

# Community Factors and Moving in Nonmetro Iowa

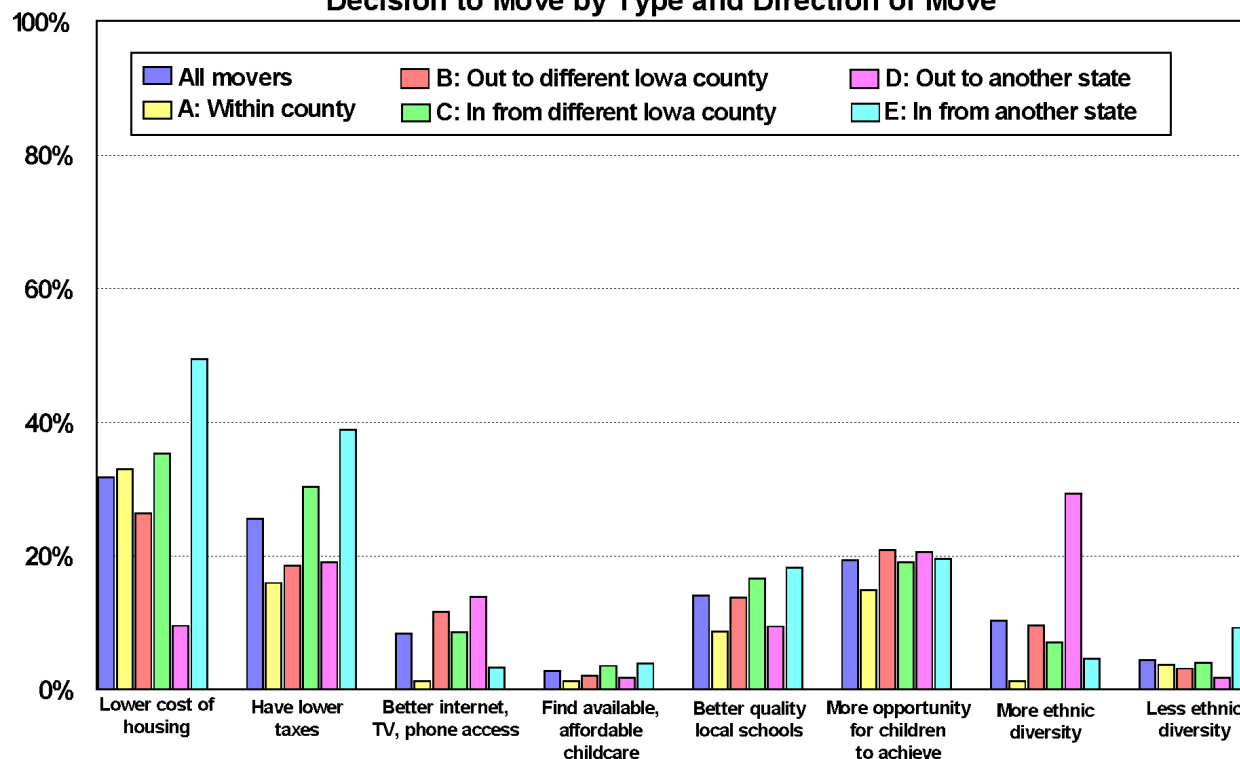
Sandra Charvat Burke and Mark A. Edelman

## Findings

This study highlights the influence of community factors in the decisions of people who have recently moved to or from 19 selected nonmetropolitan counties of Iowa. The purpose is to increase understanding about why people move so community leaders and citizens can develop actionable strategies for attracting and retaining population. Using data from a survey mailed to residents who moved, this study finds that:

- Fifty-three percent of respondents cited at least one community factor as important in their decision to move.
- Just over 49 percent of the respondents who moved into Iowa from other states said they wanted to lower their cost of housing; 9.5 percent who left for other states said this.
- Respondents moving into the counties, whether from other states or other areas of Iowa, were more likely than those who moved out to say they moved to have lower taxes.
- Just over 29 percent of the respondents who moved out of Iowa to other states said that wanting to have more ethnic diversity was a factor in their move; fewer than 10 percent of other types of movers said this.
- Respondents younger than age 45 were much more likely than older respondents to cite the quality of local schools, childcare, or opportunities for their children to achieve as a factor in their move.
- The youngest respondents, age 18 – 24, were the most likely to say they moved to find better quality internet, TV, or phone access (18.8%); fewer than ten percent of other age groups cited these factors in their move.

**Figure 1: Percent Responding ‘Yes’ to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move**



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

## The Study

This report is the fifth in a series<sup>1</sup> that examines the experiences of people who have recently moved to or from 19 selected nonmetropolitan counties of Iowa. The goal is to better understand the decisions and thoughts of people who have moved and what they think about the communities and areas where they have lived. The objective of this project is to help community leaders better understand local household moving trends so they can develop actionable strategies to address the reasons why people come, why people leave, enhance the qualities that cause people to stay, and thus stabilize or increase their populations.

The research results are from a survey of nonmetropolitan movers in 19 selected counties in Iowa (Adams, Appanoose, Cherokee, Davis, Decatur, Dickinson, Floyd, Hamilton, Hardin, Henry, Howard, Jefferson, Page, Ringgold, Sioux, Taylor, Union, Van Buren, Wayne).<sup>2</sup> People who had moved either into or out of these 19 counties were identified through a purchased database of new movers. The criteria to be included in the study were that both current and previous zip codes had to be known, at least one of the zip codes had to be from the selected 19 counties, and the zip codes had to be different, indicating a community move rather than just a move across the street or down the block.

Category	Number	Type and Direction of Move
A: <i>Within County, Zipcode change</i>	85	Moved within one of the 19 study counties but changed zip code.
B: <i>Out To Another Iowa County</i>	206	Moved out of one of the study counties to another county in Iowa.
C: <i>In From Another Iowa County</i>	207	Moved from another county in Iowa into one of the study counties.
D: <i>Out To Another State</i>	121	Moved out of one of the study counties to another state.
E: <i>In From Another State</i>	159	Moved from another state into one of the study counties.

The survey asked questions about the respondent's previous location as well as their current location, reasons for moving, satisfaction with multiple factors in their communities, as well as their demographic, social, and economic situation. The surveys were mailed in the fall of 2005 and 737 respondents who met the study criteria replied for a response rate of 35 percent. Most respondents had moved during 2003 through 2005.

