



## **Minn-LInK Child Welfare Special Topic Report No. 10**

*Sanctions and Education Outcomes for Children in  
TANF Families*

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in **Child Welfare**

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### **Minn-LInK**

The Minn-LInK project at the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work relies on secondary administrative data obtained from statewide public programs. Minn-LInK provides a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well-being in Minnesota. The administrative data sets used in this descriptive analysis originate in the Minnesota Department of Human Services (utilizing the Social Services Information System, or SSIS) which oversees the state child protection system in Minnesota and student public school education records from the Minnesota Department of Education. All data use has been within the guidelines set by strict legal agreements between these agencies and the University of Minnesota that protect personal privacy.

Human service programs collect data for multiple purposes: program administration, compliance with federal and state reporting, fiscal management, and local outcome measures. Policy and practice research has rarely been the focus of either automated system development or data collection. While these realities do not prohibit the successful design, implementation, and completion of research, it does present researchers with unique challenges related to study design and time-frames for study group selection that do not occur when collecting and working with primary data. Instances in which data system conditions drove the structure of this study have been noted in this report.

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## Table of Contents

Welfare Reform and Accountability .....	1
Sanctions.....	1
Study Data and Design .....	6
Results .....	10
Limitations.....	13
Discussion.....	14
References .....	16
Figure 1. Timelines for Data Linkage and Overlap .....	6
Figure 2. Cumulative Percent of Disruptions in Relations to Sanction Occurrence.....	13
Table 1. Comparison of Child Attributes: Families With and Without Sanctions .....	9
Table 2. Differences in Sanctions Over 24 Months .....	10
Table 3. Disruption Types for Students with Sanctions by Grade Level Groups.....	11
Table 4. Disruptions, Attendance by Sanctions and Grade Level Groups .....	12



## **Welfare Reform & Accountability**

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) significantly changed the accountability of public assistance programs for families for the foreseeable future. Under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), PRWORA (or Welfare Reform), changed the consequences of noncooperation with work requirements of parents in households on assistance in important ways. As was the case with so many aspects of Welfare Reform, states had a variety of options for implementing sanctions but in most cases, states implemented progressive sanctions for parents who continued to fail to cooperate with program requirements for job search, training, or employment. This report is a companion to another Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) report on broader aspects of the well-being of children in TANF families in Minnesota, Minn-LInK report No. 11, *The Education and Child Welfare Status of Minnesota TANF Children*, forthcoming. This sanction study used the same cross-sectional data from one year of public assistance use in Minnesota (2005) but focused specifically upon the relationship, if any, between family sanctions and negative educational outcomes for students in those households.

### **Sanctions**

When Welfare Reform was passed, one of its overarching goals was the promotion of the self-sufficiency of families, particularly those who may have relied on public assistance for some time. Policymakers sought ways to push families to comply with training and work requirements so that they could make this move towards employment and exit the system. As a result, most sanction policies were oriented around failure to comply with work requirements and most states chose to establish stricter sanctions than were required by federal TANF regulations (GAO, 1997; Wu, Cancian, Meyer, & Wallace, 2006).

### ***Definitions and Who is Affected***

Although most sanctions are related to noncooperation with work activities, they can vary in severity ranging from a variety of partial sanctions of benefits to full family sanctions which not only reduce or eliminate the adult portion of the grant, but also the child's portion (Wu, et al, 2006). Much of the variation in sanction definitions and the numbers of families affected is a product of the high variation in state TANF programs, one of the hallmarks of Welfare Reform. This variation makes it nearly impossible to compare sanction rates from one state to another with any meaning (Pavetti, Derr, & Hesketh, 2003). Child-only cases (cases in which there are no eligible adults in the grant household)

have steadily increased as time has gone on. In 2008 in Minnesota, Child-only cases now comprise approximately 32% of the total TANF (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2009).

In Minnesota, TANF heads of household can receive a sanction of 10% of the grant amount for one eligible adult who does not cooperate with employment services, increasing to a 30% sanction if there are two eligible adults in the household and neither is cooperating. If this first sanction is not resolved, the 10% sanction increases to 30% for the next benefit month. Any subsequent sanctions are at 30%. In 2003, Minnesota's state Legislature imposed a 100% sanction (100% MFIP case closure) after the sixth incidence of non-compliance. The 100% sanction eliminates all cash assistance but allows families to apply for Food Support. The most recent monthly data from December of 2008 indicates that 5.5% of all cases experienced employment services-related sanctions for non-cooperation during 2008 (5.3% for households with one eligible adult and 6.6% for those with two eligible adults) and 0.8% of all cases ( $N=170$ ) experienced six sanctions (0.7% for one eligible adult and 1.1% for two adults) and were consequently liable for closure if the sanction were not resolved (DeMaster, 2009).

