



Center for Advanced Studies  
in Child Welfare

## ***Minn-Link Issue Brief*** ***No. 8, Spring, 2009***

### ***Are Attendance Gains Sustained? A follow-up on the educational and child welfare outcomes of students with child welfare involvement for educational neglect***

#### **Original Education Neglect Study**

Our original study examined statewide child welfare data for educational neglect cases for 2000-2001, the last year during which educational neglect reports were processed and coded in a traditional manner which allowed for identification in administrative data. All children impacted by educational neglect in the state of Minnesota were examined during this time period.

The principle finding was that 72% of all children who had received a determination of maltreatment for educational neglect exhibited improved attendance during the school year following their involvement with child welfare. In addition, although children of color comprised a disproportionate share of the study group, they experienced attendance improvements similar to their white peers. The study results suggested that the child welfare involvement positively influenced school attendance, at least in the short-term.

#### **Follow-up Study Purpose**

The follow-up study was intended to investigate whether or not the effects of the original child welfare involvement were sustained over time. Our research questions included: 1) were the school attendance improvements sustained for students whose attendance improved immediately after contact with child welfare in 2001-2002; 2) if attendance improvement was sustained, for how long; 3) what were the discernable patterns of attendance change for the Worsened or Maintained and Improved groups in post-study years; and 4) how might the subsequent child welfare involvement of students interact with their post-study attendance patterns?

#### **Study Data**

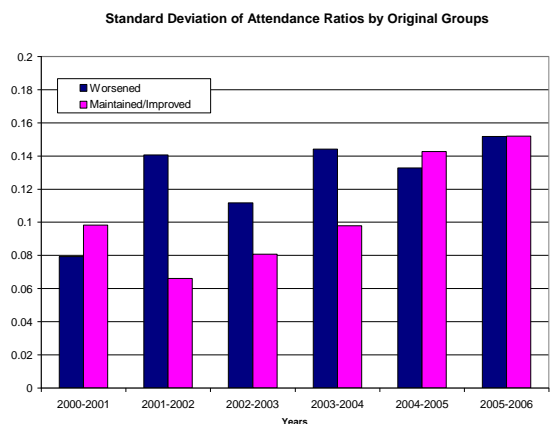
Data to support the current study data were obtained by starting with the original group of children (N=623) and locating their education records for the four consecutive years after the original study: 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Match rates were variable over time, with a year-to-year loss of approximately 9%. This yielded a study group that was sizeable, at just over 500 students over all years. The proportion of the full study group matched was 91.2% (2003); 88.9% (2004); 83.9% (2005); and 80.6% (2006). This data from the Department of Education was used to examine attendance, disability status and type, free and reduced meal eligibility, special education eligibility, and status updates, such as school moves or other disruptions. In addition, data from the Department of Human Services was used to determine whether or not the child had contact with the child welfare system, both reports and substantiated maltreatment findings, after the initial finding of educational neglect from the original study.

#### **Findings**

##### **Attendance**

Students whose attendance initially improved after child welfare involvement had significantly better long-term attendance patterns compared to students whose attendance did not initially improve. Figure 1 shows the standard deviations of the mean attendance ratios of these two groups through 2006, at which point groups differences disappear.

**Figure 1.**



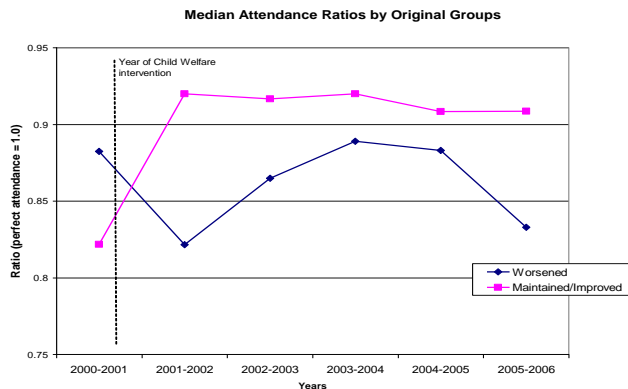
The variation in mean attendance ratios of both original study groups over the follow-up years show significant differences between groups up until three years after the child welfare intervention for educational neglect, or by the 2004 school year.

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Figure 2.



Statistically significant differences in group attendance means were observed up to 2004 ( $F=9.264, 1, 486, p=.002$ ). Students whose attendance initially worsened in the wake of child welfare involvement make delayed improvement by 2003 and attendance for many students falls by the 2004-2005 school year. Results have practical significance in that improvements at or above 90% (which the Maintained/Improved group reached) represents a minimum attendance threshold for learning for most school districts.

Age at the time of child welfare intervention was an important factor. Younger children consistently had better-sustained attendance over time and older children generally had less improvement in attendance as well as less likelihood of maintaining improvements.

### Attendance Trajectories

To make a determination of the overall attendance status of these students over the follow-up study school years, it was helpful to examine both year-to-year directional change (i.e. improved, worsened) and magnitude of change (whether or not they maintained 90% attendance). Positive trajectories included children whose attendance generally improved or maintained and was above 90% during the last study year. Negative trajectories included those whose attendance worsened or maintained and was below 90% during the last study year. Students' whose attendance rose and fell in equal measures over the period were assigned a mixed attendance trajectory.

Some proportion of students who had maintained or improved their attendance after having child welfare contact (23.4%) experienced negative attendance trajectories over the following four years. Nearly half (49.2%) of students whose attendance worsened after their educational neglect-based child welfare contacts

in 2002 eventually experienced improved attendance trajectories.

### Child Welfare Involvement

Although the majority of students did not have additional child welfare contacts, among students who had subsequent reports to child welfare, more experienced positive long-term attendance trajectories. A student with reports to child welfare was .5 times more likely (log odds = .5) as one who did not to have a positive long-term attendance trajectory.

### Limitations

Limitations to this analysis included: the exclusion of approximately 40% of students from trajectory analysis because their long-term attendance trajectories were mixed; variability in attendance tracking and child welfare practices in the state; and lack of detailed intervention knowledge to associate with results.

### Discussion Points

- School disruptions of any kind rarely resulted in positive attendance trajectories. Policies to boost student attendance should take this into account.
- If not doing so already, child welfare agencies should partner with school systems to address absenteeism more intentionally.
- The child welfare report process may act as a check-in on families who may not consistently monitor their children's school attendance. While child welfare is intended to be an intervention strategy, in the case of educational neglect, it may perform more of an early intervention or even prevention function.

### References

- Chang, H., & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Retrieved on January 10, 2009 from [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html)
- Romero, M., & Lee, Y. (2008). *The Influence of Maternal and Family Risk on Chronic Absenteeism in Early Schooling*. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Retrieved on January 10, 2009 from [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_802.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_802.html)

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is a resource for child welfare professionals, students, faculty, policy-makers, and other key stakeholders concerned about child welfare in Minnesota. Minn-LinK is a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well being in Minnesota using state administrative data from multiple agencies. For more information, contact Anita Larson at 612-625-8169 or email at [amlarson@umn.edu](mailto:amlarson@umn.edu).