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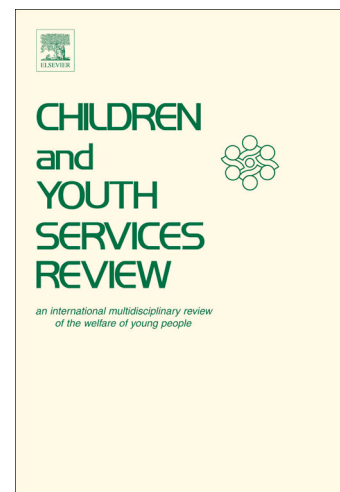
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The Power of Connectedness: Associations Between Caring Non-Parental Adult Relationships, School Attendance, and Discipline Among Foster Involved Youth
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Brittani A. Lamb^{1,2}, Knoo Lee³, Sarah M. Espinoza¹, Barbara J. McMorris¹

¹University of Minnesota, ²Augsburg University, ³University of Missouri

Abstract

Relationships with caring adults are protective for adolescents. However, little is known about the impacts of caring adults for youth who have experienced disruptions in caregiving due to involvement in the foster care system, especially with regard to their school outcomes. We analyzed cross-sectional data from foster-involved youth (5th, 8th, 9th, & 11th graders, N = 4,629) who responded to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and multivariate logistic regression models were used to evaluate whether perceptions of caring in relationships with non-parental adult relatives, teachers/school staff, and adults in the community were associated with students' absences and instances of being sent out of class for disciplinary reasons in the last 30 days. Significant, protective bivariate associations were noted between students' perceptions of how much non-parental adult relatives in their lives care about them and their instances of school absences and exclusionary discipline ($p < .05$). Chi-square tests also revealed that high perceptions of caring in relationships with teachers and school staff were associated with fewer absences. Relationships with other adults in the community were not significantly associated with absences or discipline. In multivariate logistic regression analyses (controlling for sex, race and ethnicity, and grade), only associations between non-parental adult relative caring and absences ($p = .01$) and between non-parental adult relative caring and exclusionary discipline ($p < .001$) remained significant. Relationships with caring non-parental adults are important for youth involved in foster care and support school attendance and

behavior. Families, schools, and foster care systems should prioritize youths' connections with relatives and school staff to support their educational experiences.

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Keywords: Foster care, caring adults, school attendance, school discipline, non-parental adult relatives

Author Note

Brittani Lamb <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5197-3342>

Knoo Lee <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4339-9483>

Sarah M. Espinoza <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8719-077X>

Barbara J. McMorris <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9605-0931>

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to lamb.brittani@gmail.com.

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1. Introduction

Relationships with caring adults are important for children and adolescents. Attachment theory and related research articulate the contributions of children's early and ongoing

relationships to their development and wellbeing (Bowlby et al., 1956; Bretherton, 1985; Groh et al., 2017). Although much of the attachment literature focuses on parents' contributions to children's wellbeing, research also suggests that young people who have at least one consistent caring adult in their lives who is not their parent experience improved mental health and social-emotional outcomes (Sacks et al., 2020; Sterrett et al., 2011; Taliaferro et al., 2018). Safe, supportive relationships with non-parental adults help children and adolescents develop social skills and find their place within the community (Duong & Bradshaw, 2014; Foster et al., 2017; Sieving et al., 2017). Such relationships are also associated with academic achievement and motivation (Jose et al., 2015). For young people who have experienced disruptions in caregiving due to involvement in the foster care system, relationships with caring adults may be even more important.

Youth involved in foster care are separated from their parents and may move frequently, resulting in disrupted connections and potentially insecure attachment (Miranda et al., 2020). These experiences may contribute to challenges for foster-involved youth at school. However, caring adult relationships may support their experiences at school, as supportive connections are associated with young people's academic performance and post-secondary outcomes (Sacks et al., 2020). However, few studies have addressed whether relationships with adults—especially adults who are not their parents—have similarly beneficial impacts on school outcomes specifically for youth involved in foster care. This study aims to explore the associations between caring adult relationships and school absences and experiences of exclusionary discipline for youth who have ever experienced foster care.