Some studies of sanction effects have examined sanction risk as opposed to actual sanction occurrence and the characteristics that are barriers to employment tend to predict likelihood of sanction as well. For instance, women with more than three children, a history of welfare use, less education, less formal employment experience, and whose primary language was not English have been shown to be much more likely to experience sanctions (Wu, et al., 2006). Chandler, Meisel, Jordan, Rienzi, & Goodwin's (2005) examination of a longitudinal sample of over 600 families on TANF in two California counties revealed that families headed by women with mental health problems were much more likely to leave for negative reasons (such as sanction) than women without mental health problems. This finding prompted the researchers to recommend that prior to issuing any sanction, agencies should first complete a mental health assessment on caregivers (p. 606). Recipients who are younger, and have mental and physical health problems, histories of domestic violence, and transportation and child care problems have been shown to be disproportionately more likely to receive sanctions (Sherlin, Bogen, Quane, & Burton, 2002; Hasenfeld, Ghose, & Larson, 2004; Goldberg & Schott, 2000; Pavetti & Bloom, 2001).

Efforts to predict which families will experience disproportionate sanctions have shown that some characteristics are more highly correlated with this outcome than others. Kalil, Seefeldt, and Wang's (2002) examination of data on 562 families from the Women's Employment Study (WES) showed that between 1997 and 1999 African American women who lacked a high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree (GED) were 1.73 times more likely to be sanctioned compared with African American women with high school degrees (Kalil, et al., 2002). Schram, Soss, Fording, and

Houser's (2009) experimental application of the Racial Classification Model (RCM) to test case worker bias showed that caseworkers were much more likely to sanction black mothers with a history of sanction than they were White women with no prior sanction history when exposed to vignettes that held most circumstances constant except for race (p.414). Women with sanctions were also significantly more likely to engage in hardship-mediating activities (such as drug sales or prostitution), more likely to have a preschooler in the home or a child with disabilities, and have the expectation of being on welfare the following year than women without sanctions (Kalil et al., 2002). The important relationship between recipient mental health and leaving TANF for negative reasons has been examined with the intent of learning more about how to improve assessment and intervention and avoid the accumulation of negative economic outcomes through things like sanctions. Interviews conducted over three years (1999-2001) with 356 California TANF participants revealed that those who had a mental health diagnosis were 12.8% more likely to leave welfare for negative reasons than those who did not (Chandler, et al., 2005). The researchers acknowledged that depression in particular, might be equally a cause and a consequence of unemployment (p.605). The direct negative effects of maternal depression upon child outcomes have been well-documented (DiLauro 2004; Smith and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Yeung, Linver, and Brooks-Gunn 2002) and must be considered among the effects of loss of TANF on an entire TANF family.

### ***Frequency & Patterns***

Wu and colleagues (2006) examined the timing of sanctions for families on Wisconsin's W-2 program, learning that sanctions were quite common, with 40% of families sanctioned at least once, 14% sanctioned four or more times, and over four years, almost two-thirds experienced some sanction. This study also revealed that 71% of women returned to full benefits after a sanction and that the most common pattern was one month of sanction followed by a return to full benefits (p. 47). Data on sanctions from 1,123 families participating in the longitudinal Illinois Families Study (IFS) who received sanctions between January 1999 and March 2001 were examined to explore the relationship between sanctions, types of earnings, and food hardship (Lee, Slack, & Lewis, 2004). This examination showed that sanctions were significantly related to food hardship and behavior changes in terms of informal employment as opposed to formal employment, as well as some suggestion of sanctions preceding other hardships such as rent and utility problems (p. 394, Lee et al., 2004). Twenty-six percent of Minnesota's MFIP families in 2001 had been sanctioned in the previous 12 months (Wagner, Nguyen, O'Connell, & Collins, 2002).

There is also a possible relationship between the conditions of families at welfare exit and whether or not sanctions were experienced. Wu's (2007) study of over 13,000 TANF families in Wisconsin over 48 months showed that as families experienced increasing sanctions, so did their likelihood of leaving TANF without employment (they were 18% more likely) (p. 35). In addition, Wu (2007) uncovered the pattern of sanction severity positively predicting greater economic hardship after leaving TANF. Both of these findings challenge the motivational assumptions behind sanction policies. Other research has focused upon the duration of sanctions; in 2003, a New Jersey study revealed that more than three-quarters of TANF recipients in that state experienced sanctions lasting three months or less over an 18-month period (Wood & Clark, 2003).

