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JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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An Initial Study of the  
**Second Judicial District Court's  
Project ONE Program**

Washoe County, Nevada



**ONE**  
PROJECT

One Family-One Judge | No Wrong Door | Equal and Coordinated Access to Justice

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## Introduction/background

In 2010, with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to support critical cross-departmental and cross-system work, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges began work on the Multi-Court Collaboration (MCC) Initiative, now known as Project ONE, named to signify a holistic approach to families through One Family/One Judge, No Wrong Door, and Equal and Coordinated Access to Justice principles.

In July 2012, the NCJFCJ Board of Trustees adopted the Project ONE key principles (go to <https://www.ncjfcj.org/publications/project-one-key-principles/>) which include:

- One family-One judge
- Judicial Leadership
- Implement Recommended Practice
- Respect
- Engagement
- Multiculturalism and Diversity
- Collaboration
- Adequate Resources
- Data Collection, Analysis, and Sharing
- Victim Safety and Empowerment
- Adult and Juvenile Offenders Accountability

Initially, the NCJFCJ selected these six sites for the implementation of Project ONE:

1. Jefferson County Family Court, Louisville, Kentucky
2. Milwaukee County Circuit Court, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
3. North Okaloosa County unified Family Court, Crestview, Florida
4. Orleans Parish Juvenile Court, New Orleans, Louisiana
5. Sixth Judicial Circuit Court (Pasco County), Dade City, Florida
6. Second Judicial District Court, Family Division (Washoe County), Reno, Nevada

Of these sites, the Second Judicial District Court (the SJDC) in Washoe County, Nevada, achieved sufficient progress to allow for an initial assessment of the impacts of its Project ONE program. The SJDC implemented its program in 2013 with subsequent adjustments to program structure over the course of the past five years.

While the SJDC's Project ONE program represents a broader cross-system collaboration, this technical assistance bulletin summarizes the findings of an initial assessment of the court's attempt to improve system performance and case outcomes for youth who experience overlapping adjudications in the child welfare (dependency) and juvenile justice (delinquency) systems.

## The national research on dual system youth

A growing body of research has consistently documented the challenges presented by youth involved in multiple systems, particularly those with dual system involvement in child welfare and juvenile justice (of which, dually adjudicated youth represent a small subset). The latest culmination and summary of this research appears in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s national study entitled “Dual System Youth Design Study: Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Pursuing a National Estimate of Dual System Youth.” (Herz and Dierkhising, 2019)

The national dual system youth design study represents an ambitious effort to encapsulate and bring cohesion to a wide range of programmatic activities and research knowledge surrounding dual system youth. This includes but is not limited to:

- Identifying best practices evident in the handling of dual system cases and creating a best practices rubric for integrated systems.
- Defining dual system youth and exploring the different types and incidence of dual system contact and prevalence.
- Describing the characteristics of dual system youth and the pathways taken for dual system involvement.
- Examining a range of outcomes and trajectories for these youth.

As the authors of the national study emphasize, “although most youth involved in the child welfare system do not cross into the juvenile justice system, (the national) study shows that approximately half of youth petitioned to the juvenile delinquency court have touched the child welfare system. Research shows that the outcomes for these youth can be dire and warrant the time and attention to improve integrated system work across child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, and educational systems (to name a few).”

The national study also emphasizes the critical importance of intervening with dual system youth as early as possible to prevent these cases from spiraling into continuous and deeper system involvement at great cost (human and financial) to communities and to the youth themselves. The national study further confirms that youth who experience deeper involvement (e.g., dual adjudication) in the child welfare and juvenile justice system experience particularly adverse trajectories including very poor permanency and delinquency outcomes, making this group of youth particularly challenging and resistant to effective intervention.

It is within this context, and with full recognition of the aforementioned challenges presented by these youth, that the SJDC and its stakeholders decided to select dually adjudicated youth specifically as the primary target population for the initial Project ONE study. While there are other jurisdictions that have established “dual status” or dual system programs, and some of those programs allow dually adjudicated cases to participate, the SJDC effort specifically selected dually adjudicated youth (and youth whose adjudications were held in abeyance, generally, due to competency issues) as the focus of this study.

Furthermore, Project ONE also allows for the inclusion of juvenile parole cases (i.e., cases that have been committed to state youth corrections custody), which represents another unique aspect of the SJDC program. The factors behind program eligibility were made via a consensus of the SJDC's Project ONE stakeholder committee, and they reveal much about the history of cross-system collaboration in the SJDC, and the guiding principles and values of the local child welfare, juvenile justice, and broader Washoe County community.

### **The history of collaboration in the SJDC**

Project ONE was not the first cross-system collaborative effort in the SJDC. In 2012, the Washoe County Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) and the Washoe County Human Services Agency (HSA, the local child welfare agency), implemented the Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform's Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM, for more information on the CYPM, go to <https://cjjr.georgetown.edu/our-work/crossover-youth-practice-model/>). Implementation of the CYPM in Washoe County helped ignite strong cross-system collaboration in the SJDC between the juvenile probation department and child welfare agency and, based on stakeholder comments expressed in the qualitative component of this study, laid the foundation for expanded collaboration to include the SJDC's Family Division and the creation of Project ONE.

The SJDC Project ONE stakeholder group, members of which also participated in qualitative interviews for this initial study, included representatives from:

- The Second Judicial District Court
- The Washoe County Department of Juvenile Services (DJS)
- The Washoe County Human Services Agency (HSA)
- The Office of the Washoe County District Attorney
- The Office of the Washoe County Public Defender
- Washoe Legal Services
- Nevada Youth Parole
- Washoe County Alternate Public Defender's Office

Building a strong culture of collaboration and positive judicial leadership in the SJDC has been a key ingredient in the development, implementation, and continuation of this broad cross-systems approach. This dynamic was clearly born out in the qualitative component of this study as virtually all Project ONE stakeholders emphasized that the program has strengthened coordination across agencies, particularly for the DJS, juvenile parole, and the HSA. At the same time, local stakeholders have recognized the formidable challenges presented by the dually involved population, particularly dually-adjudicated youth, and have actively sought to evaluate the impacts of Project ONE, starting with this initial look at the dually adjudicated cohort..

Starting in 2013, the SJDC not only began to identify Project ONE program objectives but also established a data subcommittee that identified a wide range of system and youth/family performance indicators and outcome measures for the program. The initial listing of program performance indicators and outcomes constructed by the data subcommittee were essential in



helping researchers further clarify and refine the measures to be included in this initial assessment.

## **Key Project ONE program components**

### ***Program eligibility/target population***

Since its inception, program eligibility has always been defined as dually involved youth who are concurrently enrolled in services with the Washoe County Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) and the Washoe County Human Services Agency (HSA). Any youth who is dually involved may be added to the Project ONE docket by the assigned probation officer, social worker, and/or district attorney's office when the legal threshold of dual involvement is reached (i.e., the filing of a dependency petition and an arrest for a delinquent act). In other words, youth eligible for Project ONE include:

- Youth receiving supervision and/or services through DJS, and
- Youth placed in the legal and physical custody of HSA in a dependency case

While all dually involved youth are eligible for Project ONE, this study focused on the dually adjudicated (dependency and delinquency) subset of youth enrolled in the program.

### ***How are Project ONE cases identified and selected for the program?***

When a youth is arrested and referred to DJS, the DJS intake department determines if the youth is in the custody of the HSA. Once dual involvement is confirmed, the youth is assigned to the Project ONE docket. This process may also occur at initiation of protective custody through HSA if the youth has an open legal (delinquency) case with DJS.

Any stakeholder can identify and refer a new Project ONE case and can notify DJS, HSA, and the case compliance specialist. Once deemed eligible, the case compliance specialist notifies the previously assigned judicial officers of acceptance into Project ONE and facilitates the transfer of the case to the Project ONE docket. In general, this process is done in a very timely manner, typically within one or two business days.

