Evaluation and the Courts: Two Current Projects

Britany Orlebeke
Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

National Child Welfare Evaluation Summit
August 29, 2011
Two Current Projects

• New York State Child Welfare Data Metrics Project (administrative data)

• Evaluation of the implementation of the National Quality Improvement Center on the Representation of Children in the Child Welfare System (QIC-ChildRep) model of child representation. (program evaluation)
NYS Metrics

Outcomes
• Permanency (minimize time, maximize exit to a family)
• Subsequent filings after court jurisdiction ends.

Process
• Timely sequence of fact-finding and disposition for abuse/neglect petitions
• Timely permanency hearing
• Timely filing of TPR petition
• Timely sequence of fact-finding and disposition on TPR filing
Administrative Data: Where do they fit in?

• Administrative data can “observe” fundamental processes and outcomes for all children touched by a system. Few other data sources will be this comprehensive.

• Anchor system actors in what’s currently true about these processes and outcomes.

  ➔ “Here’s what has been true about this process. Half of our cases are disposed in 3-4 months, and half are disposed in longer than 3-4 months.”

• Serve as vital signs for the system – like blood pressure, body temperature, heart rate. Not the only source, but they are signals to pay attention to, to be aware of, and to use to guide and anchor deeper inquiry.

• Won’t provide all the answers – but will make the black box smaller.
Administrative Data and Courts: What’s next?

• Use best practices in constructing measures.
  – Entry cohorts
  – Point-in-time populations going forward
• Partner with child welfare agency. Both partners in the system can come to a basic understanding of the contours of shared outcomes using administrative data.
• New York State provides a model.
QIC Child Representation Project and Evaluation

• Background

• Project and Evaluation Design

• Challenges and Opportunities
What *should* be evaluated?

- Fiscal impact of programs, particularly when goal is to reduce utilization of out-of-home care. Puts focus on reinvestment opportunities: Can money be found for innovative, effective programs by safely reducing utilization of out-of-home care and retaining that money in the child welfare system?