Five categories of movers are used to examine the results (Table 1). Among the respondents, 696 (94.4%) fit into just one of the five mover categories. The other 41 respondents (5.6%) had moved out of one of the study counties and into another of the 19 included counties. These 41 responses are included as both out-movers to another Iowa county and in-movers to a county in the study. However, in the results that follow, the category of *All Movers* includes only the 737 respondents without duplication.

### Community Factors and Type of Move

This report focuses on community-related factors, including schools, cost of housing, taxes, and diversity that influenced the

decision to move. This report adds to the results described in previous reports<sup>1</sup> by presenting more detailed information about specific community factors that respondents said influenced their moving decision. These results come from a series of eight questions that asked about the cost of housing, taxes, quality of schools, childcare, TV, phone and internet access, and ethnic diversity (Table 2).<sup>1</sup> For each of the eight items, the respondent was asked to circle "yes" or "no" if the factor was involved in the decision to move. Respondents could respond "yes" to more than one of the eight items.

When thinking about the role that these community factors played in their decision to move, 53 percent of the respondents selected "yes" for at least one of the eight items. This reinforces the importance of community factors in the decision to move, however, higher proportions of the respondents said that a work (77%), family (69%), or lifestyle (70%) factor influenced their move than noted these community factors.<sup>1</sup>

The specific community factors varied in the role they played in the moving decision. Among all respondents, 31.7 percent said that lowering the cost of housing influenced

Table 2. Percent Responding "Yes"<sup>a</sup> to Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move.

	Type and Direction of Move					
	All Movers <sup>b</sup>	A: Within County, Changed Zipcode	B: Out To Different Iowa County	C: In From Different Iowa County	D: Out To Another State	E: In From Another State
Community Factors	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes
To lower the cost of housing	31.7	32.9	26.3	35.3	9.5	49.4
To have lower taxes	25.5	15.9	18.5	30.3	19.0	38.8
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	8.3	1.2	11.6	8.5	13.8	3.3
To find available and affordable childcare	2.7	1.2	2.0	3.5	1.7	3.9
To find better quality local schools	14.0	8.6	13.7	16.6	9.4	18.2
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	19.3	14.8	20.8	19.0	20.5	19.5
To have more ethnic diversity	10.3	1.2	9.6	7.0	29.3	4.6
To have less ethnic diversity	4.4	3.7	3.1	4.0	1.7	9.2

<sup>a</sup>respondents could respond "Yes" to more than one question; <sup>b</sup>based on 737 total respondents.

Table 3. Percent Responding “Yes” to Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Age.

	All Ages <sup>b</sup>	Age in Years					
		18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 59	60 – 69	70 or Older
Community Factors	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes
To lower the cost of housing	31.5	31.3	29.5	24.4	34.9	37.5	31.8
To have lower taxes	25.2	25.0	18.6	22.8	30.0	32.0	23.5
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	8.2	18.8	7.7	9.4	7.6	4.8	4.9
To find available and affordable childcare	2.7	6.3	7.1	1.6	0.6	1.0	0.0
To find better quality local schools	13.5	17.2	24.5	20.5	9.9	2.9	0.0
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	18.9	28.1	29.5	29.1	16.2	3.9	0.0
To have more ethnic diversity	10.2	20.6	12.2	7.9	11.0	5.9	6.1
To have less ethnic diversity	4.4	9.5	3.2	3.2	3.5	7.9	2.4

<sup>a</sup>respondents could respond “Yes” to more than one question; <sup>b</sup>based on 728 respondents who completed the age question.

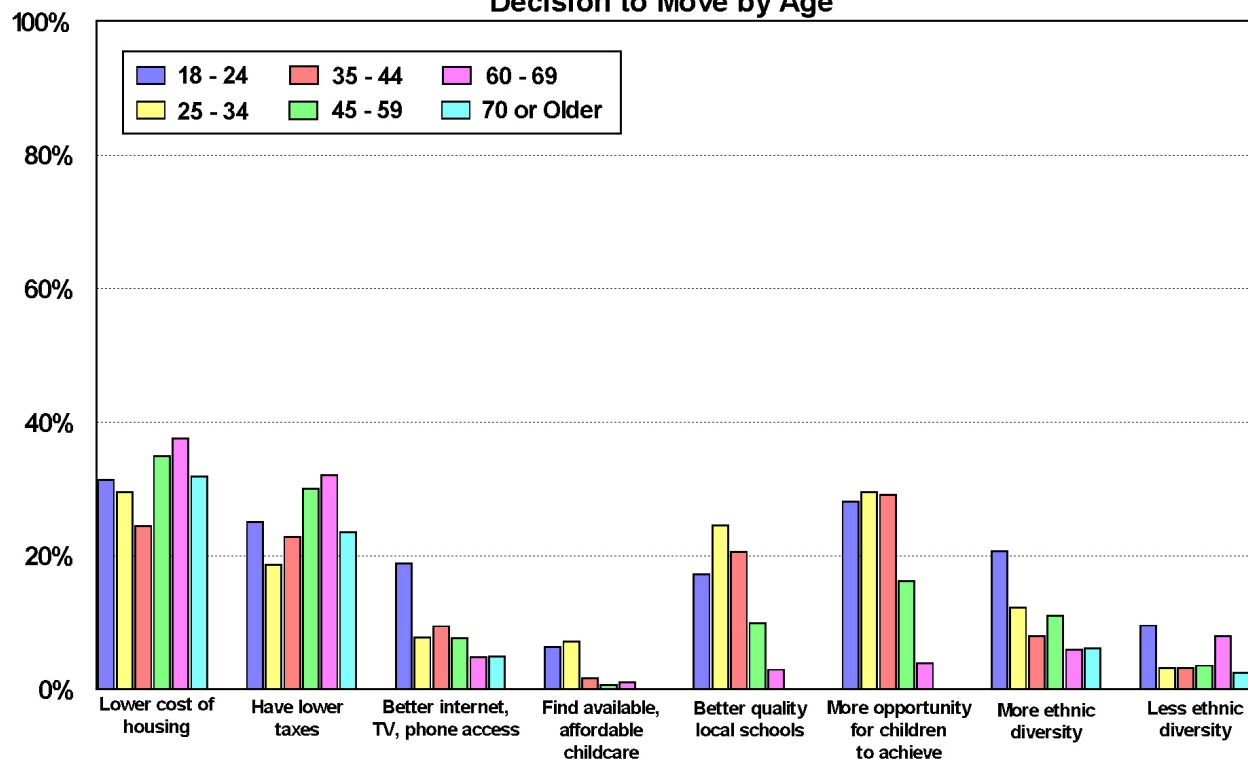
their moving decision and, in a similar fashion, 25.5 percent wanted to have lower taxes. Significantly fewer respondents overall (8.3%) said that wanting better TV, phone, or internet access was a factor in their move (Table 2, Figure 1). Issues relating to children were important for some respondents. Nineteen percent said that having greater opportunities for children to achieve was a factor in their moving decision, fourteen percent cited wanting to find better quality local schools, while fewer than three percent noted finding available and affordable

childcare as important. Ethnic diversity was a factor in the moving decision for some respondents. Just over ten percent overall said they wanted to have more ethnic diversity while less than five percent cited wanting less ethnic diversity (Table 2, Figure 1).

