

Child Support Receipt, Moves, and School Changes

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Abstract

We use administrative data from Wisconsin merged with child and school level data from the Department of Public Instruction to examine the association between the regularity of child support receipt on non-promotion school moves holding residential moves constant. We utilize the Multi-Sample Person File (MSPF) that merges a number of data sources. Data on child support payments come from the Kids Information Data System (KIDS), which contains monthly records of child support payments received by custodial parents. The Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support (CARES) database contains detailed information on participation in public programs in the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Individual earnings data come from administrative records from the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system, maintained by the Wisconsin state government and accessed through the MSPF files. Our sample consists of 123,444 Wisconsin families with child support orders in effect for at least 2 years with 256,634 children in the public school system from 2006 to 2011. Controlling for the amount of child support received, the housing environment via Fair Market Rents provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, child, family and school level factors associated with school mobility and child support receipt, findings suggest that receiving child support for at least four months in a year compared to less regular support is modestly associated with a 3.5 to 4.6 percent reduction in the odds a child will make a non-promotional school move.

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BACKGROUND

Prior research unambiguously finds that frequent moving is associated with poor health and developmental outcomes for children. What is less clear, however, is if these negative outcomes are due to the disruption of moving, family difficulties associated with both frequent moving and poor child outcomes, school changes, or a combination of factors. Anderson et. al (2014) propose that multiple contexts that may be altered by a move, including those of the family, school, and neighborhood, are likely to influence any association between residential mobility and child outcomes, and that such associations may vary by developmental stage. The residential mobility literature has found positive and relatively consistent associations between frequent moving and behavior problems for children as well as reduced academic performance using a variety of analytic techniques and data sets. It is noteworthy, however, that very little work directly examines how changes in income support programs or policies might be associated with residential moves and none have examined school moves distinctly. Prior work does account for economic conditions through controls for household income and receipt of income-conditioned benefits though isolating those associations has not been the focus of this work.

A recent report (“Child Support Receipt and the Quality and Stability of Housing,” completed as part of the 2012–14 Child Support Research Agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Institute for Research on Poverty) found an association between the regularity of child support mothers receive, holding the total amount constant, and housing stability. Results suggested that receiving child support within 25 percent of the order amount for 4 to 12 months versus 1 to 3 months is associated with a 10–12 percent reduction in the odds that a mother will move more than once in a year holding the total amount

of payments received constant. Between 2002 and 2006, annual mobility rates for custodial mother families receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits ranged between 14 and 21 percent, while they ranged from less than 1 percent to 2.5 percent for custodial mothers not receiving SNAP (Curtis & Warren, 2014). These mobility rates are most certainly underestimates because we could not capture moves within zip codes without geocoded address records. Underreporting mobility rates is particularly likely for the SNAP sample since prior research confirms that lower-income families are more mobile and further, that those moves are concentrated locally (Geronimus, Bound & Ro, 2014; Ihrke, 2014).

This report uses geocoded address records from the Wisconsin Kids Information Data System (KIDS) to generate more accurate mobility rates for custodial mother families who have had an order in place for at least 24 consecutive months between 2006 and 2011. This report also utilizes data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on school moves, school features and student characteristics. By using more recent geocoded child support data, we produce robust estimates of residential mobility patterns over a 5-year period. By incorporating data from DPI on school and child-characteristics we estimate multivariate models examining the relationship between child support regularity and non-promotional school moves controlling for family characteristics, household earnings and program participation.

DATA AND METHODS

Analytic Sample

The analytic sample are children in the DPI data living in custodial mother households who had a child support order in place for at least 24 consecutive months between 2006 to 2011 (256,634 children within 123,444 families). Families with children were excluded from the sample if they were reported as having died ($n = 141$) or if they moved out of the country ($n =$

953). We select children with continuous child support orders to more precisely estimate the relationship between child support regularity and types of moves.

Geocoding Addresses

IRP programming staff geocoded addresses available in KIDS for the entire universe of mothers with children in the DPI data who were also involved in a KIDS case at any time between 2006 and 2011. The address records were geocoded to block group, zip code, or city, depending on the quality of the data.