### ***Outcomes for Families & Children***

Reflecting the adult orientation of TANF, the majority of TANF research is rarely focused upon child-specific outcomes such as educational performance. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has incorporated parent perspectives on child well-being in their longitudinal studies of MFIP families (MN DHS, 2010). Some national studies have shown that school-aged children in TANF families have stable or improved school performance in the areas of grades, behavior, and attendance (Washington State Employment Security Department, 2008; Zaslow et al., 2001) while others suggest little to no effect of TANF upon children (Gennetian & Miller, 2002). Additional research has suggested that TANF children experience more behavioral, learning, and mental health problems (Tout, Scarpa, & Zaslow, 2002) and that length of time on cash assistance and receipt of other supportive services such as housing subsidy are associated with variations in student attendance (Larson, Singh, Amendariz, Lewis, & LaLiberte, forthcoming). Multiple studies have also recognized that there are differential impacts upon children in TANF families that are age-dependent (Gennetian, Duncan, Knox, Vargas, Clark-Kauffman, & London, 2004; Tout, Scarpa, & Zaslow, 2002; Vandivere, Zaslow, Brooks, & Redd, 2004) that may also apply to educational outcomes.

Fewer studies have examined child outcomes specifically related to sanctions. In her qualitative interviews with 70 current and former TANF recipients in the Philadelphia area, Cleaveland (2007) learned that women who were eventually sanctioned off of TANF found other means of supporting their families, some of which were illegal. Because these means included selling alcohol, drugs, or engaging in services for cash (criminal activity and "under-the-table" work), these mothers put the custody of their children at risk to child welfare involvement. Gourdine's (2007) survey of child-only TANF cases showed that 40% of caregivers had experienced depression and that some parents chose to turn their children over to a relative (essentially creating a child-only TANF case) as a way to secure



ongoing benefits for their children when they began to experience repeated negative consequences with the program, such as sanctions.

Slack, Bong, and Berger's (2007) examination of over 1,200 families in Illinois revealed that while families experiencing TANF sanctions did not have a statistically greater likelihood of experiencing a report for maltreatment or neglect, they did experience an increased rate in investigations for child neglect (the point at which a report is accepted for investigation of actual harm and neglect). In particular, families experiencing sanction without additional income supplement were more likely (at a hazard ratio of 4.4) than those without income supplement (hazard ratio of 3.9) to experience an investigated neglect report (Slack et al., 2007). The researchers concluded that their findings are concerning, but did not suggest that child protection should necessarily become more involved in the lives of sanctioned families. Rather, the patterns observed in their data suggest an important level of economic hardship that may indeed be affecting children adversely (p.224).

### ***Reason for Study***

The philosophy behind sanctions is that they will motivate the unmotivated TANF parent to comply with training or work requirements, and many families who experience short-term punishment do quickly correct and retain full benefits. On the other hand, significant numbers of families leave TANF entirely and without employment after experiencing accumulating sanctions. Researchers attempting to understand why sanctions are motivating for some families but disengaging for others are challenged by the fact that the characteristics of families who disengage are similar to those who are more likely to struggle generally with employment and self-sufficiency. Lee and colleagues' (2004) analysis of IFS data concluded that "whether the findings indicate that sanctions cause certain hardships or simply indicate that those who receive sanctions are also those who face the most difficult transition to self-sufficiency, a discussion of how to improve sanction policy is warranted" (p. 397).

In addition, the small but growing body of knowledge on how TANF sanctions interact with children's lives has been limited to indirect affects upon family conditions or via maternal depression. No known studies have examined school-age student experiences in relation to TANF sanctions. Given the importance of educational attainment in positive human outcomes and the need to encourage poor children to break free from cycles of poverty through improved employment opportunities, it is very important to build further upon the work of others who have examined educational outcomes of TANF children by incorporating the experience of sanctions upon children. The present study adds to this discussion in two ways: by focusing upon the child outcomes of school attendance and enrollment disruptions in the elementary, middle, and high school grade levels in relation to sanction experience;

and by revisiting the issue of sanction timing and negative education outcomes (with no assumption about which comes first: sanction or negative outcome). Findings are expected to support further research in this area and reinforce the need for more focus on the well-being of children in TANF families.

