

Innovation Brief

Beyond Anecdote: New Resources in Washington State for Data-Informed Policy Reform

A growing demand exists in juvenile justice for quality information to support a range of policy planning, program research and evaluation efforts. Challenged with system reform, the states require examples for how the data used to support day-to-day interactions with youth and families can be managed to support state wide policy and planning for juvenile justice. As part of *Models for Change* in Washington, a range of data tools to support this vision have been produced by the Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) with assistance from the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ), including tools to support program evaluation, performance management and ongoing modification of juvenile justice operations in an action research cycle. This *Brief* summarizes highlights from the effort, describes the results and lessons learned, and presents examples of juvenile justice research and planning innovations on the horizon in Washington that can serve as inspiration and models for other states.

The Issue

States face a number of challenges in pursuing the goal of state-wide, data-driven juvenile justice reform. Primary among these is the technical difficulty of translating the complexity of transactional systems to support analytic activities. In the case of most states this means developing building blocks from disparate information sources. Even within the courts themselves several distinct pieces often must be mastered by a team of researchers supported by programming staff. While these systems are developed there has to be some interaction with data suppliers to help them manage performance, understand operations and modify processes.

Innovations

A variety of data resources pre-dated *Models for Change* in Washington State that were variously used to support a research and planning approach to monitoring and advancing juvenile justice. WSCCR was established in 2003 by The Supreme Court of Washington to advance objective and informed research for the courts. As such, WSCCR was well-positioned to help coordinate data activities during *Models for Change* in Washington and develop new analytic tools to support the effort. This involved mastering research files that spanned different court automation platforms, principally the juvenile court reporting systems and those of the superior court that contained truancy and child protection records. Additionally, the criminal court division

records had to be accessed to support the potential for ongoing recidivism research.

Evaluation Research Tools

During *Models for Change* WSCCR began constructing a set of notable evaluation research tools. Primary among these are the Court Contact and Recidivism Database (CCRD), the Assessments Research Database (ARD) and the Educational Research Database (ERD).

The CCRD is a resource for showing all individual delinquency or criminal contacts with the Washington court system regardless of age, allowing for longitudinal analyses that include both adult and juvenile contact with the system. The database bridges separate automation platforms to bring in information concerning contact for status offenses or child protection matters and merges these at the individual record level.

The ARD was developed to warehouse the individual records of youth that have been screened using the Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment, which resides in a different automation platform than court activity information. It is an essential tool for assessing program and probation effectiveness, and when merged with the CCRD, the impact of different assessment characteristics on re-referral to juvenile court or probation.

The ERD is a tool containing student-level information on dozens of key data elements (e.g., attendance, grades, disciplinary actions). It has been applied to research on several important policy fronts both in the area of status offenses and the effects of child abuse and neglect, including a study of the characteristics of youth that are petitioned for truancy in Washington.

Performance Management

During the time frame of *Models for Change*, Washington has advanced systems for reporting key indicators to support sound juvenile probation management, racial and ethnic fairness in juvenile justice and evidence based practice service delivery.

The Juvenile Probation Performance Management System is an effort to build the connections necessary for local stakeholders to take full advantage of the evaluation research tools that WSCCR developed during *Models for Change*. A part-time position has been funded to model reporting that will support continuous quality improvement and a broader use of data to inform policy and planning at the local level. Analysis and reporting for this system currently uses data from the Washington Juvenile Court Assessment to determine whether youths under probation supervision are eligible for state-funded, evidence-based treatment programs and, if eligible, whether they are assigned to treatment, whether they start, and whether they complete treatment—these indicators show the extent to which treatment resources are used and the ability of treatment providers and probation counsellors to engage with youths. Combining the assessment data with court case filings and adjudication records enables the juvenile probation departments to assess the impact of treatment programs on recidivism. When supplemented with information about treatment providers (therapists and trainers), juvenile probation departments will have access to information about the ability of different treatment providers to engage successfully with particular youth.

