

## **FLOWS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR SCHOOL AND COURSE MOBILITY IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The observatory of the paths of secondary education students (OTES/DGEEC-MEC) has, as its main objective to produce and disseminate information on educational and professional paths of students from secondary schools in order to support the decision making process in education.

In this context, a flow analysis of school and course change in secondary education was developed. This analysis aims to address the following questions: What is the expression of school and course mobility? What are the main flows established between different types of education and training (mobility between-courses/educational path type)? What are the motivations for students to not change their school or course when they wanted to?

**Keywords:** School mobility, Course mobility; Social representations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the last few years, the Portuguese government has established as a priority the rise of compulsory education up to the secondary level (upper secondary education). In this scenario, there is a need to follow student trajectories in and out of this education level. At stake is the policy interest in a greater understanding of the learning processes of secondary education students as well as their transitions to the labor market or to higher education. For this purpose the Observatory of the Trajectories of Secondary Education Students (OTES) was constituted in 2006. OTES aims to provide tools to diagnose, monitor and evaluate the education system in order to support the decision making process in local and central sub-systems of education governance. In this regard, the following objectives are pursued:

1. To produce and disseminate information on educational and occupational trajectories of secondary school students by analyzing:
  - the trajectories within secondary education;
  - the transition trajectories of secondary education graduates within the education system (to higher education);
  - the socio-occupational integration of secondary education graduates;
  - the socio-occupational integration of students that did not complete secondary education.
2. To support the decision making process in education by:
  - Signaling aspects that are of strategic importance to the policy-making process and making recommendations;
  - Providing information to support decision making (monitoring, self-evaluation and external evaluation) at the school level.

## **THEMES**

To analyze student's school trajectories and learning processes, the Observatory addresses five relevant topics: socioeconomic origins, school performance, school choices, occupational trajectories and school and citizenship practices. Socioeconomic origins analysis main goal is to identify the social and economic origins of secondary education students. This identification is made by collecting information about their parents' occupational status and levels of education. School performance analysis aims

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to study students school performance levels based on indicators such as the grades obtained, dropouts and early exits from secondary education, as well as their perceptions about their own school performance. The theme of school choices regards the dynamics of choices school trajectories and the motivations that underlie each choice, the degree of satisfaction with different aspects of schools and education facilities. The transition trajectories to the labor market are also examined, namely the conditions under which this transition occurs and the expectations students have about it.

At last, under the topic related to school and citizenship we address the practices of citizenship at school and the levels of participation of students and their families in the construction of school's everyday life. We analyze the associative practices of students, their participation and the one of their families in activities organized by different bodies in school or other activities, which, although less formal, is relevant for the development of citizenship values and behavior.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodological approach of OTES / DGEEC in order to identify student's trajectories during and after secondary education follows two mixed strands – cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis.

The cross-sectional analysis allows us to obtain, at any given time, an overview of high school student's trajectories within the various education and training modalities offered by the secondary education system. The longitudinal analysis allows us to record how the trajectories unfold over time and is particularly suited to analyze transitions between basic education and secondary education, secondary education and the labor market and between secondary education and tertiary education.

This analysis can be accomplished in several ways, including the longitudinal analysis of the second cohort follow-up method, based on examination of the same group of students (cohort) in different moments of their school trajectory.

## **DATA SOURCES**

OTES applies three surveys to secondary school students at different moments of their paths: i) Questionnaire to “students on the entry level of secondary education”, ii) “Students at the end of secondary education”, and iii) “Youth in post-secondary education”.

These surveys are applied through a digital infrastructure developed by the Observatory, in collaboration with the schools. The questionnaire used in the study of flows of school and course mobility analysis is called “Students at the end of secondary education”, and it was applied to students that attend public and private schools, from mainland Portugal, in the following educational types: scientific-humanistic courses, specialized artistic education courses – visual and audiovisual arts, education and training courses, professional courses and technological courses.

The data collecting process was developed through:

- Questionnaire “Students at the end of secondary education – 2008/2009” with 83,4% of school involvement (658) and 46,8% of the students (38 610);
- Questionnaire “Students at the end of secondary education – 2009/2010” with 81,2% of school involvement (691) and 57,9% of the students (45 472);
- Questionnaire “Students at the end of secondary education – 2011/2012” with 84,8% of school involvement (680) and 60,1% of the students (47 024).