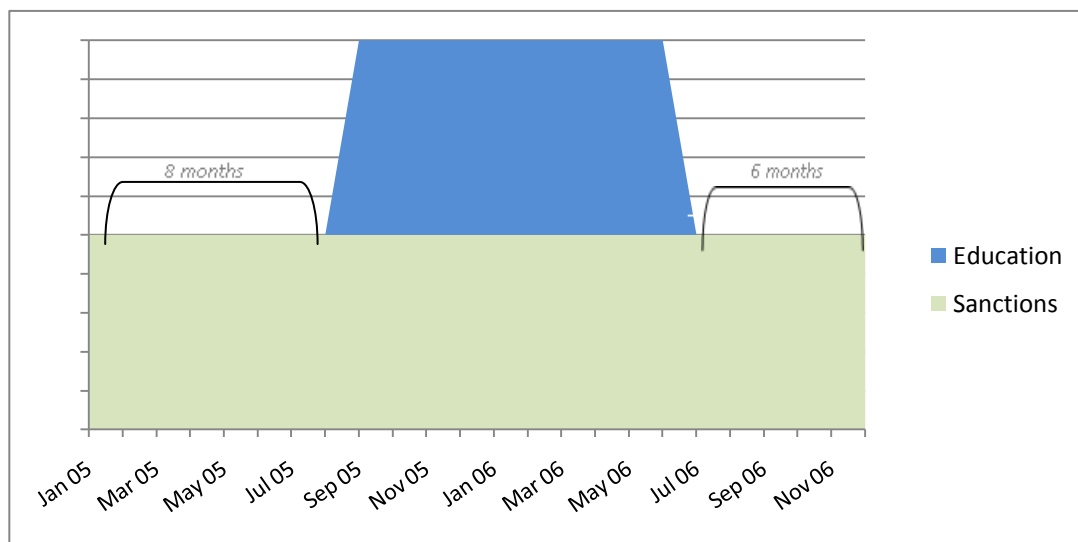
## Study Data and Design

Administrative data for this study was obtained from the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education. Use is allowed and governed by legal data sharing agreements between these state agencies and the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare.

### *TANF and Education Data*

To begin, data on children in all families (cases) who were active on MFIP in Minnesota as of December 2005 were obtained (*including children, N=67,015 from approximately 35,000 families*), including monthly case sanction status for the time period of January 2005 through December 2006 (24 calendar months). The education records for all school-aged children in MFIP households were then matched to public education records for the 2005-2006 school year. The time periods of these linkages are shown in Figure 1. The education timeframe can be considered the observation period.

*Figure 1. Timelines for Data Linkages and Overlap*



All preschool and unmatched children were removed from the study file. Preschool children were those who were not age five as of September 1, 2005. Unmatched children are those for whom an education record could not be matched from the 2005-2006 school year (these students may have been attending private schools).

To eliminate the bias of family attributes due to family size, one school-aged child was randomly selected per MFIP family. Random selection was accomplished by using a random numbers

table and retaining the record for the school-aged child in the household whose last two digits of their Person ID (a unique identifier assigned by the statewide human services systems) contained the random number pairs.<sup>1</sup> These actions resulted in a study file containing 19,181 children (one child per family). Among these school-aged children, 4,400, or 23% were from families that had experienced at least one sanction during the 24-month period and 14,781 experienced no sanctions.

### ***Education Measures***

The education data used here captures the experience of the student over the course of the entire school year, that is, it is longitudinal within the school year as opposed to point-in-time (i.e. a fall census). Administrative education data contains a wide array of variables that can describe student status and experience for the academic year (see the full report, *No. 11* for an overview of population attributes for this TANF population). The two education measures focused on in the current report were attendance and negative disruptions to enrollment.

#### Attendance

School attendance contributes significantly to achievement and educational attainment. In these administrative data, attendance was calculated as a ratio of Average Daily Attendance (the days the student actually attended) over Average Daily Membership (the required days of enrollment). This ratio ranged from .01 (very low, or almost no attendance) to 1.0, which would be perfect attendance, or 100%. Use of this ratio as opposed to another measure of attendance allows for comparisons of students across school districts whose lengths vary in Minnesota. As a ratio variable, attendance is useful for calculating and comparing group means. In this dataset, the ratio for attendance was used.

