



Poverty, Residential Mobility, and Student Transiency within Rural and Small Town Contexts

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Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods
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Work referred to in this presentation includes:

- Schafft, K.A., Killeen, K., & Morrissey, J. (forthcoming, 2010). The challenges of student transiency for US rural schools and communities in the era of No Child Left Behind. In Schafft, K.A. & Jackson, A. (Eds.), *Rural education for the twenty-first century: Identity, place, and community in a globalizing world*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.
- Prins, E.S., & Schafft, K.S. (forthcoming, Aug. 2009). Individual and structural attributions for poverty and persistence in family literacy programs: The resurgence of the culture of poverty. *Teachers College Record*.
- Schafft, K.A., & Prins, E.S. (2009) Poverty, residential mobility and persistence across urban and rural family literacy programs in Pennsylvania. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal* 3, 3-12.
- Killeen, K., & Schafft, K.A. (2008) The organizational and fiscal implications of transient student populations in urban and rural areas. Pp. 631-650. In H.F. Ladd & E.B. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*. New York: Routledge.
- Schafft, K. A. (2006). Poverty, residential mobility and student transiency within a rural New York school district. *Rural Sociology*, 71(2), 212-231.
- Schafft, K. A. (2005). The incidence and impacts of student transiency in upstate New York's rural school districts. *The Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 20(15), 1-13. Retrieved June 24, 2009 from <http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/20-15.pdf>.

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- Primarily (though not exclusively) qualitative in approach.

A Narrative of Poverty, Residential Mobility, and School Change (28 Year Old Single Mother of Two):

You told me that when you were growing up, you moved around a lot too. What was that like?

A lot of tearful nights....because I never really *knew* anybody. I never got to where I could say “hey this is my long-time good friend,” because I never got to stay anywhere for too long. When I was ready to learn and put in all I had and just go gung ho, every time I got to that time, I got snatched up and moved somewhere else. I never looked forward to anything because I was always pulled in halfway through something, or right at the end of something and I never felt like it was complete. It was bits and pieces of everything is how I felt. You get bits and pieces and bits and pieces and pretty soon you don’t care no more.

The one time we stayed where we were for a while I doubled up my school years because I had failed a grade and I had a chance to double up and take them both at once and get back to where I was supposed to be. I worked really, really hard at it and then I achieved it and when I got up here, the program I went through down in Florida was not acknowledged. So I was right back at square one again and at that point I had given up. I didn’t care no more.

A Narrative of Poverty, Residential Mobility, and School Change (28 Year Old Single Mother of Two), con't:

So you grew up down south?

Yeah, mostly down south. I moved up here when I was fifteen. I lived in Florida, I lived in Georgia, I lived in New Jersey. I lived in Arizona and then I moved back to Florida, and then moved back up here. We moved all the time.

Why did your family move?

Sometimes it was for job purposes. Other times it was to get away from my biological father that had pulled a bunch of stuff on my mom. And then the last move that we made to up here was because my grandfather passed away and my mom couldn't handle it down south any more and she wanted to be closer to her family and so we moved back up here again.

“No one owns these kids. They have no political or economic power. The chances of reform happening [for them] are certainly less than they might be for other groups. No one speaks on behalf of these kids and they are less likely to advocate on behalf of themselves.”

- High School Guidance Counselor, rural New York

Student Transiency in Rural and Small Town Settings in New York

1. Study of student transiency in nearly 300 upstate districts;
2. Focused study of enrollment change and residential mobility in 11 rural districts;
3. Gathering of residential histories from low income, mobile households.

Key Findings: Challenges for NY School Districts

- Strains on teaching and administrative staff;
- Highly mobile, high need students tend to be high-cost students;
- Perceived impacts on school testing assessments;
- Academic underachievement;
- Reduced social and academic attachment of mobile students;

Key Findings: Challenges for NY School Districts, con't

- The reported student turnover rate in disadvantaged districts was nearly twice that of wealthier districts;
- Most movement is highly localized and confined to nearby and adjacent districts;

Rural “*Mobility Sheds?*”

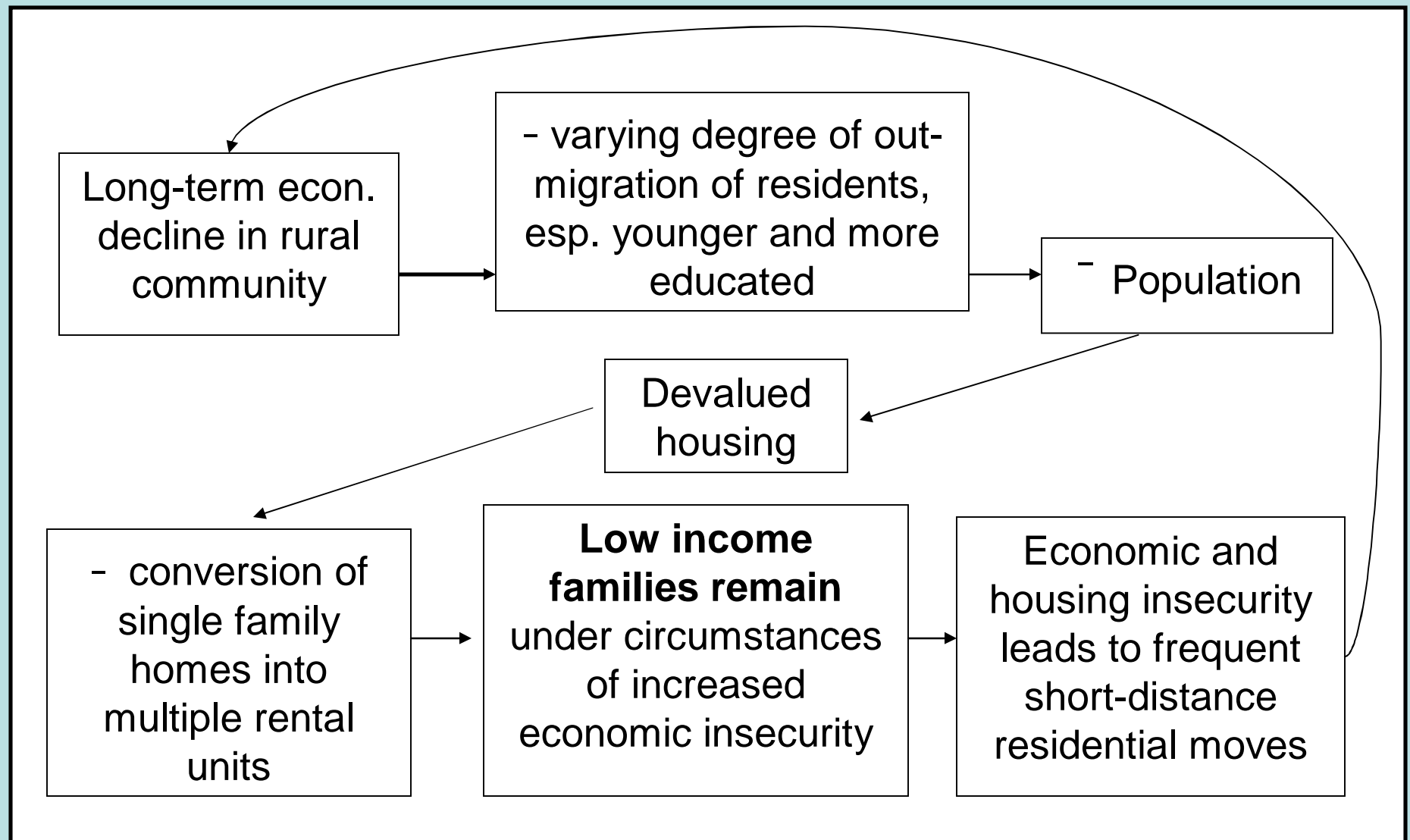
Key Findings: Challenges for NY School Districts, con't

- Mobility is driven largely by household social and economic insecurity;
- The lack of safe, adequate and affordable housing is a significant contributing factor.