1.1 Previous research

For youth involved in foster care, connections to caring adults may be complicated by removal from their family of origin. Children and youth of all ages enter foster care for varied reasons and may remain in care anywhere from one night to several years (Child Safety, 2020). Sometimes, youth in foster care live with a relative, but many times, they move in with an unknown foster family who may be of a different racial or ethnic identity or part of a different community. This is especially true for Black and Indigenous youth, who are disproportionately represented in the foster care system (Child Safety, 2020; Woolman & Slama, 2019). Youth may have multiple moves within the foster system to different homes or other facilities (Child Safety, 2020). Family, school connections, and community members can be sources of stability when a child or adolescent is removed from their family of origin, but such connections may be lost or minimized in the transition to foster care or between different foster placements.

Youth in foster care also face unique challenges at school. A history of traumatic experiences, social stigma, and inadequate supports all contribute to higher rates of school absences and discipline (Cho et al., 2019; Legal Center, 2014; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Students in foster care also miss school at times due to system-related reasons, such as changing schools and waiting for re-enrollment, appointments, court hearings, travel to family visits, and more. As a group, foster-involved youth also experience more exclusionary discipline (such as being sent out of class or suspended), which can exacerbate the trauma of loss and separation (Cho et al., 2019; Legal Center, 2014). Encouragingly, students' feelings of connectedness and relationships with caring adults in general can reduce incidences of discipline and increase attendance, therefore increasing students' time in class (Anyon et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2013). For foster-involved students specifically, caring adults support resilience and increase their

likelihood of high school and post-secondary graduation (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Greeson et al., 2015; Neal, 2017; Weinberg et al., 2014).

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Given the unique circumstances of the foster care experience, this population of youth warrants explicit study to examine the ways in which caring adult relationships connect to positive educational outcomes (Harpin et al., 2013; Oldfield et al., 2018). However, previous studies of foster-involved youth, their perceptions of relationships with caring adults, and school experiences have relied on small sample sizes (mostly of youth high school-aged or older) and focused on caring adults supporting long-term outcomes like graduation and post-secondary educational attainment (Lemkin et al., 2018; Neal, 2017; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Few studies focus on attendance and exclusionary discipline, and other research is inconclusive on the role of caring adults in educational outcomes for youth in foster care (Lemkin et al., 2018; Somers et al., 2020). Much of the existing literature describes relationships at school, with little focus on relationships with non-parental adult relatives or community relationships outside the school context (Anyon et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2013; Somers et al., 2020; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016).

1.2 Current study

This study investigated the associations between foster-involved youths' perceptions of caring in relationships with non-parental adults and their absences from school and instances of exclusionary discipline. Our analysis was grounded in the theoretical framework of attachment, recognizing the importance of caring adult relationships in young people's lives (Bowlby et al., 1956). Because previous research shows caring adults serve protective functions against multiple risk behaviors, we hypothesized that high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives, teachers/school staff, and adults in the community would associate with fewer school

absences and experiences of exclusionary discipline (Duong & Bradshaw, 2014; Foster et al., 2017; Sacks et al., 2020; Sieving et al., 2017; Starratt et al., 2011; Taliaferro et al., 2018)

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2. Method

2.1 Data source and sample

Data for the current study came from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS). The MSS is a voluntary statewide survey distributed triennially to public, charter, tribal, and private schools in Minnesota, as well as to alternative learning centers and juvenile correctional facilities. The survey collects information on 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th graders' health and wellbeing by asking questions about students' activities, opinions, behaviors, and experiences (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). In 2019, 81% of Minnesota school districts elected to participate in the survey and more than 170,000 students completed the MSS (Minnesota Department of Health, 2019). All responses are de-identified, and the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board designated our secondary data analysis as non-human subjects research. Since this study focused on foster-involved youth, our subsample of the MSS included only students who responded "Yes, during the past year" or "Yes, more than a year ago" or both to the question, "Have you ever been in foster care?" and had complete data on other measures of interest (N = 4,629). We combined any "Yes" response ("Yes, during the past year," "Yes, more than a year ago," or both) into one group for our analyses because we considered *any* involvement in foster care a potential disruption in youths' attachment (Miranda et al., 2020).