The next step involves setting an expedited Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting that is attended by social workers and juvenile probation officers assigned to the Project ONE case. This expedited CFT initiates the joint case planning process so essential to the program model. At roughly the same time, the new dually involved or dually adjudicated cases are set on the court's Project ONE docket for initial review. The assigned social worker(s) and probation officer(s) are required to attend all Project ONE hearings, not just this initial review, along with the assigned chief deputy district attorney and chief deputy public, or alternative public, defender handling delinquency matters, an assigned dependency prosecutor, assigned dependency counsel for the youth and parents, and others as deemed appropriate by the court. As stakeholders attest, overall, this team approach has further strengthened cross-system collaboration in Washoe County.

***One judge is assigned to hear Project ONE cases, and MOUs allow for sharing of information and resources across agencies***

In brief, the Project ONE judge handles all hearings, delinquency and dependency, applicable to the case, and the DJS probation officer(s) and HSA social workers assigned to the Project ONE docket work collaboratively on case planning, case management, and supervision. Interagency agreements/MOUs with the court and between the two primary agencies (DJS and HSA) spell out what information can be shared and how resources are pooled for placement and services. In addition, there is a Project ONE manual that describes key elements of the program.

***Summary of key components of the Project ONE program:***

- Timely screening and identification of dually involved and dually adjudicated cases
- Expedited Child and Family Team meetings to initiate case planning
- Timely first hearing emphasizing One family – One Judge with a special Project ONE docket
- Joint case planning and case supervision
- Shared resources for placements and services
- Memoranda of Understanding and information sharing agreements between agencies
- Project ONE cases in which the delinquency or dependency matter is closed continue on the Project ONE docket to maintain One family – One judge
- The Project ONE case compliance specialist tracks key case performance indicators using Excel. The DJS and HSA also track key performance measures on their automated case management systems (JCATS and UNITY, respectively)
- Assigned DJS probation officers, HSA social workers, and DCFS parole officers are required to attend all Project ONE court hearings for their assigned cases

**The initial Project ONE study**

***Methodology***

This initial study used a mixed methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative components. At the onset, the NCJFCJ research team worked with the Project ONE data subcommittee to create a program logic model and to clarify program inputs, activities, outputs, initial outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and longer-term outcomes.

The research team ultimately identified 32 research questions that were organized into seven broad data categories. These categories include prevalence, case characteristics, case processing, case management and supervision, placement and services, system impacts, and youth/family outcomes. This approach reflects the framework proposed by the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice Dual Status Youth Initiative. (Siegel, 2014)

***Quantitative analysis***

The quantitative aspect of the study compared the dually adjudicated cases admitted to Project ONE between January 1, 2013, and March 31, 2017, to a comparison group of youth who experienced overlapping dual adjudications before the advent of Project ONE *and* before

implementation of the CYPM. More specifically, the comparison group included cases that experienced overlapping dual adjudications between January 1, 2008, and March 31, 2012. To be included in the Project ONE cohort, cases had to experience at least one completed hearing on the Project ONE docket, though, as it turned out, all Project ONE cases included in the study experienced more than one hearing.

This initial study relied on a convenience sample as it was not possible to select randomly the Project ONE and comparison group cases for analysis. At the time of the study, there were 48 active Project ONE dually adjudicated cases, and all of these were included in this initial assessment. Various factors limited the size of the dually adjudicated comparison group including sealed records, files that did not have complete records, and time constraints to complete the study. In other words, given the constraints of this initial research and other considerations, it was not possible to have a comparison group of equal size to the Project ONE experimental group. All comparison group cases were closed at the time of analysis while some of the experimental group cases were still open at the time of analysis.

### ***Court case file reviews***

Court delinquency and dependency case files that are scanned into the court's Contexte system were reviewed to obtain applicable court data. The research team developed a standardized case file review (CFR) form in collaboration with the court, and the research team established CFR coding conventions focused on court-related variables only available in the files. The researchers cross-checked/tested the CFR for inter-rater reliability before reviewing and coding files (court and NCJFCJ staff coded some of the case files, and their coding was cross-checked by the NCJFCJ's lead on-site researcher).

### ***Administrative systems data from the DJS and the HSA***

The NCJFCJ researchers worked with the DJS and the HSA to clarify data specifications/operational definitions for all variables needed to answer the research questions. These specifications were provided to the two agencies and those agencies produced extracts using Excel that contained applicable data output. NCJFCJ researchers then transferred the data from Excel into IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

### ***Qualitative component***

Seventeen key stakeholders were interviewed (the Project ONE judge, prosecutors, delinquency attorneys, dependency attorneys, social workers, probation officers, parole officers, mental health professionals, the case compliance specialist, and others) to obtain their perceptions of the project. A summary of interview themes was compiled after the interviews and shared with the court, maintaining the anonymity of respondents.

### **Caveats and limitations of the study**

This study needs to be viewed as a preliminary assessment as there are important limitations. As already mentioned, subjects in both study cohorts were not randomly selected – this study relied



on a convenience sample and available data. Other important caveats include the small sizes of the experimental and comparison groups and the differences in sizes between the two cohorts.

Another important consideration involved the decision not to include CYPM and non-dually adjudicated cases in the study samples. Once again, the Project ONE data subcommittee requested that this study focus on dually adjudicated youth. Ultimately, the local data subcommittee also felt it best to focus on pre-CYPM cases for comparison purposes. The primary reason for this decision stemmed from the fact that many of the non-court (i.e., child welfare and juvenile justice) case management, planning, and supervision practices in the CYPM were adapted and assimilated into Project ONE; meaning, the data subcommittee wanted a more clearly differentiated comparison group, one that did not already reflect a range of collaborative, albeit non-court aspects, that preceded Project ONE. Thus, the data subcommittee and the NCJFCJ research team felt it would be more valuable to compare pre-CYPM cases and practices to the Project ONE cohort.

With these and other caveats, it is important to emphasize that one cannot generalize from these initial findings – they apply only to the youth included in the study. That said, the preliminary quantitative and qualitative aspects of this initial program assessment suggest there are some positive systemic and youth/family benefits associated with Project ONE, along with some persistent challenges, and continuing study and careful case tracking are highly recommended.

### **Summary of key findings**

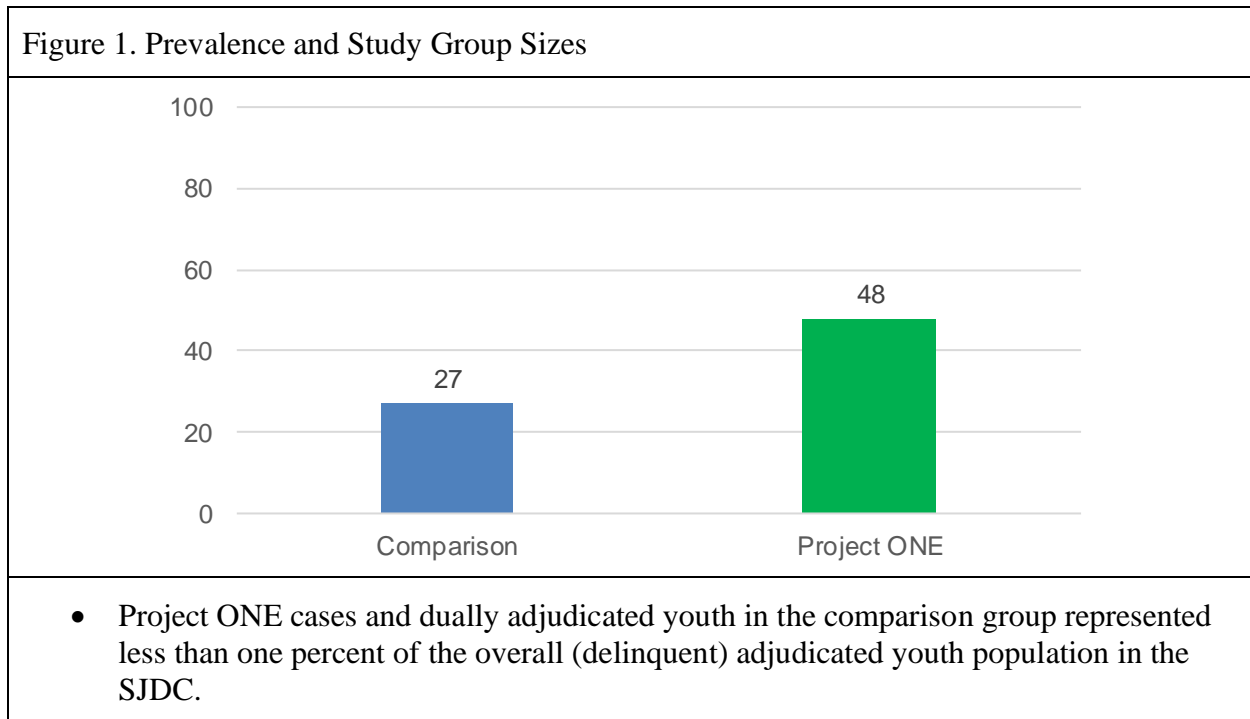
In terms of the performance indicators and outcomes noted here, this bulletin covers only the findings that were statistically significant. Please contact the authors for a full summary of the data analyses that include other findings that were not statistically significant.

