

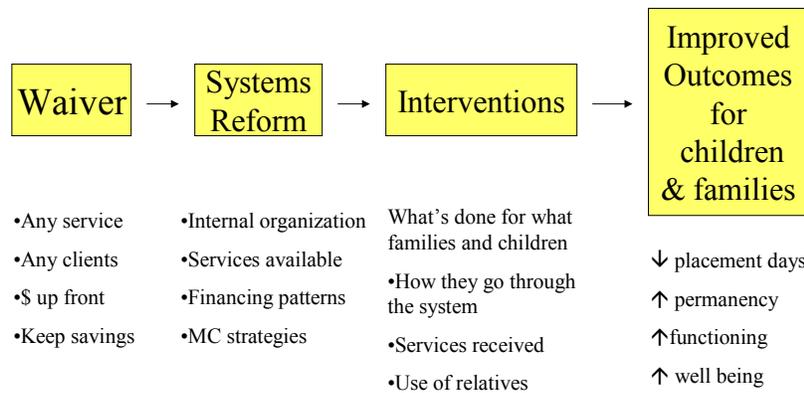
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

This chapter presents a summary of findings from the five-year evaluation, poses additional research questions, and discusses possible directions for continued work.

8.1 MAJOR FINDINGS

The core hypothesis underlying Ohio’s Title IV-E Waiver is that changes to federal child welfare eligibility and cost reimbursement rules will change purchasing decisions and service utilization patterns in ways that are favorable to children, families and communities. ProtectOhio counties as a group seek to adopt managed care strategies to reform child welfare practice, leading to reductions in the use of foster care and improvements in permanency for children. This broad statement of purpose is illustrated in Exhibit 8.1.

Exhibit 8.1 ProtectOhio Logic Model



Counties participating in the Waiver traded guaranteed, unlimited, fee-for-service federal contributions to foster care board and maintenance costs for certain children, for a fixed amount of money that could be used for all child welfare services for any child. This trade had three facets for demonstration counties. First, the Waiver gave county administrators the opportunity to treat federal Title IV-E revenue as a source of flexible funding that could be allocated to a range of child welfare services that normally could not be supported with Title IV-E funding. The Waiver addressed the prevailing belief that restricting the use of Title IV-E funding to foster care created a disincentive for reducing foster care expenditures. Without the Waiver, counties would "lose" federal Title IV-E funding if the county agency was able to reduce foster care expenditures. Under the Waiver, counties would be able to retain this federal Title IV-E funding for other child welfare purposes.

Second, county administrators were expected to take more action to reduce foster care expenditures in ways that were favorable to children, families and communities than were

comparison counties. This would be done by making management and program changes within current resources or investing flexible funds in service alternatives designed to reduce admissions to foster care, reduce length of stay in foster care, and reduce the use of high-cost placements. The federal share and local “matching” share of reductions in foster care expenditures, available as a result of the Waiver, would allow county administrators to either pay back investments they had made to reduce foster care utilization or to further diversify investments in services other than foster care, strengthen families and communities, and further reduce the need for foster care.

Third, this trade exposed county administrators to new risks. At a minimum, county administrators risked that the fixed amount of money received through the Waiver would be less than the county would have received under normal Title IV-E reimbursement rules. If foster care expenditures did not change at the same rate as the control counties during the Waiver period, the county would lose revenue as a result of Waiver participation. In addition, county administrators risked the amount they had invested in services intended to reduce foster care expenditures. If foster care expenditures did not go down, these investments would not be paid for by reductions in foster care and would have to be funded by another source of revenue.

In the course of the five-year evaluation, the study team explored county-level changes related to 29 “priority outcomes” (Table 1.3). Understood in the language of the Waiver logic model, these 29 outcomes can be seen to represent a large set of system reforms and interventions, as well as outcomes for children and families. The following section summarizes how the demonstration counties responded to the Waiver stimulus – what system reforms they put in place and what interventions they employed -- compared to their own pre-Waiver behavior and the concurrent behavior of the comparison counties. The next section discusses whether and, if so, how these actions contributed to improvements in child and family outcomes.

8.1.1 Demonstration Counties’ Response to the Waiver

During the Waiver period, demonstration counties pursued a variety of initiatives to reform child welfare practice, some of which occurred systematically across the sites and some that were unique to one or a few sites. During the same time period, comparison counties also pursued many programmatic changes, some very similar to actions taken in the demonstration sites. As a result, a number of areas show a systematic difference between demonstration counties and comparison counties, while in other areas, expected differences did not emerge.

Process Implementation Findings

The Process Implementation Study team explored two broad areas – use of managed care strategies and interagency collaboration. With the flexibility afforded by the Waiver, demonstration counties were expected to be more active in using a broad range of managed care strategies and more successful in building collaborative ties to other child-serving organizations in the community, than were comparison sites. In six areas, the actions of the demonstration counties did not appear to differ systematically from those in the comparison counties:

- Case Management: No significant differences emerged between demonstration and comparison counties in the extent of changes made in three main aspects of case

management: family involvement in case decision-making, team conferencing, and screening processes (see pages 31-34). PCSAs in both groups have slowly increased opportunities for families to be involved in case-level decisions; and both groups have taken substantial steps to increase use of team conferencing methods and to alter screening procedures for cases referred to the PCSA.

- Financing: The demonstration sites made greater use of managed care contracting mechanisms, although the number of counties participating was quite small (3 counties), making this an interesting contrast but not a systematic effect across the demonstration counties (see pages 26-27).
- Competition: Both demonstration and comparison counties have consistently sought to increase competition by expanding agency foster homes, through increased per diem payments and other methods (see pages 35-36).
- Utilization Review and Quality Assurance: Demonstration counties were only slightly more likely to conduct formal reviews of children entering placement and already in placement (see pages 38-39); and no difference emerged between the groups due to use of caseload analysis (see page 12).
- Service Array: Little difference was evident between the two groups concerning improved service availability, the nature of new services developed, or timely access to services (see pages 12, 48-50, 59-67).
- Interagency Collaboration: Demonstration and comparison PCSAs have similarly strong relationships with the local Juvenile Court and with the local mental health board; in addition, in most sites, interagency work of the Family and Children First Council tends to dominate collaborative activities (see pages 12, 80-81).

In five areas, the Waiver appears to have led to important changes in the demonstration sites that were not matched by the comparison counties:

- Service Array: In one aspect of service array, an important difference emerged concerning preventive services. Demonstration counties, more so than comparison sites, appear to be targeting new prevention activities to areas of insufficiency (see page 53). In addition, demonstration sites appear to be more focused on prevention activity, with more of them both expressing a strong commitment to prevention and increasing spending on non-foster care at a rate above the median of all counties (see pages 54-57).
- Targeting: Initial exploration indicates that demonstration counties more often target their new service development to areas of noted insufficiency, and generally report doing more targeting of new initiatives to particular populations, than comparison sites (see pages 53-54 and 59).
- Quality Assurance and Data Management: Demonstration sites give moderately more attention to outcomes data, more often systematically gathering outcome information, sharing it with staff, and using it in management decisions (see pages 38-41).

- Overall Use of Managed Care Strategies: In both Year 2 and Year 4, a notable difference appeared between demonstration and comparison counties in use of managed care strategies – comparison sites had lower scores than did demonstration counties. In Year 2, the difference was statistically significant (see page 23). This difference in overall score reflects differences in nearly all the components: in Year 4, the average demonstration county score was higher than that of comparison sites for seven out of the eight managed care components (see page 21).
- Interagency collaboration: A key element of interagency collaboration, pooling or sharing funds, revealed a moderate difference between demonstration and comparison sites – during the Waiver, demonstration sites were somewhat more likely to adopt joint funding mechanisms (see pages 79-80). In addition, a Year 5 survey of child-serving agencies in all 28 study sites revealed a significant difference between the two county groups -- demonstration county collaborative partners view their collaboration with the PCSA as more successful than do comparison county partners (see pages 82-83).

Taken all together, the managed care findings may mean that the Waiver enabled counties to change practice more easily to include managed care strategies, but we do not yet know whether such changes have a direct impact on child and family outcomes. Some of the case studies (Chapter 7) suggest an association between rational management strategies and improved outcomes.

The findings on interagency collaboration suggest that the Waiver has had a measurable impact on the level of collaboration between demonstration PCSAs and their collaborative partners. We do not yet know the exact nature of many of these collaborations, and it is unclear exactly how these collaborations are contributing to improved outcomes for children.

Fiscal Findings

Using a strict test of statistical significance, the Fiscal Study team found no significant differences between demonstration and comparison counties in the patterns of change in child welfare spending over the course of the Waiver. Both groups of counties experienced growth in paid placement days and in the average daily cost of foster care, with no significant differences between them (see page 104). In addition, neither group significantly changed the proportion of placement days that occurred in residential settings (see pages 107-109). However, in two areas, the patterns of change were close to significant and are thus important to highlight:

- Growth in foster care spending: Nearly all study counties increased foster care spending from the pre-Waiver period to the end of the Waiver period, but eight of the ten counties that grew the fastest, with over 50% growth from the baseline to 2002, were comparison sites (see page 103). This suggests that demonstration counties may have been able to contain foster care growth more than comparison sites.
- Growth in non-foster care expenditures: Overall growth in foster care spending means no shift occurred from foster care to non-foster care; nonetheless, most counties increased spending on child welfare activities other than foster care board and maintenance (called “other child welfare” spending). Most of the demonstration counties generated some

revenues from the Waiver that could be used for such new spending on other child welfare activities (see pages 112-114). Ten of 11 demonstration counties spent more than their additional Waiver monies to increase other child welfare expenditures (see pages 115-117). And, although not statistically significant, the demonstration counties appear to have increased other child welfare expenditures by more than the comparison counties – seven comparison sites and only one demonstration site showed the smallest growth rates (see pages 118-119). These findings suggest that demonstration counties are taking advantage of the flexibility of the Waiver to expand their activities in areas other than foster care board and maintenance.

8.1.2 Outcomes Resulting from Program and Fiscal Changes

The Participant Outcomes study examined a wide range of child and family outcomes, comparing the performance of demonstration and comparison counties during the pre-Waiver and Waiver periods. The Year 2 and Year 3 findings provided preliminary indications of what might have been happening under the Waiver – preliminary because the Waiver had been in operation for only a short time and the analyses were not adjusted for child characteristics that might have influenced the outcomes. In those years, differences between demonstration and comparison counties, or between pre-Waiver and Waiver periods, could not be attributed to the Waiver but provided a “check” on permanency and safety trends. The Year 4 and Year 5 analyses reflected more years of Waiver experience and data, and controlled for child characteristics, and so constitute the primary findings on the effects of the Waiver. This section describes primary and preliminary findings in the high-priority areas of permanency, placement stability, use of relatives, child and family well-being, and child safety, followed by a discussion of changes in the population entering placement and what this means for the PCSAs. Finally, some findings from the six county case studies are presented.

Permanency

The primary findings were that the Waiver did not have significant effects in the permanency areas of reunification rates, adoption rates, or median length of stay prior to reunification or adoption. The Waiver effect on exits to return home, while being significant overall, actually occurred in only one of the demonstration counties, and the proportion of children exiting to adoption was not larger than it would have been without the Waiver (pages 159-161, 165). Median length of stay in foster care prior to exit to return home or to adoption was not significantly different in the demonstration counties overall than it would have been without the Waiver (pages 162-163).

However, primary county-level findings on permanency indicated that a few demonstration counties showed a significant Waiver effect on duration of first placement, depending on the exit destination. Three counties had longer length of stay for children exiting to return home, compared to what would have happened without the Waiver; two counties had shorter stays for children being adopted; and two counties experienced longer median stays across all exits, while one large county experienced a shorter median stay across all exits (page 165). These varied findings highlight the importance of examining individual county situations, due to the strong contrasts among the counties in the strategies they employed under the Waiver.

Although no significant overall differences in adoption rate emerged between the demonstration and comparison counties as a result of the Waiver, the preliminary findings were that in both groups the number of children eligible for adoption subsidies (a proxy for adoptions) increased substantially during the first three years of the Waiver (page 126). This showed that substantial changes were being achieved in the area of adoption, but the lack of significant Waiver effects in the primary findings indicated that those changes would have occurred even without the Waiver.

Placement Stability

Only preliminary findings were available for placement stability, and they indicated that demonstration and comparison counties had similar outcomes. During the first two years of the Waiver, both groups increased the percentage of children who experienced no moves during their first placement, and decreased the percentage who experienced five or more moves. In addition, the demonstration sites were no more successful than the comparison group at moving children to less restrictive placement settings (pages 124-126).

Use of Relatives

Granting custody to relatives appears to have increased more in demonstration counties. The primary findings were that, among children exiting their first placement during the Waiver, the proportion going to relatives' custody was four percentage points higher (18 percent of all exits) than it would have been without the Waiver (page 163). And this pattern is significant in six of the 13 demonstration counties, indicating the breadth of the practice change (page 164).

The trend in the use of relatives as a placement setting appears more mixed. The preliminary findings indicated that during the first three years of the Waiver, both demonstration and comparison groups increased the number of children temporarily placed with relatives, but this pattern held in nine demonstration sites and only six comparison sites (page 124). However, by Year 5, the primary finding emerged that only four demonstration counties significantly increased use of relatives for first placements, while three counties significantly decreased those placement settings (page 163).

Cases Served In-home

In the absence of data related to family functioning, the study team examined child and family well-being through analysis of whether a case was served in-home or went into placement at some point during the year. Primary findings indicated that little change occurred during the Waiver in the proportion of children served in-home; both the demonstration and the comparison counties maintained a pattern of serving approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of all cases in-home (pages 125, 153).

Child Safety

The primary findings on child safety indicated that, for children exiting their first placements to reunification, there were no significant Waiver effects on re-entry rates or on the median duration of reunification before re-entry, either in specific counties or for the demonstration counties overall (pages 166-167). These results indicate that the Waiver maintained the safety of children returned home at the same level that it would have been without the Waiver, thus

alleviating the concern that a focus on reducing placement usage might lead to children being returned home too soon and needing to re-enter care.

However, another primary finding, using other data and methods, presented a different picture of safety. The Year 5 caseworker survey found significantly more multiple case openings in demonstration counties, possibly suggesting that demonstration counties closed cases more quickly than comparison counties and thus experienced more case re-openings (page 167). It remains unclear whether this can be attributed to the Waiver and the extent to which this posed a safety risk to children.

A preliminary finding supported the conclusion that children in demonstration counties were not demonstrably more unsafe. During the first three years of the Waiver, the majority of counties in both demonstration and comparison groups decreased recidivism among targeted children with abuse/neglect reports as well as among closed cases (page 126). Although the demonstration sites did not fare differently than the comparison group, these findings suggest that children were probably as safe under the Waiver as they would have been otherwise.

It is important to note that both preliminary and primary findings pertaining to child safety were severely constrained by data limitations in the areas of substantiation and indication, as well as the variation among the counties in how they categorize cases, assess risk, and record risk levels. Further research on child safety outcomes is critical before concluding that the Waiver did not worsen child safety. This chapter later proposes additional research questions and activities to assess safety outcomes for children not yet included in the safety analysis, as well as to document the safety outcomes of new screening and prevention initiatives implemented by the counties.

Population Entering Placement

The primary findings were that, compared to the pre-Waiver period, several demonstration counties saw significantly greater numbers of children in first placement during the Waiver who were under one year of age, white, and with alleged abuse or neglect; and fewer children who were 14-17 years old, of “other” race, with alleged sexual abuse, and with cognitive disabilities (pages 158-161). These differences suggest that a shift was required in the focus of demonstration PCSAs. For example, increases in the proportions of children who were younger and those with alleged abuse or neglect possibly indicate fewer court referrals and greater demand for adoptive homes and intensive family intervention services.

Case Study Findings

In addition to the findings from the Participant Outcomes study, discussed above, the evaluation team has also begun to integrate all the findings through the experience of six individual counties.

- The two most successful counties profiled – Lorain and Muskingum – share a pattern of strong leadership and careful planning of systemic reforms. Both demonstrated an early and ongoing commitment to expanding resources for child welfare activities other than foster care board and maintenance, well beyond the flexible funds generated by Waiver

participation. They also sharply reduced placement utilization, instead serving children in-home or through referral to community agencies.

- The other four case study counties experienced more mixed results during the course of the Waiver. Placement days increased in three of the sites, and the amount of flexible IV-E funds was limited. All the sites were able to leverage funds from other sources to expand non-foster care activities; one county turned to private managed care contracts, another built a valuable collaboration with the juvenile court; and another shifted its population focus to younger children. In the end, all seemed to find some success in changing the common patterns of intervention with new cases, but continued to struggle with the challenge presented by children already in foster care at the start of the Waiver, a group that received little systematic attention by either policy makers or the evaluation.

8.1.3 Key Factors That Diminished the Measurable Effect of the Waiver

The evaluation findings outlined above are a mix of evidence of a significant impact of the Waiver and areas where evidence of a systematic impact is lacking. Research always faces the risk that, even with perfect data, it will miss an effect that existed but could not be detected. As a consequence, the evaluation team is mindful that Waiver effects could have occurred in demonstration counties that were distinguishable from comparison counties but were not detectable using the data available. Why did the Waiver *appear to fail* to stimulate some of the expected changes among demonstration counties? The evaluation team hypothesizes several possible explanations:

First is the larger context of funding for public child welfare in Ohio. Title IV-E is but one of several major funding sources; indeed, local tax levies generate over half the funds for the PCSAs. Because these tax levy funds are also flexible, PCSAs had the ability without the Waiver to change the way these funds were invested. It is possible that PCSAs needed more than flexibility to make investments to reduce foster care expenditures. Further muting the effect of IV-E changes is the fact that, during the later years of the Waiver, Ohio counties experienced substantial losses in state support. Local mental health boards and juvenile courts faced serious cutbacks, especially in the past two years; and funds available due to federal changes in welfare programs initially supported child welfare initiatives, but then these too were severely curtailed as welfare rolls rebounded in the economic downturn.

Second, Ohio child welfare programs are administered at the county level, leading to substantial variability in county program initiatives. Each participating county undertook somewhat different approaches to reform, varying in nature and intensity of effort. For example, Franklin County entered into a managed care contract whereby private provider groups would serve substantial proportion of the child welfare population, while Portage County had a small case rate contract for selected children awaiting adoption; Lorain County systematically modified agency operations in accordance with a strategic plan and accreditation standards of practice, while several other counties tried one or more discrete practice changes; Muskingum County consciously expanded reliance on relatives, both for temporary placement and as permanent homes for children in care, through family group conferencing, while many other counties pressed case workers to look more to relatives without putting specific strategies in place. Where

analysis occurs at the county level, the study team has limited ability to tease out the effects of competing programmatic initiatives when the sample size is only 14 demonstration sites and 14 comparison sites.

Third, many of the counties in the study are small in size, with annual foster care caseloads often too small for complex analysis. The small sample sizes mean that, to detect a significant change, the impact would have to have been very powerful. In particular, the presence of many small counties causes confidence intervals on the length of stay findings to be extremely large, making it hard to say whether there is no effect or whether the sample size is too small to reveal the effect.

Fourth, data limitations clearly impact the study team's ability to document changes related to the Waiver. For the Fiscal study, the team's ability to interpret expenditure trends was limited by imprecision of data provided by the counties, the inability of PCSA staff to interpret trends in their own fiscal data, and the absence of complete data from several of the 28 counties. For the Participant Outcomes study, the study team faced the usual challenges associated with large secondary data sets, such as changing and inconsistent variable definitions and data entry procedures, loss of some data in the transmission process, case duplication, and data modifications over time.

Fifth, demonstration county administrators lacked the management tools that would have linked investments in family and community-based services to outcomes and allowed the staff to track progress towards outcomes and change course as necessary. When the Waiver began, the fiscal study team judged that no demonstration county or comparison county had a comprehensive, sophisticated, integrated approach connecting budgeting, program implementation and outcomes in child welfare. For the most part, county fiscal administrators seemed to operate separately from program administrators. Most counties' fiscal offices did not track aggregate expenditures by service type or program area and almost none possessed the ability to track service costs and outcomes at a child-specific level.

During the five years of the Waiver, the team observed that the majority of county administrators did not develop stronger connections between finance, program operations and outcomes. Based on annual interviews with fiscal staff, the team perceived that neither demonstration nor comparison county staff developed comprehensive new information resources linking these three components of their operations. Budgeting and expenditure tracking for child welfare services appeared to continue in the same manner as it had prior to the Waiver in all of the counties analyzed. County budgets were not developed by program area with specific expectations for outcomes to be achieved. County expenditures were not tracked by program and analyzed for impact and effectiveness at the aggregate or the child-specific level.

The process implementation study provides ample evidence that demonstration county officials undertook a range of activities and new programs as part of their Waiver project. Based on interviews with county staff and observation of Consortium meetings, the study team observed that county program administrators, along with state and federal officials, seemed to believe that flexible funding by itself would inspire large-scale innovation in child welfare services and result in reductions in foster care use and cost. Without the tools to manage the stimulus of the Waiver,

county administrators were left to hope that programmatic changes would drive changes in spending without their explicitly tracking expectations and monitoring progress, changing course as necessary¹.

Sixth, the risk associated with not responding to the Waiver stimulus was limited. In general, PCSA fiscal staff appeared to view the Waiver as a relatively low-risk proposition. While they may not have known how much additional revenue the PCSA was receiving through the Waiver, most fiscal staff believed that their agency was receiving more revenue than it would have without the Waiver. Counties were encouraged to participate in the Waiver only if they were expected to receive at least as much Title IV-E revenue through the Waiver as they would under normal Title IV-E reimbursement rules. The state provided a formula to help counties make this assessment. During the implementation of the Waiver, reports from ODJFS showed most counties receiving additional revenue as a result of Waiver participation.

While the fiscal incentive to reduce foster care expenditures existed, the financial risk of *not* reducing foster care expenditures was muted. As a result, during the five years of the Waiver, perception of the Waiver among PCSA fiscal staff continued to reflect a focus on securing enough revenue for expenses recommended by program staff. Most demonstration county fiscal staff treated the Waiver award the same way they had treated other sources of flexible revenue in the past. They appreciated its predictability and used it as another slice of the revenue pie that was not explicitly connected to any type of spending or a particular outcome.²

Finally, integrating the data from all the studies presented its own set of challenges. Each study team, given the varying nature of the data being gathered, used somewhat different standards to judge a finding as worthy of note. In the Process study, which relied almost exclusively on qualitative data at the county level, no formal statistical significance was calculated in most areas of examination. In comparing demonstration and comparison counties, a difference of two or three counties was termed “slight”, four to six counties was termed “moderate”, and a difference of seven or more counties was judged to be “substantial”. By contrast in the fiscal study, which similarly used the county as the unit of analysis, the team used a non-parametric test to compute statistical significance. In addition, the findings from the length of stay analysis and the fiscal analysis are not completely compatible. As noted on page 94, the populations used in the two analyses are not identical; each study examines a somewhat different part of the overall population of children served. Also, the length of stay analysis is able to control for many child characteristics, something that cannot be done in the fiscal study because it relies on county-level data rather than child-level data.

In the end, the Title IV-E Waiver did not appear to be strong enough to alone generate fundamental reform of the state’s public child welfare system. While demonstration counties

¹ It is important to note, however, that Process study findings suggest some movement among counties, especially demonstration sites, to better share programmatic and fiscal information at the management level to facilitate development of the needed tracking and planning functions; see Chapter 2, Section 2.7.3.

² The most sophisticated demonstration county fiscal staff viewed the change from fee-for-service reimbursement to a fixed amount of revenue primarily as a potential source for additional revenue that the county would not have gotten under the fee-for-service arrangement. The Waiver provided an opportunity for maximizing revenue from other sources while maintaining historical levels of Title IV-E board and maintenance reimbursement.

reported many activities and programs undertaken as a result of the Waiver, these actions were neither sufficiently large-scale nor sufficiently targeted to bring about a statistically significant change in foster care expenditures or child and family outcomes. The Ohio child welfare system is quite complex; adoption of broad-based system reform in the absence of well-articulated logic models targeting specific outcomes is unlikely to succeed. The Waiver appears to be one route to reform, but not the only route and not a sufficiently robust one to alone lead to improved child and family outcomes. In a few isolated demonstration counties where the Waiver has been accompanied by clearly defined goals and a rational implementation plan, it seems to contribute to the reform agenda and lead to reductions in placement utilization and increased activity in non-foster care areas.

With further time to address some of these barriers and limitations, the evaluation can be expected to bring to light more varied effects of Waiver participation in the demonstration county group and/or in particular counties that will supply deeper information to understand the complex dynamics of systemic reform. The following section outlines some possible next steps.

8.2 PROPOSED STEPS TO FURTHER ILLUMINATE WAIVER EFFECTS AND TO ENHANCE THE EVALUATION

Further evaluation of ProtectOhio will build on the findings summarized above, addressing areas where more information is needed to fully illuminate the effects of the Waiver. To tackle the factors that limited the first evaluation, the evaluation team proposes a three-pronged approach:

- Research in areas that the evaluation team did not yet explore;
- Exploration of areas where more in-depth information could reveal more subtle effects;
- Ongoing data collection in areas where the existing approach has been valuable but more time is needed to observe Waiver effects.

The following sections offer details about proposed activities in each of these areas.

8.2.1 New Areas of Research

Due to challenges and limitations in available data, both Westat and Chapin Hall used the first few years of the evaluation to clarify and implement the best approach to data collection and analysis. As a result, time did not allow for a full examination of certain critical areas such as child safety, re-entry to care, and placement experience of children already in placement when the Waiver began. It is reasonable to expect some impact of the Waiver in these and other areas.

An overriding question posed by the Federal government is: Are children served by the demonstration counties safe? In any new child welfare practice or system reform, it must be demonstrated that child safety is not compromised. The evaluation has shown that the Waiver did not harm children who were reunified with their families after first placements, or at least did not increase their rate of re-entry. However, the caseworker survey found that significantly more cases in the demonstration counties had been opened four or more times, which may suggest that demonstration counties tended to close cases too quickly, leading to a greater proportion of those

cases re-opening. Thus, many crucial questions related to safety remain unanswered. The counties have implemented numerous activities (especially in the area of prevention) that have not yet been investigated, and new primary data collection is required to fully assess those activities. Similarly, the study team has not investigated community and family trends that may influence maltreatment and reporting patterns as well as safety outcomes. In addition, new information is available on family risk assessment that is highly relevant to safety issues, and that information has not yet been used in the evaluation. Finally, broadening the re-entry analysis will allow the study team to examine safety outcomes for children with other types of exits from placement (besides reunification).

Two situations highlight the gaps in knowledge. First, during evaluator site visits, several counties reported that they were focusing on the prevention of placement and had implemented new services for families; however, that shift did not emerge as statistically significant in the fiscal analysis. So far the Participant Outcomes Analysis has not examined cases that did not involve placement and has not analyzed prevention services and their outcomes. An investigation of these services and safety outcomes will be a major focus of the evaluation during the extension and will provide important information on the effects of flexible funding. In addition, some counties have reported use of relatives early during the referral and intake process, essentially diverting the child from coming into PCSA custody, which the study team could not evaluate with the available data. Below, the team proposes possible evaluation activities to address these gaps. In addition to activities focusing on safety outcomes, the team proposes additional analyses of potential Waiver effects on high utilization, and an evaluation of managed care impacts.

Community and Family Trends

Learning about community and family trends in child populations, family stresses, child maltreatment, and abuse and neglect reporting, even prior to case opening in FACSIS, will aid in understanding Waiver impacts. Have there been changes in the characteristics and sizes of the child populations? If so, did they affect the patterns of maltreatment in the counties? Did the Waiver have an affect on the reporting of child maltreatment and the counties' response? What was the severity of needs, when an incident was noted?³ Was there a difference in the likelihood of investigating child maltreatment between demonstration counties and comparison counties? What happens with families before placements occur?

Since many occurrences of child maltreatment are never reported to child welfare agencies, the team could ask people to report suspected maltreatment directly to us. The study team could establish contacts in a representative sample of schools, day care centers, hospitals, police departments, and juvenile facilities (the primary sentinels in communities who are in positions to identify child maltreatment) who would report to us situations where they suspected child maltreatment, over a period of a few weeks. The analysis then could investigate differences in maltreatment patterns; compare the characteristics of the children in occurrences that were

³ In Ohio, if an allegation is not screened out, it requires an investigation and full risk assessment.

reported and those that were not reported; and of the occurrences reported, compare those that were investigated and not investigated.⁴ The study team would then follow cases in both demonstration and comparison counties to assess child and family outcomes and identify services (both in-home and placement) provided to the cases.

Reports Not Resulting In Placements

The evaluation has not investigated whether the Waiver compromised safety for four groups of children who were alleged victims of child maltreatment but who did not experience placement, at least not as a result of that allegation⁵: (1) children who were reported but referred to the community for services (i.e., screened out), so that cases were never opened; (2) children for whom cases were opened but then closed during intake, with no further services provided; (3) children for whom cases were opened and full risk assessments and investigations were conducted, but no services were provided and the cases were closed; and (4) children for whom cases were opened and full risk assessments and investigations were conducted, but in-home services were provided rather than placement into foster care. Depending on Ohio's areas of interest and emphasis in the extension, several approaches could be used to help understand Waiver effects on safety for these children.

1. Audit logs of allegations in which cases were not opened, in demonstration and comparison counties. Did the Waiver influence the rate at which cases were investigated? Were demonstration counties less likely to accept and investigate allegations of child maltreatment? This would address the first population above, children with allegations but no case openings. The study team could compare the frequencies and characteristics of allegations with and without case openings, in demonstration and comparison counties, to assess the effect of the Waiver on counties' likelihood of investigating allegations.
2. Conduct a survey of closed cases. Did the Waiver have an effect on case closings? Were demonstration counties more likely to close cases without providing services, or to close cases sooner, where in-home services were provided rather than placement? This would address the second, third, and fourth groups listed above: (1) cases closed during intake so that no risk assessments or investigations were conducted and no services were provided; (2) cases with full risk assessments and investigations but no services provided; and (3) cases with full risk assessments and investigations, and services provided in-home. The study team could conduct a prospective survey in which county workers complete forms about all cases closed during a period of time, where there was no placement into foster care. The study team would compare frequencies and characteristics of the three groups in demonstration and comparison counties, to assess the effect of the Waiver on case closings. An additional issue the team could explore is how often cases

⁴ Nationally, only a third or fewer maltreated children received CPS investigation in 1993-1994, according to the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) (Sedlak and Broadhurst, 1996).

⁵ These groups are based on the Caseflow Model for Child Welfare System Delivery from the *Second Annual Report*, Appendix I.

were classified as “in-home” but the children actually were living with relatives, and what were the characteristics of those cases.

3. Audit records of cases that were closed without placement and later re-opened. Did the Waiver have an effect on the safety of children who were not placed into foster care? Were demonstration counties more likely to experience re-openings of cases where there was no placement? The study team could audit the cases that were closed without placement and later re-opened to assess the Waiver’s effect on the likelihood of this happening. These cases include all those for which there was no placement into foster care; many of these were served in-home, while some received no services or were referred to community services.

Cases With Placement

The study team proposes further study of cases where there was placement into foster care. The following activities will help to better understand the Waiver’s impact on the safety of these children.

1. Broaden the re-entry analysis. What were the safety implications of releasing children to relatives’ custody or “other” types of exits? Did the Waiver affect the re-entry of children who exited care to the custody of relatives? Did the Waiver affect the re-entry of children with “other” types of exits? The Year 5 analysis of re-entry included only children re-entering from reunification. The study team proposes analyzing re-entry (both re-entry rate and how much time elapsed before re-entry) for children who exited placement to relatives’ custody and for children with “other” types of exits.
2. Investigate Waiver effects on the safety of children initially receiving services in-home but ultimately placed into foster care. Under the Waiver, were there more children who ultimately experienced placement in spite of in-home services? In demonstration counties, was there a longer median gap between case opening and placement? Did this pose a safety risk to children who initially received in-home services? Did the children in demonstration counties eventually experience more intensive placements than children in comparison counties? How did the Waiver affect the decision-making process about placement or the services provided to these children? What were the safety outcomes for these children? The study team could analyze the period between case opening and placement, find out about the services that were provided, and track the cases to their outcomes (type of placement; length of stay; type of exit; and re-entry into placement).
3. Analyze runaways. Why did the runaway rate increase in some demonstration counties? What happened to the children who ran away from their placements? The Year 5 analysis showed that, although the percentage of exits that involved running away was low, the Waiver significantly increased the rate of runaway in three counties and for the demonstration counties overall. The study team could do a qualitative study in the three counties with significant increases, to learn more about what could have led to the finding and what happened to the children who ran away. Many of them may have gone to unsafe

reunifications with their families; did they later go back into placement or other systems such as criminal justice or mental health?

Risk Level and Outcomes

Counties conduct risk assessments for cases that they accept through the intake process, and the Waiver may have influenced counties' responses to the assessments. Taking into consideration the risk level of cases, were demonstration counties less likely to provide services or placement? The study team could sample cases and extract information from the risk assessments, then follow the cases as they unfold to see what happened – whether services were provided and what kind of services; whether the children were placed into foster care; how long the cases were open; and if the cases were closed, whether later there was re-entry.

High-Utilization Model

Some county Waiver activities focused specifically on children who had been in care for a long time or had experienced repeated placements at the start of the Waiver. Did the Waiver affect length of stay of children already in care or returning to care? Did the demonstration counties have greater success in ending long or repeated placements than the comparison counties? The purpose of a new model on high utilization is to examine the Waiver's success in reducing length of stay for children who had been in care for a long time or had repeated placements. The study team proposes to examine cases in which children have been in care for at least 2 years and develop a model to estimate the Waiver's effects on their length of stay and type of exit. An alternative approach might be to model all children in care on January 1, 1998 (the date the Waiver began).

Evaluation of Managed Care Impact

Does the use of capitated or case rates and risk-sharing contractual arrangements lead to better outcomes for children and families? As discussed in Chapter 2, several demonstration counties implemented managed care strategies such as capitated or case rates and various degrees of risk sharing with private agencies and service providers. The study team proposes to investigate the Waiver effects in the counties with major managed care contracts by analyzing the effects of the managed care contracts on type of placement, length of stay, type of exit, and re-entry. In Franklin County, for example, where children are randomly assigned at case opening to either the public child welfare agency or one of two private agencies, the study team proposes to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the initiative. This could include: (1) comparing characteristics and risk levels of children assigned to the public agency with those assigned to a private agency; (2) tracking placement history and service utilization of children served by public and private agencies; and (3) comparing permanency and safety outcomes for children served by public and private agencies (including likelihood of placement, length of stay, type of exit, and re-entry).

8.2.2 Further Exploration of Areas Already Studied

In several key areas, the five-year evaluation identified emerging effects of the Waiver that can be expected to more fully develop in coming years. In terms of system reform activities and changes in interventions (reflecting the logic model presented above), four topics merit further exploration. Three of these issues fall under the rubric of managed care strategies, including

preventive activities (to prevent child placement and/or case opening), targeted service development, and data management enhancements especially related to linking fiscal and program information for decision-making. A fourth topic, interagency collaboration, also appears to be a potentially rich source of insights about demonstration counties' ability to leverage reform among other child-serving agencies in the community. These topics may be explored through data collection in selected counties or through surveys of workers and/or families in all counties.

In addition, in terms of changes in child and family outcomes, two areas will be explored more fully: expanded model development related to analysis of first placement experiences during the Waiver and the use of relatives.

Prevention

The analysis so far suggests that demonstration counties are doing more prevention work. Where substantial prevention activity is occurring, what types of prevention initiatives have been developed, how did they evolve, and how they are funded? Is this increased focus on prevention related to improved outcomes for children and families? The Process Study team proposes to expand the case study investigation of selected sites to more fully probe the nature of prevention activities and their effects on child and family outcomes.

Where PCSA managers report increased prevention activity, do workers and families perceive this change, and take advantage of the new opportunities? It may be valuable to survey PCSA staff in all counties concerning their knowledge of and reliance on specific preventive efforts, and whether the availability of prevention services has had an impact on their casework practice.

Targeting of New Service Development

Process study findings suggest that the demonstration sites more often target the development of new mental health and preventive services to specific areas of most need in the county. Do demonstration sites do more targeting in all service areas? The study team plans to reanalyze qualitative data from Year 3 and Year 4 across all services to see if counties who indicated a service insufficiency created a new service in Year 4 (i.e. adult mental health, substance abuse, juvenile sex offender treatment, etc.). It may also be useful to survey case workers to examine perceptions of changes in areas of greatest service need, given new service development; such data collection would be done in all counties, with sufficient sample size per county to allow reporting data at the county level.

Integrated Program and Fiscal Management

Throughout the evaluation, both the fiscal study team and the process study team explored aspects of PCSA fiscal operations and decision-making, observing substantial variation among the counties in the strength of the connections between finance, program operations and outcomes. Making such connections can be understood as a “best practice” activity. No county appeared to have developed comprehensive new information resources linking these three components of their operations, leaving them unable to take full advantage of the Waiver. However, some sites showed more progress in this direction than others, and may be worth

further study. The study team proposes to investigate the efforts of selected counties, in both evaluation groups, to better link fiscal and program information and decision processes.

Interagency Collaboration

Given the high levels of collaboration found in both groups of counties, the study team proposes to examine in more detail the nature of these activities. What types of collaborations occur between PCSAs and their partners? What roles do community-based agencies play as PCSA partners, and does this differ between the demonstration and comparison groups? What impact do these community-based agencies have, especially in the area of providing prevention services? The study team will re-examine data from the Year 5 collaboration survey, plus gather additional information via a follow-up survey to the PCSA collaborative partners.

Model Development

Building on the work in Years 4 and 5, the Participant Outcomes Study team proposes additional model development to revise the length-of-stay model to incorporate the recently revised FACSIS data. All additional model development will address changes in case mix, as did Year 4 and Year 5 analyses. The additional work also will incorporate the managed care index (described in Chapter 2), which was not done previously, to see if the level of managed care utilization influenced the findings.

Did the Waiver affect length of stay, especially for placements in residential settings (which tend to be very service-intensive and costly)? The study team analyzed length of stay in detail in Year 5. However, following that analysis the study team received extensively revised data from Hamilton County, and the scope of the revisions invalidated some of the previous results and precluded presenting any findings on residential placements. Also, Hamilton County had to be excluded from the tables showing Waiver effects, and the “overall” findings in some tables had to be excluded. The study team proposes conducting an audit of Hamilton County’s data and revising the model in Year 6 so that the team can present complete findings on length of stay. In addition, based on feedback from the counties, the team will (1) explore incorporating other FACSIS variables in the analysis, and (2) add additional years of placement data to examine changes in later years of the Waiver.

Use of Relatives

One important issue to investigate in the extension is the use of relatives in pre-placement, placement, and exit from placement, since many counties reported increasing their reliance on relatives. In counties that increasingly use relatives, is there a safety risk for children?

The Year 5 analysis found that under the Waiver, over 18 percent of exits from all first placements were to relatives’ custody, while it would have been about 14.5 percent without the Waiver, a statistically significant difference. As shown in Table 8.1, it also emerged that the use of relative placements increased significantly in four demonstration counties, and the use of exits to relatives’ custody increased significantly in six demonstration counties. In two of the counties, Greene and Muskingum, both types of use of relatives increased significantly. The team proposes to examine safety outcomes in the counties that experienced increases in either relative placements or exit to relatives’ custody. In these counties, what happened to children initially

placed with relatives? Are children more often being immediately placed with relatives in lieu of or during an investigation? What services do these children and families receive? Are children placed with relatives more likely to exit placement to the custody of a relative? Are they more likely to experience re-entry?

Table 8.1 County-Level Waiver Effects on Use of Relatives in Placement and Exit From Placement		
County	Relative Placement	Exit to Relative's Custody
Ashtabula	—	—
Belmont	↑	↓
Clark	—	↑
Crawford	—	—
Fairfield	↑	—
Franklin	↓	↑
Greene	↑	↑
Lorain	—	↑
Medina	↓	—
Muskingum	↑	↑
Portage	—	↑
Richland	↓	—
Stark	—	—

8.2.3 Continuation of Prior Data Collection

There are many indications that demonstration counties have begun to develop the capacity to systematically respond to the Waiver stimulus; continuation of certain parts of the evaluation's data collection activities will confirm whether some of these nascent activities will lead to basic changes in caseload dynamics and/or spending patterns.

Caseload Dynamics

In the Fourth Annual report, the Participant Outcomes Study team presented information on county-level trends in caseload dynamics, from pre-Waiver (2 years before the Waiver began) to the Waiver period (ending Federal Fiscal Year 2001). The topics included: number of reported abuse and neglect incidents; use of in-home vs. placement services; number of children in ongoing cases; volume of children entering first placements; and case mix of children (sex, age, race, setting of first placement, county size/urbanicity, sexual abuse, alleged abuse or neglect, cognitive disabilities, and physical disabilities). In the extension, the team will incorporate later years of placement data and extend the trend lines presented in that report. Additional trend reports will be added to measure outcomes for new initiatives offered by counties for the extension. One initiative under consideration is the piloting of a new family assessment system; ODJFS and the participating counties might find it useful to have trend reports on family acuity

(as measured by the risk assessment score) and variables such as length of stay, number of case openings, and recidivism.

Expenditure Patterns

Throughout the five years of the Waiver evaluation, the Fiscal Study team has systematically gathered expenditure data from each PCSA in the evaluation, creating a comprehensive database on spending for foster care and other child welfare activities. Because many of the demonstration counties initiated changes in practice at various points during the Waiver, it is reasonable to expect that some reforms had not been in place long enough to observe effects on spending patterns. For this reason, continuation of the fiscal data collection process is a high priority for the evaluation.

8.3 CONCLUSION

The basic thrust of the research proposed for the Waiver extension will require work at two levels – continued data collection across all 28 study sites, and some more intense focus on individual counties.

In addition to the specific research tasks outlined above, the evaluation team will continue to share research findings with all of the evaluation counties. The first activity would be a debriefing synthesizing the overall findings from the first five years of the evaluation. The event would seek to engage both demonstration and comparison sites in discussion of the major findings and the outstanding hypotheses about varied effects among the sites. Given the extensive time and energy which the counties have all contributed to data collection efforts, the evaluation team feels it is crucial to share the findings in detail, both to evoke response from the counties, leading to new insights, and to indirectly offer them suggestions for improving practice. Insofar as both groups of counties will be involved, such information sharing does not favor the demonstration group by giving them any special access to proven practices.

The extensive findings of the evaluation have cast valuable light on the dynamics of child welfare system reform in Ohio, and more can be learned. If the state is awarded an extension to ProtectOhio, the proposals suggested above will be discussed by ODJFS and the participating counties, and a subset of the activities will be identified as future evaluation tasks.