Responses by mover category (Table 1) revealed differences in the roles that these community factors played in the moving decision. An especially large difference between those moving in from other states and those leaving for other states emerged

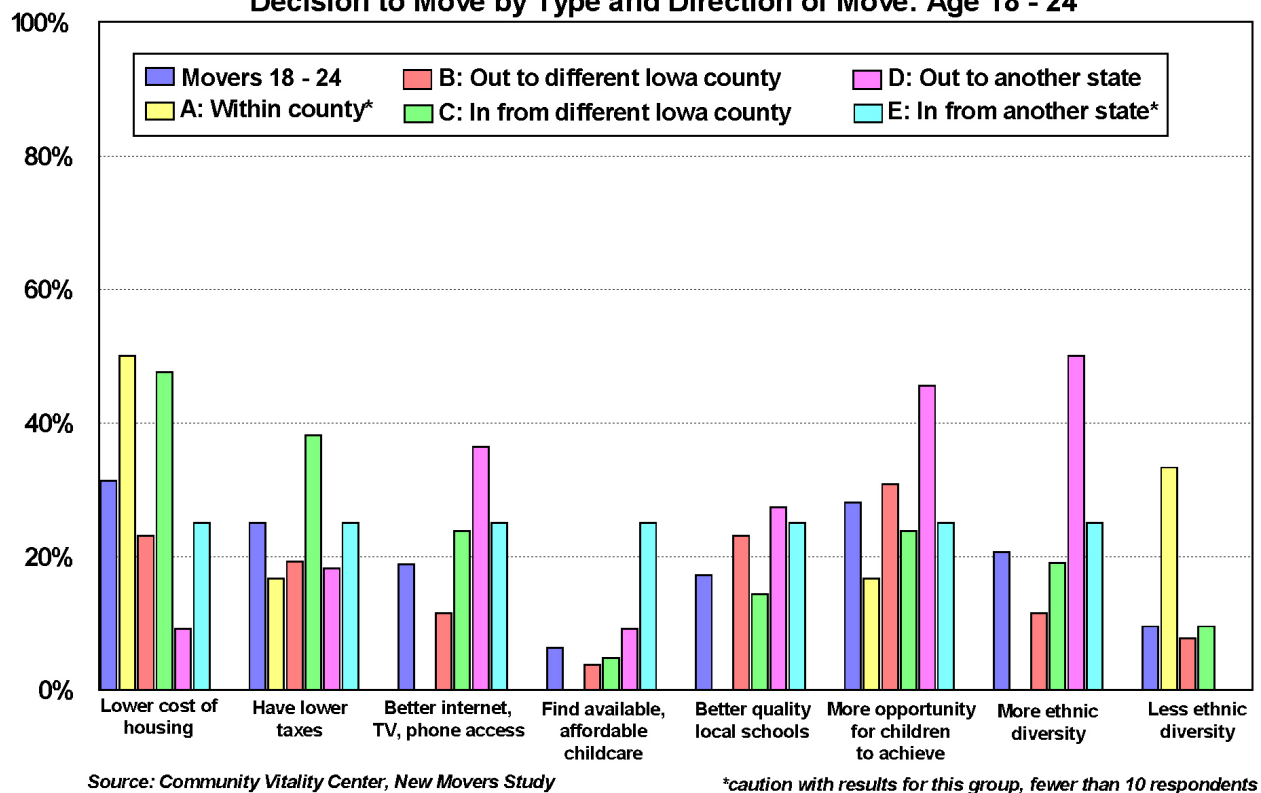
for the housing item. Nearly half (49.4%) of the respondents who came to Iowa from other states (Group E) said lowering the cost of housing was a factor in their move compared with just 9.5 percent of those who moved out to other states (Group D). A trend in the same direction was shown between those moving into the counties from other areas of Iowa (Group C) and those going to other counties in the state (Group B), although the gap was not as large as for those moving between states.

