by transiency from the perspectives of students and parents. Perceived differences in academic rigor and support were important areas of focus in these interviews, as well as how schools engage parents. I also aimed to explore how stability has or could have impacted student engagement and perceived success (Leonard & Gudiño, 2016).

In this phase of my study, I submitted requests to all Chittenden County special education directors to assist me in locating 16–20 appropriate candidates for my research. These candidates were to have resided in Chittenden County during at least one transition between schools and be aged 12–21 years old. Students were required to be in the custody of a parent. Despite reminders and discussions with these colleagues, no candidates were identified who wished to participate. Special education directors had identified teachers and administrators in the previous phase of my research, so I believe that they made an effort in good faith to disseminate my request for students and parents interested in participating in this phase of my research.

Given my lack of success in finding students and parents willing to participate in the study through district-level administrators, I submitted a revised study proposal requesting broader permission to post notices in public places with my contact information to allow individuals to self-select themselves for participation. I also proposed that I approach and request that other agencies distribute my request. These agencies were selected by me as those most likely to come into contact with the desired demographic. I requested the flexibility to distribute widely within the community in Chittenden County. I also amended my study to allow me to pay participants $50 in compensation when each parent and student's interview was completed.

Despite several weeks of online and physical postings in more than 30 sites, I was unable to identify any participants for my study. These sites included agencies that serve students with and without disabilities, notice boards in medical facilities, and community bulletin boards.

Since I was unable to locate candidates for this phase of the research, I engaged in a casual conversation on this topic with students at Burlington High School in Burlington, VT. I have been associated with the Burlington School District for many years and am well known to the students with whom I spoke in this casual conversation, having known them since they were in elementary school. Based on this relationship, I had reason to believe that they had experienced some school transiency. I asked them why they thought that I was unable to find students who were willing to discuss their experiences. The students voiced their agreement that the topic was sensitive and embarrassing. They did not believe that students would be interested in participation, even with the assurance of confidentiality, due to their desire not to be associated with a group of students who

experienced this type of transiency. This sentiment was also voiced by two parents who had initially expressed interest in participating in the study but withdrew because their children refused to participate. When I asked the parents why the students had refused, the parents consistently reported that the students were embarrassed and did not wish to be associated with others who experienced school transiency.

The lack of student and parent participation in this research has led to a significant absence of important data. Students and parents would likely have provided valuable insight into the development of processes that would support students who are experiencing transiency. Personal accounts from students with disabilities would also have helped to determine whether having an IEP benefits students, has a negative impact, or has no apparent impact. Data collected through interviews with parents and students might also have better enabled me to determine whether documents arrived at new schools promptly and provided schools with sufficient time to prepare for these students.

In the third phase of this study, I returned to the teachers and administrators whom I had interviewed in the study's first phase. I used the focused interview model to ask the teachers and administrators for their opinions on why the interviews with students and parents had failed to attract participants, their views on the relative impact of trauma and ACEs on students, and whether they had additional thoughts regarding transiency since the interviews that had taken place three years earlier. The previously interviewed teachers and administrators were located in several school districts or supervisory unions throughout Vermont.

## 1.2 Need for the Study

The impact of transiency on school-aged students and their peers has been explored in various communities for more than two decades. However, several components remain insufficiently explored. This research addresses the impact of transiency on students with disabilities in the unique urban and rural school environments in Vermont. Based on this research, I have found that students in Vermont are transient between schools within the state as well as between other states and Vermont schools. Vermont educators and students would benefit from research-based information on best practices in the classroom and systemic interventions.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

Following a review of the research in this field over the past several decades, the efficacy of interventions for transient students remains unclear, particularly for those with disabilities. This research attempts to provide greater clarity regarding the causes of transiency, noting differences between those with and without disabilities, to conclude whether schools ought to consider different interventions based on these causes.

This dissertation focuses on three main objectives:

- Survey and analyze the impact of school transiency on students with disabilities from the perspective of teachers and administrators.
- Seek out the voice of students and parents to better understand the impact of school transiency on students with and without disabilities from their perspective.
- Develop methods and best practices that support students with disabilities who experience residential and school transiency.

### 1.4 Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

- What do practitioners believe is best practice in supporting students with and without disabilities who experience school transiency?
- What do students with and without disabilities believe will support them when they experience transiency?

**1.5 Problem Statement**

Vermont schools have reported a substantive population of transient youth coming and going from public schools (Morgan, 2008). This problem has persisted in Vermont. Research demonstrated a 38% increase in homelessness—or an additional 915 students—between the 2010 and 2011 school years (Miller & Bourgeois, 2013). Research has also shown that poverty is often a contributing factor in residential and school transiency (Coley & Kull, 2016). The annual economic cost of child poverty in 2008 was estimated to be $500 billion or 4% of the gross domestic product "due to the impacts of lost income, increased crime, and poorer health over the lives of poor children" (Porter & Edwards, 2014). Given the knowledge that Vermont has experienced a significant increase of transiency in children of school age and the resulting detrimental effects on not only the families and children involved, but on the wider the community, then it is reasonable to ask what supports have been implemented for these students and what impact the supports have had. Have these interventions provided sufficient support to mitigate the losses associated with homelessness and high rates of transiency?

Although no clear scholarship has been found on the distinct experiences or needs of transient youth with disabilities, this section elaborates on the research topic and questions. In doing so, the importance of the topic is associated with pressing social questions and issues in a manner that justifies the research as an important area of study.

## 1.6 Significance

In this study, I posit that students who experience school transiency encounter challenges that are not faced by their more residentially and school-stable peers. Furthermore, this research explores the differences in the experiences of transient students with and without disabilities.

Through initial interviews with special educators, classroom teachers, and school administrators, I explored many facets of student transiency and the factors that contribute to the school experiences of transient youth. In follow-up interviews with these school staff members, I asked questions that more deeply explored how environmental conditions and the household structures of transient families contribute to the education of their children. I inquired into how school staff come to understand how relationships with teachers and peers are impacted by transiency. Perceived differences in academic rigor and support continued to be an important part of these interviews, as did how schools engage parents. An important goal was to understand whether school transiency causes instability and how this instability impacts students' engagement and perceived success (Leonard & Gudiño, 2016).

## 1.7 National Significance of the Research

The National Center for Homeless Education has reported, based on information collected as part of the McKinney–Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, that more than 1.3 million children were homeless nationwide in each of the school years from 2016 - 2018 (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2020). The McKinney–Vento Act,

which became effective in 1987, defines homelessness in children or youth as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Homeless students are provided protections to access education in their school, despite their lack of residency, and supports including transportation. Students who have been identified as disabled are also known to comprise a portion of this student population. The McKinney–Vento Act broadly defines homelessness as living in shelters or transitional housing, awaiting foster care, being doubled-up (e.g., living with another family), being unsheltered (e.g., living in cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailers, or abandoned buildings), or living in hotels or motels (NCHE, 2020). The Act requires that homeless students are provided access to education and transportation to the school that they attended just before homelessness occurred or to an appropriate school in the district in which they currently reside. This requirement remains until students obtain a permanent residence, even if that takes several years. After a student's family finds a permanent residence, the student is eligible to remain in his or her current school for the remainder of the school year, even if that residence is not in the area that the district serves. In Vermont, this positive act toward school stability may, at times, necessitate several hours in a car or van to get to school and back to shelters each day.

However, not all students who experience residential and school transiency are homeless. When families relocate due to circumstances other than homelessness, the McKinney–Vento Act does not provide protection. Some Vermont school districts require students to immediately transfer to the new local school district while other districts may allow students to complete the school year in the town in which they previously resided.

In my experience, however, the parent or other interested party must be able to advocate for the student, as continuation in a school, despite family relocation, is not assured.

Many students in public schools experience residential and school instability, resulting in transiency. This problem occurs in Vermont schools, particularly in densely populated areas, where transiency in children of school age is common (Morgan, 2008). Students may experience residential transiency without moving schools. Students may be in the physical custody of their parents or in state-supported homes. Whether living in their family home or state-sponsored accommodation, some students experience multiple residential moves in one school year. These moves may be due to the instability of employment, adult/child relationships, incarceration, or any number of issues that result in residential instability.

Recent research has demonstrated that 45% of children change schools by the end of the third grade, especially students from ethnic minority groups, students who live in urban communities, and those who are of low socioeconomic status (McKinnon, Friedman-Krauss, Roy, & Raver, 2018). This transiency affects students' relationships with teachers due to the impact of stress related to school instability on students' academic growth and self-regulation (McKinnon et al., 2018).

While homelessness is not the only factor in school transiency, it is likely to play a significant role. Research has indicated that parents may choose to move to another area for a "fresh start" (Crowley, 2003); however, the prevalence of homelessness as a cause of residential and, therefore, school transiency seems to indicate that this may not be the case as often as previous researchers supposed.

Another potential cause of school transiency is the impact of trauma and Adverse Childhood Effects (ACEs). Previous research demonstrated that statistically significant factors impacted school performance including trauma and low socioeconomic status in addition to homelessness as noted above (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2013).

### 1.8 Significance of Research in Vermont

Few studies have been conducted to determine how school and residential transiency impact students in Vermont schools. Vermont, a relatively rural state with a smaller than average population, is often perceived by residents as unique and possibly immune to issues that affect larger communities in other states. However, the Vermont state government has begun to enact programs designed to protect students who are transient, homeless, or in state custody.

The Vermont state legislature has enacted a series of rules that protect students' right to school stability while in state custody (Vermont Agency of Education, n.d.). This is known as the Interagency Coordination for Education Stability Agreement, which provides guidelines requiring interagency supports to keep students in their current school placements if that is what is determined to be in the students' best interest. The Department of Children and Families must complete a Best Interest Determination (BID) form to document why a student is retained in or removed from the school of origin.

In Vermont, total homelessness rose from 1,035 individuals reported in 2007 to 1,225 individuals in 2017. Unaccompanied children were not included in these figures until 2016, with 71 children reported in that year (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019). The highest concentration of homelessness in Vermont is in Burlington, Chittenden

County, with 18 individuals for every 10,000 of the population, or 291 individuals, representing approximately one-quarter of all homelessness in the state of Vermont.

Homelessness is not always visible. Of those families who report homelessness, most homeless children live doubled-up with friends or relatives. Notably, more than 3% live in cars, campgrounds, or abandoned buildings. Nearly 20% of children live in poverty, while the adult poverty level is less than 15% (NCHE, 2017). However, homelessness is not the only cause of school transiency. Families may choose to move, their employment may change, or they may experience divorce, leading to residential changes that could result in school changes, potentially in the middle of the school year.

Additional studies demonstrate the correlation between challenges with student school engagement and exposure to ACEs. The impact of ACEs has been demonstrated to vary by individual, however. Research conducted at University of Vermont and Vermont Medical Center suggests these variations may be due to protective factors including supportive school and community environment (Bethell et al., 2017).

### 1.9 Significance of Research for Students with Disabilities

Despite the awareness of the impact of transiency at the national and state level, very little research has focused on the impact of transiency on students with disabilities. Significant questions arise about how one or more school moves could impact the ability of students with disabilities to receive services as determined by the Education Support Team (EST) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. I posit that this may become even more significant when movement is frequent or when students' documentation does not arrive at the new school promptly. In my earlier research, teachers and administrators

noted that effective supports could only be implemented quickly if documents arrived at school before or near to the arrival of students with disabilities. Notably, some teachers suggested that students with disabilities enjoyed greater protections than their non-disabled peers when schools received high-quality IEPs and progress monitoring documentation (Killeen et al., 2017).

Student records may be delayed when traveling from one school location to another. While problematic for all students, this delay may cause students to be enrolled in classes without the required supports and services. With subsequent moves, the risk of the loss of important documentation on needs increases, as does the possibility of the loss of connection to effective interventions.

### 1.10 Researcher Assumptions – Subjective "I" Statement

As an experienced special educator and administrator in the Vermont public school system, I wish to acknowledge my own implicit bias that students with and without disabilities are likely to demonstrate loss in the development of academic and social skills when experiencing school transiency.

Early in my career, I learned that any transiency has subjectively negative effects on academic growth for students of any age. Based on my interactions with parents and teachers, this continues to be a commonly held belief. Most educators discourage any mid-year change in school placements and even school changes from year-to-year, except those transitions to next-level programs such as middle school and high school. My bias in this regard was reinforced by the meta-analysis of longitudinal statistical data (Hattie, 2008),

which demonstrated an effect on student learning with a significance level of negative .34. I am cognizant that this important research did not investigate the causes of transiency or whether familial economic circumstances improved or declined after the move.

This research topic interests me on several levels. I am interested in determining the reasons for commonly held beliefs about the impact of transiency in education. Some hold the belief that change in school placement can provide a student with a fresh start. Parents may believe that school staff or communities have biases against the child or family. A change in school may be perceived as a way to erase the perceived barriers. There have been isolated cases where I would agree this might be the case. However, my preliminary discussions with students indicated that student behavioral history often precedes students' attendance in new schools. This seems to negate students' abilities to begin anew in different locations. In casual conversations with teachers prior to beginning research, I have also heard the opinion that students with IEPs are better protected and have better access to supports than those without written plans. However, this may not be the case, as student documentation often seems to lag behind students' attendance of new schools. I aim to shed light on these assumptions to help determine whether they are valid or possibly require additional research.