#### Negative Enrollment Disruptions

Education data contains a status end code that provides additional information about the reason for an update to a student record. Many of these status codes are generic (“00” = fall reporting, “99” = closing one record, opening a new one) and some are positive (“08” = graduated, “36” = enrolled in a post-secondary institution). Among more negative record updates are those that indicate student disconnections from school:

- 02 – transferred to another public school in the same district
- 03 – transferred to an approved nonpublic school
- 04 – student moved out of district
- 05 – student moved out of the state or country
- 13 – student committed to a correctional facility
- 14 – student withdrawn after 15 consecutive days absence – expected back
- 15 – student left school because of marriage
- 16 – student expelled and did not return during the year

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<sup>1</sup> If no children in the household had IDs that matched numbers in the random number table, we moved through the random number table until we received a match to one of the children in the household.

- 17 – student left school due to pregnancy
  - 18 – student withdrew, no transcript requested, or transferred to a non-approved nonpublic school
  - 22 – student withdrew to enter care or treatment program
  - 24 – withdrew to receive homebound services
  - 31 – left for social reasons
  - 32 – student left for financial reasons
  - 33 – student left for family environment reasons
  - 34 – student left for unknown reasons
  - 35 – student left school at age 21 and did not graduate
  - 42 – student met graduation requirements but did not pass basic standards tests needed to graduate
- (pp. 1-6, status end codes, Minnesota Department of Education MARSS Manual, 2010)

These types of disruptions were quantified for each student. Students had a range of total disruptions: some students had no disruptions and others had many. While there is a logical correlation between disruptions to enrollment and poor attendance, they can occur independent of one another. A date is associated with each student record update and is treated in these analyses as an effective date for that change. This date is used to calculate the relationship between the dates of these disruptions and sanction occurrence (see Timeframes section, below).

### Sanctions

Sanction data ranged from January 2005 through December 2006. Sanctions were attributed to family heads, so this data was associated once with the randomly selected student from each household. Because sanctions were assigned monthly, there could only be one per month. Students could be from families experiencing zero sanctions, up to 12 sanctions.

### Timeframes

To get a sense of whether there was a relationship between the timing of sanctions and the timing of negative enrollment disruptions for students, a time difference variable was calculated for each student, taking into account the difference in months between the date of the disruption and the date of sanction. Timeframes between sanction and disruption dates were also dummy coded into groups by three-month intervals to describe the clustering of events.

### ***Methodological Approach***

Examining the relationship between sanctions and other life events using statistical models is a relatively new practice. When examining the relationship between events over time and when seeking predictive power, discrete-time event history methods are superior to others and multinomial logistic models are preferred (Wu, et al., 2006; Wu, 2007). These methods take into account the accumulation of negative events (such as sanctions) in relation to categorical dependent variables that have multiple levels (Powers & Xie, 1999). In Wu's (2007) analysis, 48 months of data were used, yet the author only cautiously approached the issue of causality between welfare sanctions and their dependent

variable of economic well-being (p.41). Longer time periods are best when using event history methods to maximize the likelihood of capturing the influence of one event upon another. The shorter time period examined here (24 months) and the observation period of only a nine month school year, roughly September 2005 through June 2006, embedded within the sanction time period makes a similar exploration of causality untenable. In addition, the sanction dates that occur at the early points of 2005 and towards the end of 2006 create a challenge of left- and right-censoring<sup>2</sup> in the event that sanction dates in fact precede negative education outcomes. With such a truncated observation period (the nine month school year) it becomes challenging to know how to address the sanctions that occur early and late in the sanction periods. Finally, education is arguably a continuous experience with periodic breaks (such as summertime); examining only one school year likely fails to capture the full interaction between cumulative TANF sanction activity and continuous education experiences. Because of the limitations of narrow data timeframes, overall and for education in particular, this analysis is limited to a descriptive overview of event timing with some group difference statistics provided. Recommendations for more complex approaches appear in the discussion section.

