

# Hennepin County Co-Parent Court



**Minnesota Fatherhood and Family  
Services Summit - January 24, 2011**

**Co-Parent Court**

*Establishing Paternity, Supporting Families and Strengthening Communities*

# Presenters:

- The Honorable Judge Bruce Peterson, 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District
- Christa Anders – Advance Consulting LLC
- Rose Allen, Extension Educator and Professor, University of Minnesota Extension
- Maisha Giles, Co-Parent Court Navigator, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center
- John Jackson, Co-Parent Court Navigator, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center

# Mission of Co-Parent Court

The mission of the Hennepin County Co-Parent Court is to create a model for paternity establishment that supports co-parenting to improve the social, emotional, and financial outcomes for children, families, and communities.



# Genesis of Co-Parent Court Project

- Family Court Bench leaders recognized that the Hennepin County Family Court was doing many innovations for divorcing families but had not kept up with large demographic changes in families
- Minnesota Supreme Court required parenting classes for divorcing parents in contested cases and all 87 counties were providing classes (the majority through the U of MN Extension “Parents Forever” program)
- Paternity calendar disproportionately comprised of families of color
- Hennepin County Child Support was doing good work at establishing paternity
- No one was specifically serving the parenting needs of families going through paternity establishment

# Hennepin County Family Court

## Paternity Calendar: an opportunity

- 5,000 children born to unmarried parents in Hennepin County every year
- 1,000 paternity adjudications in Hennepin County annually-  
approximately 35 cases each Week
  - 18 of those are adjudicated
  - Over 60% with both parties present

### *The Status Quo:*

- “Mass Calendar”
- Focus on child support
- Support services limited to employment
- No education (unlike divorce)
- Orders typically provide for “reasonable parenting time”