Overall, the analyses found that the two study cohorts were comparable on a variety of indicators including demographic (age, gender, race/ethnicity), child welfare histories (i.e., a variety of dependency measures.), juvenile justice histories (i.e., a variety of delinquency measures), and other criteria. Below, key findings are presented and, as stated, are organized into seven general categories.

### **Prevalence and study groups**

The study identified 48 youth who were dually adjudicated and admitted to the Project One (experimental group) between January 1, 2013, and March 31, 2017. The research team also developed logic to identify a pre-Project ONE comparison group of dually adjudicated youth between January 1, 2008, and March 31, 2012. After close examination, 27 youth were identified for the comparison group. Figure 1 displays the study group sizes and the overall prevalence of dually adjudicated delinquent youth in Washoe County.

***Dually adjudicated youth represent a very small percentage of the overall delinquency population.***



### Case characteristics

While, overall, the two study groups were comparable, researchers also found some important case characteristics that distinguish the dually adjudicated population from other segments of the general delinquency and dependency populations in Washoe County. In general, these differences are consistent with the national research on dual system youth (Herz, et al, 2019) and they include:

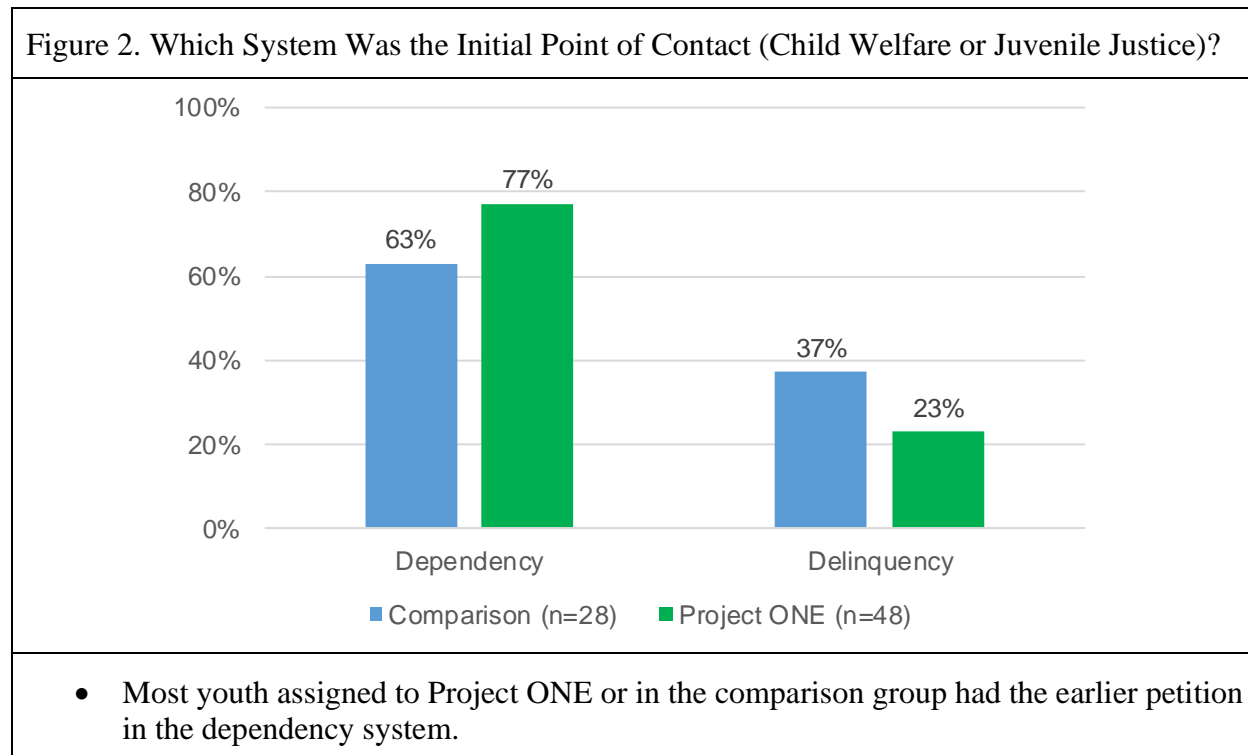
- More children in the study cohorts experienced their first removals from home at earlier ages than the general child welfare population.
- More dually adjudicated youth (i.e., youth in both the Project ONE and comparison groups) experienced their first delinquency referrals and adjudications at ages younger than the general delinquency population.
- The percentage of girls in each dually adjudicated cohort was higher than the percentage of girls in the general delinquency population.
- There was a higher proportion of African American youth in the dually adjudicated groups than in the general delinquency population.
- Dually adjudicated youth in both study groups exhibited more extensive prior delinquency referral histories (i.e., over half of the cases in both groups had three or more prior delinquency referrals) than in the general delinquency population, and half or more had prior felony referrals. (NOTE: Delinquency referral data in the study did not include status offense referrals, only felonies and/or gross misdemeanors.)

- Almost all youth in both study groups presented moderate to high risk and needs assessment scores on standardized assessment tools used by DJS.
- Most study cases had Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) permanency case plan goals that generally reflected youth who eventually would be in independent living settings, not family-type settings.

### Case processing

Previous dual system youth research has examined the first system point of contact for youth involved in multiple systems. As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of dually adjudicated youth made contact with the child welfare system first, though a substantial number of cases made first contact with the juvenile justice system.

*Over two thirds of the comparison group and over three fourths of the experimental group experienced first system contact on the child welfare side with subsequent delinquency system contact.*