The KIDS data were successfully geocoded with an 88 percent match on street address data for block groups, which means that we can observe short-distance moves with marked precision for the majority of the sample. The remaining 11 percent of cases could not be matched to a block group, due to missing data in the address fields, but could be matched on zip codes. Zip codes, which are defined by the U.S. postal service rather than the Census Bureau, are typically larger geographic areas than census block groups. Located within larger census tracts, block groups are the smallest geographic unit defined by the U.S. Census, and are most well suited for capturing local moves. To illustrate this point, Wisconsin contains 896 zip codes, 1,409 census tracts, and 4,489 block groups. Geocoding dramatically improved the precision of identifying both the type and number of moves custodial mothers and their children experienced over a 5-year period.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

In this section, we describe the socio-demographic characteristics of our sample, as well as how we measure key constructs in the multivariate analysis. We then look at the number of residential moves by year and SNAP participation, reasons for school moves recorded in the DPI

data as well as rates of child support regularity. These analyses allow us to capture residential mobility with more precise data on moves; describe the reasons why children may make school transitions recorded in the DPI data and examine child support regularity among a sample of school-age children with continuous child support orders over a two year period. We also determine whether there are significant time trends in all of these analyses.

Sociodemographic Characteristics: Custodial Mothers, Their School-Age Children and Housing Environment

Table 1 describes the economic, demographic, child, school and housing characteristics of the sample. We estimate regressions using child-wave observations for the 256,634 children in the 123,444 families with child support orders in place for 24 consecutive months that also appear in the DPI data. We choose the children and families observable in 2008 for illustrative sample characteristics; we do not find differences in the nature of the sample over time. There is significant variation in the amount of child support mothers received in 2008, with 42 percent receiving from 0 to \$1,999 (at the maximum, this is around \$166 monthly if received regularly).¹ Mothers who received between \$2,000 and \$4,999 annually account for 29 percent of the sample, while another 26 percent reported receiving between \$5,000 and \$14,999 over the course of 2008. A relatively small proportion of mothers, 3 percent, reported receiving at least \$15,000 annually. This sample of school-age children live in households with an average of 2.7 children, have mothers with a mean age of 41, and mean earnings from both labor market and TANF cash benefits of \$27,498.

¹Rates of child support regularity for 2008 are reported in Table 4.

Table 1
Summary Statistics for Children and Families in 2008

	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Annual Amount of Child Support Received	
Less than \$900	29.1%
\$900–\$1,999	13.0
\$2,000–\$4,999	29.1
\$5,000–\$14,999	26.2
\$15,000+	2.6
Family Characteristics	
Mother's Age	41.2 (7.2)
Number of Children in the Household	2.7 (1.5)
Mother's Income (Earnings and W-2)	\$27,498 (16,601)
Child Characteristics	
Child's Race/Ethnicity	
White, Non-Hispanic	55.0%
Black, Non-Hispanic	29.8
Hispanic	9.3
American Indian	4.3
Asian	1.7
Child's Age	
4–8 Years Old	33.0%
9–13 Years Old	35.9
14 Years or Older	31.1
Male	50.8
Has Been Expelled or Suspended	11.9
School Attendance Rate	91.6 (11.6)
Has a Disability	18.6
Not Born in the United States	1.2
Type of School Change	
No Change	64.1%
Promotion or Graduation	21.9
Non-Promotional Transfer	13.0
Dropout	1.0
Household Characteristics	
Experienced Residential Move	27.5%
Receives Housing Subsidy	22.6
Receives SNAP	51.9
County Fair Market Rent	\$785 (103)
Lives in Urban County	48.1%

Note: $N = 94,353$.

Characteristics of the child and school environment are taken from the DPI data and provide context for the composition of Wisconsin public school children with a continuous child support order for at least two years. A bit more than half (55 percent) of the sample identify as white, non-Hispanic; 30 percent as black, non-Hispanic; 9 percent as Hispanic; 4 percent as American Indian; and 2 percent as Asian. Prior research suggests the importance of developmental stage in both behavioral and educational outcomes (Herbers, Reynolds & Chen, 2013) which may be associated with school changes. Elementary schoolchildren, between the ages of 4 and 8 account for 33 percent of the sample, while middle schoolchildren, between the ages of 9 and 13 make up 36 percent and high school-age children account for another 31 percent. Other factors that might be associated with unplanned or non-promotional school moves are child gender, disability and nativity. A bit more than half of the sample (51 percent) are boys, 19 percent report a disability and 1 percent are foreign-born. Primary reasons why a child may change schools are either child or school factors that make functioning in the system difficult. To capture this possibility, we include whether the child was expelled or suspended (either in school or out of school) and the proportion of days per year that the child attended school, with 100 percent representing perfect attendance. A non-trivial 12 percent of children report having been expelled or suspended while attendance rates are quite high with a mean of 92 percent. The majority of students, 64 percent, did not make a school transition, while 22 percent made a promotion school change, 13 percent made a non-promotional change and 1 percent dropped out.