### 1.11 Definition of Terms

"School transiency" is also known as "school mobility" in scholarship related to education, the sociology of education, teaching and learning, and within special education studies. The term "student mobility" is more often used in the related literature, but, in the context of disability studies, may be unnecessarily confused with modality impairments.

The term “student transiency” is meant to be broader than “student mobility,” inclusive of both short- and long-term school changes, and may be a function of household or residential changes.

### 1.12 Methods of Searching

In the course of my research for the literature review, the University of Vermont Howe online library provided access to literature across many disciplines, access to multiple research databases, and interlibrary loan resources. My searches of the databases included the use of Boolean operators to allow me to combine concepts while locating as many relevant results as possible. I also found truncation of search terms to be useful, although this method often resulted in obscure and unrelated information. Often, the method of article adjacency (i.e., reviewing the references provided by other research) was highly successful. Following this model, I reviewed articles and books cited in the texts of the literature. This resulted in additional concepts to explore in relation to my research topic.

As described earlier in this dissertation, student transiency is the movement of a student from one school to another during the school year for reasons other than progression from grade to grade and is often referred to in the literature as school instability or mobility. As such, I used the terms transiency, instability, and mobility to search for literature to understand the broad concepts to begin this study and to incorporate the findings of experts across the United States. When looking for greater depth in the understanding of large systemic practices for interventions, I found literature describing

military schools and other government organizations that support students and families who are known or expected to be transient.

School transiency has many causes, including socioeconomic changes in the family. In order to understand how these changes might impact school transiency, I conducted searches to find relevant materials that describe the concepts of homelessness, trauma, and ACEs. While investigating the literature addressing these issues, I considered trauma and ACEs both as precursor events and as the experiences of transiency on students and families.

An important component of this research was to understand the impact of transiency on students and families. As such, I undertook a survey of the literature describing the differences between parental involvement and the more robust model of collective parent engagement. This portion of the literature review provided information describing social models that support families in communities including—but not limited to—school-based settings. However, the search of the literature included the desire for information about how parental involvement or engagement in schools might mitigate school transiency. I also looked for information about how families of transient students might be engaged despite moving from school to school.

In this literature review, I considered research from 1990 to the present. The research in the literature primarily focused on students in public schools in large urban settings and military organizations. Some of the reviewed studies posited that all transiency with any frequency was undesirable (Hattie, 2008) or referred exclusively to somewhat nonspecific undesirable outcomes (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Later research demonstrated that some school transiency might benefit students, such as moves prompted

by improved socioeconomic conditions (Coley & Kull, 2016). None of the literature was found to address specific impacts on students with disabilities, the transiency of students who live in rural settings, or those who move frequently between the same known school settings.

### 1.13 Theoretical Orientation for the Study

When undertaking this study, I initially hypothesized that transient students with disabilities experience more significant loss in learning, develop fewer relationships with peers, and receive less support from teachers than transient students without disabilities. I also expected transient students with and without disabilities to demonstrate loss in these areas compared to students who do not experience transiency. My experience working in prekindergarten–grade 12 public school settings had prepared me to expect that students who change schools during the school year do so out of necessity rather than choice. This assumed necessity included homelessness, poverty, flight from abuse, and migrancy. I expected these to be the reasons for most students (with and without disabilities) to experience school transiency. I anticipated the impact on transient students with disabilities to be greater than on transient students without disabilities.

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# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Literature Review

Within the literature, research methods are presented as a combination of complementary methodologies, including qualitative interviews, quantitative data reviews, and observations.

***2.1.1 Early research results.*** A large body of scholarship has been published from the 1980s to the 2000s that draws connections between the incidence of student mobility and negative outcomes for students in US public schools. Key works include those by Lash and Kirkpatrick (1990), who were among the earliest to note that the frequency of school changes was associated with weak academic outcomes. This finding was reinforced by authors such as Franke, Isken, and Parra (2003). Authors have also drawn connections between transiency and weak non-academic outcomes; Crowley (2003) found that highly frequent school changes were associated with weakened social and community connections.

The analysis of research examining residential and school transiency on students spans two decades in the United States, primarily focusing on low socioeconomic populations and students of color residing in dense urban settings (Franke et al., 2003). From as early as 1990, qualitative studies have demonstrated the impact of school instability on students' learning (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Lash and Kirkpatrick's early study noted that one in five students was transient in a given school year, but little was known about the impact of this movement on students' learning. Teachers in a single school were interviewed using a fixed protocol with a quasi-experimental design to develop recommendations for the education of transient students. Disability was not a primary focus

of this study. Recommendations included processes for the integration of transient students into the classroom and training for teachers to develop instructional flexibility in curricula. No benefits to including transient students were identified, except for the benefit of teachers' skill development. A later study, which was a synthesis of meta-analysis data related to influences on the success of school-aged students, demonstrated that school transiency had a significant negative impact on students who were experiencing school instability, but the precursors or causes of such school instability were not considered (Hattie, 2008).

The *Journal of Negro Education* published several articles exploring the causes of transiency. These articles include analyses of a lack of affordable housing (Crowley, 2003; Winter, 2003), which forces low-income families to become transient. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that families sometimes choose to move students to new schools to seek a "fresh start" when peer and teacher relationships are problematic in current school settings. However, as noted in previous studies frequent school change can be counterproductive by causing difficulty for students to feel connected to their new community, "Children who are not allowed to root and who are buffeted from school to school cannot bond with educators or schoolmates. Their emotional resources are used up just managing change, leaving them depleted of ability to absorb and integrate new learning" (Crowley, 2003). This research underscored learning difficulties associated with gaps in learning, as school curricula were not aligned between sending and receiving schools. Crowley concluded that the provision of residential and school stability should be considered a public good and called for funds to be allocated to subsidize low-income housing to improve these conditions.

Authors have also noted that efforts to alter school procedures to benefit transient students often lead to benefits for all students. A study by Franke et al. (2003) entitled *A pervasive school culture for the betterment of student outcomes: One school's approach to student mobility* provided an analysis of vignettes in addition to local gang behavior statistics to explore the costs and benefits of school culture changes that will support students in urban school settings that are known to experience high transiency. In this study, the authors posited that short-term interventions are not successful in schools with frequently transient populations. The use of short-term interventions intended only for those who experience transiency actually impedes these students from becoming part of a school community. The authors recommended appropriate supports and interventions for all students, regardless of whether they are transient or not.

Authors have also examined relationships between student transiency, dropping out, and some protective factors that reduce the likelihood of separating from school. Osher, Morrison, and Bailey (2003) used a meta-analysis of behavior and dropout data to create a list of examples of "protective practices" for these vulnerable students. Recommendations include strategies that are be likely to benefit all students and improve school culture. The authors demonstrated the value of students' perception of belonging even in limited social or academic school activities, such as participation in sports teams or a sense of success in specific classes (Osher et al., 2003). This study suggested that students who are transient and are not successful in school are more likely to drop out before graduation than those who feel part of school culture in some manner.

***2.1.2 Recent studies: long-term impact.*** Recent research has continued to build on the types of conditions and critical events that appear to stimulate school transiency. A mixed-methods study analysis published in the *Child Development Journal* began to suggest precursor events that cause transiency, such as poverty, parental drug use and incarceration, food instability, and housing instability, as significant factors in social and behavioral skill development. School instability, mobility, or transiency often present concurrently with residential instability (Coley & Kull, 2016). This study posited that timing, child development, and the "arena of functioning" or context all play pivotal roles in the impact of residential and school transiency. The authors suggested that the greatest impact is evident in social and emotional development, particularly when a loss of continuity of school and residency occurs for younger children. Furthermore, this study indicated that the impact of transiency may become more evident over time, as the effect may be delayed or even become cumulative given continued school instability.

Mental health issues among transient school children have more recently become a focus of study. Marcal, (2017) examined national data to demonstrate how inconsistent instruction, school and residential instability, and the loss of peer networks can result in greater risk for mental health problems. Students who are homeless are almost 80% more likely to demonstrate characteristics consistent with mental illness than their residentially stable peers (Marcal, 2017).

***2.1.3 Key factors.*** Throughout these and other studies, homelessness and poverty have been demonstrated as key factors in stimulating involuntary school mobility for many students. The aforementioned studies also demonstrated that moves to better schools and

neighborhoods could have beneficial effects on students' academic and emotional development (Coley & Kull, 2016), suggesting that the movement itself is not necessarily the detrimental event. However, since access to schools is primarily driven by parent residency status, students may be greatly impacted by parental choices or misfortune that may then lead to instability. Students who are in state custody have also traditionally been challenged with school instability when placements in foster homes are unsuccessful. Legislation such as the McKinney Vento Act has been passed at the federal level to counteract this effect with some success. Regulations that require child welfare and school agencies to consider students' best interests when determining educational stability may provide additional benefits for students who are experiencing residential instability (Office of Special Education Programs, 2013).

Whether school moves are voluntary or not, schools can develop systems that will support students who are experiencing transiency. These systems are most effective when they are part of the school infrastructure and are incorporated into its culture (Franke et al., 2003). Students benefit most from well-constructed supports that are known to all teachers and do not cause students to be separated from their peer groups. Effective practices can include the timely transfer of student records, a checklist for administrators to track services provided, assessment of students in reading and mathematics within 48 hours of their arrival, and peer supports such as an assigned buddy (Blum, 2005).

***2.1.4 Successful interventions.*** Some success in providing supports for students who have experienced school instability has been demonstrated. Research related to the performance of students in military schools supports the use of consistent procedures that

develop student and family connections in schools (Blum, 2005). These processes are believed by Blum to benefit transient students and improve classroom continuity. The culture of transiency as a norm may be an additional factor in allowing students to move fluidly, as systems are built to provide similar experiences from setting to setting. Data provided by federal government resources, including best practices in military schools, appear to be validated by standardized testing and graduation rates (Butler, n.d.).

Figure 1, below, demonstrates an example of a student assistance program developed to support transient students in an urban public school where school instability is common (Franke et al., 2003). This example is an effective model of an intentionally created support that can become part of the established culture. In this model, the authors expected some students to experience school transiency. They developed a plan and clearly identified supports in the form of a flow chart to assist students and school personnel in understanding what supports were available and who was responsible for their implementation.

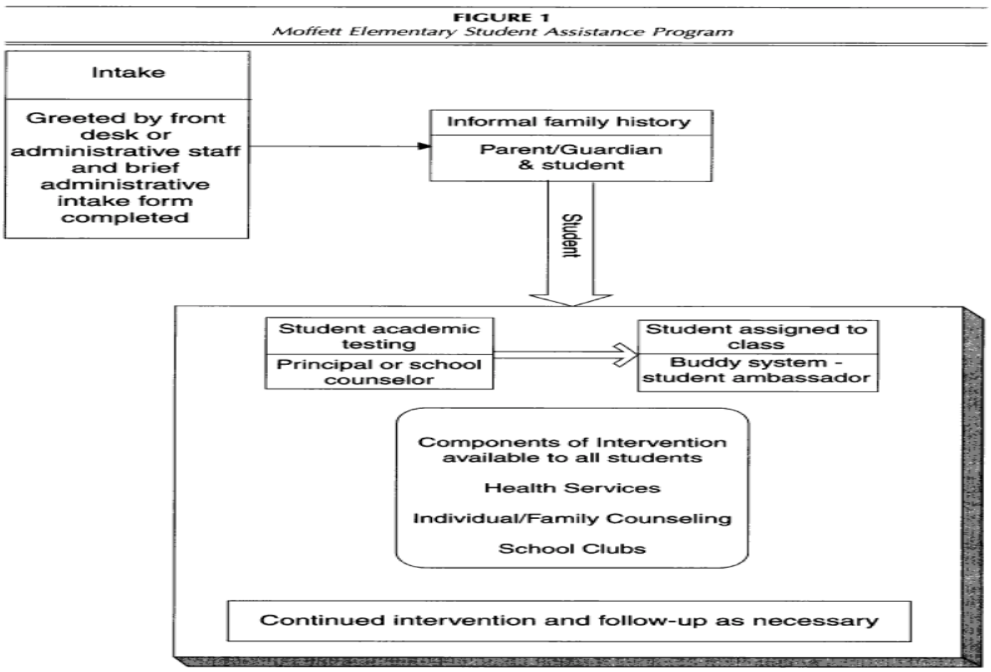


Figure 1. A flowchart showing the procedure of the Moffett Elementary Student Assistance Program (Franke et al., 2003)

***2.1.5 Current research perspective.*** While research exploring school transiency is extensive, little information in the literature demonstrates a difference in the impact of transiency for students with and without disabilities, particularly among US student populations. Recommendations for processes and supports in US schools address students with trauma and emotional disturbance, but do not specifically address the needs of transient students identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was reauthorized in 2004, or Americans with Disabilities (ADA), which was last amended in 2008. In a study completed in New Zealand that was a blend of qualitative data gleaned from schools and families, the researchers concluded that school and family relationships were critical to work toward including transient students in new school

environments. This shortfall in the existing scholarship is a focus of this dissertation's research (Marcal, 2017; Mutch, Rarere, & Stratford, 2011).

