Background information for school mobility media release

Who did the research?

It comes from a report called *Student movement and Schools: what are the issues?* which is due to be published shortly. It was done by NZCER researchers for the Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment (CRESA) and is a research project designed to investigate the educational issues faced by communities with high levels of residential mobility. The project is part of a much larger study called *Building Attachment in Communities and Families Affected by Transience and Residential Movement.* (See www.whypeoplemove.co.nz for more information). Other researchers have looked at issues such as welfare, housing and employment.

The project looked at four parts of the country: Waitangirua/Cannons Creek in Porirua, the rural North Canterbury community of Amuri; Opotiki; and Kawerau. Researchers looked at 20 schools in the first phase and 18 in the second after two dropped out.

Do these findings come as a surprise?

This is the second phase of the study and backs up the preliminary findings, released in late 2005, which found no statistically significant differences between the students who moved frequently and those who were more stable.

This time researchers collected new data and checked previous results to verify the earlier findings. They added a survey of students to assess their sense of belonging to the school, as well as interviewing teachers and re-interviewing principals.

What is a frequent mover?

Different studies use different definitions.

This study used three baselines. Children in Years 1–6 at a primary school who have not moved house would usually have attended one school. Year 8 students would usually have attended up to two schools, and secondary school students (Years 9–13) would usually have attended up to three different schools in their school careers. "Non-mobile" individuals were defined as those who had attended the baseline number or one more, and "mobile" students were defined as those who had been to a total number of schools that was **two or more** than the baseline figure for their year.

Were there any differences between the groups of students?

Overall, the study found no significant differences in educational achievement between mobile and non-mobile students at either primary or secondary level. There was a small but consistent pattern of slightly lower achievement in some areas by mobile students compared with non-mobile students in the same schools. However it cannot necessarily be inferred from this that the lower achievement *resulted from* the mobility.

We think further investigation of this issue, using much larger samples, would be worthwhile.

Does high mobility affect students' sense of belonging to the school?

We surveyed students about this. There were no differences between the two groups in regard to how they felt about their teachers, and a few small differences between the two groups' views of school and school work. The area where the differences were most marked was in the responses to questions about the links between their school and their families. Almost half the non-mobile students said their families came to school events "most or all of the time" compared with only 30 percent of mobile students. This difference was evident at all age levels but was particularly marked at Year 11.

What now?

Student mobility is still an emerging research area. It could be useful to investigate whether or not high decile schools have the same patterns (two-thirds of the schools surveyed in this project were decile 1)

Similarly, looking at achievement levels in low decile schools that have low mobility rates could be worthwhile in that it is possible that the achievement levels of *all* students are affected when schools have large numbers of mobile students.

It may also be worthwhile investigating mobile families' experiences of the school system - as another way of understanding the impact of mobility on students, and to help develop effective strategies for engaging "diverse" families with school communities.