

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In October 1997, Ohio implemented ProtectOhio, a Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration project. As one of a score of Title IV-E Waiver programs in the country, ProtectOhio experiments with the flexible use of federal IV-E dollars; funds normally allowed to be spent only for foster care can be spent for a range of child welfare purposes. The underlying premise of the Title IV-E Waiver is that the opportunity to use federal child welfare funds flexibly will change purchasing decisions and service utilization patterns in ways that are favorable to children and families. ProtectOhio is one of four states experimenting with capped IV-E allocations; two more states in this category have recently had their Waivers approved¹. As in the other states, Ohio's primary goals are to reduce the number of children coming into care; decrease the length of stay in care; decrease the number of placements experienced by children already in care; and increase the number of children reunited with their families or placed in other permanent situations.

The first ProtectOhio Waiver demonstration program operated for five years, from October 1, 1997 through September 30, 2002. There then ensued a "bridge period" of two years, while Ohio negotiated with the federal Children's Bureau to obtain a five-year extension. The extension was granted in January 2005, retroactive to October 1, 2004, and scheduled to end September 30, 2009.

Children's services in Ohio are county-administered. When the Waiver began in 1997, 14 local public child-serving agencies (PCSAs) opted to participate in ProtectOhio, each county having its own ideas about how best to utilize the flexibility – and how to handle the risk – of limited Title IV-E funds. Their involvement signaled a desire to explore innovative approaches to meeting the needs of children and families in their communities and a commitment to systemic change in the management of child welfare services, as the vehicle for improving child and family outcomes.

Since 1997, in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of the federal demonstration project, Ohio has contracted with a research team led by Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the ProtectOhio demonstration. Essential to the evaluation is the examination of a group of comparison counties, chosen for their similarities to the demonstration counties. With the advent of the Waiver extension, in October 2005, the group of demonstration counties gradually changed, losing one PCSA and adding four new ones. Four more comparison sites, one of which is still to be determined, are in the process of being added to balance the study groups. Table 1.1 below lists the PCSAs currently participating in the evaluation.

¹ The other three are Indiana, North Carolina and Oregon; the new waivers are in California and Florida.

Table 1.1: ProtectOhio Evaluation Counties*					
<i>Demonstration Counties</i>			<i>Comparison Counties</i>		
Ashtabula	Greene	Stark	Allen	Mahoning	Warren
Belmont	Lorain	Coshocton	Butler	Miami	Wood
Clark	Medina	Hardin	Clermont	Montgomery	Guernsey
Crawford	Muskingum	Highland	Columbiana	Scioto	Morrow
Fairfield	Portage	Vinton	Hancock	Summit	Perry
Franklin	Richland		Hocking	Trumbull	TBD

*New counties are in bold; an additional comparison county will be added soon.

Building on our working relationships firmly established during the first five years of the ProtectOhio Waiver evaluation, the evaluation team includes HSRI, Westat, and the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Responsibility for the major evaluation studies is shared as follows:

- HSRI leads the Process Implementation Study, which consists of six distinct research studies addressing structural or service delivery changes targeted by some or all of the demonstration PCSAs. Westat actively supports the HSRI work by preparing special administrative data files and discussing data management and analysis options.
- Chapin Hall leads the Fiscal Outcomes Study, continuing the approach used during the first five-year evaluation which focused on changes in child welfare spending patterns. HSRI and our consultant, Larry Wallerstein, work closely with Chapin Hall to gather and analyze the county data.
- Westat and Chapin Hall share responsibility for the Participant Outcomes Study, comprised of two distinct outcome analyses which entail major data management tasks. Westat conducts the Placement Outcomes Study (POS), focused on children already in care at the start of the Waiver; Chapin Hall leads the collaborative work on the trajectory analysis, identifying changes in the pathways children follow in their tenure in the child welfare system.

Full details of each of the three studies is provided in subsequent chapters of this report.

1.1 OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The central evaluation hypothesis is: Children and families served by PCSAs that have flexible use of Title IV-E funds (henceforward the demonstration sites) experience better outcomes than the comparison group, and better outcomes than children in the demonstration sites prior to the Waiver. All children served by the PCSA are part of the evaluation.

The two key evaluation questions are:

- (1) In what ways have the demonstration sites varied in their implementation of Waiver activities since January 2005, compared to each other and to the group of comparison sites? Answers will come from both the Process Implementation study and the Fiscal Outcomes study.

(2) In what ways do outcomes differ among the demonstration sites and between the demonstration and comparison groups? Answers will come from both the Process study (the results of the special strategies) and the Participant Outcomes study.

Table 1.2 below contains the full list of outcomes being addressed in the evaluation, reflecting both the stipulations of Ohio’s federal Terms & Conditions for ProtectOhio and the ongoing concerns of local stakeholders.

Table 1.2: Outcomes Focus for ProtectOhio Evaluation	
Research Topic/Outcome	Section Where Addressed in this Report
Change in number of children entering care	Chapter 1; Section 1.2 Appendix A
Change in length of stay in care	Chapter 1; Section 1.2 Chapter 2; Section 2.1
Change in number of children reunified with families or placed in other permanent situations	Will address in subsequent reports
Change in rates of re-entry into care	Will address in subsequent reports
Family Team Meetings: differences in implementation and impact on child and family outcomes	Chapter 4
Visitation between parents and children in out-of-home placement: differences in implementation and impact on reunification	Chapter 5
Kinship services and supports: differences in implementation (especially use of guardianship) and impact on child and family outcomes	Chapter 6
Adoption services and supports: differences in implementation and impact on child and family outcomes	Chapter 3; Section 3.2.
Enhanced mental health and substance abuse services: differences in implementation and impact on child and family outcomes	Chapter 7
Selected managed care strategies: differences in implementation and impact on county operations and on child and family outcomes	Chapter 3; Section 3.3 Chapter 8
Relationship between PCSA and court system	Chapter 3; Section 3.2.
Children with substantiated CAN report: changes in number who go to placement and who experience recidivism after exit from care	Chapter 2; Section 2.1
Changes in expenditures on placement/non-placement	Chapter 9

The evaluation team will continue to use this framework to guide all its evaluation activities, and will present periodic research findings in terms of these outcomes.

Because the evaluation has been in place for nearly nine years, the team members have considerable familiarity with the participating counties and have access to longitudinal data spanning three periods of time: pre-Waiver (1996-1997), first Waiver (1997-2002), and second Waiver (2005-present). In general, our analyses will not only compare the group of demonstration counties to the group of comparison counties but will also compare different time periods.

1.2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Evaluation activities began in February 2005. Because of the extended Bridge period², demonstration counties needed time and support to resume full participation in ProtectOhio. Although they had continued to receive capitated Title IV-E funding throughout the Bridge period, they proceeded carefully, taking fewer financial and programmatic risks, lest the Waiver not be extended and the PCSA would suddenly have to resume standard Title IV-E reimbursement. With the extension in place, the 13 demonstration counties began to refocus their attention to strategies for reducing the need for paid placements. The evaluation team rapidly built on discussions held with the demonstration counties during the Bridge period, formulating a detailed Evaluation Plan to embrace the new ProtectOhio focus on specific intervention strategies. Because of our well-established relationship with ODJFS and the demonstration counties, we have participated more actively in Consortium³ meetings and committees, and have represented the ProtectOhio experience to national gatherings. We offer below brief descriptions of the main project management activities.

1.2.1 Key Meetings

Evaluation Team: Reflecting the collaborative nature of all the evaluation tasks, staff from HSRI, Westat, and Chapin Hall have met frequently, by phone and in person, to discuss research issues pertinent to one or more of the studies. In addition, periodic conference calls and group meetings are held as needed to assess overall evaluation progress and to discuss upcoming reports. In August 2005, the entire team gathered together to discuss overall plans for the five-year evaluation and to prepare for the 28-county data audit (Section 1.2.2.1).

Consortium: One or more members of the evaluation team have participated in each bi-monthly Consortium meeting, providing an update on evaluation activities and research findings. In addition, HSRI and Westat staff actively planned and participated in a two-day Consortium retreat in January 2006, held near Columbus, Ohio.

Annual Child Welfare Waiver Conferences: Members of the evaluation team participated in both the June 2005 and April 2006 meetings of the Child Welfare Demonstration Projects, at the latter meeting presenting a break-out session on the new Ohio waiver and evaluation.

² Technically, the Bridge period was October 1, 2002 through September 30, 2004 but, in actual practice, it was longer -- the Waiver renewal was approved January 2005, retroactive to the beginning of FFY05, October 2004.

³ The ProtectOhio Consortium consists of representatives of each of the demonstration county PCSAs, staffed by ODJFS.

1.2.2 Data Management

A critical task for the evaluation team is obtaining, organizing and understanding data from a variety of sources. Although FACSIS administrative data files have been our primary data source since the Waiver began in 1997, we still encounter problems and raise questions that were not at issue during the first evaluation period. In anticipation of such continuing challenges, and in direct response to Ohio's transition to SACWIS⁴, we have worked closely with the Data Committee, a subcommittee of the Consortium. The committee consists of data-savvy staff from most of the demonstration counties. The group meets every few months, as the need arises; the members have assisted us by reviewing data collection plans and tools, clarifying how FACSIS data elements are used, and directly providing us with some local data. We expect to continue this active collaboration throughout the Waiver.

Three particular data-related activities merit further explanation: the data audit, creation of Caseload Dynamics reports, and upcoming conversion from FACSIS to SACWIS.

1.2.2.1 Data Audit

Several of the studies required collecting information from county FACSIS systems and personnel to clarify uncertainties about the counties' coding, variable definitions, and processing procedures, and to obtain a better understanding of what information is available locally. In addition to addressing the data needs of specific studies, the evaluation team also conducted general audit activities to clarify several underlying FACSIS issues relevant to a large part of the work in the new Waiver period. Team members reviewed the data audit instrument with the data committee and held a training for all site visitors in August 2005.

Between October and December 2005, members of the evaluation team collected this information during an extensive audit in each of the 28 evaluation counties. Team members spent up to two days in each county interviewing caseworkers, supervisors, and data entry personnel to better understand local data collection and data entry practices in the demonstration and comparison counties; clarify variable definitions and find out about what information is available in the local MicroFACSIS systems that is not available at the state level; clarify data issues pertaining to the strategies; and assess data stability and consistency.

The findings from the data audit⁵ are being used primarily to inform Westat's construction of FACSIS analytic files and subsequent analytic design decisions related to the participant outcomes studies and the process implementation strategies. In addition, a few findings have strong implications for the evaluation as a whole, as discussed in this section.

Variation in counties' use of local events in FACSIS. Key purposes of the data audit were to further explore the coding process and find out what data could be obtained from the counties' local systems, how consistent the counties were in their use of local events, and whether any additional data from local events could be used for the trajectory analysis. From the data audit, the study team learned that counties have the option to define variables (events) for their internal use. These events are neither used nor monitored by OJFS. Counties provided the team with the

⁴ State Automated Child Welfare Information System, mandated by the federal Children's Bureau.

⁵ Copies of the data audit protocol and the analysis of findings can be obtained on request.

local data elements used within their counties. The audits revealed a tremendous variation in the local events that were used, as well as in the values assigned to each event.

Following the audit, the team obtained pilot data directly from Stark, Portage, and Greene counties to examine their use of local case openings. The data showed much variation in the use of case categories for reasons why the case opened, as well as whether counties coded for Information and Referrals. After scrutinizing the pilot data, the team decided that the local case opening (010) data were not useful for trajectory or any other analysis. The data were cumbersome to obtain from the counties, and the wide variation in the use of the local case opening (010) suggests it will not be useful to the analysis. Instead, the evaluation will rely on the state-level FACSIS events, plus primary data collection. The team might reconsider using local data later on, if we find a greater consistency in its use and a greater ease of access from OJFS.

Clarification of runaway and aging-out definitions. The counties had raised questions about the evaluation's definitions of aging out and runaway youth. These are outcomes in the placement analyses for the first and second Waiver periods. The data audit helped in clarifying the definitions and deciding where these outcomes should be included in the analysis.

The evaluation team defined "runaway" as a placement that ends when a child is AWOL (absent without leave). Counties vary slightly on the period of time the child has to be AWOL before the placement ends, but for most it is 30 days with the placement ending on either the 30th or 31st day. The evaluation team will continue to use this as an outcome in the participant outcome modeling.

Aging out occurs at age 18 in most counties, although counties may continue to provide services until high school graduation if the youth wants the services, wants to remain in care, and attends school regularly. Cases for youth with MR/DD or other disabilities can continue until age 21 in most counties, or until transferred to adult services. Over-18 cases will be included in the analysis where appropriate; we will be explicit about when they are included or excluded, as these cases have placement cost implications. In general we will focus on children under 18 to look for successful outcomes, as there is still the opportunity with these cases for adoption, reunification, and subsidized guardianship.

Variation in when counties open an ongoing case. For the purposes of the trajectory analysis, the data audit helped assess consistency among the counties in recording the opening of ongoing cases. The study team wanted to know (1) how counties recorded the first contact, (2) when counties provided services without opening an ongoing case, (3) how counties handled referrals from the court, and (4) under what circumstances cases might be opened to ongoing without a report of abuse or neglect. The study team found great variation in how the counties open ongoing cases, particularly in ongoing cases without indication or substantiation of abuse or neglect. This variation complicates the interpretation of certain trajectories, leading to the decision that the trajectory analysis will define the first contact as either a victim or a case opening.

Clarification in counties' use of case types. Another purpose of the data audit was to clarify how counties use certain case types and whether they are consistent in their definitions and usage. Counties showed a wide variation in how they use several important case types, including “dependent,” “unruly/delinquent,” “protective,” and “voluntary,” with implications for the analysis.

In particular, the counties vary widely in their use of “dependent” or “unruly/delinquent” as a reason for initial placement and “dependency” or “delinquent/unruly” as an adjudication type. Several counties told team members that the courts regularly “bargain down to dependency” as a negotiation tactic with lawyers and families. Thus, the analysis will not be able to use these elements in determining the population of children remanded to the PCSA by the juvenile court who could have been served elsewhere. Such “inappropriate” referrals can have a substantial effect on a PCSA’s ability to contain placement days.

The data audit also revealed a lack of consistency among the counties in their definitions of “protective” and “voluntary” services. We decided to collapse these two case types into one subgroup because there is no clear differentiation among counties in how they define them, although most counties have a preference for using one over the other. In contrast, counties use “protective supervision order” more consistently because it involves judicial action. A caseload report addressing counties' use of protective service orders is included in Appendix A. This information will help any future analysis using case types.

1.2.2.2 Caseload Dynamics Reports

In the first Waiver period, the evaluation team began producing caseload dynamics reports to help counties understand changes in their caseloads that were relevant to the Waiver. By the second Waiver period, counties had begun to produce their own reports on many of the caseload trends. The current caseload dynamics reports cover fewer topics than in the first Waiver, and reflect an iterative process by which the evaluation team both recommended topics and incorporated suggestions from the data committee. Table 1.3 below lists the caseload dynamics reports currently being developed by the evaluation team for the counties. Reports listed in Table 1.3 appear in Appendix A.

Because they present raw data that have not been risk-adjusted, these reports are not intended, nor should they be used, to reflect Waiver effects. They are best used as a point of reference for discussion of changes in caseloads over time within a county. Tracking these changes can help explain some of the intervention strategies described in Chapter 2; for example, trends summarized in Reports 10 and 11 might have relevance to the kinship strategy implemented in some of the counties. And the caseload reports might show constraints or pressures that influence a county’s ability to restrain placement days or costs; for example, Report 1 might give an indication of the volume of reports and Report 13 might reveal trends in long-term foster care, over which a county might have little control.

Reports are organized by size groupings that provide points of reference for counties.

Table 1.3 Caseload Dynamics Reports

<i>Table</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Number of Children Served in Child Welfare by Year	Unduplicated count of children in any case or as victim in any report
2	Number of Children in Ongoing Cases by Year	Unduplicated count of children in any ongoing case during the year, grouped into cases where children were placed and were not placed
3	Number of New Children Served in Child Welfare by Year	Number of new children in any case or as victim in any report during the year
4	Number of New Children in Placement by Year	Number of new children in placement for at least one day during the year
5	Number of Child Abuse/ Neglect Incidents by Year	Number of incidents (not number of children in incidents) during the year
6	Number of Children in a Child Abuse/Neglect Incident by Year	Unduplicated count of children as victims in at least one child abuse/neglect incident during the year
7	Number of Children with a Substantiated/Indicated Child Abuse/Neglect Allegation by Year	Unduplicated count of all children with a substantiated or indicated abuse/neglect allegation during the year
8	Number of Children Under Protective Supervision by Year	Unduplicated count of all children under court-ordered protective supervision during the year
9	Number of Placement Exits to Other Relatives by Year	Unduplicated count of children exiting to relative custody during the year
10	Placement with Relatives and Nonrelatives as of January 1 each Year	Snapshot of all children in unlicensed relative homes or unlicensed nonrelative homes, as of January 1 each year
11	Unpaid Placement Days per Year	Number of placement days with unlicensed relatives and unlicensed nonrelatives during the year
12	Children in Placement for more than 24 Months as of January 1 each Year	Snapshot of all children who have been in placement for more than 24 months and not in PPLA, PCC, or PS, as of January 1 each year
13	Children in PPLA or PCC/PS as of January 1 each Year	Snapshot of all children in placement with custody type of PPLA, PCC, or PS, as of January 1 each year
14	Number of Children in Subsidized Adoptions as of January 1 each Year	Snapshot of all children who are receiving adoption subsidies, excluding SAMS, as of January 1 each year

1.2.2.3 Monitoring SACWIS Integration

As previously mentioned, Ohio is in the process of converting FACSIS and county child welfare data to SACWIS. The advantages of SACWIS are that it standardizes data elements across counties and provides more descriptive values that will enhance the analysis of service

delivery and outcomes. Clients and services can be tracked across counties since the SACWIS client/case identification numbers remain with the client regardless of which county provides services. Clients can be linked to more than one case if the family composition changes or if they happen to be involved in more than one case. Adopted children will continue to be de-linked from the family of origin due to confidentiality. In addition, foster care placements and adoptive assistance are linked to the payment system, and invoices for provider services are generated within SACWIS.

The evaluation will not lose historical client records through the conversion. Critical data elements used by the evaluation team in earlier analyses will not be lost and in many cases will be enhanced. Although certain data element code values have no corresponding value in SACWIS and cannot be converted, all pre-SACWIS client ID's will be stored as reference numbers for the client in SACWIS so that data not converted to SACWIS can be linked. This will be helpful in linking FTM data to client records until SACWIS can be enhanced to record the FTM data. Kinship care will be identified and tracked in SACWIS even if the county does not have custody of the child, as long as the child receives services due to abuse/neglect or dependency. The Kinship Permanency Incentive Program, which is supported with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds and allows kin to apply for cash assistance, will not be entered into the SACWIS. The state has provided the evaluation team with documentation that maps all FACSIS data elements to SACWIS data elements.

The pilot SACWIS conversion in Muskingum County took place on August 7, 2006. The current SACWIS conversion schedule for all other counties began with Wave 1 on January 29, 2007, and will end with Wave 21 in November 2007 (the end date is subject to change). Each county is charged with reviewing a conversion dry run to validate and clean their data before the final move to SACWIS production. During the conversion, when some counties are still using FACSIS and others are converted to SACWIS, state staff will create files that contain FACSIS and SACWIS data element values for all the corresponding and converted service events. During and after conversion, the evaluation team will continue to receive the critical data files provided in the past. Soon after SACWIS conversion is complete, Westat will receive and review SACWIS output to determine if there were any data shifts on major variables needed in the evaluation – variables on case characteristics, placements, etc. The team will then determine whether any shifts will affect the analysis plan.

1.2.3 Institutional Review Board Process

Westat's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed issues related to the protection of human subjects for the entire study, beginning in July 2005 when the IRB exempted Westat's Participant Outcomes Analysis (POA) study because that study involves only administrative data and poses no risk to human subjects. In February 2006, the Westat IRB reviewed and approved HSRI's submission for the entire evaluation, and in December 2006 the IRB granted expedited approval of HSRI site visits. As required by the IRB, annually we will submit documentation for IRB review concerning protection of human subjects.

1.2.4 Reporting

The evaluation team has prepared three reports thus far: the evaluation plan (April 2005) and two progress reports (June 2005 and June 2006). This Interim Evaluation Report covers much of the information included in the progress reports, and frequently refers to the Evaluation Plan.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The next eight chapters of this Interim Evaluation Report present the activities and findings for each of the major studies comprising the evaluation, offering an overview of each study and its constituent parts, a description of the research methodology, an update on progress vis a vis the work plan, and initial results. Chapter 2 describes the Participant Outcomes Study, comprised of the trajectory analysis and placement outcome analysis. This chapter is presented first because the analyses utilize data from the first ProtectOhio Waiver. Chapters 3-8 use contemporary data to discuss the six separate investigations comprising the Process Implementation Study. For certain ones of these studies, results include not only process/implementation findings but also preliminary outcome analyses. Chapter 9 presents the Fiscal Outcomes Study, continuing the methodology used successfully in the first Waiver evaluation to examine early expenditure data from the second Waiver. The final chapter offers some conclusions and next steps for the evaluation.

For readability, detailed methodological descriptions and certain findings have been placed in the appendices.