Washington can track indicators of disparities for various racial categories (including Hispanic origin) using the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's preferred methodology – the Relative Rate Index (RRI). In December 2012, the Washington Supreme Court's Minority and Justice Commission capped a year-long effort with NCJJ (designed to make DMC statistics readily available to researchers, youth advocates, and the general public) by releasing preliminary data on racial and ethnic disparities in Washington's juvenile courts. With data supplied by the Court, NCJJ created a workbook that displays Relative Rate Indices across ten decision points for the State of Washington and all of its juvenile courts. The workbook houses data from 2005 through 2011 and is scheduled to be updated annually. The system also allows a toggle for calculating RRIs based on raw counts and those adjusted for missing race and ethnicity using spreading techniques based

Washington's DMC Indicator Website



on population or court event. The workbook (see above) generates reports that are now available online for the first time at the jurisdiction-level.

The *Evidence Based Practice (EBP) Service Delivery Tool* is a web based tool designed to collect detailed information on participants and providers of EBPs. The system is integral to legislative efforts to continue advancing the state-of-the-art in evidence based programs. Washington emerged as a national leader in this regard through the collaborative efforts of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP), the Washington Association of Juvenile Court Administrators (WAJCA) and the Juvenile Justice & Rehabilitation Administration (JJ&RA). The *Evidence Based Practice (EBP) Service Delivery Tool* was developed by WSCCR and is being tested with providers of Washington State Aggression Replacement Training (WSART). In addition to compiling data for statewide research, interactive reports available through the tool allow courts to evaluate the efficacy of their programs and their providers. This system can utilize the CCRD and ARD tools to place data in the hands of those providing ART services in nearly every county offering WSART in Washington.

While Washington may be considered a “data rich” state when it comes to statewide court data, there have been challenges associated with improving the access, availability and analytical capabilities associated with local county-based juvenile justice data.

Through its involvement with *Models for Change*, Clark County Juvenile Court recognized the need to become a more “data-driven” organization. In order to identify and implement important policy and practice changes, locally and at the state level, the juvenile court developed the capabilities to routinely pull and analyze data from multiple local data sources to support its reform efforts.

After attending a *Models for Change* national conference and learning about the innovative data driven efforts in Calcasieu Parish (Louisiana), the Clark County team determined that it was vital to have a full-time data coordinator (officially titled the “Information Services Coordinator”). This position was filled on May 11th, 2011, with *Models for Change* support. Because county administrators, along with judges and other court personnel, have come to recognize the essential value of accurate and timely local juvenile justice data, the county now covers the full cost for the position.

Two key data-related accomplishments for which the Information Services Coordinator has played a pivotal role include:

- The creation of a “school domain” in the Clark County multi-system database – dubbed C3MS – specifically, for the Clark County Truancy Project (CCTP). This domain has made it much easier for CCTP staff to track their cases, to record and monitor assessments, case plans, social service agency referrals, and appointments, and to journal case notes.
- The ability to track a CCTP (current or past) student when that student escalates further into the truancy or court system, with detailed data on prior truancy interventions, and services for each program participant. This provides the court with better access to important information to more effectively intervene in cases of chronic truancy and/or delinquency matters. It also allows the court to produce a range of individual case and/or summary reports that accurately reflect the range of local interventions and services that have been provided to CCTP participants and to track longer-term outcomes associated with those cases. In other words, Clark County has sustained its data-driven efforts to continue to track the impact of its ongoing reform efforts.