**Figure 2: Percent Responding ‘Yes’ to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Age**

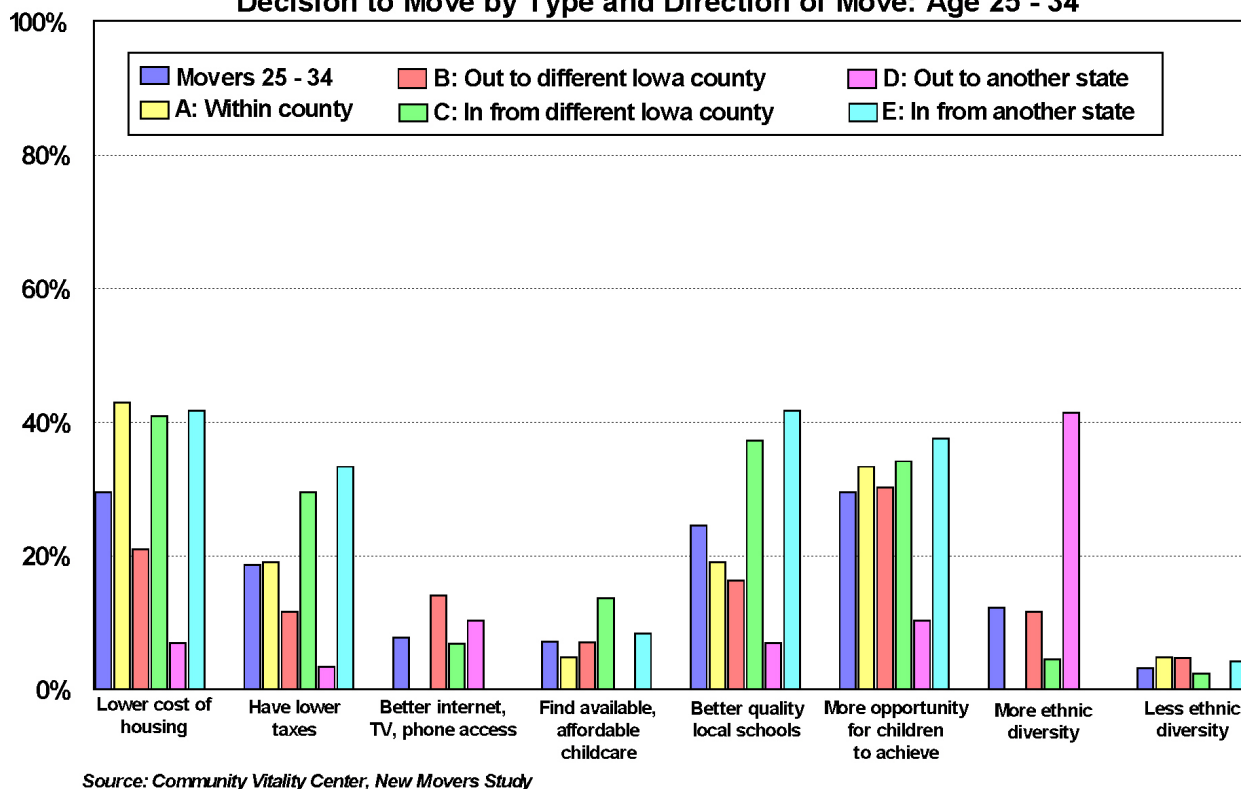


Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

**Figure 3: Percent Responding 'Yes' to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move: Age 18 - 24**



**Figure 4: Percent Responding 'Yes' to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move: Age 25 - 34**



The issue of taxes showed a similar pattern. Respondents moving into the counties were more likely than those moving out to say that lower taxes influenced their moving decision. Twice as many respondents moving into the counties from other states (38.8%) than those leaving Iowa (19.0%) said that wanting to have lower taxes was a factor in their move (Table 2, Figure 1). In contrast to the issues of housing and taxes, respondents leaving the state were the most likely (13.8%) to say that better internet, TV, or phone access influenced their move compared with just 3.3 percent coming to Iowa from other locations.

Relatively low proportions of respondents overall cited availability and affordability of childcare regardless of the direction of the move, although somewhat higher percentages of those moving into the counties noted this than did those moving out. The quality of local schools was a more important factor with schools generally being cited more often by respondents moving in than those moving out. About double percentages of respondents coming from other states (18.2%) noted they wanted to find better quality local schools than did those going elsewhere (9.4%). With the exception of the within-county movers (Group A), around 19 or 20 percent of respondents, regardless of direction of move, cited wanting more opportunities for children to achieve as a factor in the moving decision (Table 2, Figure 1).

Finally, wanting more ethnic diversity was cited by 29 percent of respondents leaving Iowa, less than 10 percent of those moving into Iowa or between Iowa counties, and by less than two percent of within-county movers in the state. Wanting less ethnic diversity was noted by relatively few respondents overall, but most often (9.2%) by those coming to Iowa from other states (Table 2, Figure 1).

## Community Factors by Age and Type of Move

Age and life-cycle stage influence decisions about moving. The respondents were grouped into six age categories to examine how community factors and the moving decision varied (Tables 3, 5).<sup>3</sup> Respondents age 45 and older were somewhat more likely than those younger to cite lowering

housing costs as a factor in their move, but it was a generally important factor across the age groups with 24 percent or more of each group noting it as important (Figure 2).

Lowering taxes was more important for those age 45 through 69 than for the younger or the oldest groups. Fewer than 19 percent of those age 25 – 34 cited taxes as important in their move compared with 32 percent of those age 60 – 69. Access to better internet, phone, and TV service, however, was cited most often by respondents under age 25. Nearly 19 percent of respondents that age cited these items as factors in the move, double the percentage of any other age group (Table 3, Figure 2).

Issues relating to children were of most concern to respondents younger than age 45, the time when younger children and school concerns are present in the family. Six to seven percent of respondents younger than 35 cited childcare issues as a factor in their moving decision. Among respondents through age 44, seventeen to twenty-four percent said they considered the quality of local schools as a factor in their move while twenty-eight to twenty-nine percent of respondents of those ages cited concerns for opportunities for their children to achieve. These factors relating to children were less important for respondents age 45 – 59 and relatively unimportant for those age 60 or older (Table 3, Figure 2).

The youngest age group, those 18 – 24, were the most likely (20.6%) to want more ethnic diversity; twelve percent or less of the other age groups noted more ethnic diversity as part of the moving decision. The youngest age group, however, was also the one with the highest percent (9.5%) saying they wanted less ethnic diversity followed by those age 60 – 69 (7.9%) (Table 3, Figure 2).

This study provides the ability to examine the reasons for moving by age and type of move together to look for decision patterns that might be unique or specific to one particular group or age combination (Table 4).<sup>4</sup> What does become apparent, however, is the overall consistency in the response pattern across the age groups for the housing and the tax items.

