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# **States of Opportunity for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care**

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# States of Opportunity for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

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## Abstract

Over 20,000 youth age out of foster care each year in the United States facing various hardships. Research demonstrates that extended foster care beneficially impacts youth aging out of care; however, it is less clear which states assist these youth. This descriptive paper explores which states effectively assist foster youth aging out of care. I use the National Youth in Transition Database and a value-added model to determine state effectiveness across a variety of outcomes, including college enrollment, employment, homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, and parenthood. I find that there is considerable variation in state effectiveness depending on the outcome.

**JEL Codes:** I38, J13

**Keywords:** foster youth, extended foster care, transition to adulthood, value-added model

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)  
Chafee Strengthening Outcomes for Transition to Adulthood (Chafee SOTA)  
Fiscal Year (FY)  
Fostering Connections Act of 2008 (FCA)  
National Youth and Transition Database (NYTD)  
University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR)

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*Data Disclaimer: The data used in this paper, [AFCARS and NYTD], were obtained from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) and have been used in accordance with its Terms of Use Agreement license. The Administration on Children, Youth and Families, the Children's Bureau, the original dataset collection personnel or funding source, NDACAN, Cornell University and their agents or employees bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.*

## 1. Introduction

Over 20,000 youth age out of foster care each year in the United States facing various hardships. By the age of 21, 23 percent will have experienced homelessness, 26 percent will have been incarcerated, and only 66 percent will have received a high school diploma or GED (AECF, 2019). Moreover, less than 8 percent will receive a college degree, and 50 percent will still be unemployed by the age of 24 (National Foster Youth Institute, 2017). This descriptive paper explores which states effectively assist foster youth aging out of care.

I use the National Youth in Transition Database and a value-added model to determine state effectiveness across a variety of outcomes: college enrollment, employment, homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, and parenthood. Across all outcomes, the five best states for youth aging out of foster care between 2012 and 2018 are Rhode Island, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Utah, and Tennessee, and the worst five states are Wyoming, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Idaho, and District of Columbia. However, I find that there is considerable variation in state effectiveness based on the outcome. For example, Illinois leads in reducing homelessness but is one of the worst states for reducing incarceration. In other words, there is not one state that clearly dominates across all outcomes. Moreover, these state rankings differ from trends in overall child wellbeing produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Extended foster care might be contributing to these trends. Indeed, research demonstrates that extended foster care beneficially impacts youth aging out of care; however, there is limited causal evidence. Dworsky & Courtney (2010a, 2010b) and Hook & Courtney (2010) use data from the Midwest Survey, a longitudinal survey that followed youth from 17 to 26 years old in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois in the early 2000s, to compare outcomes of youth. These studies find that extended foster care is associated with delayed homelessness, increased college enrollment and persistence, but not graduation, and increased employment. These analyses do not control for state-level characteristics, so they may be confounding beneficial outcomes of extended foster care with state characteristics. A national-level analysis finds that extended foster care is associated with better access to services that aid in the transition to adulthood and better adult outcomes, like employment and educational attainment (Rosenberg & Abbott, 2019). However, this study compares youth in extended foster care to youth not in extended foster care, so this analysis may suffer from selection bias since youth in states with extended foster care can choose whether or not to participate. Alternatively, Prettyman (2021) exploits the conditionally random roll out of

extended foster care across the country between 2012 and 2016 and finds that federally funded extended foster care reduces homelessness, incarceration, and disconnectedness (neither enrolled in school nor employed). In addition, Courtney et al. (2018, 2021) use California administrative and survey data from 2006 to 2015 and find that extended foster care increases college enrollment, extends employment, and reduces homelessness, and these beneficial impacts persist through age 23, two years after youth exited care.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate some potential benefits of extended foster care; however, it is less clear which aspects of the program assist these youth. Is it the extended housing support to age 21, planning the future with a caseworker, the ability to reenter care between the ages of 18 and 21, financial support to the foster families for transitional age youth, all of the above, some combination of these, or something else entirely? One reason for this limitation is that states have complex extended foster care programs, in addition to other policies, not targeted to foster youth, that may interact with extended foster care. Moreover, it is unclear where foster youth thrive and which state is the model for extended foster youth.

The Chafee Strengthening Outcomes for Transition to Adulthood (Chafee SOTA) Project seeks organizations and programs that help foster youth successfully transition to adulthood ([OPRE](#)). This paper provides a launching pad for researchers and policymakers to investigate why certain states, or which policies and programs, benefit vulnerable youth more than others. Promising policies can then be investigated and modeled to ensure that all foster youth have opportunities for success, regardless of where they live.

## **2. Background on Extended Foster Care**

A primary goal of foster care is to safely reunify children with their biological parents. When reunification is not possible, the next best option is adoption. Adoption subsidies targeted to families help children achieve permanency (Hansen & Hansen, 2006; Argys & Duncan, 2013), but subsidies targeted to states for older youth are less effective (Brehm, 2018). In these cases, youth remain in care until emancipation.

Over 20,000 youth age out of foster care each year and are abruptly forced to become self-sufficient overnight. They have to learn many skills quickly and on their own, such as applying to college, setting up bank accounts, managing finances, taking out loans, writing resumes, applying for jobs, and obtaining health insurance. Alternatively, the average young adult can acquire these

skills over various years and receive assistance from their parents (Swartz et al., 2011). In fact, 34 percent of youth aged 18 to 34 still lived at home with their parents in 2015 (Vespa, 2017), and during this time, they received approximately 48,000 dollars<sup>1</sup> in financial support.

Recognizing the challenges foster youth face while transitioning to adulthood, state and federal agencies have implemented various programs to assist this process. The Fostering Connections Act of 2008 (FCA) incentivized states to implement extended foster care by providing federal funds for eligible youth.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, nine states implemented extended foster care under the FCA, in 2011, another four states were approved, and as of December 2018, 26 states operate under this federal policy. Additionally, from 2012 to 2018, 13 states enacted their own state-funded extended foster care programs. The decision to extend foster care using state or federal funds is unclear.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to funding source, states have different eligibility requirements and implementation strategies. Most states require that their foster youth are either employed part-time, enrolled in school, or have a documented medical disability that prevents them from employment or enrollment. Some states automatically extend foster care to age 21, while others require their youth to sign a voluntary placement agreement. Some states allow foster care reentry between the ages of 18 and 21, while others do not. Lastly, some states pay the foster care stipend directly to the youth while others continue to pay the foster family or agency caring for the youth.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Data**

Data for this analysis come from three main sources: the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR) Poverty and Inequality National Welfare Dataset. NYTD is a national survey that collects demographic information and outcome measures for the universe of foster youth aging out of care, AFCARS is a national dataset that contains rich descriptive information about children in foster care, and the UKCPR Welfare Dataset contains state-level information about the economy and safety net programs in a given year. I link individuals from the two most recent NYTD cohorts to their AFCARS data and control

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<sup>1</sup> This is the inflation adjusted value (2015 USD) for the original estimate of 38,000 dollars (Schoeni & Ross, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Prettyman (2021) for more details about other programs that assist youth aging out of care.