***2.1.6 ACEs and trauma.*** Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are defined as exposure to violence; emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; deprivation; neglect; family discord and divorce; parental substance abuse and mental health problems; parental death or incarceration; and social discrimination. Students who experience more than one of these adverse events have been found to be 2.67 times more likely (Table 1) to experience challenges in school, such as grade retention (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014). Some students—although not all—experience trauma and stress as a result of these experiences. In a nationally representative sample, students experiencing trauma due to adverse childhood experiences reported a higher rate of anger, depression, anxiety, and dissociation (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2013). In this research, additional areas of statistically significant factors that affect school performance were added to the list of ACEs, including physical and emotional trauma, homelessness, and low socioeconomic status (Table 2).

The literature review did not provide insight into the possible connection between school transiency and trauma or ACEs as either causes or products of school transiency, although many new findings of these adverse effects suggest a causal or correlational impact, as the ACEs might result in residential or custodial changes.

Table 1. (Finkelhor et al., 2013)

**Table 1. Regression of Wave 1 Trauma Scores on Lifetime Victimization and Adversity**

| Characteristic (n = 2030) | % | Regression Coefficient, β[a] Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Demographics, time 1[b] | | | |
| Age, mean, y | 13.5 | −0.01 | −0.03 |
| Male sex | 51.2 | −0.03 | −0.08[c] |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 15.1 | 0.01 | 0.03 |
| Other, non-Hispanic | 5.7 | −0.05[d] | −0.05[e] |
| Hispanic, any race | 17.8 | −0.02 | −0.03 |
| ACE scale items | | | |
| Physical abuse | 14.9 | 0.16[c] | 0.13[c] |
| Emotional abuse | 17.7 | 0.16[c] | 0.08[c] |
| Emotional neglect | 7.7 | 0.12[c] | 0.12[c] |
| Physical neglect | 4.0 | 0.09[c] | 0.07[c] |
| Household mental illness | 27.9 | 0.08[c] | 0.04[e] |
| Household substance abuse | 16.8 | 0.08[c] | 0.01 |
| Sexual abuse | 6.6 | 0.08[c] | 0.05[d] |
| Mother treated violently | 13.1 | 0.05[e] | −0.02 |
| Incarcerated household member | 11.1 | 0.02 | −0.01 |
| Parental separation or divorce | 41.2 | −0.01 | −0.05[e] |
| Additional victimization and adversity items | | | |
| Peer victimization (nonsibling) | 47.6 | | 0.17[c] |
| Parents always arguing | 22.0 | | 0.15[c] |
| Property victimization (nonsibling) | 41.0 | | 0.11[c] |
| Someone close had a bad accident or illness | 64.4 | | 0.10[c] |
| Exposure to community violence | 63.4 | | 0.09[c] |
| No good friends | 1.8 | | 0.07[c] |
| Socioeconomic status | 0.04 | | −0.06[d] |
| Below-average grades | 6.1 | | 0.04[e] |
| Someone close died from illness/accident | 49.3 | | 0.05[e] |
| Parent lost job | 19.5 | | 0.04[e] |
| Parent deployed to war zone | 9.9 | | 0.04 |
| Disaster | 10.9 | | 0.03 |
| Removed from family | 4.8 | | 0.03 |
| Very overweight | 3.0 | | 0.02 |
| Physical disability | 6.9 | | −0.01 |
| Involved in a bad accident | 13.8 | | −0.02 |
| Neighborhood violence is "big problem" | 4.3 | | −0.02 |
| Family homeless | 3.2 | | −0.02 |
| Repeated a grade | 13.2 | | −0.03 |
| Less masculine or feminine than peers | 8.7 | | −0.03 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | | 0.24 | 0.36 |

Abbreviation: ACE, Adverse Childhood Experiences.
[a] Change in adjusted $R^2$ was significant at $P < .001$.
[b] Reference category for race/ethnicity is white, non-Hispanic (61.4 % of sample).
[c] Coefficient is significant at $P < .001$.
[d] Coefficient is significant at $P < .01$.
[e] Coefficient is significant at $P < .05$.

Table 2. (Finkelhor et al., 2013)

**Table 2. Items in Original and Revised ACE Scales**

| ACE Scale Adversities (Lifetime) | |
|---|---|
| **Original** | **Revised** |
| Emotional abuse | Emotional abuse |
| Physical abuse | Physical abuse |
| Sexual abuse | Sexual abuse |
| Physical neglect | Physical neglect |
| Emotional neglect | Emotional neglect |
| Mother treated violently | Household mental illness |
| Household substance abuse | Property victimization (nonsibling) |
| Household mental illness | Peer victimization (nonsibling) |
| Incarcerated household member | Exposure to community violence |
| Parental separation or divorce | Socioeconomic status |
| | Someone close had a bad accident or illness |
| | Below-average grades |
| | Parents always arguing |
| | No good friends (at time of interview) |

Abbreviation: ACE, Adverse Childhood Experiences.

In *The Body Keeps the Score*, childhood trauma is described as training individuals to respond to fight or flight response triggers even when such responses are not appropriate. These maladaptive responses can impact many life functions, including education and relationships (Van Der Kolk, 2014). While this study did not specifically address the connection of ACEs and trauma with school transiency, I believe there is a significant correlational relationship, if not a causal one. Within the list of original and additional ACEs are parental incarceration, death, and divorce. In addition to this, ACEs include emotional and physical neglect and abuse as well as sexual abuse, which are known to create barriers for children in developing trusting relationships with peers and adults. In their book, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, Perry and Szalavitz (2008) warned schools that the exclusive emphasis on academic learning without developing social and emotional learning and meeting students' basic needs creates significant barriers for students who have experienced trauma.

***2.1.7 Student and family perspectives.*** While many studies over time have defined processes or supports for transient students, little research has been designed specifically for those with disabilities. I was also unable to find information related to family perspectives, with the notable exception of a study completed in New Zealand that was a blend of qualitative data gleaned from schools and families (Mutch et al., 2011), as noted above. In this study, the researchers concluded that school and family relationships are critical to work toward including transient students in new school environments.

***2.1.8 Parent engagement.*** Parent engagement in public schools is challenging for most educators; while some parents are able to engage due to adequate time and resources, other parents rely on schools to provide childcare as well as education for their children due to the need to work. Some parents have more than one job in their effort to support their families, while others struggle to understand the public school system, possibly due to language barriers, their own disabilities, or negative childhood experiences of school (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012). The research into parent community and school engagement is ongoing, as is the development of new theories to support parent involvement. Studies have demonstrated that teacher and parent expectations can sometimes be at odds with one another, but that the development of school systems to foster the connection between teachers and parents can effectively improve connections and engagement (Epstein, 2018). In Epstein's research, findings demonstrate that teachers are noted to believe that parents with less education are less likely to engage with schools, only attending meetings when their children experience difficulty in school. In contrast, single parents report that teachers are more likely to request their involvement than that of married parents. However, teachers who are committed to parent engagement are perceived by parents to be more consistent and balanced in their requests for parental involvement in schools.

Somewhat similarly to this research, a small number of self-described pilot studies and quasi-experimental quantitative studies that intended to determine the value of collective parent engagement (CPE) indicated that while parent engagement demonstrates

that students perform better when parents are involved and engaged, this is not the same as full engaging in and being successful in school. In this study, parents in both the CPE group and the comparison group demonstrated that 50% of students in the study group and the comparison group "remained far below basic" on the SAT-9 post-test; see Table 3, below (Alameda-Lawson, 2014).

Table 3 (Alameda-Lawson, 2014).

Table 3: Between-Group Comparison of Potential Confounding Variables

| Variable | CPE Group | | Comparison Group | | *t* | *p* value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | |
| Maternal age | 40.72 | 8.6 | 38.7 | 9.6 | 0.62 | .26 |
| Annual reported income | 12,820 | 4,900 | 11,057 | 6,041 | 0.91 | .19 |
| Number of children in household | 2.4 | 0.9 | 1.7 | 0.9 | 2.19 | .02 |
| Parent education | 11.88 | 1.4 | 11.44 | 0.89 | 1.06 | .15 |
| Parent–teacher conferences | 1.81 | 1.2 | 1.78 | 1.55 | 0.06 | .48 |
| Homework assistance | 7.29 | 2.49 | 7.14 | 2.17 | 0.18 | .43 |
| School volunteering | 7.88 | 8.65 | 7.55 | 8.87 | 0.11 | .46 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EOA score | 98 | 11.88 | 77.375 | 9.79 | 5.36 | .001 |
| SAT-9 Mathematics (baseline) | 545 | 42 | 556.1 | 45.61 | –0.71 | .24 |
| SAT-9 Reading (baseline) | 581 | 44.11 | 575.61 | 47.81 | 0.33 | .62 |
| SAT-9 Language (baseline) | 561.25 | 32.54 | 581.5 | 35.6 | –1.67 | .052 |
| SAT-9 Mathematics (post-test) | 602.9 | 53.08 | 591.25 | 51.67 | 0.63 | .27 |
| SAT-9 Reading (post-test) | 608.53 | 42.14 | 596 | 35.6 | 0.9 | .81 |
| SAT-9 Language (post-test) | 597.25 | 45.41 | 586 | 34.51 | 0.78 | .78 |

Note: CPE = collective parent engagement; EOA = empowerment outcomes assessment (Alameda-Lawson, 2014).

**2.2 Synthesis of the research findings.** Based on the analysis of the literature, school transiency, which is frequently the result of changes in family residency and socioeconomic factors, is associated with reduced academic and social skills, which may

have delayed and cumulative effects on individual students. This has been demonstrated in both qualitative and quantitative study measures.

The literature has focused primarily on students who reside in urban settings and attend relatively large public schools. School transiency—often referred to as mobility—is broadly defined as changes in attendance in school settings. Recent studies have demonstrated that delays in socioemotional development may not be immediately evident, but may be seen in later years (Coley & Kull, 2016).

Not all school transiency is involuntary, although much has been demonstrated to be based on socioeconomic factors. Research has demonstrated that families may select a change of school mid-year as a result of their desire for change in environment or services. This is sometimes perceived by the family and students as an opportunity to "restart" or "reset" relationships that might have been damaged or to improve other undesirable conditions (Crowley, 2003). Students who have one or more family members who are part of the United States military have also been known to experience school transiency. These school changes are expected as part of the military culture and planned for within the schools that serve the students. Both the culture of the organization that normalizes school transiency and the interventions in place to mitigate challenges provide buffers that appear to mitigate negative impacts on students (Butler, n.d.).

The literature has consistently underscored the need for structured and consistent supports for students who experience school instability. Research studies have rarely depicted school transiency as positive, except when families select the change and when a move to a new school is to improve a family's socioeconomic conditions (Coley & Kull,

2016). In nearly all studies, school transiency has been portrayed as the result of negative economic or social events, and often both. Such studies have associated school transiency with negative student academic and social outcomes. No study in the literature has concretely stated whether these negative outcomes are the result of the school transiency itself or are due to the precursor events that prompted the move to another school.

Social and academic outcomes in students experiencing transiency have been connected to individual classroom teacher training and understanding of how to teach such students, as well as how students are integrated into new classrooms (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Systemic schoolwide interventions have been recommended as important to improved outcomes in students who are experiencing transiency. However, none of the studies identified in the literature review addressed differences between students with and without disabilities (Franke et al., 2003). Due to this omission in the literature, there is no indication of whether IEPs are successful in providing consistency in academic and social programming for students with disabilities. One might question whether student outcomes would be impacted by the timely delivery of IEPs to new schools and whether the quality of the documents and communications between schools are important factors in the transition of students with disabilities.

Research connecting trauma and ACEs to school performance and social connections is relatively new in this area of inquiry. The studies identified in this literature review are largely quantitative and draw on national longitudinal data. These studies suggest a significant connection between “multiple familial and contextual influences,” which demonstrate connections to loss of academic learning (Olofson, 2017). These studies

do not demonstrate causation but show a reasonable connection between school transiency, socioeconomic trauma, and negative school outcomes.

**2.3 Critique of the previous research methods.** I noted that the literature has rarely addressed the impact of school transiency from the perspective of those affected. The only exception that I found addressed input from family members and was conducted outside of the United States (Mutch et al., 2011). Even in this example, student input was not included. Research that specifically inquired into ACEs and trauma solicited the input of parents and children and demonstrated significant findings related to the benefits of resiliency in children when coping with negative impacts. While research in the area of ACEs and trauma has frequently connected these negative effects on education in school, no causal or correlational connections have been made from ACEs and trauma to school transiency, though this has often been implied, as ACEs include parental incarceration, separation, and death (Finkelhor et al., 2013). This appears to be a significant gap in the literature, which this study had aimed to fill.