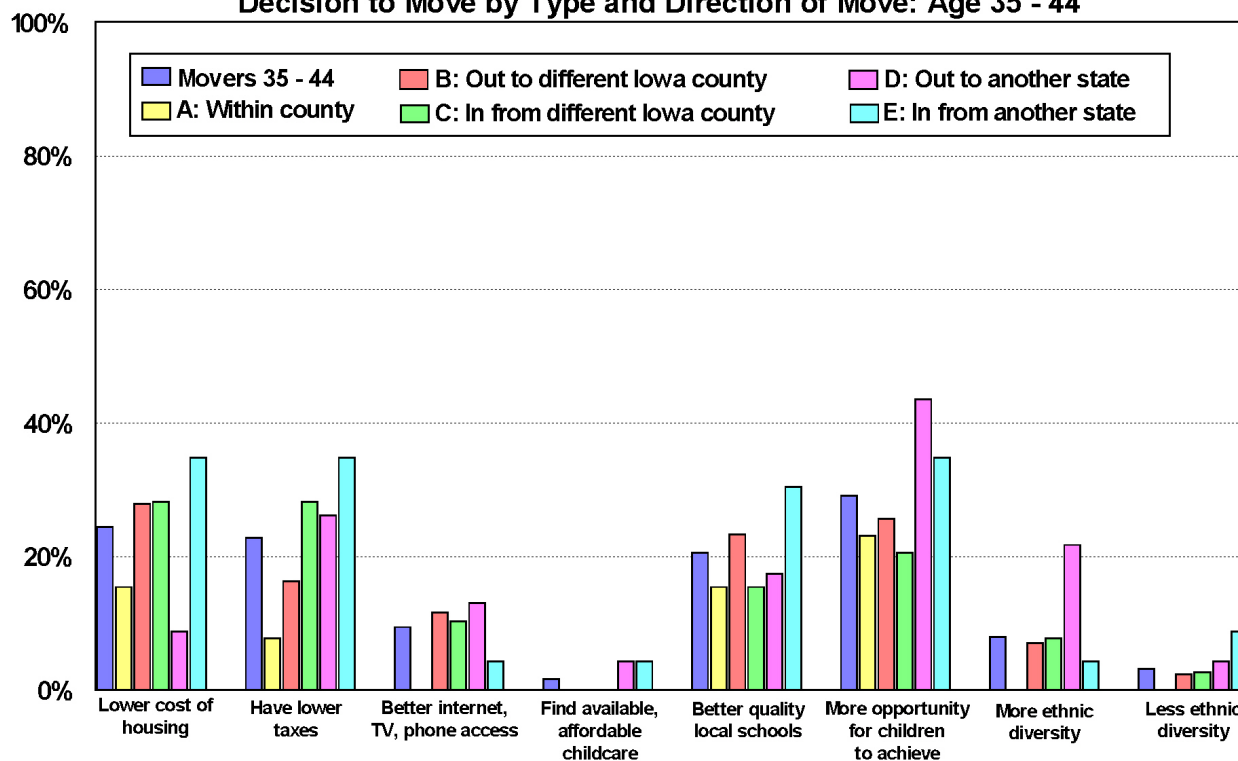
Regardless of the age group, much larger proportions of the respondents who moved into these counties from other states, compared with those who moved out of Iowa, said that lowering the cost of housing was a factor in their decision. Depending on the age, roughly twenty to fifty percentage points separated the responses of these two groups of movers (Table 4, Figures 3 – 8). The pattern on the housing question for those moving between counties in Iowa was similar, although there was usually not as large a percentage difference between those moving in and those moving out. For several of the age groups, the respondents who moved within a single county had important concerns about lowering housing costs as well (Table 4, Figures 3, 4, 6).

Another consistency across the age groups emerged in the response to the question on lowering taxes. The respondents who moved into the study counties, both from other states and other areas of Iowa, were more likely than those leaving to say they wanted to have lower taxes. The only exception on the tax question was the between-county movers age 60 – 69 (Table 4, Figure 7).

The youngest moving group, age 18 – 24, was the age group overall most likely to say that better internet, TV, or phone access influenced their moving decision. Among these youngest respondents, those who left Iowa were especially likely to cite these factors. Over thirty-six percent of the respondents age 18 – 24 who moved to another state said that internet, phone, or TV access was part of the reason they moved (Table 4, Figure 3).

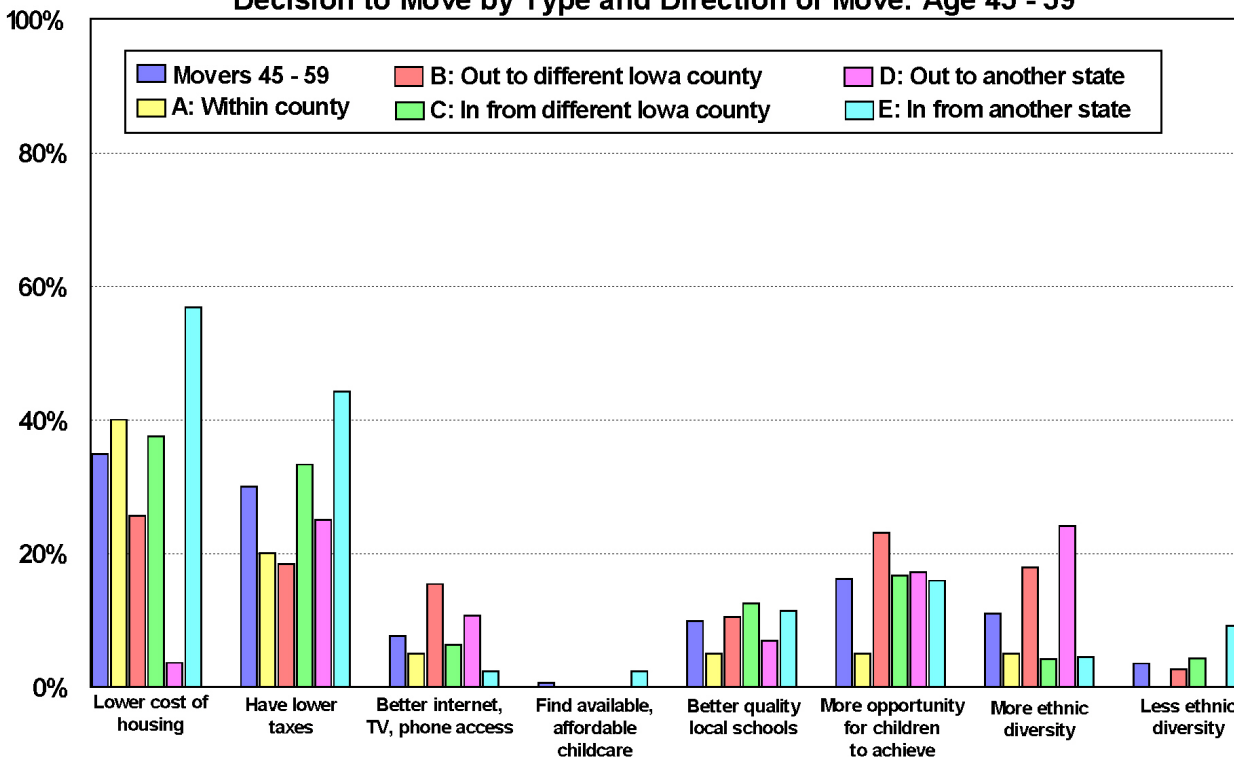
The youngest age group was the most likely overall to say that wanting more ethnic diversity was a factor in their move. As with the question on phone and internet access, it was those who left Iowa that most often said they wanted more ethnic diversity. Fifty percent of those age 18 – 24 who went to another state said that more ethnic diversity was important to them, more than any other age or mover group (Table 4, Figure 3). In contrast to these respondents, those of the youngest group who moved within a county had the highest proportion reporting wanting less ethnic diversity.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 5: Percent Responding 'Yes' to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move: Age 35 - 44**