<sup>3</sup> Brewsaugh et al. (2021) find that the most common reason for not extending support to older youth is lack of funding, and the second most common reason is confusion about the extension.

<sup>4</sup> For more details about state specifics, refer to this Child Welfare Information Gateway [publication](#).

for time-varying state characteristics with the welfare dataset. The first cohort was 17 in fiscal year (FY) 2011 and the second cohort was 17 in FY 2014.

NYTD is the first national survey to collect outcome measures for foster youth aging out of care.<sup>5</sup> States identify and survey all youth in foster care at age 17 and then follow up with these same youth at ages 19 and 21, regardless of their foster care status. Youth answer questions about their educational attainment, employment status, incidence of homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, and parenthood, among other outcomes. NYTD also collects i) demographic information, such as date-of-birth, race, gender, and state, ii) report details, such as date-of-report and survey participation (or reason for not participating),<sup>6</sup> and iii) service use, such as foster care status, academic support, career preparation, budgeting, mentoring, health education, and financial assistance. In 2011 and 2014 nationwide, there were approximately 38,000 and 31,000 youth in foster care at age 17, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Approximately 32,000 of these youth were eligible<sup>8</sup> to participate in the NYTD surveys.

I restrict my analysis sample to youth who participated in the survey at age 17 and 21, had foster care history information from AFCARS, and answered at least one question regarding the outcome measures, resulting in 13,891 observations. Table 1 provides state counts by outcome measure. Notably, Vermont and Tennessee have few respondents, and California has thousands. In addition, the response rates at age 21 for each state are provided. They vary from 35 in Indiana to 97 in New York. Approximately half of these respondents are from the first cohort, meaning they turned 18 and potentially aged out of foster care in FY 2012 and the other half potentially aged out in FY 2015.

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<sup>5</sup> National accountability of foster youth outcomes began in 2011 as a result of the 2008 accountability mandate proposed by the Administration for Children and Families. States are required to collect and report reliable responses every 6 months and are fined for noncompliance. States must report outcomes for at least 80% of youth in foster care and 60% discharged from care. These numbers were based on research on response rates and reviewing the Office of Management and Budget's guidance on surveys. States are fined up to 5% of their Chafee funds if they do not comply and meet reporting requirements. For more specific details about NYTD data collection and reporting requirements, visit <https://www.childwelfare.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/nytd/faq/>.

<sup>6</sup> Reasons for not participating include declined, incarceration, incapacitation, death, not in sample, and missing or unable to locate.

<sup>7</sup> Author's estimate based on the number of 17-year-old foster youth in care at the start of the fiscal year (from AFCARS 2011 & AFCARS 2014 data).

<sup>8</sup> Survey eligibility is based on age, foster care status, and survey completion. Eligible youth must turn 17 during the fiscal year, be in foster care on the day of the survey, complete the survey within 45 days of their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, and answer at least one survey question.

*Table 1 – Sample sizes by outcome and state*

	College Enrollment	Employment	Homelessness	Incarceration	Substance Abuse	Parenthood	Response Rate
AK	69	70	67	67	64	66	0.92
AL	154	153	150	150	157	146	0.79
AR	141	136	121	120	119	126	0.64
AZ	49	43	32	29	25	34	0.65
CA	2,381	2,213	2,021	2,029	1,978	2,019	0.85
CO	144	118	107	105	125	112	0.41
CT	200	190	172	175	184	169	0.77
DC	90	86	74	81	75	78	0.91
DE	84	76	73	75	72	73	0.72
FL	372	337	285	297	265	249	0.81
GA	349	291	268	275	251	254	0.51
HI	37	36	33	31	30	32	0.93
IA	331	249	196	212	187	195	0.51
ID	45	43	45	45	44	40	0.79
IL	152	73	76	85	74	78	0.49
IN	149	66	69	71	74	74	0.35
KS	388	369	329	346	321	326	0.75
KY	272	241	226	216	191	200	0.71
LA	183	180	127	132	115	139	0.49
MA	293	147	149	138	141	141	0.62
MD	285	235	195	202	193	188	0.70
ME	34	25	26	24	26	23	0.51
MI	459	444	425	427	412	421	0.85
MN	215	203	192	194	185	190	0.89
MO	324	277	251	255	255	254	0.65
MS	95	93	78	85	81	88	0.92
MT	53	51	53	49	50	50	0.79
NC	158	139	131	127	125	128	0.84
ND	83	83	72	73	70	72	0.73
NE	148	145	142	149	144	137	0.82
NH	35	34	28	29	27	32	0.76
NJ	150	134	127	120	124	121	0.88
NM	44	40	27	33	33	34	0.69
NV	151	147	147	151	152	145	0.84
NY	659	444	345	351	322	340	0.97
OH	192	138	139	141	129	130	0.61
OK	305	282	250	232	225	242	0.82
OR	120	111	91	70	74	81	0.85
PA	196	88	78	82	75	75	0.42
RI	133	122	125	119	122	120	0.85
SC	278	263	245	243	237	248	0.79
SD	87	81	77	77	79	78	0.81
TN	22	15	16	15	16	13	0.96
TX	627	406	391	394	385	393	0.39
UT	250	250	213	206	203	213	0.77
VA	311	301	272	271	257	267	0.83
VT	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	0.43
WA	355	226	220	222	212	211	0.75
WI	306	160	168	170	152	145	0.87
WV	112	99	67	61	60	78	0.73
WY	38	37	30	32	31	27	0.69

Notes: <10 masks the true number due to small samples.

Table 2 provides summary statistics for this sample of NYTD participants and non-respondents at age 21. Respondents and non-respondents differ along various dimensions, especially their foster care history and experiences at age 17. In general, respondents are positively selected. They had better first placement settings and experienced fewer hardships at age 17.

*Table 2 – Summary statistics for NYTD participants and non-respondents*

	Variable	Mean of Respondents (N=13,891)	Mean of Non-respondents (N=6,260)	P-Value
Demographic Characteristics	Female	0.54	0.44	0.00
	Non-Hispanic White	0.43	0.46	0.00
	Non-Hispanic Black	0.30	0.28	0.00
	Non-Hispanic Other	0.08	0.07	0.00
	Hispanic	0.19	0.19	0.90
	Ever diagnosed with a disability	0.57	0.54	0.00
Foster Care History	Total placements as a child	7.18	7.78	0.00
	Cumulative length of stay in foster care as a child (in years)	4.40	4.09	0.00
	Age at first removal	11.77	12.14	0.00
	Age at last removal	17.28	17.27	0.73
First Placement	Kinship Care	0.16	0.13	0.00
	Foster home	0.49	0.42	0.00
	Group home	0.30	0.37	0.00
	Other	0.05	0.08	0.00
Ever removed for... These do not add up to 100% because a child may be removed for multiple reasons.	Abuse	0.27	0.27	0.33
	Neglect	0.55	0.55	0.96
	Parental Incarceration	0.06	0.07	0.00
	Parental Substance Abuse	0.19	0.23	0.00
	Inadequate Housing	0.10	0.12	0.00
	Child-related Issue	0.34	0.44	0.00
Experiences at 17	Homelessness	0.18	0.17	0.77
	Incarceration	0.28	0.38	0.00
	Substance Abuse	0.23	0.29	0.00
	Parenthood	0.05	0.06	0.19
	Employment	0.16	0.11	0.00

*Notes:* Mean for respondents and non-respondents provided. Non-respondents consist of the eligible NYTD participants linked to their AFCARS data that did not respond to the survey at 21 years old. P-values from a two-tailed t-test are provided.