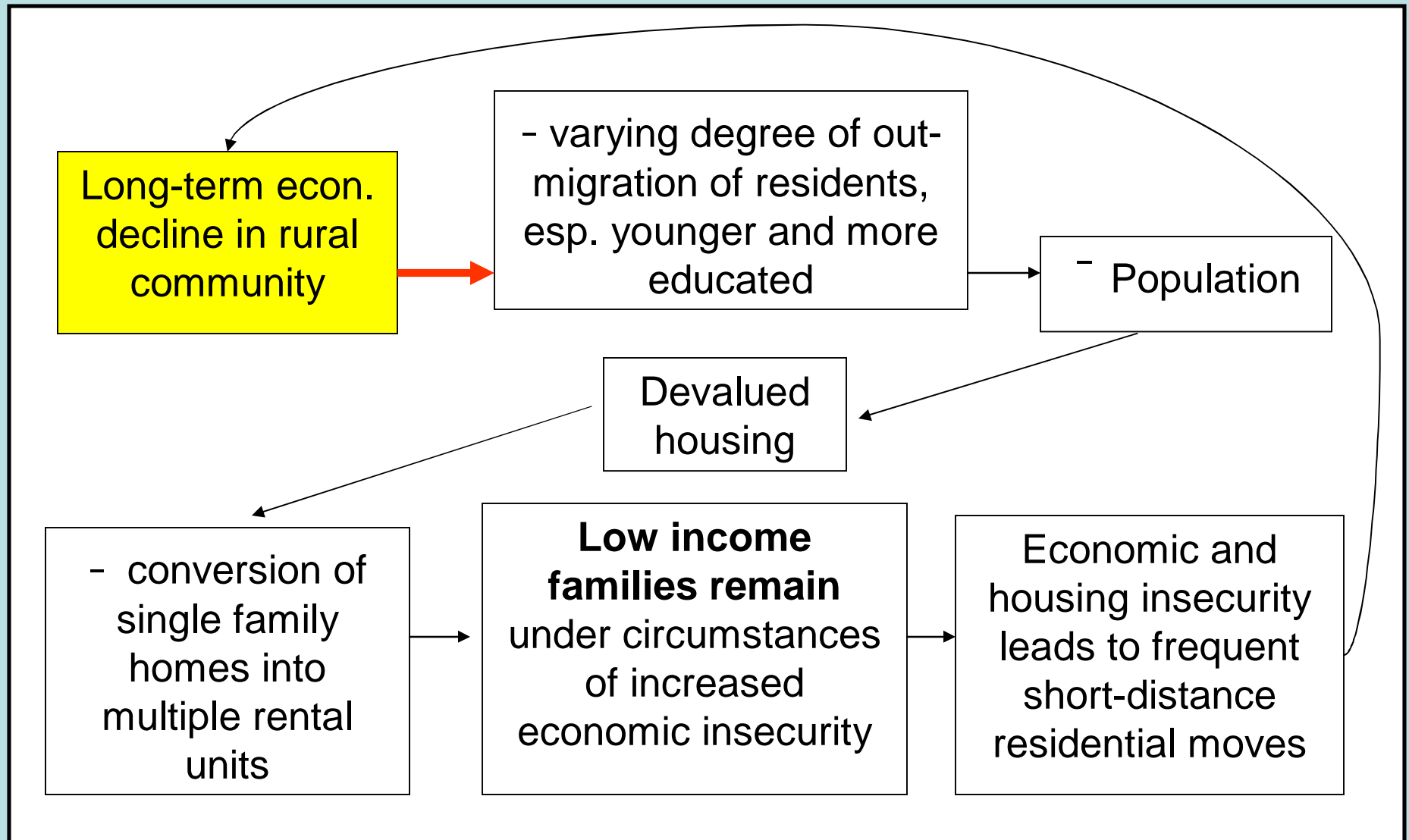
“Most of the community does not recognize this as an issue... There is no general awareness, but right now there is no excess. The aid is frozen by the state. To pay for the needs of these kids we will have to go to the local taxpayer. It’s a hard sell to the community at large that we have this unknown group that requires substantial resources that don’t even exist to most people here, but nonetheless are very real to us here.”

- District Superintendent, NY Southern Tier

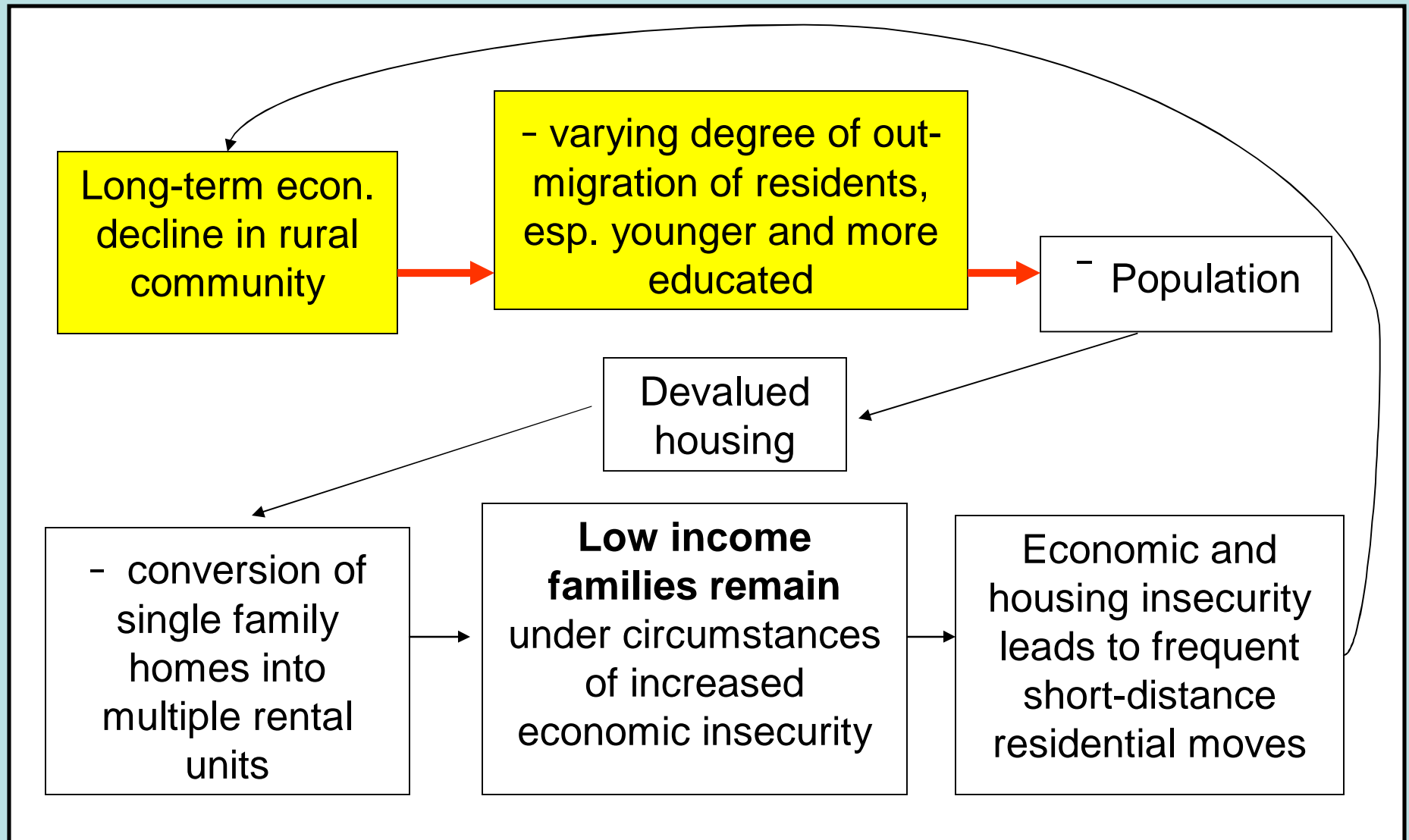
The Cycle of Poverty, Residential Mobility and Community Disadvantage



