



Entering and Exiting the Foster Care System: Implications for Absenteeism Among Child Welfare Involved Youth

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**Entering and Exiting the Foster Care System:
Implications for Absenteeism Among Child Welfare Involved Youth**

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Abstract

While foster youth miss more school versus their non-foster counterparts, their status as a foster youth is not static, with many of them entering and exiting the foster care system over time. These dynamics of entry and exit can represent particularly crucial transition periods of stability and instability that may differentially influence absenteeism. Yet, there is a dearth of studies that have explored these dynamics; absent this knowledge, we may be overlooking children in the child welfare system that may need targeted support during these transition periods to promote their educational wellbeing. In our study, we estimate whether and how entry into and exit out of foster care have different associations with absenteeism. We analyze four years of longitudinal data (2015–16 to the 2018–19 school years) from four large districts in California, the state with the largest population of foster youth, using an asymmetric fixed effects strategy. For children involved with the child welfare system, entering foster care is associated with 2.5 fewer days absent ($-2.51; p < .001$) while the probability of being chronically absent was lower by about 12.6 percentage points ($-0.126; p < .001$). On the other hand, foster youth exiting foster care missed about an additional day ($0.958; p < .01$) while their probability of chronic absenteeism was about 6 points higher ($0.058; p < .001$). Overall, these results shed new light about the vulnerability of foster youth exiting the system and bring new awareness of targeted supports they may need to promote their attendance.

Keywords: attendance, chronic absenteeism, foster youth, California, asymmetric fixed effects

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Foster youth—children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect—are a highly vulnerable, yet understudied group in absenteeism research despite their alarming rates of absences. Rates of chronic absence (missing 10% or more of school days for any reason) among foster youth increased dramatically over the course of the pandemic where in states, such as California, rates surged from 28% prior to the pandemic to 46.5% percent in the 2021–22 school year (California Department of Education, 2024). The consequences of absences can be particularly detrimental to foster youth’s educational trajectories, leading to higher dropout rates and lower academic performance (Santibañez, 2021). While foster youth share some of the same challenges that non-foster youth face in attending school, they confront unique systemic barriers that exacerbates their likelihood of being chronically absent, including behavioral challenges due to traumatic experiences of abuse and neglect (Burns et al., 2022) and high rates of educational instability due to frequent changes in foster care placements (Zorc et al., 2013).

Despite these underlying drivers of high rates of absences, less is known about how foster youth who enter and exit the foster care system while still in school influences attendance behaviors. Moving into and out of foster care represent critical transitions periods during which foster youth can experience both stabilizing and destabilizing experiences that may profoundly influence their educational trajectories. Children involved with the child welfare system who enter the foster care system are placed temporarily within the protective environment of foster caregivers (Lawrence et al., 2006), while those exiting are reunified with their biological guardians or parents (Font et al., 2018). Entering foster care can offer educational stability

through the support of foster parents alongside educational advocates and liaisons who can monitor absence behaviors more closely thereby improving attendance (Weinberg et al., 2014). On the other hand, exiting foster care can indirectly contribute to higher rates of absences due to increased behavior problems, substance abuse, and legal involvement (Bellamy, 2008; Taussig et al., 2001). Further, children exiting foster homes could return to more unstable home environments of their biological parents and the reunification process itself could lead to higher stress levels (Bellamy, 2008). To date, teasing out the directionality of the foster youth exit and entries on absenteeism has yet to be empirically tested. From a policy perspective, evidence of whether foster care entry and exits can have differential effects can help pinpoint critical transition—and potentially more disruptive—periods when foster youth may need more intensive supports and interventions to promote their attendance.

Accordingly, the aims of this study are twofold. First, we estimate whether and how entry into and exit out of foster care have different associations with absenteeism. Second, we conduct a set of exploratory analyses to examine potential heterogeneity of foster care entries and exits by gender and race/ethnicity. Our study is unique in several respects. We situate our study in California, the state with the largest population of foster youth, and use longitudinal data on a population based sample of K–12 foster youth from four large school districts in California. Analytically, we use an asymmetric fixed effects regression model (Allison, 2019) that leverages within-child variability in foster care exits and entries over time and controls for time-stable differences, both observed and unobserved, between children.