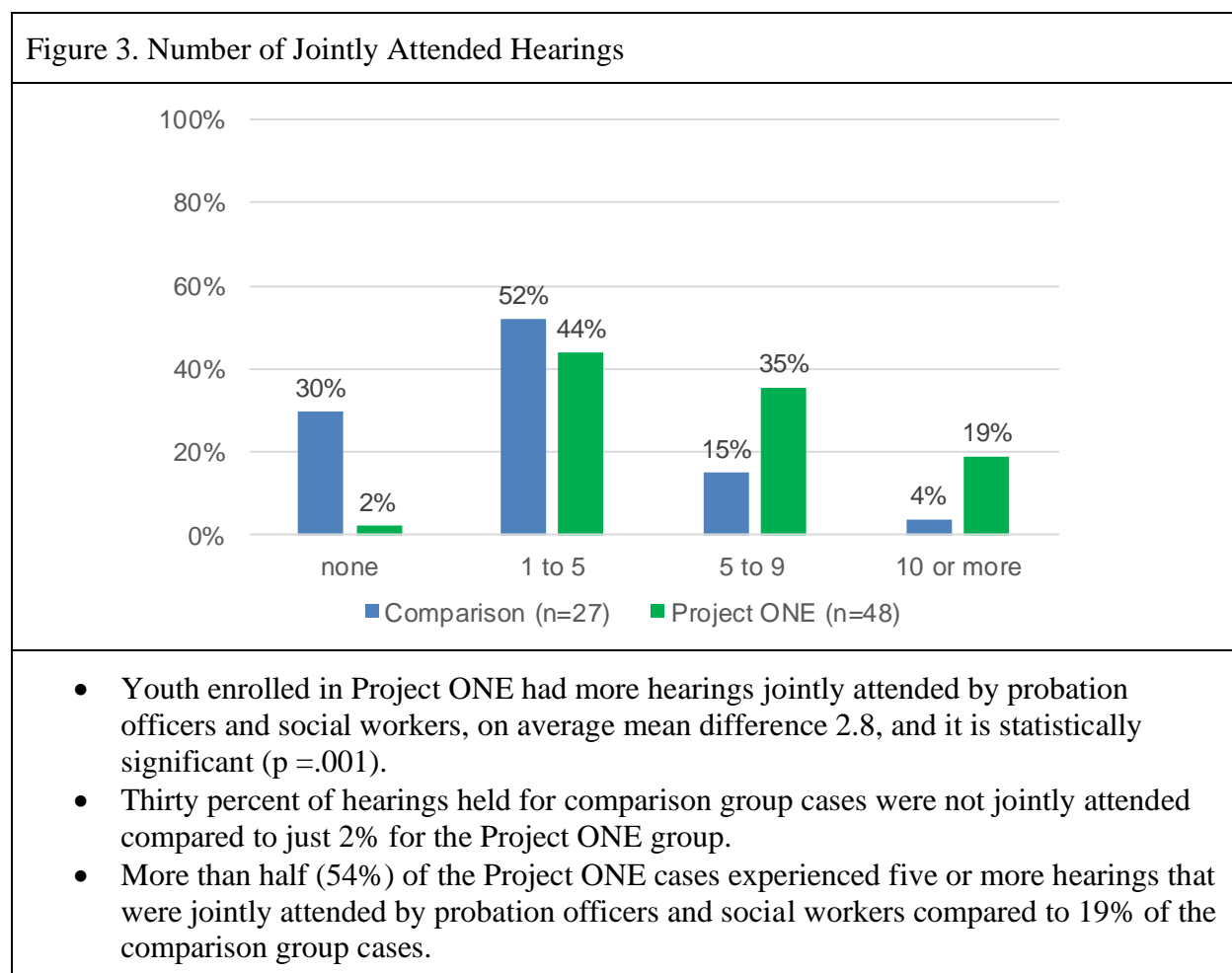
### Case management, planning, and supervision

One of the priority performance measures for Project ONE involves consolidating what are historically separate court hearings (i.e., dependency and delinquency) into single court events. By consolidating such hearings, key stakeholders (prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, social workers, parole officers, and others) are able to avoid having to attend separate proceedings. Such separate hearings can result in conflicting case plans, confounding court orders, and other complicating variables. The Project ONE program requires all stakeholders to

attend all hearings to promote greater consistency, communication, and coordination in these difficult matters. (NOTE: The Project ONE docket was not formally consolidated until September 2015 so the actual rate of jointly attended hearings was probably much higher after that date.)

As shown in Figure 3, joint hearing attendance by probation officers and social workers has significantly increased under Project ONE. Before Project ONE, different stakeholders attended different hearings that were often handled by different judges. Project ONE changed this approach. Most importantly, it required juvenile probation officers and social workers to attend jointly the hearings involving dually adjudicated youth, a practice that rarely occurred prior to Project ONE. This requirement, which stakeholder interviews revealed was a source of initial concern among some stakeholders, is now considered one of the most important strengths of the program with both probation officers and social workers extolling the positive impacts of joint attendance on case planning, case management, and supervision.

*Project ONE cases experienced significantly more hearings that were jointly attended by probation officers and social workers than the comparison group.*

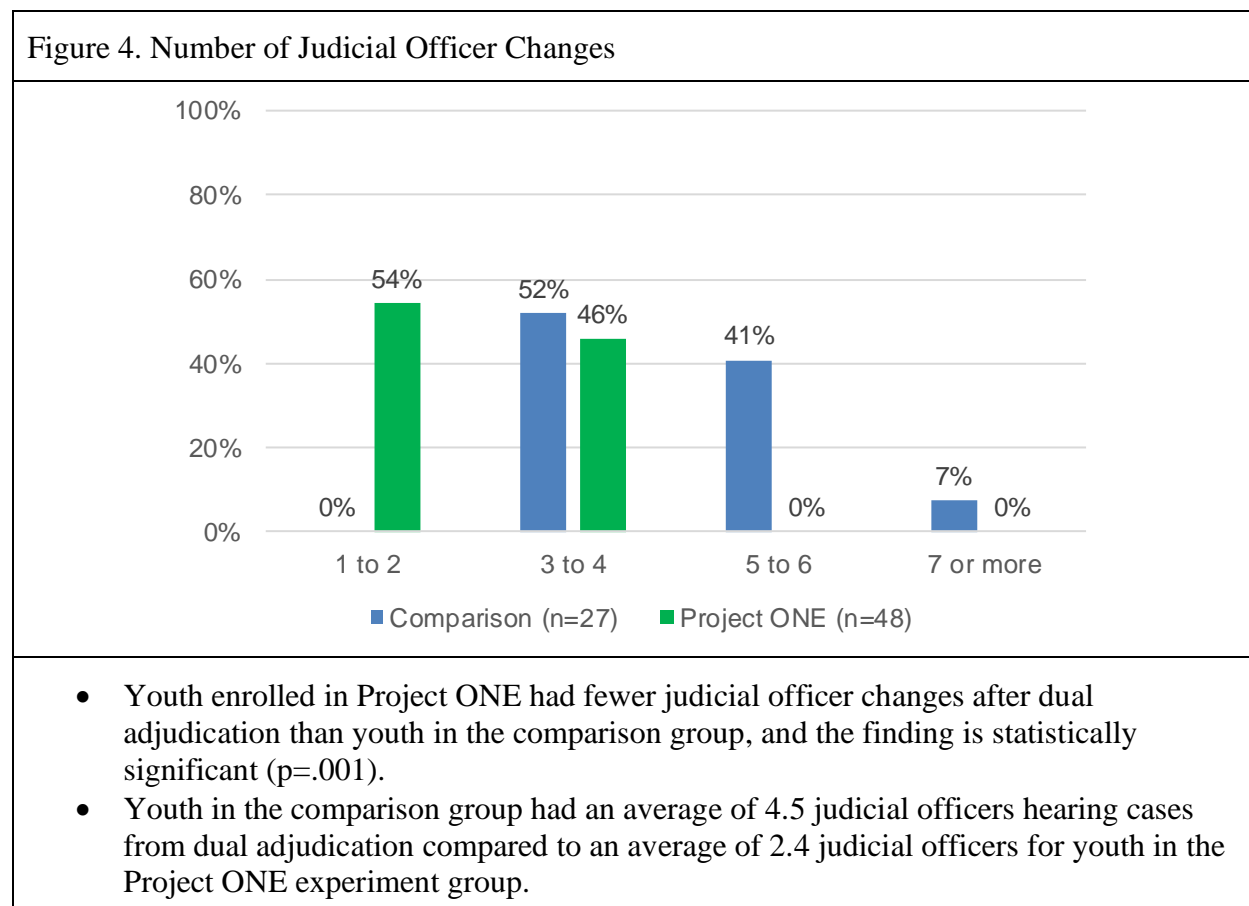


### ***Reducing the number of judges handling dually adjudicated matters***

Another important goal of Project ONE involved the attempt to reduce the numbers of different judges who handle dually adjudicated cases and to realize more fully the One Family/One Judge practice recommended in both the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases* (Gatowski, et al., 2016) and the *Enhanced Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Juvenile Justice Cases* (Pearce, Ed., 2019).