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The change or the desire to change schools and/or course/ type of course is the topic to be developed in this paper. A more descriptive analysis will be used, the expression of these phenomena will be taking into consideration factors such as the type of the current course, the type of school and some variables related to school performance.

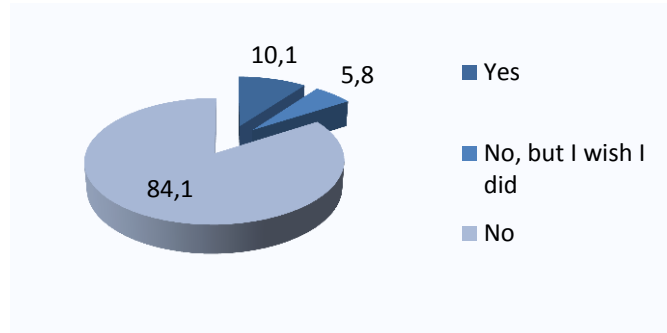
Change profiles will be established, always taking into consideration that the school change can also be associated to a course change. When treating this information, the type of course will be contemplated, in example: what are the types of courses in which the majority of students change, and at the same time what are the ones that receive more students.

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Finally, the reasons given by students to change schools/course will be analyzed, as well as the reasons given for not making the change even when there is a desire to do so.

The analysis of the collected data shows that most students indicated that they didn't change or desired to change school during secondary education (Graphic 1). From the remaining, 11,1% detailed that they in fact changed school and 5,7% specified that they didn't do it, even when—at some point - wanted to.

**Graphic 1 - Change or desire to change school during secondary education (%)**



Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC - 08/09; 09/10; 11/12.

**Table 1 - Change or desire to change school during secondary education, according to the type of course (%)**

|                |     | Yes  | No, but I wish I did | No   | Total |
|----------------|-----|------|----------------------|------|-------|
| Type of course | CHC | 9,7  | 8,6                  | 81,7 | 100   |
|                | VC  | 17,0 | 4,0                  | 79,0 | 100   |

Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC - 08/09; 09/10; 11/12.

Making an breakdown according to the type of course frequented, it is possible to observe that students from vocational courses are the ones that changed schools the most (19,1% to 6,5%). On the other

hand, students from scientific-humanistic courses stated that they desired to change school slightly more often than their colleagues (8,6% to 4,0%) (Table 1).

Having in consideration the effective change or the desire to change according to the nature of the current school it's possible to observe that students that frequent private schools are the ones that changed school the most (21,6%), and that the ones from

**Table 2 - Change or desire to change school during secondary education, according to the attended type of school (%)**

|                |         | Yes  | No, but I wish I did | No   | Total |
|----------------|---------|------|----------------------|------|-------|
| Type of school | Public  | 9,6  | 7,5                  | 82,9 | 100   |
|                | Private | 21,1 | 5,6                  | 73,4 | 100   |

Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC - 08/09; 09/10; 11/12.

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public schools are the ones that desire to change the most (7,5%) although the difference is less noticeable in the last example (Table 2).

**Table 3 – Change or desire to change school, according to the number of years of annual deviation during secondary education (%)**

|                      | No deviation | 1 year | 2 years | >=3 years |
|----------------------|--------------|--------|---------|-----------|
| Yes                  | 7,1          | 28,9   | 35,8    | 43,5      |
| No, but I wish I did | 7,4          | 6,4    | 5,1     | 3,5       |
| No                   | 85,4         | 64,7   | 59,1    | 53,0      |
| Total                | 100          | 100    | 100     | 100       |

Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12

When comparing school change with the number of years students deviate from the expected age to frequent 12<sup>th</sup> grade, it is observable that as the number of years increases, it is more

likely that students will have changed school during secondary education (43,5% of students with >=3 years). On the other hand, the fewer the years of annual deviation, the more they consider that they would have liked to change school (7,4% with no deviation, and 5,1% with >=3 years) (Table 3).

School change during secondary education is characterized by three distinctive profiles: the first one, composed by students that have changed school while keeping the same course and type course (60,0%); the second one, composed by students that have changed school and course, while keeping the same type of course (17,1%) and a third group, on which the students have changed school, course and also type of course (22,9%) (Figure 1).