In the rest of this paper, we provide an overview of foster youth in California followed by a theoretical and empirical overview of foster youth and absenteeism. This is followed by our research design and findings. Finally, we conclude with implications for policy and practice.

Foster Youth: The California Context

During the 2022–2023 school year, there were approximately 31,000 foster youth enrolled in California’s schools, representing around 0.5% of the total student population (California Department of Education, 2024). Foster youth are children who have experienced abuse or neglect by a parent or guardian and consequently have been removed from their homes and placed into the care of temporary foster families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). Foster youth in California are more likely to move schools within the same year, be enrolled in the highest poverty schools, and have disciplinary infractions (California Department of Education, 2024). Additionally, foster youth were less likely to meet or exceed standards on state assessments, graduate from high school, and attend college. Importantly, foster youth also miss more days of school versus their non-foster youth counterparts. In 2022–23, about 39% of students in foster care were chronically absent (missing 10% or more of school days for any reason), nearly 1.5 times the statewide rate (California Department of Education, 2024).

In tackling the unique educational challenges of foster youth, California has taken a nationwide lead in advocating for foster youth’s educational well-being. In 2003, California became the first state in the nation to pass legislation (A.B. 490, 2003) ensuring educational rights for foster students. Since then, the state has continued to pass legislation requiring school districts to explicitly set educational goals as well as allocate educational funding for foster youth. Although the state follows federal regulations ensuring foster youth’s educational stability by allowing foster youth to remain in their schools of origin, adherence to these regulations in practice remains lacking (Alliance for Children’s Rights, 2020).

Foster Youth and Absenteeism

Conceptually, the link between foster care status and absenteeism can be explained through two interrelated lenses; each lens forms the core components of a broader ecological framework that has been used to theoretically explain drivers of absenteeism (Gottfried & Gee, 2017). The first of these lenses focuses on individual behavioral characteristics of foster youth, while the second focuses on systemic structural influences.

The child-level behavioral lens helps us understand the unique and individual behavioral attributes of children placed in foster care which predisposes them to a higher risk of absenteeism. Foster youth's experiences of maltreatment, abuse, and neglect can affect their mental and behavioral health (Baldwin et al., 2023). These types of traumatic experiences can lead to behavioral issues such as heightened internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Kim & Cicchetti, 2010) which can, in turn, impact school attendance (Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Problem behaviors, like heightened internalizing behaviors, are known as developmentally disruptive characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) that negatively impact how children engage in proximal and reciprocal interactions with their immediate environments, such as schools.

However, these child-level behavioral influences alone are insufficient to explain the links between status as a foster youth and absenteeism. While individual factors explain the majority of the variability in absences (Gee, 2019), the broader systems that foster youth interact with on a daily basis—the child-welfare system, their foster care settings, and the schools they attend—can influence whether they are absent. These systems, known as children's *microsystems*, include the immediate settings that children actively and regularly engage with (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The child welfare system represents one prominent system-level influence. Involvement in that system can have significant repercussions on student mobility which, in turn, influences absenteeism (Zorc et al., 2013). Child-welfare involved

children can move between 5 or more foster homes (Courtney et al., 2014) and these multiple placements often trigger moves to different schools. In fact, the majority of foster youth (71%) moved schools at least once in the school year compared to only a third of non-foster youth while nearly a quarter of foster youth moved four or more times (Burns et al., 2022). These moves to different schools and districts can disrupt not only their learning (Somers et al., 2020) but their school engagement and subsequent attendance (Burns et al., 2022). Beyond mobility, students in the foster care system may also need to miss school to attend court hearings and, in some instances, for parental visitation with their biological parents (Lamb et al., 2022).