### Results

Students whose families experienced any sanctions in the 24-month period constituted 23% of all randomly selected students in the study group (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

*Students With and Without Sanctions*

**Table 1. Comparison of Child Attributes: Families With and Without Sanctions over 24 Months**

	No sanction, N=14,781		At least one sanction, N=4,400	
	N	Perc	N	Perc
<b>Child Race*</b>				
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1,554	10.5%	538	12.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,029	13.7%	137	3.1%
Hispanic	1,232	8.3%	340	7.7%
Black, not Hispanic	5,659	38.3%	1,698	38.6%
White, not Hispanic	4,307	29.1%	1,687	38.3%
<b>Grade in School**</b>				
Elementary, K-5	7,315	49.5%	2,744	62.4%
Middle School, 6-8	3,148	21.3%	767	17.4%
High School, 9-12	4,318	29.2%	889	20.2%
<b>Sex</b>				
Female	7,387	50.0%	2,246	51.0%
Male	7,394	50.0%	2,154	49.0%

<sup>2</sup> Right-censoring, for example, occurs when the cases that were exposed to some event (sanctions) are excluded from analysis because any potential effects occur outside the observation period and are consequently, undetectable. The same challenge occurs with events occurring in the other direction (left-censoring).

<sup>3</sup> Recall that this is a case-level statistic since there was one student selected per case/family.

$$*\chi^2=440.850,4,p<.001$$

$$**\chi^2=233.357,2,p<.001$$

Students whose families experienced at least one sanction were more likely to be White (38.3% with sanctions compared to 29.1% without), American Indian or Alaskan Native (12.2% with sanctions compared to 10.5% without), and much less likely to be Asian or Pacific Islander (13.7% without sanctions compared to 3.1% with sanctions). Black and Hispanic students were nearly equally likely to be in either the sanction or no sanction groups. There were no differences in sanction experience by gender, but elementary school-age students were much more likely to be from families experiencing sanctions (62.4%) than not (49.5%).

**Table 2. Differences in Numbers of Sanctions Over 24 Months**

Child Race*	At least one sanction, <i>N</i> =4,400		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>StdD</i>
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3.54	716	2.927
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.46	140	1.924
Hispanic	3.27	326	2.386
Black, not Hispanic	2.94	2,138	2.345
White, not Hispanic	3.18	1,843	2.412
<b>Grade in School**</b>			
Elementary, K-5	3.26	3,235	2.548
Middle School, 6-8	2.86	911	2.191
High School, 9-12	2.88	1,017	2.364
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	3.13	2,651	2.440
Male	3.09	2,512	2.481

$$*F=11.436,4,p<.001$$

$$**F=15.513,2,p<.001$$

Table 2 describes the differences in the magnitude of sanctions experienced by these student groups over the 24-month period. In this case, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic, and White children were from families experiencing disproportionate numbers of sanctions, with means of 3.54, 3.27, and 3.18, respectively. The average number of sanctions experienced by middle and high school students were nearly identical (2.86 for middle schoolers and 2.88 for high schoolers) while the average was much higher for elementary school students, at 3.26. Differences by gender were not significant.

### ***Enrollment Disruptions and Attendance for Students with Sanctions***

Status code changes indicate a variety of types of updates to student records, including disruptions. Table 3 describes the frequency of disruptive changes for students whose families

experienced at least one sanction over the 24-month period. Students can experience multiple disruptions throughout the year.

**Table 3. Disruption Types for Students with Sanctions, by Grade Level Groups**

	Elementary, N=2,744		Middle, N=767		High, N=889	
	N	Perc	N	Perc	N	Perc
02 – transferred to another public school in the same district	489	18%	72	9%	267	30%
03 – transferred to an approved nonpublic school	10	<1%	2	<1%	8	1%
04 – student moved out of district	568	21%	64	8%	167	19%
05 – student moved out of the state or country	81	3%	5	1%	24	3%
13 – student committed to a correctional facility			11	1%	24	3%
14 – student withdrawn after 15 consecutive days absence – expected back	15	<1%	7	1%	79	9%
15 – student left school because of marriage						
16 – student expelled and did not return during the year			2	<1%	2	<1%
17 – student left school due to pregnancy					4	<1%
18 – student withdrew, no transcript requested, or transferred to a non-approved nonpublic school					7	1%
22 – student withdrew to enter care or treatment program	3	<1%	14	2%	38	4%
24 – withdrew to receive homebound services	2	<1%	2	<1%	7	1%
31 – left for social reasons					2	<1%
32 – student left for financial reasons					2	<1%
33 – student left for family environment reasons	1	<1%			2	<1%
34 – student left for unknown reasons	2	<1%	2	<1%	27	3%
35 – student left school at age 21 and did not graduate					5	1%
42 – student met graduation requirements but did not pass basic standards tests needed to graduate					3	<1%
<i>Totals within Grade Levels</i>	<i>1,171</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>668</i>	<i>75%</i>

High school students proportionally experienced more disruptions (75% experienced at least one type) as well as the greatest variety of types. Forty-two percent of elementary-age students experienced at least one type of disruption and middle schoolers the least, with 23%. For all three age groups, the most common type of disruption was moving to another public school in the same district and students moving out of the district. Older students were more likely to enter care or treatment programs (0% elementary, 2% middle school, and 4% high schoolers) and correctional facilities (0%, 1%, and 3%, respectively) and more likely to leave for unknown, social or family environment reasons.

Students from families with no sanctions had significantly fewer disruptions ( $mean=.495$ ) than did students from families with at least one sanction ( $mean=.548$ ) ( $F=12.940$ ,  $1$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and had slightly higher mean attendance ratios for the school year (no sanction  $mean=.88$  versus at least one sanction  $mean = .87$ ) ( $F=34.548$ ,  $1$ ,  $p<.001$ ). To determine whether progressive sanctions were associated with disruptions and attendance, subsequent analyses were confined to just students whose families experienced sanctions. Students in this study group were from families who had experienced a range

of 1 to 12 sanctions over the 24-month period. Attendance ratio patterns and disruptions were examined next in relation to three levels of sanction experience. Table 4 shows these trends by student grade level group.

*Table 4. Disruptions and Attendance, by Sanctions and Grade Level Groups*

	Total Disruptions			Attendance Ratios		
	Mean	N	StdD	Mean	N	StdD
Elementary, K-5						
1- 4 sanctions	.4707	2,335	.755	.9012*	2,335	.076
5-8 sanctions	.4725	400	.745	.8946	400	.083
9-12 sanctions	.2222	9	.667	.8426	9	.138
Middle School, 6-8						
1- 4 sanctions	.5673	654	.989	.8746	654	.113
5-8 sanctions	.4865	111	.749	.8726	111	.107
9-12 sanctions	1.500	2	2.12	.8678	2	.031
High School, 9-12						
1- 4 sanctions	.7703	762	1.01	.7795	762	.190
5-8 sanctions	.8211	123	.958	.7600	123	.207
9-12 sanctions	1.250	4	1.25	.7459	4	.125

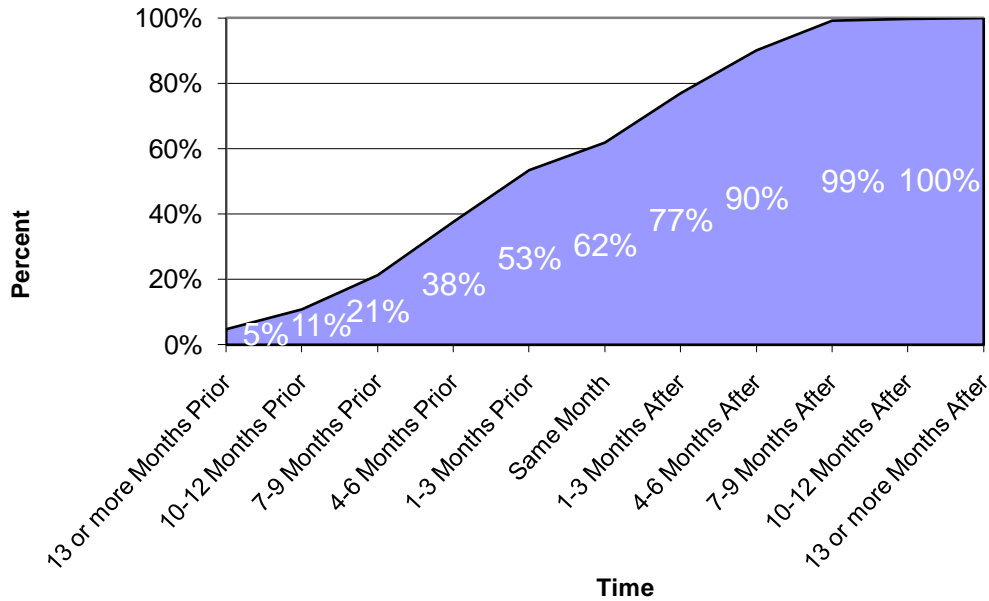
\*F=3.720,2,p<.01

As the number of sanctions increases, there was little evidence that educational disruptions increased in number as well. Only in the case of middle and high school students did the mean number of disruptions increase as sanctions increased, but differences were not statistically significant and Ns become quite small (particularly for the 9-12 sanction range). In the case of attendance ratios, attendance did appear to decrease as the number of sanctions increased for all grade level groups, but only differences for elementary students were statistically significant with children whose families had 1-5 sanctions having a mean attendance of .90 (or 90%), those with 5-8 sanctions having attendance of .89, and those in the 9-12 sanction range with attendance of .84.