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Figure 1 – Changes between schools, type of courses, and courses in secondary education (%)

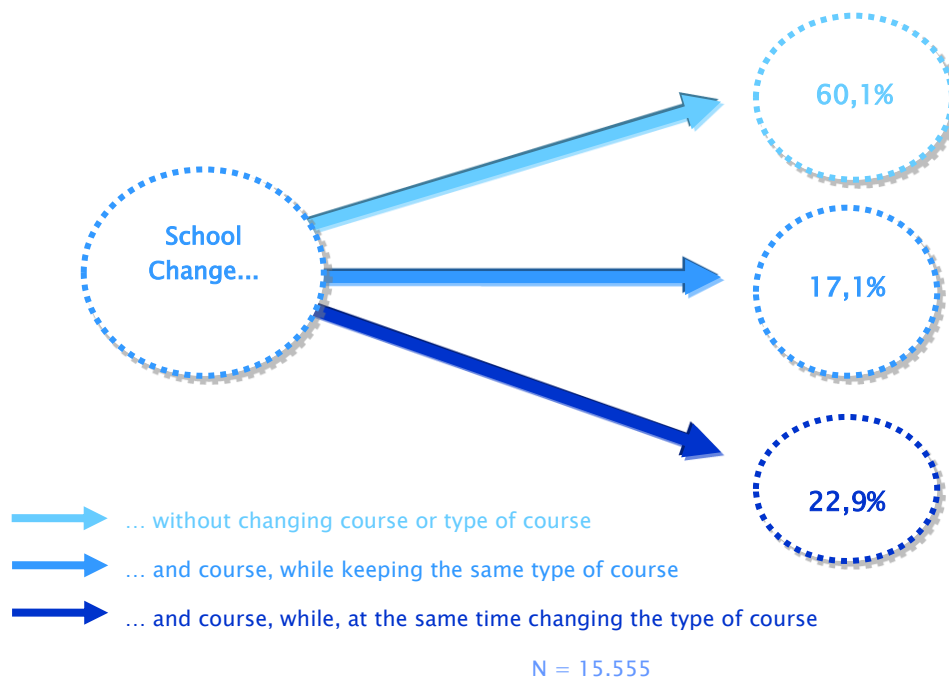


Table 4 – Main reasons to have changed or wished to have changed school, according to the current type of course (%)

|  | Total | CHC  | VC   |
|--|-------|------|------|
| I wanted a school that offered the course/subjects I want  | 35,5  | 21,0 | 61,1 |
| I wanted to have better teachers                           | 16,1  | 21,5 | 6,7  |
| I wanted a school closer to my home                        | 12,9  | 14,1 | 10,8 |
| I wanted a school with better installations                | 11,7  | 14,2 | 7,4  |
| I wanted a school with greater prestige                    | 13,0  | 16,1 | 7,7  |
| I wanted to go to the school my friends went               | 10,0  | 12,3 | 5,8  |
| I changed town/country                                     | 8,8   | 9,0  | 8,4  |
| My parents said the school I was wasn't the best for me    | 7,2   | 9,0  | 3,9  |
| Persona reasons  | 5,3   | 5,9  | 4,3  |
| I wanted a school with less security problems              | 3,8   | 4,4  | 2,7  |
| I wanted to meet new people and/or be in a new environment | 3,0   | 4,1  | 0,8  |
| I wanted a school with less problems between students      | 2,8   | 3,6  | 1,2  |
| I wanted a school closer to my parents workplace           | 1,6   | 1,9  | 0,9  |
| Other reasons  | 8,2   | 9,9  | 5,2  |

Note: This table refers to a multiple choice question.  
 Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12  
 N = 15.895

The most frequently stated reasons by students to change or desire to change school were: the desire to find a school that had their favorite course/subjects (35,5%); to have better teachers (16,1%); to attend a school closer to their home (12,9%); with better installations (11,7%); and with more prestige (13,0%) (Table 4). The same analysis, according to the current type of course allows the understanding that, while

students from scientific-courses divide mostly between changing to a school that offered

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the favored course/subjects (21,0%) and with better teachers (21,5%), students that attend vocational courses mention mostly the first type of reasons (61,1%).