On the other hand, children placed in longer term foster care can transition out of a destabilizing environment (i.e., an abusive home) to a more stable environment, thus increasing their access to supports that foster youth need to stabilize their school attendance. For instance, some foster families could be more capable at advocating for their foster child and navigating their school's bureaucratic policies on a range of educational issues that have implications for their child's attendance (Morton, 2015). This includes accessing services to support a range of issues more common among foster youth, such as access to transportation, supports for behavioral issues as well as access to Individual Education Plans (IEP). Consequently, if foster parents are more successful in advocating for receiving these services, foster children under their care may experience improved attendance.

Beyond the child welfare system and foster family environment, school systems, particularly through the availability of resources and supports targeted specifically to foster youth, can influence their attendance. While some foster youth attend schools with strong support systems that can enhance resilience and attendance (Lamb et al., 2022), other foster youth tend to be concentrated in schools with the lowest academic performance and are often in

non-traditional schools, i.e., alternative schools serving students who face academic or behavioral challenges (Barrat & Berliner, 2013). The extent to which these kinds of schools tend to be under resourced and lack sufficient support for foster youth could lead foster youth to experience higher rates of absenteeism. Relatedly, the types of schools that foster youth are more likely to attend can also place foster youth at differential risks of absenteeism. For instance, foster youth may attend schools where they receive positive emotional support from teachers (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016); as a result, given the link between support and attendance (Havik et al., 2015), they can face lower risks of absenteeism.

Finally, these systems-level structural influences often affect and interact with each other which can shape attendance behaviors. Two microsystems, such as the child welfare and schooling microsystems, interact to form the child's *mesosystem*. How well these two systems coordinate with each other may lead some foster youth to thrive while others may fall through the cracks. When schools and the child welfare systems lack coordination, both systems may not even know which students they mutually serve, and if foster youth show early warning signs of attendance issues, those systems may not be equipped to appropriately coordinate services in timely and preventative ways (Zetlin et al., 2010). Conversely, models based on cross-sector collaboration between schools and the child welfare system hold promise in boosting the educational success of foster youth (Wulczyn et al., 2009). Schools serving high proportions of foster youth could integrate social welfare support services to enable them to receive individualized supports through a case management approach, which could help promote stronger attendance and academic achievement (Rubin et al., 2013).

Empirically, the extant research literature base pinpointing underlying correlates of absenteeism are consistent with aforementioned individual-behavioral and structural systemic

lenses. One strand of research shows how absences among foster youth are linked to individual-behavioral factors, especially maltreatment type (e.g., neglect), alongside systems-level factors (e.g., placement changes which triggers school mobility). At the individual-level, children in out-of-home care (which includes foster youth) who experienced neglect were more likely to be absent (Armfield et al., 2020; Fantuzzo et al., 2011). They posit that more frequent absences could be due to the lack of parental support, but this could also be driven by the kinds of behavioral challenges caused by neglect.

The most consistent explanatory rationale and evidence for why foster youth experience higher rates of absences point to placement changes in the foster care system and the resultant impacts those changes have on school mobility (Weinberg et al., 2014; Zorc et al., 2013). These findings are part of a larger body of work showing how mobility, in general, can negatively impact children's attendance (Welsh, 2018). For foster youth in particular, placement instability—children that were placed in different foster homes beyond 9 months from the initiation of the 24 month study—was linked with a higher likelihood of absences (Zorc et al., 2013). Foster youth with instability attended, on average, 3.6 different schools and missed 22 days of school per year. In contrast, their more stable peers (i.e., placed in a stable home within 45 days after foster care entry) experienced less mobility (1.7 schools) and subsequently lower absences (16 days, on average). Based on these results, students experiencing instability would be considered chronically absent (10% or more of the school year) while their more stable counterparts would not.

