

MODERN DAY STUDENT MOBILITY

“School can be described as a **conveyor belt** that keeps moving forward regardless of whether students are on it. The question becomes, “How do we get transient students to jump on?””



<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/764/schools-out-forever>

This podcast, released in March 2022, explores several facets of how the Covid pandemic has impacted the very idea of how we view what school is. The host, Chana Joffe-Walt, follows the stories of two kids who have drifted away from school. In Act 2 (The Case of the Vanishing Sixth Grader), the host introduces “Marisela,” a girl who has re-enrolled in her school in Los Angeles after an 18-month absence. We learn that during this absence Marisela has been moved to Mexico for a time, where she experiences the loss of family members and long periods of isolation. Her family loses their apartment in Los Angeles and spends time living out of their truck followed by living in a hotel. When Marisela is re-enrolled at her school, there are no transcripts to secure because she was not enrolled anywhere. Her first day back to school after this “blip” in her education is described through her eyes and the eyes of Chana Joffe-Walt, who had the privilege of experiencing Marisela’s first day back with her. While

learning Marisela's story, we learn that an estimated 3 million students were out of touch with school in 2020. The host of the podcast uses an analogy of school being designed like a conveyer belt – it continues moving forward whether you are there or not. Marisela (along with all transient and mobile students) must figure out how to jump back on after a “blip” of missing crucial years in her education.

Transient and mobile students have a clear history of being marginalized. After listening to this podcast, the impacts seem far greater with the ushering in of a global pandemic. It is a relevant topic for discussion and awareness in the educational community. When a student in my class asks me a question that I think they should know the answer to because of prior learning, how should I respond? There are many questions like this to reflect on. Since beginning at Agora I have interacted with students who have similar stories and backgrounds to those detailed in this podcast. In the case of Marisela, she chose to return to her prior school, despite many schools being closer to the hotel she was staying in. This tells me that students have connections that are worth preserving in a school setting – with teachers, counselors, classmates, principals, etc.

My efforts in the classroom go far beyond teaching math content. My classroom and I are a familiar, reliable, and safe space for many students. I want to strive to help students want to jump onto the moving conveyer belt of learning, despite their blips in education. A student recently emailed me regretful news about having to leave Agora to move to Puerto Rico. She thanked me for the time we had and told me, “I'm glad I can count on you!”. My efforts and actions in the classroom are always geared toward being a teacher (and a person) that my students can count on. My recent experiences and research on the topic of transient and mobile students has changed my perspective and mindset on how I will approach students and their learning.