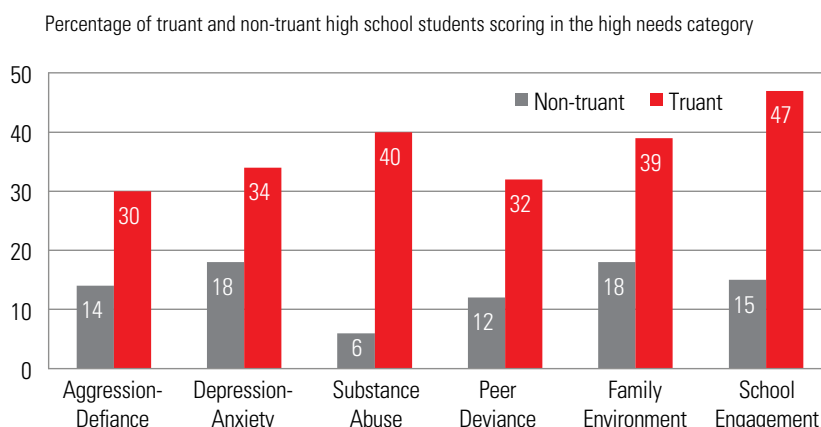
Modification of Processes

WSCCR’s evaluation tools have also been used to support research that has explored reform topics and developed new approaches. Two examples are Washington’s *Models for Change* Multi-system Youth Prevalence Research and the validation of the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) status offender assessment tool. Both efforts are leading to modifications.

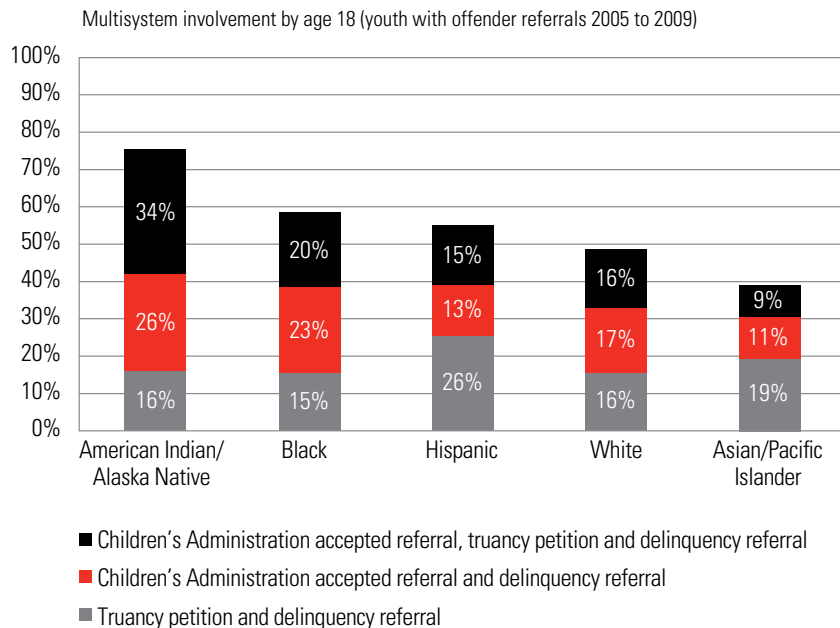
The multi-system prevalence research has helped the King County Juvenile Court’s Uniting for Youth project:

- Determine the prevalence and case characteristics of dually involved youth to help inform system reforms.
- Initiate county-wide reforms to include changes in practices that will produce more timely identification of dually involved cases, lead to more consistent joint case assessment and planning between the juvenile court and child welfare (Children’s Administration), and enhance joint case management, supervision and service provision/coordination of these challenging cases.
- Identify initial performance indicators and outcome measures, and conduct a preliminary analysis that examines the impacts of reforms.