As noted previously, the literature has focused primarily on students who reside in urban settings and attend relatively large public schools. In most studies, school transiency—often referred to as mobility—has been broadly defined, without specifying whether students move between a series of known schools or whether the moves are to schools that are new to the students each time there is a change. Few studies have discussed the frequency of school transiency except to state that it occurs. Furthermore, few details have been offered to demonstrate the number of times that a student leaves a known school program and whether that student returns in future transitions.

## 2.4 Summary

Despite decades of research, school transiency continues to impact students in public schools. Many factors appear to occur at the same time as movements between schools, but these have not been clearly demonstrated as contributing factors. Some school transiency is selected by families who have had a positive change in socioeconomic status or have decided to seek a change in school-based relationships and resources. Students in military families often expect transiency as a necessary consequence of the culture of the organization. More often, however, school transiency is not chosen but is a consequence of changes in life circumstances.

Recent studies have demonstrated the impact of school transiency on student development and have suggested that a loss of social connections may be demonstrated even some years after a transition. Research has shown that systemic and skilled classroom-based interventions can provide supports to transient students, allowing them to recover lost learning and social connections. However, no evidence or interventions have been offered in the literature to specifically address losses in transient students who have disabilities. Moreover, the literature has not addressed the differences that might be present in rural communities versus larger urban settings.

While some aspects of school transiency have been clearly described in the literature, its connection to ACEs and trauma are relatively new considerations for

researchers in this area. Parental involvement in schools has been addressed, but the literature has not provided significant practical recommendations for the education community about actions that schools can take to involve outside agencies in the prevention or mitigation of the impact of school transiency, except for among children who are experiencing homelessness.

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## Chapter 3: Phase 1 – Interviews with School Administrators and Teachers

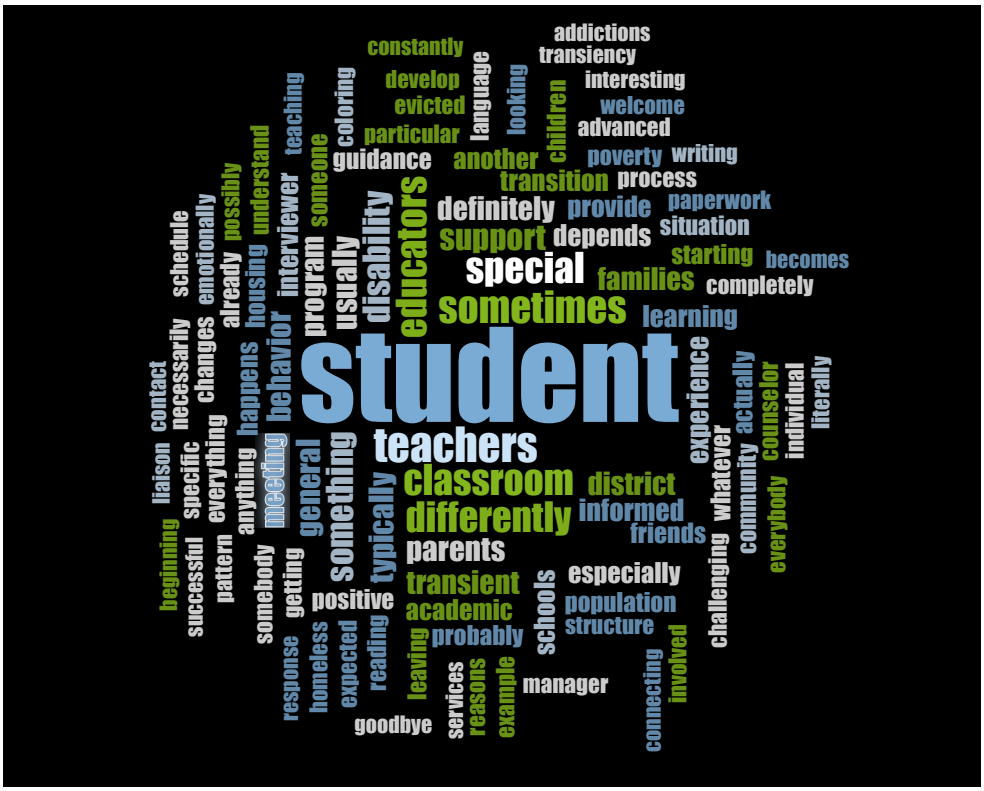


Figure 2. Frequently recurring words in NVivo data analysis phase one interviews.

### 3.1 Methodology

This study employed an ethnographic design with focused interviewing strategies to explore the impact of transiency on students with disabilities. I interviewed 16 Vermont school administrators and teachers to investigate their perspectives on the impact of transiency on students with and without disabilities.

Following an analysis of the literature on student transiency, I developed a qualitative study to collect data by interviewing Vermont school administrators and

teachers. An interview protocol was developed that comprised 20 questions (see Appendix A) to explore how the experiences of transient students differ from school stable students. I investigated whether there was an observable difference between the stable student population and the transient student population for students both with and without disabilities. The teachers and administrators responded to questions about their awareness of residential and household factors that stimulate school transiency and whether they noted differences among student populations with greater academic and learning challenges. The teachers and administrators also spoke about how teaching or school processes differed for students who enrolled at non-traditional times of the school year.

Using my personal contacts, I requested the assistance of administrators in five Vermont school districts/supervisory unions to identify teachers and administrators who worked with socioeconomically diverse populations of students in public schools in the 2017 – 2018 school year, including those who experience transiency, with and without disabilities. The administrators identified interview candidates who they believed had the appropriate experience and were able to provide information and perspective. The study was designed to obtain as broad a database as possible from the relatively small sample. The selected school districts represent locations in the Northern, Central, and Southern Vermont areas. All Vermont school districts have relatively low student enrollment compared to the national average, ranging from fewer than 1,000 to 4,000 students. These locations also vary in transiency rate and the rate of urban to rural areas, as well as in their socioeconomic levels.

This qualitative study was designed based on the research described in *A Classroom Perspective on Student Mobility* in order to determine whether conditions reported in this

earlier study remain valid or have changed over time (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). However, while Lash and Kirkpatrick's study was conducted in one school within a large urban school district, the current study's series of interviews was designed to draw information from a greater breadth of schools, both urban and rural, to obtain more holistic results and seek patterns of behavior.

***3.1.1 Procedures.*** An interview protocol was developed based on Lash and Kirkpatrick's (1990) study and modified to meet the present study's specific criteria. The developed semi-structured interview protocol was used consistently to ensure uniformity in the data collected. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and was recorded with the verbal consent of the interviewee and the district administration's approval. Written consent was not requested in this study.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were coded to protect the identity of the subjects being interviewed. No identifying information was used when analyzing the results of the interviews. All data was maintained in digital format and password protected.

## 3.2 Analytical Approach

***3.2.1 Rationale for the qualitative method.*** This study was developed to demonstrate how transiency affects students with disabilities and their typically developing peers. Given the lack of data on this issue nationally or in the state of Vermont, I determined that school-based faculty would likely provide valuable information to fill this gap. Vermont's social and educational needs are commonly perceived by educators to be unique

among all other states due to the complexity of its social and geographic makeup. This study provides information that will allow the reader to consider the perceptions of student transiency from this unique Vermont perspective and compare these perceptions to studies with foci on parts of the United States that are very different in terms of population density and economic resources.

***3.2.2 Site and participant selection description and rationale.*** Six school districts were selected based on population density, the difference in community socioeconomics, and the known fluctuation of student populations in schools. One supervisory union/district declined to participate. In the remaining five districts, superintendents, special education directors, or, most commonly, school administrators were contacted to help me to determine who would be available for an interview. I had predetermined that a mixture of administrators, general education teachers, and special educators would yield the broadest data. The desired criteria were given to the district administrator, who then provided the names and contact information of potential candidates to interview. I was able to complete 16 interviews, all of which were voluntary.

All of the teachers and administrators interviewed were licensed appropriately in the area in which they were employed. Several had multiple teacher and administrator endorsements. All had experience of teaching in Vermont, and many had significant teaching experience in other parts of the United States. Several had worked in urban school settings inside and outside of Vermont.

***3.2.3 Data analysis.*** Qualitative data were categorized by observations of teachers' subjective perceptions of transiency in students with and without disabilities. The questions in the interview protocol focused on how students adjusted to new schools, interacted with peers and adults, and how transiency impacted academic learning and behavior.

Teacher and administrator interviews were transcribed and input into the qualitative analysis tool, NVivo. The data were separated into categories consistent with the interview protocol and collated by category. Subsequently, the data were reviewed for the consistency (and inconsistency) of the responses and to identify any unexpected results.

For example, I asked teachers and administrators to discuss the reasons that students might move into their school at non-traditional times during the school year. I divided this question to first discuss teachers' non-traditional entry experiences, the number of students commonly expected to enter, and how students adjusted, and second to discuss the methods that teachers used to assist them. Each portion of this complex question was further divided into discrete data points, as were similar questions related to students' experiences of exiting their schools. I began the interviews by discussing students' needs generally, then became more specific to determine teachers' approaches to differences between students with and without disabilities.

***3.2.4 Ethical considerations.*** Most public school teachers and administrators are aware of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This legislation is a federal law intended to protect the privacy of student educational records (USDOE, 2020). Such rules do not extend to conversations about activities in schools. The teachers,

administrators, and I were careful to avoid using or requesting identifiable student or family information, therefore interpreting the rule broadly and ensuring student anonymity.

## 3.3 Findings

***3.3.1 Experience with transiency.*** The frequency and number of students moving into and out of schools during the school year varied significantly. School districts in rural communities reported fewer incidents of school transiency than did urban or larger school districts. Transiency was reported to be more frequent in school districts near to the I-89 interstate highway, although this cannot be reliably reported as a consistent factor. Teachers and administrators in suburban and rural Vermont school districts where families had access to affordable housing and middle-class neighborhoods reported less school transiency than urban school districts. These teachers and administrators also reported the frequency of school transiency to be low, with between one to three students entering the school annually at non-traditional times of the year. The teachers and administrators in these suburban and rural school districts stated that there was significant variability in the school transiency rate and that school transiency was relatively uncommon. The teachers and administrators in urban school districts, in contrast, noted that school transiency was very common and represented in approximately 30% of the student population throughout the school year. In the urban school districts, school transiency was reported to be common. In all studied areas of Vermont, school transiency was perceived to be increasing. Most teachers and administrators noted that students experiencing school transiency moved

between Vermont schools and were likely to return to their school district over time. Although some students who moved to another state returned, this was reported less often.

Few interviewees were able to cite specific data that had informed their perception of the frequency of transiency in their districts. The teachers and administrators interviewed stated they believed transient students entered new schools more often than they left.

In school districts where transiency is common, teachers and administrators noted that students are known to leave the school only to return sometime later. Many districts that experience frequent school transiency note patterns of transiency between specific towns or schools, in effect students leaving and coming back between known education settings. As noted by one interviewed teacher, school staff works hard to be sure returning students are well placed to ensure greater success, “There’s a lot of instances where the kid leaves and comes back. The administration does an amazing job of looking at that and saying, "Okay. So, they were here a year or two, three, four, years ago. What was the combination of kids that worked and didn’t work?" Because just to throw the kid back on a team where ... let’s look back at the history and make sure we’re not walking into some minefield that’s going to set the kid up for disaster. We want to set the kid up for success.” Teachers and administrators noted that transiency between known schools was not uncommon in districts experiencing frequent student transiency.

***3.3.2 Observation of transiency patterns and reasons for school change.*** Teachers and administrators noted that school transiency was difficult to predict. Students left school

for a variety of reasons but were reported to be more likely to do so due to socioeconomic factors. When patterns were identified, these were often in the spring and associated with evictions, as a state law in Vermont prohibits evictions in the winter. A lack of affordable housing or the condemnation of low-income housing were also perceived as significant factors in school transiency. Teachers and administrators noted that students in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) experienced significant challenges with school transiency. While the DCF and schools made an effort to protect students' access to a known school even when residential changes occurred, the distance and frequency of residential changes could make school stability difficult to achieve. Students experiencing homelessness were also frequently cited as a cause of school transiency. Teachers and administrators noted that the McKinney–Vento Act (NCHE, 2017) provided students with additional protections to remain in their school district despite economic and residential changes.

In some cases, the interviewees were aware of incidents including economic changes, such as parents' loss of employment, or family issues like child abandonment, changes in custody agreements, abuse, and drug use, as factors in the loss of residential stability and thus school transiency. As noted by a teacher in school experiencing relatively higher school transiency, many factors can impact student school transiency, "Occasionally they move out of the district for a new job opportunity. I guess also the past couple years, I've seen an increase in my awareness of parents who have been basically suffering from addiction and the children will be moving in with a grandparent or a family member or the custodial parent will have suffered or dealing with addiction move out of district for a fresh start."

When school transiency was frequent or school changes "bounced" between Vermont school districts, the interviewees considered this to be the result of frequent residential changes crossing school district lines. One school administrated noted the timing of school transiency was clearly indicative of a change of residence, potentially related to family economic challenges. "I would say [student's start school midyear in the] beginning of the month. The holidays time. We've also seen in late October when the campgrounds close."