**Table 5 – Main reason for students not changing schools, when they wanted to, according to the current type of course (%)**

|   | Total | CHC  | VC   |
|---|-------|------|------|
| The school I attend is the one closest to my home           | 41    | 43,1 | 31,6 |
| My friend s are in this school, this is why I didn't change | 14    | 15,2 | 8,7  |
| My parents thought this school is the best one for me       | 13,2  | 13,2 | 13   |
| I felt safer in this school                                 | 7,3   | 7,6  | 6,1  |
| This is the only school that had my desired course          | 7,8   | 4,7  | 21,5 |
| This school has more prestige                               | 2,6   | 2,6  | 2,4  |
| This school is closer to my parents workplace               | 2     | 2,2  | 1,2  |
| This school has better teachers                             | 1,8   | 2    | 1,1  |
| For personal reasons  | 1,5   | 1,4  | 1,5  |
| This school has better installations                        | 1,1   | 1    | 1,7  |
| Other reasons   | 2,7   | 4,5  | 8,3  |

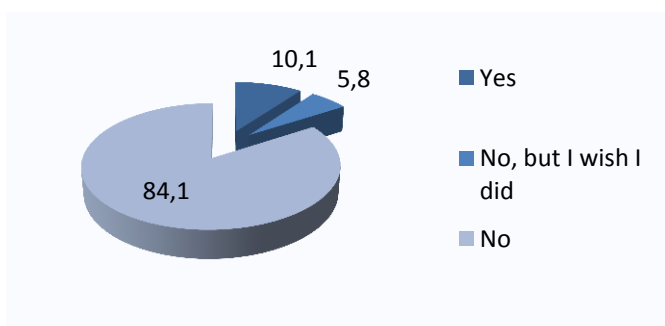
Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12  
N = 9272

For students that, while desiring to change school at one point of their educational path didn't do it, the most frequently presented reasons were: that their school was the one closest to their home (41,0%); was frequented by their friends (14,0%); and was the most appropriate school, according to their parent's opinion (13,2%) (Table 5). While students from scientific-humanistic

courses mentioned responses mostly similar to the global results, vocational courses students mentioned that they wanted a school closer to their home (31,6%), they also mentioned that this is the only school that offers the course that they wanted to attend (21,5%) (Table 5).

**COURSE AND COURSE TYPE MOBILITIES**

**Graphic 2 – Change or desire to change course during secondary education (%)**



When questioned if they changed, or desired to change course during secondary education most students responded that it never happened in most cases (84,1%). Only 10,1% has changed and 5,8% said



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that at some point they wanted to change, but for some reason didn't follow through with their intentions (Graphic 2).

Just like what was observed with school changes, it's the vocational courses students that experienced a course change the most during secondary education (18,8%), and the ones from scientific-humanistic courses are the ones that desired to change course the most (7,0%) (Table 6).

**Table 6 – Change or desire to change course during secondary education, according to the type of course (%)**

|                |     | Yes  | No, but I wish I did | No   | Total |
|----------------|-----|------|----------------------|------|-------|
| Type of course | CHC | 5,9  | 7,0                  | 87,1 | 100   |
|                | VC  | 18,8 | 3,3                  | 77,9 | 100   |

Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12

Having into consideration the number of years students deviate from the expected age to frequent the 12<sup>th</sup> grade we can understand that students with one (39,3%), two (43,3%) and 3 or more years of some kind of retention (38,5%) are the ones that have changed course the most (Table 7). Regarding the desire to change course, it is observable a reversed tendency, since students that have never experienced any kind of retention are the ones that want to change the most.

