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Consequences of Eviction-Led Forced Mobility for School-Age Children in Houston

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Abstract

Eviction cases are concentrated among renter households with children, yet we know little about the repercussions of evictions for children's educational trajectories. In this study, we link eviction records in Harris County, Texas, to educational records of students enrolled in the Houston Independent School District between 2002 and 2016. At least 13,000 public school students in Houston lived in households that were filed against for eviction. These students came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and nearly a quarter lived in households that were filed against repeatedly. Students whose parents were threatened with eviction were more likely than their peers to have left the district by the next academic year. Students who remained were more likely to have switched schools, often relocating to schools with fewer resources, more student turnover, and lower test scores. Eviction filings were associated with increases in absences and, among students who switched schools, more suspensions.

Keywords

eviction, school mobility, student retention, absences, suspensions

Every year, 2.7 million U.S. renter households receive an eviction filing (Gromis et al. 2022). These households are disproportionately likely to include children (Desmond et al. 2013; Urban et al. 2019). The typical household facing eviction includes one child under the age of 18 (Graetz, Gershenson, Hepburn, et al. 2023). Both the events that precipitate eviction filings and the residential instability that such cases trigger have potentially serious repercussions for children across multiple domains (Benfer et al. 2021). Despite a large body of research on the negative effects of housing insecurity, homelessness, and residential and school mobility on children's educational outcomes (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012; Mehana and Reynolds 2004; Welsh 2017), little research has been conducted specifically on involuntary moves, which are likely to be most consequential. In this article, we explore the effects of eviction filings on school mobility and children's educational trajectories.

This work relies on a unique data set linking eviction court cases in Harris County, Texas, to educational records of elementary school, middle school, and high school students enrolled in the Houston Independent School District (HISD)

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between 2002 and 2016 (N = 3,095,432 student-years). Limitations of the linkage process mean we do not observe all children whose parents were filed against for eviction, but nonetheless, we identify more than 13,000 such students. These students were disproportionately Black, and nearly a quarter lived in households that were filed against repeatedly, often within the same academic year.

We find that students whose parents were threatened with eviction were significantly more likely than their peers to have left the school district by the next academic year. Those who remained were significantly more likely to have switched schools. Moreover, students who switched schools following eviction filing tended to relocate to schools with fewer resources, more student turnover, and lower standardized test scores. Students whose parents faced eviction were absent significantly more days in the year in which the eviction was filed. Those who moved schools experienced significantly more suspensions in the years following eviction filing. These children represent a large population of highly mobile students who are eligible for protection and resources afforded under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

EVICTION, HOUSING INSECURITY, AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Eviction is the legal process through which a landlord seeks to remove a tenant and regain possession of a rental unit. Eviction cases generally proceed through a series of five steps: (1) The landlord notifies their tenant that they intend to evict them; (2) the landlord files a case with the court; (3) the court holds a hearing; (4) if the court finds on behalf of the landlord, it issues an eviction judgment; and (5) a writ of eviction is executed. Data limitations and ambiguities in case resolution make it difficult to consistently track the latter stages (Nelson et al. 2021; Summers 2023), but eviction filings—the second stage of the process—provide a reliable measure of housing insecurity.

Eviction is a common event in the United States. Between 2000 and 2018, 3.6 million eviction cases were filed annually, on average, against 2.7 million unique households (Gromis et al. 2022). Within this context, Houston is typical. Harris County experienced an eviction filing rate of 8.1 percent in 2018, just above the national average of 7.8 percent (Desmond et al. 2018). In Houston, as in most of the country, Black renters face heightened risk of eviction: Although Black individuals make up 26 percent of renters in Harris County, they are the defendants in 42 percent of eviction filings (Hepburn, Louis, and Desmond 2020).

Eviction filings—even those that do not result in an executed eviction—may affect children in a variety of ways. Resolving an open case typically requires the tenant pays back rent and fines plus any fees the landlord accrued by filing the case. These additional expenses can significantly increase housing cost burden (Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2021), leading families to cut back spending on food, health care, and children's education or activities (Airgood-Obrycki, Hermann, and Wedeen 2022; Newman and Holupka 2014).

Many eviction filings result in a residential move, an event that can occur at any stage in the process (Hartman and Robinson 2003). Eviction increases the risk of homelessness (Collinson et al. 2024) and often leads families to double-up with friends or neighbors (Desmond, Gershenson, and Kiviat 2015). Because landlords consider eviction history when screening potential tenants (Rosen, Garboden, and Cossyleon 2021; So 2023), families attempting to find new housing after an eviction case are often limited to low-quality apartments in less desirable neighborhoods (Desmond et al. 2015). This increases children's exposure to environmental hazards, crime, and violence (Desmond and Shollenberger 2015). Evictions impoverish families (Collinson et al. 2024; Desmond 2016), inhibiting parents' ability to invest in their children.

Housing security—residential stability, affordability, and safety in high-quality neighborhoods—fosters a wide range of benefits for children and their families (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012; Galvez and Luna 2014). By contrast, insecurity, particularly residential instability, has been linked to negative effects on children's well-being, school engagement, and academic performance (Pribesh and Downey 1999; Rumberger 2003). Residential moves have been linked to reduced school performance (Astone and McLanahan 1994; Cordes, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2019), increased behavioral issues (Ersing, Sutphen, and Loeffler 2009; Fowler, Henry, and Marcal 2015; Gillespie 2013), and heightened risk of

dropout (South, Haynie, and Bose 2007), effects that appear to be more acute for Black and Hispanic children (Perkins 2017; Xu, Hannaway, and D'Souza 2009) and children from lowest income households (Ziol-Guest and Mckenna 2014). These effects are evident even at the very start of children's educational trajectories, with kindergartners and first graders from residentially unstable households demonstrating lower levels of school readiness (Coulton et al. 2016; Herbers et al. 2012; Obradović et al. 2009). Residential moves often precipitate school moves, which have been linked to lowered academic performance (Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber 1996; Goldhaber et al. 2022; Temple and Reynolds 1999), higher odds of school dropout (Gasper, DeLuca, and Estacion 2012; Rumberger and Larson 1998), and a number of harmful developmental outcomes in early adulthood (Herbers, Reynolds, and Chen 2013).

One challenge in evaluating the effects of residential and school moves is that they may result from very different circumstances (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 2004; Rumberger 2015; Schwartz, Stiefel, and Cordes 2017). A child who moves to a new home because her parents divorced may experience very different outcomes than one who moves because her parents have taken better jobs in another city. Because the causes of residential and school mobility are rarely observed, this body of research generally estimates average effects. Doing so potentially underestimates the true negative effects of disruptive or forced mobility on children's educational performance (Garboden, Leventhal, and Newman 2017).[1]

Eviction represents a key form of forced mobility, but the direct effects on children's educational trajectories remain uncertain. As Holme (2022:971) points out, ''while there is evidence that mobility caused by eviction can have lasting negative impacts on parents, specifically mothers, few if any studies have examined the impact of eviction on children, or how eviction might shape children's schooling experiences.'' One hypothesis is that eviction may have a negligible effect on children's schooling. If the economic stress and uncertainty that puts their parents at risk of eviction have already taken a toll on children's development, this could limit the effect of displacement given the cumulative disadvantage children already face. The alternative hypothesis is that an eviction filing represents a significant moment of rupture even for relatively disadvantaged children. Only a small body of research provides evidence to assess these hypotheses. Recently evicted nine-year-old children score lower on cognitive assessments than do otherwise similar children (Schwartz et al. 2022). Initial analyses of data from Cleveland suggest that evicted children—relative to those whose parents are filed against but not evicted—experience an increase in absences (Richter et al. 2021). But we do not know what effects there may be on patterns of school mobility or other markers of academic performance or behavioral problems.

Using Houston as a case study, this article offers the first large-scale examination of the effects of eviction on children's school mobility and behavioral performance. We ask three questions:

Research Question 1: Does the filing of an eviction case put students at increased risk of switching schools or leaving the district?

Research Question 2: Were eviction-led school moves to campuses of lower quality, as measured by per-pupil budgets, standardized test scores, and several measures of student disadvantage?

Research Question 3: Do eviction cases lead to negative effects in terms of school absences and suspensions?

An Introduction to the HISD

By total enrollment, the HISD is the seventh largest school district in the United States. During the study period (2002–2016), 685,546 unique students enrolled in prekindergarten through Grade 12 in the HISD. This was a diverse set of students, with a particularly large Hispanic population (Table 1).[2] This does not match the racial/ethnic distribution of young people in Harris County overall, which has a larger share of White residents and fewer Hispanic residents, likely due to racial/ethnic disparities in private school enrollment (Hussar et al. 2020). Black households in Houston are most likely to rent their homes and thus be at risk of eviction and by most measures, are socioeconomically disadvantaged relative to other groups (see Section 1.1 of the online supplement). There was an even gender split among students in these grades during the study period.[3] Nearly 4 out of every 5 students (79.4 percent)

Table 1. Houston Independent School District Early Education, Elementary, and Middle School Student Characteristics, 2002–2016.

Student characteristics	% of students	*N*	
Race/ethnicity			
Asian	3.9	23,438	
Black	29.4	178,058	
Hispanic	57.2	346,162	
White	8.8	53,109	
Other	0.7	4,289	
Gender			
Female	48.9	295,754	
Male	51.1	309,302	
Limited English proficiency	36.4	220,363	
Qualified for free or reduced-price lunch	79.4	480,589	
Economically disadvantaged	40.3	243,765	
Enrolled in special education	10.4	62,750	
At risk of dropping out	81.8	495,400	
Academic and behavioral measures	***M***	***SD***	***N***
Standardized tests			
iStation Early Reading	109	15	161,582
iStation Advanced Reading	987	121	206,619
TAKS	1,695	611	1,145,413
STAAR	2,274	1,094	1,120,329
Absences per year	7.28	9.92	3,129,916
Suspensions per year	0.29	1.21	3,095,432

Note: The economically disadvantaged indicator captures students from families with annual income at or below the official federal poverty line, students eligible for public assistance, students who received need-based financial assistance, students eligible for programs assisted under Title II of the Job Training Partnership Act, and students eligible for benefits under the Food Stamp Act of 1977. TAKS = Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills; STAAR = State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness.

qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) at some point. Just over 1 in every 10 students (10.4 percent) were enrolled in a special education class during at least one academic year.

During the study period, HISD administered three standardized tests: the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS; grades three to eight between 2002 and 2011), iStation (grades pre-K to eight in 2012 to 2016), and the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR; grades three to eight for 2012 to 2016). We report scores in original units, but analyses detailed in the following focus on standardized test score percentiles. On average, students were absent for just over seven days per academic year, and 23.5 percent of students were suspended at least once.

HISD students were served by 365 unique schools, 234 of which were in operation for the entire study period. Most campuses house elementary schools (prekindergarten through 5th grade), middle schools (6th through 8th grades), or high schools (9th through 12th grades). Some schools did serve broader or narrower grade ranges. For example, Soar Center, a specialized campus west of downtown Houston, serves 1st to 12th graders, with a median enrollment of just 132 students. Table 2 shows the characteristics of schools broken down by school type.

Most schools in the HISD are elementary schools, with typical enrollment of just over 600 students. Middle schools and high schools have higher enrollments, and specialized schools serve fewer students. Available per-pupil budgets are relatively even between school types, although notably higher in specialized schools. Distribution of students by race/ethnicity is functionally equal

Table 2. Characteristics of Houston Independent School District Schools, 2002–2016.

	Elementary schools		Middle schools		High schools		Nontraditional campuses	
	M	*N*	*M*	*N*	*M*	*N*	*M*	*N*
Median enrollment	627.40	157	1,065.89	40	840.49	40	439.80	40
Median funding per student	$4,462.24	157	$5,287.80	40	$6,073.17	40	$9,489.88	38
Median share of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch	88.5%	157	90.6%	40	86.3%	40	83.0%	40
Racial/ethnic majority	% of schools	*N*	% of schools	*N*	% of schools	*N*	% of schools	*N*
Black	24.2	38	25.0	10	27.5	11	22.5	9
Hispanic	62.4	98	57.5	23	52.5	21	60.0	24
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other/none	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note: Cells are marked with an "—" when the absolute number of schools in that category is sufficiently small that disclosure standards established by Houston Education Research Consortium prevent us from reporting the exact count/share of schools. Other values are averaged within schools across available school-years and then between schools in the given category.

across school types. Schools are highly segregated; as detailed in Section 1.2 of the online supplement, levels of residential racial/ethnic segregation in Harris County exceed the national average, and segregation across HISD campuses is even higher.

DATA AND METHODS

Eviction Court Records in Harris County

We draw on two large administrative data sets. The first contains the records of 728,952 eviction cases filed between 2002 and 2016 in Harris County. Records were collected by January Advisors directly from the Harris County Justice of the Peace Court and compiled and cleaned by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University. We stripped duplicate records and commercial eviction cases, geocoded the data, and validated cumulative caseloads against publicly available data sources published by the county.[4] These records allow us to pinpoint when, where, and against whom eviction cases were filed in Houston over this period.

Our event of interest is an eviction filing, the second step in the eviction process and the first recorded by the courts. Although not all filings result in an executed eviction judgment, these filings often lead to significant disruption in the lives of tenants and their children. Upon receiving a filing notice, many tenants move out and ''give up the battle'' before the court process is completed (Hartman and Robinson 2003). On average, just over 50,000 eviction cases were filed every year in Harris County, translating to an average eviction filing rate—calculated over the denominator of renter-occupied housing units—of 8.4 percent (see Section 1.3 of the online supplement).

Court records contain limited information about each case: case numbers, names of plaintiffs (e.g., landlords, property managers) and defendants (lease-holding tenants), defendant addresses, and filing dates. The records contain no information about the sociodemographic characteristics of defendants or the composition of their households.

Education Records from HISD

Our second source of administrative data is education records from elementary school, middle school, and high school students enrolled in the HISD, maintained by the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) at Rice University. These records provide a wealth of information about students and their progress through the school system, including student-level demographic, guardian, and address information; data on enrollment and attendance; and multiple measures of academic achievement and behavioral problems.

Parents of HISD students are required to register their children at the beginning of each academic year. The form they complete asks parents to provide their name and address.[5] Parents update

this information in the event of a move during the school year and must resubmit the form every fall regardless. This procedure results in a consistent listing of parents' names and addresses—the same information that would be listed on an eviction case—for every student-year.

Matching Eviction and Educational Records

We linked school registration data to eviction records, using the *fastLink* package in R (Enamorado, Fifield, and Imai 2020), to perform probabilistic matching between the two administrative data sets. We required exact matching of zip codes and performed string distance matching between (1) the names of students' listed guardians and eviction defendants and (2) street addresses on both registration and eviction records. The *fastLink* algorithm quantifies the likelihood, that is, the posterior probability, that two records represent a true match. We retained matches with posterior probabilities of 85 percent or higher. We restricted matches such that only filings that fell between September 1 of one year and August 30 of the following year were associated with that academic year. We refer to these children as ''students facing eviction'' even though the children themselves were rarely listed in the eviction filing.

This matching method is conservative, accepting only high-certainty matches and resulting in an unknown number of false negatives: cases in which students' parents were threatened with eviction but discrepancies between eviction and registration records were large enough to preclude linkage. We cannot quantify how many false negatives exist in our data. We have no reason to believe the matching process is systematically biased (i.e., yielding better match rates among relatively more or less advantaged students) and as such treat the resulting matched records as a random subset of the true population of children whose parents faced eviction filing. The resulting data set does not allow us to assess the prevalence of eviction filings among HISD students, but it is suitable for analyzing the consequences of these cases. Overall, by including ''unmatched'' students whose parents were filed against for eviction in the general population of students who avoided eviction, we downwardly bias our estimates.

In total, we observed 18,502 eviction filings that were matched to one of the 3,095,432 student-years in our sample. Put another way, 0.60 percent of student-years involved a student's parent or guardian being filed against for eviction, well below the 8.4 percent average eviction filing rate in Harris County during the study period. A large portion of the discrepancy can be explained by tenure: Calculated over the denominator of all households—rather than all renter households—the eviction filing rate in Harris County would be 3.7 percent.[6] In our sample, 13,197 unique students (1.93 percent) had a parent who was filed against for eviction, and just under a quarter (23.4 percent) of those students faced eviction repeatedly. Of the 3,086 students who faced repeated parental eviction filings, 2,404 (77.9 percent) experienced more than one filing in a single academic year.

Despite Black students making up only 29.4 percent of HISD enrollees in our sample, the majority of HISD students threatened with eviction (70.2 percent) were Black. By contrast, only 25.7 percent of students threatened with eviction were Hispanic, and 2.8 percent were White. The lower rate of eviction filing against Hispanic students' households should not be interpreted as evidence that these families were securely housed (Arzuaga 2024). Indeed, previous evidence shows high rates of other forms of housing insecurity for Hispanic households (e.g., crowded, doubled-up arrangements; Richard et al. 2024). Hispanic households may be reluctant to engage with the courts in ways that leave them at higher risk of informal or illegal eviction (Desmond et al. 2015).

Eviction risk was also disproportionately elevated for students who were ever enrolled in special education classes: 10.4 percent of students were enrolled in such classes, but these students accounted for 16.1 percent of parental eviction filings. This aligns with previous research showing that severely disadvantaged children are overrepresented among those enrolled in special education (O'Connor and Fernandez 2006). Likewise, FRPL-qualified students were disproportionately filed against. Nearly four-fifths of all students (79.4 percent) qualified for FRPL for at least one academic year, and fully 90 percent of all students threatened with eviction did so.

Analytic Plan

Using these matched records, we conduct three sets of analyses. First, we analyze the relationship between eviction filing and student moves, both

between schools and out of the district. HISD records allow us to observe the schools in which students are enrolled and instances in which students stop attending, as when a student transfers to a different school system or drops out.

We fit a set of regression models to estimate the risk of students transferring schools and leaving the HISD as a function of whether they faced eviction, their sociodemographic characteristics, and a variety of school-level characteristics. In fitting all models, we remove junctures where ''structural moves'' occur (e.g., the move between elementary school and middle school following fifth grade). These models allow us to assess whether eviction filing significantly increased the risk of mobility, but they do not provide causal estimates. Eviction cases are precipitated by a variety of factors, often including some form of economic hardship, that may directly and indirectly affect children and their academic trajectories (Collinson et al. 2024). We cannot disentangle eviction filings from these factors and therefore do not claim a causal effect of the court case.

Formally, the model is specified as a two-level linear probability model (LPM) with school-years nested within students. We use an LPM for ease of interpretation; results are substantively comparable using a logistic regression model (see Section 2.1 of the online supplement). The level one model is

$$Y_{ti} = \beta_{0i} + \beta_{1i}FILING_{ti} + \beta_{ji}GRADE_{jti} + \beta_{ki}Z_{kti} + e_{ti}. \quad (1)$$

Across four separate models, the dependent variable (Y_{ti}) is a binary indicator for whether student i who started academic year t in a given school (1) finished the academic year in a different school (indicating a midyear change that may be particularly disruptive for students), (2) started the subsequent academic year in a different school, (3) did not appear in HISD records in the following academic year, or (4) remained in the same school the following year. The fourth outcome (remaining in the same school) is the inverse of the second and third outcomes (switching schools or leaving the district). The level one predictors are whether or not the student's parent was filed against for eviction in the given academic year (binary), student's grade (categorical), and school characteristics in the vector Z_{kti}. These variables, measured each year, reflect school resources, need, and quality: funding per student (logged), the share of students qualifying for FRPL, the school attrition rate,[7] and the school's average standardized test score percentile.[8] We also account for the racial/ethnic majority of the school, acknowledging that majority-minority institutions are often perceived as less desirable even when high performing (Evans 2021).

At level two, we allow the intercept parameter (β_{0ij}) to vary as a function of time-invariant student characteristics, factors that may affect the baseline likelihood of a child switching schools or moving from HISD. Results are substantively comparable when controlling for all time-invariant student characteristics by using student fixed effects at level two (see Section 2.2 of the online supplement). Formally, this model is

$$\beta_{0i} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{0l}X_{li} + \mu_{0i}. \quad (2)$$

In Equation 2, we first model a student's baseline risk as a function of a vector of covariates (X_{li}) recorded in their educational records: race/ethnicity, gender, whether students were identified as a limited English proficient student, whether they ever qualified for FRPL, whether they experienced other economic disadvantage,[9] whether they were ever enrolled in special education classes, and whether they were ever categorized by their school as ''at risk'' of dropping out.

Second, we analyze school transitions in terms of changes in school characteristics. To do so, we calculate school characteristics for every pair of sending and receiving schools we observe when students change schools regardless of whether or not the move was eviction-related. For example, we can see for a given move whether the share of FRPL-qualified students was higher or lower in the receiving school than in the sending school.

We apply t tests to these data to assess the quality of school moves and to analyze whether eviction-related moves resulted, on average, in better or worse moves than moves that were not eviction-related. When assessing racial/ethnic composition of sending and receiving schools, we fit a multinomial logistic regression predicting the likelihood a student would move to a majority-Black, majority-Hispanic, or majority-White school or a school with no racial/ethnic majority based on two variables: the racial/ethnic composition of the sending school and whether or not the move was eviction-related.

Third, we use a dynamic difference-in-differences framework to explore the effects of eviction

filing on two measures of student behavior: absences and suspensions. This framework addresses an unobserved counterfactual: How many absences or suspensions would students have received had they not faced an eviction? Models assess trajectories for students who were and were not filed against, with the latter serving as a comparison for the former. Students experienced eviction filing at different times throughout our study period, which can induce bias in common estimation frameworks for event studies such as two-way fixed effects (Goodman-Bacon 2021). We use the dynamic difference-in-differences estimator described by Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021b) and implemented in the R package *did* (version 2.1.2; Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021a). This framework provides a set of dynamic treatment effects (i.e., an event study) and an overall average treatment effect on the treated (ATT; i.e., the weighted sum of the dynamic treatment effects). The Callaway and Sant'Anna estimator is expressed in Equation 3:

$$\mathrm{ATT}(i,g,t) = \sum \beta_t I(t - t_y^* = i) + \delta_i + y_t + X_i + \sigma_{i,t}. \quad (3)$$

In Equation 3, the ATT represents the average treatment effect on the treated for a given outcome for group g at year t, where group is a function of treatment timing for individual i at year t; for example, all students exposed to eviction filing in 2010. The student fixed effect (δ_i) controls for all unobserved time-invariant confounders by student, the grade fixed effect (θ_a) controls for an average grade trend (i.e., students may get suspended more, on average, as they get older), and the year fixed effect (γ_t) controls for average period effects (i.e., some school years may have seen particularly progressive/regressive suspension policies). A causal interpretation of this ATT estimate relies on the parallel trends assumption: Absences and suspensions among students exposed or not exposed to evictions would have continued on the same trajectory if no evictions had occurred. The dynamic treatment effect estimates allow for a visual examination of the pretrends in absences and suspensions during prefiling years. Standard errors are clustered at the student level.

Using this estimation framework, we first compare students facing eviction to all students whose parents were not filed against for eviction. We then build a set of comparisons against a shared control group representing the ''best-case'' scenario: students whose parents were not filed against for eviction and who did not make a nonstructural move between schools. We compare this group to three treatment groups: (1) students facing eviction who switched schools, (2) students facing eviction who did not switch schools, and (3) students whose parents were not filed against for eviction but who did make a nonstructural school move. Comparison of results between the first and second groups and between the first and third groups allows us to assess the independent or cumulative effects of eviction filings and school moves.

RESULTS

Eviction as a Driver of School Moves and Disenrollment

Eviction filing is a risk factor for school moves and disenrollment. We identified 13,160 student-years in which a student was not enrolled in the terminal grade of their campus and in which their parents received an eviction filing. Within this subset, we observed those students in a different school within the same academic year in 1,619 cases (12.3 percent) and in a different school in the subsequent academic year in 2,739 cases (20.8 percent). By contrast, for all student-years that did not involve a parental eviction filing and where students were not enrolled in a terminal grade, students were observed in another school in the same and the next academic years 4.7 percent and 11.2 percent of the time, respectively. Of students facing eviction, 29.9 percent did not appear in HISD records the following academic year, compared to 17.0 percent of students whose parents were not filed against for eviction. In short, students facing eviction were more likely to move and disenroll from the HISD than were their peers whose parents were not filed against. An alternative way of considering these data is through a lens of stability: Which students did not experience location-based disruption in their schooling? Seven in every 10 students who were not threatened with eviction (71.8 percent) were enrolled in the same school the following year. Among students threatened with eviction, fewer than half (49.2 percent) were still in the same campus the next academic year.

Table 3. Results of Regressions Predicting School Moves, Disenrollment, and School Stability.

	Dependent variable							
	Moved this academic year		Moved next academic year		Disenrolled next academic year		Same school next academic year	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Eviction filing	0.074***	0.060***	0.079***	0.055***	0.128***	0.107***	−0.189***	−0.165***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.004)
School budget per student (log)		0.018***		0.013***		−0.001 $^{+}$		−0.011***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
School share eligible for free/reduced-price lunch		0.044***		0.059***		0.106***		−0.163***
		(0.001)		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.002)
School racial majority Black		−0.001*		0.013***		−0.021***		0.009***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
School racial majority White		−0.018***		0.017***		0.003		−0.020***
		(0.001)		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.003)
School attrition rate		0.006***		−0.092***		1.023***		−0.927***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Composite test score rank		−0.022***		−0.045***		−0.002*		−0.046***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Male		−0.012***		−0.007***		−0.006***		0.013***
		(0.0004)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Black		−0.007**		−0.006 $^{+}$		0.0001		0.004
		(0.003)		(0.003)		(0.004)		(0.005)
White		−0.003		−0.009**		0.012***		−0.004
		(0.002)		(0.003)		(0.004)		(0.004)
Asian		0.017***		0.024***		0.053***		−0.074***
		(0.002)		(0.003)		(0.004)		(0.004)
Other race		−0.010***		−0.003		0.010*		−0.007
		(0.003)		(0.003)		(0.004)		(0.005)
Limited English proficiency		−0.021***		−0.025***		−0.012***		0.039***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Free/reduced-price lunch		0.008***		0.016***		−0.021***		0.004**
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Economically disadvantaged		0.011***		0.027***		−0.081***		0.047***
		(0.0004)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
At risk of dropping out		0.022***		0.035***		−0.071***		0.030***
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Special education		0.008***		0.012***		−0.017***		0.003**
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Constant	0.052***	0.051***	0.091***	0.095***	0.180***	0.191***	0.707***	0.723***
	(0.0002)	(0.001)	(0.0003)	(0.001)	(0.0003)	(0.001)	(0.0004)	(0.014)
Observations	1,745,883	1,670,390	1,745,883	1,670,390	1,745,883	1,670,390	1,745,883	1,670,390
Log likelihood	198,022.3	196,234.6	−319,917.8	−302,649.7	−760,034.8	−252,117.9	−1,031,178.0	−738,512.0
Akaike information criterion	−396,020.6	−392,413.3	639,859.6	605,355.3	1,520,094.0	504,291.7	2,062,380.0	1,477,080.0
Bayesian information criterion	−395,872.1	−392,068.1	640,008.1	605,700.5	1,520,242.0	504,636.9	2,062,528.0	1,477,425.0

Note: All models include student grade as a categorical variable at level one. All variables are grand-mean centered.
$^{+}p < .10$. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

Differences in rates of mobility and disenrollment may be attributable to the characteristics of students and their schools rather than to eviction. Table 3 reports results from a series of regression models that control for these factors and predict the likelihood of school moves (or stability) as a function of eviction filing. Model 1 shows that a student threatened with eviction—relative to a student who was not threatened—was significantly more likely to move to another school in the HISD in the same academic year. This relationship remained after student- and school-level variables were added (Model 2). After all controls, students facing eviction were 6.0 percentage points more likely to move schools than were equivalent students not facing eviction. The same pattern held for moves between academic years (Models 3 and 4), and effect sizes were similar. Notably, we found that Black students—whose parents were filed against for eviction most often—were significantly less likely to make either of these types of school moves in the absence of an eviction filing (Models 2 and 4).

Models 5 and 6 in Table 3 show that students facing eviction were significantly more likely than their peers whose parents were not filed

Table 4. Characteristics of Eviction-Led and Non-Eviction-Led School Moves in the Same and Following Academic Years.

	Eviction-led	Non-eviction-led	*p* value
Destination share qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch	92.4%	91.3%	$1.22*10^{-6}$
Destination share economically disadvantaged	61.9%	57.4%	$1.60*10^{-51}$
Destination-school mean annual attrition rate	19.4%	18.5%	$2.32*10^{-8}$
Destination share at risk of dropping out	90.77%	90.73%	0.776
Destination-school composite test score percentile	44.3%	49.0%	$4.44*10^{-37}$
Moves in the same academic year			
Origin-school mean budget	$5,734.53	$6,027.94	0.0616
Destination-school mean budget	$6,006.66	$7,033.74	0.000119
Moves between academic years			
Origin-school mean budget	$5,139.08	$4,908.88	0.0183
Destination-school mean budget	$5,380.82	$5,581.08	0.106

Note: The first five rows measure moves between academic years.

against to disenroll from the HISD. Indeed, ceteris paribus, a student threatened with eviction was 10.7 percentage points less likely to be enrolled in the district the following year. Models 7 and 8 capture the inverse possibility: Students threatened with eviction were significantly less likely to be in the same school in the following year, whether because of a move to a different school or due to disenrollment from the HISD.

Eviction-Led Moves and Changes in School Quality

For students who remained in the HISD, eviction-led school moves appear to be different than moves made by other students. Table 4 displays average differences in school characteristics for eviction-led and noneviction moves and results from simple *t* tests evaluating the significance of these differences. Most of these gaps reveal statistically significant but practically small differences.

Eviction-led moves were to schools with larger shares of students qualifying for FRPL and identified by HISD as economically disadvantaged. These schools also had significantly higher attrition rates, signaling more routinized turnover that can be disruptive to learning. Destination-school standardized test scores were significantly lower for students making eviction-led moves than for students whose moves were not precipitated by eviction.

Mobile HISD students started from schools with relatively similar per-pupil budgets regardless of whether the move was eviction-led or not. For moves made within the same academic year, origin-school mean budgets were not statistically different between eviction-led and non-eviction-led moves. For between-year moves, non-eviction-led moves tended to be from schools that, on average, had lower budgets, suggesting parents were voluntarily relocating to better funded schools. For both within-year and between-year moves, students whose moves were eviction-led largely ended up in schools with smaller budgets (the difference is nonsignificant in the case of between-year moves).

Eviction threats were also associated with significant differences in the racial/ethnic composition of receiving schools. Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities of receiving-school racial/ethnic majority as a function of whether or not the move was eviction-led, controlling for origin-school racial/ethnic composition. Students whose parents were filed against for eviction, compared to those whose parents were not, were significantly more likely to move to majority-Black schools and significantly less likely to transfer to majority-Hispanic schools.

Eviction and Changes in Absences and Suspensions

Our third set of analyses assesses the effects of eviction filings on students' behavioral outcomes. We fit a series of event study models that allow us to estimate the effect of eviction cases and/or school moves on the number of absences and suspensions that students accrue.

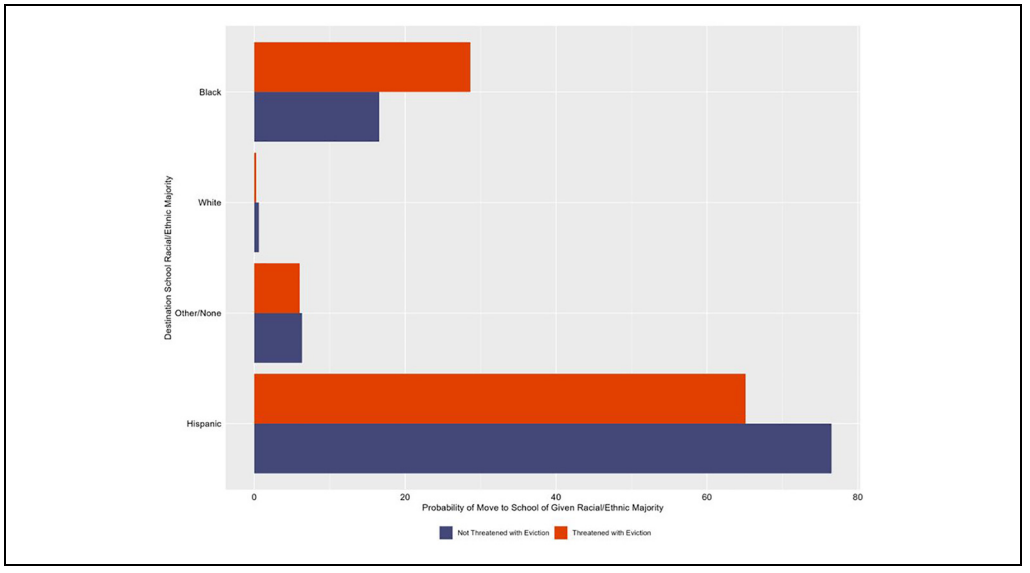

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of receiving-school racial/ethnic majority, based on eviction filing and racial/ethnic majority of sending school.

Figure 2 reports the time-varying effects of eviction filing on student absences (e.g., event year three corresponds to the effect of an eviction filing on absences three years later). We trimmed at five years on either side of the eviction filing because the relatively small number of observations beyond those student-years introduces prohibitive uncertainty in the treatment effect estimates. Due to violations of the parallel trends assumption, we do not interpret results on absences as causal. Table 5 provides aggregated group-time ATTs and 95 percent confidence intervals; the first column, reporting effects on absences, corresponds to the models in Figure 2.

We first compare students facing eviction to all students whose parents were not filed against for eviction (Panel A of Figure 2, top row of Table 5). Evicted students accrued, on average, 0.929 additional absences per year following eviction filing, but the effect was largest in the year of filing (2.05 additional absences, 95 percent CI = [1.00, 3.09]). Absences also grew in the year prior to eviction filing, which may reflect the effect of accumulating hardships faced by households that go on to face eviction (Collinson et al. 2024).

We then compare students facing eviction who switched schools to students whose parents were not filed against for eviction and who did not make a nonstructural move between schools. Panel B of Figure 2 shows a significant increase in absences the year of eviction filing (3.57 days, 95 percent CI = [0.83, 6.31]), but the ATT is nonsignificant (Table 5, row two). Comparing students facing eviction who did not switch schools to students who were not threatened with eviction who did not move schools, we again find a significant increase in absences in the year of eviction filing (3.82 days, 95 percent CI = [1.30, 6.34]). These students had, on average, more than three additional absences per year following eviction (Table 5, row three). Finally, we compare two groups of students who did not face eviction: those who made a nonstructural school move and those who did not. Here, we find a small but significant increase in absences that persists for several years following a school move (ATT of 1.972 additional absences). Because confidence intervals on ATT estimate overlap across each of these treatments, we cannot reliably distinguish between possible effects.

In Figure 3 and the second column of Table 5, we replicate this series of comparisons for models of suspensions. Overall, we find virtually no effect of eviction filing on accrual of suspensions. This holds when comparing all evicted students to all nonevicted students (Figure 3, Panel A; note the small but significant ATT estimate in the top row of Table 5) and when focusing on evicted

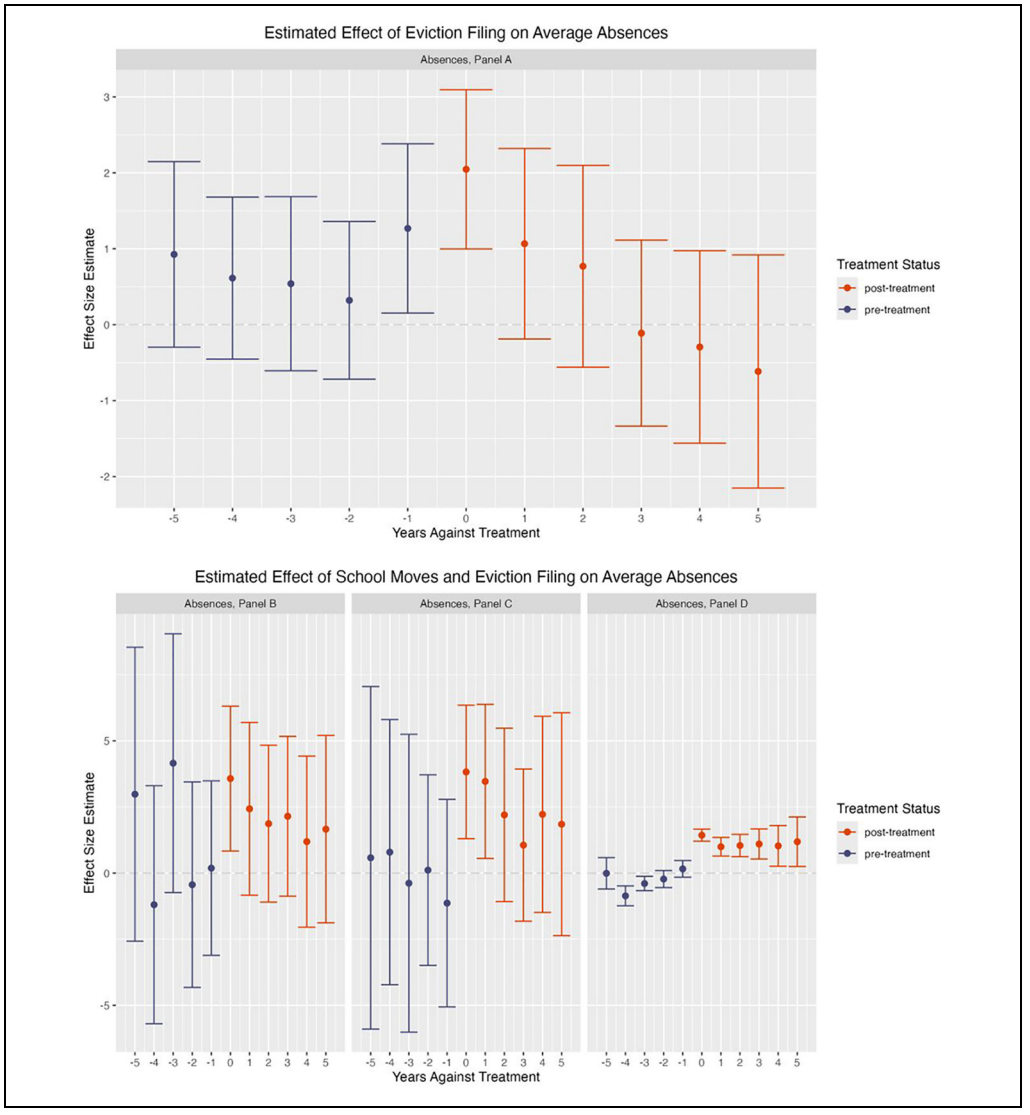

Figure 2. Event study models of total annual absences before and after different combinations of eviction filings and school moves.

Note: Panel A compares evicted students to nonevicted students. The bottom three panels compare students facing eviction who switched schools (Panel B), students facing eviction who did not switch schools (Panel C), and students whose parents were not filed against for eviction who made a nonstructural school move (Panel D) to students whose parents were not filed against for eviction and did not make a nonstructural move between schools.

students who did not make a school move (Figure 3, Panel C).

By contrast, we find a significant and lasting effect of school moves on the number of suspensions students receive. Evicted students who switched schools were suspended, on average, one more day per year in the years following eviction filing (row two of Table 5, Panel B of Figure 3). We find a similar but attenuated pattern in Panel D of Figure 3: Students who were not threatened with eviction and made a school move received significantly more suspensions in the year they move and the following years. The ATT estimate of 0.486 additional suspensions

Table 5. Aggregated Group-Time Average Treatment Effects on Total Annual Absences and Suspensions Following Eviction Filing or School Move.

	Total annual absences	Total annual suspensions
Evicted vs. nonevicted	0.929[a]	0.197[a]
	[0.134, 1.724]	[0.075, 0.318]
Evicted and school move vs. stable	2.221	1.002[a]
	[−0.175, 4.617]	[0.724, 1.281]
Evicted without school move vs. stable	3.087[a]	−0.029
	[1.425, 4.748]	[−0.209, 0.150]
Nonevicted and school move vs. stable	1.972[a]	0.486[a]
	[1.557, 2.387]	[0.450, 0.522]

Note: The 95 percent confidence interval are in brackets. The first row compares evicted students to nonevicted students. Rows two, three, and four compare students whose parents received an eviction filing who switched schools (row two), students whose parents received an eviction filing who did not switch schools (row three), and students whose parents did not receive an eviction filing and who made a nonstructural school move (row four) to students whose parents did not receive an eviction filing and who did not make a school move.
[a]Confidence interval does not cover zero.

(row four of Table 5) is roughly half as large as for students who moved schools following an eviction filing, and confidence intervals are nonoverlapping. Results suggest that students who switch schools—particularly students whose moves are eviction-related—face increased suspensions in their new schools both immediately and in the following years.

DISCUSSION

Previous research has documented the toll that housing insecurity and residential and school mobility has on children and their schooling. Especially for low-income and minority children, moving and changing schools can result in academic delays and a range of detrimental outcomes. Still, by and large, researchers have not evaluated the differential effects of voluntary and forced mobility. In this study, we use Houston as a case study to explore the consequences of eviction filings—a marker of housing insecurity and a predictor of forced residential mobility—on school moves and educational outcomes.

Even accounting for individual- and school-level characteristics, students threatened with eviction were far more likely to change schools and disenroll from the HISD than their peers who did not face eviction. Students whose school moves were eviction-led generally moved to lower quality schools than did peers whose moves were not precipitated by eviction. In the year of the court case, students facing eviction accrued significantly more absences than did students not facing eviction. The relatively modest scale of this effect may reflect a coping mechanism on the part of parents: attempting to keep children in a relatively more stable school environment while dealing with instability at home. We also found that students facing eviction who switched schools received significantly more suspensions than those who did not face eviction or switch schools. This may be a function of behavioral issues that arise in the context of disrupted social relationships and unfamiliarity with receiving-school norms.

This study analyzed students whose parents were filed against for eviction. Not all households were ultimately evicted, and not all moved. Yet our results suggest that even filings without school moves are associated with increased absences. This may be due to underlying factors that lead to eviction filing (e.g., parental unemployment, a medical emergency) or financial stress caused by the eviction case. Results contribute to a growing body of literature that highlights the costs, financial and otherwise, of eviction filings, even filings that do not lead to formal eviction judgments (Graetz, Gershenson, Porter, et al. 2023; Leung et al. 2021; So 2023). In supplementary analyses, we demonstrate similar trends among children whose parents received an eviction judgment, suggesting that considerable harm accrues at the stage of eviction filing (see Section 4 of the online supplement).

This study makes two key contributions. First, findings deepen our understanding of the

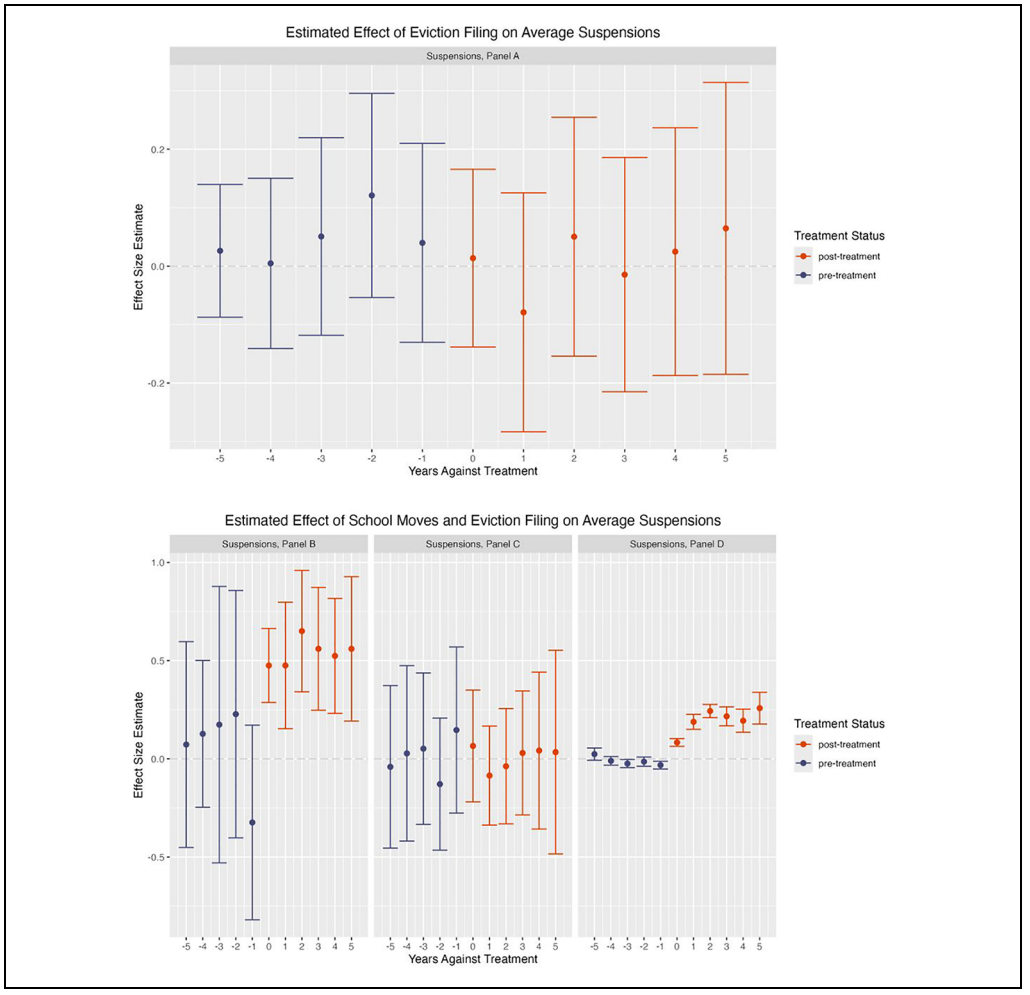

Figure 3. Event study models of total annual suspensions before and after different combinations of eviction filings and school moves.

Note: Panel A (top) compares evicted students to nonevicted students. The bottom three panels compare students facing eviction who switched schools (Panel B), students facing eviction who did not switch schools (Panel C), and students whose parents were not filed against for eviction who made a nonstructural school move (Panel D) to students whose parents were not filed against for eviction and did not make a nonstructural move between schools.

consequences of housing insecurity broadly and eviction specifically. A small body of research has begun to grapple with the price children pay when their parents face eviction (Benfer et al. 2021; Himmelstein and Desmond 2021), but we have yet to establish a full accounting of these costs. Our findings detail additional dimensions of housing insecurity that can follow from an eviction filing. We show that even the threat of eviction precipitates meaningful increases in the odds of school moves and disenrollment, moves to materially worse-off schools, and increased school absences and suspensions—events that have significant long-term consequences (Bacher-Hicks, Billings, and Deming 2019; Mittleman 2018).

Second, this study offers practical insights for school systems beyond Houston. Children whose parents face eviction represent a population of unstably housed students who should be targeted for assistance using resources provided through the McKinney-Vento Act. Our results suggest that less resourced schools will be forced to

manage the fallout of the eviction crisis, likely entailing further spillover effects given that instability and disruptions caused by frequent school moves also negatively affect nonmobile students in schools with higher mobility rates (Hanushek et al. 2004; Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell 2003; Lash and Kirkpatrick 1994).

Previous research has detailed strategies that schools, teachers, families, and students can use to address problems associated with residential and school mobility (Rumberger 2003). Our findings highlight the need to reduce eviction filing rates and minimize the number of children at risk of losing their homes. Studies have identified multiple ways of doing so, such as increasing notice requirements (Gromis et al. 2022), raising eviction filing fees (Gomory et al. 2023), and providing legal counsel to families threated with eviction (Ellen et al. 2021). Policymakers could explore ways to provide additional eviction protections for families with school-age children, whether through regulatory reform or emergency rental assistance. Our findings also highlight the need to target housing stabilization services to at-risk students through the schools. The Elementary Housing Assistance Program in Tacoma, Washington, a partnership between the Tacoma Public Schools and the Tacoma Housing Authority, provides an example of the benefits of such coordination (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012; Jacobson 2019; Johnson and Milner 2014).

Our results were restricted to one school district in one city. Patterns elsewhere, where eviction is either less or more common, may look different. In addition, the matching strategy we used to identify students at risk of eviction failed to identify an unknown number of student-years in which students' parents were threatened with eviction. This likely biases our results in a conservative direction and may limit our ability to identify results. Likewise, data on absences may undercount the numbers of days missed when students are forced to switch schools, again resulting in conservative bias in our estimates.

Another important limitation—and we believe a critical area for further research—relates to the effects investigated: the effects of parental eviction filing on children. Previous research has demonstrated that mobility affects nonmovers and movers (Hanushek et al. 2004; Kerbow et al. 2003; Lash and Kirkpatrick 1994). Future research should explore the spillover effects of eviction on classrooms and schools. Future work should also account for age stratification in the effects of eviction filings, attempting to identify periods when students may be particularly vulnerable.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study marks a step forward in understanding the effects of forced residential and school mobility and the costs of eviction filings. So long as eviction is endemic and heavily concentrated among households with school-age children, it will continue to be a significant contributing cause of academic instability, particularly for Black and low-income students. Solutions to the underlying eviction crisis should be evaluated not just in terms of their immediate benefits for residential stability but also in terms of their long-range, cross-generational effects.

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RESEARCH ETHICS

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Princeton University under Protocol 10268. This research relies on publicly accessible data from the Harris County courts, which is not considered human subjects research. Administrative data collected from the Houston Independent School District is maintained by the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) at Rice University. All results were disclosed by

HERC in a manner designed to maintain student confidentiality.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

NOTES

1. Researchers have focused on effects of residential foreclosure on educational outcomes in the context of the Great Recession (Been et al. 2011; Bowdler, Quercia, and Smith 2010; Bradbury, Burke, and Triest 2013; Comey and Grosz 2011; Kachura 2012), but limited research has examined the effects of eviction, a more common disruption.
2. HISD data do not allow us to describe ethnicity separately from race. Students are identified as Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, or non-Hispanic of some other race.
3. HISD data define students as either male or female and do not allow for identification as nonbinary or transgender.
4. For every county-year, we compare the total number of cases listed in our data to aggregate statistics published by the courts. Over the 14 years in the sample, data fall between 95.9 percent and 101.7 percent of the annual totals reported by the courts (median = 100.0 percent).
5. Between 2007 and 2013, parents who lived separately were allowed to report multiple names and addresses. To increase comparability, we accepted only matches with the first listed parent and address.
6. There are several other reasons why the eviction filing rate against HISD students is significantly lower than the county rate. First, as discussed earlier, our matching process is conservative and misses an unknown number of false negatives. Second, families with children below school age face high risk of eviction (Graetz, Gershenson, Hepburn, et al. 2023). Risk may be particularly concentrated among families whose children are not yet enrolled in school.
7. The attrition rate is defined as the percentage of total students in nonterminal grades not appearing at a given school in the following year.
8. To calculate average standardized test score percentiles, we take all student scores on each test administered in the given academic year and average them at the school–academic-year level. We then calculate each school–academic-year's position within the full distribution, assigning each its percentile value. If more than one test was administered within the school academic-year, we set test-specific school–academic-year percentiles and then average within academic years between percentiles.
9. This indicator captures students from families with annual income at or below the official federal poverty line, families eligible for public assistance, families who received need-based financial assistance, families eligible for programs assisted under Title II of the Job Training Partnership Act, and families eligible for benefits under the Food Stamp Act of 1977.

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