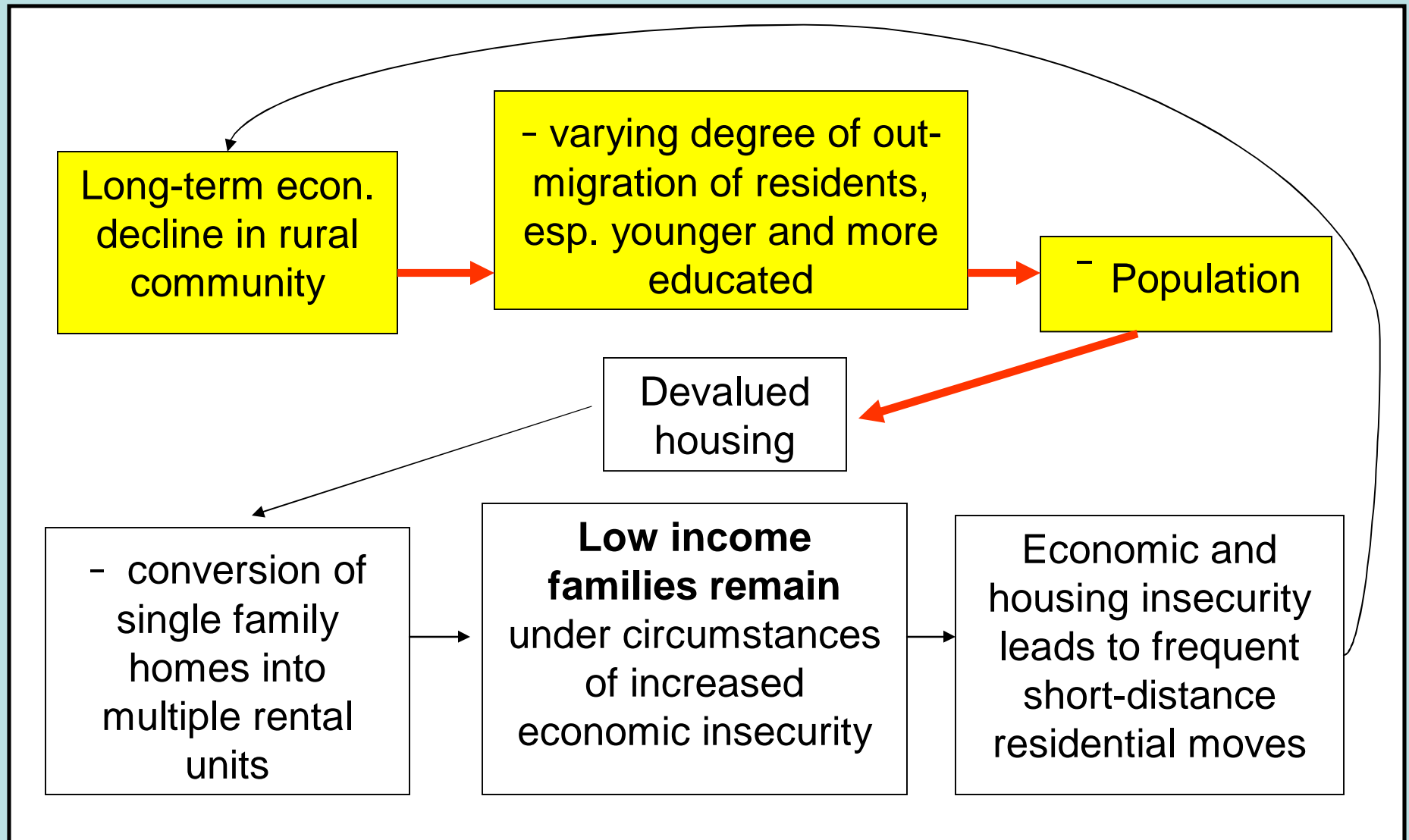
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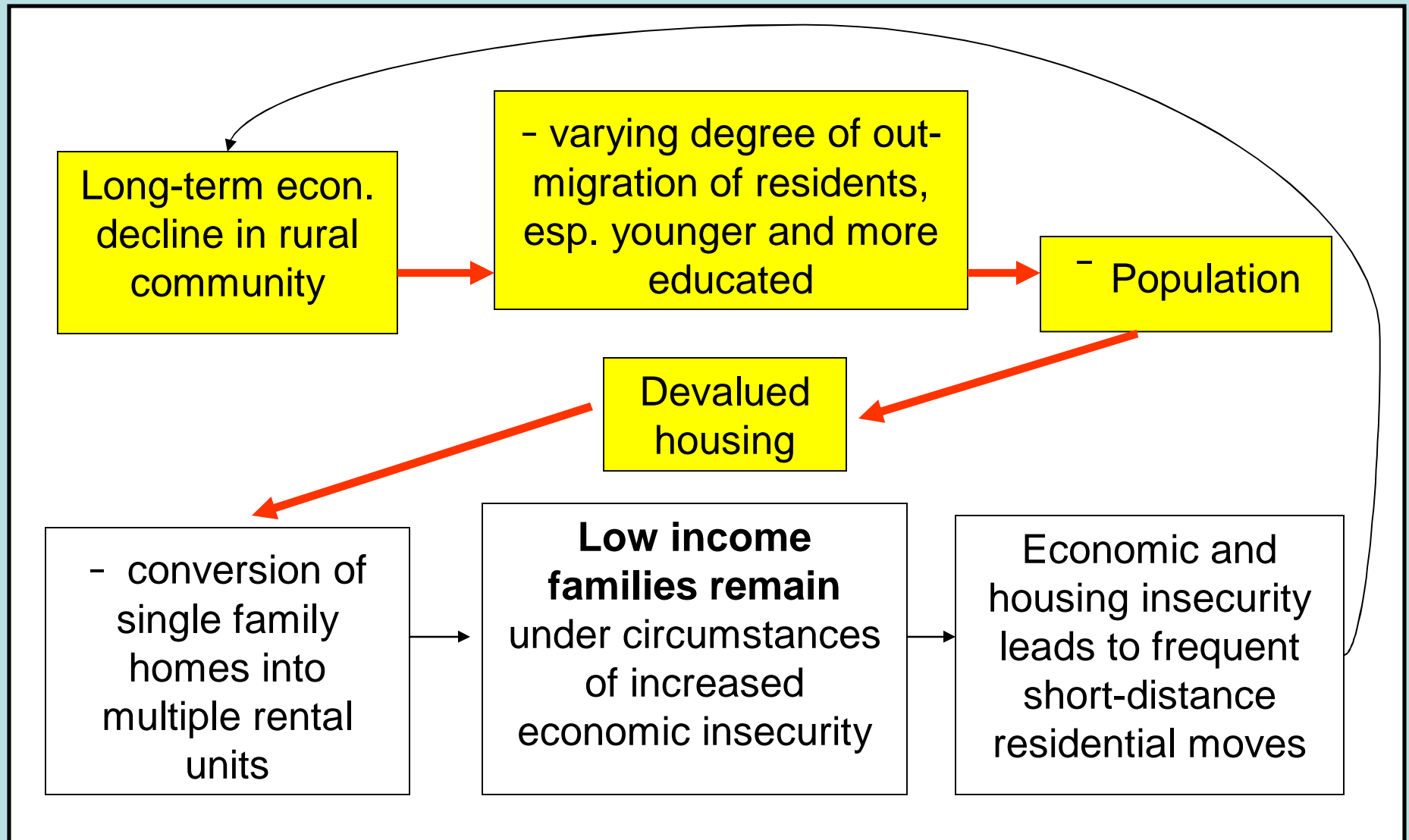
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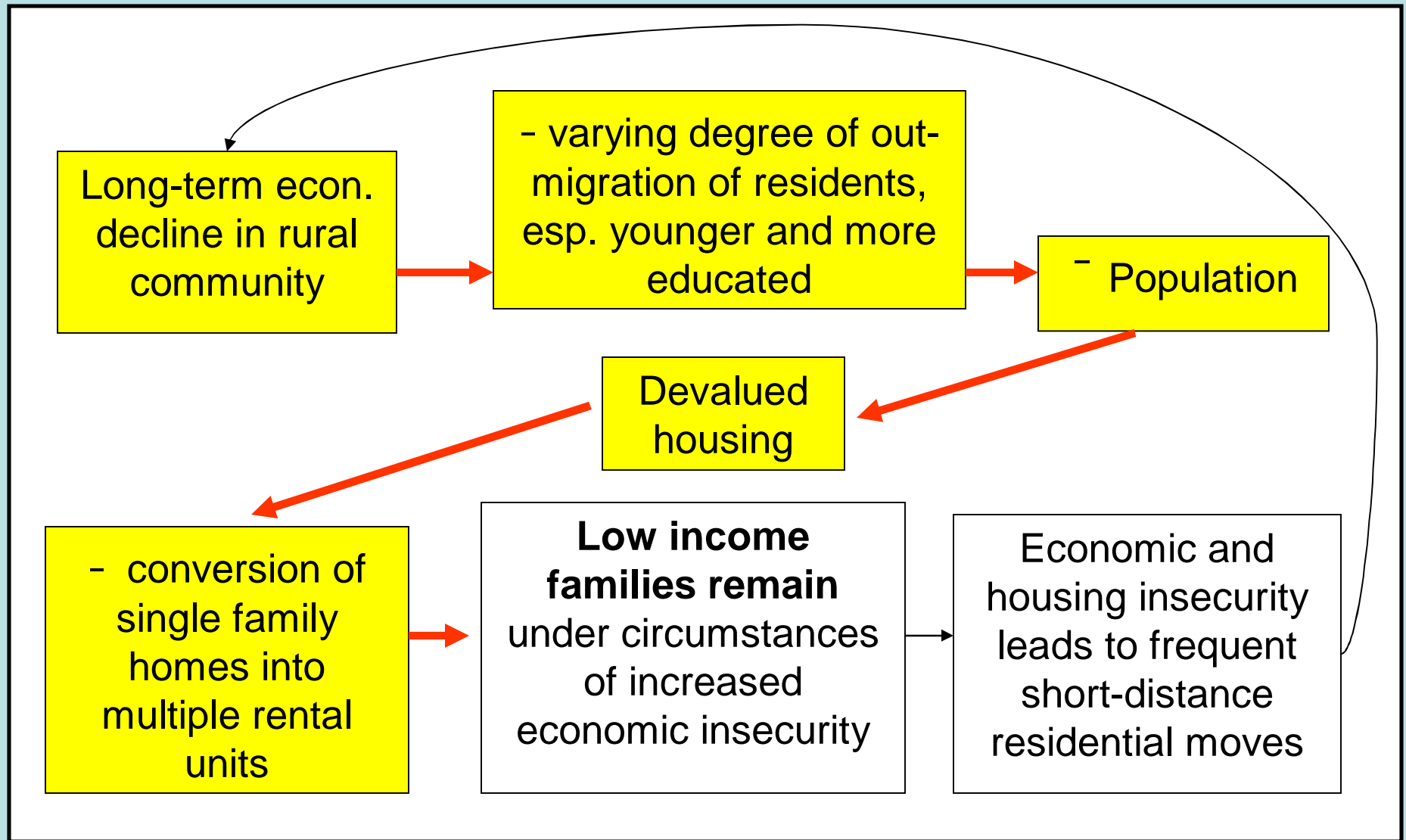
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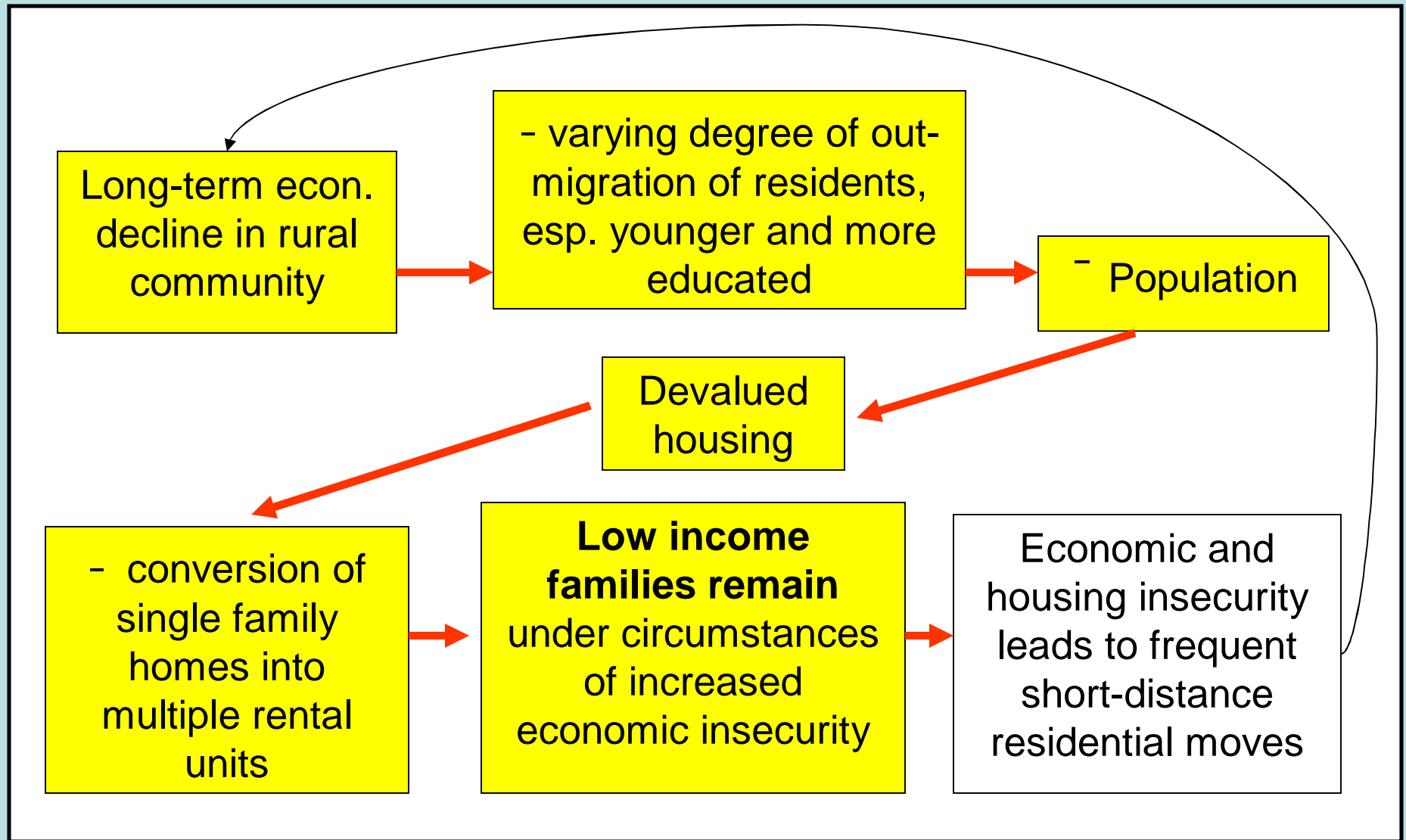
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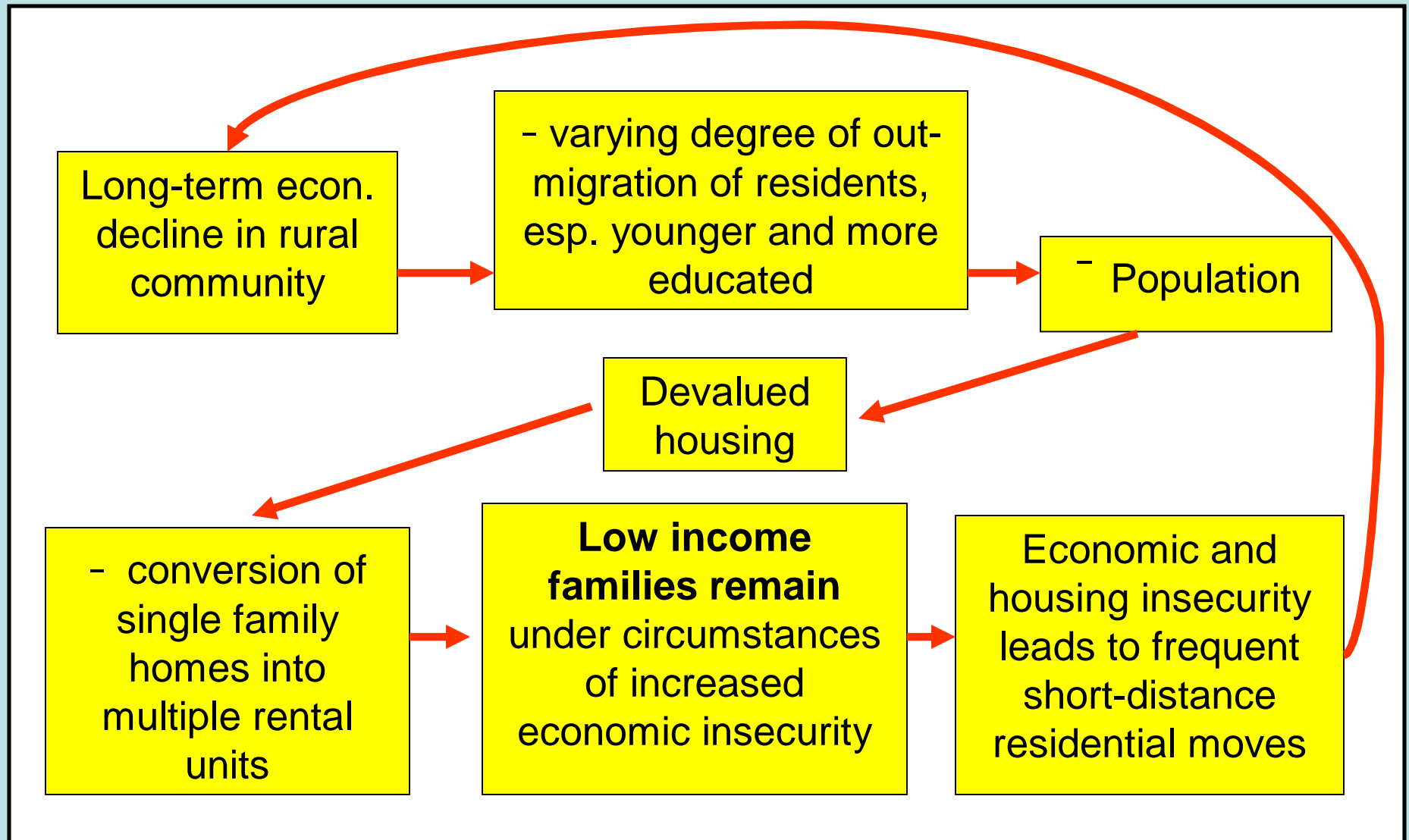
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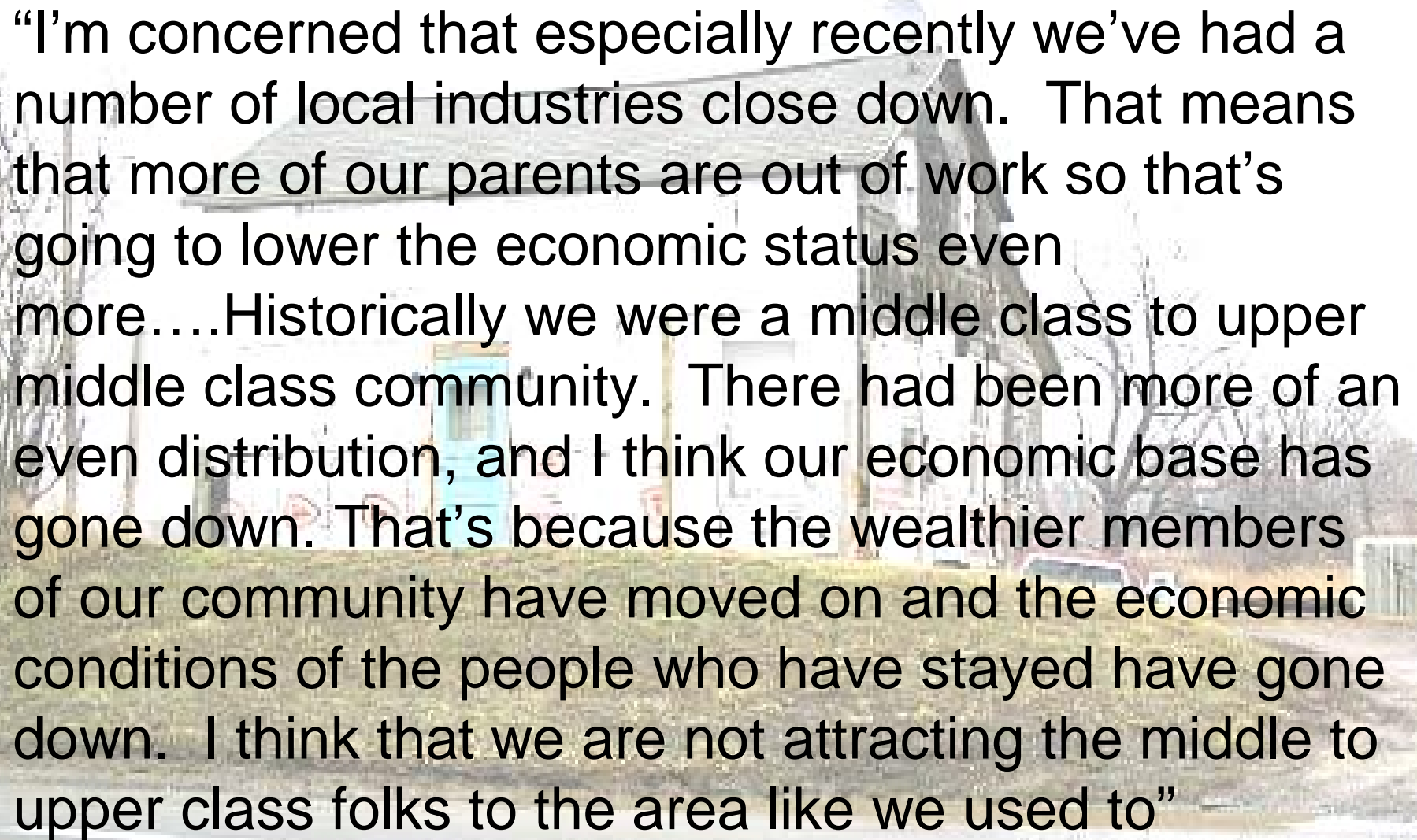