Other suggested reasons included families moving to gain other advantages, such as living in a more suburban or rural area. In some cases, families found challenges in transportation such as the lack of public buses, the loss of a known nearby community, or employment opportunities to prompt a return to their former residential area. At times, students have experienced problems in the current school or in their personal lives, prompting a desire for school change.

***3.3.3 Value in school change.*** The teachers and administrators interviewed noted that they occasionally perceived advantages to school transiency. As noted, teachers and administrators spoke of families making changes to find a "fresh start" when they felt that school personnel and other students knew too much about their circumstances. This was reported to be due to the fear that the community might judge them unfairly. As noted by a teacher in an urban district, school transiency was sometimes prompted by a parent's belief that school change would be helpful stating, "parents didn't want them to be at our school anymore or they thought behavior issues would be different at another school".

The interviewees also noted that families might move to obtain services or resources that were unavailable in their current school district. Teachers and administrators reported that some families believed their current school district or residential area to be unsafe, prompting changes in residence and schools. In some cases, students were said to have left school districts when families moved out of or into Vermont to avoid the attention of child protection services in the area of their previous residence. Interviewees noted that parents may remove students from school and move to other areas to avoid contact with government agencies such as the Department of Children and Families (DCF). One administrator noted this was a known strategy that met with limited success, "if they're running away from DCF, Vermont, it's like, they're going to find you. We have had families from New Hampshire run away from DCF in New Hampshire and come to Vermont, and that doesn't generally cross state lines, so that piece does work".

***3.3.4 Classroom strategies***. Teachers and administrators reported the need to know as much as possible about students entering the school mid-year. This information included data about learning skills and qualitative information about students' life circumstances. The interviewees cited the value of knowing whether the move was voluntary and desired versus necessary or imposed. Factors such as family history and student exposure to trauma were noted to be important in the development of support for individual students. Students who moved in and out of the same district were said to be known; therefore, the teachers found developing effective learning plans for these students to be easier than for students from other states or countries, despite their frequent absences. The interviewees stated that

information about students was easier to obtain when they moved between Vermont school districts. However, when students came to school mid-year from other states or outside of the United States, the interviewees noted that academic records and personal information were more difficult to find.

Most of the interviewees noted that school guidance counselors and registrars were often the first to connect families to resources in the community and to obtain important information needed to place students appropriately. This was often a districtwide practice, although the process for disseminating information was reported to vary somewhat. Notice of the arrival of a new student was often short; students were often placed in classrooms less than 24 hours after the teacher had been notified. Sometimes, a student arrived on the morning that the teacher was made aware of the new student and before the teacher was provided with information about the student's academic and socioemotional needs. Based on the interviews with teachers and administrators, schools experiencing higher rates of transiency demonstrated more effective systems for obtaining information and sharing it with teachers before students' arrival.

Preparation before the arrival of a new student was cited by the interviewees as highly important. The interviewees noted that having time to create materials such as name tags, assigning peer groups, and considering classroom dynamics were critical to the success of incoming students and the support provided to their peers. When these requirements were met, the school was more able to acknowledge students and to allow them to perceive that they were both "seen" and welcome.

Students were most often integrated into schools using peer models for the incoming student. Peer modeling in the classroom consisted of assigning a student or a small cohort in the classroom to demonstrate expected behaviors and procedures. In some cases, teachers would reteach expectations to the entire class, perceiving the arrival of a new student as an opportunity to reinforce this learning in peers while integrating the new or returning student. Other strategies included assigning a peer as a "buddy" to follow the student throughout the day in all—or nearly all—classes, as well as unstructured time for a week to 10 days to provide the student with support in academic and social settings.

Once a student had entered the school, teachers and administrators noted that assessments would be completed to determine the student's present educational levels. This was considered to be more important when students' records were delayed or were incomplete. The interviewees noted that information from out-of-state school districts was often more likely to be delayed or to differ too significantly from Vermont school practices to be of use.

When asked, the teachers and administrators noted that both systemic interventions and classroom practices were valuable when integrating transient students and maintaining the stability of the learning environment for their peers. The importance of "meeting the student where they are" was often noted, as student needs varied from child to child and family to family. A blend of direct interventions and flexibility to allow students to find their own path in their new school was consistently noted as best practice. The teachers and administrators reported that while some practices worked for most students, understanding of age-appropriate development, trauma, and the impact of academic

learning gaps, as well as the ability to be flexible, are critical knowledge and skills for teachers working with students who experience school transiency. A teacher noted the following example during an interview: "when I know they're moving and I know so much is in flux at home, I try to just give them extra attention and extra support. Like for the little girl, she lost all her toys because they went to the shelter. She didn't bring them, and then somebody at the shelter stole her iPad. Things like that. She's trying to be tough and take care of her dad and take care of her brother, but just has way too much for [a child] going on…. [she could go to] the guidance counselor….. so, she could have breakfast with her, and we kind of made a plan to give her a little more support…"

When students provide notice that they expect to leave a school, the teachers and administrators noted the importance of creating opportunities for emotional closure for all students. Peers benefit from the ability to say goodbye, and transient students benefit from the acknowledgment that they will be missed by the group and welcomed back should they return. Some teachers noted brief leaving parties or the presentation of a memory book or signed card as important mementos.

Often, however, there is little or no notice of a school move. The interviewees noted that students might report impending residential moves that would result in school changes, but that this could continue for weeks or months without changes or confirmation from their parents. The teachers and administrators noted that the most certain indicator of change is a request for educational records from the receiving school. Occasionally, teachers and administrators in both rural and urban districted noted, a student leaves a

school abruptly and is “just gone” without any notice given to the school or classroom teacher.

***3.3.5 Special populations.*** The interviewees reported no perceived difference in the patterns or frequency of the arrival or departure of students with disabilities in schools compared to their typically developing peers. They noted that when the Educational Support Team (EST) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) team was in contact with their school before a student’s arrival, the student with disabilities was likely to be better known to the receiving school than their non-disabled peers. This advantage was said to be especially true when IEPs were well-developed to meet the student’s educational and socioemotional needs and when the documents arrived at the receiving school promptly. When the receiving school was unable to contact the sending school, when IEP documents were poorly written or arrived with a significant delay, students with disabilities were perceived to experience significant disadvantages due to the complexity of their needs and the delay in the provision of appropriate services and accommodations. Delays were said to extend for several months at times, and on rare occasions, receiving schools were unaware of the existence of an IEP until several weeks after the student had arrived. Delay in obtaining important information was often tied to poor communication with parents and sending schools:

> A teacher in a rural school district cited an example “[A student who] recently who came to me from other schools, who I didn’t know from anything that were on IEPs until almost a month into the school year. I would have no reason to suspect they were, quite honestly. It wasn’t until some odd conversations that I had. One was a

kid's pediatrician who said, I'm looking to renew the kid's prescription for something. Can I get a copy of his IEP? I say, what are you talking about?

All of the interviewees agreed that communication between individuals who know the student and those who will be providing future support is critical to the success of transient students with and without disabilities.

Communicating about students experiencing transiency was described by the interviewees as far easier when students transferred from within Vermont than when students arrived from other states. The way that IEPs are written and implemented differs significantly between states. Differences in services available to students also vary within Vermont. Students who move from a district where they were educated in a small setting with highly structured activities and limited access to general education classrooms may find that this setting does not exist in their new school district or that there is a significant waiting list to gain access. Students who found educational benefit in full inclusion with peers with well-developed supports may find that their receiving Vermont school does not have sufficient structures in place or staff trained to provide similar supports.

The importance of communication is not limited to sending and receiving schools, however. Classroom teachers reported high value in receiving copies of IEPs or summaries of needs before students' arrival or as soon after their arrival as possible. Teachers and administrators found that students with significant behavioral challenges or those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) rely heavily on consistent structures and expectations and experience significant losses of skills and opportunities for growth when

these supports are not available to them. They observed that students who have experienced frequent school transiency appeared to demonstrate a reluctance to trust teachers and peers in their new school. The teachers and administrators spoke of the importance of establishing trust with at least one adult in the school to integrate students into their new learning environment.

The teachers and administrators noted that some students find making friends to be challenging. They observed that school change requires students to find their place in a new social group, and frequent school transiency exacerbates this challenge. The interviewees were concerned that no all students with disabilities who do not have access to appropriate learning opportunities will experience loss of educational benefits due to delays caused by the need for repeated assessments and IEP development.

When asked about interventions for students with disabilities who are transient, the interviewed teachers and administrators were consistent in their belief that schools must meet the needs of children and families "where they are." In an interview, a teacher who works primarily with students with behavior challenges in an urban district defined the concept of meeting students where they are in the following terms, "our structure is our structure, and the general treatment in the behavioral programs that we have set up for this classroom never change. That remains constant, but an individual child's individual crisis management plan is fluid." The teacher noted that behavior plans must be flexible or "fluid" to meet the changing needs of students. This can be done by finding out what interests the student. "The challenge we see with new kids coming in that don't have skills, we find that a lot of times they are aversive to the other kids and

don't want to be with the other kids. A lot of times we have to do some work where we try to get them to build a sense of belonging. We do that through play where we take out the academic component and literally try to get them involved in something that is of interest to them. If they like basketball, for example, we'll have somebody play basketball with them. If they like to color, we'll have somebody get a giant coloring thing and have two people coloring together. We do anything we can to try to find what the kid wants to do, and we try to develop that sense of belonging long before we start with a more demanding schedule." There was a consistent perception among those interviewed that students required a sense of belonging, common interest, and acceptance to successfully transition into a new school.

The interviewees spoke about student exposure to trauma as a significant factor in developing a plan to meet student needs, regardless of whether a student was identified as having a disability. The analysis of student needs within the structure of a multidisciplinary team and parent involvement was said to provide the greatest benefit. However, this was most likely to occur when the student had a known disability and a well-defined IEP.

***3.3.6 Parent/school connections***. Parent involvement is a significant challenge for schools that support transient students. The interviewed teachers and administrators reported different experiences with parents of students with and without disabilities. In some cases, the parents of students with disabilities were strong advocates for their children, despite transiency, while others were disengaged. When parents become aware of a need to change their student's school, they may have the ability or resources to be selective. The family may choose where they live based on the resources available for their

child in a school district. A school administrator in a larger Vermont school district noted, "…people who are planning to move, who have means, are calling and searching the school districts. They're doing the phone ahead to see what are your special ed services." This is not true for many families, however. The administrator went on to share:

> I've seen the people who are more frequently mobile, or with lower income, who are either being evicted or moving out at the end of the month, because they can't afford the rent, and they're jumping to another housing or whatever. Almost, it's a little bit at times like pulling teeth to get the parents to do the stuff.

While parental engagement varied from family to family, most of those interviewed noted that participation in school activities was less consistent when students did not have known disabilities.

Schools experiencing frequent school transiency had the most systems in place to support students and families. These included systems that act as liaisons to community resources that provide food, material, and mental health needs. Schoolwide initiatives such as community dinners or other events providing meals were said to improve contact with the parents of transient students. In many cases, the parents of transient students were said to be difficult to contact due to factors such as the demands of employment or parents' perception that the school placement was temporary.

As with students, teachers and administrators noted that parents are more likely to engage with the school if there is a known person who they can trust. When students have additional challenges such as disabilities, the need for consistency in support was found to

be even more important. In an interview, a teacher stated, “I think it’s similar to that overwhelmed feeling and it’s almost in more ways. I have found that they kind of need a point person to know, "Okay, I can talk to this person, and there’s not going to be judgment, it’s just going to be like, I can tell them what I need to tell them or they can help me." Teachers and administrators noted that when students move away and come back to schools, the established relationships between school staff and parents are also sometimes lost. A teacher in a rural district observed, “after they moved, the social worker said he couldn’t take them back on. He was full, and so she didn’t have that same point person, and I don’t think for the rest of the school year, she really established who that was, and so I think that’s hard. I think building that trusting relationship with someone new is hard, and knowing that that person is going to stick up for your kid and do anything they can to help them. I think forming that relationship for students with special needs is a little bit harder.”

***3.3.7 Other factors.*** The teachers and administrators spoke about the need for schools to provide greater socioemotional and economic supports than in previous years. They noted the need to provide morning coffee for parents, meals to families, and mental health supports to students experiencing transiency. The interviewees believed that the social services usually required to provide these resources were overtaxed by demand and could not meet students’ needs in schools. This continued need has also placed demands on school systems, especially in areas where school transiency is most common.

The interviewees described schoolwide behavior programs, including Positive Behavior in Schools (PBiS), as providing significant benefit and consistent expectations within the current school setting. The teachers and administrators also spoke of the benefit

of professional development to understand the impact of trauma on child development. In addition, the interviewed special educators mentioned the benefit of common IEP-writing software, as, at present, some school districts use one program, while others use another option. When school districts use the same software, IEPs can be transmitted electronically, which results in instant access.