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Independent variables: Perceptions of adult caring

We used three items in parallel format to measure students' perceptions of caring from their non-parental adult relatives, teachers, and other adults in their community: "How much do

you feel [other adult relatives, teachers/other adults at school, adults in your community] care about you?" The question about "other adult relatives" followed the question, "How much do you feel your parents care about you?", so survey participants had the context that the question was asking about adults other than their parents. Students responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale, consisting of options of "Not at all" (scored as 1), "A little" (2), "Some" (3), "Quite a bit" (4), and "Very much" (5).

We dichotomized responses for each item into low and high perceptions of caring. Scores of 1 to 4 on each item were converted to "0" or "Low Perceptions of Caring," and scores of 5 were converted to "1" or "High Perceptions of Caring." Even though students' perceptions of adults caring "A little," "Some," or "Quite a bit" indicate some feelings of caring, students who responded "Very much" were the most certain and confident in their perceptions of adult caring and therefore designated as the high caring group; this decision is similar to a previous use of MSS data (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006). As a result, our independent variables ultimately reflected "Low" and "High" perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives, teachers/other adults at school, and adults in the community.

2.2.2 *Dependent variables: Absences & exclusionary discipline*

This study used two school-related dependent variables. First, we operationalized students' numbers of full-day absences with the question, "During the last 30 days, how many times did you miss a full day of school?". Second, we operationalized instances of exclusionary discipline with the question, "During the last 30 days, how many times did you get sent out of the classroom for discipline?". Students responded to each question with a 5-point Likert scale, which included the options "None" (scored as 1), "Once or Twice" (scored as 2), "3-5 times" (scored as 3), "6-9 times" (scored as 4), and "10 or more times" (scored as 5).

We dichotomized absences into “0” for students who reported “none” or “once or twice” in the last 30 days, and “1” for students who were absent three or more times in the last 30 days.

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This split distinguished students with rare absences from those with chronic absenteeism (over 10% of school days) (Romero & Lee, 2008). We dichotomized the exclusionary discipline variable with “0” representing students who reported no instances of being sent out of the classroom for discipline and “1” representing students who had ever been sent out of the classroom in the last 30 days. We decided upon this “none” or “any” split for discipline (as opposed to the more lenient split of absences) because having even one experience of being sent out of class for discipline could be cause for concern and impact a student’s school record (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018).

2.2.3 Covariates

Students’ self-reported grade level, race and ethnicity, and sex (“What is your biological sex?”) were included as demographic variables to describe the sample and as control variables in inferential analyses. Previous research shows that students in higher grades are more likely to be chronically absent and experience exclusionary discipline (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; United States Department of Education, 2016). We controlled for race and ethnicity due to known racial disparities in both the foster care system and schools’ exclusionary disciplinary practices, with students of color more likely to be overrepresented in the foster care system compared to the general population and to experience exclusionary discipline; controlling for race and ethnicity was our attempt to adjust, by proxy, for these systemic inequities (Child Safety, 2020; Samimi, 2020; VanderWeele & Robinson, 2014). Finally, we controlled for sex due to disparities in rates of discipline between male and female students; male students are more likely to be disciplined at school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

2.3 Analysis strategy

We used cross tabulations and chi square tests to compare associations between each of the three adult caring variables (non-parental adult relatives, teachers/other adults at school, and adults in the community) and absences and between the three adult caring variables and instances of exclusionary discipline. To assess associations between the three adult caring variables, we computed Spearman's rho. Then, we tested two separate multivariate logistic regressions predicting 1) absences by all three adult caring variables and 2) instances of exclusionary discipline by all three adult caring variables, while controlling for demographics. We used RStudio version 3.5.3 (2019-03-11) for all analyses and a p-value of 0.05 to determine statistical significance.