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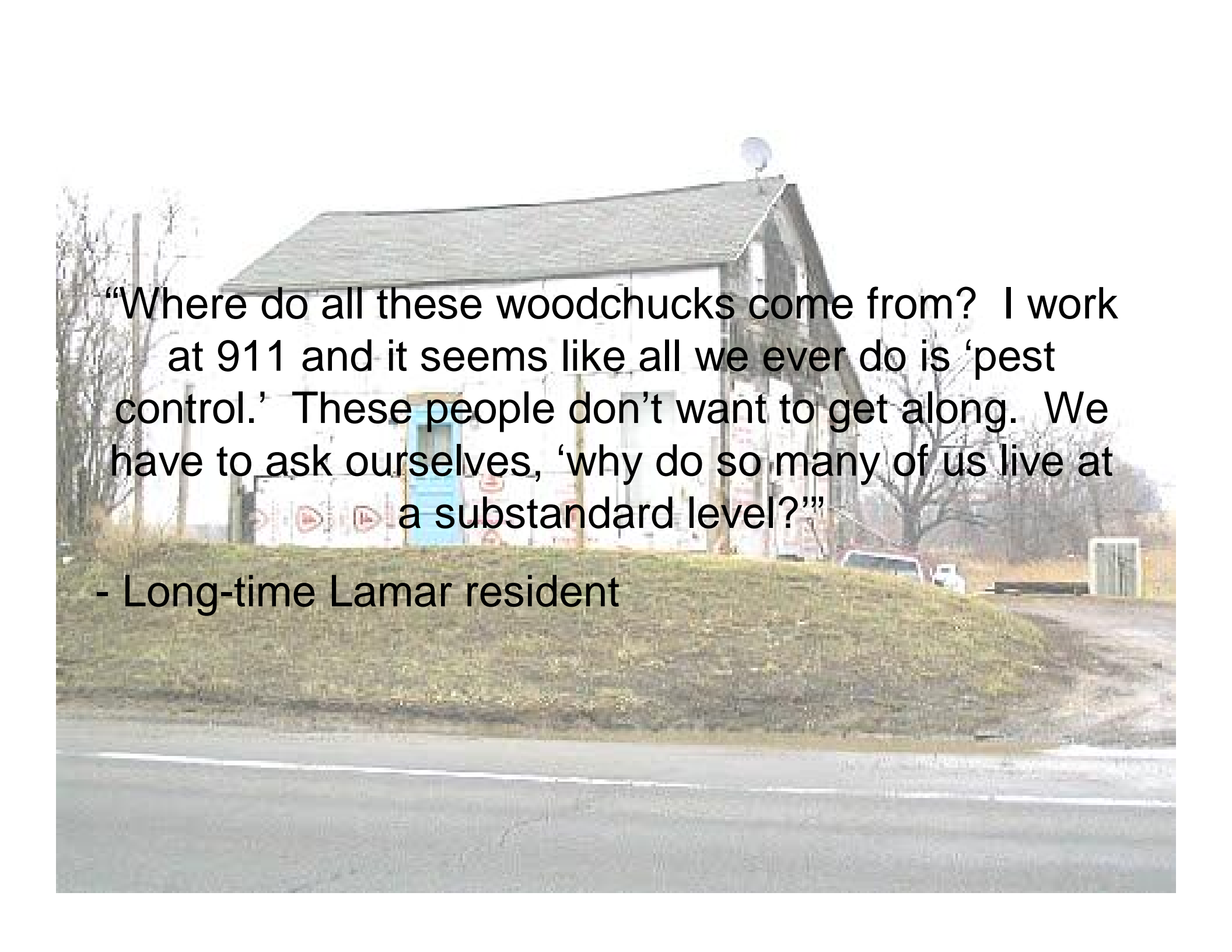