As shown in Figure 4, Project ONE cases had fewer judicial officer changes after dual adjudication than the comparison group. Previous research examining the impacts of reducing the number of judicial changes (Gatowski, et al, 2019; Summers, et al., 2013) has found that stronger adherence to the One Family/One Judge model is associated with lower incidences of court hearing continuances and delays, greater consistency in case plans and court orders in child welfare and juvenile delinquency matters, and reduced times to case closure.

*By creating the Project ONE docket, the SJDC has more fully realized the One Family/One Judge practice model in dually adjudicated cases.*

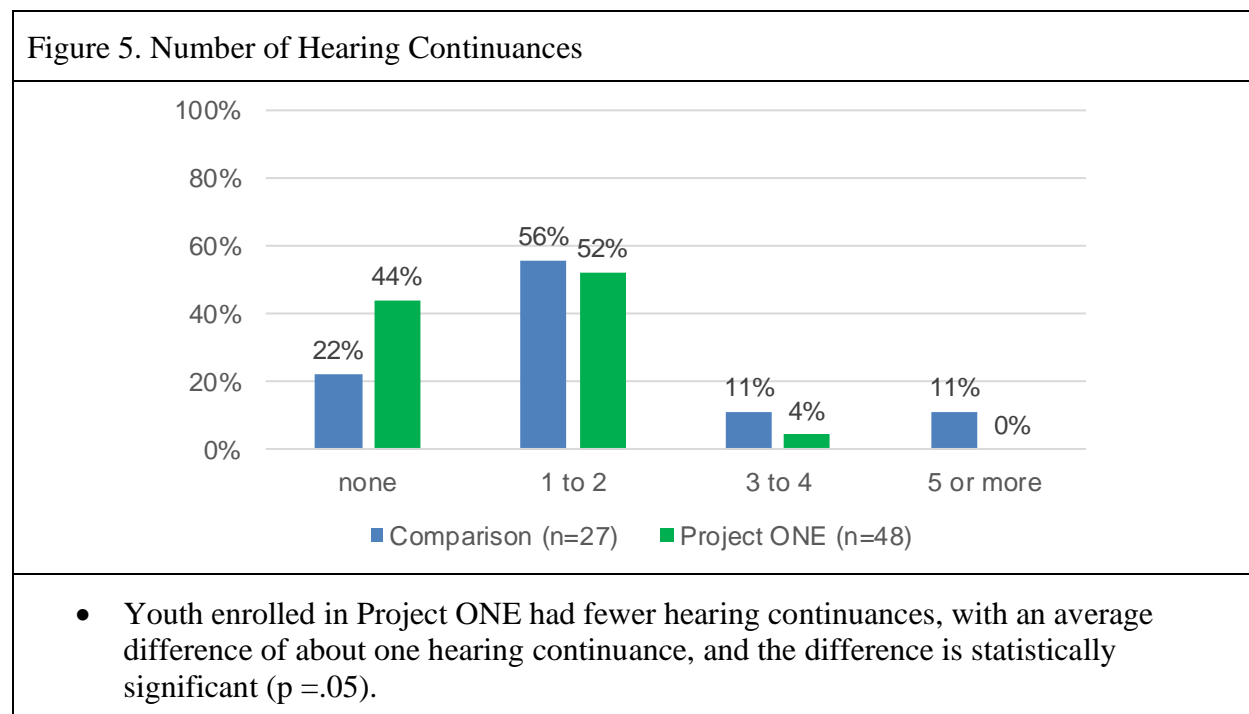




### ***Reducing hearing continuances***

Consistent with the previous finding, Project ONE cases experienced significantly fewer hearing continuances than the comparison group (see Figure 5). These findings were further reinforced by comments made in Project ONE stakeholder interviews which indicated that the adherence to One Family/One Judge in Project ONE also has made court hearings more predictable and substantive, and made court orders more consistent.

*Overall, Project ONE cases experienced fewer hearing continuances than the comparison group.*

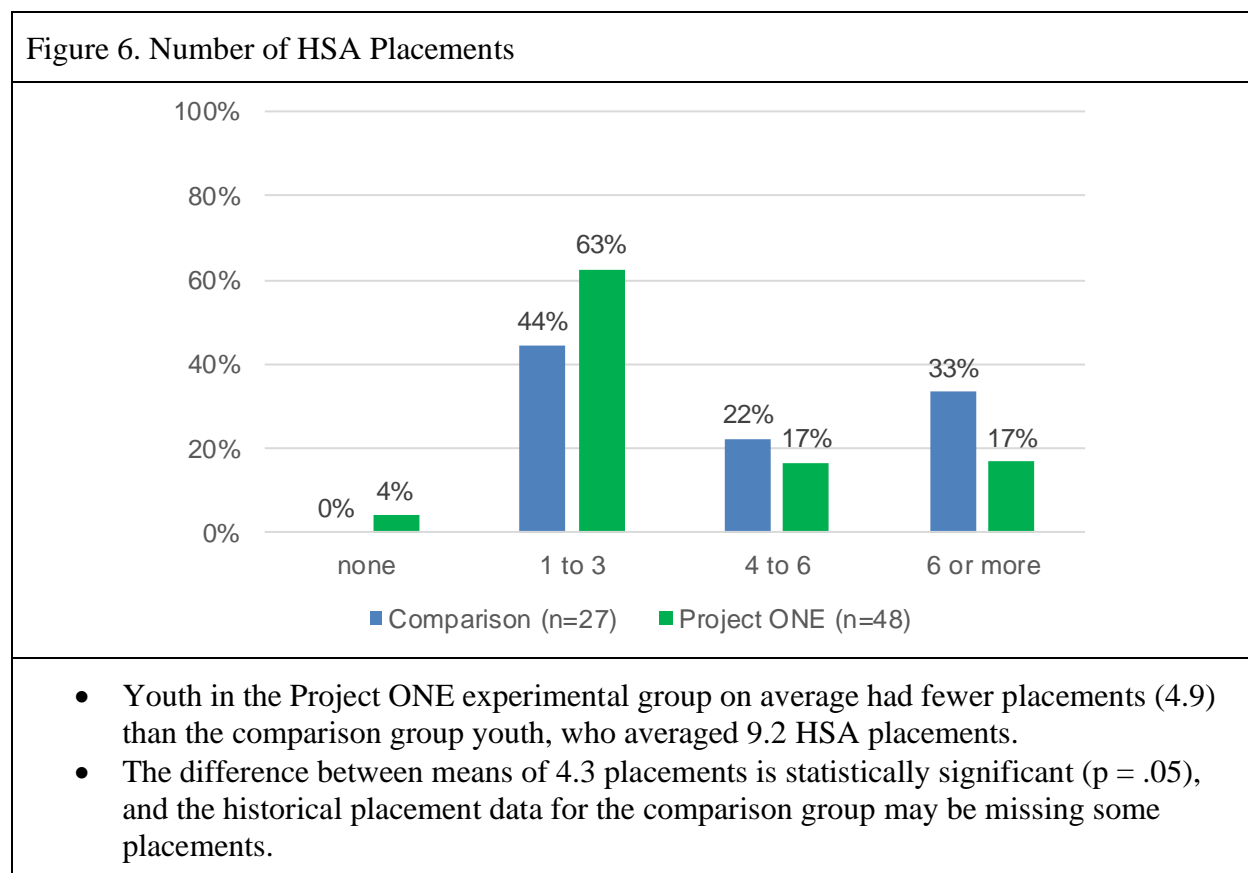


## **Placement and system impacts**

### ***Reducing out of home placements and placement disruptions***

Previous research has documented the extensive disruptions and costs associated with placements and services for dually adjudicated youth (Halemba, 2004). As shown (see Figure 6), dually adjudicated youth in Project ONE experienced fewer out of home placements than the comparison group, as documented by the Washoe County HSA.