More young women respond than young men. Representative of the foster care population, respondents are disproportionately Black. More than half of the sample have been diagnosed with a disability at some point in their life. Of these youth, the most common diagnoses include emotional and personality disorders. On average, this sample of foster youth entered care at 12 years old, have been in care for a cumulative total of about four years (excluding extended foster care), and have had over seven different placement settings. Most youth were first placed in a foster home (49%), group home (29%), or kinship care (16%). The most common removal reasons are neglect, child-related issues, and abuse.

These youth have faced many hardships at young ages. By 17 years old, 18 percent had experienced homelessness, 28 percent had been incarcerated, 23 percent had been referred for substance abuse, and 5 percent were parents.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the average adolescent has a 3 percent chance of experiencing homelessness (Bassuk et al., 2014), a 0.15 percent chance of incarceration,<sup>10</sup> and the teen pregnancy rate ranges from 2 to 3.<sup>11</sup> Many of these adverse experiences increase with age for foster youth. It is difficult to determine whether continued adversity is a result of youth characteristics, including past experiences, or (lack of) state resources.

#### **4. Empirical Strategy**

To measure state effectiveness, I use a two-step value-added model,<sup>12</sup> developed by Ehlert et al. (2014) which is commonly used in the education literature to measure teacher and school effectiveness (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008; Kodel et al., 2015; Ehlert et al., 2016).<sup>13</sup> The value-added model is derived from a cumulative model of student achievement (Sass et al., 2014) and boils down to assuming student achievement is a function of past achievement and inputs from the teacher and school. Similarly, I will assume youth outcomes are a function of past outcomes and inputs from the state. Some of these inputs from the state are observed, such as the unemployment and poverty rates, other inputs are unobserved.

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<sup>9</sup> Both young men and women are asked whether they have a child.

<sup>10</sup> Estimate comes from the [Kids Count Data Center](https://www.kidscountdatacenter.org/) provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/about/alt-text/birth-rates-chart-2007-2015-text.htm>

<sup>12</sup> The two-step value-added model is also known as the aggregate residuals value-added model (Parsons et al., 2019).

<sup>13</sup> This measure is starting to be used more broadly, e.g. to measure college (Mountjoy & Hickman, 2021) and college advisor effectiveness (Canaan et al., 2022).

In the first step, youth outcomes are estimated as a function of their own characteristics and characteristics of the state in which they live, like so:

$$Y_{isc} = \mathbf{X}_{ic}\boldsymbol{\beta}_1 + \mathbf{S}_{sc}\boldsymbol{\beta}_2 + \gamma_c + \varepsilon_{isc} \quad (1)$$

$Y_{isc}$  is the probability that youth  $i$  in state  $s$  from cohort  $c$  experiences the outcome of interest,  $\mathbf{X}_{ic}$  is a vector of individual characteristics, including demographics, foster care history, and experiences at age 17,  $\mathbf{S}_{sc}$  is a vector of state-level, time-variant macroeconomic factors like the unemployment rate and safety net generosity,  $\gamma_c$  is a cohort fixed effect, and  $\varepsilon_{isc}$  is the error term.<sup>14</sup>

The difference between the actual and predicted probability of the outcome is then a function of state unobservable characteristics which can be estimated in the second step with state fixed effects, like so:

$$resid_{isc} = \delta_s + \omega_{isc} \quad (2)$$

Where the estimated effect for each state,  $\delta_s$ , is the weighted average differences between the actual and predicted probability of the outcome. The weights are the number of foster youth in each state. Consequentially, states with fewer youth will have less precise estimates. Because the first step nets out the impact of individual traits and the state economy, the state value-added estimates generated in the second step identify the effectiveness of a state relative to other states with similar youth and economies.<sup>15</sup>

By construction, the average state will have a value-added of zero. For desirable outcomes, like employment and college enrollment, values greater than zero imply the state is better than average, and for undesirable outcomes, like homelessness and incarceration, values greater than zero imply the state is worse than average. Importantly, these estimates are relative. Performing better than average does not necessarily mean these youth are flourishing.

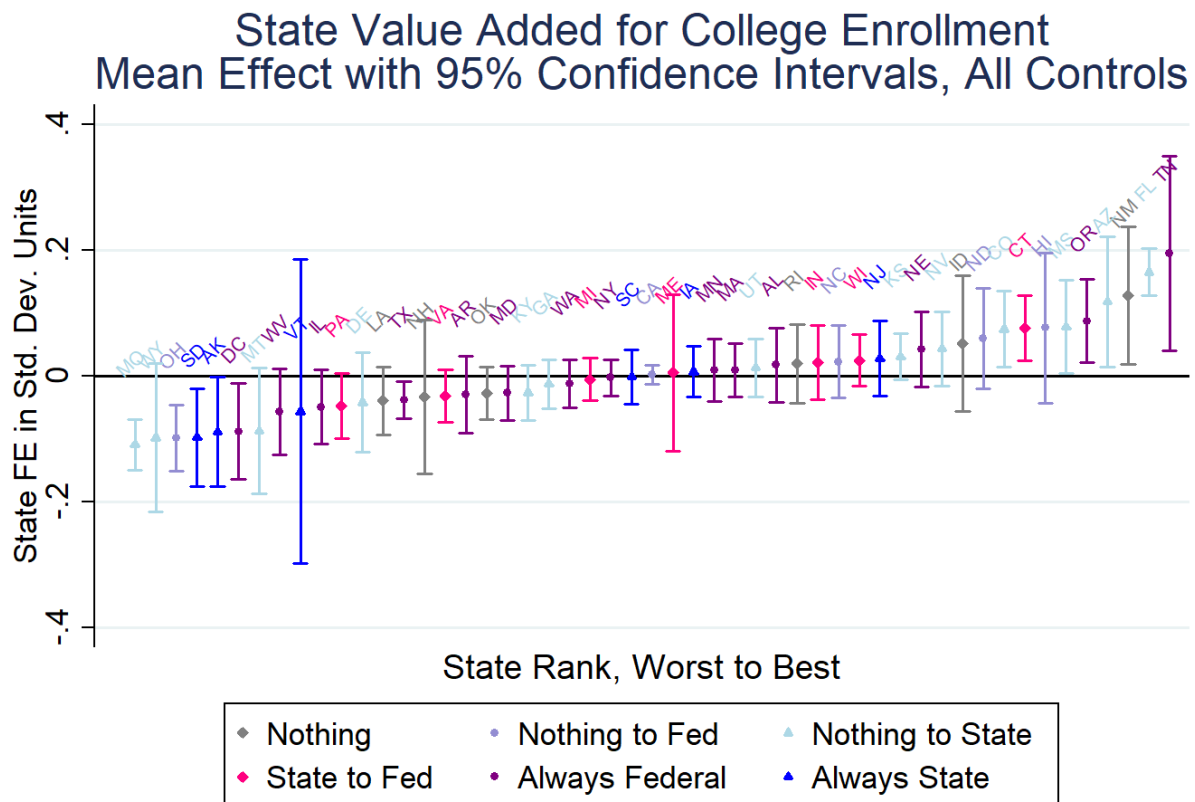
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<sup>14</sup> Unlike teacher or school value-added models which typically use student test scores as the outcome, the outcomes in this paper are binary measures, so this model should be estimated using logit or probit, as opposed to ordinary least squares (OLS). The results are the same regardless of the estimator, so I use OLS, and logit are available by request.