**Lamar: A Community Struggling
with Poverty and Mobility**



“I’m concerned that especially recently we’ve had a number of local industries close down. That means that more of our parents are out of work so that’s going to lower the economic status even more....Historically we were a middle class to upper middle class community. There had been more of an even distribution, and I think our economic base has gone down. That’s because the wealthier members of our community have moved on and the economic conditions of the people who have stayed have gone down. I think that we are not attracting the middle to upper class folks to the area like we used to”

-Local business owner, Lamar long-time resident



“Where do all these woodchucks come from? I work at 911 and it seems like all we ever do is ‘pest control.’ These people don’t want to get along. We have to ask ourselves, ‘why do so many of us live at a substandard level?’”

- Long-time Lamar resident

Where are mobile
students coming from
and going to?

Origins and Destinations of Mobile Lamar Students , AY 03-04

	Entrances		Exits	
	Raw	Percent	Raw	Percent
Upstate ^a	120	76.9	80	54.1
Downstate	0	0	1	.7
Out of State	13	8.3	17	11.5
Private School	5	3.2	3	2.0
Home School	4	2.6	2	1.4
Dropout/Re-enroll	0	0	21	14.2
Unknown	14	9.0	24	16.2
Total	156	100.0	148	100.0

^a“Upstate” refers to all of New York State except for Long Island, New York City, Westchester and Rockland Counties (which constitute “downstate”).

In sum, in the Lamar District, AY 03-04...

156 students entered;

148 students exited;

Overall, about 54% of mobile students were FRPL-eligible;

~ BUT ~

Of the **entering** students, 62.98% were FRPL-eligible;

Of the **exiting** students, 42.27% were FRPL-eligible;

This suggests that Lamar not only experienced high mobility of disadvantaged students, but that entering students are *disproportionately* disadvantaged.

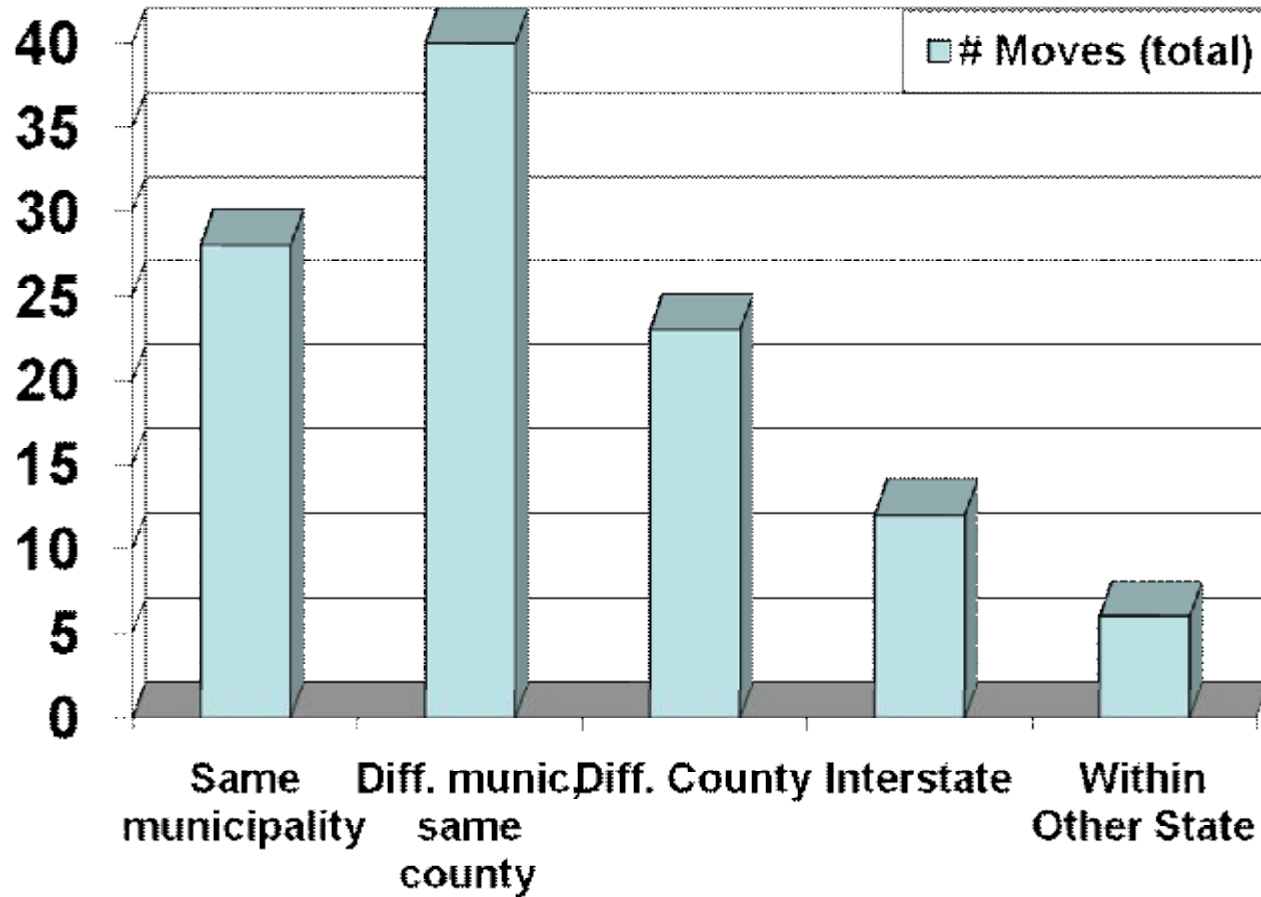
Residential Mobility from the Perspective of Families:

looking at the interview data

22 interviews/residential histories
completed in Lamar...