Finally, we include covariates associated with school mobility in order to capture the housing environment in which children live. More than a quarter (28 percent) of children had a residential move in the current academic year, a bit more than half of families receive SNAP (52

percent) and 48 percent live in an urban county with mean housing costs at \$785. Using information from SNAP records in CARES, we also include a covariate indicating whether the family receives a housing subsidy, which 23 percent of families reported receiving.

Residential Mobility Patterns

We now turn our attention to residential mobility patterns among the sample. Table 2 presents the types of moves among 123,444 families with Wisconsin school-age children with a child support order in place for at least 24 consecutive months from 2006 to 2011. The vast majority of moves, as reflected in KIDS, are from one block group to another, with 88 percent of families reporting well over 1.5 million moves over this time period. In contrast, only 11.6 percent of families moved from one zip code to another. These newly geocoded data confirm that prior work estimating moves based on zip codes vastly underreport the number of residential moves families undertake. Types of moves among families with orders in place at any time between 2006 and 2011 do not differ from those presented in Table 1 (not shown).

Table 2
Type of Residential Moves among Custodial Mother Families with Wisconsin School-Age Children with a Child Support Order for 24 Consecutive Months, 2006–2011

Type of Move	Percentage of Families	Total Number of Moves
Block Group	88.2%	1,581,536
Zip Code	11.6	208,002
City or No Match	0.20	3,587

Note: $N = 123,444$.

Table 3 presents the number of residential moves among Wisconsin public schoolchildren with a child support order in place for at least 24 months from 2006 to 2011. These annual mobility rates show moves among the proportion of the sample we observe in any

Table 3
Residential Moves among Wisconsin Public Schoolchildren with a Child Support Order for 24 Consecutive Months,
By Year and SNAP Participation

	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	Non-SNAP	SNAP	Non-SNAP	SNAP	Non-SNAP	SNAP	Non-SNAP	SNAP	Non-SNAP	SNAP	Non-SNAP	SNAP
No Moves	82.4%	56.2%	82.0%	57.4%	85.4%	61.5%	87.7%	65.1%	89.0%	68.1%	91.1%	71.8%
1 Move	12.8	23.3	13.3	23.6	11.9	24.3	10.0	22.6	9.3	21.7	7.7	19.1
2–5 Moves	4.8	20.5	4.7	19.0	2.7	14.2	2.3	12.3	1.7	10.2	1.2	9.1
<i>N</i>	48,537	38,286	50,726	40,671	50,188	44,165	45,655	48,984	41,060	51,261	37,367	47,617

Note: Non-SNAP and SNAP groups are different at $p < .05$ for all years and all move types.

given year. Move patterns are statistically different in each year between the SNAP and non-SNAP families. The vast majority of the non-SNAP families, 82–91 percent, do not move in any given year compared to 56–72 percent among SNAP families. Annual moves are reported by 8–13 percent of non-SNAP families, compared to 22–24 percent of SNAP families.

Moving more than twice in any given year has been associated with adverse outcomes for children and adults, thus examining these rates may be particularly useful for policymakers focused on family outcomes. Annual rates of moving two or more times in a given year are 1–5 percent for non-SNAP families, and 9–21 percent for SNAP families. Mobility rates over time generally show an increasing pattern of stability for all families.

It is instructive to compare the proportion of families that do not move in 2006 between the prior report and the current sample. This is not a direct comparison because the samples differ from custodial mothers with children with a new child support order (kids could be any age) and custodial mothers with a child support order and school-age children. Nonetheless, we think it is worth considering.