3. Results

3.1 Sample characteristics

Self-reported characteristics of the study sample are displayed in Table 1. The overall rate of foster care involvement in the full MSS sample was 3% (N = 4,629). For most students, it had been over a year since their experience in the foster care system (n = 3,110, 67%). Almost a quarter of foster-involved students had been in foster care within the last year, and 8% had been in foster care both within the previous year and more than a year ago. This could be attributed to multiple instances in the foster care system or one experience longer than a year in duration. Sex was evenly distributed within the sample, and fifth graders represented the largest group by grade at 30%.

As anticipated, there were racial disproportionalities in the study sample compared to the full MSS 2019 sample. In the full sample, 67% of students identified their race and ethnicity as white only, yet in the subsample of foster-involved youth, 45% of students identified as white

only (Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team, 2019). The percentage of American Indian youth who had ever been in foster care (9%) was higher than the percentage of American Indian youth in the full MSS sample (1%). Black and multiracial youth were represented in this foster care subsample at approximately twice the rate as they are in the full MSS sample (at 13% and 18%, respectively, compared to 7% and 8% in the full MSS sample). Data from the state agency responsible for foster care in Minnesota confirm this disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in foster care compared to the population of children in the state (Child Safety, 2020).

Frequencies and percentages for the dependent and independent variables are located in Table 2. Regarding absences, about 74% of students who had ever been in foster care reported being absent zero to two times in the last 30 days and 26% reported being absent three or more times in the same time frame. Instances of discipline were similarly distributed; 74% of youth who had ever been in foster care reported never being sent out of class for discipline in the last 30 days, while 26% had been sent out of class at least once. We found that more students reported high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives (41%), compared to perceptions of caring from teachers/other adults at school (22%) and adults in the community (17%).

With regard to associations between the caring measures, students with high perceptions of caring in one adult relationship do not necessarily have equally high perceptions of caring in other adult relationships. We found Spearman's rho values of .43 between other adult relatives and teachers, .40 between other adult relatives and community adults, and .62 between teachers and community adults.

3.2 Bivariate findings

3.2.1 Absences

Chi-square tests of associations between the three types of adult caring and full-day absences revealed two statistically significant findings, shown in Table 3. Foster-involved students who reported high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives were significantly more likely to report fewer absences than foster-involved students with lower perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives ($p = .01$; $\chi^2 = 7.57$). Additionally, foster-involved youth who reported high perceptions of caring from teachers/other adults at school were significantly more likely to report fewer absences than foster-involved youth with low perceptions of caring from teachers/other adults at school ($p = .04$; $\chi^2 = 4.23$). Perceptions of caring from adults in the community were not significantly associated with absences.

3.2.2 Exclusionary discipline

Chi-square tests of associations between the three types of adult caring and instances of discipline yielded one significant finding, as seen in Table 4. Participants who reported high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives were significantly more likely to have experienced zero instances of discipline compared to participants who had low perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives ($p = .03$; $\chi^2 = 4.87$). Students' perceptions of caring from teachers/other adults at school and from adults in the community were not significantly associated with instances of school discipline.

3.3 Multivariate Findings

3.3.1 Absences

Results from the multivariate logistic regression model for school absences are in Table 5. There were no significant differences by sex and only one significant difference by grade (i.e., 9th graders were significantly less likely than 5th graders to report 3 or more school absences). Significant differences in race and ethnicity were found, with students of color (with the

exception of Asian students) and those who identified as multiple races experiencing significantly higher odds of being absent 3 or more times in the past 30 days, compared to white students. Controlling for all variables, students with experience in foster care who reported high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives were significantly less likely to report 3 or more absences in the last 30 days, compared to students with low perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives (adjusted odds ratio = 0.81; 95% CI: -0.37, -0.05; $p = .01$). Neither perceptions of caring from teachers/other adults at school nor perceptions of caring from other adults in the community were significantly associated with absences when controlling for all other variables.