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

**Figure 6: Percent Responding 'Yes' to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move: Age 45 - 59**



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study



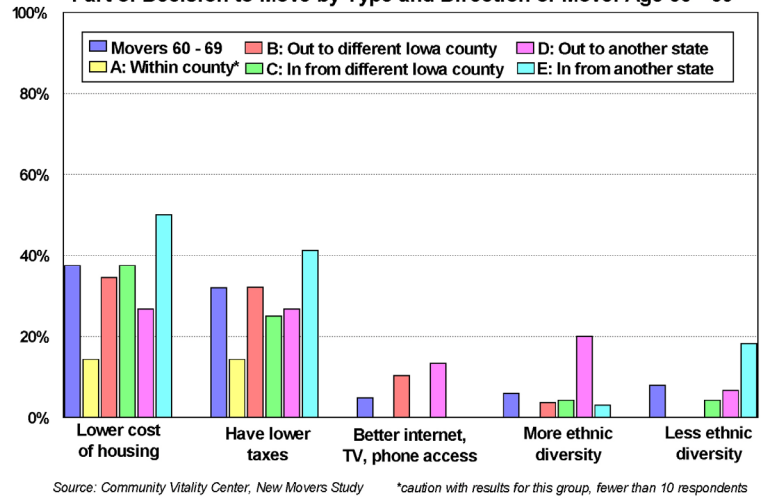
In general, among the youngest respondents, those leaving the counties were somewhat more likely than those moving in to say they were looking for better quality local schools and for more opportunity for their children to achieve. It was those this age moving to Iowa from other states, however, that, more than any other age or mover group, cited the need to find available and affordable childcare as a factor in their moving decision<sup>4</sup> (Table 4, Figure 3).

The respondents age 25 – 34 had responses regarding housing and taxes that were similar to the youngest group, but differed from those younger in the issues of schools and opportunities for children. For those age 25 – 34, it was the respondents moving in, both from other states and other Iowa counties, who were more likely to note the factors of better schools and more opportunities for children, a reverse of the pattern of the youngest group (Table 4, Figures 3, 4). However, the 25 – 34 year old movers were again similar to the younger respondents in that it was those moving to other states who were relatively likely (41.4%) to say they wanted to have more ethnic diversity (Table 4, Figure 4).

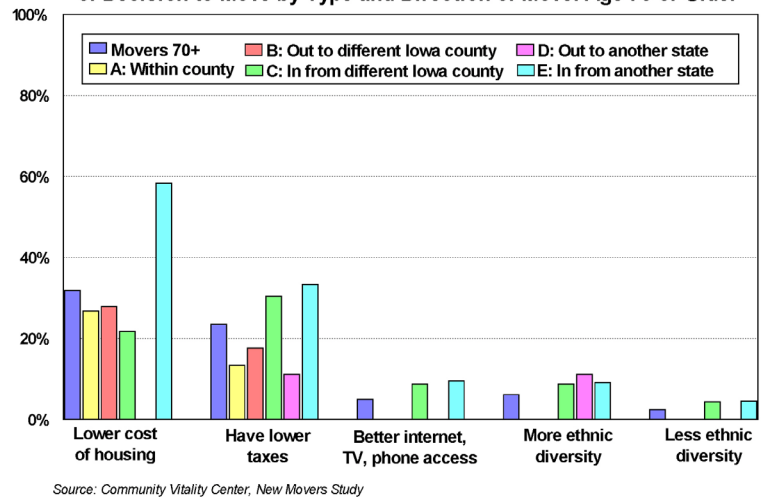
The pattern for housing and taxes was mostly repeated for the respondents age 35 – 44 in a similar fashion as for the two younger age groups. For the 35 – 44 year old movers, the overall response for the importance of finding childcare was much lower than for those younger. Interest in local schools and opportunities for children remained similar overall to the younger age groups but the relative pattern comparing those moving in with those moving out was mixed. Also, as with younger respondents, those this age most likely to say they were interested in more ethnic diversity as a factor in their move were those who moved from Iowa to other states (21.7%) (Table 4, Figure 5).

Among those age 45 – 59, some of the highest percentages saying they wanted to lower housing costs and to have lower taxes were noted among those coming to Iowa from other states. There was less overall concern with schools and opportunities for children compared with younger ages, although from five to twenty-three percent of the various mover groups this age cited these child-related issues. Once again, those most often

**Figure 7: Percent Responding ‘Yes’ to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move: Age 60 - 69**



**Figure 8: Percent Responding ‘Yes’ to Selected Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Type and Direction of Move: Age 70 or Older**



mentioning wanting more ethnic diversity were those who left Iowa to go to other states. In contrast, those most often mentioning wanting less ethnic diversity among respondents this age, were those moving into Iowa from other states (Table 4, Figure 6).

Very few respondents age 60 – 69 cited childcare, schools, or opportunities for children as factors in their moving decision (Table 4). As with younger movers, those this age moving into the counties were more likely to say they wanted lower housing costs than those who moved out but the responses to the tax question for this age group were mixed.

The 60 – 69 year old movers who went to other states were much more likely (20.0%)

than any others that age to cite more ethnic diversity as important for their move, while those this age who came from other states into Iowa (18.2%) were the most interested in less ethnic diversity (Table 4, Figure 7).

Among the oldest respondents, age 70 or older, just over 58 percent of those who came into the counties from other states said they wanted to lower the cost of housing, the highest percent of any age or mover group. This age group also had many more moving into the counties citing an interest in having lower taxes than those moving out of the counties. Few respondents this age cited internet, TV, or phone access as important in their decision to move and none of them said “yes” to the questions about finding childcare, better

## New Mover Studies: Community Factors and Moving in Nonmetro Iowa

Table 4. Percent Responding “Yes”<sup>a</sup> to Community Factors as Part of Decision to Move by Age and Type and Direction of Move.