*Project ONE youth experienced fewer out of home placements than the comparison group youth.*



Additional preliminary analyses specifically examined group home placements for the two study groups. Previous research (for example, see Halemba, 2015) found that dual system youth who are placed in group home settings appear to be at greater risk of negative delinquency trajectories than youth who are placed in more family-like settings. Preliminary data provided by the HSA appear to indicate that Project ONE youth experienced shorter lengths of stay in group homes and fewer group home placement events than their comparison group counterparts. That said, the HSA data also indicate that Project ONE youth experienced more frequent residential treatment center placements, most often for acute mental health issues, than comparison group cases.

### Youth and family outcomes

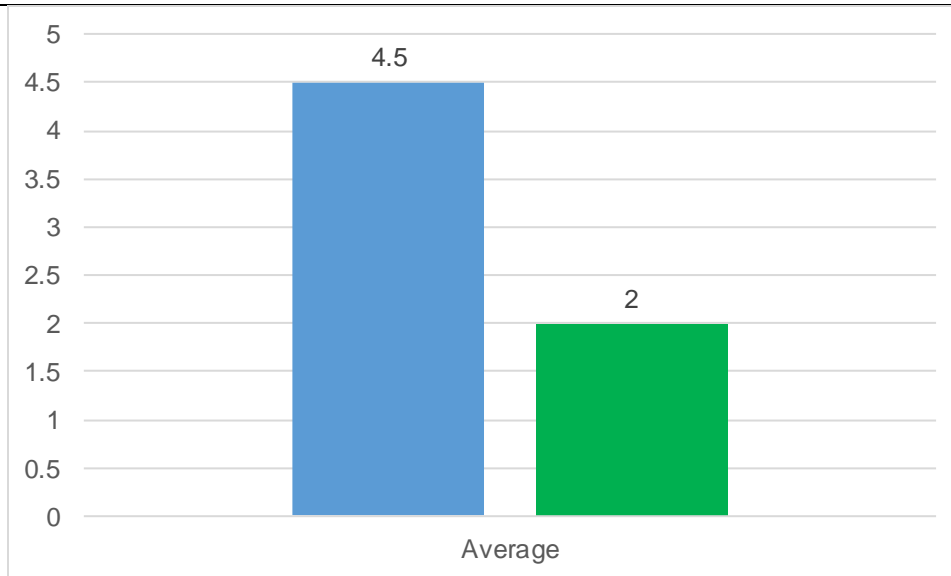
The study sought to capture a variety of youth and family outcomes that are briefly summarized in this section.

#### *Reducing subsequent delinquent activity*

Overall, youth in the Project ONE group had fewer subsequent delinquency referrals after program assignment/dual adjudication than comparison group youth (see Figure 7).

*Project ONE youth experienced fewer delinquency referrals after program assignment/dual adjudication than the comparison group youth.*

Figure 7. Average Number of Subsequent Delinquency Referrals After Project ONE Assignment/Dual Adjudication



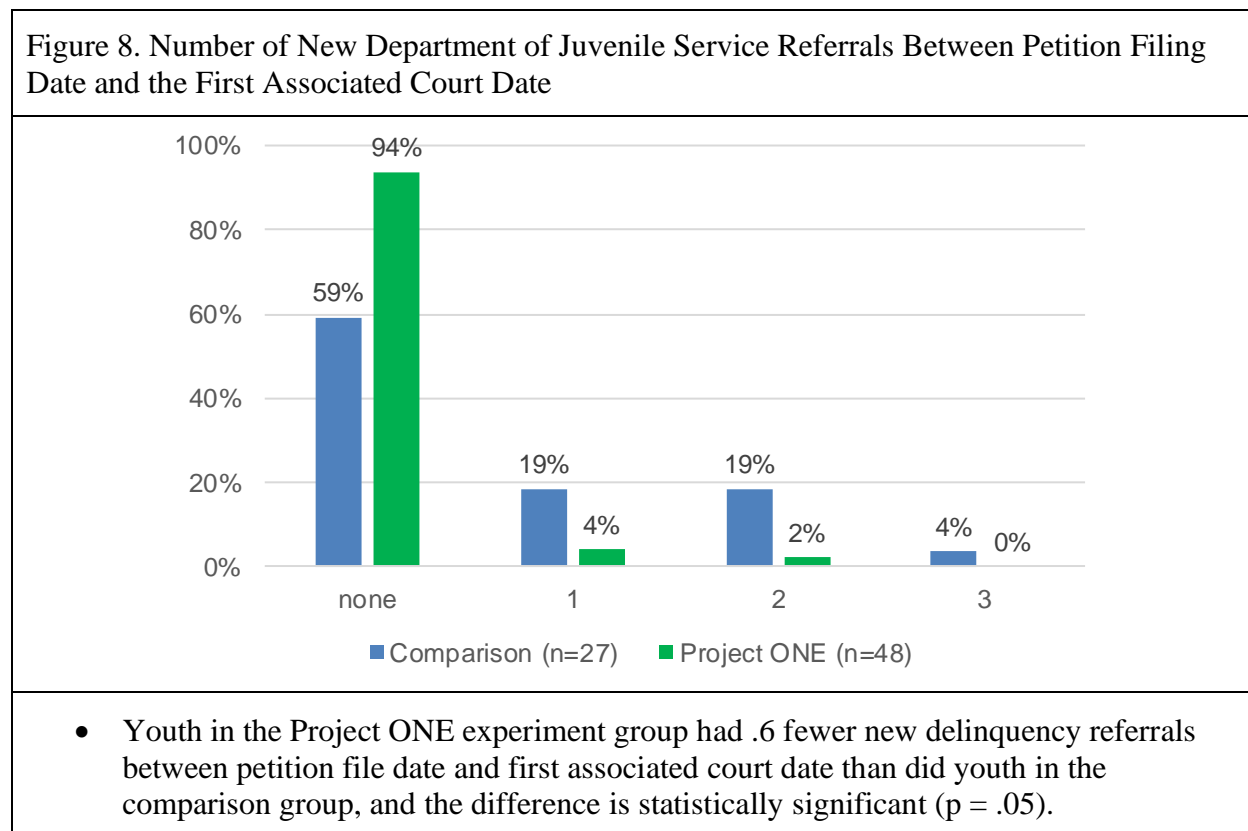
- Youth in the Project ONE experiment group averaged 2.0 subsequent DJS referrals (after Project ONE assignment) compared with 4.5 for the comparison group. The difference is statistically significant ( $p = .008$ ).
- In the comparison group, 22 of 27 youth (81%) had at least one subsequent DJS referral compared with 34 of 48 (71%) in the Project ONE group.
- Most of the subsequent offending in both groups was prior to DJS termination, but many of the Project ONE group had not yet terminated.

The calculation of the average number of subsequent delinquency referrals captured the period from the point of a youth’s admission (which, generally, also reflects the date of dual adjudication) into Project ONE for the experimental group and from the date of dual adjudication for the comparison group. As indicated, while the Project ONE group displayed a lower average of subsequent delinquent referrals than the comparison group, the overall percentages of cases that experienced at least one subsequent delinquency referral were high for both cohorts (81% for the comparison group versus 71% for the Project ONE cohort), a finding that reaffirms the adverse trajectories of dually adjudicated cases.

Previous research (Halemba, et al., 2004) has documented the rapidity with which so many dually adjudicated youth reoffend. It is unfortunate that for many dually adjudicated youth their reoffending patterns can and often do accelerate even after they receive the referrals that initiate dual adjudication status. In other words, it is not just the overall frequency of subsequent offending that is important to track but also the timing of such activity.

One of the key periods to examine in this regard is the time from the filing of the delinquency petition that led to dual adjudication status and the actual dual adjudication date, a period in which dually adjudicated youth were very likely to experience new delinquency referrals. This performance measure is important because it emphasizes the need for timely intervention and system response in these cases. Figure 8 shows that the Project ONE group experienced far fewer referrals during this time period.