### 3.4 Summary

This study has demonstrated that school transiency has a significant impact on students' growth in schools. This is most apparent when school changes are due to undesirable socioeconomic factors, including trauma, loss of housing, or parents' loss of employment. The frequency of school transiency is believed to be an exacerbating factor, especially in students who require consistent structure in behavioral or academic supports. The information gathered in these interviews suggests the benefit of well-written IEPs as a significant advantage for students with disabilities. Strong communication and the analysis of needs by multidisciplinary teams have been shown to benefit students who experience school transiency. This is more likely to occur when students are identified as having disabilities. The structure of a student's IEP, the timely arrival of important documents, and access to appropriate services are critically important to provide educational benefit to transient students with disabilities. This research demonstrates that when systems for communication and appropriate documentation are available, students with disabilities are

well protected by having an IEP. When systems fail, however, students with disabilities are more likely than their typically developing peers to experience loss of educational benefit in transiency.

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# Chapter 4: Phase 2 – Students and Families

## 4.1 Interviews with Students and Families

Following the initial interviews with teachers and administrators, I proposed to explore the development of intervention strategies in greater depth through interviews with students and families. When reviewing the literature, I noted that student and parent voice had not been explored. I felt this gap was significant and appeared to me to be an obvious omission without explanation. Advocates representing marginalized groups have long held that policy and processes should not be created without the voice of those represented (Charlton, 2000). This is a strongly held value in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has created two indicators of successful special education practices, Indicator 4, (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A) and 1442) for early education and Indicator 8 (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A) and 1442) for K-12 education, explicitly expressing the need for parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.

In the literature, research exploring school transiency of students demonstrated no evidence of seeks to obtain input from those impacted. While the primary focus of previous research did not focus directly on those students with disabilities, students with and without disabilities were included. Given that my research does address students experiencing transiency with and without disabilities, it is not appropriate to omit my attempt to include student and parent voice. This phase of my research was intended to correct this apparent flaw in the research.

My goal was to explore the many facets of student transiency and the factors that contribute to the school experiences of transient youth. I proposed to meet with students and parents to ask questions that would explore how environmental conditions and the household structures of transient families contribute to the education of their children. I wanted to inquire into how relationships with teachers and peers are impacted by transiency. The perceptions about differences in academic rigor and support were to be important aspects of these interviews, as were schools' methods of engaging with parents. I had also intended to explore how stability impacts student engagement and perceived success (Leonard & Gudiño, 2016).

This portion of my research would have focused on student and parent responses. These responses would have informed the study of the practices that were believed to be effective in supporting transient students with atypical learning needs. I posited that students who present as new school enrollees require substantially different adult interactions in the school intake and registration processes, and present with different attendance patterns to non-transient students. Therefore, they likely also experience classroom teaching differently. A secondary objective of this research was to understand how school personnel and their related procedures contribute to these differences in educational experiences for transient students with disabilities from the perspectives of these students.

Following initial Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, I submitted requests to all Chittenden County special education directors to assist me in locating 16–20 appropriate candidates for my research. These candidates needed to have resided in Chittenden County during at least one transition, be 12–21 years old, and have experienced school transiency.

For this study, the students also needed to be in the custody of a parent. Despite reminders and discussions with special education directors in Chittenden County, no candidates were identified who wished to participate. Special education directors had identified teachers and administrators in the previous leg of my research, so I believe that they made a reasonable effort to do in this case. A revision of the study was submitted to the IRB to request broader permission to post notices in public places with my contact information to allow candidates to select themselves for participation. I also proposed that I approach and request that other agencies distribute information about my study. These agencies were selected by me as those likely to come in contact with the desired demographic. I requested the flexibility to distribute widely within the community in Chittenden County. I also amended my study to allow me to pay each participant dyad $50 when each interview with a parent and student was completed.

Despite several weeks of online and physical postings at more than 30 sites, I was unable to identify any participants for my study. These sites included agencies serving students with and without disabilities, notice boards in medical facilities, and community bulletin boards.

On one occasion, I engaged in a casual conversation in Burlington High School with students whom I believed to have experienced school transiency. These were students I had an established relationship with over many years. When I asked them why they thought that I had been unsuccessful in my efforts to find willing participants. The students voiced agreement that the topic was sensitive and embarrassing. They did not believe that students would be interested in participation, even with assurances of confidentiality, due to their desire not to be associated with a group of students who experienced this type of

transiency. This was further reinforced by two parents who initially expressed interest in participating in the study but withdrew because their children refused to participate.

## 4.2 Conclusion

Student and parent voice is an important component in research that explores the impact of educational practices designed to meet their needs. This is true for all students, including those with and without disabilities who are experiencing school transiency. There is no question that the loss of this data due to the inability to engage parents and families is a barrier to the deep understanding of their needs and the development of best practices. This chapter must not be omitted, however, due to the lack of the desired data. Given the value placed on parent involvement in the training of education professionals, especially those in special education, the omission of the attempt to obtain the data would be glaringly obvious to anyone in the field working with students with disabilities, causing them to doubt the authenticity of the research structure. This researcher has no desire to minimize the importance of this fundamental value by not disclosing the failed attempt to obtain this information.

## 4.3 References

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# Chapter 5: Phase 3 – Focused Interviews with Teachers and Administrators

## 5.1 Purpose of the Study

Following my unsuccessful attempt to obtain input from students and parents, I returned to the teachers and administrators I had interviewed in the first phase of my study. Using a focused interview model, I explored why the interviews with students and parents had failed, the teachers' and administrators' views on the relative impact of trauma and ACEs on students, and whether they had had additional thoughts regarding transiency since the interviews conducted more than two years previously.

Of the original 16 teachers and administrators interviewed, 11 were available for a follow-up interview. Each interview was conducted by telephone, consisted of seven questions, and lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. The previously interviewed teachers and administrators were located in several school districts throughout Vermont.

## 5.2 Research Questions

Following a review of the research conducted over the last several decades, the question of the efficacy of interventions for transient students remains elusive, particularly for transient students with disabilities. The aim of this research was to provide greater clarity regarding the causes of transiency, noting differences among those with and without disabilities, to determine whether schools ought to consider different interventions based on these causes. This portion of the study was guided by three main questions:

- The literature does not address the perspectives of parents and students on transiency and what educational and social resources or interventions are effective for them based on their experiences. What might be the cause of this lack of important data?
- To what extent do teachers and administrators believe that ACEs and trauma are factors that impact transiency?
- To what extent do teachers and administrators view school transiency as a barrier to student and parent community engagement?

In this portion of the study, I applied a focused ethnographic design. I contacted all of the previously interviewed teachers and administrators located throughout Vermont. Based on the questions that developed from the previous research and especially due to the lack of parent and student input, I developed an interview protocol of seven questions (see Appendix B) to help to determine whether any important information might have been missed during the first phase of interviews with teachers and administrators.

## 5.3 Analytical Approach

***5.3.1 Procedures.*** As in the previous interviews, I developed a semi-structured interview protocol and used this consistently to ensure uniformity in the data collected. In this phase of the study, each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. Each interview was recorded with the verbal consent of the person being interviewed and the district administration's approval. Written consent was not requested in this study. All interviews

were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were coded to protect the identity of the interviewees. No identifying information was used when analyzing the results of the interviews. Finally, all data were maintained in digital format and password-protected.

***5.3.2 Site and participant selection description and rationale.*** The same five school districts were selected as in the previous phase of this study. These were originally selected based on population density, differences in community socioeconomics, and the known fluctuation of student populations in schools. I approached the same teachers and administrators as interviewed previously. Of the original 16 individuals interviewed, 11 were available and agreed to discuss topics in a follow-up interview. I was able to complete the 11 interviews, all of which were voluntary.

***5.3.3 Data analysis.*** Qualitative data were categorized by observations of teachers' subjective perceptions of the impact of trauma and ACEs on students experiencing transiency with and without disabilities. This brief follow-up interview focused on how students were impacted by these adverse events in the context of transiency. I continued to explore the possible differences in impact on students who also have a known disability. This portion of my research was also intended to determine whether the teachers and administrators interviewed had insight into why students and parents experiencing transiency did not participate in interviews to share their own perspectives on social and

academic supports are effective for them in public school. Finally, we discussed the innovations or supports, if any, that had been developed in schools since we last spoke.

As in the previous study, the interviews with the teachers and administrators were transcribed and input into the qualitative analysis tool, NVivo. The data were separated into categories consistent with the interview protocol and collated by category. Subsequently, the data were reviewed for the consistency (and inconsistency) of the responses and to identify any unexpected results.

## 5.4 Findings

***5.4.1 Protections afforded by IEPs.*** In the first phase of the study, the teachers and administrators spoke about the value of well-written IEPs and strong interdisciplinary teams in supporting students with disabilities who are experiencing transiency. This finding was supported in the third phase of the study. The interviewees spoke of the importance of a comprehensive evaluation to inform the development of students' IEPs. A teacher in an urban school district expressed this concern by saying, "[a] lot of places do not put the same emphasis on deeply diving into the child's disability in order to provide all the services that a child is entitled to when properly evaluated." The teachers and administrators stated that students with disabilities are better supported when transitioning between Vermont schools than when coming to Vermont schools from another state. Those interviewed stated that these transitions between Vermont schools are often less difficult, even when documents may lag behind students' arrival, because the schools share information. However, a common concern expressed across school districts was the inconsistency of evaluation processes and IEP quality from other states

and within Vermont. An administrator of a small urban district observed, “if they have a disability and they’re on an IEP, then that IEP is really going to spell out what they need and that shouldn’t change when they go to a new school. However, we have gotten students on IEP where that IEP does not reflect what we’re currently seeing with that student, mostly out of state students. IEPs are different in every state. And we’ll reevaluate them. So, we’ll start the process over if we need to, to make sure that the student is getting what they need”.

The overall view of the interviewees was the belief that the existence of an IEP, whether written well or poorly and whether delayed or not, draws the attention of teachers to the individual needs of a student more than when a child does not have one. One interviewee in a rural district observed, “I think the fact that students have been identified as having a disability means we are more likely to be paying attention quickly”.

Teachers and administrators spoke of their perception, based on observation, that students who experience transiency also appear to have IEPs more often than their non-transient peers. They spoke of increased levels of mental illness and emotional disturbance among students who experience school transiency.

***5.4.2 Understanding the efficacy of interventions.*** When educating students who are experiencing transiency, teachers and administrators must determine the most effective teaching methods. In the interviews, the teachers and administrators spoke of challenges in determining effective methods for transient youth, as they believed that nothing is universally appropriate. The interviewees stated that multidisciplinary teams

were more likely to be able to "meet students where they are" and individualize supports within the school system. When asked how educators know what works best for transient students, a teacher in a school district experiencing high rates of school transiency expressed, "actually I don't. I mean, I'm going to be honest. What I do know is that I work with an experienced seasoned staff, and we have some metrics that we use right from the first week. We have structures in place so that, for instance, when a new student arrives with or without an IEP, we immediately start to look for some data. We assign a peer for that student. We have a once-a-week guidance meeting. I work with a team, and we all bring our notes. So we're very proactive."

Ultimately, both administrators and teachers observed that the demonstration of growth over time is the most reliable measure of educational benefit. Student learning can be a more challenging measure when students move between schools, as there are significant variations in curriculum standards and assessment methodologies, even for students with the support of an IEP. Teachers and administrators spoke about the value of seasoned and well-trained staff who have experience with transient students. The availability of staff with this background in any given school was considered to be a significant variable both in measuring efficacy and providing educational benefit.

When discussing how they knew that learning was effective for transient students with disabilities, the educators consistently spoke of the value of a comprehensive, well-written evaluation of each student to inform the student's IEP. When an IEP was written in such a way that it described a student's learning profile and previously observed effective learning strategies, the student could be effectively integrated into the learning

community. When an IEP was delayed or omitted parts of these important descriptors, the IEP team lost time in reevaluating and using ineffective interventions, resulting in the loss of educational opportunities. This was clearly more problematic when students were frequently transient.

***5.4.3 ACEs and trauma***. Many school districts in Vermont are training staff to better understand the impact of trauma on students' academic and emotional development. The teachers and administrators in this study spoke about their increasing understanding of their students in a more holistic manner than in the past. They voiced frustration at having little or no ability to influence the ongoing struggles of students after school hours and their awareness that even historical trauma can impact current learning. The educators spoke about the "layering" of impact on students in schools, noting that the ACEs that result in trauma have an exacerbating effect on transient students. An educator in an urban school district observed, " [There are students] that are transient and have had trauma and some who have not, although the majority have. And the trauma history makes it so hard sometimes for them to engage in any kind of learning or build any kind of trust that sometimes it can just take such a long time to get through that. And then to have the instability, particularly with kids that might have reactive attachment disorder, those are the kids that I think transiency is a double whammy."