- Families of 61 children;
- 51 of those children
school-aged

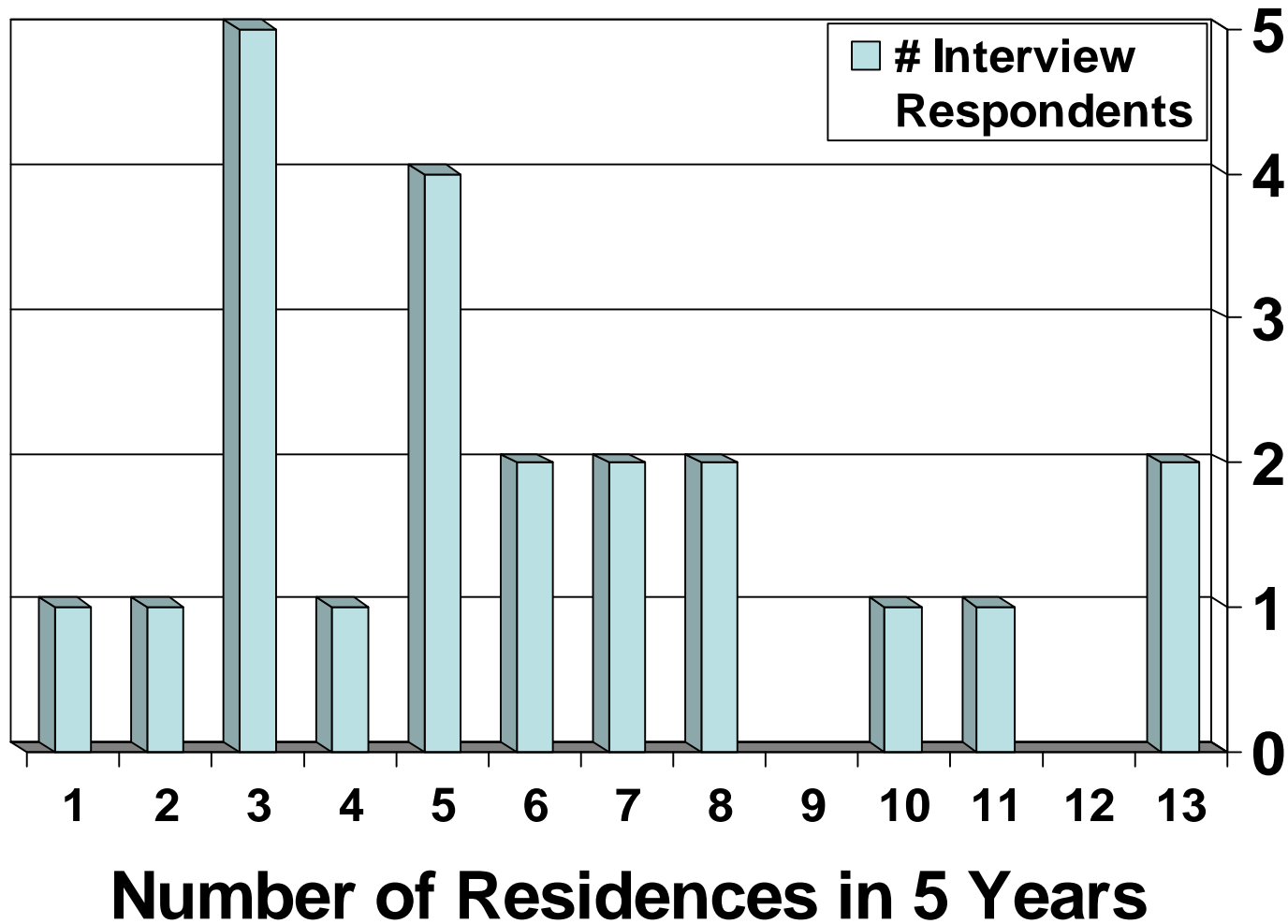
WHERE are families moving?



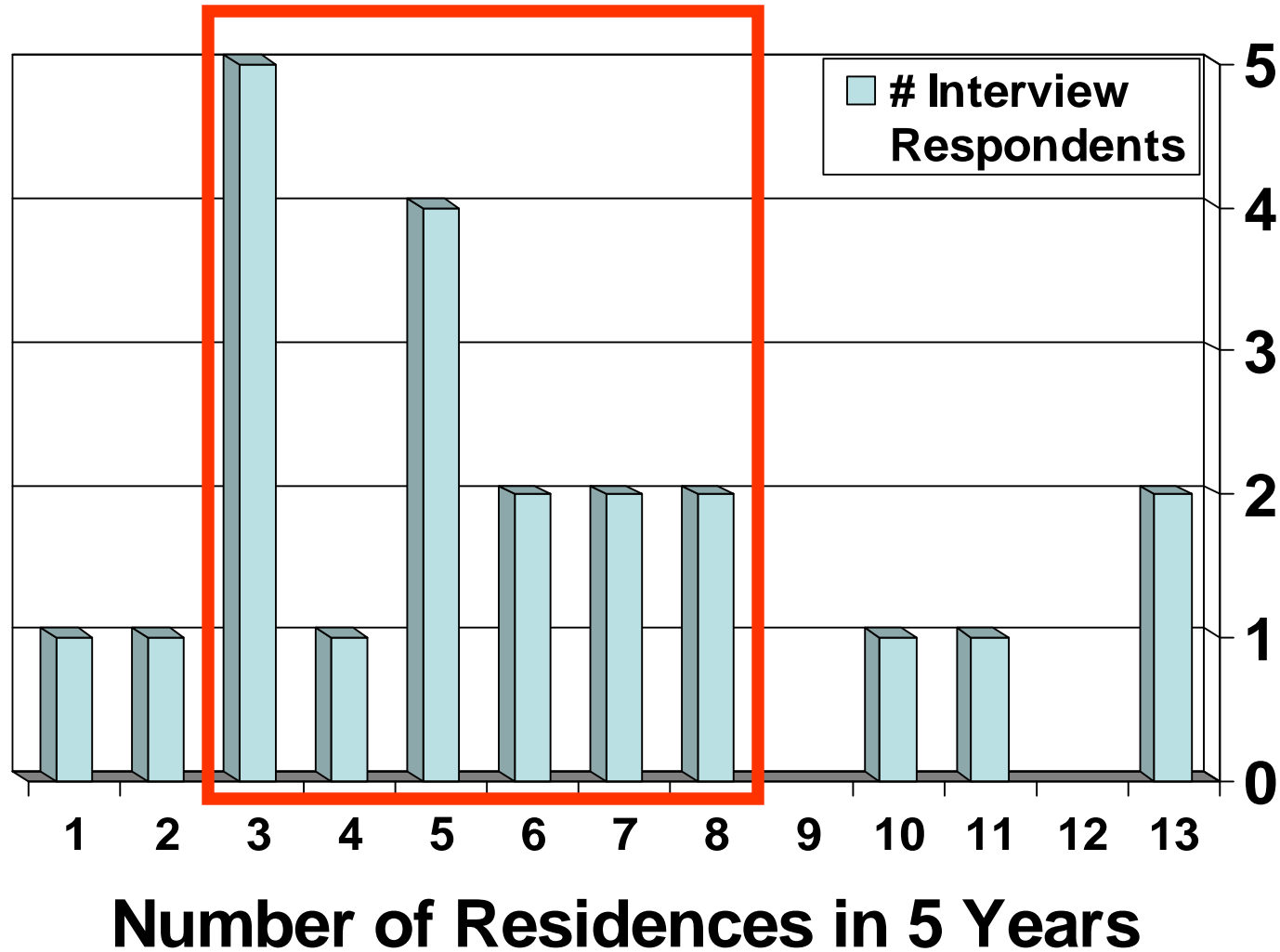
Residential Movement in 5 Years

- Total of **109 moves** from the 22 households
- Of those, 91 were made within upstate New York communities;
- Of these moves, 31% were made within the same municipality and fully 35% did NOT involve a school change
- However, these moves in total resulted in **152 individual school changes.**

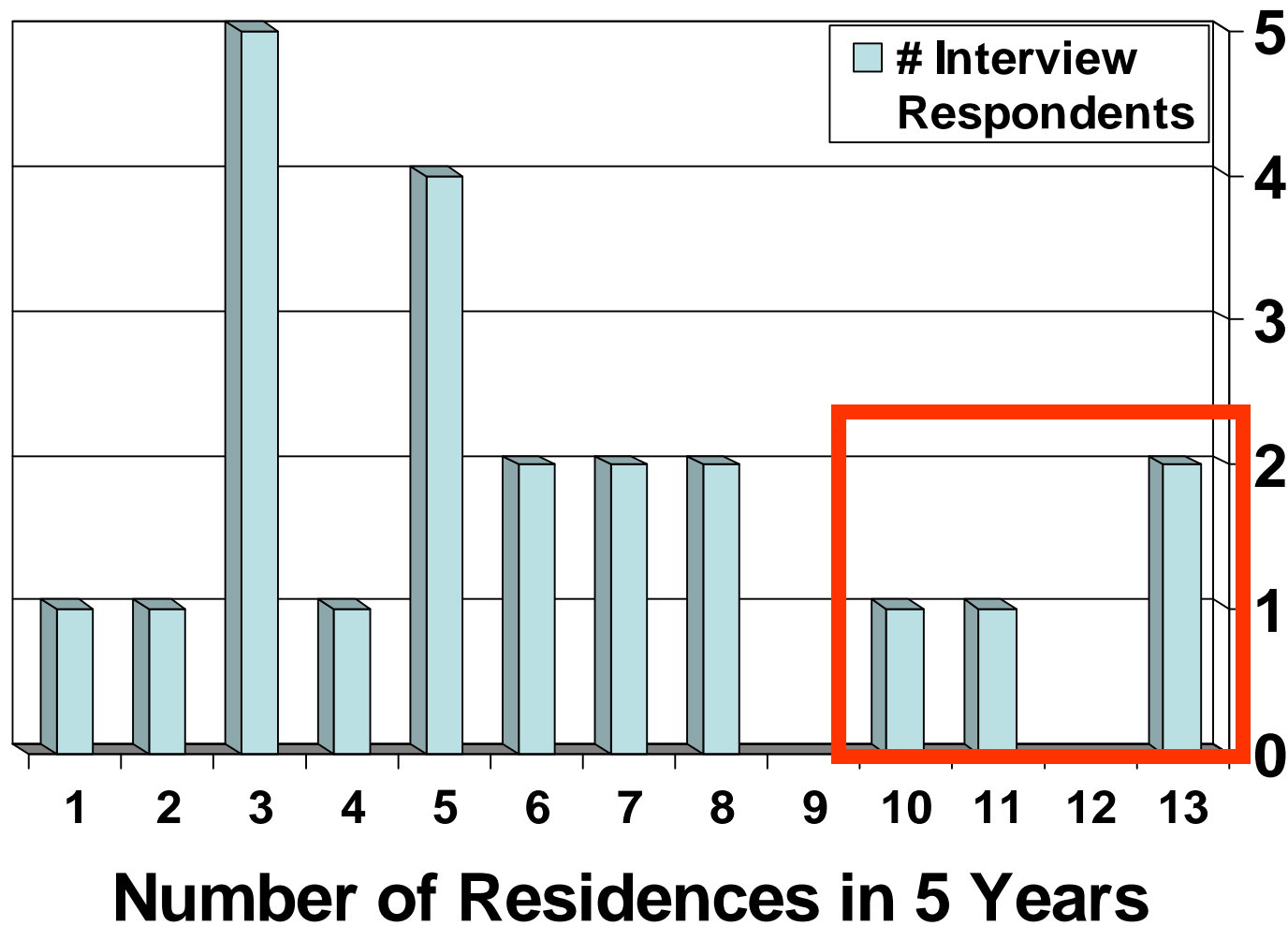
Interviewed Parents: Variability in Residential Stability Over a 5-Year Period