In the prior report (Curtis & Warren, 2014), we find that among a sample of 11,755 custodial mother families with a new child support order in 2006, nearly all families report no moves. Specifically, 99.6 percent (non-SNAP) and 82.9 percent (SNAP) did not experience a residential move in 2006. Markedly more moves are captured in the current sample. For example, 82.4 percent of the non-SNAP families do not move in 2006 compared to 99.6 percent in the prior report, suggesting mobility rates that are 17.2 percentage points higher. These differences are even larger for the SNAP sample. For example, 82.9 percent of SNAP families do not move in the prior report compared to 56.2 percent in the current sample, suggesting mobility rates that are 26.7 percentage points higher.

Housing unit moves are one type of change that children experience which preliminary work suggests is positively associated with regular child support receipt within 25 percent of an order (Curtis & Warren, 2014). School moves are another transition that might be associated with child support regularity independent of residential relocation. Disentangling residential moves and school moves is likely an important task. Approximately 66 percent of residential moves necessitate a school move for children, so the remaining 34 percent of school moves are unrelated to a household relocating (Herbers, Reynolds & Chen, 2013). Children change schools for many reasons beyond residential relocation that may have to do with child, school or family characteristics. For example, parents may choose to change schools to optimize their child's education because they do not believe the child is well-served in the current system. If the move is prompted by difficulties in the previous system (behavioral or educational), these occurrences may also be associated with family or economic factors that are related to school moves. Likewise, if there are school-specific factors (e.g., environment, programming, or after-school programs) that are also associated with school moves, capturing these are important for our ability to interpret the relationship between child support (an economic support) and school moves, independent of residential relocation.

Schools: Promotional and Non-Promotional Changes

Table 4 shows the types of school changes children make over time. School changes are a normative part of the education process as children move to different schools as a function of promotion or a planned transition to another school. From 2006 to 2011, 63.4 percent of our sample remains in the same school, while 21.7 percent change schools due to promotion or graduation, 13.4 percent make a non-promotional transfer and 1.5 percent drop out.

Table 4
School Changes among Wisconsin Public Schoolchildren with a Child Support Order for 24
Consecutive Months, 2006–2011

Type of School Change	Percentage of Changes
No Change	63.4%
Promotion or Graduation	21.7
Non-Promotional Transfer	13.4
Dropout	1.5

Preliminary analysis did not reveal any consistently significant differences in school moves by SNAP status suggesting that though residential mobility patterns are different among these groups, school moves are not (not shown). Preliminary descriptive analysis also did not reveal any significant time trends in the reasons why children change schools over time (not shown).

Child Support as Economic Support: Patterns in the Regularity of Receipt

Finally, using our sample of custodial mothers whose child support order was in place for at least 24 consecutive months, we present the number of months mothers report receiving child support within 25 percent of the modal amount in Table 5 from 2006 to 2011. To account for obligors who may make biweekly support payments, if the custodial mother did not receive a payment on an order owed, we calculate the average of that month and the previous month, and the average of that month and the following month. If either of these averages is within 25 percent of the order amount, the month is counted as a month of regular receipt (Ha, Cancian & Meyer, 2011; Curtis & Warren, 2014). We find no significant time trends in patterns of receipt; about a fifth of months report receiving no support at all, about 14 percent received support in 1 to 3 months, between 22 and 25 percent in 4 to 9 months, and between 41 to 44 percent reported receipt in 10 to 12 months.

Table 5
Proportion of Children Receiving Child Support Within 25 Percent of Order Amount, by Number of Months

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of Months Child Support Received Was Within 25 Percent of Order Amount						
No Months	19.9%	20.3%	19.7%	21.2%	20.7%	20.8%
1–3 Months	13.5	13.3	13.2	12.8	12.5	12.9
4–9 Months	25.1	24.5	24.6	21.8	23.0	24.5
10–12 Months	41.5	41.9	42.5	44.2	43.8	41.8
<i>N</i>	86,823	91,397	94,353	94,639	92,321	84,984

MULTIVARIATE MODEL

Next, we examine the relationship between child support regularity and school moves controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, residential moves, school and child-specific characteristics that are associated with school mobility. Preliminary analysis revealed that exit dates in the DPI data were typically clustered at the end of the year, so are an artifact of the coding scheme and do not actually represent “real” variation in school exit dates. Because there are a host of reasons why children may change schools, it is important to control for factors that we know are associated with school moves. Holding residential mobility constant and examining non-promotional school moves allows us to estimate the unique impact of child support regularity on school changes that likely represent stressful occurrences. Though some of the determinants of residential and school mobility are similar, school and child specific characteristics that may drive school changes need to be accounted for. In order to control for child level factors associated with non-promotional school moves, we include whether the child has been suspended or expelled, school attendance rates, child disability and whether a child is an English language learner. In order to control for school level characteristics that may be

associated with non-promotional moves, we include a series of dummy variables indicating which school the child attended.