The research databases are used to validate the WARNS— an emerging case classification tool for status offenders



The Research Databases Help Advance Knowledge of Multisystem Involvement of Youth



Both the CCRD and ARD were essential tools in helping to validate the WARNS, a instrument that has been successfully applied in over 20 jurisdictions to structure decision making concerning the diversion of status offenders, particularly truants from formal handling by the juvenile court. For example, the WARNS played a central role in a truancy diversion project initiated during *Models for Change* in the Spokane County demonstration site. The West Valley Community Truancy Board (WVCTB) model has been in place in Spokane County since the late 1990's and has undergone many changes over the years. Once a student is referred to the program, the truancy board assists the youth and their family by collaborating with the school, court, and a myriad of community based services to address the student's barriers to education and re-engage them in school. With *Models for Change* support, the original WVCTB approach has been enhanced to include elements of the "Check and Connect" best practice model and administration of the WARNS to assist with case planning and case management. The model has been evaluated twice by Washington State University, with both evaluations documenting its efficacy, and has been replicated in other school districts.

Results and Lessons Learned

The evaluation tools developed during *Models for Change* are being sustained/updated on a quarterly basis by WSCCR and are incrementally advancing a more data-driven approach to juvenile justice reform. The tools have provided what many states and/or jurisdictions lack: the ability to support performance management and quality improvement cycles, system improvement indicators, and point-in-time evaluation research that is both efficient and cost effective. Very importantly, the tools have helped facilitate groundbreaking research and new insights on challenging juvenile justice issues, including the trajectories of multi-system youth and risk-need screening for special populations like status offenders.

Among the lessons learned is that creating and maintaining the research files is not enough. Room for expansion and improvement always exists and needs to be considered on an ongoing basis as opportunities to align additional blocks of information arise. Similarly translational resources are essential for linking state data partners to local research and planners in the juvenile courts that can assist juvenile court leaders and stakeholders in accessing the tools and

improving them. In many cases, flaws in the data sources are detected only when they begin to be used. Both human resources, like the Information Services Coordinator in Clark County, and technology, as it is being modeled in the EBP Services Delivery Portal, are examples of the solutions that need to be sustained and expanded to fully realize the potential for impact on informing youth outcomes and performance measures.

Looking Forward

Washington is poised to continue using research tools to advance a well informed and outcome based approach to juvenile justice reform. The resources described in this brief are all being sustained as direct support for *Models for Change* site work comes to an end, with plans for further development. These include plans to expand the multi-system prevalence research to a performance indicator system with web-based reporting and accessibility to juvenile court administrators and system partners, and to enhance the *Juvenile Probation Performance Management System*, which has recently received state support for a position to work with local and state performance management teams to assess the impact of probation services at the ground level. Treatment information from the EBP Service Delivery portal, connecting treatment program quality assurance with probation performance management, will enable continual feedback about which programs and treatment providers are effective with which youth. And development of reporting that takes account of offense type, risk for recidivism, and use of treatment programs will help communities understand and address racial and ethnic disparities in Washington's juvenile justice system.

Resources

For more information concerning the juvenile justice evaluation databases and the Juvenile Probation Performance Management System, please contact, Carl McCurley, Director, Washington State Center for Court Research, at Carl.McCurley@courts.wa.gov

For more information concerning racial and ethnic disparities indicator reporting and the *Evidence Based Practice (EBP) Service Delivery Tool*, please contact, Sarah Veele, Washington State Center for Court Research, at Sarah.Veele@courts.wa.gov

For more information concerning the Clark County Juvenile Court's Information Services Coordinator, please contact Pat Escamilla, Juvenile Court Administrator, at pat.escamilla@clark.wa.gov

For more information on the WVCTB model and the data presented here, please see the initial evaluation report: West Valley School District Community Truancy Board Evaluation and the post-replication analysis: Washington State University *Models for Change* Final Report, May 2013. <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/467>

Jointly developed by WSCCR and NCJJ

Contact, Hunter Hurst, NCJJ 412-246-0842

This brief is one in a series describing new knowledge and innovations emerging from *Models for Change*, a multi-state juvenile justice reform initiative. *Models for Change* is accelerating movement toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system by creating replicable models that protect community safety, use resources wisely, and improve outcomes for youths. The briefs are intended to inform professionals in juvenile justice and related fields, and to contribute to a new national wave of juvenile justice reform.