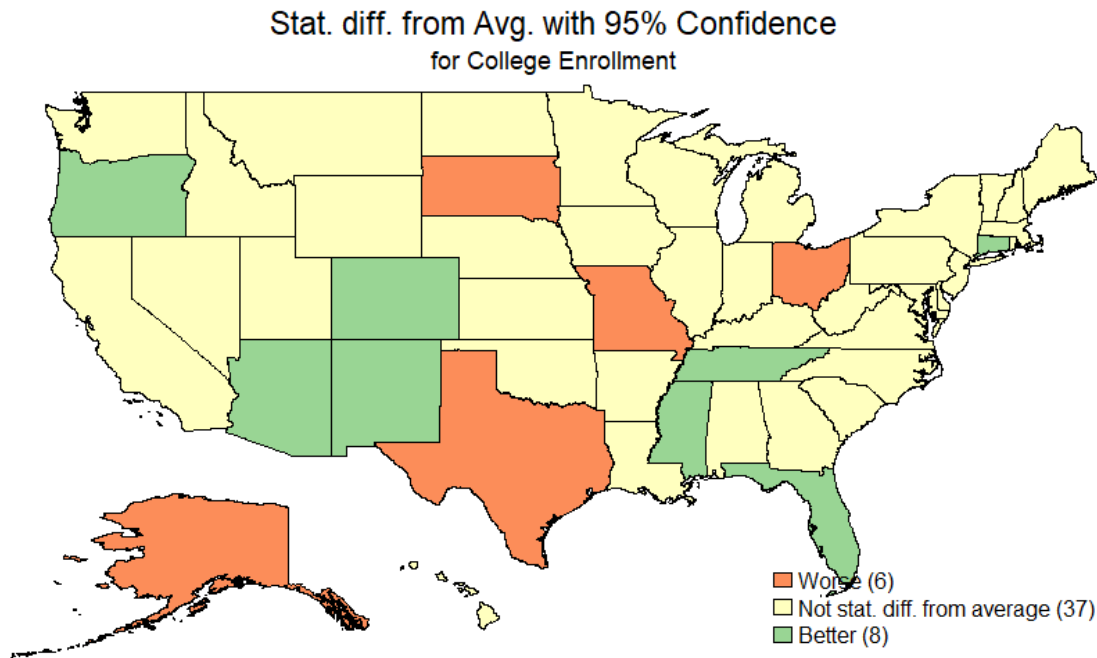
<sup>15</sup> Simply, comparing means across states for each outcome is unable to disentangle the states' effectiveness from the youth characteristics. For example, a state with high college enrollment might have these rates because they have a program focused on college readiness and enrollment or because all of the foster youth aging out of care in their state are positively selected.

## 5. Results

I present figures of the state rankings based on various outcomes and discuss potential policies, if known, that may be contributing to the findings. Appendix Table 1 provides the averages for each outcome at age 21. In the first figure, the markers classify the extended foster care policy in a particular state. The light diamond markers identify the six states that have not implemented extended foster care, as of 2018. The dark circle (triangle) markers identify the states that adopted federally (state) funded extended foster care prior to 2012. The light circle, light triangle, and dark diamond markers identify the states that changed their policy between 2012 and 2018. In the second figure, the three colors indicate whether the valued-added estimates are better than, worse than, or indistinguishable from the average state.

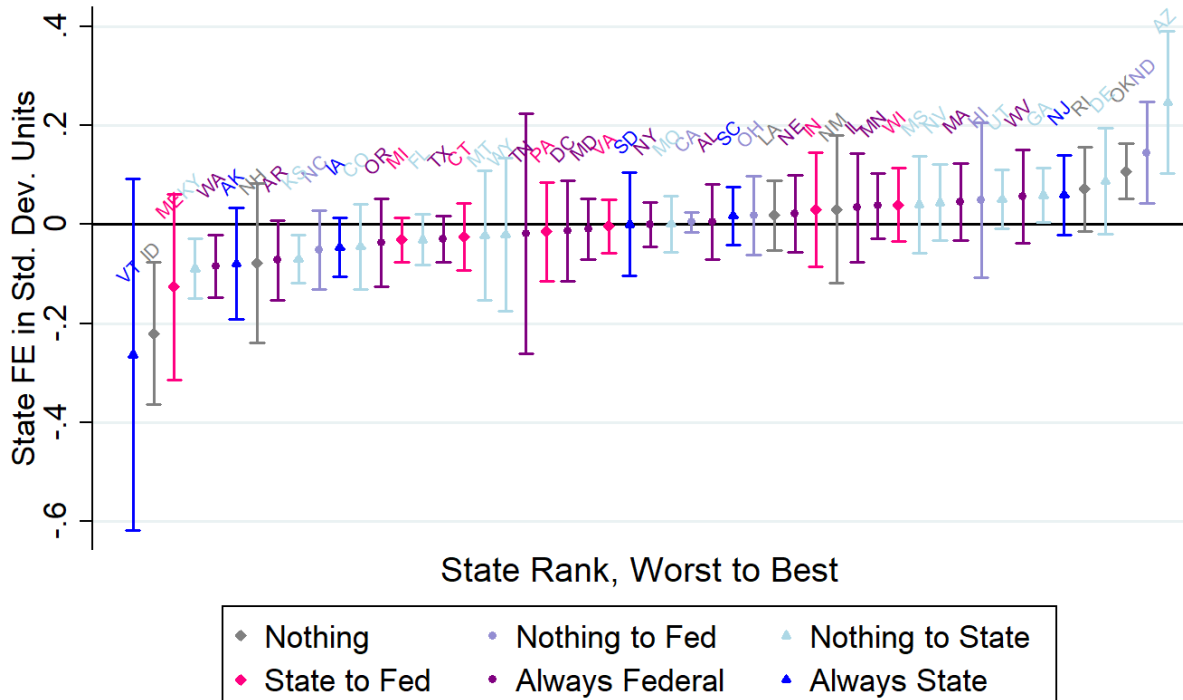


Note: Statistical significance is based on a 95 percent confidence level. The national average value-added effect is zero.