Finally, differences in the dates of disruptions in relation to sanction dates were calculated for each student in the sanction dataset. Student disruptions could occur in the months prior to the sanction month, the same month as the sanction, or months afterward. Figure 2 shows the cumulative distribution of disruptions in relation to sanction dates for all students whose families experienced sanctions in the 24-month period.



*Figure 2. Cumulative Percent of Disruptions in Relation to Sanction Occurrence*



By the month of sanction, more than half of disruptions had already occurred and by the post-sanction, four to six month mark, 90% of all disruptions had occurred.

### Limitations

This analysis utilized data from a broader cross-sectional study of child outcomes and as such, only a very narrow time-period of data was available. This narrow timeframe limited the analytical options and prohibited the use of discrete event-history analysis methods that are more ideally suited to detecting causality over time. In addition, the nine-month education timeframe, which served as the observation period, was even shorter than the 24-month sanction time period and did not incorporate corresponding months of education experience from the last half of the 2004-2005 school year or the fall of 2006. These limitations in data and timeframes made this analysis much less useful from an analytical perspective. The literature on correlates with positive child education outcomes identifies a number of variables that were unavailable in this dataset such as student self-control and academic self-competence (Kurdek & Sinclair, 2000), parental education levels (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009), behavioral involvement of an adult in schooling (Kurdek & Sinclair, 2000), positive mother-child interaction in kindergarten (Gregory & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008), cultural retention for immigrant

students (Akiba, 2007), and grades in high school as predictors of college success for older students of color (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005), among many others.

## Discussion

Evaluations of the effects of Welfare Reform upon families and children are sparse, and analyses of the interactions, if any, between negative aspects of TANF program provisions and child outcomes specifically are fewer. This analysis examined two different educational outcomes in relation to children's families' sanction experience and found that overall, children from families with at least one sanction had lower mean attendance and significantly more disruptions to enrollment. Consistent with literature on the sanction experiences of families on TANF, younger children (in grades K-5) were more likely to be from families with any sanctions as well as higher average rates of sanctions over the 24-months of study. In contrast to other studies, children from families that experienced any sanctions were more likely to be White than children from families with no sanctions, and sanction rates for White children were similar to those for American Indian and Hispanic children. Future research might explore whether there are geographic patterns of sanctions that override racial disproportionality.

When focusing upon just children whose families experienced sanctions, high school aged students (grades 9-12) experienced the most disruptions to enrollment (75%). All children from families with sanctions experienced moves to schools in different districts and moves out of the state or country, indicating high rates of mobility. There was no evidence that increasing sanctions were associated with increasing numbers of enrollment disruptions for students, but for elementary students, attendance was markedly worse as the numbers of sanctions increased.

The timing of sanctions in relation to enrollment disruptions suggests that sanctions may precede disruptions in school and by the month of sanction, over half of disruptions had already been experienced by students. On the other hand, this may be an artifact of the lack of alignment between the timeframes of the sanction and education data, in which there are eight months of sanction data prior to the education timeframe and only six months after. Or, this may suggest that the family conditions that are interfering with the student's school enrollment (moves, leaving for treatment programs, leaving for juvenile detention, etc.) are also interfering with the TANF caregiver's ability to comply with program requirements, eventually resulting in sanction. This phenomenon deserves greater scrutiny, using more rigorous time-event history analysis, and with a much broader time period, preferably encompassing multiple school years of data. Disruptions may in fact precede sanctions, or,

there may be an ongoing and reflexive relationship between the two over time. Only with a longitudinal perspective might the order and causality of sanctions and child outcomes, if any, be uncovered.

Wu and colleagues (2007), arguably leading the way in this area of research, argue for the increased emphasis on the inclusion of specific TANF policy provisions in analyses of TANF impacts. These policy provisions should be accompanied by greater attention given to family circumstances including child age, household composition, and caregiver and child illness. Because these other factors can directly impact employability, parenting, and educational engagement, future study should incorporate these variables within longitudinal timeframes to allow for the most robust examination of these factors. These results suggest that there may indeed be important interactions to uncover, particularly for young children. At the very least, these results suggest that just as the correlates of life disruption and sanction are hard to disentangle (Kalil, et al., 2002), the challenges experienced by families that result in sanction may also be highly correlated with negative education outcomes for children.

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