3.3.2 Exclusionary discipline

Results from the logistic regression model of instances of discipline, found in Table 6, were similar to those of absences, with a few exceptions. Male students were over twice as likely as female students to experience any exclusionary discipline in the last 30 days (adjusted odds ratio = 2.19; 95% CI: 0.64, 0.93; $p < 0.001$). Older students (9th and 11th graders) were significantly less likely than 5th graders to experience any exclusionary discipline. Asian/Asian American students were significantly less likely than white students to experience any exclusionary discipline (adjusted odds ratio = 0.68; 95% CI: -0.71, -0.06; $p = .02$). All other racial/ethnic student groups, with the exception of Hispanics or Latinos, had significantly greater odds of exclusionary discipline compared to white students. Only high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives were protective for students' instances of discipline, after controlling for all variables in the model. Students with high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives had significantly lower odds of any instance of exclusionary discipline in the last 30 days (adjusted odds ratio = 0.74; 95% CI: -0.47, -0.14; $p = .01$). Perceptions of caring

from teachers/other adults at school and from adults in the community were statistically unrelated to instances of discipline.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine associations between foster-involved youths' perceptions of non-parental adult caring and their rates of school absences and experiences of exclusionary discipline. We hypothesized that high perceptions of caring from non-parental adult relatives, teachers and other school staff, and adults in the community would associate with fewer absences and fewer experiences of exclusionary discipline (e.g., being asked to leave class by a teacher).

Our hypothesis was partially supported. Students' perceptions of high caring in relationships with non-parental adult relatives and teachers/school staff significantly associated with better student attendance in bivariate analyses, but only perceptions of high caring with non-parental adult relatives remained a significant predictor once we adjusted for all variables in a logistic model. That is, students who felt most strongly that their non-parental adult relatives cared about them were more likely to report fewer absences than students who did not feel as strongly that non-parental adult relatives cared about them.

Regarding discipline, only students' perceptions of high caring in relationships with non-parental adult relatives significantly associated with experiences of exclusionary discipline after controlling for all variables. Students who felt the most strongly that their non-parental adult relatives cared about them were significantly more likely to report never having been asked to leave class than students who felt less strongly that their non-parental adult relatives cared about them. Contrary to our hypothesis, in bivariate relationships and after adjusting for all variables, perceptions of caring from teachers/other school staff and other adults in the community were

not significantly associated with students' experiences of exclusionary discipline. These results highlight the importance of students' relationships with non-parental adult relatives.

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Study findings align somewhat with previous research on the importance of non-parental adult relationships for young people, as well as add new information to the literature regarding the meaning of such relationships for foster-involved youth and the role of non-parental adult relatives. For instance, previous studies demonstrate how students' perceptions of teacher caring affect their school engagement, but we found that these relationships did not hold among foster-involved youth after accounting for demographic variables and other measures of caring (Anyon et al., 2016). The strong associations found between non-parental adult relative caring and fewer absences and instances of discipline, after adjusting for covariates, also supplement existing literature. Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) described how educational resilience is supported by family engagement in a student's life, while Greeson et al. (2015) discussed the importance of permanency connections with caring adults for youth in foster care, although neither of these studies incorporated attendance or discipline. Having a family member who cares about them may help young people have high attendance and fewer instances of discipline through meeting their emotional need for belonging and encouraging their success at school (Jose et al., 2012). As one participant in Greeson et al.'s (2015) study explained, "it's good to know that you got somebody that's not going anywhere" (p. 143).