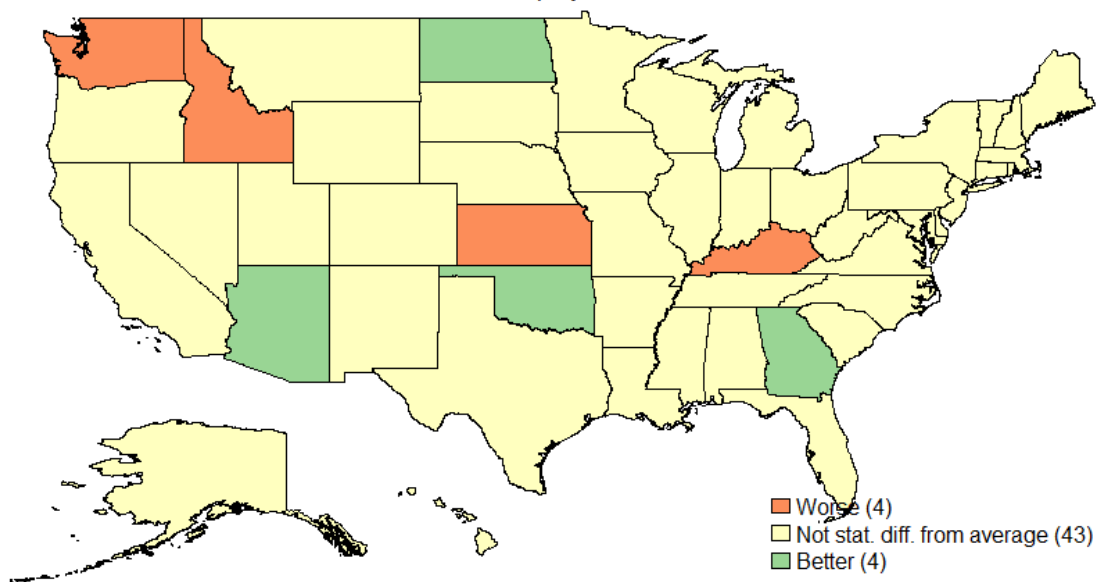
The college enrollment outcome is derived from the educational attainment and current enrollment survey questions. Youth who respond that they have graduated from high school and are enrolled in school are assumed to be enrolled in college. I use “college enrollment” loosely to include any post-educational program beyond high school such as 2-year, 4-year, and trade school enrollment. Approximately 21 percent of respondents are enrolled in college. Tennessee, Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, and Oregon lead in college enrollment with 0.1 to 0.2 standard deviation units of value added. That is, youth in Tennessee are 8.2 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in college compared to similar-looking youth in a comparable state. Tennessee and Oregon have been offering statewide free community college since 2014 and 2016, respectively. Unique to Tennessee Promise, recipients are paired with a mentor who helps them navigate college ([Dennon, 2022](#)).

## State Value Added for Employment Mean Effect with 95% Confidence Intervals, All Controls



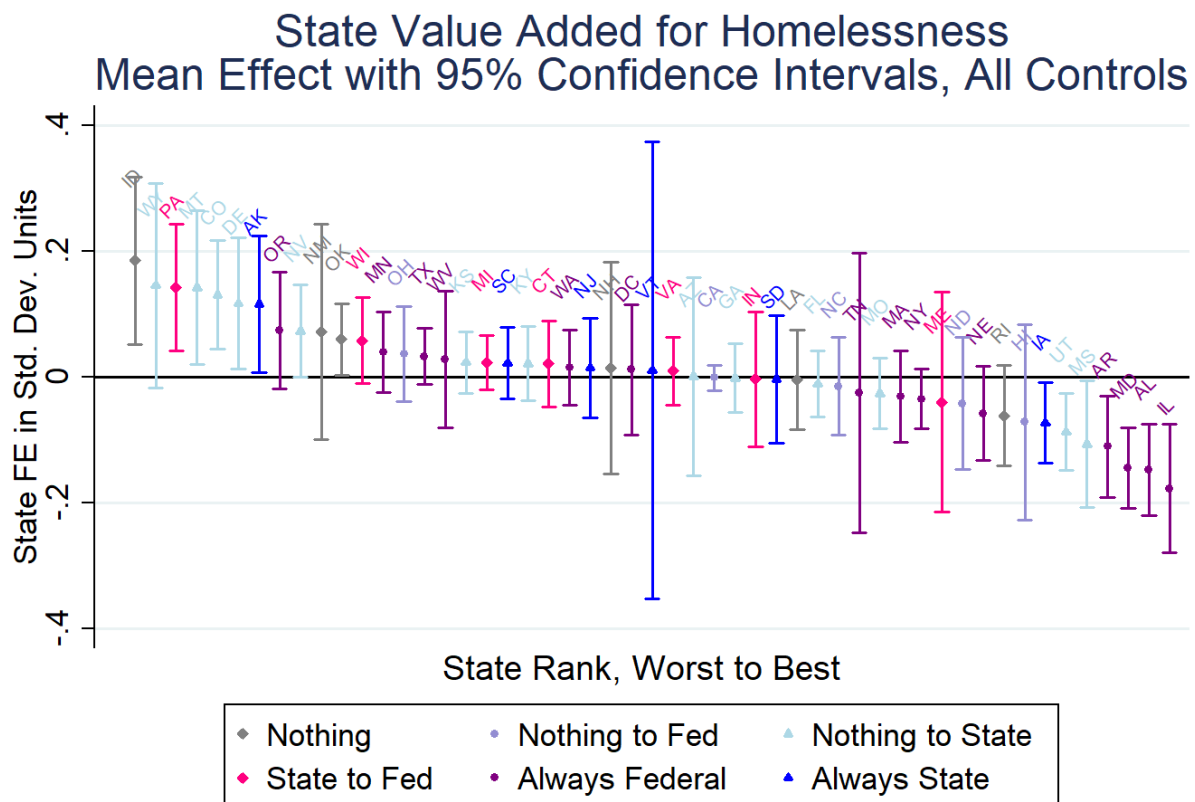
Note: Statistical significance is based on a 95 percent confidence level. The national average value-added effect is zero.

## Stat. diff. from Avg. with 95% Confidence for Employment



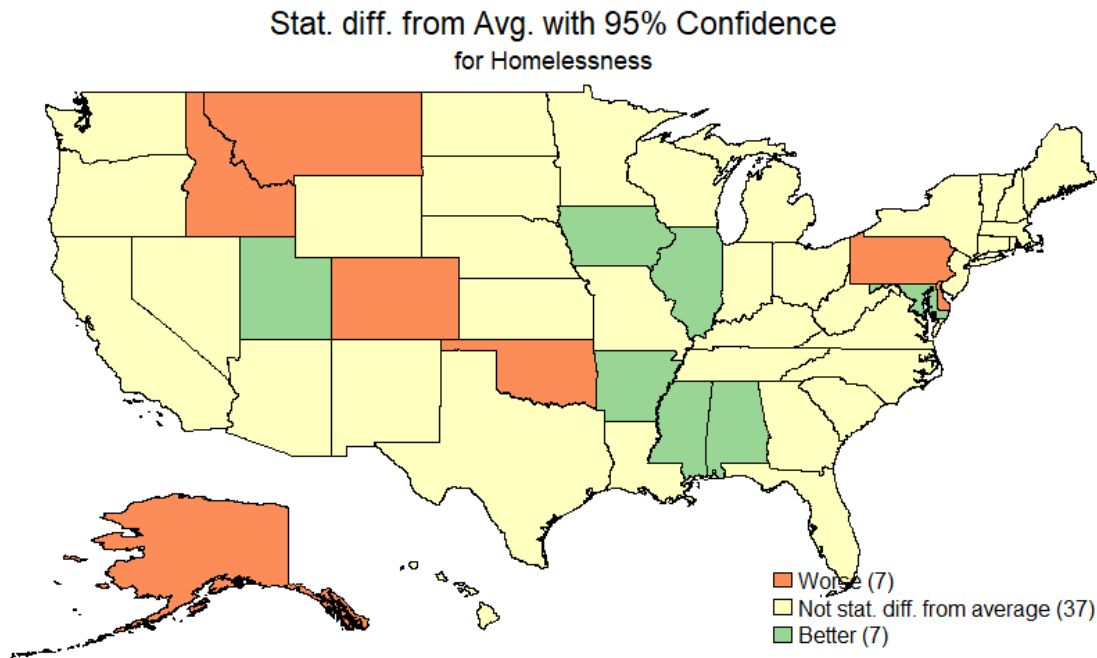
This employment outcome includes part-time and full-time employment. Approximately, 55 percent of respondents were employed at age 21. Arizona, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and

Georgia lead in employment. Interestingly, Georgia has an employment program, Georgia C.R.E.W.,<sup>16</sup> specifically targeted to foster youth.



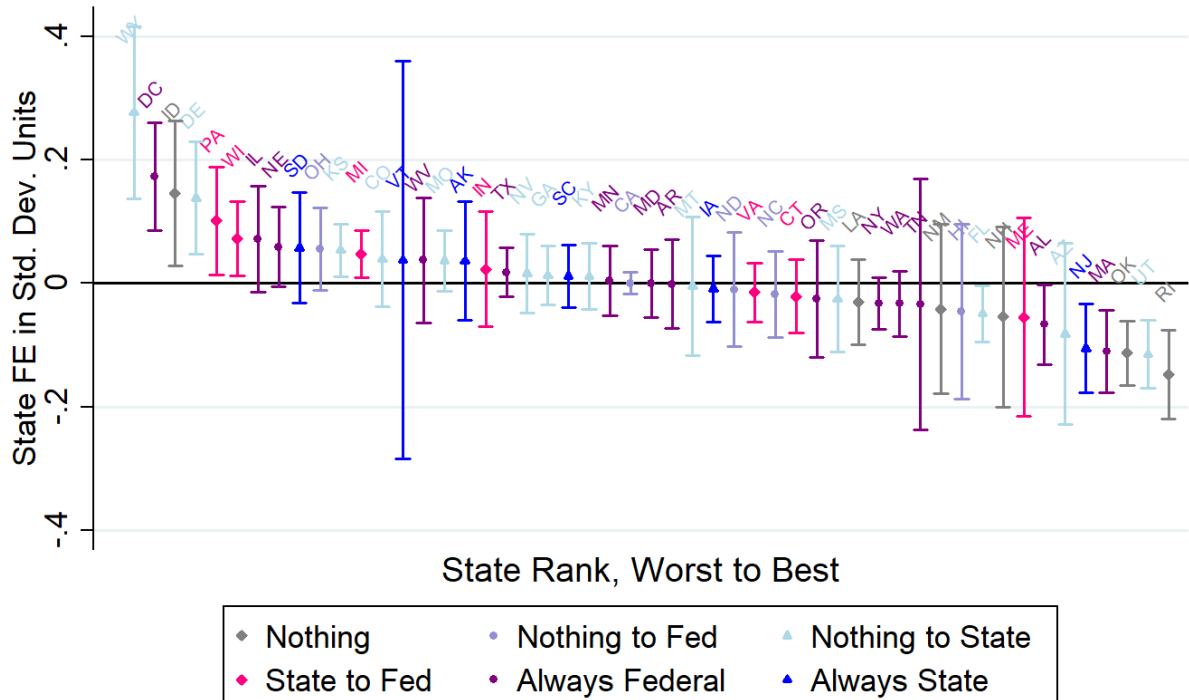
Note: Statistical significance is based on a 95 percent confidence level. The national average value-added effect is zero.

<sup>16</sup> The program was formerly a summer internship program, called TeenWork, and started in the mid-2000s. You can find more information about the current program [here](#).



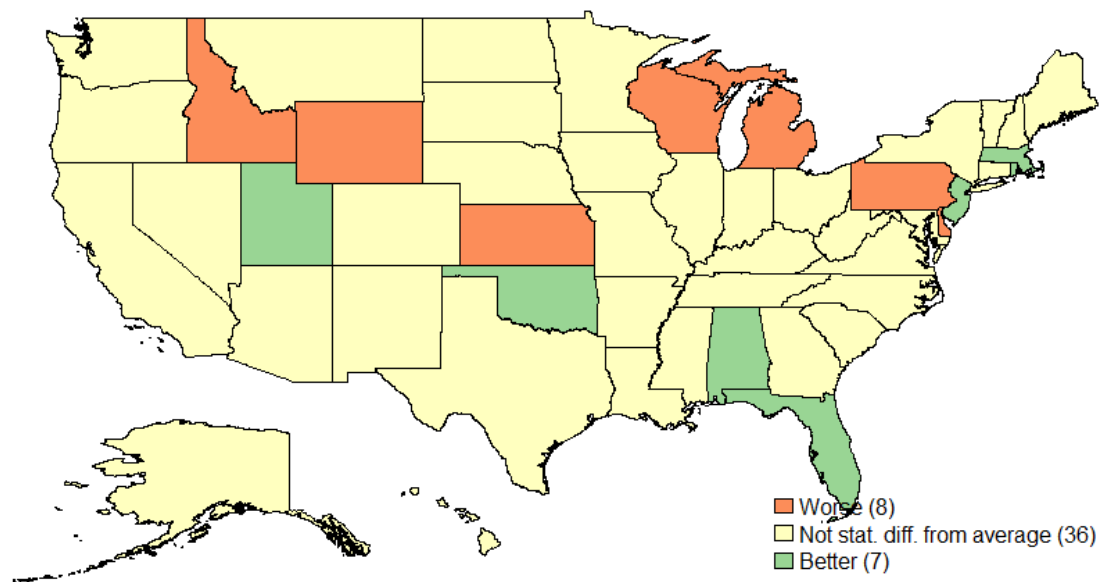
This outcome measures the incidence of homelessness between the ages of 17 and 21. Homelessness refers to not having a regular or adequate place to live, including situations where the youth is living in a car, on the street, homeless shelter, or other temporary shelter. On average, 42 percent of survey respondents experienced homelessness between the ages of 17 and 21. Reducing homelessness is desired. Illinois, Alabama, Maryland, and Arkansas, all states with federally funded extended foster care, lead in reducing homelessness. In addition, Illinois and Alabama have been providing extended foster care as early as 2002. One aspect of extended foster care is providing supervised independent living arrangements for foster youth.

## State Value Added for Incarceration Mean Effect with 95% Confidence Intervals, All Controls



Note: Statistical significance is based on a 95 percent confidence level. The national average value-added effect is zero.

## Stat. diff. from Avg. with 95% Confidence for Incarceration



Incarceration includes confinement in jail, prison, a correctional facility, or juvenile or community detention center in connection with allegedly committing a misdemeanor or felony.



### State Value Added for Substance Abuse

Mean Effect with 95% Confidence Intervals, All Controls

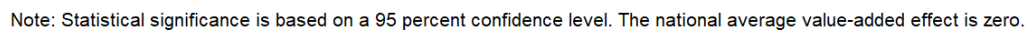
State FE in Std. Dev. Units

State Rank, Worst to Best

Legend:

- Nothing
- State to Fed
- Nothing to Fed
- Always Federal
- Nothing to State
- Always State

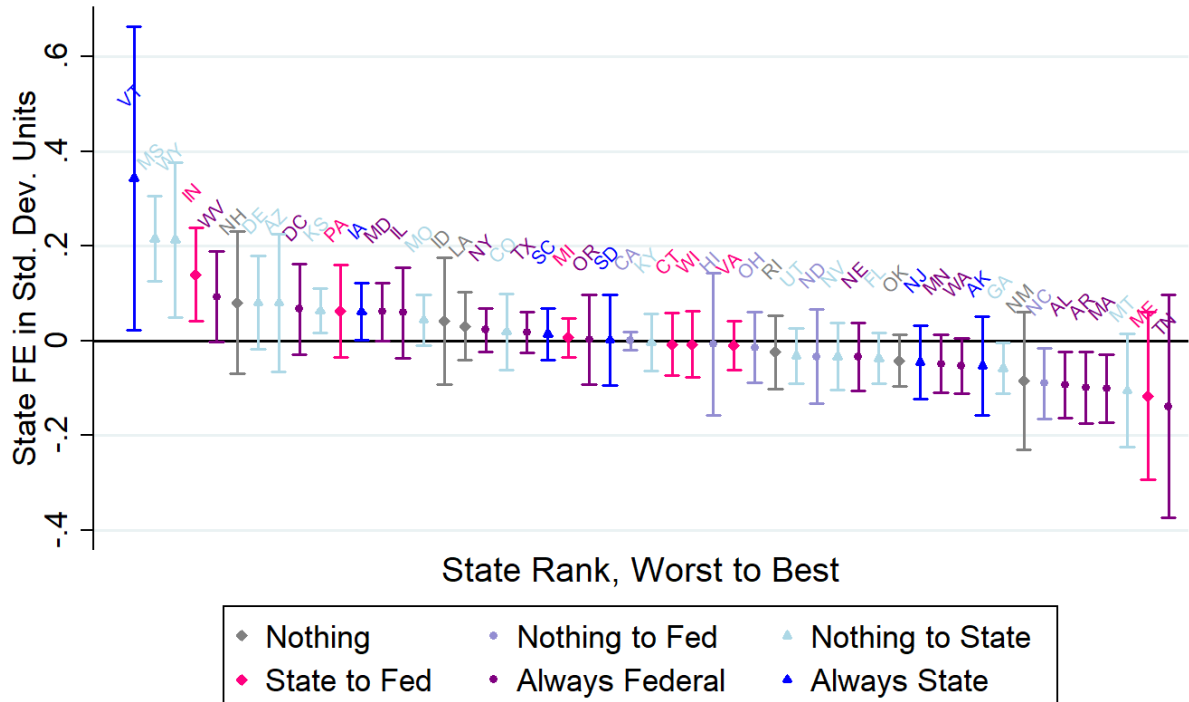
Note: Statistical significance is based on a 95 percent confidence level. The national average value-added effect is zero.



Worse (10)  
Not stat. diff. from average (37)  
Better (4)

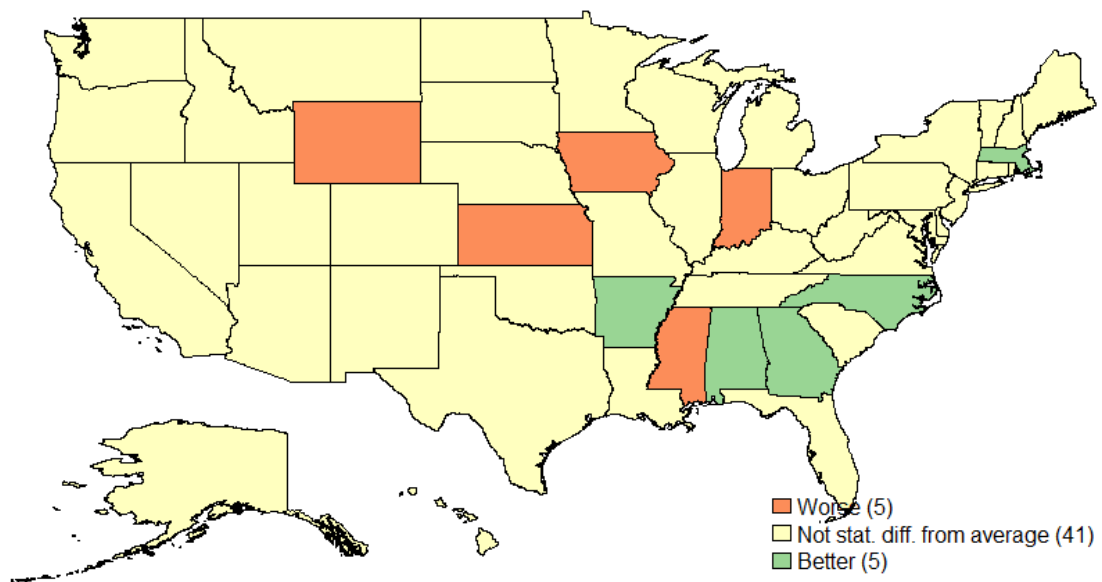
On average, 23 percent of respondents have been referred for substance abuse. Referrals for substance abuse can be made by a variety of people in which the youth interact and are used to determine whether a youth has a problem with alcohol or drugs. The leading states in reducing substance abuse include Arizona, Rhode Island, North Dakota, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma. Some of the leading states in reducing substance abuse also lead in reducing incarceration. Between 2012 and 2018, many states legalized marijuana for medicinal and recreational use and started prescription drug monitoring programs. While these policies are not directly targeted to foster youth, they might interact with foster youth experiences.

## State Value Added for Child Born Mean Effect with 95% Confidence Intervals, All Controls



Note: Statistical significance is based on a 95 percent confidence level. The national average value-added effect is zero.

## Stat. diff. from Avg. with 95% Confidence for Child Born



Finally, this outcome measures the incidence of parenthood between the ages of 17 and 21, which is asked to both female and male respondents. Approximately, 33 percent of respondents

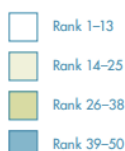
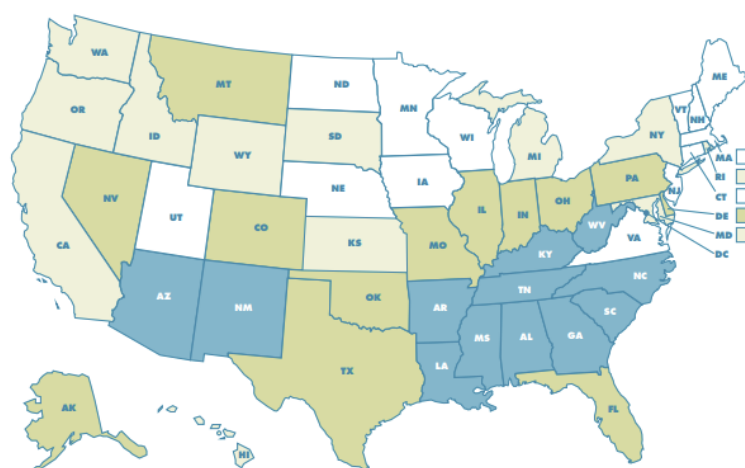
had a child between the ages of 17 and 21. Top states in reducing parenthood include Massachusetts, Arkansas, Alabama, and North Carolina.

Across all outcomes, the best five states for youth aging out of foster care between 2012 and 2018 are Rhode Island, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Utah, and Tennessee, and the worst five states are Wyoming, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Idaho, and District of Columbia. However, state rankings vary considerably across outcomes. For example, Illinois leads in reducing homelessness, but lags in reducing incarceration. There is also considerable variation in extended foster care, regional location, and political affiliations in rankings within outcomes. For example, the leading states in reducing substance abuse are Arizona, Rhode Island, North Dakota, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma. Among these states, there is variation in extended foster care policies, location, and political affiliation.

The variation in the state rankings likely comes from the variation in state policies. First, there is considerable variation in how states implement extended foster care. Second, many states have other programs and policy changes during this period that may be interacting with extended foster care or foster youth experiences. For example, Tennessee, who leads in college enrollment, was one of the first states to provide free community college (Tennessee Promise). This program was designed to assist low-income individuals attend community and technical colleges, so it was not directly targeted to foster youth, but likely helped such youth. Other policy changes that might impact foster youth experiences and their transition to adulthood include school accountability measures, Medicaid expansions, marijuana legalization, and prescription drug monitoring programs.

Finally, these state rankings differ from trends in overall child wellbeing produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2005 (AECF, 2005). I compare 2005 state rankings because this is the year that youth in my sample were between the ages of 8 and 11 years. The New England states lead overall, except for Rhode Island, and the Southern states are the lowest ranked.

## Overall Rank: 2005



A state's Overall Rank is determined by the sum of a state's standing on each of 10 measures of the condition of children arranged in sequential order from highest/best (1) to lowest/worst (50). See Definitions and Data Sources on the KIDS COUNT website for a detailed description of the methodology used to construct the composite index and rank states.

Rank	State	Rank	State
1	New Hampshire	27	Pennsylvania
2	Vermont	28	Illinois
3	Minnesota	29	Ohio
4	New Jersey	30	Indiana
5	North Dakota	31	Delaware
6	Massachusetts	32	Nevada
7	Maine	33	Missouri
8	Iowa	34	Montana
9	Utah	35	Florida
10	Wisconsin	36	Alaska
11	Connecticut	37	Texas
12	Nebraska	38	Oklahoma
13	Virginia	39	Georgia
14	Washington	40	North Carolina
15	Kansas	41	Arizona
16	Idaho	42	Kentucky
17	California	43	Tennessee
18	Oregon	44	Arkansas
19	Maryland	45	South Carolina
20	New York	46	New Mexico
21	South Dakota	47	West Virginia
22	Rhode Island	48	Alabama
23	Wyoming	49	Louisiana
24	Hawaii	50	Mississippi
25	Michigan	N.R.	District of Columbia
26	Colorado		

N.R.=Not Ranked.

Notes: Reproduction of graphic with from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2005). Kids Count Data book. Baltimore, MD: William P. O'Hare. Retrieved from [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

## 6. Conclusion

This descriptive paper estimates state effectiveness in increasing opportunities and reducing hardships for foster youth aging out of care between 2012 and 2018. These value-added estimates are specific to the NYTD respondents, which differ from non-respondents in some notable ways. Respondents had better first placement settings and fewer adverse experiences at age 17. Moreover, survey response rates differ across states, ranging from 35 to 98 percent. In the value-added framework, states with similar youth and characteristics are compared, thus these differential response rates are not driving the trends observed.

Rhode Island leads in assisting youth across a variety of outcomes. Perhaps this finding is a product of Rhode Island's senator from 1976-1999, John Chafee. John Chafee was an advocate for

assisting foster youth aging out of care (Boyer, nd), contributing to the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the adoption of the resulting Chafee programs.

Another major finding of this study is that state rankings vary by outcome. Hopefully, researchers and policymakers can start with these findings and then further investigate the most effective states for each outcome to learn specifically which policies and programs benefit the youth the most. Such investigation will motivate causal analyses and evidence-based policymaking.

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## Appendix

*Appendix Table 1 – Outcomes at age 21*

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
College Enrollment	12,117	0.21	0.41
Employment	10,179	0.55	0.50
Homelessness	9,247	0.42	0.49
Incarceration	9,289	0.34	0.47
Substance Abuse	8,720	0.23	0.42
Parenthood	8,954	0.34	0.47

*Source:* NYTD Cohort 1 and 2

*Notes:* Sample limited to foster youth aged 17 in FY 2011 and FY 2014 linked to their AFCARS records who were eligible to participate in the NYTD survey and answered at least one question in the follow up survey at age 21.