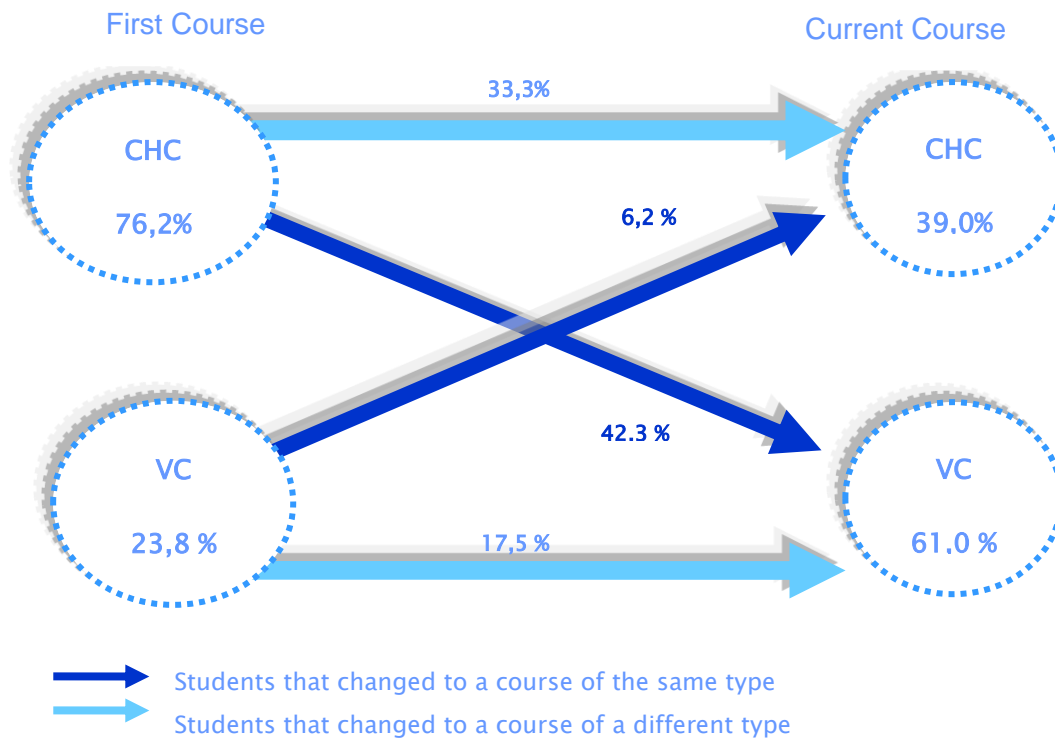
**Table 7 – Change or desire to change course, according to the number of years of annual deviation during secondary education (%)**

|                      | No deviation | 1 year | 2 years | >=3 years |
|----------------------|--------------|--------|---------|-----------|
| Yes                  | 3,1          | 39,3   | 43,3    | 38,5      |
| No, but I wish I did | 6,1          | 5,3    | 4,3     | 3,2       |
| No                   | 90,8         | 55,5   | 52,4    | 58,3      |
| Total                | 100          | 100    | 100     | 100       |

Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12

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Figure 2 – Flows in secondary education: course and type of course mobility (%)



Fonte: Questionário OTES/GEPE – 2009/2010.

N = 13221

Having under consideration only students that changed course during secondary education the following is observable (Figure 2):

- Even though scientific-humanistic courses present themselves predominantly as a first choice (33,3%), a good percentage of these students have changed to another course from this modality;
- From the students that have changed course, 42,3% did it from a scientific-humanistic course to a vocational course. This fact shows that these are the most desired courses;
- From the students that have changed course, most of them (61,0%) are currently frequenting a vocational course. These are the most wanted type of courses for students that have changed;
- Only 6,2% of students, from a total of 23,8%, have changed from a vocational course, to a scientific-humanistic course;
- 17,5% of a total of 23,8% have changed between vocational courses.

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The most frequently presented motives by students to have changed course during secondary education were the following: the fact the previous course wasn't the one they wanted (40,8%); that it wasn't adequate to the desired profession (28,0%); that it was too hard (27,3%); and it was too theoretical (18,1%). When these reasons were analyzed

**Table 8 – Main reasons to have changed or wished to have changed course, according to the current type of course (%)**

|   | Total | CHC  | VC   |
|---|-------|------|------|
| The previous course was never the one that I really wanted    | 40,8  | 35,2 | 38,0 |
| I thought the course wasn't suitable to my desired profession | 28,0  | 37,4 | 22,0 |
| The course was too hard                                       | 27,3  | 31,2 | 24,8 |
| The course was too theoretical                                | 18,1  | 8,9  | 24,0 |
| This course grants better chances of finding a job            | 11,4  | 6,7  | 14,4 |
| I flunked in the last course so I decided to change           | 7,9   | 5,0  | 9,8  |
| My previous class didn't had a good environment               | 6,0   | 6,2  | 5,8  |
| Some close friends advised me to change course                | 5,2   | 5,9  | 4,8  |
| The teachers weren't good                                     | 4,9   | 4,3  | 5,2  |
| I changed school and this one doesn't have my course          | 2,7   | 2,0  | 3,1  |
| The course was too practical                                  | 1,0   | 1,3  | 0,9  |
| The previous course ceased to exist                           | 1,7   | 1,0  | 2,1  |
| Other reasons   | 3,6   | 3,0  | 3,6  |

Note: This table refers to a multiple choice question.  
Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12  
N = 15.895

according to the currently attended type of course, it was possible to verify that although students from both type of courses have mentioned that the previous course wasn't the one they wanted, the ones from scientific-humanistic courses mentioned mainly that their old course wasn't suitable to their professional expectations (37,4%) and that it was too hard (31,2%) (Table 8). Students from vocational courses also considered that their old course was too theoretical (24,0%).

**Table 9 – Main reason for students not changing schools, when they wanted to, according to the current type of course(%)**

|   | Total | CHC  | VC   |
|---|-------|------|------|
| I would have to restart from the 10 <sup>th</sup> grade                           | 50,1  | 52,2 | 40,7 |
| The course that I would like to attend doesn't exist in this school               | 18,9  | 16,1 | 29,7 |
| The course that I would like to attend doesn't allow me to find a good profession | 11,0  | 12,5 | 4,4  |
| My family didn't want me to change course   | 8,6   | 9,1  | 6,5  |
| The course that I would like to attend is too hard                                | 3,4   | 3,1  | 4,5  |
| The course that I would like to attend is too far from my home                    | 3,0   | 2,1  | 6,8  |
| My friends were in this course so I didn't change                                 | 1,9   | 1,8  | 2,2  |
| I couldn't get a vacancy to change course   | 0,3   | 0,2  | 0,6  |
| Other reasons   | 2,9   | 2,6  | 4,7  |

Note: This table refers to a multiple choice question.  
Source: Questionnaire OTES/DGEEC – 08/09; 09/10; 11/12  
N = 7.580

profession (11,0%) (Table 9). The same analysis, now according to the type of course shows that, while scientific-humanistic courses students mostly mention that they didn't want to restart secondary education (52,2%), the ones from vocational courses while also mostly mentioning the same reason, also stated that the desired course didn't exist in their school (29,7%).

For students that changed course, it is possible to observe the necessity to repeat a school year while changing. Most students mentioned that they were retained for at least a year (Table 10). This fact

Students that didn't change course, but desired to do so at some moment of their school paths mentioned that the reasons why they didn't do it were: that they didn't want to start 10<sup>th</sup> grade all over again (50,1%); they didn't had the desired course in their school (18,9%); and the fact that the desired course wouldn't allow them to find a good

**Table 10 – Need to repeat a year in order to change course, according to the current type of course (%)**

|  | Total | CHC  | VC   |
|--|-------|------|------|
| Yes, but even if I didn't change course I was going to fail anyway | 34,5  | 25,1 | 40,5 |
| Yes, because I couldn't get equivalences                           | 44,0  | 41,1 | 45,9 |
| No, I didn't have to repeat a year                                 | 21,5  | 33,8 | 13,6 |
| Total  | 100   | 100  | 100  |

Fonte: Questionário OTES/GEPE – 2009/2010.  
N = 15.895

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is particularly observed in vocational courses were almost 90% of students repeated a school year when they changed courses.

### **MAIN FINDINGS**

The change/desire to change school (about 20%) and course (about 15%) is a reality that some students experienced during their secondary education journey.

School change flows are usually associated to course changes, to the proximity to the area of residence and to the desire to study with better teachers, and in better schools. Course changes are usually derived from the fact that the students are not frequenting their desired course, the course is not appropriate to perform in the desired profession, and it's hard and theoretical. When students don't change courses when they want to, the main reasons are that they don't want to start their secondary education journey all over again, and that the course they desire doesn't exist in the frequented school.

Scientific-humanistic courses are the ones that lose the most students due to course mobility, and, in an inverse way, vocational courses are the ones that receive more students.

This work aims to contribute to a reflection on the individual and structural conditionings in the design of youth's school paths. The flows of change show that in a change/desire to change school/ type of course scenario, some conditionals stand out. The lack of interest in the chosen type of education/course, to questions of school/household proximity, and the need to restart their secondary education journey all over again

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