*Project ONE youth experienced significantly fewer delinquency referrals between the time of petition filing and program admission/dual adjudication than comparison cases.*

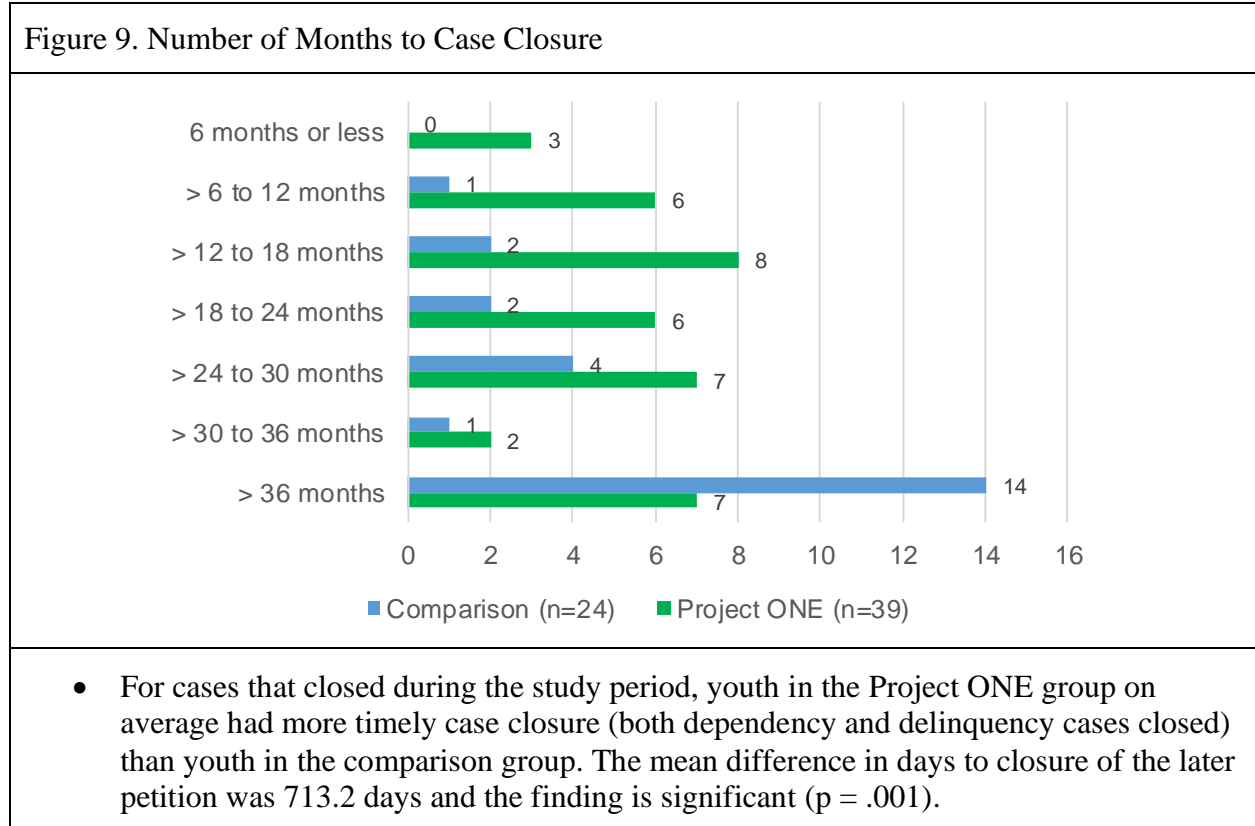


Local stakeholders believe this finding reflects changes in practice at DJS and HSA. More specifically, a number of stakeholders remarked in interviews that the two agencies respond to cases at risk of dual adjudication in an even more coordinated and timely fashion than in the past.

Again, this measure attempted to gauge how many delinquency referrals youth experienced between the time of the filing of the petition that led the youth to be dually adjudicated and their dual adjudication date, a time that for many dually adjudicated youth can be marked by continued delinquent behavior while the juvenile justice and child welfare systems attempt to respond. Timely coordinated action in such cases is imperative in at least temporarily slowing the accelerated pattern of delinquent activities so characteristic of these youth. This more timely intervention at the point of petition filing appears to be one key aspect of Project ONE.

Time to case closure represents another important performance measure for the Project ONE stakeholder group. Previous research (Halemba, 2014) has documented that dually adjudicated cases are much more likely to remain open in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare system than cases that are not dually adjudicated. Cases that stay open longer generally prompt greater strain on the resources (court time, staff, placements, treatment services, etc.) available to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Figure 9 indicates that, overall, Project ONE cases experienced shorter times to case closure than cases in the comparison cohort.

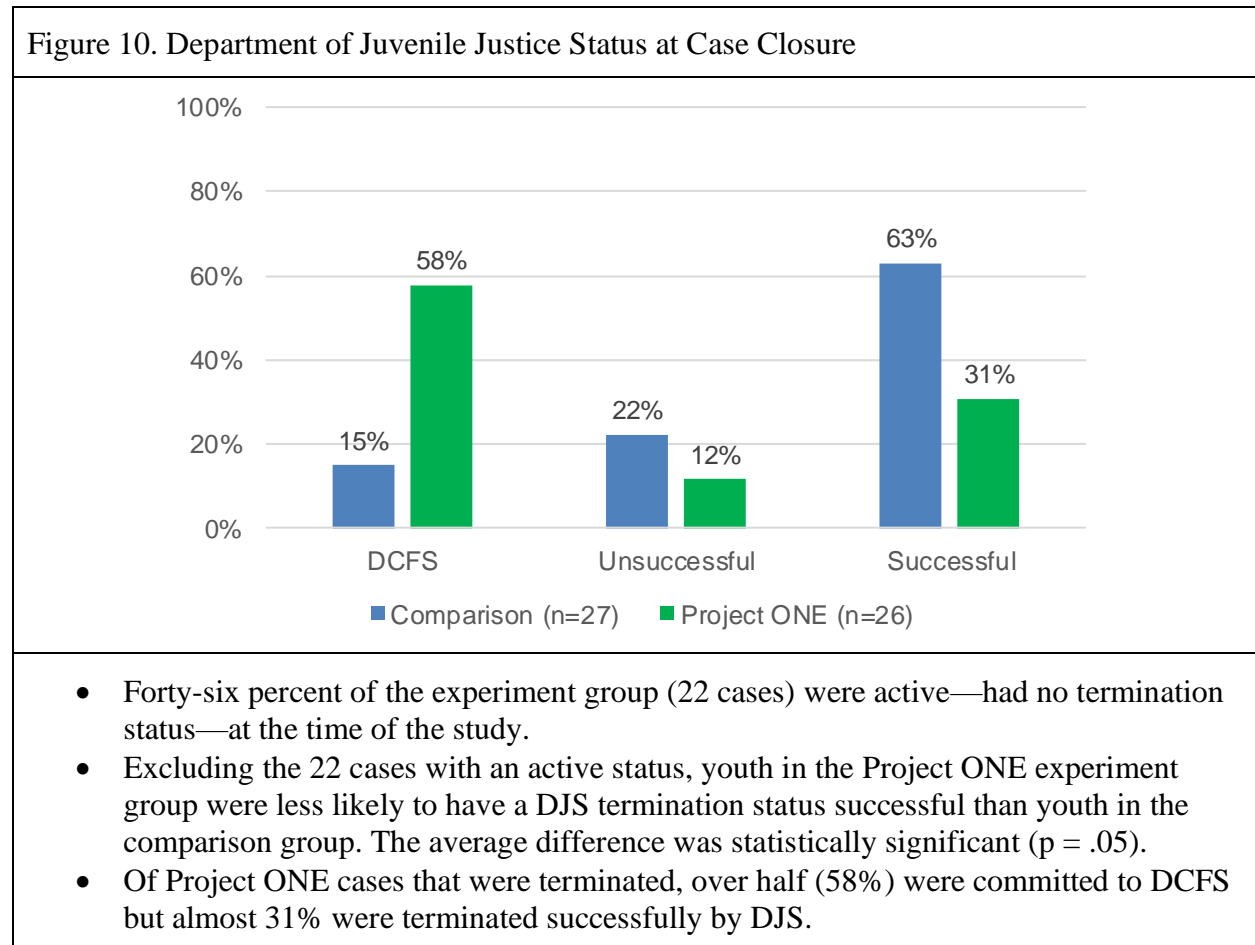
*Overall, Project ONE youth experienced more timely case closure than the comparison group.*



As shown in Figure 10, the study also found that youth in the Project ONE group who were terminated from probation by the DJS were less likely to be terminated as “successful” than the comparison group, with more than half of the Project ONE cases that were terminated by DJS being committed to state youth corrections. In other words, while, overall, youth in the Project ONE group displayed more timely case closure rates, a substantial percentage of these closures reflected less than hoped for outcomes in terms of successful probation terminations and state commitments.