One surprising finding was that students' perceptions of how much their teachers and other adults at school cared about them were not significantly associated with attendance or exclusionary discipline after adjusting for other caring variables and demographic factors. Previous research suggests connections between having a caring adult at school and other school outcomes, such as graduation, exist for students in foster care (Anyon et al., 2016; Foster et al.,

2017; Neal, 2017; Pecora, 2012; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) also noted the importance of support and encouragement from foster parents in school success.

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Non-relative foster parents may fall into the category of “adults in your community” in this context (though, notably, we do not know how students categorized their foster parents when responding to this survey). Yet our findings did not show a significant association between community adult caring and attendance or discipline, after controlling for other factors. More research is needed to further explore the roles of teachers and other adults at school and adults in the community in the lives of foster-involved youth.

4.1 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered in conjunction with this study’s strengths. Primarily, questions regarding students’ experiences lacked nuance. The MSS did not ask whether students were currently in foster care, when or how long they had been involved in the system, whether they lived with relatives for foster care, or how long they had been attending their current school. These limitations reflect broader issues in research among foster-involved youth: there is little consistency in whether and how scholars evaluate differences in the timing of students’ experiences of foster care across studies, as well as how researchers compare outcomes between students who have been in foster care in the past versus contemporarily. Some studies examine former foster youth (Ahrens et al., 2011; Clemens et al., 2017; Neal, 2017; Pecora, 2012), while others sample youth currently in care (Greeson et al., 2015; Harpin et al., 2013; Weinberg et al., 2014), or combine both current and former foster-involved youth (Day et al., 2012; Townsend et al., 2020). Additionally, it was unclear whether students’ absences were excused or unexcused, which is an important distinction. Absences may be because of decisions students make for themselves (e.g., skipping class, which may be a coping mechanism)

or because of decisions made for them (e.g., attending court hearings or other foster-related appointments). Furthermore, while the discipline item asked how many times a student had been sent out of the classroom for discipline, it did not capture the cause or severity of the incident - it should be noted that exclusionary discipline is an adult response to student behavior, and that students of color and other marginalized groups experience discipline at higher rates for less severe behavior and are overrepresented in this subsample (Samimi, 2020). Finally, the dataset was cross-sectional and we cannot imply causal order of associations between adult caring and students' absences and discipline. Despite these limitations, our study is one of few to examine associations between different types of non-parental adult caring and school absences and experiences of exclusionary discipline for foster-involved students who participated in a large, population-based data collection effort.

4.2 Future research

There are many opportunities to uncover potential protective factors for youth in foster care. The wide range of data available through population-based surveys, such as the Minnesota Student Survey and others, can provide helpful insight into many areas of wellbeing for this subpopulation. Researchers should further investigate relationships between adult caring and academic achievement, student safety, and health for young people involved in foster care because these youth may be at increased risk for inequitable outcomes. Including additional protective or risk factors as predictors will also further our understanding. Using a developmental lens for such research is critical, as the salience of different relationships are complex and vary across developmental stages. For instance, perhaps caring adults outside the family are more important for older youth as they explore their identities independently beyond the family (Denham, 2018). Our findings that students with high perceptions of caring in one

relationship did not necessarily have high perceptions of caring in other adult relationships could be evidence of the salience of different relationships at different developmental stages and should be explored further. Additionally, the ability to distinguish between the timing of foster care involvement and students' current age could yield more insight into the importance of caring adult relationships. Relatedly, future research should also explore in more detail the differences between students currently in foster care and those who previously experienced foster care. Using an antioppressive and critical race theory lens could help elucidate how disparities in the foster care system relate to attendance and exclusionary discipline at school (Legal Center, 2014; Samimi, 2020). Finally, qualitative research that engages foster-involved youths' voices to explain how caring adults matter to their academic outcomes could provide deeper understanding of these relationships.