The mobility evidence further demonstrates a more nuanced point that tends to be overlooked in the research on foster youth and absenteeism—movement into and out of foster care can have distinct relationships to absences. For instance, one of the earliest studies detected

a possible protective effect of transitioning into foster care on attendance (Runyan & Gould, 1985). The rate of absences decreased, on average, about 12 percentage points from the school year prior to and after a report of maltreatment and placement in foster care (15.6% versus 3.48%); in contrast, children who also experience maltreatment, but remained in their homes experienced a 1 point drop over the same time period (Runyan & Gould, 1985). More recent evidence corroborates this trend, with average absences decreasing after placement into foster care—in the 60 days prior to foster care placement, average daily absence rates were 31% while in the 60 days after placement, the rate decreased to 24%, a 7 percentage point drop (Zorc et al., 2013). There is also a spike in rates of absence right after foster care placement (as high as 50% immediately after placement), then about a 25% decrease in the 30 day window after placement (Zorc et al., 2013).

Other studies have shown that transitioning into foster care can lead to increased attendance, especially for children who remain in care for an entire school semester (Conger & Rebek, 2001). Beyond stability of care, the quality of care and the relationships that foster youth form in foster care can also be critical to their school attendance—foster youth with high versus low levels of caring and support from non-parental relatives experienced 20% lower odds of being absent in the past 30 days (Lamb et al., 2022). However, exiting out of foster care after brief periods during a school semester and returning home has also been associated with decreases in attendance (Conger & Rebek, 2001). Children exiting foster homes could return to more unstable home environments of their biological parents, and the reunification process itself could lead to higher stress levels (Bellamy, 2008) leading to higher rates of absences. These latter findings suggest that it is not just foster placement that matters for their absences, but the immediate transition periods into and out of foster care that are salient. Estimating how

transitions into and out of foster care might be uniquely related to absences has yet to be fully explored in the extant literature base—we tackle this issue head-on in our current study and generate new evidence that helps shed light on how these critical transition periods influence foster youth’s absenteeism.

Method

Dataset and Sample

We used data from four districts within the California CORE Data Collective, a collection of the eight largest school districts in the state. Per the data use agreement between the researchers and the Data Collective, we cannot disclose any information about the schools or districts included in this study. We rounded all statistics and sample sizes to prevent the identification of our partner districts. In total, these districts served over one million students across roughly 1,800 schools. All districts participated in a shared data system of longitudinal student-level data, including administrative data collected by districts on student demographics, academic performance, attendance, school characteristics, and school climate measures. In the dataset, students have unique identifiers linking their data between different datasets and over multiple school years.

We used 4 years of administrative data on K–12 students from the 2015–16 to the 2018–19 school years. In constructing our analytic sample, we excluded students if they were missing data on our outcomes, student characteristics, grade level, or school attended (less than 3% of total observations). We also excluded extreme cases of absenteeism which we defined as students missing more than 75 days of school (less than .38% of total observations). Of those excluded, 38 observations (1%) were foster youth. In total, our sample included almost $N = 1,000,000$ student-by-year observations across over 300 schools in four districts.

Measures

Absenteeism

We used two different measures of student absenteeism. The first is the total days absent, a continuous measure of the total number of days of school a student missed in a particular year. The second is an indicator of chronic absenteeism, a binary measure of whether a student missed 10% or more of the school year (= 1) or not (= 0). We constructed this chronic absence measure by dividing the number of days absent by the number of days enrolled in the school year. Any student who missed 10% or more was coded as chronically absent.

Foster Care Status

The dataset included an indicator of whether a student was documented in school records as being in foster care in a given year. Foster care status applies to students who have been removed from the home (e.g., permanently, subject to probation, or voluntary placements—specific reasons were not provided in the dataset), students who remain in the home receiving court-ordered family maintenance, tribal foster youth, and emergency removals (California Department of Education, 2024). Foster care status is time-varying, as students move in and out of this status during childhood and adolescence, a pattern which we observe in our dataset. In Table 1, we group students into three categories based on foster care status during the years of our data: 1) in foster care, 2) entered foster care, and 3) exited foster care. In our data, we had roughly 11,200 students who we observe in foster care across the four waves of data. We observe 2,890 students entering foster care and 3,260 students exiting foster care across our four waves of data.