Community Factors by Age	All Movers in Age Group <sup>b</sup>	Type and Direction of Move				
		A: Within County, Changed Zipcode	B: Out To Different Iowa County	C: In From Different Iowa County	D: Out To Another State	E: In From Another State
Age 18 - 24	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes
To lower the cost of housing	31.3	50.0 <sup>c</sup>	23.1	47.6	9.1	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To have lower taxes	25.0	16.7 <sup>c</sup>	19.2	38.1	18.2	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	18.8	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	11.5	23.8	36.4	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To find available and affordable childcare	6.3	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	3.8	4.8	9.1	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To find better quality local schools	17.2	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	23.1	14.3	27.3	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	28.1	16.7 <sup>c</sup>	30.8	23.8	45.5	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To have more ethnic diversity	20.6	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	11.5	19.0	50.0	25.0 <sup>c</sup>
To have less ethnic diversity	9.5	33.3 <sup>c</sup>	7.7	9.5	0.0	0.0 <sup>c</sup>
Age 25 - 34						
To lower the cost of housing	29.5	42.9	20.9	40.9	6.9	41.7
To have lower taxes	18.6	19.0	11.6	29.5	3.4	33.3
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	7.7	0.0	14.0	6.8	10.3	0.0
To find available and affordable childcare	7.1	4.8	7.0	13.6	0.0	8.3
To find better quality local schools	24.5	19.0	16.3	37.2	6.9	41.7
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	29.5	33.3	30.2	34.1	10.3	37.5
To have more ethnic diversity	12.2	0.0	11.6	4.5	41.4	0.0
To have less ethnic diversity	3.2	4.8	4.7	2.3	0.0	4.2
Age 35 - 44						
To lower the cost of housing	24.4	15.4	27.9	28.2	8.7	34.8
To have lower taxes	22.8	7.7	16.3	28.2	26.1	34.8
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	9.4	0.0	11.6	10.3	13.0	4.3
To find available and affordable childcare	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	4.3
To find better quality local schools	20.5	15.4	23.3	15.4	17.4	30.4
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	29.1	23.1	25.6	20.5	43.5	34.8
To have more ethnic diversity	7.9	0.0	7.0	7.7	21.7	4.3
To have less ethnic diversity	3.2	0.0	2.3	2.6	4.3	8.7
Age 45 - 59						
To lower the cost of housing	34.9	40.0	25.6	37.5	3.6	56.8
To have lower taxes	30.0	20.0	18.4	33.3	25.0	44.2
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	7.6	5.0	15.4	6.3	10.7	2.3
To find available and affordable childcare	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
To find better quality local schools	9.9	5.0	10.5	12.5	6.9	11.4
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	16.2	5.0	23.1	16.7	17.2	15.9
To have more ethnic diversity	11.0	5.0	17.9	4.2	24.1	4.5
To have less ethnic diversity	3.5	0.0	2.6	4.3	0.0	9.1
Age 60 - 69						
To lower the cost of housing	37.5	14.3 <sup>c</sup>	34.5	37.5	26.7	50.0
To have lower taxes	32.0	14.3 <sup>c</sup>	32.1	25.0	26.7	41.2
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	4.8	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	10.3	0.0	13.3	0.0
To find available and affordable childcare	1.0	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9
To find better quality local schools	2.9	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.8
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	3.9	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	0.0	0.0	6.7	8.8
To have more ethnic diversity	5.9	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	3.6	4.2	20.0	3.0
To have less ethnic diversity	7.9	0.0 <sup>c</sup>	0.0	4.2	6.7	18.2
Age 70 or Older						
To lower the cost of housing	31.8	26.7	27.8	21.7	0.0	58.3
To have lower taxes	23.5	13.3	17.6	30.4	11.1	33.3
To have better internet, TV, or phone access	4.9	0.0	0.0	8.7	0.0	9.5
To find available and affordable childcare	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
To find better quality local schools	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
To have greater opportunities for children to achieve	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
To have more ethnic diversity	6.1	0.0	0.0	8.7	11.1	9.1
To have less ethnic diversity	2.4	0.0	0.0	4.3	0.0	4.5

<sup>a</sup>respondents could respond “Yes” to more than one question; <sup>b</sup>based on 728 respondents who completed the age question; <sup>c</sup>caution with results for this group because fewer than 10 respondents.



Table 5. Age of Respondents by Type and Direction of Move.

Age Categories	All Movers <sup>a</sup>	Type and Direction of Move				
		A: Within County, Changed Zipcode	B: Out To Different Iowa County	C: In From Different Iowa County	D: Out To Another State	E: In From Another State
Median Age	46.0	45.0	43.0	44.0	41.0	53.5
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18 – 24	8.8	7.1	12.7	10.2	9.3	2.6
25 – 34	21.6	24.7	21.0	22.0	24.6	15.4
35 – 44	17.7	16.5	21.5	19.0	19.5	14.7
45 – 59	24.3	23.5	20.5	24.4	24.6	28.2
60 – 69	14.3	8.2	14.1	11.7	12.7	21.8
70 or older	13.3	20.0	10.2	12.7	9.3	17.3
Total Number of Respondents	728	85	205	205	118	156
18 – 24	64	6	26	21	11	4
25 – 34	157	21	43	45	29	24
35 – 44	129	14	44	39	23	23
45 – 59	177	20	42	50	29	44
60 – 69	104	7	29	24	15	34
70 or older	97	17	21	26	11	27

<sup>a</sup>based on 728 total respondents who completed the age question.

local schools, or better opportunities for children (Table 4, Figure 8).

## Summary

Community factors played a role in the moving decision of 53 percent of the respondents in the study. Age influenced the pattern of responses in that the youngest respondents, age 18 – 24, were the most likely to say they moved to find more ethnic diversity or better internet, phone, or TV access. Respondents younger than age 45 were the most likely to say that child-related issues, such as schools, childcare, and opportunities for children to achieve, were a factor in their moving decision. Respondents in the middle-age range, 45 – 69, were the most likely to cite lowering housing costs or lowering taxes as part of their reason for moving.

Although there were differences in the community factors cited by the respondents based on their age, several consistencies in the responses emerged based on the type of move made. Respondents moving into the counties, whether from other states or other areas of Iowa, were more likely than those who moved out to say they moved to have lower housing costs and lower taxes. Especially large differences in responses occurred between those who moved in or out from other states.