4.3 Implications

Findings from this study have implications for practice for states, counties, and other systems connected to foster care. States and counties should track and evaluate data for their foster care systems to assess children's opportunities to build supportive relationships, their absences, and their instances of exclusionary discipline at school. For example, individual case managers and jurisdictions may want to pay attention to the presence and quality of youths' relationships with non-parental relatives, as well as how often youth need to miss or change schools due to reasons related to experiencing foster care (Blankenship, 2018). Other implications for foster care jurisdictions include supporting connections to relatives when youth enter foster care, as well as trying to keep students in the same school whenever possible (Clemens et al., 2017; Pecora, 2012). Schools can facilitate family engagement and involve relatives, foster parents, case managers, and other supportive adults in a family group conference

to support and plan for a student when they enter foster care (Blankenship, 2018; O'Connor & Peterson, 2014). Coordination and cohesion amongst these teams can help make a student feel supported (Clemens et al., 2017). Our study yielded cross sectional evidence of associations in general, and implications of findings are relevant at a systems level; however, each student experiences unique circumstances. Our findings may not be applicable for every student who has experienced foster care. We also recognize foster-involved students are not the only students who may experience disruptions in attachment; these findings may be applicable for other young people who have inconsistent connections to caring adults.

5. Conclusion

Caring adult relationships are important for the success of young people in foster care at school, especially since these youth may experience disruptions in their social connections. As there is little research on relationships with caring adults and foster-involved youths' school attendance, behavior, and wellbeing, scholars should work to understand how individuals and systems can serve protective functions for this population. Individuals and institutions involved in foster care, including relatives of youth in foster care, as well as states, counties, case managers, and schools, should work together to support youths' relationships with adults who care about them.

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Journal Pre-proofs

Tables

Table 1

Journal Pre-proofs

	n	%
Foster Care Experience		
During last year	1,141	24
More than a year ago	3,110	67
During the last year + more than a year ago	378	8
Grade		
5 th	1,409	30
8 th	1,155	25
9 th	1,214	26
11 th	851	18
Race & Ethnicity¹		
American Indian only	411	9
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander only	31	1
Asian or Asian American only	329	7
Black, African, or African American only	591	13
Hispanic or Latino/a only	356	8
White only	2,081	45
Multiple races (checked more than one)	830	18
Sex		
Male	2,262	49
Female	2,367	51

¹ MSS combines race and ethnicity into one question; respondents can mark all that apply.

Table 2

Absences, Discipline, and Perceptions of Non-Parental Adult Caring Among Students with Experience in Foster Care (N = 4,629)

Journal Pre-proofs		
Absences in Last 30 Days		
0-2	3,295	74
3+ times	1,176	26
Exclusionary Discipline in Last 30 Days		
0	3,324	74
1+ times	1,162	26
Non-Parental Adult Caring		
Other Adult Relatives		
Low Caring	2,710	59
High Caring	1,899	41
Teachers/Other Adults at School		
Low Caring	3,599	77
High Caring	1,006	22
Adults in Your Community		
Low Caring	3,802	83
High Caring	800	17

Note. Low caring = responses of “Not at all,” “A little,” “Some,” and “Quite a bit”; high caring = responses of “Very much” to the question “How much do you feel _____ care about you?”.

Table 3

Bivariate Associations Between Absences and Perceptions of Non-Parental Adult Caring Among Students with Experience in Foster Care (N = 4,629)

Journal Pre-proofs

		0-2	3+	χ^2 , df, p-value
		n (row %)	n (row %)	
Other Adult Relatives				7.57, 1, 0.01
	Low Caring	1865 (72)	708 (28)	
	High Caring	1361 (76)	424 (24)	
Teachers/Other Adults at School				4.23, 1, 0.04
	Low Caring	2510 (73)	911 (27)	
	High Caring	717 (77)	217 (23)	
Adults in Your Community				0.59, 1, 0.44
	Low Caring	2667 (74)	942 (26)	
	High Caring	562 (75)	184 (25)	

Note. Low caring = responses of “Not at all,” “A little,” “Some,” and “Quite a bit”; high caring = responses of “Very much” to the question “How much do you feel _____ care about you?”.