Additional Measures

The CORE data also included student characteristics, like race/ethnicity and gender as well as English learner, free and reduce priced lunch, disability, and homelessness status. The data also contained information on each student's enrollment spell for each year. From the structure of the data, we created a binary indicator of whether a student moved schools within a year. Less than 4% of the entire sample moved schools, and of this subsample, close to 100% moved schools only once.

Analytic Strategy

To examine the dynamics of entering versus exiting foster care on absenteeism, we use an asymmetric fixed effect approach (Allison, 2019). The model we fit to data leverages the longitudinal nature of the data by considering the accumulation of switches into and out of a particular condition—in our case, foster care status—within the same individual over time (Allison, 2019; York & Light, 2017).

More formally, we begin with a baseline model to fit to data for child i in grade g at school s in year t , is as follows:

$$Y_{igst} = \beta_0 + \beta_1^+ \left(\sum_{q=1}^t FosterEntry_{iq} \right) + \beta_2^- \left(\sum_{q=1}^t FosterExit_{iq} \right) + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{igst}$$

where Y is the absenteeism outcome measure and $\sum_{q=1}^t FosterEntry_{iq}$ denotes the accumulated changes in foster youth entries (i.e., the total number of times that the variable *Foster* switches from 0 to 1 until time t) whose effects are captured in β_1^+ . Conversely, $\sum_{q=1}^t FosterExits_{iq}$ captures the accumulated changes in foster care exits (i.e., the total number of times that *Foster* switches from 1 to 0) whose effects are captured by the estimate β_2^- . The model includes a student fixed effect represented by γ_i that sweeps out all between-child variation in time-stable

characteristics, both observed and unobserved. Finally, ε_{igst} is the error term clustered at the school level to account for the correlation of students in the same school.

Then, we augmented our baseline model by incorporating time-varying student characteristics potentially related to foster care entries and exits and absenteeism, including whether students had a disability, received free or reduced priced lunch, experienced homelessness, were an English language learner, or moved schools in a given year. Lastly, we included fixed effects for year, school, and a school-by-grade-by-year fixed effect to control for any across grade variation at a particular time within schools, and thus reduces potential school or teacher bias on effects (Hanushek et al., 2002). Additionally, the school-by-grade-by-year fixed effect controls for both observed and unobserved school characteristics across grades and years. We used generalized least squares (GLS) for panel data to fit our models to data.

To explore heterogeneity among student subgroups, we refit our asymmetric fixed effect models and incorporated an interaction term between our foster care entry and exit predictor variables and each subgroup of interest. We first explored whether gender and race/ethnicity moderated the relationship between foster care status entries and exits and absenteeism. Also, given that previous research has also pointed to different attendance trends across school levels, where older students generally miss school at higher rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012), we estimated whether entries and exits had differential associations with absenteeism when foster youth were in secondary versus primary grades.

When the outcome in our models was the number of days absent, we fit a linear model to data, where the coefficients represent the change in days absent associated with either entering or exiting foster care. When the outcome was chronic absenteeism, we fit a linear probability model to data where the coefficients represent percentage point changes in the probability of a student

being chronically absent (Gomila, 2020). For all our analyses, we adopted a conventional level of significance (.05) to test the null that status as a foster youth was unrelated to our absenteeism outcomes. We also performed a joint hypothesis test on the coefficients capturing the accumulated entries and exits (i.e., β_1^+ and β_2^-) to determine if they statistically differed from each other.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for our sample. When comparing attendance and demographic characteristics across the four subgroups—All Students, Ever Foster Youth, Ever Entered Foster Care, and Ever Exited Foster Care—several important patterns emerge. Foster youth, particularly those who have entered foster care, exhibit higher absenteeism, with the average number of days absent being substantially greater compared to all students. For instance, students who have ever entered foster care report an average of 11.719 days absent, compared to 7.898 days for all students. Chronic absenteeism is also significantly higher among foster youth, especially for those who have entered care, where nearly 29% are chronically absent compared to 13% of the general student population. However, those who have exited foster care tend to have slightly better attendance, with a lower chronic absenteeism rate than those still in the system.

Demographically, foster youth are more likely to be Black and less likely to be Asian than the general population. While the proportion of students identified as free and reduced price lunch is quite high for all students in the sample (73%), it is still much higher among foster youth, particularly for those who have exited foster care. Moreover, foster youth are more likely to have a disability, be homeless, and have moved schools during the academic year, all of which are indicators of heightened vulnerability. While the demographics and absenteeism patterns

between those who have entered and exited foster care are similar, the exited group shows marginally better attendance outcomes, suggesting that stability post-exit may improve certain outcomes, though the overall challenges faced by foster youth remain evident.

Table 2 presents our main exit and entry results for total days absent and chronic absenteeism. As shown, we detected different relationships between entering and leaving foster care on absences, relationships that are obscured in results only using a symmetric fixed effect model (see Appendix Table A1 for the symmetric results). The first row of the table indicates that foster youth entering the foster care system experience a decrease in days absent and the probability of being chronically absent; notably, these results remained robust across all our asymmetric fixed effects specifications.

Based on our final model (Model 3), at the time of foster care entry, foster youth experience 2.5 fewer days absent (-2.51 ; $p < .001$) while their probability of being chronically absent was lower by about 12.6 percentage points (-0.126 ; $p < .001$). On the other hand, foster youth who transition out of the foster care system experience an increase in days absent and an increase in chronic absenteeism. More specifically, when exiting foster care, foster youth missed about an additional day (0.958 ; $p < .01$) while their probability of chronic absenteeism was about 6 points higher (0.058 ; $p < .001$). These exits results can be interpreted relative to foster youth who remained in foster care over the same time period. Based on a set of joint linear hypothesis tests, the coefficients capturing the associations between the accumulated entries and exits and our outcomes statistically differed from each other ($p < .001$).

In terms of our exploratory heterogeneity analyses by gender and race/ethnicity, we did not detect any significant associations (Table 3), suggesting that entries and exits were similar by these subgroups. In terms of the direction of these effects, while not significant, it is interesting

to note that exits were positively associated with attendance for foster youth identifying as Asian, Hispanic and White while the opposite pattern existed for Black, Multiracial and Native American children. We did detect that those entering foster care in secondary grades missed about 1.8 more days (1.85; $p < .05$) and experienced a higher probability of being chronically absent (about 7 percentage points; 0.068; $p < .05$) versus their counterparts in elementary grades. Overall, except for school level, these results demonstrate that entering and exiting status as a foster youth did not have differential associations either with days absent or chronic absences across various student subgroups.

Discussion

Prior research has demonstrated that foster youth experience high rates of absenteeism placing them at heightened risk for a host of other negative outcomes (Woods et al., 2024). While the evidence is unequivocal that foster youth, as a group, miss more school versus their non-foster counterparts, their status as a foster youth is not static, with many of them entering and exiting the foster care system over time. These dynamics of entry and exit can represent particularly crucial transition periods of great stability and instability that may lead to differential associations with absenteeism. Yet, there is a dearth of studies that have explored these dynamics; absent this knowledge, we may be overlooking child welfare system-involved children that may need targeted attention and support during these transition periods to promote their educational wellbeing. To overcome this gap in the knowledge base, our study provides new empirical evidence on how entries and exits into foster care can lead to different absenteeism outcomes for foster youth using large-scale data from four school districts in California. We found that for children involved with the child welfare system, entering foster care is linked to decreases in days absent and chronic absenteeism while exiting is linked to

increases. Overall, our results underscore the need to focus on foster youth exiting the foster care system.

Given ongoing interest in improving the educational wellbeing of foster youth in California and nationwide, these findings help deepen our understanding of how critical transition periods shape foster youth's attendance behaviors and underlying supports needed during those transitions. Indeed, our finding that absenteeism is lower in the time period immediately after placement into foster care is consistent with prior research (Zorc et al., 2013; Conger & Rebek, 2001). While our data do not allow us to pinpoint the underlying reasons behind the decrease, this finding could be picking up the potentially differential role of stronger relationships and supportive services that child welfare system involved youth encounter in foster care (Burns et al., 2022). Further, our findings could also reflect the investments that California has made to improve local systems-level structural conditions to support foster youth, such as co-locating education and child-welfare staff, developing one-stop resource centers for services, focusing on school-level relationships, and providing tiered support systems.

Our findings about exits out of foster care also have implications for how school systems track former foster youth as well as the kinds of educational services that they may need during the transition period, especially when they remain in school. Typically, transition services focus on children who age out of the system which in California is by age 21 (California Department of Social Services, 2024), but our findings suggest that it is also important for districts and schools serving high proportions of foster youth to track those transitioning out of foster care but remain school-aged in order to understand how their attendance patterns may have shifted after exiting foster care. Using real-time absenteeism data on those youth could reveal potentially precipitous declines which could be addressed through interventions and supports. In terms of

specific support services, former foster youth who continue to struggle with absences as they exit might benefit from continuity of services, like educational liaisons. Educational liaisons offer a range of education support services to foster youth, such as monitoring attendance (Weinberg et al., 2014) which could allow them to intervene before attendance issues become more problematic. However, while educational liaisons have been linked to improved achievement outcomes (Zetlin et al., 2004) additional research is needed to establish whether such liaisons can also impact attendance.

While our study empirically establishes a link between foster care entries, exits, and absences, there are several important limitations. First, our findings are applicable only to the population of foster youth in the districts we have included in our study; we are unable to extrapolate beyond those districts. However, we encourage other districts and states to explore the same dynamics to see if these patterns hold. Second, though our estimates account for between-child and school differences, we cannot make causal claims about the impact that foster care entries and exits have on absenteeism. Nonetheless, we see our study as a starting point for future work that could leverage quasi-experimental techniques, such as propensity score matching or weighting to derive closer causal estimates of exiting and entering foster care.

Foster youth remain some of the most vulnerable youth populations who continue to face often insurmountable educational challenges. By digging deeper into how their attendance patterns shift as they navigate from foster care entry to exit exposes critical junctures where additional targets and supports could make a difference to their educational livelihoods, especially among those exiting the foster care system.

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Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	<u>All Students</u>		<u>Ever Foster Care</u>		<u>Ever Entered Foster Care</u>		<u>Ever Exited Foster Care</u>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Attendance</i>								
Total Number of Days Absent	7.898	9.545	11.026	12.179	11.719	12.683	10.709	11.721
Chronically Absent	0.130	0.336	0.256	0.436	0.286	0.452	0.221	0.415
<i>Demographics</i>								
Male	0.512	0.500	0.513	0.500	0.481	0.500	0.532	0.499
Asian	0.112	0.315	0.040	0.195	0.025	0.157	0.047	0.212
Black	0.095	0.293	0.185	0.388	0.157	0.364	0.159	0.366
Hispanic	0.652	0.476	0.613	0.487	0.645	0.478	0.643	0.479
Multi-Race	0.034	0.181	0.046	0.209	0.057	0.232	0.055	0.227
Native American	0.004	0.060	0.007	0.083	0.007	0.083	0.002	0.039
White	0.103	0.303	0.110	0.313	0.108	0.310	0.094	0.292
With disability	0.127	0.333	0.234	0.423	0.223	0.416	0.227	0.419
Free and reduced price lunch	0.730	0.444	0.818	0.386	0.801	0.399	0.858	0.349
Homeless	0.064	0.245	0.101	0.301	0.135	0.342	0.089	0.284
English learner	0.219	0.414	0.170	0.376	0.191	0.393	0.152	0.359
Moved schools	0.037	0.189	0.110	0.313	0.133	0.340	0.101	0.302
<i>Grade Level</i>								
Primary	0.485	0.500	0.562	0.496	0.557	0.497	0.573	0.495
Secondary	0.515	0.500	0.438	0.496	0.443	0.497	0.427	0.495
N	989,240		11,210		2,890		3,260	

Table 2

Associations Between Foster Care Entry/Exit and Absenteeism

	Total Days Absent			Chronic Absenteeism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Foster care entry	-2.544*** (0.500)	-2.607*** (0.489)	-2.510*** (0.473)	-0.134*** (0.019)	-0.128*** (0.019)	-0.126*** (0.019)
Foster care exit	0.495 (0.362)	0.635 (0.356)	0.958** (0.350)	0.045** (0.014)	0.051*** (0.014)	0.058*** (0.014)
With disability		-0.244* (0.099)	0.568*** (0.090)		-0.022*** (0.004)	0.000 (0.004)
Free and reduced price lunch		0.573*** (0.086)	1.093*** (0.088)		-0.029*** (0.002)	-0.018*** (0.002)
Homeless		0.423* (0.191)	0.738*** (0.152)		0.012* (0.006)	0.022*** (0.005)
English learner		0.632*** (0.089)	-0.047 (0.052)		0.017*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)
Moved schools		4.465*** (0.529)	3.566*** (0.378)		0.155*** (0.011)	0.134*** (0.008)
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
School-grade-year fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
N	913,460	907,920	907,880	913,460	907,920	907,880

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3*Associations Between Foster Care Entry/Exit and Absenteeism by Subgroup*

	Total Days Absent			Chronic Absenteeism		
	Foster Care	Foster Care Entry	Foster Care Exit	Foster Care	Foster Care Entry	Foster Care Exit
Male	0.401 (0.503)	0.118 (0.599)	-0.292 (0.450)	0.027 (0.019)	0.034 (0.022)	0.007 (0.017)
Asian	0.008 (1.114)	-0.480 (1.896)	1.032 (1.524)	0.012 (0.035)	0.025 (0.055)	0.040 (0.056)
Black	1.652* (0.780)	0.793 (0.902)	-0.487 (0.896)	0.046 (0.030)	0.056 (0.035)	-0.021 (0.029)
Hispanic	-1.149 (0.586)	-0.050 (0.657)	0.121 (0.446)	-0.021 (0.024)	0.017 (0.025)	0.003 (0.019)
Multi-Race	1.543 (1.132)	-0.067 (1.568)	-1.411 (1.498)	0.041 (0.040)	0.019 (0.062)	-0.062 (0.046)
Native American	-6.512 (5.077)	-5.638 (5.839)	-14.698 (8.646)	-0.208 (0.133)	-0.256 (0.148)	0.111 (0.097)
White	0.034 (0.840)	0.753 (1.211)	1.040 (0.913)	-0.029 (0.031)	-0.016 (0.046)	0.055 (0.034)
Secondary	0.889 (0.513)	1.849* (0.764)	0.486 (0.565)	0.033 (0.020)	0.068* (0.029)	0.016 (0.022)

*Robust standard errors in parentheses*** $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$*

Appendix

Table A1

Foster Care Status and Absenteeism: Symmetric Fixed Effects Models

	Total Days Absent			Chronic Absenteeism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Foster care	-1.355*** (0.343)	-1.480*** (0.333)	-1.612*** (0.324)	-0.089*** (0.013)	-0.089*** (0.013)	-0.092*** (0.013)
With disability		-0.254* (0.099)	0.562*** (0.090)		-0.022*** (0.004)	-0.000 (0.004)
Free and reduced price lunch		0.570*** (0.086)	1.091*** (0.088)		-0.030*** (0.002)	-0.018*** (0.002)
Homeless		0.427* (0.191)	0.741*** (0.151)		0.012* (0.006)	0.022*** (0.005)
English learner		0.630*** (0.089)	-0.050 (0.052)		0.017*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)
Moved schools		4.468*** (0.529)	3.568*** (0.377)		0.155*** (0.011)	0.135*** (0.008)
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
School-grade-year fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
N	909,840	907,920	907,880	909,840	907,920	907,880

*Robust standard errors in parentheses** $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$