

CHAPTER 6: YEAR 5 FINDINGS ON PERMANENCY AND SAFETY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws on the richness of county-level evaluation data and applies modeling techniques to help understand the Waiver's effects on children's permanency and safety in each demonstration county. In the *Fourth Annual Report*, as described in the preceding chapter, the study team compared overall outcomes for children in the 14 demonstration counties to those in the 14 comparison counties and compared pre-Waiver outcomes to outcomes after the Waiver was implemented. After adjusting for case mix and child characteristics in demonstration and comparison counties, the study team attributed any significant differences to the overall effects of the Waiver. In Year 5, the study team used a different analytic method, one which simulated a "counterfactual" measure (or an estimate of what would have happened had the Waiver not been in place). The study team then compared the counterfactual simulations with the actual distributions to estimate the Waiver's effects. Although unmeasured factors may still have influenced the findings, the counterfactual technique provides better estimates of Waiver effects for individual demonstration counties and for the 14 demonstration counties as a group. Note that the Year 4 and Year 5 findings constitute the primary findings of the evaluation, as was discussed in Chapter 5, while the Years 2 and 3 findings were preliminary.

Permanency. In Year 5, the study team focused on two permanency outcomes that were among the priority outcomes identified by the demonstration counties: *increase in permanency of children in foster care* and *reduction in length of stay in foster care*. These outcomes were of interest because achieving an increase in permanency was an overriding goal even before the Waiver (due to ASFA), and there were concerns that trying to reduce foster care usage might have adverse consequences for permanency. In the push to reduce placement, what has happened to permanency outcomes – for example, reunification, giving custody to relatives, or finding adoptive homes for children? Has pushing on one part of the child welfare system (e.g., length of stay) resulted in ripples or bulges elsewhere (e.g., more children going to relatives rather than back home)? To measure these outcomes, the study team analyzed (1) exit types for first placements (i.e., how the placements end – reunification, custody to relative, adoption, runaway, and other), and (2) length of stay for first placements.

Safety. For this final analysis, the study team focused on a priority safety outcome, *reduction in recurrence of child abuse and neglect*, and also examined running away, which was not a specific priority safety outcome but one of obvious concern. To measure the recurrence outcome, the study team focused on the re-entry rate after reunification

and the length of time between reunification and re-entry.¹ An additional evaluation activity, using a different data source and methodology, obtained some limited information on multiple case openings. Clearly, reducing placement days through more reunification would not be an effective or acceptable way to reduce costs, if it resulted in further maltreatment, placements, or case openings. Demonstration counties identified one objective of the Waiver as ensuring that the rate of recurrence of abuse and neglect does not worsen as an effect of the Waiver. The analyses provide evidence on whether the child safety objective is being met. In connection with safety, the study team also examined running away, which reflects a very small proportion of exits (about 1 percent of all exits from first placements under the Waiver) but is an outcome with serious safety implications. In general, due to data and resource constraints, the assessments of safety outcomes were more limited than the assessments of permanency outcomes and would benefit from additional study.

After describing the study team's approach in the Year 5 analysis, the chapter presents the characteristics of children entering placement during the study period. Following that, the chapter assesses the success of the Waiver as a whole by examining the overall Waiver effects (for the demonstration counties as a group) on exit types and placement duration. However, because many of the significant overall effects were driven by results in just a few counties, the chapter then presents county-level findings. The final section summarizes the Year 5 findings.

In prior years of the evaluation, analyses of aggregate data found that activities in the demonstration counties did not translate into substantially better outcomes. Thus, in Year 5, the study team focused on individual counties in addition to the overall analyses and strengthened the county-level methodology to document any Waiver effects (positive or negative) at the county level. The team summarizes significant county-level effects in this chapter; the next chapter presents case studies of several individual counties that enrich our understanding of the findings.

6.2 ANALYTIC APPROACH IN YEAR 5

For Year 5, the study team adopted an analytic approach that estimated county-specific Waiver effects for each of the 14 demonstration counties.² The Year 5 analysis involved

¹ The Year 4 analysis, presented in Chapter 5, found that the Waiver had no significant effect on the rate of re-entry after reunification. The Year 5 analysis used another approach to further assess whether the Waiver had a negative effect on children's safety.

² However, the findings on Waiver effects are presented for only 13 counties. In the past year, Hamilton County conducted a major data clean-up and implemented some data entry changes. The new data set resulted in large changes in placement and length-of-stay findings, especially for children whose first placement was in residential settings. The modeling had already been completed and could not be re-done, so the Hamilton findings are not presented.

developing models³ for each exit type, then using these models to estimate what would have happened in each Waiver county if the Waiver had not been in place – that is, to establish the “counterfactual.” See Appendix III for more information on the modeling methodology.

The Year 5 counterfactual estimates built on the experience of children in the 14 comparison counties who were similar to the children in the 14 Waiver counties. Thus, this approach was based on the entire comparison group, taking into account the effects of child characteristics (but not county differences) and comparing children with similar characteristics as defined in the FACSIS data. The methodology is fully explained in Appendix III; briefly, the counterfactual model estimated what would have happened in each Waiver county in the absence of the Waiver, based on what actually happened in the comparison counties. The analysis compared “actual” distributions, which included imputations⁴ for the censored cases, with counterfactual distributions, which estimated what would have happened in the absence of the Waiver. It is important to note that, although the counterfactual analysis is an accurate assessment of the effects of the Waiver in the demonstration counties, it should not be used for projecting Waiver effects statewide or beyond. The experience of implementing a Waiver in only 14 counties is not sufficient for extrapolating beyond the 14 counties.

The study team considered using a “pure county” approach in Year 5, comparable to that used in the fiscal analysis, which would generate an estimate of change in each demonstration county. As was discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, only aggregate (rather than child-level) expenditure data were available for the fiscal analysis, while the child-level administrative data available for the participant outcome study allowed statistical modeling that controlled for child characteristics and used the experience of both demonstration and comparison counties. An estimate of change is not the same as an estimate of a Waiver effect because it leaves open the question of how each demonstration county would have changed in the absence of the Waiver. Thus, the team incorporated the comparison counties into the counterfactual analyses to allow estimation of the unique effect of the Waiver in each demonstration county.

County-specific effects were estimated for the following outcomes: exit type from first placement, duration of first placement, exit type from first placements that began in residential settings, duration of first placements that began in residential settings, re-entry from reunification, and duration of reunification where there was re-entry from reunification. (Note that this differs from the Year 4 analysis, which estimated the

³ The models used were competing risks stratified proportional hazards models. See Hosmer and Lemeshow, 1999; Hougaard, 2000; and Vermunt, 1997.

⁴ As was explained in Chapter 5, some children were still in placement at the end of the study period (February 28, 2002) and it was not known how long these children would stay in their placements. To use the information from these “censored” cases, the study team imputed the outcomes (exit type and date) using information from survival analysis modeling that took into account child and case factors that could influence the length of placement and placement outcomes.

average effect of the Waiver on the aggregate of Waiver counties, sometimes with different effects for counties of differing size and urbanicity.) Although the study team separately estimated exit types and duration of placements for first placements that began in residential settings, the findings cannot be presented here because they were invalidated by revisions in Hamilton County's data set. As discussed in Chapter 5, inconsistencies and variations in data entry or definitions can strongly influence the results.

Table 6.1 shows the raw numbers of first placements and types of exit, by county, over the entire Waiver period. The Year 5 analyses presented later in this chapter are based on these placements. As noted in the previous chapter, the study team analyzed first placements because they are the majority of placements and their outcomes are not complicated by previous placement history. The table presents frequencies of first placements by exit type, for each demonstration county separately and for all demonstration counties. These placements began at some point during the study period January 1, 1998, through February 28, 2002 (the date of censoring), with imputations for placements that had not yet ended as of the date of censoring. The exit types in Table 6.1 correspond to these placements. Overall almost 18,500 children started their first placements during the study period, with reunification the most common exit type (8,387 out of 18,498 placements, or 45 percent). Note that the table includes only children in their first placement, and it includes placements over the entire Waiver period, thus averaging any changes in exit patterns that may have occurred over time during the course of the Waiver.

Table 6.1: Number of First Placements, by County and Exit Type						
County	First Placements Ending With:					
	Reunification	Custody to Relative	Adoption	Runaway	Other^a	Total^b
Ashtabula	224	116	57	0	66	463
Belmont	140	23	24	1	58	245
Clark	311	144	78	19	110	663
Crawford	89	35	18	0	71	213
Fairfield	128	44	47	1	35	254
Franklin	4,420	1,351	643	108	1,286	7,809
Greene	161	74	40	1	66	342
Hamilton ^c	1,066	678	273	35	2,537	4,589
Lorain	362	205	108	3	106	785
Medina	102	14	15	1	33	166
Muskingum	143	93	26	0	45	308
Portage	189	112	42	7	67	417
Richland	314	120	87	1	119	641
Stark	736	345	259	14	249	1,603
Total^b	8,387	3,354	1,716	193	4,848	18,498

^aIncludes placements ending in emancipation, transfer to another institution, court termination, guardianship to unrelated third party, or death, or those with missing or unclear information on exit type.

^bCounty figures may not sum exactly to the totals due to rounding.

^cThe Hamilton County placements in Table 6.1 are based on the original data set, not the revised one, so should be viewed as unreliable. They are presented here because those are the cases used in the counterfactual modeling. The tables on Waiver effects in the remainder of the chapter do not show Hamilton County findings.

6.3 CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Numerous characteristics of the counties and the caseloads can influence permanency and safety outcomes and, if not accounted for, lead to distorted findings on Waiver effects in individual counties. For example, large urban counties may experience demands, stresses, and resources that are very different from those in small rural counties. Counties with growing caseloads of teenagers may achieve very different outcomes than those with

fewer teenagers and more infants. The county-level estimates of the permanency and safety outcomes took into account, or adjusted for, these and other case characteristics.

In this section, the study team discusses significant county-level⁵ changes in relevant case characteristics, from the pre-Waiver to the Waiver period. In addition, the team summarizes county-level changes in the settings of the first placements. Placement setting can give an indication of severity of needs, availability of resources, and other factors. The information on case characteristics and settings of first placements provides an overall picture of changes from before the Waiver period (1991-1997) to the end of the study period (1998-February 2002) in the demonstration counties. Note that in the Year 5 findings, the section on caseload characteristics and settings for first placements compares pre-Waiver and Waiver periods (instead of offering year-by-year findings as in the Year 4 report).

6.3.1 Children's Demographic Characteristics

Table 6.2 presents changes in the demographic characteristics of children in their first placements in demonstration counties.⁶ The table shows significant increases from the pre-Waiver to Waiver period (↑), or significant decreases (↓), or no significant effect (–). Only the largest county experienced significant increases in the proportion of males, while the rest experienced no significant changes in gender patterns. Five counties experienced significant declines in the proportion of teenagers, and only one experienced an increase. The proportion of infants increased in three counties. The proportion of white children increased in four counties, including the largest county, while the proportion of black children increased in one county.

⁵ The overall case characteristic findings from the Year 4 report are not presented in this section or in their corresponding tables in Appendix IV. That is because the revisions in Hamilton County's data confounded the Year 4 findings. This section presents county-level results for all counties except Hamilton.

⁶ Table 6.2 is derived from Table IV-1 in Appendix IV, which presents county-level data for each of the two time periods (pre-Waiver and Waiver).

Table 6.2: Changes in Demographic Characteristics of Children in First Placements in Demonstration Counties, from Pre-Waiver to Waiver Period								
County	Sex	Age				Race		
	Male	<1	1-4	5-13	14-17	White	Black	Other
Ashtabula	–	–	↓	↑	–	↑	–	↓
Belmont	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Clark	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	↓
Crawford	–	–	–	↑	↓	–	–	–
Fairfield	–	–	↑	–	↓	–	–	–
Franklin	↑	↑	–	–	–	↑	–	↓
Greene	–	↑	–	↓	–	–	–	↓
Lorain	–	–	–	–	↓	–	–	↓
Medina	–	–	–	↑	↓	–	–	↓
Muskingum	–	–	–	–	↑	–	–	–
Portage	–	–	–	–	–	↑	↓	↓
Richland	–	↑	–	–	↓	↓	↑	↓
Stark	–	–	–	↑	–	↑	↓	↓

Summary: The child demographics varied widely among the demonstration counties. The largest county experienced an increase in males, infants, and white children. Five counties experienced decreases in teenagers, while only one experienced an increase. The proportion of infants increased in three counties. One county experienced an increase in the proportion of black children, while four experienced an increase in the proportion of white children.

6.3.2 Abuse/Neglect and Disabilities

As described in previous reports, some demonstration counties enlisted the Waiver to deal with their growing concern about court referrals. By proxy, children **without** abuse neglect status represent court referrals. Table 6.3 presents findings on changes in abuse/neglect and disabilities from the pre-Waiver to the Waiver period.⁷ The table shows significant increases from the pre-Waiver to Waiver period (↑), or significant decreases (↓), or no significant effect (–). The proportion of children who had been

⁷ Table 6.3 is derived from Table IV-2 in Appendix IV, which presents county-level data for each of the two time periods (pre-Waiver and Waiver).

sexually abused declined in nine of the 13 demonstration counties shown. Four counties experienced increases in the proportion of children who were alleged victims of abuse or neglect, and two counties experienced decreases. The proportion of children with cognitive disabilities declined in six counties, and the proportion of children with physical disabilities declined in two.

Table 6.3: Changes in Abuse/Neglect and Disabilities of Children in First Placements in Demonstration Counties, from Pre-Waiver to Waiver Period				
County	Abuse/Neglect and Disabilities			
	Sexually Abused	Alleged Victim of Abuse or Neglect	Cognitive Disabilities	Physical Disabilities
Ashtabula	–	↑	–	–
Belmont	↓	–	↓	–
Clark	↓	↓	↓	↓
Crawford	–	↑	–	–
Fairfield	↓	–	–	–
Franklin	↓	–	↓	↓
Greene	–	↓	–	–
Lorain	↓	↑	–	–
Medina	↓	–	–	–
Muskingum	↓	–	↓	–
Portage	↓	–	↓	–
Richland	–	–	↓	–
Stark	↓	↑	–	–

Summary: In many counties, the proportions of children who had been sexually abused and those with cognitive or physical disabilities declined. The proportion of children who were alleged victims of abuse or neglect increased in four counties and decreased in two others. This reflects some shift in the non-abuse/neglect population, including court referrals, which counties found more difficult to serve.

6.3.3 Settings of First Placements

Table 6.4 shows changes in the settings of first placements in the demonstration counties, from the pre-Waiver to the Waiver period.⁸ Assessing Waiver effects on placement setting is important in examining issues such as use of less restrictive (and less expensive) settings as a result of changes in practice under the Waiver. It can also indicate changes in severity of needs. The table shows significant increases from the pre-Waiver to Waiver period (↑), or significant decreases (↓), or no significant effect (–). Placement in residential treatment centers significantly decreased in three counties and increased in one county. The use of group homes increased in two counties (including the largest county), and it decreased in two counties. The proportion of first placement settings in foster homes declined significantly in five demonstration counties and increased in five, including the largest. The use of nonlicensed nonrelatives⁹ increased in four small counties. The use of relatives declined in three counties, including the largest, and increased in four counties. Placements in detention facilities or hospitals increased in five counties, including the largest. Thus, there appears to be no clear trend toward the use of less restrictive settings. Some counties did reduce placement in residential treatment centers and several increased their use of nonlicensed nonrelatives, but there was also an increase in the use of detention facilities or hospitals.

⁸ Table 6.4 is derived from Table IV-3 in Appendix IV, which presents county-level data for each of the two time periods (pre-Waiver and Waiver).

⁹ “Nonlicensed nonrelative” includes family friends, godparents, etc. In Ohio, county staff refer to this as “kinship placement.” The study team use “nonlicensed nonrelative” to distinguish this category from nonlicensed relative and the modern connotation of kinship.

Table 6.4: Changes in Settings of First Placements in Demonstration Counties from Pre-Waiver to Waiver Period								
County	Setting of Child's First Placement							
	Residential Treatment Center	Group Home	Foster Home	Nonlicensed Nonrelative	Relative	Independent Living	Detention Facility or Hospital	Adoptive Home
Ashtabula	↓	–	↑	–	–	–	↓	–
Belmont	–	↑	↓	–	↑	–	–	–
Clark	–	–	–	–	–	–	↑	–
Crawford	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Fairfield	–	–	↓	↑	↑	–	↑	–
Franklin	↓	↑	↑	–	↓	–	↑	–
Greene	↑	–	–	–	↑	–	–	–
Lorain	↓	–	↑	↑	–	–	–	–
Medina	–	↓	↑	–	↓	–	–	–
Muskingum	–	–	↓	–	↑	–	–	–
Portage	–	–	↓	↑	–	–	–	–
Richland	–	–	↑	–	↓	–	↑	–
Stark	–	↓	↓	↑	–	–	↑	–

Summary: The proportion of first placements in residential treatment centers increased in one county and decreased in three. The use of group homes increased in two counties and decreased in two. Use of foster homes increased in five counties and decreased in five. Placements with nonlicensed nonrelatives increased in four counties. Placements with relatives increased in four counties and decreased in three. Placements in detention facilities or hospitals increased in five counties. There was no evident trend toward use of less restrictive placement settings.

6.4 OVERALL EFFECTS ON EXIT TYPES

Policy makers in the child welfare field have expressed concern that an emphasis on reducing placement days might influence where children go when they exit care and result in decreased reunification, as workers search for alternative permanent settings for children in order to achieve shorter lengths of stay in foster care. The Year 5 analysis found that, for demonstration counties overall, the Waiver did have a significant effect on all types of exit from first placement except adoption. Indeed, fewer placements ended in

reunification, and the placements that, in the absence of the Waiver, would have ended in reunification ended instead in custody to relatives, running away, and other exit types (not including adoption). In Table 6.5, the “Actual Under the Waiver” column shows actual frequencies of each exit type during the Waiver period, with imputations for censored cases. The “Counterfactual Projection” column shows estimates of frequencies of each exit type if the Waiver had not been implemented in that county, adjusted for child characteristics and based on what actually happened in the comparison counties (using the modeling methodology detailed in Appendix III). The “Waiver Effect” column shows the difference between the actual frequency and the counterfactual estimate.¹⁰ Asterisks indicate statistically significant findings regarding the Waiver effects.

Table 6.6 shows that, for the demonstration counties overall¹¹:

- The Waiver had the effect of decreasing exits to reunification overall by over 11 percentage points (which was driven by a decrease that occurred only in the largest county). The actual rate of reunification was about 45 percent under the Waiver, and the counterfactual models indicate that it would have been nearly 57 percent without the Waiver. The specific reasons for this are unclear; further study would be helpful to clarify whether there were Waiver-associated changes in screening, risk assessment, or other practices that decreased the rate of reunification. Some counties claim that many children who would have been reunified in the absence of the Waiver are being kept out of placement and supported with extra services at home. This is consistent with the Waiver objectives, but not easily measured in FACSIS.
- The Waiver increased other exits (emancipation, transfer to another institution, court termination,¹² guardianship, or those with missing or unclear information) by 7 percentage points, to about 26 percent. In some counties, this may partially reflect an increased use of voluntary placement agreements, where a parent voluntarily places a child outside the home without a formal termination of rights. When the voluntary agreement is terminated, the child returns to the parent. Similarly, some of the other cases that ended as court terminations are reunifications with which the PSCA disagrees. Some of these exits may be similar to a reunification exit, although they are not classified as such.

¹⁰ Table IV-4 in Appendix IV shows confidence intervals for the Waiver effects.

¹¹ Note that Hamilton County’s data are included in the counterfactual analyses in Sections 6.4 and 6.5, even though Hamilton was not included in the caseload trends discussions. Although the changes in Hamilton’s data invalidated the analyses of first placements in residential settings, the overall counterfactual analyses of all first placements were not substantially affected. County-level results in Sections 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8 do not include Hamilton County.

¹² “Court termination” is defined in FACSIS documentation as “an action taken by the court, upon motion, to terminate the agency’s custody against the recommendation of the agency.” although there are indications that the coding was not always applied correctly. This population may bear further study, since it reflects tensions between PCSAs and the courts about permanency alternatives.

- The Waiver increased exits where custody was given to relatives by nearly 4 percentage points, to about 18 percent. This is consistent with a current practice trend that focuses on using relatives as resources, with the result of creating extended legal families. It also may reflect the use of voluntary agreements discussed above, since children with voluntary agreements are often placed with relatives.
- The Waiver increased the runaway rate by half a percentage point, to about 1 percent. The runaway rate is further discussed later in this chapter.
- There was no significant effect on the adoption rate. This finding was not surprising, since there are several federal and State adoption initiatives in which all Ohio counties are participating and which began prior to the Waiver. Thus, even if a county experienced an increase in adoptions, it could not be attributed to the Waiver because a similar effect was widely experienced in other counties (demonstration and comparison).

Table 6.5: Waiver Effects on Exit Types from First Placements for All Demonstration Counties			
First Placements Ending With:	Percentage of Cases		Waiver Effect
	Actual Under the Waiver	Counterfactual Projection	
Reunification	45.34	56.74	-11.40*
Custody to Relative	18.12	14.46	3.66*
Adoption	9.26	9.26	0.00
Runaway	1.04	0.54	0.50*
Other ^a	26.22	19.02	7.20*
Total	100.00	100.00	N/A

^aIncludes placements ending in emancipation, transfer to another institution, court termination, guardianship, or death, or those with missing or unclear information on exit type

*Statistically significant Waiver effect

Summary: The Waiver had a significant effect on all types of exit from first placement except adoption. The rate of reunification was 11 percentage points lower (45 percent of all exits under the Waiver) than it would have been without the Waiver, while custody to relatives, running away, and other exit types (not including adoption) together increased by that amount.

6.5 OVERALL EFFECTS ON PLACEMENT DURATION

One of the priority outcomes for demonstration counties was to reduce children’s length of stay in foster care, in the effort to both free up placement resources and enhance children’s permanency. To more fully understand the Waiver’s effects, the study team analyzed placement duration separately for each exit type to see whether the effects differed depending on where children were going after placement. It is important to note that length of stay in placement can be influenced by many factors. These include system changes, such as those introduced by the Waiver and other policy changes (including ASFA). Length of stay also might be influenced by county characteristics, such as whether the county is rural or urban, or has a small or large population. And length of stay can be influenced by changes in characteristics of the children in the child welfare system. As previously described, the analyses controlled for some of these factors (whether the counties were small rural, small urban, or large urban, and the following child characteristics: age, sex, race, medical conditions and disabilities, type of placement, allegations of abuse or neglect, and whether the child had been sexually abused).

When analyzing all exits together, the Waiver had a small but significant effect on the duration of first placements (which was driven by a decrease that occurred only in the largest county), shortening the median length of stay by nearly half a month, as shown in Table 6.6.¹³ The Waiver had no significant effect on median durations when examining specific exit types.¹⁴

Table 6.6 Waiver Effects on Duration of First Placements for All Demonstration Counties			
First Placements Ending With:	Median Placement Duration in Months		Waiver Effect
	Actual Under the Waiver	Counterfactual Projection	
Reunification	3.04	2.90	0.14
Custody to Relative	6.56	6.28	0.28
Adoption	31.78	32.00	-0.22
Runaway	6.96	9.24	-2.28
Any type of exit	4.50	4.90	-0.40*

*Statistically significant Waiver effect

¹³ Table IV-5 in Appendix IV shows confidence intervals for the Waiver effects.

¹⁴ Note that Table 6.6, and Table 6.8 later, present median durations only, rather than the quartile analysis presented in the Fourth Annual Report. Although this provides less nuance, it greatly simplifies the tables while still showing Waiver effects on duration.

This overall effect of the Waiver on duration in first placements is consistent with findings from the caseworker survey (see Chapter 2). Significantly more demonstration county workers reported receiving various types of training to expedite permanency,¹⁵ which may contribute to their ability to move children out of placement more quickly.

Summary: The Waiver shortened the overall median duration of first placements by nearly half a month, when considering all exit types together. There were no significant effects on exit types considered separately.

6.6 COUNTY-LEVEL EFFECTS ON EXIT TYPES

The overall Waiver findings are often driven by Waiver effects in just a few counties, so this section presents the county-level Waiver effects and highlights where they differ from overall findings. The 14 demonstration counties implemented the Waiver in different ways and through varied activities and initiatives, which had their own influences on the outcomes. The case studies in the next chapter provide details on some diverse county experiences with the Waiver and illustrate how different applications of the Waiver can result in different evaluation findings.

Table 6.7 presents county-level findings on significant Waiver effects on exit types.¹⁶ The table shows whether the Waiver significantly increased (↑) or significantly decreased (↓) placements ending in the exit types, or whether it had no significant effect (–). The effects include:

- The Waiver significantly increased the percentage of first placements that ended with custody to relatives in six of the 13 demonstration counties and decreased it in one county.
- The Waiver significantly increased runaways in three counties, although the overall effect was small (+0.50, from Table 6.5).
- The Waiver decreased reunifications in the largest county.
- The Waiver increased adoptions in one county, with no overall effect.
- The Waiver increased “other” exit types in one county (the largest) and decreased them in two others, for an overall increase (+7.20, from Table 6.5).

¹⁵ Three types of training showed significant differences: permanency in general (39 percent of demonstration workers compared to 30 percent of comparison site workers), HB484 (35 percent versus 23 percent), and ASFA (26 percent versus 17 percent). In addition, demonstration workers more often reported receiving on-the-job training, 86 percent compared to 80 percent for comparison county caseworkers.

¹⁶ Table IV-4 in Appendix IV presents county-level tables on exits from first placements, including confidence intervals for county-specific Waiver effects.

Table 6.7: County-Level Waiver Effects on Exit Types from First Placements					
County	Exit Type				
	Reunification	Custody to Relative	Adoption	Runaway	Other^a
Ashtabula	–	–	–	–	–
Belmont	–	↓	–	–	–
Clark	–	↑	–	↑	↓
Crawford	–	–	–	–	–
Fairfield	–	–	↑	–	–
Franklin	↓	↑	–	↑	↑
Greene	–	↑	–	–	–
Lorain	–	↑	–	–	↓
Medina	–	–	–	–	–
Muskingum	–	↑	–	–	–
Portage	–	↑	–	–	–
Richland	–	–	–	–	–
Stark	–	–	–	↑	–
Overall	↓	↑	–	↑	↑

^aIncludes placements ending in emancipation, transfer to another institution, court termination, guardianship, or death, or those with missing or unclear information on exit type.

Summary: Nearly half of the demonstration counties observed a significant increase in custody to relatives under the Waiver. In three counties, the Waiver significantly increased runaways. Only one county observed a significant decrease in reunifications, and that was the largest county, leading to a significant overall effect on reunifications.

6.7 COUNTY-LEVEL EFFECTS ON PLACEMENT DURATION

Table 6.8 presents the Waiver’s county-level effects on median length of stay in foster care.¹⁷ As with exit types, overall findings on placement duration tend to be driven by results in just a few counties, and the case studies in the next chapter will help explain

¹⁷ Table IV-5 in Appendix IV presents county-level data on placement duration, including confidence intervals for county-specific Waiver effects.

significant findings (or lack of them) in light of the activities that took place in several individual counties. Table 6.8 specifies whether the Waiver significantly shortened (↓) or significantly lengthened (↑) the median amount of time in placement for each exit type, or whether it had no significant effect (-). The effects include:

- The Waiver significantly lengthened placements ending with reunification in three counties and shortened them in one (the largest county), so that the overall effect was not significant.
- The Waiver slightly lengthened placements ending with custody to relatives in one county, although the overall effect was not significant.
- The Waiver shortened placements ending in adoption in two counties, but there was no overall significant effect.
- The Waiver lengthened placements with any type of exit in two counties and shortened them in one other (the largest), so that the overall effect was to shorten the placements.

Table 6.8: County-Level Waiver Effects on Median Duration of First Placements					
County	Exit Type				
	Reunification	Custody to Relative	Adoption	Runaway	Any Type of Exit
Ashtabula	-	-	-	-	-
Belmont	-	-	-	-	-
Clark	-	-	-	-	-
Crawford	-	-	-	-	-
Fairfield	↑	-	-	-	↑
Franklin	↓	-	-	-	↓
Greene	-	-	-	-	-
Lorain	-	-	-	-	-
Medina	-	-	-	-	-
Muskingum	-	-	↓	-	-
Portage	-	-	-	-	-
Richland	↑	-	↓	-	-
Stark	↑	↑	-	-	↑
Overall	-	-	-	-	↓

Summary: The Waiver lengthened placements ending in reunification in three counties and shortened those placements in the largest county. In one county, it lengthened placements ending in custody to relatives. In two other counties, it sped up placements ending in adoption. The overall effect of shorter placements (when considering any type of exit) was driven by the effect in the largest county.

6.8 EFFECTS ON RE-ENTRY AND CASE OPENINGS

This section discusses two safety outcomes examined in Year 5 (re-entry from reunification and multiple case openings), while the next section discusses running away as a safety outcome. Reunification with family is a permanent and successful outcome, as long as the child successfully remains with the family thereafter. Using counterfactual modeling, the study team explored what happened after children were reunited with their family. The questions addressed by the counterfactual analysis are: Did the Waiver have an impact on the rate of re-entry after reunification? Did it have an impact on the length of time children remained reunified with their family before re-entering foster care?

The counterfactual safety analysis used data only on first placements and reunifications. Using a different method and source of information, the evaluators also learned about another aspect of child safety: multiple case openings in demonstration vs. comparison counties. The two types of analysis present somewhat different results regarding child safety under the Waiver, although the findings are not directly comparable due to the differences in methods. The counterfactual modeling did not find a negative Waiver impact on re-entry of reunified children, while the other analysis found a significant difference in multiple case openings in demonstration and comparison counties (although it remains unclear whether this can be attributed to the Waiver and the extent to which this poses a safety risk to children).

The Year 5 counterfactual analysis found no significant Waiver effects on rates of re-entry after reunification, either in specific counties or for the demonstration counties overall. In other words, the Waiver has not worsened, to a detectable degree, the rate of re-entry after reunification from first placements. This had been a fear of policymakers – that the desire to reduce length of stay might cause agencies to send children home before it was safe to do so. However, the demonstration counties appear to be achieving the objective of not increasing the re-entry rate for this group of children, even though the rate is not decreasing. Table 6.9 shows that, overall, 37 percent of children reunified with their families re-entered placement, ranging from a low of 23 percent to a high of nearly 42 percent.¹⁸ Table 6.9 does not present counterfactual projections because there were no significant Waiver effects.

¹⁸ Table IV-6 in Appendix IV presents county-level data on re-entry after reunification and median duration before re-entry, including confidence intervals for county-specific Waiver effects.

Table 6.9: Re-entry After Reunification from First Placement ^a		
County	Actual Rate Under the Waiver (%)	Median Duration Before Re-Entry (months)
Ashtabula	26.76	15.32
Belmont	36.10	11.46
Clark	27.30	9.22
Crawford	23.08	18.40
Fairfield	37.44	8.12
Franklin	41.64	9.84
Greene	30.44	14.04
Lorain	23.70	12.88
Medina	38.60	16.22
Muskingum	35.38	10.08
Portage	31.70	11.90
Richland	38.40	13.46
Stark	32.44	15.56
Overall	37.44	12.08

^aThese include imputed re-entries for actual reunifications, but do not include imputed re-entries for imputed reunifications.

Table 6.9 also presents results of the counterfactual analysis of the median duration of reunification before re-entry. Overall, children remained reunited with their families about 1 year before re-entering care; the median duration ranged from a low of 8 months to a high of over 18 months. As with the re-entry rates, the counterfactual analysis showed no significant Waiver effects on duration of reunification before re-entry.

A new source of information presents the child safety picture from a different angle. The question of whether demonstration county cases were more likely to have multiple openings was briefly addressed in the caseworker survey (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). Significantly more demonstration county workers reported that their sampled case had been opened four or more times (32 percent compared to 24 percent for comparison cases). This is a much broader view and should not be directly compared to the counterfactual analysis, which considers only children in their first placement and looks only at re-entry to placement after reunification, whereas the caseworkers may be responding to children in later and other types of placement episodes, and/or cases that re-open to agency services without necessarily going to placement. Nonetheless, it offers

an interesting counterpoint to the counterfactual results, suggesting that demonstration counties tended to close cases more quickly, leading to a greater proportion of those cases re-opening, sometimes multiple times. Thus, the still-scanty evidence does not allow a definitive conclusion regarding the Waiver's impact on child safety.

Summary: There were no significant Waiver effects on rates of re-entry following reunification from first placements, either in specific counties or for the demonstration counties overall. Overall, where there was re-entry after reunification, the reunifications lasted about 1 year before the re-entry, with no significant Waiver effect. The demonstration counties appear to be achieving the objective of not worsening the re-entry rate, even though it is not improving. However, demonstration counties may be experiencing more cases that had been opened four or more times, which suggests that demonstration counties tended to close cases more quickly. Thus, the still-scanty evidence concerning child safety is inconclusive.

6.9 EFFECTS ON RUNNING AWAY

Running away is not a permanency option and certainly raises serious safety concerns, but it is an exit that older children, especially, occasionally choose. While rare, it is a definitive failure of a placement. The percentage of runaways is an indicator of a PCSA's capacity to place children in appropriate settings with appropriate services. A child who ran away from a placement and did not return for 30 days was documented in FACSIS as a placement that ended through the runaway event. If the child returned to PCSA care after that time, then the FACSIS system would show that a second placement episode had begun. Because it is the older children who run away, this analysis included only the children in first placement who were age 10 and older when placed. Details of the Waiver effects include:

- Three counties and the overall group experienced significant Waiver effects that increased the incidence of running away, as was shown in Table 6.7.
- Overall, the Waiver increased the runaway rate from all first placements by half a percentage point, to about 1 percent, which was statistically significant and represented a doubling of the runaway rate (from Table IV-4 in Appendix IV).
- There were no significant Waiver effects on the duration of placement before running away, as was shown in Table 6.8.

Summary: Although running away was a rare event, the Waiver did double the overall runaway rate, from half a percentage point to 1 percent, with statistically significant increases in three counties.

6.10 SUMMARY

The Year 5 analysis used counterfactual modeling to estimate what would have happened to children in their first placement episode in terms of exit types and length of stay if the Waiver had not been in place. Since the modeling controlled for county and caseload characteristics that were likely to influence outcomes, and incorporated information from the comparison counties, the difference between the counterfactual and actual distributions are an estimate of Waiver effects on permanency and safety. The modeling was based on the almost 18,500 children who were in their first placements in the demonstration counties during the study period.

First, the chapter reviewed some caseload characteristic trends to provide a context for the permanency and safety outcomes. Trends in child demographics varied widely among the counties. The largest county experienced significant increases in the proportions of males, infants, and white children. In many counties the proportions of children who had been sexually abused and those with cognitive or physical disabilities declined. Finally, the placement settings changed somewhat from the pre-Waiver to the Waiver periods, although there appears to be no clear trend toward the use of less restrictive settings (which is a potential outcome of trying to reduce costs and a possible indicator of severity of needs). Some counties did reduce placement in residential treatment centers and several increased their use of nonlicensed nonrelatives, but there was also an increase in the use of detention facilities or hospitals.

The Year 5 analysis closely examined exit types because of concerns that attempts to reduce placement costs might influence where children went when they exited care. In trying to shorten children's placements, are workers more reluctant to send children home and more likely to use other exits such as custody to relatives? Indeed, the Waiver did have a significant effect on all types of exit from first placement except adoption, although that result was driven by the effects in the largest county. Fewer placements ended in reunification, and more placements ended in custody to relatives, running away, and "other" types of exits (which include emancipation, transfer to another institution, court termination, guardianship, or those with missing or unclear information on exit type).

The Year 5 analysis also examined length of stay, since reducing placement duration was a high priority of the demonstration counties. This objective was met, to an extent: although there were no significant Waiver effects on specific exit types, overall the Waiver shortened the median duration of first placements by nearly half a month, when considering all exit types together (and again, this result was driven by the effects in the largest county). Note that the Year 5 finding on length of stay differs somewhat from that in Year 4, which indicated that the overall effect of the Waiver was to shorten the median length of placement by 1.7 months. Although the different methodologies produced different estimates of the magnitude of the Waiver effect on overall length of placement, both approaches found that the Waiver did shorten placements.

The Waiver was a state project and, thus, the study team assessed outcomes for the overall project, but there were some interesting differences between findings overall and those at the level of individual counties that bear highlighting. For example, although overall there was a significant decrease in reunifications, that decrease occurred only in the largest county. None of the other counties had a significant change in rate of reunification. And the significant increase in runaways that occurred overall actually was observed in only three demonstration counties. Supporting the overall increase in custody to relatives, nearly half the demonstration counties observed a significant increase in this exit type.

Similarly, although there was no overall significant effect on length of stay for placements ending in reunification, the Waiver actually significantly lengthened those placements in four counties and shortened them only in the largest county. And in two counties, the Waiver lengthened placements ending in custody to relatives, in spite of no overall effect. In two other counties, the Waiver sped up adoptions. The overall effect of shorter placements when considering any type of exit was largely driven by the effects in the largest county.

The Year 5 analysis examined the safety outcomes of reunification and re-entry, multiple case openings, and runaway, and found mixed results. Maintaining the safety of children in the child welfare system was a major objective of the Waiver, and there was concern that, if children were returned home more often and more readily in order to reduce placement costs, recidivism rates might worsen under the Waiver. However, the demonstration counties appeared to be achieving the objective of not worsening the rate of re-entry after reunification from first placement, even though the rate is not decreasing. (Of course, the Waiver decreased the rate at which children were returned home, suggesting that those children most likely to fail at reunification were perhaps not being reunified at all, which may have helped prevent the re-entry rate from worsening.) Overall, where there was re-entry after reunification, these children were able to remain at home about one year before re-entering foster care, and that duration was not significantly influenced by the Waiver.

However, demonstration counties had significantly more multiple case openings, suggesting that demonstration counties tended to close cases more quickly, leading to a greater proportion of those cases re-opening, sometimes multiple times. Thus, the possibly inconsistent findings on the re-entry rate and the rate of multiple case openings do not allow a definitive conclusion regarding the Waiver's impact on child safety.

The final Year 5 safety analysis focused on the runaway rate. This analysis showed that, although running away was a rare event, the Waiver did double the overall runaway rate, with significant increases in three counties.