Results, shown in Table 6, suggest that receiving regular child support during 4 to 12 months in a given year is modestly associated with a reduction in the odds of a non-promotional school move holding residential moves and child and school characteristics constant. Specifically, regular child support is associated with a 3.5–4.6 percent reduction in the odds that a child will make a non-promotional school move. In terms of demographic characteristics, both children who identify as black or Asian have increased odds of non-promotional moves (1.121 and 1.149 respectively) relative to white students. Results suggest that developmental stage is a driver for non-promotional moves. Both middle school-age children (ages 9 to 13) and high school-age children (14 and older) have markedly increased odds of a non-promotional transfer (2.080 and 4.443 respectively) relative to elementary schoolchildren (ages 4 to 8). We control for school characteristics, though there may be other factors we do not capture that influence families school choices for their older children. Child-level factors such as an expulsion or suspension, disability and English language learner status, are modestly associated with increased odds of a non-promotional school move while regular school attendance is positively associated with a modest reduction in the odds of a non-promotional move. Experiencing a residential move is associated with a substantial (49 percent) increase in the odds of a non-promotional move.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis considers the association between the regularity of child support and non-promotional school moves. Results suggest a modest but significant relationship between regular child support receipt (between 4 and 12 months in a year) and a reduction in the odds of a non-

Table 6		
Logit Estimates of the Association between Child Support Regularity and a Non-Promotional School Move		
	Non-Promotional School Move	
	Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Child Support Receipt		
Child Support Regularity		
Received No Child Support	Omitted	
Received Child Support in 1–3 Months	1.005	(0.014)
Received Child Support in 4–9 Months	0.967*	(0.015)
Received Child Support in 10–12 Months	0.956**	(0.015)
Annual Amount of Child Support Received		
Less than \$900	Omitted	
\$900–\$1,999	0.990	(0.015)
\$2,000–\$4,999	1.007	(0.014)
\$5,000–\$14,999	1.018	(0.016)
\$15,000+	0.975	(0.027)
Family Characteristics		
Mother's Age	1.004***	(0.001)
Number of Children	1.003	(0.003)
Child Characteristics		
Child's Race/Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic	Omitted	
Black, Non-Hispanic	1.121***	(0.011)
Hispanic	1.004	(0.013)
American Indian	1.025	(0.018)
Asian	1.149***	(0.031)
Child's Age		
4–8 Years Old	Omitted	
9–13 Years Old	2.080***	(0.016)
14 Years or Older	4.443***	(0.043)
Male	1.003	(0.006)
Has Been Expelled or Suspended	1.019***	(0.001)
School Attendance Rate	0.992***	(0.000)
Has a Disability	1.041***	(0.008)
English Language Learner	1.108*	(0.045)
Household Characteristics		
Mother's Income (Earnings and W-2) (\$100)	1.000*	(0.000)
Experienced Residential Move	1.494***	(0.009)
Receives Housing Subsidy	1.049***	(0.009)
Receives SNAP	1.026**	(0.008)
County Fair Market Rent (\$100)	0.994	(0.005)
Lives in Urban County	1.014	(0.011)
Year Fixed Effects		Included
School Fixed Effects		Included
Note: <i>N</i> = 511,088 child-wave observations. Standard errors clustered at the family level.		
* <i>p</i> < .05 ** <i>p</i> < .01 *** <i>p</i> < .001		

promotional school move within an academic year, holding residential moves, school and child specific characteristics constant. Data limitations preclude the use of the term “non-promotional” school moves as a universally negative outcome; it is certainly possible that a proportion of these moves represent better fits between school, children and families. It is instructive, however, to consider that an economic lever such as the regularity of child support receipt has any significant association with non-promotional school changes beyond the direct effect on whether a family moves. Although this is a first look at an interesting phenomenon in an area where there is very little prior research, child support regularity as a proxy for economic expectations may prove a useful factor to consider in state efforts to think carefully about mobile families with school-age children in the child support system.

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