The educators felt that students with disabilities are not more likely to experience trauma or ACEs, but that the impact of such experiences may be greater than in their peers without disabilities, as the trauma appears to create greater challenges to academic and socioemotional growth. As observed by a teacher in a rural district, "I think that they

need explicit interventions to be successful. I think we have to look at it like all kids need different things, and if a kiddo has moved from district to district, I think that they do need more connections and more intentional connections, I guess, in the school community and adults that really put in a little additional effort and spend time developing those relationships so they can feel connected and safe." The interviewees noted that students who experience trauma were often difficult to connect with due to overt behavioral challenges or disconnection and unwillingness to engage with adults or peers. They believed this to be accurate because students who had experienced trauma or ACEs were harder to engage in learning. As with previous observations, transient students with disabilities who are also experiencing trauma were described as being better protected by a well-written IEP, but when the IEP was insufficient due to a lack of clarity of needs and known interventions, a great deal of time could be lost in creating an effective learning program.

The teachers and administrators spoke about the necessity of adults making intentional connections to students who experience transiency and the importance of awareness of the confounding implications of trauma and ACEs in all students in the community. The interviewees noted that holistic and intentional methods of reaching out and educating students were critical. The interviewees also noted the importance of engaging families whenever possible to build emotional investment and practical relationships, which result in better connections to the learning community.

***5.4.4 Student integration.*** When newly or returning transient students join a school mid-year, routines have often already been established. The interviewed teachers

and administrators noted that a large part of the work of integrating students into the community is developing arriving students' understanding of expectations and procedures. As in the first phase of interviews, the interviewees spoke of the value of assigning a peer or "buddy" to help a new student to learn school schedules and the implicit school culture. The educators noted that transient students are also less likely to have access to the internet on cell phones or in the home. The lack of these resources may make the completion of homework assignments challenging and create barriers to notification of school events.

Schools that have highly transient student populations demonstrated greater awareness of the impact of transiency. The teachers and administrators of these schools spoke of embedded practices within the school community that support this known and dynamic population. A special educator shared a useful strategy stating, "The way I personally operate is to just make sure that I have personal contact with the parents or guardians. I have positive relationships with students so that they are comfortable. They feel safe and secure in the school." While they rarely knew whether these practices were districtwide, the educators spoke of the availability of counselors who could address the socioemotional needs of their students, as well as their awareness of resources within the community to share with families.

***5.4.5 Lack of student and parent interviews data.*** In an earlier phase of this research study, I proposed to interview students who experienced school transiency and their parents in order to include the voices of those impacted. Despite significant outreach and financial incentives for participants, I was unable to identify a student and parent

who were willing to participate.

In the third phase of my research, I asked the interviewed teachers and administrators why they thought I had been unsuccessful. Their answers revealed several significant factors (Figure 3). While some of the interviewees were surprised by the lack of family participation, suggesting that the study was too narrow in scope and had missed participants, most agreed that parents' and students' fear of being judged by their community and peers was likely a significant factor in their unwillingness to participate. The educators felt that unless they had a relationship with the students, it was unlikely they would open up about their experiences. The administrators noted that parents had been known to fail to disclose living arrangements to schools out of fear that the school would collude with the DCF to remove their children from the home if information about the causes of this transiency were revealed, despite reassurance to the contrary. One administrator summed up this sentiment in the following way:

> I think there's just that lack of trust for most of those families. I would say all of the experience I've had with kiddos that are in this population, unfortunately, and I feel so weird generalizing, but I think a lot of the families that I've dealt with, they're just not trusting of anyone in positions of power that they feel are over them in any way. That they've had a lot of involvement with DCF and I think that there's just that fear, there's that internal fear of something's going to happen if I say anything.

This observation underscores the need for known trusted relationships. While school transiency appears to be quite visible, as students enter school at nontraditional times during the school year, parents and students both appear to feel the need to protect

themselves against unwanted intrusion into their privacy. Thus parental trust, or the lack of this trust, with organizations, both the school and even a university, appear to be a strong factor in their unwillingness to discuss family residential and school changes.

The interviewed teachers and administrators also spoke about their own lack of awareness of which students were at risk of school transiency. They felt this was, at least in part, due to the lack of disclosure by students and families. They further posited that students were likely to be embarrassed by school transiency and the reasons for the change. Conversely, some educators believed that some school transiency might be considered a normal part of life by both students and families and, therefore, not something about which they were sufficiently concerned about to participate in the study.

In an attempt to analyze the observations from the Vermont educators interviewed in this phase exploring the reasons I was unable to include the voices of students experiencing school transiency and their parents, I developed a fishbone diagram or Ishikawa diagram which is intended to determine the cause and effect of a specific problem as part of a root cause analysis. This method is used to find the causes of failures within systems or projects. The diagram has the appearance of a fish's skeleton. The problem is in the head of the fish and the causes of the problem are entered into the spine (CCSD, 2012).

In figure 3 below, I placed the problem "student and parents did not participate in the research study in the head of the fishbone diagram." Since the interviewees spoke of the students' and parents' likely fear of judgement, possible normalization due to

frequent transiency and the fear of loss due to government intervention, such as DCF, I entered these concerns under Parents and Students on the spine of the diagram. Those interviewed also believe the target participants resisted participation due to the perceived belief or hope that schools and government agencies may be unaware of their transiency.

As the researcher, I believe it is possible the program design may have missed participants due to the narrow focus of the design, which excluded students in state custody or New Americans or insufficient offer of incentives. These changes to development of the student/parent interview pool would certainly introduce variables that might be challenging to analyze, however.

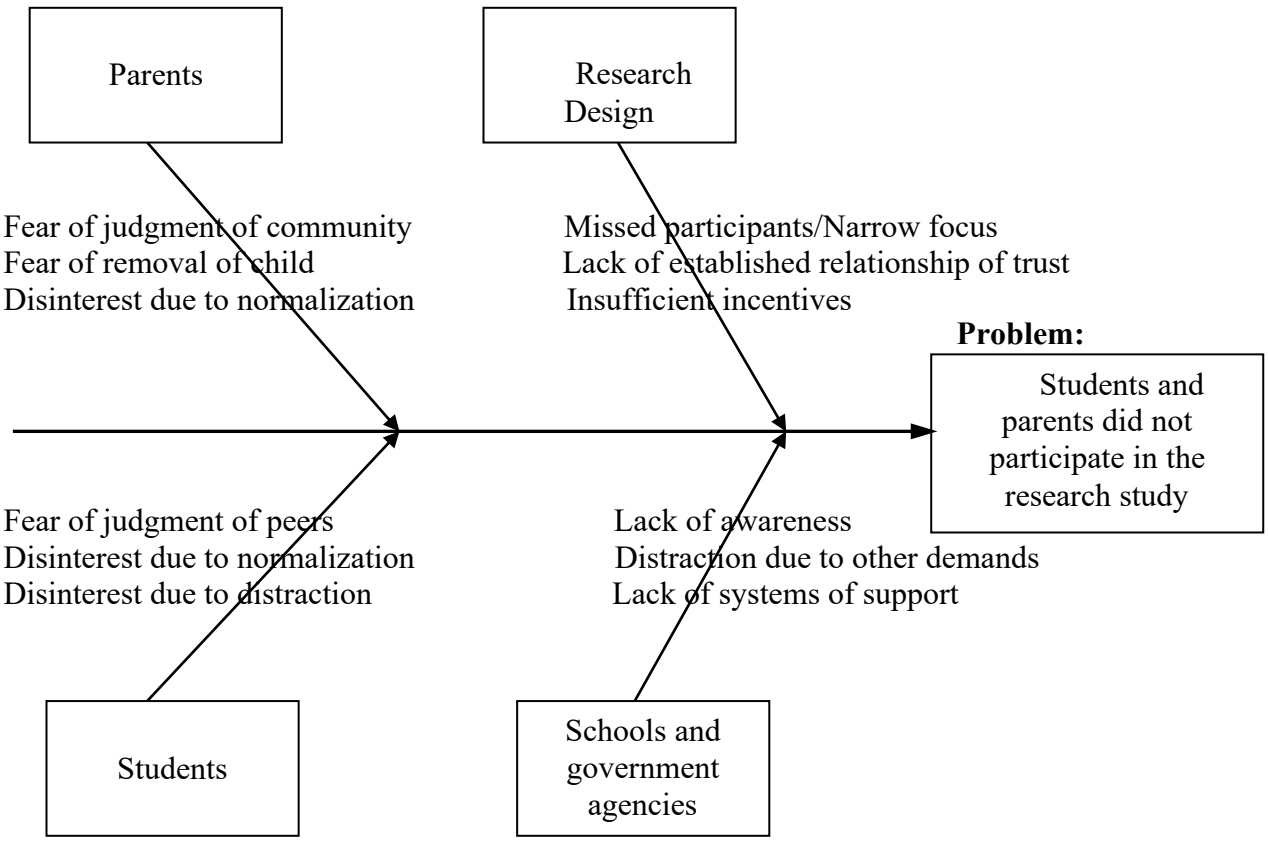


Figure 3. Fishbone diagram of reasons for the failure of the student/parent interviews.

***5.4.6 New interventions.*** When asked about new strategies that had been implemented since the previous interview, many participants mentioned the support of district-based homelessness liaisons who coordinated resources to provide children with transportation to school from new housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019). They also discussed the Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care federal regulations, which require agreements between districts to provide educational stability, including permitting students to remain in school despite changes in residency and providing transportation (Vermont Agency of Education, n.d.). Students in state custody are eligible for school stability protection, requiring teams to review Best Interest Determination or to engage in a Stability Agreement between schools. When discussing Best Interest Determination or Stability Agreements for students in state custody, one educator shared, "Chances are, if the student is homeless or transient, then there's some DCF involvements. We try to get that going as often as possible to make sure that there is some connection between all the agencies and to make sure that it isn't ... So, what are you doing, and what are you doing, and what are you doing?" These supports were frequently cited as significant supports that reduced school transiency.

***5.4.7 Outreach to prevent transiency.*** Most of the interviewees noted no known new district-level interventions intended to reduce or mitigate the impact of transiency on families, but many spoke about informal outreach strategies. Several interviewees spoke of home visits to temporary housing as an effective way to increase the connections of

schools to students and families. They also recommended family events and outreach sessions that included meals and the distribution of other necessities, such as clothing. The interviewed teachers noted that offering coffee during parent meetings was a positive strategy for building connections between schools and the parents of students experiencing school transiency. Piecemeal, and informal outreach efforts were consistently stressed. Educators also spoke of the challenges in meeting student and family needs in a holistic manner. While they consistently expressed the conviction that family outreach was important, they also felt their personal resources were spread too thinly. One teacher observed, "Sometimes I don't know what my role is. As a special educator I'm like, Am I a counselor? Am I a social worker? What am I doing and what is the line that I shouldn't cross?". In this sense, a lack of confidence over formal strategies for intervention was identified by many as a leading reason for their piecemeal and informal approach.

**5.5 Summary**

This portion of the study confirmed the finding that well-written IEPs that are presented to teams in receiving schools provide additional support to students with disabilities who are experiencing transiency. This support is greater than that enjoyed by non-disabled students and significantly greater than students with disabilities who have insufficient information in their IEP or whose IEP is delayed and information is not available to the receiving school. The interviewed teachers and administrators spoke of the impact of trauma and ACEs on students with and without disabilities, noting that these factors decreased peers' and teachers' ability to connect with students. They

commented on the benefit of their increased understanding due to trauma training provided to them in their schools.

The teachers and administrators were generally unsurprised that parents and students were not interested in participating in this research study, stating that embarrassment and fear of the loss of parental rights might have been significant contributing factors. Other reasons that parents and students might not have been willing to participate include the normalization of school transiency within some families.

The interviewed teachers and administrators spoke of personal and institutionalized interventions to prevent school transiency, such as support from homelessness liaisons or stabilization regulations intended to support students in state custody. The interviewees recommended that school staff make personal contact through home visits or hold school events that provide food and other necessities, though they were concerned about overstepping the boundaries of their professional roles.

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# Chapter 6: Implications and Recommendations

## 6.1 Summary and Discussion of the Results

This research was primarily focused on determining whether students with disabilities are more likely to experience academic loss due to school transiency, as suggested by the literature in this field. The results were significant in that the study demonstrated significant protection provided by Individualized Education Program (IEP) when well developed. Students were further protected when multidisciplinary teams worked together to transition students and included parent and student input whenever possible. Students with poorly written IEPs or those without documentation of their academic and social learning experienced significant risk of loss of educational benefit.

The findings of this study demonstrated that students with disabilities who have a well-written IEP enjoyed greater protection than their non-disabled peers, students with disabilities with a poorly written IEP, or students with disabilities for whom records are delayed, or no information, was provided to receiving schools.

This research demonstrated the value of collaborative interdisciplinary teams in the development of students' evaluations and the documentation of effective educational strategies for students with disabilities. When well-written documents arrived in a student's new school promptly, the student was better served than a student who had a poorly developed IEP or a student who did not have a disability. When these documents failed to describe the student's needs or did not arrive at the receiving school promptly, significant time was lost in developing effective strategies to meet the student's needs. The research findings demonstrate that transient students with disabilities are best served

when parents are able to provide timely information about impending school changes and when the sending and receiving schools work collaboratively to provide continuity of services with as little delay as possible. The involvement and advocacy of parents were also considered those interviewed to be significant factors in students' success.