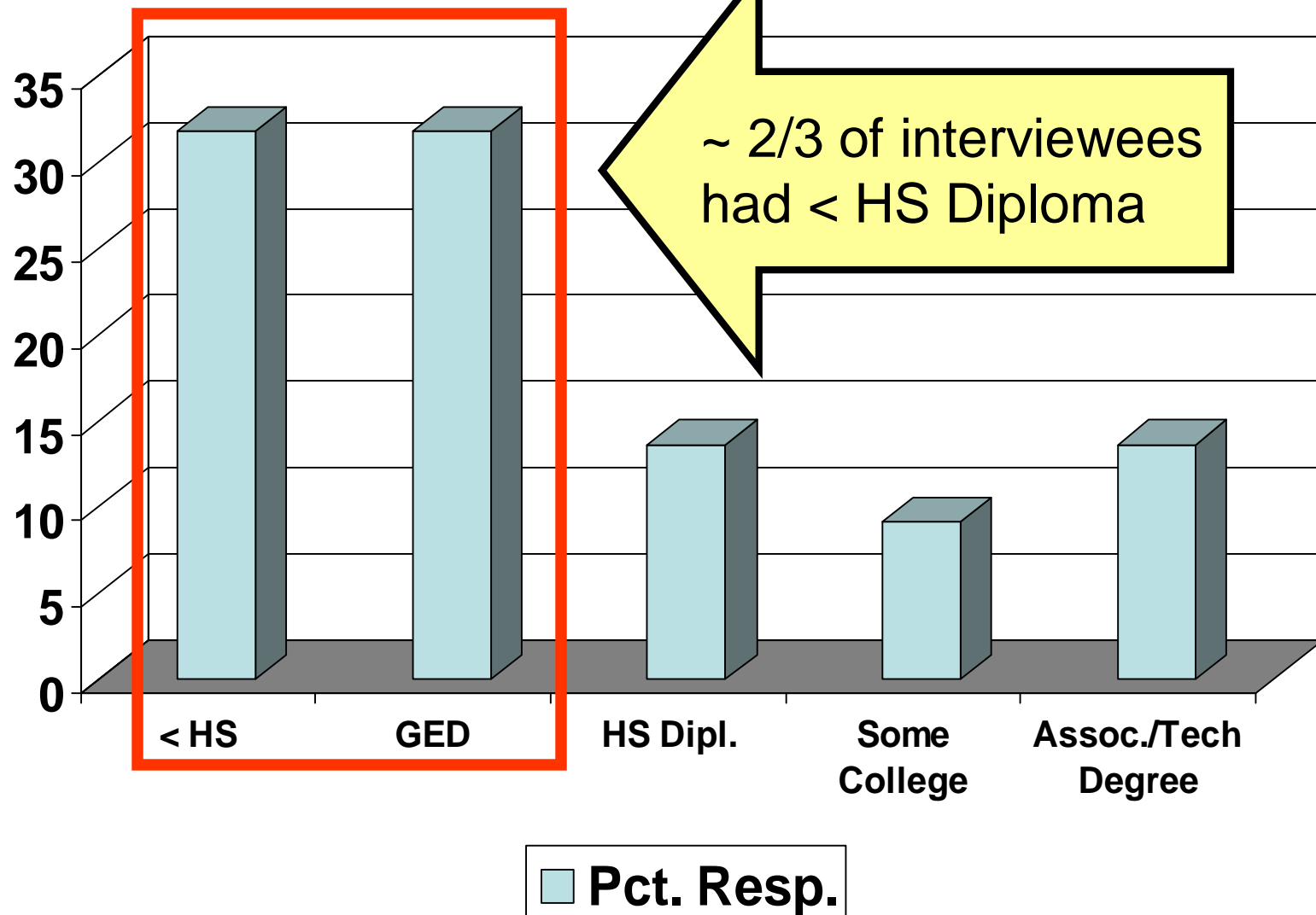
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Educational Attainment of Interviewed Parents



Why are families moving?

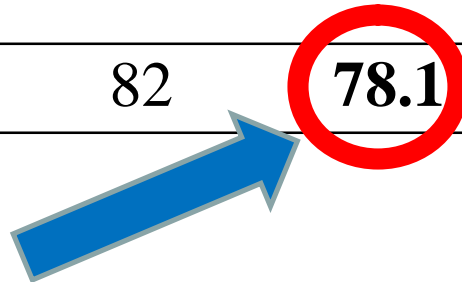
- **Social and Familial Problems**
(spousal/partner breakup, domestic violence, drug and/or alcohol abuse);
- **Economic Insecurity** (chronic and/or sudden);
- **Housing Problems**

Push and Pull Factors in Residential Change

	Residential “Pushes”		Residential “Pulls”	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Housing	65	61.9	11	10.5
Social/Interpersonal	14	13.3	9	8.6
Employment	3	2.9	3	2.9
Total	82	78.1	23	21.9

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Housing Related “Pushes”

<u>Reason</u>	<u># Mentions</u>
Eviction	12
Leaving doubling-up	10
Leaving temporary DSS housing	10
House sold/landlord stopped renting	7
Bad housing conditions	6
Too expensive	5
Bad neighborhood/area	5
Size/overcrowding	4
Other problems with landlord	4
Building condemned	2
Housing PUSH, Total:	65

Social Networks and Connections to Place:

**17% of moves were directly shaped
by networks with friends and
acquaintances**

**29% of moves were directly
shaped by familial networks**

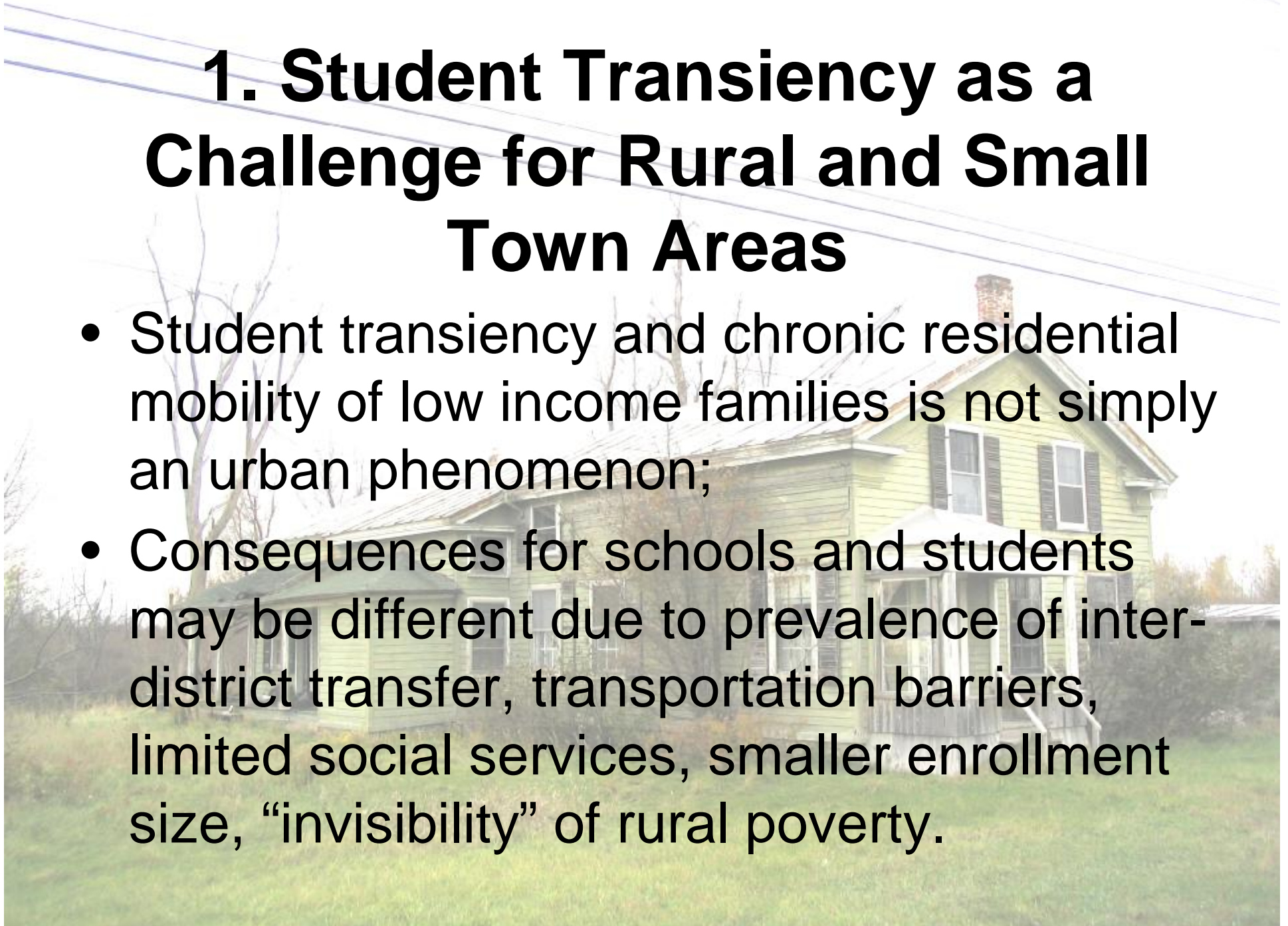
CONCLUSIONS

Some Final Observations



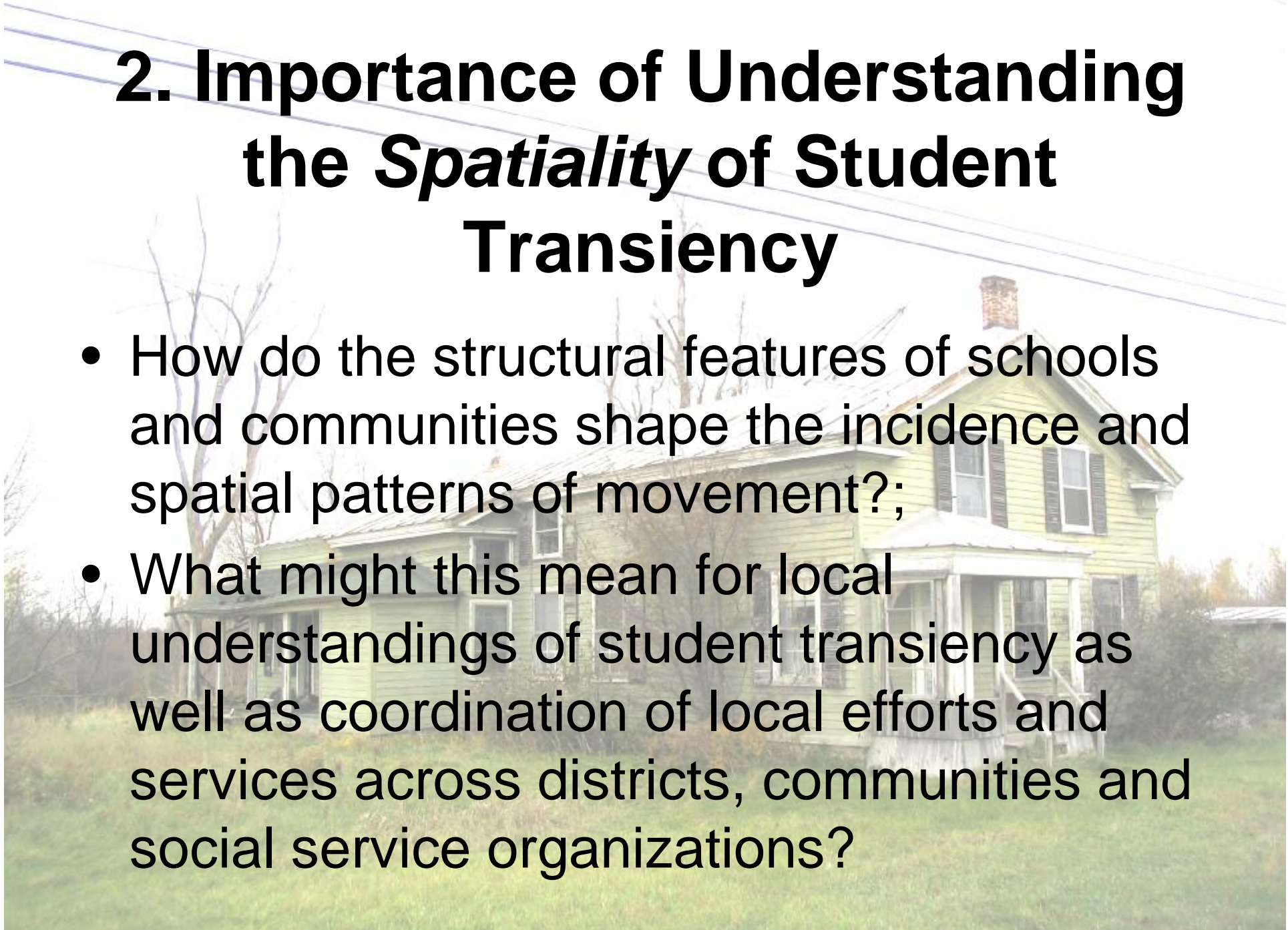
1. Student Transiency as a Challenge for Rural and Small Town Areas

- Student transiency and chronic residential mobility of low income families is not simply an urban phenomenon;
- Consequences for schools and students may be different due to prevalence of inter-district transfer, transportation barriers, limited social services, smaller enrollment size, “invisibility” of rural poverty.



2. Importance of Understanding the *Spatiality* of Student Transiency

- How do the structural features of schools and communities shape the incidence and spatial patterns of movement?;
- What might this mean for local understandings of student transiency as well as coordination of local efforts and services across districts, communities and social service organizations?

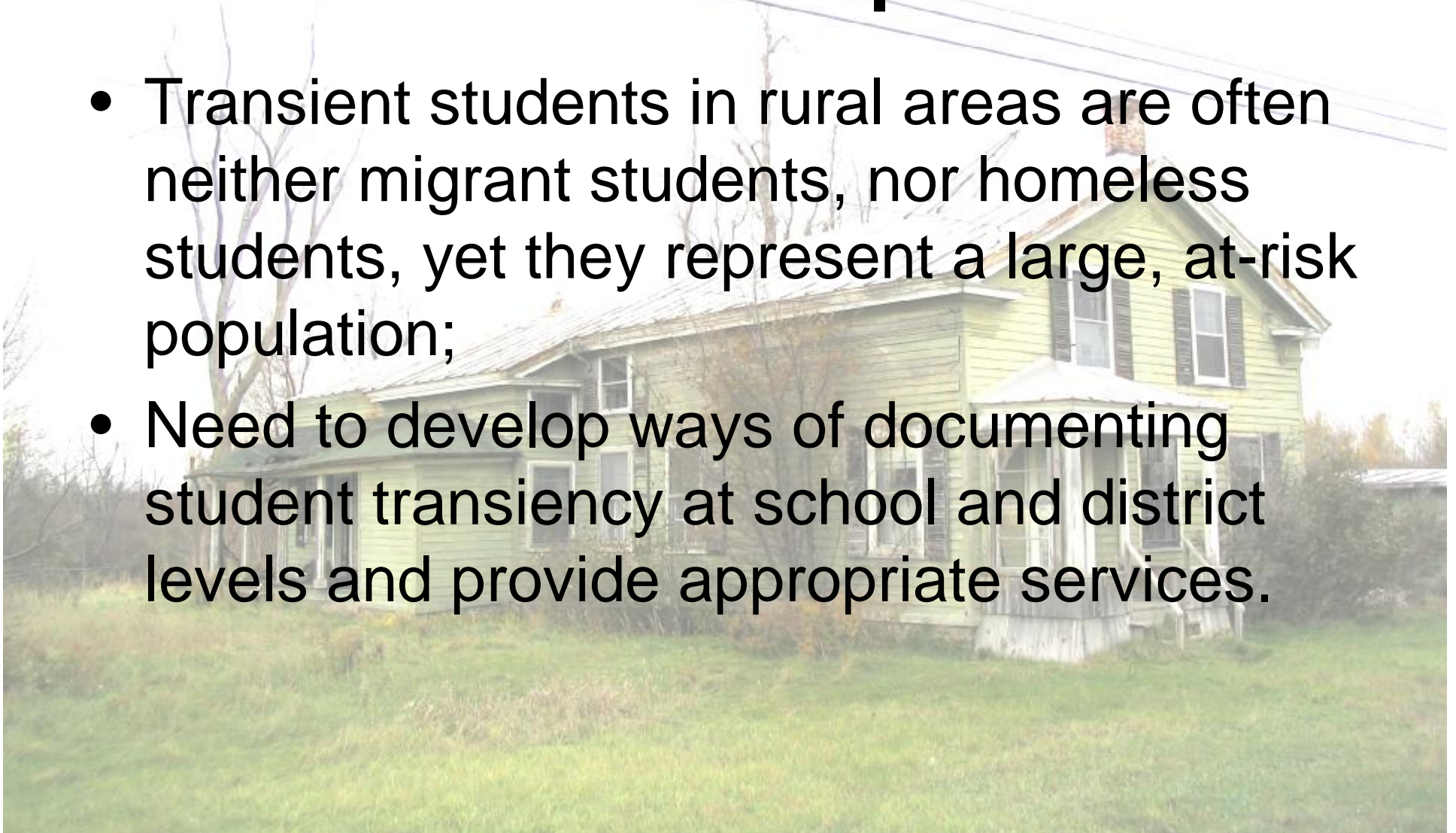


3. Student Transiency in the Context of NCLB

- High-stakes testing means that highly-mobile, low-achieving students increasingly represent liabilities to schools in danger of not meeting AYP standards;
- Educators and administrators frequently don't understand whose tests "count";
- Increased likelihood of social exclusion of transient students.

4. Transient Students as an “Unidentified Population”

- Transient students in rural areas are often neither migrant students, nor homeless students, yet they represent a large, at-risk population;
- Need to develop ways of documenting student transiency at school and district levels and provide appropriate services.



5. Critical Need to Translate Research into Practice

- Educators and administrators have few resources to draw from in addressing student transiency – especially from the research community;
- Nature abhors a vacuum: The Ruby Payne phenomenon and the resurgence of the *Culture of Poverty* discourse.