Table 4

Bivariate Associations Between Discipline and Perceptions of Non-Parental Adult Caring Among Students with Experience in Foster Care (N = 4,670)

		Exclusionary Discipline		χ^2 , df, p-value
		0	1+	
		n (row %)	n (row %)	
Other Adult Relatives				4.87, 1, 0.03
	Low Caring	1897 (73)	685 (27)	
	High Caring	1368 (76)	421 (24)	
Teachers/Other Adults at School				0.31, 1, 0.58
	Low Caring	2554 (75)	873 (25)	
	High Caring	708 (75)	230 (25)	
Adults in Your Community				0.19, 1, 0.67
	Low Caring	2706 (75)	910 (25)	
	High Caring	555 (74)	195 (26)	

Note. Low caring = responses of “Not at all,” “A little,” “Some,” and “Quite a bit”; high caring = responses of “Very much” to the question “How much do you feel _____ care about you?”.

Table 5

Logistic Regression Model Predicting 3+School Absences by Perceptions of Non-Parental Adult Caring for Students with Experience in Foster Care (N = 4,629)

	Adjusted Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	p-value
Perceptions of Caring (High v Low)			
Other Adult Relatives	0.81	-0.37, -0.05	.01
Teachers/Other Adults at School	0.84	-0.41, 0.05	.13
Adults in Your Community	1.14	-0.11, 0.37	.30
Covariates			
Male	0.89	-0.25, 0.03	.11
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian only	1.32	0.03, 0.52	.03
Asian or Asian American only	0.90	-0.40, 0.18	.48
Black, African, or African American only	1.26	0.01, 0.45	.04
Hispanic or Latino/a only	1.51	0.15, 0.67	< .001
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander only	2.73	0.17, 1.82	.02
Multiple Races	1.30	0.07, 0.45	.006
Grade			
8 th Grade	0.86	-0.34, 0.05	.14
9 th Grade	0.80	-0.41, -0.03	.03
11 th Grade	0.91	-0.30, 0.12	.39

Note. Reference categories for covariates were female, white, and 5th grade.

Table 6

Logistic Regression Model Predicting Exclusionary Discipline by Perceptions of Non-Parental Adult Caring for Students with Experience in Foster Care (N = 4,629)

	Adjusted Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	p-value
Perceptions of Caring (High v Low)			
Other Adult Relatives	0.74	-0.47, -0.14	< .001
Teachers/School Staff	0.82	-0.44, 0.03	.08
Adults in Your Community	1.13	-0.12, 0.37	.31
Covariates			
Male	2.19	0.64, 0.93	< .001
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian only	1.40	0.08, 0.59	.01
Asian or Asian American only	0.68	-0.71, -0.06	.02
Black, African, or African American only	1.62	0.26, 0.70	< .001
Hispanic or Latino/a only	0.94	-0.37, 0.23	.67
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander only	2.73	0.16, 1.85	.02
Multiple Races	1.43	0.17, 0.55	< .001
Grade			
8 th Grade	0.92	-0.27, 0.11	.40
9 th Grade	0.55	-0.79, -0.40	< .001
11 th Grade	0.27	-1.53, -1.02	< .001

Note. Reference categories for covariates were female, white, and 5th grade.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Brittani A. Lamb: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, review & editing. **Knee Lee:**
Journal Pre-proofs

Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, review & editing. **Sarah M. Espinoza:** Formal analysis – review & editing, Writing – original draft, review & editing. **Barbara J. McMorris:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

Journal Pre-proofs

Highlights

- Adult caring and school outcomes in a population-based sample of foster youth

Journal Pre-proofs

- Caring adults support positive school outcomes for foster youth in bivariate analyses
- Non-parental relative caring remains protective after adjusting for control variables

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Conflict of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose