
Book Review
Student Mobility:
Creating an Environment for Social and Academic Success
by Jane Stavem

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Jane Stavem defines student mobility as “...movement in or out of a given school during the course of a school year” (p. 11) for reasons beyond grade placement or advancement. Stavem spends the first few chapters reviewing student mobility and its impact on public schools in the United States. She spends the middle chapters discussing what she refers to as the “ins and outs” of different points of consideration for schools, teachers, and administrators when working with mobile students. Another chapter draws on the experiences of four administrators who work in districts ranging from rural to urban. She provides a list of essential questions based on each chapter, scenarios for group discussions, and a “Mobility Action Plan Framework” to wrap up her book.

Stavem is the associate superintendent of instruction for the Lincoln Public Schools system in Nebraska. This is a district that, in 2015, had nearly 40,000 students. She’s currently serving as an Advisory Board Member for Lied Center for the Performing Arts, Board of Directors for the Junior of Achievement of Lincoln, and Member Board of Directors for Educare of Lincoln. Previously, she was the Superintendent of Schools for Blaire Community Schools, a rural district in Nebraska. She also served as a principal and Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Columbus Public Schools in Nebraska.

Stavem (2014) suggests that “the problem [of student mobility] has not been on our educational radar...[because] the epidemic has been growing silently but steadily and it is only beginning to reach the critical mass required to capture the attention of national policy makers” (p. 63).

I recently taught in a school in Austin ISD that had a 24% mobility rate with 656 students. This meant 160 students did not start or stay in the same school over the course of one year. The issue of student mobility has definitely reached “critical mass” in many high needs schools in the Austin area.

However expanding, pervasive, and critical this issue may be, it seems that it is avoided by many because of the seemingly untouchable nature of the issue. Stavem (2014) articulates the purpose of her book when she states, “Knowing we have little control over the endless revolving door for students who come and go from school to school...we have to begin focusing on the things we can control. What can be controlled are the processes schools use to manage student mobility over time, to provide consistency and quality of services to students and families... schools can support the movement with solid systems that are followed with fidelity.” (p. 2).

Many educators may circumvent this critical issue because of its roots in students’ home lives. However, Stavem (2014) gives the reader hope that the effects of student mobility can be minimized and quality of education for all can be improved through systematic conversations, strategies, and practices.

The primary focus of her book is providing district and campus administrators, as well as classroom teachers, with a toolbox of systems, processes, and strategies that minimize the deleterious impact of high student mobility, both for the mobile student and the teachers of mobile students. This book does fall short in providing statistical information or data on the topic of student mobility. However, it does contain a bevy of points to consider, practices to implement, systems to promote, and strategies to perfect for those affected by student mobility. This is a practical-application book best read by practicing educators looking for guidance with this increasingly problematic issue.

Stavem recognizes that high student mobility takes its toll on a student’s social, emotional, and academic performance. She also emphasizes the counterproductive nature of our public school culture of high-stakes testing and “high accountability” and no flexibility granted for issues outside of the control of schools or districts (e.g., student mobility). Regardless, she still provides several avenues of improvement. Topics include issues with student mobility as they relate to enrollment, academic placement, student placement, classroom connections, family connections, unique needs of mobile students, community connections, and exit transitions.

The strength of this book is in its practical application. A group of concerned educators could use this book as a guiding document to create

a comprehensive plan to decrease the negative impact of student mobility in their classrooms and schools. Appendix A: Questions by Chapter provides great discussion points to start dialogue focusing on student mobility. For example, Question 14, “Are staff members culturally proficient when a variety of cultures are represented in the community?” This type of question will inevitably open the door for discussions of cultural proficiency and potential learning required for existing staff. There are 10 or more questions for each of the 12 chapters in the book. These would be great discussion prompts for stakeholders interested in the impact student mobility has on students, classrooms, and communities. Appendix C: Mobility Action Plan Framework could also be a powerful tool for developing and maintaining a comprehensive plan for tackling student mobility.

This book is not for someone interested in the etiology of student mobility. This book is not for those interested in further investigating the data, causes, or correlating variables surrounding student mobility. This book is arguably designed for school practitioners interested in a practical field guide to improve issues caused by high student mobility.

Administrators would do well to use this as a step-by-step guide to help lead faculty and staff toward establishing stronger and more effective practices in accepting and relinquishing students outside of normal circumstances. Stavem (2014) leaves no stone unturned toward this end. However, another book might be more suitable for those of us who wish to dig a little deeper into the data, statistics, or causes of student mobility and peripheral issues. I do admire Stavem for bringing the issue to the forefront by providing this ground-zero manual.

Reviewed Book

Stavem, J. (2014). *Student mobility: Creating an environment for social and academic success*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield