

**EVALUATION OF
MICHIGAN'S FOSTER CARE STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING
CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

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I. INTRODUCTION

In an effort to provide more effective services to families with children placed in foster care, Michigan's Family Independence Agency (FIA) implemented structured decision making (SDM) procedures for foster care in ten pilot counties and four purchase of service (POS) agencies in December 1997. The agency had previously developed and implemented SDM case management procedures for its in-home child protective service (CPS) operations in 1992 with positive results and wished to implement similar procedures for foster care.

In 1996, an FIA foster care core team, staffed by the Children's Research Center (CRC), a division of National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), was appointed to develop and implement the foster care pilot. The FIA's objectives for the foster care pilot initiative were: 1) to develop case management procedures which expedite agency efforts to achieve permanency for children entering foster care placement; 2) to provide a prototype design for a new foster care case management information system; and 3) to help FIA comply with the expectations of the 1997 federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

II. DESCRIPTION OF FOSTER CARE STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING

The pilot SDM procedures developed by the core team were designed to enhance FIA's existing foster care case management system which already incorporated well-defined case planning and review procedures. For instance, FIA social workers develop an initial service plan (ISP) for achieving permanency within 30 days of a child's entry into foster care. Regular progress reviews are conducted and an updated service plan (USP) is completed every 90 days while the child is in placement. Since most jurisdictions conduct case plan reviews every six months, the SDM pilot was built upon a strong existing structure. The major innovations of the foster care SDM pilot included:

- **Structured assessments for developing the ISP.** Within 30 days of a child’s entry into foster care, workers use a structured assessment to systematically evaluate the strengths and treatment needs of family caregivers and each child. These assessments were designed to identify the primary barriers to reunification of the child with the family and to guide workers in their effort to develop an effective and focused initial service plan.
- **A reunification assessment for developing the USP.** After completion of the ISP, a reunification assessment is conducted at 90-day intervals to evaluate progress toward the case plan goals. At each USP review, workers systematically evaluate family progress in addressing the barriers to reunification identified in the initial plan and assess parental visitation. This information is used to amend the service plan and expedite case management decisions to achieve reunification, adoption, or other viable permanency goals for the child. The reunification assessment includes these components:
 - ▶ An evaluation of the family’s progress in reducing the barriers to reunification identified in the initial plan (i.e., substance abuse, parental skill deficits, etc.);
 - ▶ An objective assessment of the parental visitation (frequency, quality, etc.) in the preceding 90-day period;
 - ▶ When case plan progress warrants planning for reunification, a family safety assessment to help workers evaluate the danger of harm prior to returning the child home and to plan the supportive service interventions necessary to protect the child and support the family after reunification; and
 - ▶ Clear policies for using the reunification assessment findings to expedite permanency within the guidelines recommended by the ASFA.
- **Management information reports to monitor SDM implementation.** The use of structured case assessments makes it possible for workers and supervisors to monitor critical indicators of case progress that impact the achievement of permanency. Consequently, an interim case management information system was developed to record the assessment information described above and report it to agency supervisors so they could more effectively manage service delivery. The FIA core team was provided quarterly reports which described the case assessment findings in the pilot sites for two years after implementation.

Michigan’s foster care services are provided by 82 county social service agencies which may serve cases directly with their own social work employees or enter into POS agreements with private agencies. Many counties use a combination of direct service and POS to provide foster care services.

The SDM pilot system was implemented in Wayne County, which serves nearly 50% of the children in foster care, and nine additional outstate counties.¹ All of the direct service cases in participating counties were included in the SDM pilot. In addition, the pilot included four private agencies providing foster care under POS contracts. Two operate in Wayne County and two in outstate counties.² This makes it possible to evaluate the case management procedures in both POS and direct service delivery settings. County and POS agency staff in the SDM pilot were trained in late Fall 1997 and began using SDM procedures to assess cases by December 1997.

III. METHODOLOGY

The objective of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the SDM pilot on FIA efforts to achieve permanency for children entering foster care. Essentially, the question is whether children entering foster care in the pilot agencies achieve permanency more quickly than they would have absent the implementation of the new case management procedures. Since it is not possible for FIA to randomly assign children entering foster care to pilot and non-pilot agencies, the evaluation must employ quasi-experimental methods to evaluate SDM pilot site performance. An evaluation approach which compares the performance of the pilot sites to similar agencies that did not implement the new case management procedures provides the best evidence of program impact (see, for instance, Mohr, 1995).

It is possible to compare pre-implementation performance of pilot agencies to their post-implementation performance, but this methodology cannot fully account for system-wide changes that may independently impact permanency. For example, significant state and federal legislation

¹ Counties outside Wayne County are referred to as “outstate” in Michigan.

² The extent of POS involvement in the pilot was determined by the Michigan FIA.

(Binsfield, April 1998; and the Adoption and Safe Families Act, January 1997)³ was enacted near the time the pilot began. Since the goal of these legislative initiatives was to expedite permanency for children in foster care, agency performance could have improved for these reasons alone. By comparing pilot agency performance to non-pilot agencies operating during the same time period, it is possible to control for the impact of these legislative initiatives, as well as other historical changes that may impact permanency.

Ensuring that the pilot and comparison agencies had similar characteristics was a second methodological concern. If these agencies serve similar cases and have similar administrative settings, differences in their performance are less likely to be attributable to disparities in the types of cases they serve. In short, careful identification of an equivalent comparison group increases confidence that performance differences between pilot and non-pilot agencies are the result of SDM implementation rather than other factors (Campbell and Stanley, 1966).

A. Selection of Comparison Groups

For reasons discussed above, the evaluators attempted to identify a comparison group of non-pilot agencies delivering foster care services in Michigan that were “equivalent” to the SDM pilot sites in terms of key demographic and service delivery characteristics. Since the evaluation began shortly after the pilot, agency comparisons were made using information available prior to SDM implementation. Equivalence was sought in the following areas:

- Community demographic characteristics such as population, urban/rural mix, and poverty rates;

³ The first set of Binsfield children’s legislation was effective 4/1/1998, the second set was effective 3/1/1999. ASFA was reflected by changes in Michigan’s policy on 2/11/1999.

- Administrative foster care service delivery characteristics such as the extent of POS contracting and the number of staff and administrative units;
- The characteristics of children entering foster care including child age and sex, initial placement type, ethnicity, etc.; and
- The agency's record of achieving permanency for children who entered foster care during an 18-month period prior to SDM implementation in December 1997.

This final criteria, prior record of achieving permanency, is one of the most important conditions for estimating equivalence because it is the primary outcome measure for the evaluation. If the comparison and pilot agencies have similar records for achieving permanency before SDM implementation, the pilot's impact may be evaluated directly by comparing differences in post-implementation performance.

The pilot included Wayne County FIA direct service, which serves metropolitan Detroit, nine outstate Michigan counties⁴ of varying sizes, and two private Wayne County POS agencies. Consequently, it was necessary to identify separate comparison sites for each of these pilot conditions and conduct an independent evaluation of each. This approach was chosen to reflect the administrative reality of foster care services in Michigan and to test the pilot in each of FIA's major service delivery arrangements. In comparison to Michigan's 81 outstate counties, Wayne County represents a unique, urban service delivery environment. Nearly 50% of Michigan's foster care caseload resides in the Detroit metropolitan area and the associated administrative challenges are not shared by the other counties. Within Wayne, approximately 40% of the foster care caseload is served by FIA direct service staff and the remaining 60% by private agencies through POS contracts. By evaluating the nine outstate pilot counties, the Wayne direct service pilot, and the Wayne POS pilot

⁴ These counties are Hillsdale, Jackson, Macomb, Menominee, Midland, Missaukee, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Wexford.

sites independently, it is possible to assess the impact of the foster care SDM pilot on each of FIA's three major service delivery mechanisms.

Children entering foster care with a permanent plan goal of return home are the subjects of this evaluation.⁵ A comparison agency for each pilot site was initially identified by examining county census data, foster care caseload size, staffing, and administrative data. Each of the nine outstate pilot counties was matched with the non-pilot Michigan county with the most similar population and administrative characteristics. Equivalence was then assessed further by comparing the case characteristics and permanency outcomes for every child with a new case opening to foster care during an 18-month period prior to SDM implementation, i.e., April 1996 through September 1997. Permanency outcomes were assessed by observing each child's placement status 15 months from the date the child entered care. As the following findings indicate, the initial matching procedure established a comparison group for the outstate counties and the Wayne County POS pilot agencies that was reasonably equivalent in terms of child case and agency characteristics. Wayne County's direct service operation, however, does not have an equivalent counterpart in Michigan and, therefore, an alternative evaluation approach was employed.

B. Method of Analysis

After using pre-implementation operating data from April 1996 to September 1997 to establish an equivalent comparison group, agency permanency performance after SDM implementation was evaluated separately for each the three service delivery areas described above.

⁵ Cases excluded from analysis are: a) cases with a return home goal but no days indicated in placement (missing placement data); b) cases with less than 30 days as an open case; and c) cases with initial out-of-state placement.

The nine outstate pilots were compared to nine similar outstate counties; the two Wayne County pilot POS agencies were compared to similar POS agencies operating in Wayne County; and the Wayne County direct service pilot was compared to itself since no suitable match agency could be found.

The post-implementation observation period began three months after SDM pilot agencies became fully operational in April 1998 and extended for 18 months, until September 1999. Each child with a new foster care case opening during this period was observed during a standardized 15-month period following entry into care.

The child's permanency status 15 months after placement is the critical outcome measure for assessing pilot performance. For evaluation purposes, permanency may be achieved by a return home to the removal family, permanent placement with another family member (i.e., a non-custodial parent or relative) or guardian, termination of parental rights (TPR) and adoption, or other permanent arrangements (permanent placement agreement, independent living, etc.). This outcome measure was chosen because it is consistent with the permanency expectations established by the 1997 federal ASFA.

Data for the evaluation was obtained from Michigan's Child Information System (CIS) which has been used statewide since 1980. It records child characteristics such as age, ethnicity, and sex, as well as placement information such as the child's living arrangement and permanent plan goal. Workers update information whenever a change in placement or goal is made.

Figure 1

Summary of Methodology	
<u>Study Design:</u>	Quasi-experimental (comparison of SDM pilot sites with equivalent counties or POS agencies).
<u>Data Source:</u>	Michigan Child Information System (CIS).
<u>Sample Cases:</u>	All children with a new foster care case opening and a goal of return home.
<u>Observation Periods:</u>	Pre-implementation equivalence (18-months: April 1996 - September 1997); Post-implementation evaluation (18-months: April 1998 - September 1999).
<u>Outcome Measure:</u>	Permanency status 15 months after each child's case opening date (percentage of children with permanency achieved).

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The nine outstate counties are examined first, followed by Wayne County POS agency and Wayne County direct service. In each presentation, the pre-implementation equivalency of the pilot and comparison group is reviewed first, followed by an evaluation of post-implementation permanency outcomes. Findings are presented in graphical or table format and the results of statistical tests, including bivariate and multi-variate analyses, are reported.

A. Evaluation of Outstate Pilot Counties

1. Establishing Pre-Implementation Equivalency

The first step in selecting a comparison group for the outstate pilot counties was to use their demographic and administrative characteristics to match them with the most similar of the 72 non-participating county agencies. In a second step, children entering foster care during an 18-month period prior to SDM implementation (April 1996 to September 1997) were observed to determine

whether the pilot and comparison counties served similar foster care cases and achieved permanency for children at a similar rate.

An assessment of the demographic and administrative characteristics of the outstate pilot and comparison sites shows that while the comparison counties had a larger total population than the pilots (1.79 million versus 1.39 million), other indicators such as public assistance, poverty rates, and percentage of rural population were very similar.⁶ The ethnic distribution and educational achievement of their general populations, however, differed. The comparison counties had a higher percentage of non-Hispanic African Americans (7.7% versus 3.2%), and a more educated adult population (21% of the population had an associate degree or higher, versus 14% in pilot counties). In terms of the foster care caseload administrative characteristics, however, the two groups were nearly identical. For fiscal year 2000, they reported similar numbers of direct service and POS cases and had approximately the same number of FIA foster care staff (see Appendix A, Table A1).

Table 1 reviews the characteristics of the children who entered foster care between April 1996 and September 1997 (the pre-implementation period). The pilot and comparison counties were similar with regard to the age of children who entered care, but differed in the ethnic distribution of those children. The outstate comparison group had a larger proportion of African American children (41.4% versus 18.1%). Regarding children's initial living arrangement, pilot counties had a significantly larger proportion of children initially placed in a group or shelter home (16.0% versus 4.7%),⁷ as opposed to a foster home.

⁶ Appendix A, Table A1 compares the demographic and administrative characteristics of the pilot and comparison groups.

⁷ An important question is whether children initially placed in a group home or a shelter remained at that placement or were subsequently placed elsewhere. It appears that most children initially placed in a shelter group home did not remain there. Of those children initially placed in a group/shelter home in either group, only 13.4% had no subsequent placement elsewhere. Approximately half (47.7%) were later placed in a foster home, approximately one-fourth (24.9%) were later placed in a relative or guardian's home, and the remaining 30.3% were placed in a residential care facility (more than one subsequent placement is possible; data not shown in table).

The table also shows that a greater proportion of cases from the nine comparison counties were managed by agencies under POS contracts. This difference is, in fact, a function of SDM implementation. Only two of the POS agencies operating in the outstate pilot counties implemented SDM procedures. Cases served by pilot county POS agencies that did not employ SDM procedures were excluded from the analysis because they did not employ the new case management procedures.

Table 1				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Case Characteristics				
New Foster Care Case Characteristics⁸	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	N	%	N	%
Child's Age at Case Open Date				
1 year or younger	157	23.3%	268	22.9%
2 - 4	138	20.4%	230	19.6%
5 - 9	191	28.3%	317	27.1%
10 - 14	142	21.0%	244	20.8%
15 or older	47	7.0%	112	9.6%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%
Race of Child **				
White	519	76.9%	607	51.8%
African American	122	18.1%	485	41.4%
Other	28	4.1%	26	2.2%
Missing	6	0.9%	53	4.5%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%
Initial Living Arrangement **				
Relatives or legal guardian	226	33.5%	329	28.1%
Foster home	331	49.0%	764	65.2%
Group/shelter home	108	16.0%	55	4.7%
Residential/treatment facility	2	0.3%	16	1.4%
Other	8	1.2%	7	0.6%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%
Case Management Responsibility**				
FIA direct service	666	98.7%	746	63.7%
POS agency	9	1.3%	425	36.3%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

⁸ Statistical significance for categorical variables with more than two categories was determined from Pearson's chi-square (permanency type included). Significance for two category variables (such as whether or not permanency was achieved) was determined from Fisher's exact test.

a. *Pre-Implementation Permanency Performance*

Since the goal of SDM is to expedite permanency, the analysis also compared the proportion of children for whom permanency was achieved. Permanency is defined as return home to the removal family, a permanent placement with another family member (i.e., a non-custodial parent or relative) or guardian, TPR and adoption, or other permanent arrangements (permanent placement agreement, independent living, etc.). Children for whom permanency was not achieved were still in placement with a goal of return home 15 months after their case opening.

During the pre-implementation period, 59.4% of the children entering foster care in the pilot counties had a permanent placement within 15 months of case opening (see Table 2). The permanency rate was somewhat higher (64.0%) for children served by comparison counties, but the difference is not statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, in an 18-month period prior to SDM implementation, children entering foster care in comparison and pilot counties were equally likely to enter a permanent placement within 15 months of entering care.

Table 2				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Pre-Implementation Permanency⁹	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	N	%	N	%
No	274	40.6%	421	36.0%
Yes, Permanency Achieved*	401	59.4%	750	64.0%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%

* Significance of group difference < .10 (two-tailed).

⁹ As mentioned previously, statistical significance for categorical variables with more than two categories was determined from Pearson’s chi-square (permanency type included). Significance for two category variables (such as whether or not permanency was achieved) was determined from Fisher’s exact test.

Figure 2

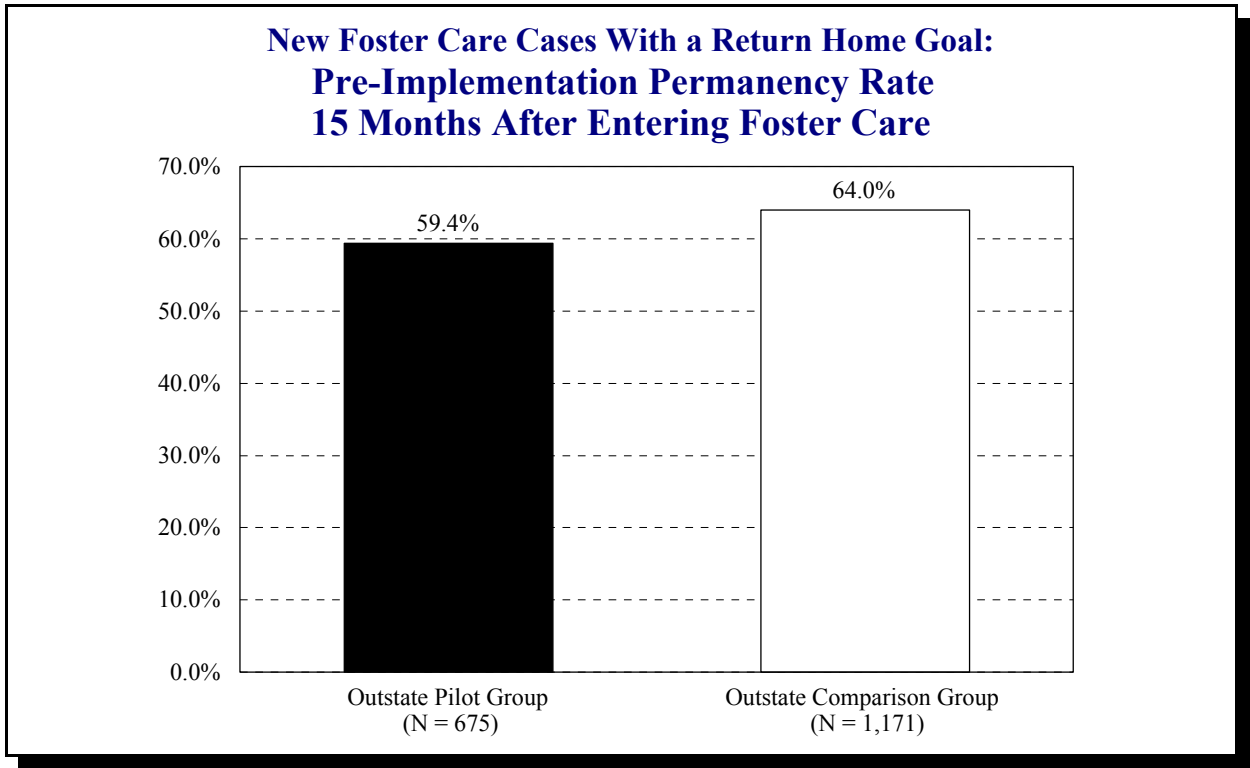


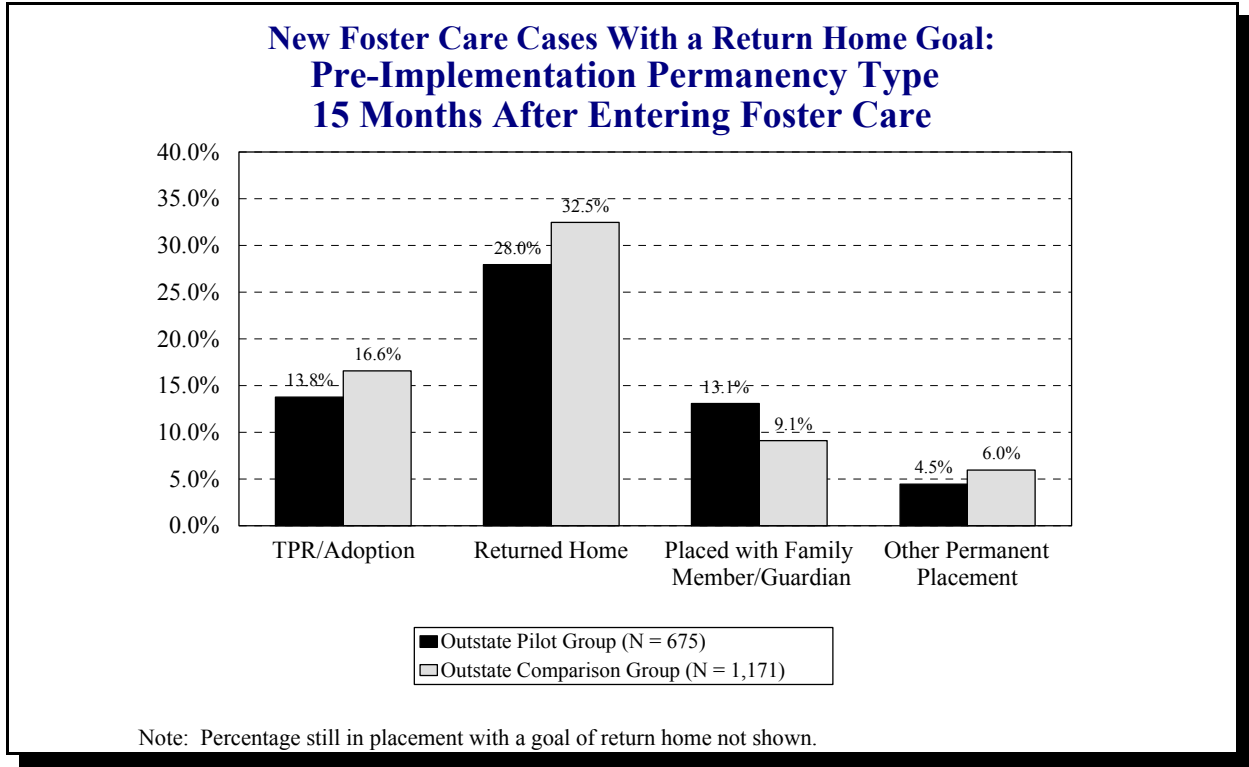
Table 3 compares permanency by the type observed, i.e., return home, TPR/adoption, permanent placement with a family member or guardian,¹⁰ etc. Pilot counties were somewhat less likely to return the child home or complete TPR/adoption.

Table 3				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Permanency Type 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Permanency Type**	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	N	%	N	%
Still in Placement with Return Home Goal	274	40.6%	421	36.0%
TPR/Adoption	93	13.8%	194	16.6%
Returned Home	189	28.0%	380	32.5%
Family Member/Guardian Permanent Placement	89	13.1%	106	9.1%
Other Permanent Placement	30	4.5%	70	6.0%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

¹⁰ A percentage of cases (less than 10% in any group) were closed with a close code of “placed with family member” but no other information was available (i.e., living arrangement = “foster care” and permanency goal = “return home”). Under FIA definitions, a close code of “placed with family member” includes return home. These cases were included in the category of “family member, guardian permanent placement” to ensure the correct nature of the “return home” category. Thus, it is possible but not easily verified that a small percentage of these children were returned home.

Figure 3



b. Pre-Implementation Permanency by Ethnic and Placement Subgroups

The preceding description of case characteristics indicated that a larger proportion of African American children entered care in the outstate comparison counties (see Table 1). To examine the possible impact of these disparities on group equivalence, permanency rates for pilot and comparison cases were compared within each ethnic subgroup. Table 4 shows the number of cases in each subgroup and the rate of permanency observed for those subgroup cases. For instance, there were 519 White children served by the pilot counties and 57.8% of them achieved permanency within 15 months. In the comparison group, there were 607 White children and 63.8% achieved permanency. No other significant differences (at the .05 level) in permanency rates for ethnic subgroups were found between pilot and comparison cases.

The pilot and comparison sites also differed in their initial placement of children. Pilot counties placed a larger percentage of their cases in relative care or shelter/group homes. As Table 4 indicates, cases served by pilot and comparison counties had similar permanency rates for foster home placements (60.4% versus 63.7%), and comparison counties had somewhat higher permanency rates for children placed with relatives/guardians and in group homes. None of these subgroup comparisons, however, were statistically significant.

As mentioned previously, pilot counties had a much lower proportion of cases that were managed by POS agencies. Table 4 shows that, among direct service cases, pilot and comparison county cases had similar permanency rates. While pilot county cases managed by a POS agency appeared to have a lower permanency rate than similar cases in the comparison counties, no conclusions can be drawn from such a small sample size.

Table 4				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care by Case Characteristics				
Case Characteristic	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	Total N	%	Total N	%
Child Ethnicity				
White*	519	57.8%	607	63.8%
African American	122	63.9%	485	64.3%
Other/Unknown	34	67.6%	79	64.6%
Initial Placement				
Relative, legal guardian	226	62.4%	329	67.2%
Foster home	331	60.4%	764	63.7%
Group/shelter home	108	50.0%	55	54.5%
Other	10	60.0%	23	52.2%
Case Management Responsibility				
FIA direct service	666	59.5%	746	63.8%
POS agency	9	55.6%	425	64.5%

* Significance of group difference < .10 (two-tailed).

c. Summary of Outstate Pre-Implementation Findings

The analyses of data from the pre-implementation period (April 1996 to September 1997) discovered some differences between outstate pilot and comparison counties in the characteristics of children entering foster care. Despite these differences in ethnicity and initial placement, pilot and comparison counties achieved similar results with regard to permanency. The sites achieved permanency at a similar rate for each of the ethnic or placement subgroups examined. This supports the conclusion that the pilot and comparison sites were reasonably equivalent prior to the December 1997 implementation of SDM in the pilot counties. Post-implementation evaluation findings are presented in the next section of the report.

2. Outstate Pilot Post-Implementation Evaluation Findings

Social workers in the nine outstate pilot counties were trained in and implemented SDM assessment procedures in December 1997. By April 1998, SDM was integrated into pilot county case management procedures. Comparison counties continued to use the regular FIA case management procedures that were employed by all counties prior to December 1997.

While implementation involved extensive worker and supervisor training and ongoing technical assistance, it is unlikely that all SDM assessments and policies were applied to all pilot county cases.¹¹ This is expected since major case management changes are difficult to fully implement in large service delivery systems. The evaluation does not attempt to estimate pilot county compliance with SDM procedures during the post-implementation period. In an effort to provide a conservative estimate of program impact, it assumes that all cases entering foster care in the pilots were served by workers who employed SDM.

The post-implementation evaluation findings reported here were observed during an 18-month period beginning in April 1998.¹² Post-implementation evaluation findings are presented in a similar format as the pre-implementation analyses. Permanency rates for all cases are compared first, followed by findings for subgroups defined by ethnicity, child's initial placement, and case management responsibility.

The proportion of children for whom permanency was achieved during the post-implementation period is shown in Table 5. Fifteen months after entering foster care, 67.8% of the children served by the pilot counties achieved permanency. This is significantly higher than the rate observed for comparison counties (56.5%).

¹¹ Individual case reviews and aggregate data reports conducted during implementation indicated that not all assessments were completed on all cases.

¹² As mentioned previously, the subjects were all new foster care cases with an initial permanency planning goal of return home placed in the pilot and comparison counties between April 1998 and September 1999.

Table 5				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Post-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Post-Implementation Permanency	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	N	%	N	%
No	285	32.2%	532	43.5%
Yes, Permanency Achieved**	600	67.8%	690	56.5%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 4

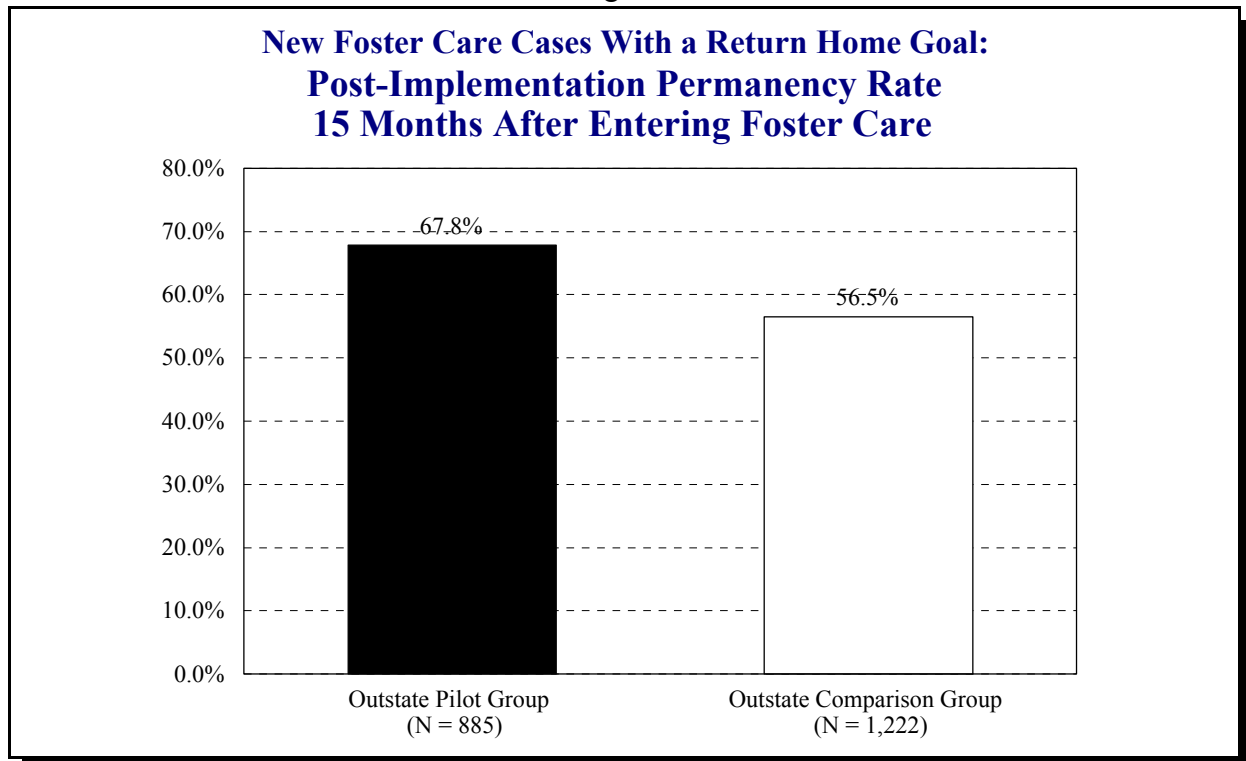


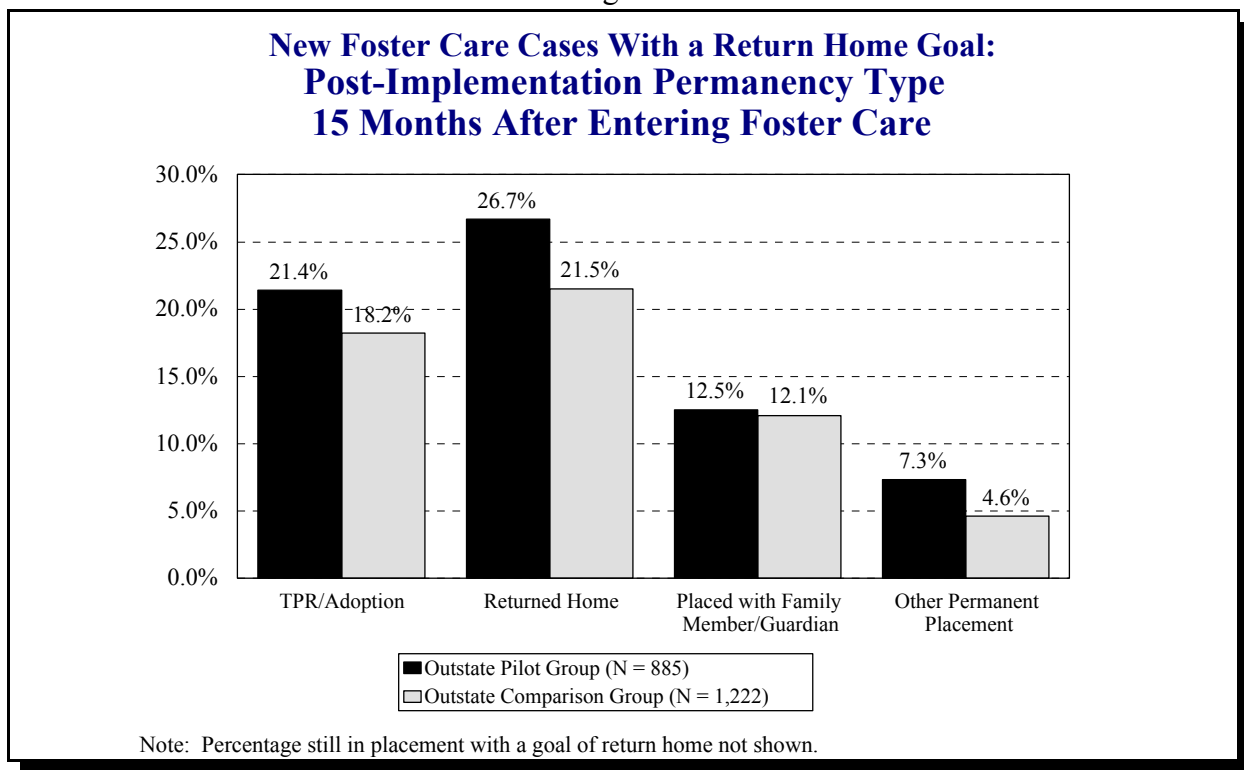
Table 6 examines the type of permanency achieved during the post-implementation period. Permanency status may be reached by returning the child to the removal home, TPR/adoption, permanent placement with a family member (including a non-custodial parent or relative) or guardian, or other permanent placements including permanent foster family agreements and independent living arrangements. Children for whom permanency was not achieved are shown in the table as still in placement with a return home goal.

As indicated previously in Table 5, pilot counties had a higher rate of permanency after SDM implementation. Table 6 shows that the pilot counties achieved TPR/adoption and return home for a greater proportion of children than did the comparison counties.

Table 6				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Post-Implementation Permanency Type 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Permanency Type Post-Implementation**	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	N	%	N	%
Still in Placement with Return Home Goal	285	32.2%	532	43.5%
TPR/Adoption	189	21.4%	223	18.2%
Returned Home	236	26.7%	263	21.5%
Family Member/Guardian Permanent Placement	111	12.5%	147	12.1%
Other Permanent Placement	64	7.3%	57	4.6%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 5



a. *Post-Implementation Permanency by Ethnic and Placement Subgroups*

Table 7 compares permanency rates for subgroups defined by child ethnicity, initial placement type, and case management responsibilities. The pilot counties had significantly higher permanency rates than did the comparison counties for children in each of the three ethnic groups examined.

Permanency rates by the type of initial placement show a similar pattern. For cases initially placed with relatives, in a foster home, or in a shelter home, pilot group cases had significantly higher permanency rates. Seventy percent of the children initially placed with a relative or guardian in pilot counties achieved permanency, versus 55.4% of children similarly placed in comparison sites. For children in foster home placements, the rate among pilot cases was 66.3% compared to 58.9% for the comparison group.

The pilot counties also had higher permanency rates than did the comparison counties regardless of case management responsibility. Table 7 shows that for cases served directly by FIA staff, permanency was achieved for 68.6% of pilot county cases and 61.0% of comparison county cases, and the difference is statistically significant. This pattern is also evident among cases managed by POS agencies, although the difference is not statistically significant given the small number of pilot county cases managed by a POS agency (n=44).

Table 7				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Post-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care by Case Characteristics				
Case Characteristic	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	Total N	%	Total N	%
Ethnicity of Child				
White**	667	66.7%	607	55.8%
African American**	174	67.2%	507	55.2%
Other/Unknown**	44	86.4%	71	65.7%
Initial Placement				
Relative, legal guardian**	350	70.0%	426	55.4%
Foster home**	424	66.3%	682	58.9%
Group/shelter home**	100	66.0%	84	44.0%
Other	11	72.7%	30	50.0%
Case Management Responsibility				
FIA direct service**	841	68.6%	871	61.0%
POS agency	44	52.3%	351	45.3%

**Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

b. Summary of Post-Implementation Evaluation Findings

During an 18-month operating period which preceded SDM implementation, pilot and comparison counties employed the same case management procedures and had very similar records of achieving permanency for children entering foster care. After SDM implementation, however, the nine outstate pilot counties attained permanency for a significantly greater proportion of children entering foster care than comparison counties. This pattern holds regardless of the type of permanency attained and is true for subgroups of children defined by ethnicity and initial placement.

While the previous results examined the permanency outcomes for the outstate pilot and comparison counties within child subgroups, a multivariate analysis was employed to more carefully assess the impact of SDM while controlling for the observed differences in characteristics of children entering care. Logistic regression was used to assess the impact of SDM while controlling for child ethnicity, child age at case opening, child's initial placement, and case management responsibilities (whether or not a POS agency managed the case; see Appendix B for more details). Among the pre-implementation cases, entering foster care in a pilot county did not significantly change the likelihood of a permanent placement within 15 months of case opening. Among post-implementation cases, however, children served by pilot sites were significantly more likely to have attained permanency within 15 months (odds ratio 1.46), after controlling for the case and child characteristics mentioned previously.¹³ These findings suggest that SDM implementation was considerably more effective in expediting permanency for children than were the existing case management procedures.

¹³ Refer to Appendix B for more details.

B. Evaluation of Wayne County Direct Service and Purchase of Service (POS) Agencies

In Wayne County, two distinct SDM pilots existed. One very large pilot group was the entire Wayne County FIA direct service agency that employs 241 service workers and recently had an active foster care caseload of 5,400 children (see Appendix A, Table A1). The second, smaller SDM pilot group included two Wayne POS agencies with a combined caseload of approximately 600 children. Staff in both pilot sites began using SDM to serve children entering foster care in December 1997. This section of the report presents evaluation findings for these two types of foster care service delivery in Wayne County - direct service and POS.

The methodology and presentation format are nearly identical to those employed for the outstate pilot county evaluation. The same pre- and post-implementation periods were examined and the same group of cases were observed. The search for appropriate non-SDM comparison agencies for the two pilot sites is presented first, followed by evaluation findings for the Wayne POS and Wayne County direct service pilots.

1. Establishing Pre-Implementation Equivalency

An obvious comparison group for the two SDM pilot POS agencies was the remaining POS agencies who serve Wayne County children but did not implement SDM.¹⁴ Establishing a comparison group for Wayne County direct service presented a more difficult challenge. There are no urban areas in Michigan of comparable size, population density, or complexity. Genesee County, like Wayne, has a large urban center (Flint) which makes it the best candidate, but further comparison of demographics shows that these two counties differ significantly. Genesee is about one-fifth the size of Wayne and has a higher percentage of rural residents (21.2% versus 1.2% respectively, see Table

¹⁴ Cases are randomly assigned to agencies (POS and direct service agencies) on a rotating basis as they enter foster care, so no systematic bias in caseload type should exist.

A1). Wayne County's population is 56% White, while Genesee County's population is more than three-fourths (77%) White. The counties also differ in their foster care administrative burden. Wayne County served a caseload of 5,414 ongoing foster care cases in the fiscal year 2000 and employed 241 direct service foster care staff. Genesee served 841 cases and had 40 staff (see Table A1). Based on these administrative measures, Wayne County is six times larger than Genesee.

An examination of the pre-implementation case characteristics in Table 8 illustrates further differences between these counties. Children entering foster care between April 1996 and September 1997 in Wayne and Genesee counties differed significantly according to child age, ethnicity, and initial living arrangement. Wayne had a higher proportion of African American children entering care and a higher percentage of children entering residential treatment as an initial living arrangement.

Table 8 also compares children served by Wayne County's pilot and comparison POS agencies during the pre-implementation period. Although both groups served children from the same population base (Wayne County), children entering care differed in some respects. For instance, children in the pilot POS cases were somewhat younger and were more likely to be placed initially in a foster home rather than with a relative or guardian. These differences, while significant, are not so pronounced as those observed between Wayne County direct service and Genesee County direct service.

Table 8										
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Foster Care Case Characteristics for Wayne County Pilot and Comparison Sites										
Pre-Implementation Foster Care Case Characteristics	Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison (Genessee)		Sig.	Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison		Sig.
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
Child's Age at Case Open Date										
1 year or younger	518	27.6%	41	18.5%	**	99	34.9%	370	25.5%	**
2 - 4	355	18.9%	47	21.2%		53	18.7%	275	19.0%	
5 - 9	481	25.6%	82	36.9%		96	33.8%	411	28.3%	
10 - 14	346	18.4%	41	18.5%		34	12.0%	266	18.3%	
15 or older	179	9.5%	11	5.0%		2	0.7%	128	8.9%	
Total	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%		284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%	
Race of Child										
White	373	19.9%	92	41.4%	**	33	11.6%	244	16.8%	**
African American	1,467	78.1%	119	53.6%		245	86.3%	1,183	81.6%	
Other	27	1.4%	6	2.7%		2	0.7%	13	0.9%	
Missing	12	0.6%	5	2.3%		4	1.4%	10	0.7%	
Total	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%		284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%	
Initial Living Arrangement										
Relatives or legal guardian	726	38.6%	93	41.9%	**	0	0.0%	437	30.1%	**
Foster home	1,013	53.9%	121	54.5%		278	97.9%	881	60.8%	
Group/shelter home	5	0.3%	0	0.0%		0	0.0%	12	0.8%	
Residential/treatment facility	122	6.5%	0	0.0%		6	2.1%	106	7.3%	
Other	13	0.7%	8	3.6%		0	0.0%	14	1.0%	
Total	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%		284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%	
Case Management Responsibilities										
FIA direct service	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%						
POS agency						284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%	
Total	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%		284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%	

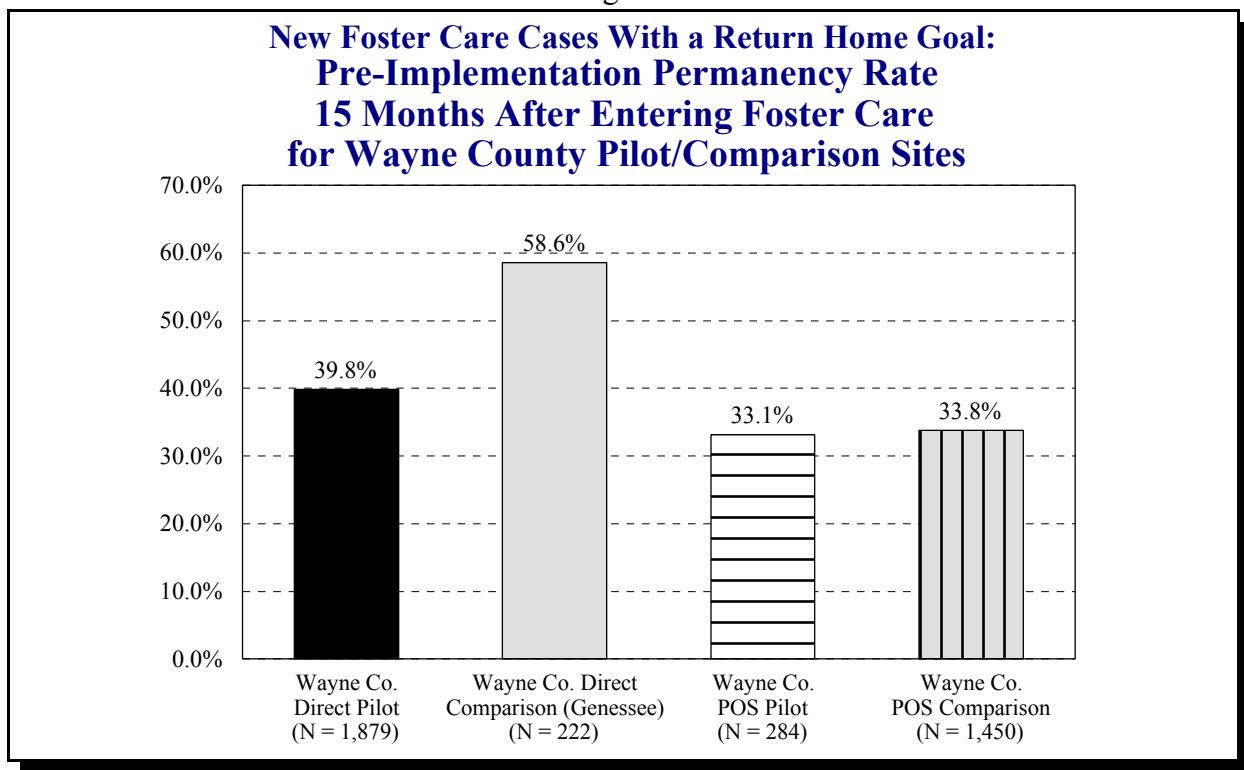
** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Table 9 examines permanency outcomes for children entering foster care during the pre-implementation period (April 1996 through September 1997) for the above mentioned groups. In Genesee, 58.6% of the children entering foster care were in a permanent placement within 15 months versus only 39.8% in Wayne County direct. The Wayne County POS pilot and the Wayne POS comparison agencies, however, had nearly identical permanency outcomes (33.1% and 33.8%, respectively). These findings from the pre-implementation period indicate that Wayne County direct service achieved permanency at a much lower rate than Genesee County, but performed significantly better than either the Wayne POS pilot or POS comparison groups.

Table 9								
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care								
Permanency Achieved?	Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison (Genesee)		Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	1,132	60.2%	92	41.4%	190	66.9%	960	66.2%
Yes, Permanency Achieved**	747	39.8%	130	58.6%	94	33.1%	490	33.8%
Total	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%

** Significance of difference between Wayne County direct and Genesee; Wayne County direct and POS pilot; Wayne County direct and POS comparison < .05 (two-tailed). The difference between Wayne County POS pilot and POS comparison is not significant.

Figure 6



Two conclusions can be drawn from these findings. The first is that the Wayne POS pilot and comparison agencies are reasonably well matched and can accurately estimate the impact of SDM in POS agencies. The second is that Genessee is not equivalent to Wayne County on the most critical pre-implementation characteristics. Genessee County serves a different foster care caseload and achieved permanency for children at a much higher rate than Wayne direct service. Given these disparities, it is not feasible to use Genessee as a comparison site for Wayne direct in the post-implementation period.

The alternative to comparing Wayne County direct service to another Michigan county is to adopt a different and weaker evaluation design. Given Wayne County's unique status, the only reasonable option was to conduct a pre/post evaluation of SDM implementation. Wayne County's permanency performance in the period preceding SDM implementation was compared directly to its

post-SDM implementation performance. In effect, Wayne County served as its own control group. This evaluation method is not as rigorous as the approach employed for the other pilot sites but provides some insight into the impact of SDM.

The following section assesses SDM implementation in the Wayne County POS agencies by reviewing the pilot and comparison agencies pre- and post-implementation. It is followed by an examination of pre- and post-implementation findings for Wayne County direct service.

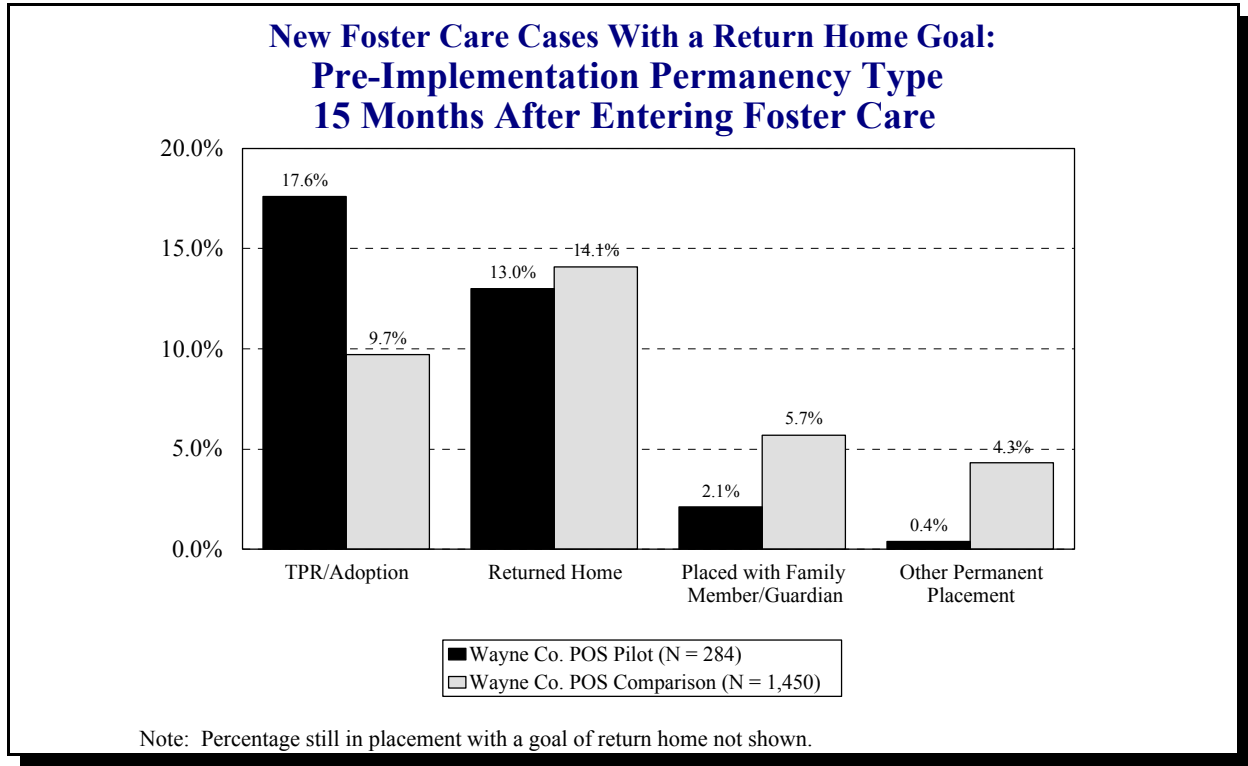
2. Evaluation of Wayne County POS Pilot Agencies

Table 10 shows that the SDM pilot POS agencies were more likely to achieve permanency by TPR/adoption during the pre-implementation period than were the comparison agencies. In addition, comparison agencies were more likely to permanently place children with a family member, relative, or guardian. The overall permanency rate for all types, however, is nearly the same (33.1% and 33.8%, respectively, see Table 9) and an almost identical percentage of children remain in placement with a return home goal at the end of the 15-month follow-up.

Table 10				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Permanency Type 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Child Permanency Type Pre-Implementation**	Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%
Still in Placement with Return Home Goal	190	66.9%	960	66.2%
TPR/Adoption	50	17.6%	141	9.7%
Returned Home	37	13.0%	204	14.1%
Family Member/Guardian Permanent Placement	6	2.1%	83	5.7%
Other Permanent Placement	1	0.4%	62	4.3%
Total	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%

**Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 7



a. *Pre-Implementation Permanency by Ethnic, Placement, and Age Subgroups*

Table 11 compares permanency rates by ethnicity and initial placement for children that entered care in the Wayne County pilot and comparison POS agencies. With regard to children’s ethnicity, pilot agencies were significantly less likely (at the .05 level) to achieve permanency for White children than comparison agencies, but the number of children (33) was very small.

As Table 8 indicated previously, the pilot and comparison POS agencies also differed in the type of initial placement children received. A much higher percentage of children in the pilot had a foster care placement as opposed to relative care. Table 11 indicates that pilot and comparison agencies had very similar pre-implementation performance for children placed in foster homes (31.7%

versus 30.1%, respectively). The pilot agencies did not have enough cases in other placement categories to enable a comparison.

The age of children entering care also differed in the POS pilot and comparison agencies (see Table 8). Pilot agencies served a greater proportion of younger children than did the comparison sites (53.3% and 44.5% under four years of age, respectively). To examine the possible impact of this disparity on group equivalence, the permanency rate was compared for children in three age groups (see Table 11). None of the pilot/comparison differences found by age group were statistically significant.

Table 11				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care by Case Characteristics				
Case Characteristic	Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	Total N	%	Total N	%
Ethnicity of Child				
White**	33	18.2%	244	47.1%
African American	245	35.1%	1,183	30.8%
Other/Unknown	6	33.3%	23	47.8%
Initial Placement				
Relative, legal guardian	0	N/A	437	37.8%
Foster home	278	31.7%	881	30.1%
Other*	6	100.0%	132	45.5%
Age of Child at Case Opening				
One year or younger	99	44.4%	370	37.8%
Two to four years of age	53	18.9%	275	25.1%
Five or older	132	30.3%	805	34.9%

* Significance of group difference < .10 (two-tailed).

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

b. *Summary of Wayne County POS Pre-Implementation Findings*

While some differences exist in the characteristics of Wayne County POS pilot and comparison agency cases in the pre-implementation period, the groups appear to be similar in terms of permanency performance and achieved permanency for children entering foster care at virtually the same rate. Post-implementation evaluation findings are presented in the next section.

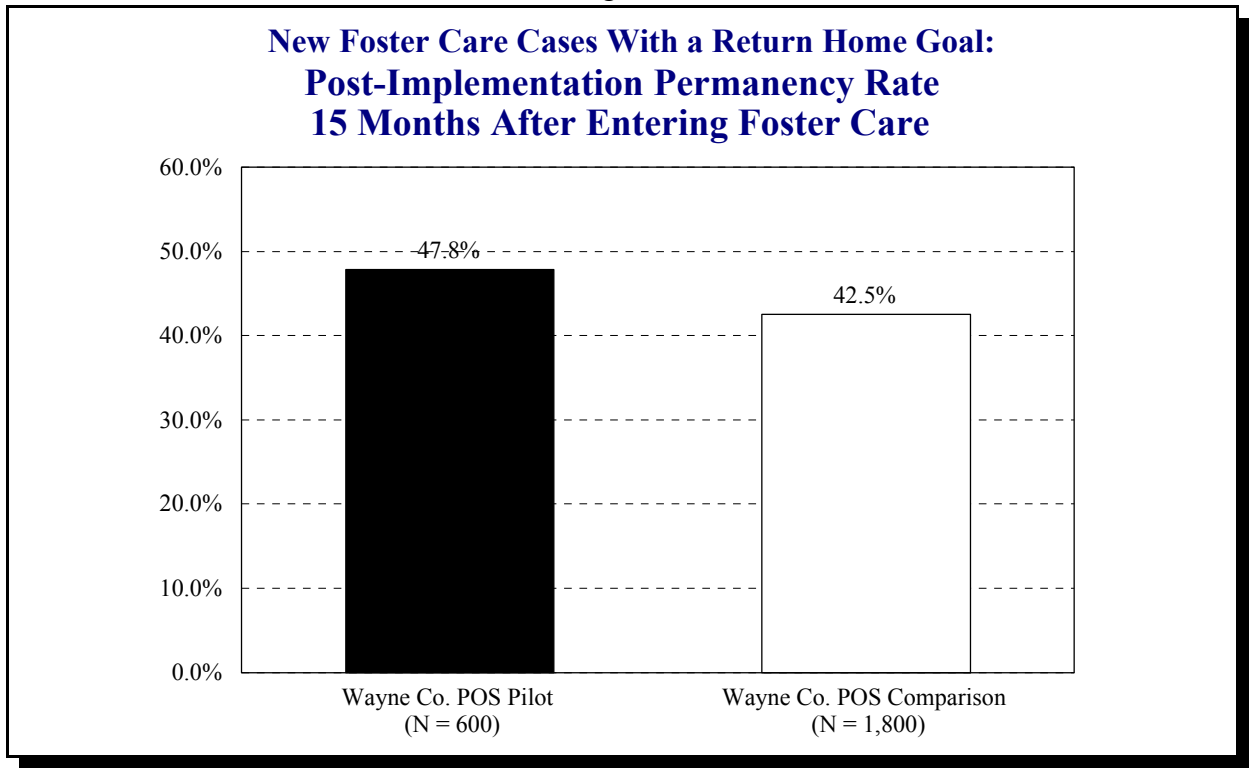
c. *Post-Implementation Wayne County POS Evaluation Findings*

In the 18-month period following SDM implementation (April 1998 through September 1999), permanency was achieved for 47.8% of the 600 children entering foster care in the Wayne POS pilot agencies (see Table 12). This is significantly higher than the permanency rate (42.5%) observed for the 1,800 children served by the comparison POS agencies.

Table 12				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Post-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Permanency Achieved Post-Implementation	Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%
No	313	52.2%	1,035	57.5%
Yes, Permanency Achieved**	287	47.8%	765	42.5%
Total	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%

**Significance at group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 8

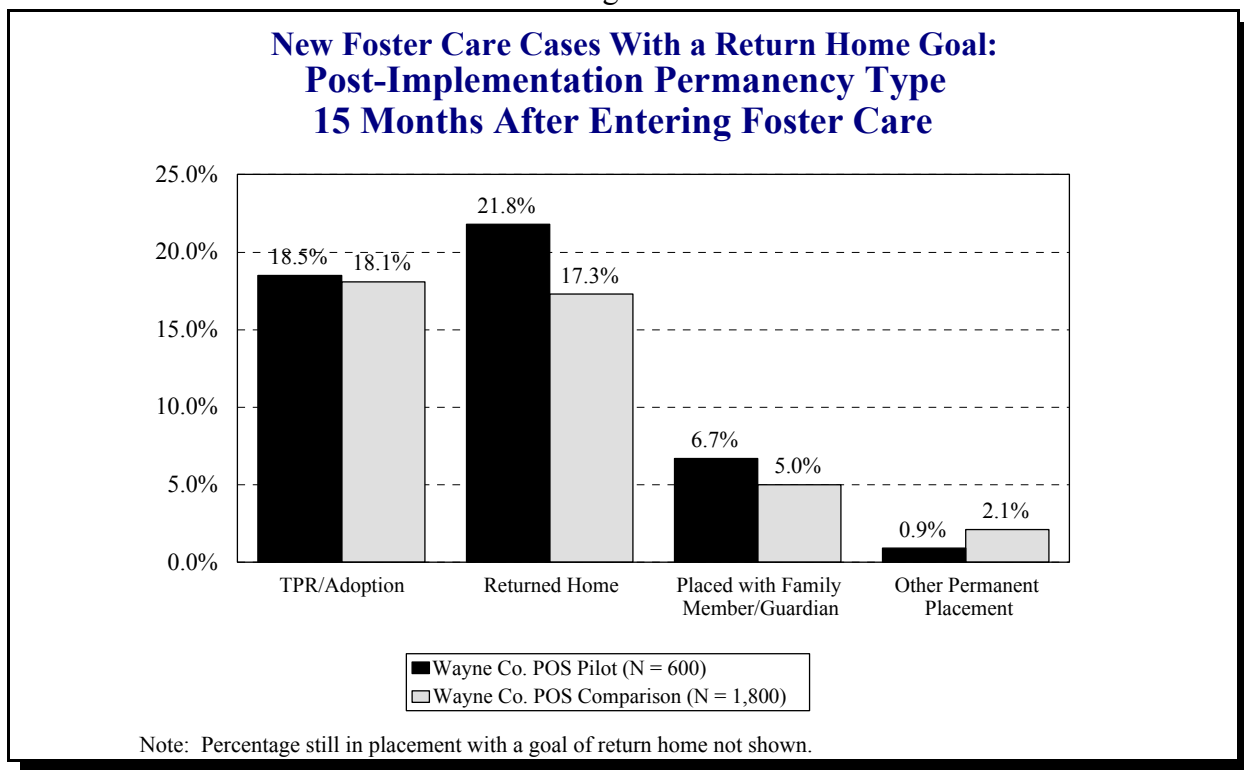


As indicated previously in Table 12, the pilot agencies had a much higher rate of permanency after SDM implementation than did the comparison POS agencies. During the post-implementation period, the pilot and comparison agencies achieved permanency by TPR/adoption at about the same frequency, but the pilot agencies returned a higher proportion of children home (21.8% versus 17.3%, see Table 13).

Table 13				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Post-Implementation Permanency Type 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Child's Permanency Type Post-Implementation**	Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%
Still in Placement with Return Home Goal	313	52.2%	1,035	57.5%
TPR/Adoption	111	18.5%	326	18.1%
Returned Home	131	21.8%	311	17.3%
Family Member/Guardian Permanent Placement	40	6.7%	90	5.0%
Other Permanent Placement	5	0.9%	38	2.1%
Total	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%

**Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 9



d. Post-Implementation POS Permanency by Ethnic, Placement, and Age Subgroups

Table 14 compares the proportion of children for whom permanency was achieved in pilot and comparison agencies by subgroups. Both White and African American children served by the pilot POS agencies had higher permanency rates than their counterparts in comparison agencies, although the difference was not significant for African American children served.

Pilot agencies also demonstrated somewhat higher rates of permanency for children in each type of initial placement (see Table 14), although the results were not significant. For children initially placed with relatives or guardians, the pilot agencies' permanency rate was 46.9%, versus 39.3% for the other POS agencies. Approximately 47.8% of the children initially placed in a foster home by the pilot agencies achieved permanency, compared to 44.2% of the children similarly placed by the comparison agencies.

Table 14 also examines post-implementation performance by the age of the child. Pilot agencies achieved permanency for a significantly higher proportion of children in two of the three age groups examined (children age two to four and age five and older). The permanency rate for children age one year or younger was slightly lower for the pilot agencies compared to that of the comparison agencies, but the difference observed is not significant.

Table 14				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Post-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care by Case Characteristics				
Case Characteristic	Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	Total N	%	Total N	%
Ethnicity of Child				
White**	74	59.5%	283	44.9%
African American	509	45.4%	1,445	41.9%
Other/Unknown*	17	70.6%	72	45.8%
Initial Placement				
Relative, legal guardian	64	46.9%	285	39.3%
Foster home	517	47.8%	1,329	44.2%
Other	19	52.6%	186	35.5%
Age of Child at Case Opening				
One year or younger	163	46.6%	477	50.9%
Two to four years of age*	132	49.2%	326	40.2%
Five or older**	305	47.9%	995	39.1%

* Significance of group difference < .10 (two-tailed).

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

e. Summary of Post-Implementation Evaluation Findings

During the 18-month pre-implementation operating period, the Wayne POS pilot and comparison agencies were reasonably equivalent in terms of their caseload characteristics and had

almost the same record of achieving permanency for children entering placement. During the 18-month operating period following SDM implementation, however, the performance of POS pilot agencies was significantly better than that of comparison agencies. Pilot agencies had higher rates of permanency for all cases entering foster care and for several of the child subgroups examined.

While the previous results examined permanency outcomes for the pilot and comparison agencies within child subgroups, a multivariate analysis was pursued to assess the impact of SDM while controlling for the observed differences in characteristics of children entering care. As with the evaluation of the outstate pilot group, logistic regression was used to assess the impact of pilot agency service delivery while controlling for child ethnicity, age at case opening, and initial placement (see Appendix B for more details). During the pre-implementation period, cases served by a pilot agency were slightly more likely to have a permanent placement within 15 months of case opening compared to cases served by comparison agencies, but the relationship was not statistically significant. Post-implementation, pilot agency cases were significantly more likely to have attained permanency within 15 months (odds ratio 1.22) after controlling for the child characteristics mentioned previously.¹⁵

These findings support the conclusion that SDM implementation helped the pilot POS agencies expedite permanency for children. These results are especially strong given that the pilot and comparison agencies serve children in the same geographic area.

3. Evaluation of Wayne County Direct Service

As the preceding section indicated, a comparison group with similar demographics and service delivery characteristics could not be found for Wayne County direct service. Other counties in

¹⁵ Refer to Appendix B for more details.

Michigan differ with regard to demographics, and non-SDM POS agencies operating within Wayne County differ in management structure. The only comparison available for Wayne County direct service, therefore, is itself.

Comparing Wayne County direct service pre-implementation performance to its post-SDM implementation performance, as mentioned previously, has limitations. This type of evaluation does not control for changes over time which might have impacted performance. For example, legislation (Binsfield, ASFA) passed shortly after pilot implementation of SDM imposed guidelines to expedite permanency for children entering foster care and is likely to have impacted agency performance.

In addition, the characteristics of cases served by Wayne County have changed over time. For instance, post-implementation case statistics show a higher proportion of older children entering care (64.5% age five and over as opposed to 53.5% during pre-implementation, see Table 15). The most dramatic change, however, was in the initial placement of children. The post-implementation period had a much higher proportion of children initially placed with a relative or guardian (73.5% compared to 38.6% pre-implementation, see Table 15).

Table 15				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Foster Care Case Characteristics for Wayne County Direct Service				
Foster Care Case Characteristics	Wayne Co. Direct Pre-Implementation		Wayne Co. Direct Post-Implementation	
	N	%	N	%
Child's Age at Case Open Date**				
1 year or younger	518	27.6%	328	20.7%
2 - 4	355	18.9%	234	14.8%
5 - 9	481	25.6%	440	27.8%
10 - 14	346	18.4%	413	26.1%
15 or older	179	9.5%	163	10.3%
Missing	0	0.0%	5	0.3%
Total	1,879	100.0%	1,583	100.0%
Race of Child**				
White	373	19.9%	350	22.1%
African American	1,467	78.1%	1,177	74.4%
Other/Unknown	39	2.1%	56	3.6%
Total	1,879	100.0%	1,583	100.0%
Initial Living Arrangement**				
Relatives or Legal Guardian	726	38.6%	1,163	73.5%
Foster Home	1,013	53.9%	186	11.6%
Other	140	7.5%	234	14.8%
Total	1,879	100.0%	1,583	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Both legislative changes and differences in case characteristics must be considered when comparing pre/post-implementation outcomes for Wayne County direct service.

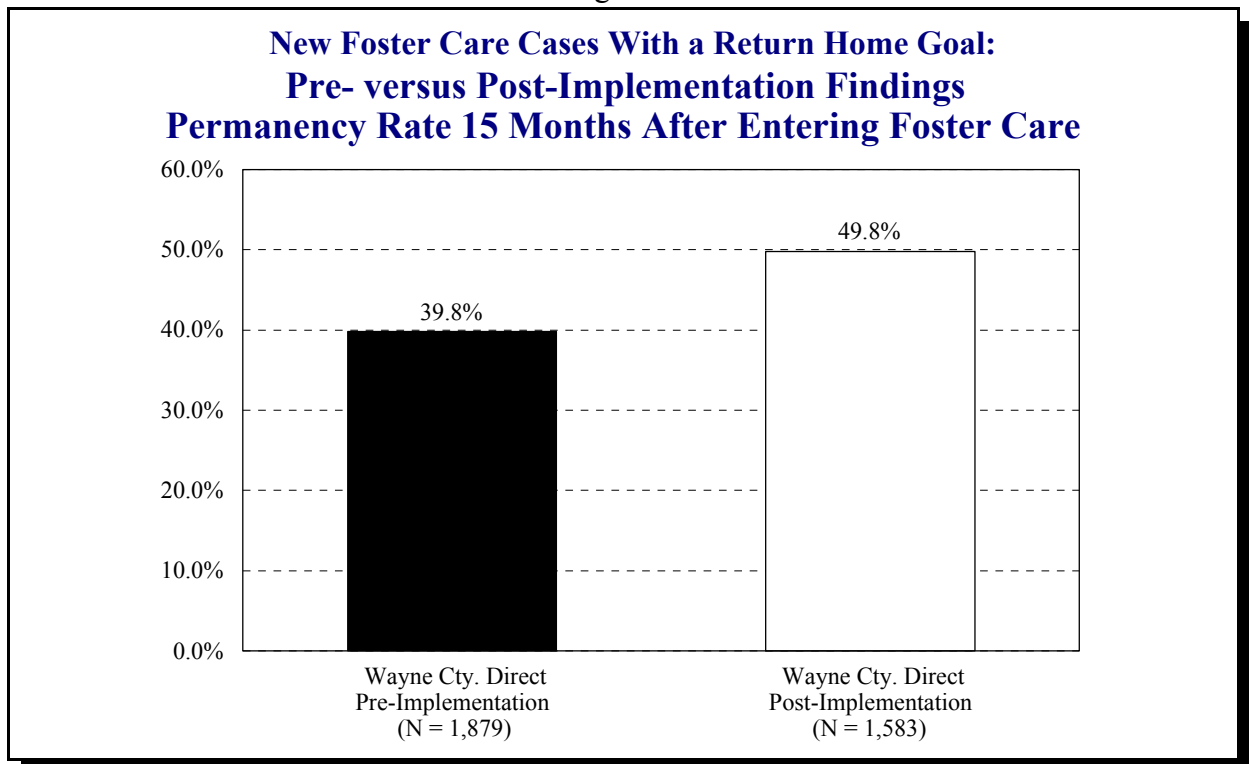
a. *Permanency Performance*

Table 16 shows that 39.8% of the 1,879 children entering foster care during the pre-implementation period had a permanent placement within 15 months of case opening. The permanency rate was significantly higher (49.8%) for the 1,583 children entering care post-implementation.

Table 16				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre and Post-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Permanency Achieved	Wayne Co. Direct Pre-Implementation		Wayne Co. Direct Post-Implementation	
	N	%	N	%
No	1,132	60.2%	794	50.2%
Yes, Permanency Achieved**	747	39.8%	789	49.8%
Total	1,879	100.0%	1,583	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 10

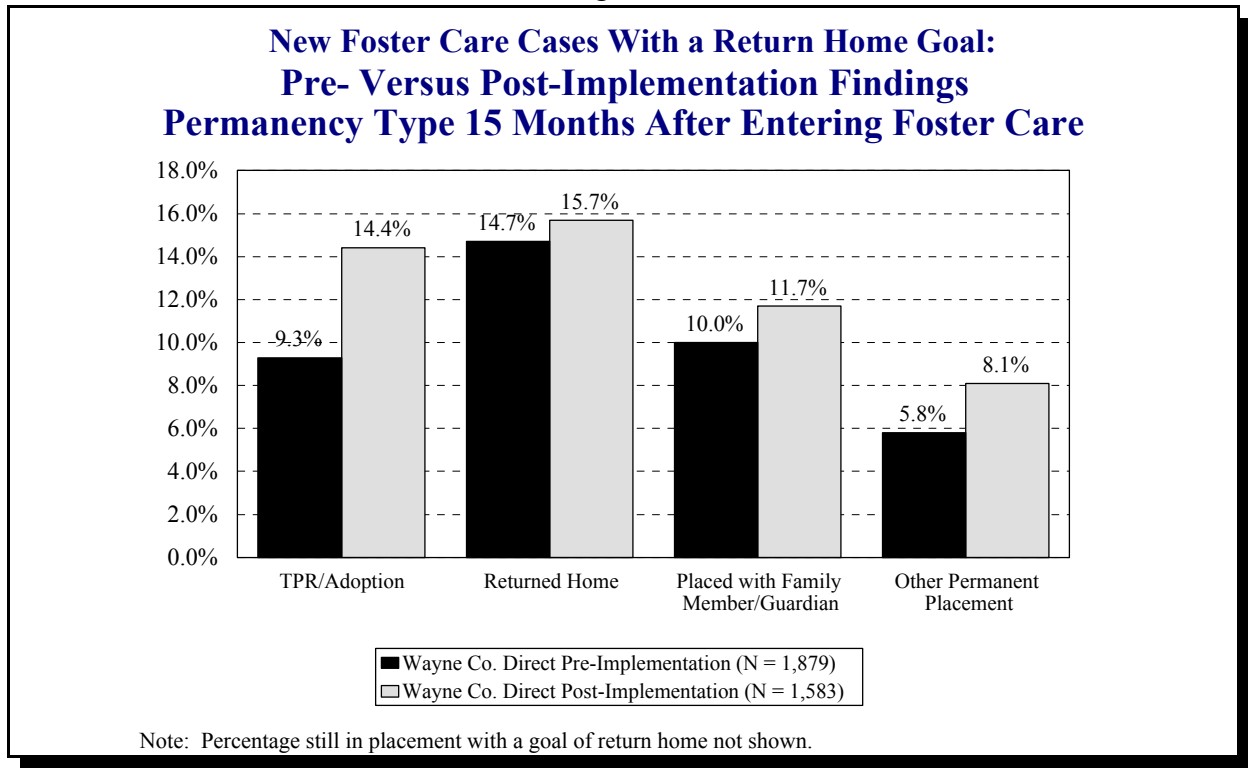


Some differences in the type of permanency achieved (i.e., returning a child home or terminating parental rights) were also found. Compared to pre-implementation practice, there was a slight increase in the proportion of children who were returned home post-implementation (14.7% to 15.7%, respectively) and a much larger increase in the proportion for whom parental rights were terminated (9.3% to 14.4%, respectively, see Table 17).

Table 17				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre and Post-Implementation Permanency Type 15 Months after Entering Foster Care				
Permanency Type Achieved**	Wayne Co. Direct Pre-Implementation		Wayne Co. Direct Post-Implementation	
	N	%	N	%
Still in Placement with Return Home Goal	1,132	60.2%	794	50.2%
TPR/Adoption	175	9.3%	228	14.4%
Returned Home	276	14.7%	248	15.7%
Family Member/Guardian Permanent Placement	187	10.0%	185	11.7%
Other Permanent Placement	109	5.8%	128	8.1%
Total	1,879	100.0%	1,583	100.0%

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 11



b. Pre- Versus Post-Implementation Comparison by Subgroups

The preceding comparison of cases entering care in Wayne County direct service showed that characteristics of children changed in the post-implementation period. For instance, a slightly lower proportion of African American children entered care post-implementation. When comparing the proportion of children for whom permanency was achieved within each ethnic group, however, the increase in permanency rates post-implementation holds constant. Table 18 shows that permanency was achieved for a significantly greater proportion of cases post-implementation within each of the three ethnic groups examined. The permanency rate for White children entering care increased by 7.8%, the rate for African American children increased by 10.2%, and the permanency rate for all other children increased by 9.2%.

The initial living arrangement of cases entering care for Wayne County direct service also differed significantly from pre-implementation. During the post-implementation period, a much greater proportion of children were placed with relatives or a guardian, as opposed to foster homes. Table 18 controls for this difference by comparing the proportion of cases with permanency achieved within each type of initial placement. For children entering care with an initial foster home placement or an initial placement with a relative or guardian, permanency rates were significantly higher post-implementation. The exception is the other placement category which includes residential facility placements. There was significant decline in the permanency rate for their placement group.

Finally, Table 18 presents permanency rates for child age groups. A significantly higher proportion of children in each age category achieved permanency post-implementation.

Table 18				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre and Post-Implementation Permanency Rate 15 Months after Entering Foster Care by Subgroups				
Subgroup	Wayne Co. Direct Pre-Implementation		Wayne Co. Direct Post-Implementation	
	Total N	%	Total N	%
Ethnicity of Child				
White**	373	49.6%	350	57.4%
African American**	1,467	37.1%	1,177	47.3%
Other/Unknown	39	46.2%	56	55.4%
Initial Placement				
Relative, legal guardian**	726	34.8%	1,163	48.7%
Foster home**	1,013	40.4%	186	53.8%
Other*	140	60.7%	234	52.6%
Age of Child at Case Opening				
One year or younger**	518	43.1%	328	57.9%
Two to four years of age**	355	30.1%	234	46.6%
Five or older**	1,006	41.5%	1,016	47.7%

* Significance of group difference < .10 (two-tailed).

** Significance of group difference < .05 (two-tailed).

c. Summary of Findings for Wayne County Direct Service

A comparison of permanency rates for Wayne County direct service cases indicates that permanency was achieved for a significantly greater proportion of cases post-implementation. In addition, permanency was examined for several subgroups defined by ethnicity, initial placement, and age, and post-implementation rates were significantly higher in all but one.

Since major state and federal legislation took effect shortly after SDM was implemented, the observed increase in the permanency rate cannot be attributed to SDM alone. Other findings from this evaluation, however, lend support to the conclusion that the increase in permanency is, in part,

the result of SDM implementation. For instance, evaluation results from both the outstate and Wayne County POS pilots indicate that SDM increased permanency in those agencies. The evaluation findings obtained for these pilots controlled for legislative changes by using equivalent comparison groups.

In addition, pilot POS agencies in Wayne had a pre- to post-implementation increase in permanency similar in magnitude to the one shown for Wayne direct service. The non-pilot POS agencies in Wayne County did not show the same rate of increase when their pre/post-permanency rates were analyzed. Since Wayne POS agencies serve similar clients as Wayne direct service, the change in their performance supports the conclusion that SDM had a positive impact on Wayne direct service.¹⁶

V. SUMMARY

The results of this evaluation indicate that the implementation of foster care SDM appears to have expedited permanency for children entering foster care in both county agencies and POS agencies. Pilot SDM agencies in outstate counties and Wayne County POS agencies had significantly higher permanency rates for new foster care cases in the post-implementation period than did equivalent comparison agencies that did not employ SDM management procedures. In addition, SDM pilots performed better across each type of permanency (TPR/adoption, return home, family/guardian placement, and other permanent placements) and generally had higher permanency rates than comparison agencies for client subgroups defined by child ethnicity, initial placement type, or age. Although an equivalent comparison group could not be identified for Wayne County direct service, the agency's performance improved significantly after SDM implementation. In short, the

¹⁶ This issue is described further in Appendix C.

SDM case management procedures improved permanency outcomes in each of FIA's major foster care service delivery systems - outstate counties, Wayne County, and POS agencies. The FIA developed foster care SDM to expedite permanency, and this evaluation provides convincing evidence that this goal was achieved in the pilot agencies.

The implementation of SDM involved extensive training of workers and supervisors, as well as ongoing technical assistance. Technical assistance included individual case reviews, site visits, and ongoing data management reports which presented aggregate data from the SDM assessment tools to pilot agency staff. In addition, CRC staff conducted face-to-face interviews with workers and supervisors in Winter 1999 to solicit feedback about use of the SDM assessments and procedures. Data obtained during implementation from these sources indicate that not all SDM assessments and procedures were applied to all cases. This was expected since major case management changes are difficult to fully implement in large service delivery systems. Results of the previously mentioned process evaluation indicated that staff were, in general, satisfied with SDM and completed the tools.

The evaluation did not consider the extent of actual agency compliance with SDM procedures post-implementation, but rather assumed that all cases entering foster care in the pilot counties were served by workers who employed SDM. By doing so, the evaluation methodology conservatively estimates the impact of SDM on case outcomes. In the future, SDM will be supported by a new FIA management information system that facilitates the completion of case assessments by workers and provides more timely information to supervisors. This development should improve the implementation of SDM and its impact on permanency.

Appendix A
Description of the Sample

County Demographics and Foster Care Administrative Characteristics

As mentioned previously, the sample consists of cases with a return home goal in the pilot or comparison group. The SDM pilot group consists of county departments or POS agencies that implemented SDM beginning in the late Fall 1997. This includes all direct service operations in Wayne County, two POS agencies in Wayne County, two POS agencies outside of Wayne County, and nine other county offices. The comparison group was selected by comparing pilot county foster care caseload information and key demographic variables to those of other counties. Table A1 compares the aggregate foster care caseload and demographic characteristics of the pilot group and the comparison group.

One problem encountered during this stage was that no other county in Michigan serves as a good comparison group for Wayne County and this is apparent in the table. Wayne County was more urban and more racially diverse than the rest of the state, and accounts for 23% of the state's population and 42% of the state's foster care population. The county that is most similar to Wayne County is Genesee County, with a large urban center (Flint). A demographic comparison shows that these two counties are far from similar: Wayne County was 56.2% White while Genesee was 77.32% white; Wayne County was 1.2% rural and Genesee was 21.25% rural; Wayne County had 241 foster care staff and Genesee had 40 (see Table A1).

The outstate pilot and comparison groups are similar across most demographic measures. The outstate pilot group's population according to 1990 Census data was 93.8% White, while the comparison group's population was 88.4% White. The comparison group had a higher proportion of African Americans in the population than the pilot group. The comparison group was also more educated: 20.9% of the population had an associate degree or higher, as opposed to 14.0% of the pilot group. FIA's fiscal year 2000 caseload data indicate that the outstate pilot and comparison groups were similar in size and the proportion of cases were purchase of service.

Table A1				
Demographic Data for Pilot and Comparison Counties				
Demographic Characteristics (based upon 1990 Census data)	Outstate Pilot	Outstate Comparison	Wayne County	Genesee County
1990 Population	1,396,416	1,791,564	2,111,687	430,459
% Rural	23.96%	23.65%	1.20%	21.25%
% Farm	1.01%	0.89%	0.02%	0.43%
% Non-Hispanic White	93.81%	88.41%	56.23%	77.32%
% Non-Hispanic African American	3.21%	7.74%	40.06%	19.41%
% Non-Hispanic Other	1.42%	2.19%	1.43%	1.37%
% Hispanic	1.45%	1.66%	2.28%	1.90%
% of Adults over 25 with an Associate Degree or Higher	13.96%	20.94%	12.18%	12.42%
% on Public Assistance	2.31%	2.47%	5.93%	5.05%
% Below Poverty Level	7.90%	8.81%	19.81%	16.27%
Departmental/Caseload Characteristics (based on fiscal year 2000 data)				
Direct Service Caseload Estimate	1,609.25	1,620.41	5,414.17	841.16
POS Caseload Estimate	407.24	477.68	3,281.08	162.17
% of Caseload that is POS	20.20%	22.77%	39.93%	16.16%
Allocated Foster Care Staff	66.10	68.39	240.68	39.97

Demographics of Children Who Entered Care During the Pre-Implementation Period

Table A2 and A3 review the case characteristics by group for children who entered care during the pre-implementation period. A review of the data is provided in the body of the report.

Table A2												
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Period Pilot and Comparison Group Demographics												
Pre-Implementation Foster Care Case Characteristics	Outstate Pilot		Outstate Comparison		Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison		Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age at Case Open Date												
1 year or younger	157	23.3%	268	22.9%	518	27.6%	41	18.5%	99	34.9%	370	25.5%
2 - 4	138	20.4%	230	19.6%	355	18.9%	47	21.2%	53	18.7%	275	19.0%
5 - 9	191	28.3%	317	27.1%	481	25.6%	82	36.9%	96	33.8%	411	28.3%
10 - 14	142	21.0%	244	20.8%	346	18.4%	41	18.5%	34	12.0%	266	18.3%
15 or older	47	7.0%	112	9.6%	179	9.5%	11	5.0%	2	0.7%	127	8.8%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%
Race of Child												
White	519	76.9%	607	51.8%	373	19.9%	92	41.4%	33	11.6%	244	16.8%
African American	122	18.1%	485	41.4%	1,467	78.1%	119	53.6%	245	86.3%	1,183	81.6%
Other	28	4.1%	26	2.2%	27	1.4%	6	2.7%	2	0.7%	13	0.9%
Missing	6	0.9%	53	4.5%	12	0.6%	5	2.3%	4	1.4%	10	0.7%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%
Sex of Child												
Male	318	47.1%	595	50.8%	933	49.7%	111	50.0%	138	48.6%	722	49.8%
Female	357	52.9%	576	49.2%	946	50.3%	111	50.0%	146	51.4%	728	50.2%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%
Handicap Indicated in Computer												
Yes	85	12.6%	122	10.4%	173	9.2%	18	8.1%	51	18.0%	147	10.1%
No	590	87.4%	1,049	89.6%	1,706	90.8%	204	91.9%	233	82.0%	1,303	89.9%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%

As mentioned previously, the proportion of cases managed by direct service versus POS agencies is a function of the SDM pilot implementation (see Table A3).

Table A3												
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Pre-Implementation Period Pilot and Comparison Group Demographics												
Pre-Implementation Foster Care Case Characteristics	Outstate Pilot		Outstate Comparison		Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison		Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Initial Living Arrangement												
Relatives or Legal Guardian	226	33.5%	329	28.1%	726	38.6%	93	41.9%	0	0.0%	437	30.1%
Foster Home	331	49.0%	764	65.2%	1,013	53.9%	121	54.5%	278	97.9%	881	60.8%
Group/Shelter Home	108	16.0%	55	4.7%	5	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	12	0.8%
Residential/Treatment Facility	2	0.3%	16	1.4%	122	6.5%	0	0.0%	6	2.1%	106	7.3%
Other	8	1.2%	7	0.6%	13	0.7%	8	3.6%	0	0.0%	14	1.0%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%
Case Management Responsibilities												
FIA	666	98.7%	746	63.7%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
POS	9	1.3%	426	36.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%
Total	675	100.0%	1,171	100.0%	1,879	100.0%	222	100.0%	284	100.0%	1,450	100.0%

Demographics of Children Who Entered Care During the Post-Implementation Period

Tables A4 and A5 review the case characteristics by group for children who entered care during the post-implementation period. The patterns are very similar to those observed for the children who entered care pre-implementation.

Table A4

**New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal:
Post-Implementation Period Pilot and Comparison Group Demographics**

Post-Implementation Foster Care Case Characteristics	Outstate Pilot		Outstate Comparison		Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison		Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age at Case Open Date												
1 year or younger	207	23.4%	289	23.7%	328	20.7%	135	22.4%	163	27.2%	477	26.5%
2 - 4	156	17.6%	228	18.7%	234	14.8%	105	17.4%	132	22.0%	326	18.1%
5 - 9	251	28.4%	322	26.4%	440	27.8%	202	33.6%	225	37.5%	570	31.7%
10 - 14	193	21.8%	269	22.0%	413	26.1%	129	21.4%	72	12.0%	353	19.6%
15 or older	72	8.1%	94	7.7%	163	10.3%	28	4.7%	8	1.3%	72	4.0%
Missing	6	0.7%	20	1.6%	5	0.3%	3	0.5%	0	0.0%	2	0.1%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%
Race of Child												
White	667	75.4%	607	49.7%	350	22.1%	226	37.5%	74	12.3%	283	15.7%
African American	174	19.7%	507	41.5%	1,177	74.4%	359	59.6%	509	84.8%	1,445	80.3%
Other	15	1.7%	39	3.2%	33	2.1%	6	1.0%	9	1.5%	47	2.6%
Missing	29	3.3%	69	5.6%	23	1.5%	11	1.8%	8	1.3%	25	1.4%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%
Sex of Child												
Male	409	46.2%	582	47.6%	783	49.5%	303	50.3%	310	51.7%	919	51.1%
Female	471	53.2%	628	51.4%	796	50.3%	298	49.5%	290	48.3%	880	48.9%
Missing	5	0.6%	12	1.0%	4	0.3%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%
Handicap Indicated in Computer												
Yes	87	9.8%	92	7.5%	95	6.0%	22	3.7%	41	6.8%	167	9.3%
No	798	90.2%	1,130	92.5%	1,488	94.0%	580	96.3%	559	93.2%	1,633	90.7%

Table A4

**New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal:
Post-Implementation Period Pilot and Comparison Group Demographics**

Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%
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Table A5

**New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal:
Post-Implementation Period Pilot and Comparison Group Demographics**

Post-Implementation Foster Care Case Characteristics	Outstate Pilot		Outstate Comparison		Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison		Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

Initial Living Arrangement

Relatives or Legal Guardian	350	39.5%	426	34.9%	1,163	73.5%	364	60.5%	64	10.7%	285	15.8%
Foster Home	424	47.9%	682	55.8%	186	11.7%	235	39.0%	517	86.2%	1,329	73.8%
Group/Shelter Home	100	11.3%	84	6.9%	50	3.2%	0	0.0%	4	0.7%	38	2.1%
Residential/Treatment Facility	4	0.5%	23	1.9%	154	9.7%	1	0.2%	11	1.8%	131	7.3%
Other	7	0.8%	7	0.6%	30	1.9%	2	0.3%	4	0.7%	17	0.9%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%

Case Management Responsibilities

FIA	841	95.0%	871	71.3%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
POS	44	5.0%	351	28.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%
Total	885	100.0%	1,222	100.0%	1,583	100.0%	602	100.0%	600	100.0%	1,800	100.0%

Appendix B
Regression Analysis

The previous analyses concentrated on comparing outcomes for the outstate and Wayne County POS evaluation groups overall, and for child ethnicity, initial placement, and other subgroups. A multivariate analysis is needed, however, to assess the impact of SDM while controlling for site differences in the characteristics of the children entering foster care.

The method of analysis used was logistic regression for the pre-implementation and post-implementation periods. The analysis assesses the impact of practice in the pilot group while controlling for child ethnicity, child age at case opening, whether or not a POS agency managed the case (when the evaluation group was outstate), and the child's initial placement.¹⁷

Table B1 reviews the logistic analysis findings for cases in the outstate pilot and comparison groups. Among the pre-implementation cases, being served in a pilot county did not significantly effect the likelihood of having a permanent placement within 15 months of case opening (odds ratio .93). Among post-implementation cases, however, children in the pilot group were significantly more likely to have attained permanency within 15 months (odds ratio 1.46) after controlling for the case and child characteristics mentioned previously.

¹⁷ The dependent variable was permanency attained within 15 months of initial foster care placement. Dependent variables included were the time period (pre- or post-implementation period), whether or not the case was in the pilot group, child ethnicity (White, African American, Other/Missing), child age (4 or under, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19), whether or not the case was managed by a POS agency, and the child's initial placement (foster home, relative/guardian placement, other).

Table B1

**New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal:
Outstate Logistic Regression Results**

	Pre-Implementation Period		Post-Implementation Period	
	Odds Ratio (95% conf. int.)	p value	Odds Ratio (95% conf. int.)	p value
Pilot	.93 (.74-1.16)	0.527	1.46 (1.20-1.78)	0.001
POS Agency	1.06 (.83-1.36)	0.649	.50 (.39-.64)	0.001
Initial Placement		0.001		0.014
Foster home	1.7 (1.24-2.39)	0.001	1.57 (1.15-2.14)	0.005
Relative/guardian initial placement	1.96 (1.38-2.77)	0.001	1.35 (.98-1.86)	0.067
Child Ethnicity		0.317		0.073
White	.81 (.53-1.22)	0.305	.63 (.42-.94)	0.023
African American	.93 (.61-1.42)	0.735	.64 (.42-.96)	0.032
Child Age at Initial Placement		0.005		0.105
5 - 9 years	.94 (.75-1.19)	0.631	1.01 (.81-1.26)	0.95
10 - 14	1.02 (.79-1.32)	0.863	1.05 (.83-1.33)	0.695
15 - 19	1.94 (1.31-2.89)	0.001	1.58 (1.09-2.29)	0.016

Table B2 shows the results of the analysis for children in the Wayne County POS pilot/comparison groups. For these agencies, logistic regression was used to assess the impact of SDM while controlling for child ethnicity, child age at case opening, and the child’s initial placement. During the pre-implementation period, cases served by a pilot agency were slightly more likely to have a permanent placement within 15 months of case opening compared to cases served by comparison agencies, although the relationship was not significant. Post-implementation pilot agency cases, although the odds ratio was similar, were significantly more likely to have attained permanency within 15 months (odds ratio 1.22), after controlling for the child characteristics shown.

Table B2				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Wayne County POS Agency Logistic Regression Results				
	Pre-Implementation Period		Post-Implementation Period	
	Odds Ratio (95% conf. int.)	p value	Odds Ratio (95% conf. int.)	p value
Pilot	1.22 (.92-1.63)	1.67	1.22 (1.01-1.47)	0.039
Initial Placement		0.001		0.312
Foster home	.56 (.38-.84)	0.005	1.24 (.89-1.75)	0.207
Relative/guardian initial placement	.84 (.55-1.28)	0.41	1.09 (.75-1.59)	0.644
Child Ethnicity		0.001		0.044
White	.93 (.43-2.04)	0.861	.91 (.57-1.46)	0.7
African American	.58 (.28-1.24)	0.162	.71 (.46-1.10)	0.126
Child Age at Initial Placement		0.002		0.132
5 - 9 years	.85 (.66-1.08)	0.189	.82 (.68-.99)	0.036
10 - 14	.82 (.60-1.10)	0.183	.82 (.64-1.05)	0.111
15 - 19	1.79 (1.19-2.70)	0.005	.75 (.45-1.25)	0.267

Appendix C

Simple Double Differencing Analysis

The application of double differencing involves looking at the difference between the pilot and comparison groups during the pre-period and subtracting it from the difference between the groups during the post-period.¹⁸ The ideal application of this comparison is when the same subjects are present for the pre- and post-periods. When this is not possible, pilot and comparison group cases should be similar based upon key demographic variables.

Table C1 shows the results of this technique for the outstate pilot and comparison counties. The difference in pre-implementation permanency rates was -4.6%, and the difference in post-implementation rates was 11.3%, which indicates that pilot counties had a relative increase of 15.9% in their permanency rate.

Table C1				
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Simple Double Differencing Analysis of Outstate Permanency Rate				
Case Status at 15 Months	Outstate Pilot Counties		Outstate Comparison Counties	
	Total N	% Permanency	Total N	% Permanency
Pre-Period	675	59.4%	1,171	64.0%
Post-Period	885	67.8%	1,222	56.5%
Pre-Post Difference	8.4%		-7.5%	
Pre-Period Difference Between Groups*	-4.6%			
Post-Period Difference Between Groups*	11.3%			
Double Difference Estimate of Impact**	15.9			

*Comparison group rate subtracted from pilot group rate.

**Pre-period difference of rates subtracted from the post-period difference in the rates.

¹⁸ Baker, Judy L. 1999. *Evaluating the Poverty Impact of Projects: A Handbook for Practitioners*. LCSPP/PRMPO, The World Bank.

Table C2 shows the results of this technique for the Wayne County direct service and POS pilot and comparison agencies. As mentioned previously, Wayne County direct service is dissimilar from the rest of the state. Genesee County, while significantly different from Wayne County (see Appendix A for more details), also has a large urban center. Double differencing looks at relative changes in permanency rates, and therefore somewhat controls for the pre-implementation difference in permanency rates between Genesee and Wayne Counties. When double differencing is applied, Wayne County direct service and Wayne County POS agencies show a relative increase of approximately 6% after SDM implementation.

Table C2								
New Foster Care Cases with a Return Home Goal: Simple Double Differencing Analysis of Wayne County Permanency Rate								
Case Status at 15 Months	Wayne Co. Direct Pilot		Wayne Co. Direct Comparison		Wayne Co. POS Pilot		Wayne Co. POS Comparison	
	Total N	% Perm.	Total N	% Perm.	Total N	% Perm.	Total N	% Perm.
Pre-Period	1,879	39.8%	222	58.6%	284	33.1%	1,450	33.8%
Post-Period	1,583	49.8%	602	62.8%	600	47.8%	1,800	42.5%
Pre-Post Difference	10.0%		4.2%		14.7%		8.7%	
Pre-Period Difference Between Groups*	-18.8%				-0.7%			
Post-Period Difference Between Groups*	-13.0%				5.3%			
Double Difference Estimate of Impact**	5.8%				6.0%			

*Comparison group rate subtracted from pilot group rate.

**Pre-period difference of rates subtracted from the post-period difference in the rates.

A more strict double differencing comparison is a regression analysis of pilot and comparison groups which controls for factors such as difference in ethnic distributions and initial living placement, such as the analysis reviewed in Appendix B.