*While, overall, Project ONE cases had more timely case closure, more of these closures involved DCFS commitments and unsuccessful probation terminations.*



The finding displayed in Figure 10 reflects an additional limitation of the study. For most cases, researchers were not able to track subsequent delinquency referrals (or criminal charges) beyond the data available through the DJS. If a youth was committed to state corrections and not retained in Project ONE on juvenile parole, the research team could not determine subsequent delinquent activity.

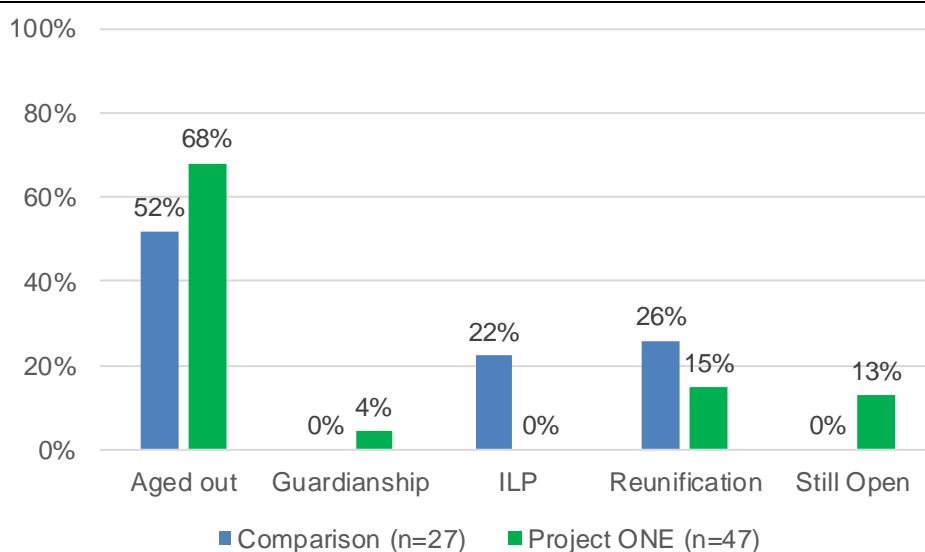
The same is true for any adult criminal charges that youth may have faced after turning age 18 – the limitations of the research prevented such analyses. That said, stakeholder interviews indicated that at least a handful of cases that voluntarily remained in Project ONE beyond their eighteenth birthdays (i.e., in an extended living program operated by the HSA) did not experience adult arrests during the study period. Furthermore, in taking an initial look at school placement data for the Project ONE cohort (data on school placements were not available for the comparison group), it was determined that at least some dually adjudicated youth have obtained their high school diplomas and avoided adult arrests while in the program. The researchers were not able to assess these reported outcomes in greater detail, but they are viewed as important variables for future analysis.

## Improving permanency outcomes

While this Technical Assistance Bulletin has focused primarily on juvenile delinquency outcomes for the study groups, a brief mention of permanency outcomes is in order. As noted, many of the youth in both study cohorts had APPLA (largely, independent living) permanency plans. As shown in Figure 11, more youth in the Project ONE group turned 18 years of age (aged out) while in the program as compared to the comparison group.

*Project ONE youth were more likely to age out than have other case outcomes.*

Figure 11. Permanency outcomes for HSA cases



- Youth in the P1 experiment group were more likely to age out (68%) than youth in the comparison group (52%), and the finding is significant ( $p = .05$ ).

However, it is important to note that for dually adjudicated youth, previous research (Halemba, 2014; Herz and Dierkhising, 2019) has consistently revealed extremely poor permanency outcomes with family reunification and relative guardianship rare events. In the SJDC study, there were seven cases in the Project ONE group (and the same number in the comparison group) that did in fact achieve reunification and two cases (in Project ONE) that achieved relative guardianship. It would seem of value to examine these cases more closely to determine what factors contributed to what appear to be positive permanency outcomes.

## Conclusions and lessons learned

Project ONE represents an expansion of a broad cross-system collaborative continuum in Washoe County. The program more directly addresses the need to coordinate cases involving dually involved and dually adjudicated youth through the creation of the Project ONE docket and other enhanced practices.

The selection of dually adjudicated youth as the target population for this study, despite full awareness of the adverse trajectories so many of these youth experience, was a conscious decision made in Washoe County. Stakeholders wanted to know if Project ONE has produced meaningful benefits compared to the ways dually adjudicated cases used to be handled. Perhaps the best response in this regard is that the preliminary findings reflect mixed results, with some positive systemic and youth/family outcomes and some less than hoped for impacts.

Perhaps one of the more telling aspects of this study is how stakeholders have reacted to the findings. When asked if they would forego Project ONE, all stakeholders interviewed for the study unanimously agreed that the benefits of the program outweigh its shortcomings. This unanimity reflects a shared belief that the local child welfare and juvenile justice systems – including the court, the district attorney’s office, the juvenile probation department, the local child welfare agency, and others – are best equipped to manage dually adjudicated cases even though such cases present formidable challenges and risks.

As noted, there were important limitations to the study’s design. Future research should address these limitations including enhancing case tracking and outcome measurement over a longer period of time. While the dually adjudicated segment of the overall delinquency population in Washoe County is quite small – estimated at just under one percent of all adjudicated delinquency cases – it is important for the court and its partners to continue to track these cases carefully to monitor if there are any changes in this proportion. In addition, the SJDC and its partners should explore options for expanding future research to include all dually involved youth, not just the dually adjudicated subset of cases.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this initial study provides some insights for other jurisdictions that are attempting to address the challenges posed by dually adjudicated youth and that are also interested in assessing the impacts of their interventions. In effect, this initial analysis may be seen as a way to augment the research methods suggested in the recent national research, perhaps in a manner that may not be as rigorous but that still provides useful information. In some ways, the SJDC Project ONE intervention presents examples of some important, albeit preliminary, positive system and youth/family impacts that should be the focus of continuing research in Washoe County and in other jurisdictions working with these difficult cases.

In sum, while the national dual system youth research strongly encourages (and provides evidence for) jurisdictions to intervene as early as possible in dual system cases, before dual adjudication occurs, this initial analysis of the SJDC’s Project ONE model, at minimum, suggests that there may be some tangible benefits for also continuing to intervene with dually adjudicated youth rather than simply committing these cases to youth corrections or the adult criminal justice system. That said, since completion of this research, the SJDC has recognized the continued need to expand eligibility for Project ONE to include cases that have not reached the dually adjudicated threshold.

The study also affirms the ongoing systemic benefits of what appear to be exceptional and sustained levels of cross-system collaboration and cooperation in the SJDC. Washoe County has truly created a culture of collaboration that allows for innovative programs like Project ONE to

be attempted. But, such programs do not come without some risks. As emphasized, the findings of this initial analysis are only limited to those cases in the SJDC. While there are important lessons to be learned from Washoe County's Project ONE, one cannot generalize from these findings. If a jurisdiction is considering expanding its dual system youth interventions to include dually adjudicated youth, it should carefully weigh the multitude of challenges associated with such an endeavor. Jurisdictions should ask themselves important questions including, "Is this a wise use of court and stakeholder resources? What performance and outcome thresholds, related to community safety, youth well-being, and system performance are acceptable?" The SJDC's experiences provide some important insights in this regard as the court strives to continue to improve system performance and outcomes for a very challenging population.

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