A different pattern emerged for the items regarding ethnic diversity. For the most part, it was the respondents who were

leaving the state who said that wanting more ethnic diversity was a factor in their moving decision. This pattern was consistent across the age groups as well and although other respondents, especially those younger than age 25, expressed an interest in more ethnic diversity, by and large it was those moving out of Iowa to other states who said this. A somewhat contrasting pattern emerged for those saying they wanted less ethnic diversity. In general, relatively few respondents said that wanting less ethnic diversity was a factor in their decision, but there was a tendency for these respondents to be those moving into Iowa from other states more than any other type.

Relatively low proportions of respondents overall cited childcare issues as a factor in their moving decision, but many more said that wanting better schools or opportunities for their children did play a role as they thought about moving. Respondents younger than age 45 were the most likely to cite these child-related issues but the patterns varied by type of move and age.

## Thinking About Next Steps

Many respondents thought about community factors as they made their decision to move. The findings in this study reinforce the importance of community issues as motivations in moving decisions but these results show important variations between those who moved into the counties and those who moved out.

For the respondents who moved into the study counties, there is a clear pattern that wanting lower housing costs was an important factor in their decision. Many of Iowa's nonmetropolitan communities have relatively low housing costs and communities could utilize this to attract new residents. Although the interest in housing was important to those who came to these counties from other areas of Iowa, it was also high for the respondents who came from other states. This suggests that nonmetropolitan Iowa can attract people from other parts of the country who find themselves priced out of the housing market in major U.S. cities and other areas around the nation.

The housing that is available, even if low cost, must meet the needs of the people and families coming to the area. Updated housing that is clean and safe will be attractive to new residents. In some communities, vacant lots in residential areas have been offered at low or no cost to prospective buyers if they agree to build single-family homes and live in them. This not only helps the newcomers but can be designed as a strategy for in-fill housing on existing vacant lots in established neighborhoods or to stimulate new developments.

Multi-generational housing might be a solution for some families so that aging parents could, in fact, live with children and grandchildren in conventional housing rather than needing higher-cost institutional living. Sometimes just an

## New Mover Studies: Community Factors and Moving in Nonmetro Iowa

addition of a ramp can make first-floor living quarters accessible to older persons with mobility difficulties. This suggests that communities might think about how housing rehabilitation incentives and redesign could increase livability for older residents and support families who would like their parents to live with them or nearby.

What might be a surprising result in the study is the finding regarding taxes. It was the respondents coming into the Iowa counties who most often were looking for lower taxes rather than those who were leaving. Too often, perhaps, there are conventional notions about the tax structure in Iowa's nonmetropolitan areas. Iowans may mistakenly assume that the state's comparison with other areas is unfavorable. The findings here suggest that incoming residents may, in fact, view the tax situation more favorably in their new location than where they lived previously and that this could be utilized to attract new residents.

The study implies, even though the primary focus is residential relocation, that some of the costs of doing business in Iowa counties may be lower than in other states and locations. Community planners and developers may be able to outline and summarize facts and figures to show that there is an advantage to their area in the cost of doing business. As taxes and housing are considered in business decisions by employers, these nonmetropolitan areas may find they have cost attributes that can be used in recruitment of new businesses and residents. This notion is reinforced by national reports that rank Iowa's cost of doing business and average commuting times favorably.

Iowa has historically ranked high with regard to children and schools. This study shows that opportunities for children and schools remain important in the moving decisions of younger persons and families who do not

want to short-change their children when they relocate. The results, however, were mixed in that some of the respondents were motivated to move into these counties in order to find better schools and opportunities for their children, while others were motivated, for those same reasons, to leave.

The implication is that not everyone with children in Iowa may perceive that it is the best environment for their children's education and opportunities. This suggests that Iowa can't just function on its reputation for schools and children, but must achieve these things in actuality. Compared with many other areas in the nation, Iowa schools may have favorable graduation rates, student test scores, and student activities but communities and school districts that achieve high performance may need to publicize these opportunities and achievements better. In addition, some communities have organized "dollars for scholars" programs to help graduates and parents with college scholarship and tuition programs. Overall, parents who perceive that opportunities for their children are better elsewhere will make efforts to relocate in order to provide what they think is needed for their children.

The ethnic diversity results provided a striking difference between the respondents leaving Iowa and the other categories of movers. Relative to other states, Iowa has a relatively homogeneous population even with the increase of new, culturally diverse residents in the last ten or fifteen years. Although the diversity in the Iowa population may not be changing rapidly, the environment for diversity and tolerance and welcoming attitudes can, in fact, be enhanced to be more attractive to a variety of residents. Some communities have provided welcoming training for those working with visitors and tourists in order to enhance the experience and pleasant reception given to visitors. The nation as a whole is becoming more diverse and multicultural and welcoming attitudes are an increasingly

important element in attracting new, and especially younger, people to the state.

Websites, brochures, and promotional materials might focus on these community characteristics as assets in messages about the community and area in efforts to recruit new residents. The results in the study showed that the younger respondents were the most likely to cite internet, phone, and TV access as a consideration in their moving decision. This implies that to reach younger potential new residents, high-speed internet access seems essential and that communities need promotional sites on the internet as this is how and where younger people get their information.

A final comment is in order, however, regarding the reasons for moving of younger adults. This report focuses on community-related reasons and these were important in the decisions of younger as well as older respondents. It is likely, however, that community reasons alone may not be enough to entice young residents to Iowa. The work-related findings discussed in our second report in this series<sup>1</sup> make clear the very high importance of work in the moving decisions of younger adults. Work, lifestyle, family, and community needs play a role in moving decisions and communities must take all into account when promoting their communities.

### Notes

1. Previous reports and the survey questionnaire are available on the Community Vitality Center web site at: [www.cvcia.org](http://www.cvcia.org).
2. The 19 counties were selected based on population, migration patterns from Census 2000, and geographic distribution across Iowa.
3. The median age of respondents was 46, but ranged from 41 for those leaving for other states to 53.5 for the respondents who came into Iowa (Table 5).
4. Because three age by mover categories (18 – 24, Within County; 18 – 24, In From Other States; 60 – 69, Within County) have fewer than 10 respondents, the results for those groups must be considered more tentative than the findings for the other groups.

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

*Community Vitality Center*  
478 Heady Hall  
Iowa State University  
Ames, IA 50011-1070  
515-294-3000  
[cvc@iastate.edu](mailto:cvc@iastate.edu)  
[www.cvcia.org](http://www.cvcia.org)  
April, 2008

*... and justice for all*

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.*

*Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.*