The phenomenon of school transiency has many causes. These include, but are not limited to, residential instability, economic change, changes in child custody, and parental choice. School transiency can occur throughout the school year. Some Vermont school districts/supervisory unions experience greater school transiency than others. School transiency appears to be more common in school districts/supervisory unions where low socioeconomic conditions and a lack of affordable housing are more prevalent. Parents may relocate to follow employment opportunities or improve their living conditions, resulting in school transiency for their children. Parents may also change residences in order to obtain perceived improvements in educational opportunities for their children.

Additional findings included the benefit of training teachers and administrators in understanding students who are experiencing trauma and ACEs. The negative impacts of trauma and ACEs were not limited to students experiencing school transiency but were considered to be exacerbating factors or additional "layers" of impact in limiting social and academic learning for students experiencing school transiency with and without disabilities.

In both phases of interviews with teachers and administrators, the interviewees spoke of the value of understanding and educating all students based on current needs, which is why the interviewees valued well-documented student needs in the IEPs of

students with disabilities who were experiencing school transiency. These documents address student needs holistically and clearly, thus allowing the implementation of appropriate interventions in a timely manner.

The teachers and administrators discussed the lack of parent and student participation in this study. Most agreed that students experiencing school transiency were unlikely to participate in this research due to their desire to protect their privacy. The interviewees believed that this was likely the case for parents as well, but also posited that parents might be fearful of losing their parental rights and the removal of their children from their home if they revealed information about the reasons for their children's school transiency. The loss of this data is significant and should be considered when developing action plans or interventions based on this and other research regarding the needs of transient students with or without disabilities.

Each phase of this study demonstrated the value of teacher and administrator outreach to students and families to build personal connections. Such outreach could include home visits, transportation to school or events, school events offering meals and other necessities, and individual discussions over coffee. There is a notable finding of impact on the teacher's role, however. Educators expressed concern that their role was ill defined. They expressed concern about crossing boundaries into the privacy of families and the lack of clarity or limitation of their role as teachers and administrators.

***6.1.1 Comparison of the findings with the literature.*** The literature demonstrated the impact of school transiency on students in urban communities. An early study, conducted with a similar ethnography methodology, was completed within one school.

The school had a high school transiency rate which was consistent and demonstrated clear patterns related to parent employment (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). The present study examined the causes and impact of school transiency in several rural and semi-urban communities in Vermont. Vermont school districts do not experience the same level of transiency or the same consistency as the school in the Lash and Kirkpatrick study (1990). While Vermont communities demonstrated characteristics unique to this area, including the lack of clearly predictable patterns of school transiency, many commonalities were found between them and the larger urban communities analyzed in the literature. Common factors included the impact of socioeconomic status on school transiency and parental choice to seek perceived improvements in living or educational opportunities as demonstrated in the research of Coley & Kull, (2016). While this study did not find consistency in the pattern or timing for the arrival or departure of transient students, this research found that students were more likely to be transiency at certain times of the year, consistent with housing instability, such as spring housing evictions. Though mentioned in other studies, such as Coley & Kull (2016) and Osher, Morrison & Bailey (2003), the present study clearly defined the need for school-based interdisciplinary teams to track and adjust programs to meet the needs of students. This study found that parent involvement and advocacy, and school staff understanding of the impacts of trauma and ACEs on student growth could be extrapolated as necessary for all students experiencing school transiency and not limited to those with disabilities.

Vermont schools that had experienced more frequent student transiency were more likely to have developed systems to support them. These range from simple practices such as the use of assigning peers as a “buddy” to use of school systemic

supports that include guidance counselors and administrative interventions. Rather than suggesting placing the onus on the families or students to share detailed information with the schools (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990), this study finds that students demonstrated academic and social gains when the schools were responsible for having systems in place to support transient students. Often, however, this study revealed that teacher professional development was instrumental in the development of empathy in school staff, which lead to individualized outreach. Notably, teachers expressed their concern with understanding the boundaries of their own role as a result.

This research found similar results to the literature that families with good support systems were more likely to result in students who were more successful in a new school environment. However, the previous research spoke of improved family economic status, improved school neighborhoods or involved medical homes (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014), while this research found that instead of relying on external factors exclusively, school systems can be developed to benefit transient students through family outreach. This research found that when schools intentionally develop inclusive communities with family outreach, students are more likely to trust the new school system they have entered.

An important finding in this study was that students with disabilities were not more likely to experience loss of educational benefit due to transiency. This research found that students with disabilities are more likely to benefit from well-developed IEPs and interdisciplinary school-based teams that act in the interest of the transient student. This is a new finding not addressed in the literature. Previous research does address the need for well-developed systems for assessment of students who experience school

transiency (Mutch, Rarere, & Stratford, 2011). In this study, the need for comprehensive and appropriate assessment was found to be true as well, but the practice was more often found to occur when students were known to eligible for special education under IDEA. This study found that students with poorly developed IEPs were subjected to assessments that might not be necessary due to lack of sufficient information to develop plans. When students were not known to have been identified with a disability despite having had an IEP in the previous school or did not have a disability, the student was more often not specifically evaluated or evaluation to address disabilities was significantly delayed.

The literature addresses the value of social workers and other key school-based roles in supporting students (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). This research shared this finding and the observation that empowering parents can improve academic achievement; however, this study found that parent and student supports must be ongoing, particularly when students do not have access to basics, such as housing, food, technology or internet services. Basic needs and the development of trusting relationships were shown to be key factors in the success of students experiencing transiency. In fact, we know from this research and the literature that families may choose school transiency as a means to improve access to school based resources or housing (Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003). In this study, teachers and administrators noted that since resources may differ from school district to school district, parents may select school districts that can provide the specific programs or services they wish their child to have. This confirms the need for consistency and constancy of supports, which may foster school stability and the development of relationships between families, students and school staff. These relationships may prevent future transiency and increase academic success.

Strong school-based relationships may also foster resilience in students who experience trauma or ACEs (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014). The literature demonstrates improved school engagement and possibly mitigation of ACEs on students. This research did not find that transient students were or were not more likely to experience trauma or ACEs, but this research did find that students who are experiencing school transiency experience a "layering effect", which might amplify the challenges their experience with trauma or ACEs. The teachers and administrators in this study posited that the impact on student development, when the student with a disability experiences trauma, ACEs, and then experiences school transiency would more greatly impede student learning and the development of relationships with teachers and peers.

None of the previous studies addressed student and parent input in their research projects. Special education advocates have expressed the moral obligation of those in power to include the voice of people with disabilities (Charlton, 2000). Therefore, this research intentionally included the process used to develop a study with input from students and parents, despite the lack of data. The purpose of doing so was to demonstrate that student and parent input was considered important in this study and not omitted due to lack of awareness of the importance of representing the voices of those who are the focus of this research.

***6.1.2 Limitations.*** This study was conducted in six Vermont school districts/supervisory unions. While the number of represented districts was limited, I believe that this study can inform school districts and supervisory unions across Vermont and similar semi-urban/rural states. The school districts/supervisory unions selected were

located in the northern, central and southern Vermont areas and represented known affluent and low socioeconomic areas in the state. While I believe an appropriate cross section was included in the study, not all Vermont school districts/supervisory unions were represented.

New Americans were not represented in this research, though this group is known to demonstrate school transiency. Students in state custody and foster care families were not included when attempting to obtain information about effective school-based practices and family supports. As noted in the body of findings, no students or family input was included due to the researcher's inability to engage them in the study.

***6.1.3 Implications for the field***. The findings in this research will impact practice in the field as important actionable steps have been defined.

- Practitioners can ensure students with disabilities are well supported by Individualized Educational Program (IEP) that are well written based on comprehensive evaluations and that arrive at the receiving school in a timely manner.
- Practitioners can ensure improved outcomes by making early contact between sending and receiving school staff to improve learning outcomes for all transient students including those with and without disabilities.
- School Districts can make every effort to promote parent engagement and advocacy as this continues to be of significant value to improve student learning outcomes

- The State of Vermont and school districts can ensure use of Best Interest Determination documentation with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) allowing students in state custody school stability.
- State agencies and school districts can work toward consistency and capacity of services for students experiencing mental health challenges to limit waitlists and resource shortages.

***6.14 Recommendations for further research.*** Given the importance of the voice of the individuals most affected by practices and regulations, I strongly recommend future attempts to interview students and parents to determine the impact of school transiency on their lives. This may be facilitated by broadening the scope of the research to include students in foster care, English learners, and other underrepresented groups.

Additional research resulting in the development of specific educational and social support strategies to mitigate the impact of transiency on student academic and socioemotional growth would also support teachers and administrators in providing holistic learning opportunities.

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## Appendix A: Teacher and Administrator Interview Protocol and Verbal Consent, Phase 1

The purpose of this research project is to determine the impact of residential and school transiency on students with disabilities. Transiency is defined as movement and enrollment from one school to another during the school year for reasons other than school promotion. The research questions address transient populations generally but maintain a focus on the experiences of students with disabilities as told by school personnel. The primary research questions concern how the experiences of transient students differ among general and special education populations, and whether school personnel observe and respond differently to these two student populations. Data are drawn from interviews with school administrators and teachers across multiple school districts in Vermont. Each interview is expected to last approximately one hour. The interviews will be recorded with the consent of the people being interviewed.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

### Demographics

I would like to ask you for a brief background statement about your education career.

How long have you been a classroom teacher at this school? What other subjects or grade levels have you taught?

### Experience with Transiency

I am going to ask a set of questions about your knowledge of—and experiences with—mobile or transient students.

1) In a typical year, how many new students joined your class after the start of the school year?

2) Do new students typically join your class/school at a particular time of year? Is there a pattern to these arrivals?

3) In a typical year, how many students withdraw from your class? Is there a pattern to these arrivals?

4) When you meet a student, what do you do to learn about the reasons for their move? Is this information valuable to you and if so, why?

5) What types of issues, such as with family, neighborhoods, or houses, appear to stimulate school changes?

**Classroom Strategies**

1) Do you receive advance notice that a new student is going to join your class? If yes, how are you informed? Is this pattern the same when students depart?

2) What do you like to know about a new student entering your classroom? Where do you seek that information?

3) How do you integrate new students into the normal routine of your [classroom or school]?

4) How do you help new students to integrate into the classroom [or school] and make friends?

5) If you work individually with a new student, how do you organize class time for the other students?

**Special Populations**

This set of questions is about transient students with disabilities.

1) Do students with disabilities experience transiency differently than other transient students? If yes, how so?

2) When a new student has a disability, do you receive a copy of the IEP and/or meet with the assigned special educator before the student attends class for the first time?

3) Do you vary how you teach transient students depending on whether or not they are disabled? If yes, how do your teaching practices differ?

4) Do you ever think about the fact that a transient student may move again? Does that impact how you work with them?

5) What do you need to do to integrate a student into your classroom after the start of the school year? Do these practices vary depending on whether or not the student is classified as disabled?

6) Upon enrolling in a class, what are the typical social and relational issues that transient students face? Is this the same for students with disabilities?

7) Upon enrolling in a class, what are the typical educational issues that transient students face? Do you think that these educational issues differ for students with disabilities?

8) Do you notice any particular behavioral patterns or issues for transient students? Are their attendance patterns different? Do these differ from those of their disabled peers?

9) How do students who begin school mid-year impact the classroom environment? Can you give some examples of how they have impacted your classroom on a peer-to-peer level?

10) Do parents of transient school children seem to interact differently with teachers than their more stable peers? Do the parents of transient and disabled students differ in their interactions with you or the school?

## Appendix B: Teacher and Administrator Interview Protocol and Verbal Consent, Phase 2

### Interview Protocol

The purpose of this research project is to determine the impact of residential and school transiency on students with disabilities. Transiency is defined as movement and enrollment from one school to another during the school year for reasons other than school promotion. The research questions address transient populations generally but maintain a focus on the experiences of students with disabilities as told by school personnel. The primary research questions concern how the experiences of transient students differ among general and special education populations, and whether school personnel observe and respond differently to these two student populations. Data are drawn from interviews with school administrators and teachers across multiple school districts in Vermont. Each interview is expected to last approximately one hour. The interviews will be recorded with the consent of the people being interviewed.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

1) When we met in the previous interview, we discussed student transiency and its impact on students with and without disabilities. Some of those interviewed felt that students with disabilities were better protected in transiency due to having an IEP, while others felt that since IEPs often lagged behind students' arrival, they offered limited or no support to students. What is your current view of this issue?
2) As a teacher or administrator, how do you know you are providing effective interventions for students who experience disabilities?

3) Do you believe that trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have an impact on students who experience transiency? Do you believe that this impact is different than for students who do not experience transiency?
4) Do you feel that transient students should be permitted to "blend in" to the school environment or do you feel that explicit intervention is necessary for success?
5) Since we last met, I attempted to interview students and families about their experiences with school transiency but was unsuccessful. Do you have any insight into why that might have been?
6) Since we last spoke, have additional interventions or methods for student supports been introduced in your school?
7) Has your school or school district developed explicit outreach programs or methods to engage parents who are not engaged in the school's culture?