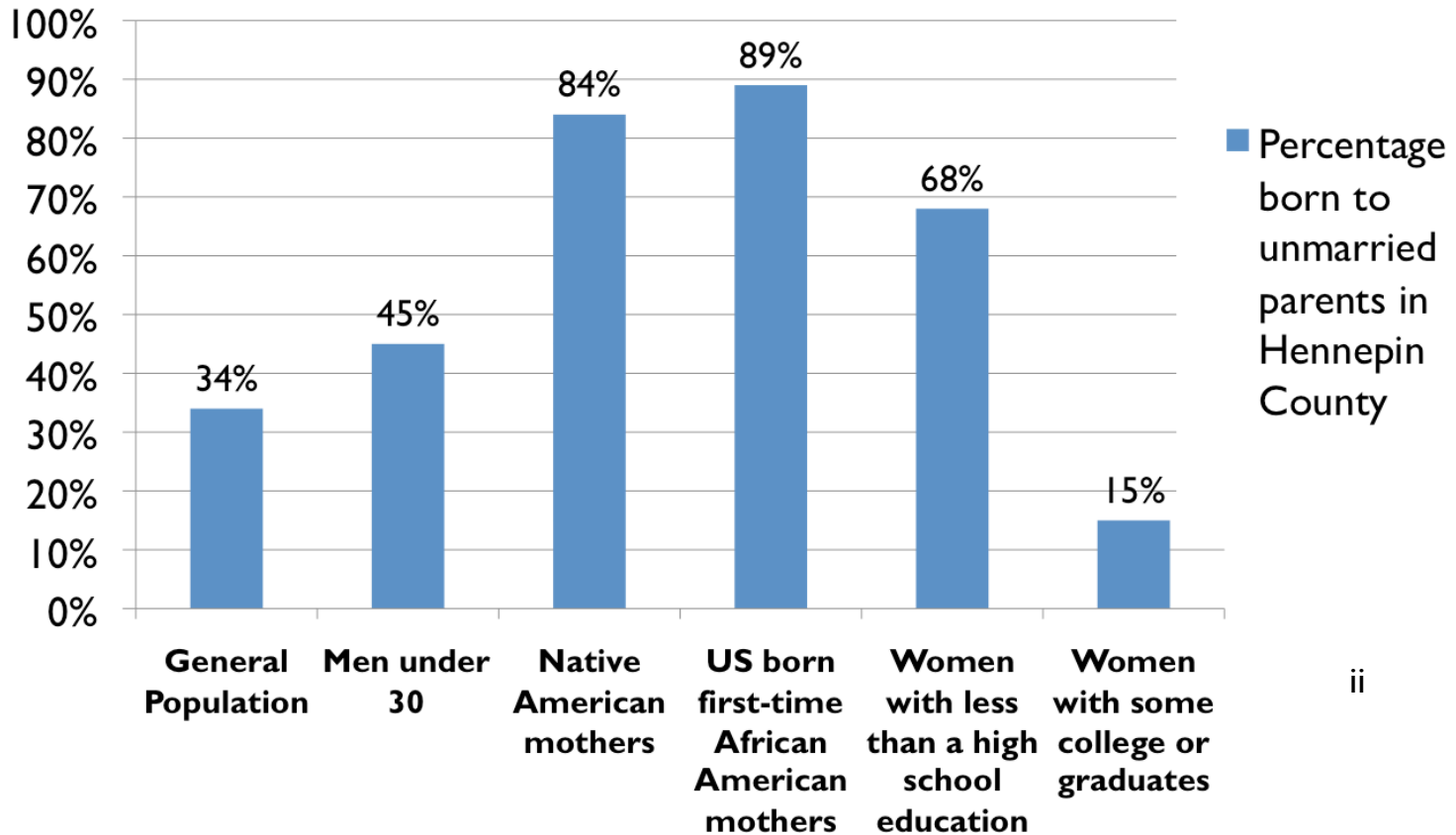
# Research Establishes Four Realities

1. Children who live away from a biological parent are at increased risk for a wide range of negative outcomes. [iv, v]
2. High-quality involvement by the non-residential parent can provide important benefits. [vi, vii, viii]
3. Intensive involvement by non-residential fathers near birth falls off over time. [ix, x]
4. Cooperative co-parenting increases involvement of the non-residential parent. [xi, xii]



# In Hennepin County, 34.1% of the children born had unmarried parents. (2006)

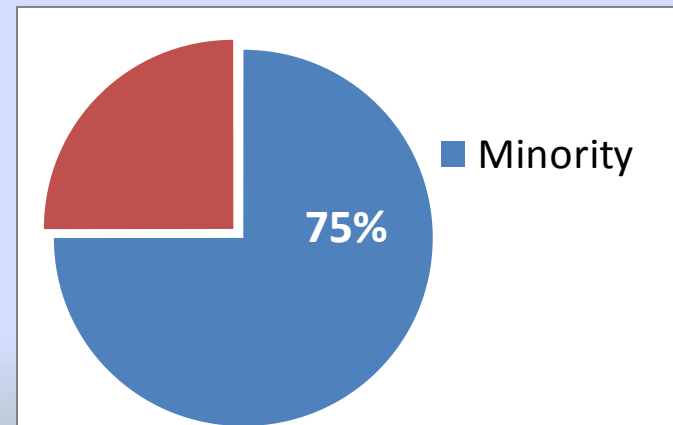
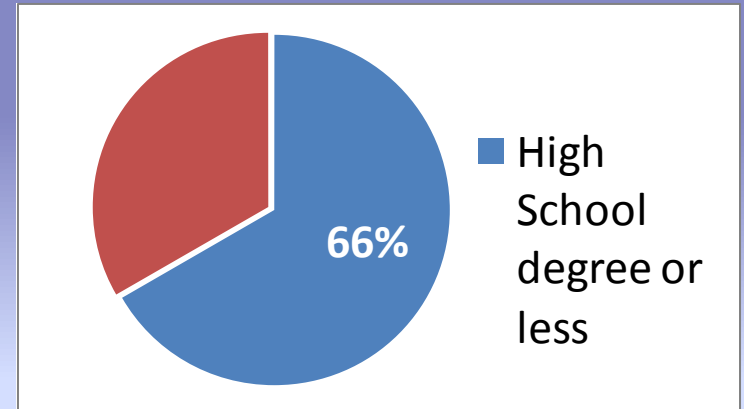
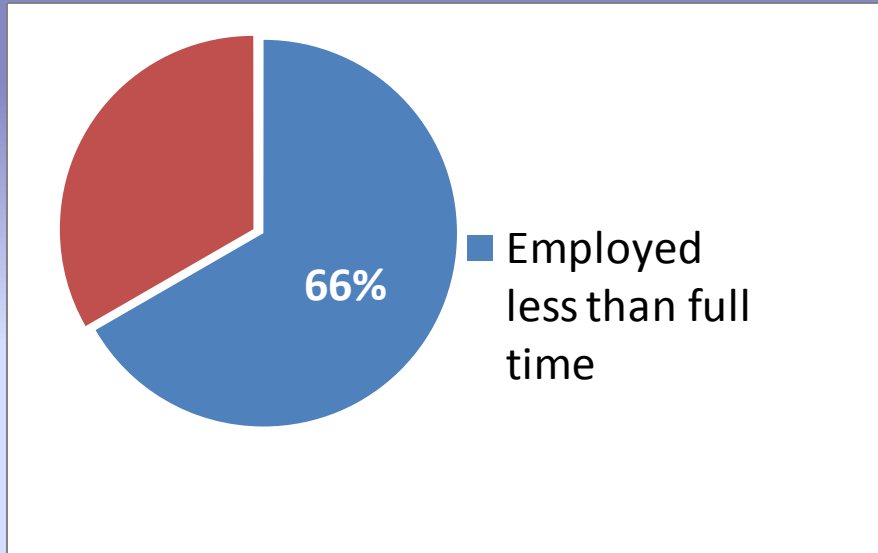
This percentage varies significantly for certain groups.



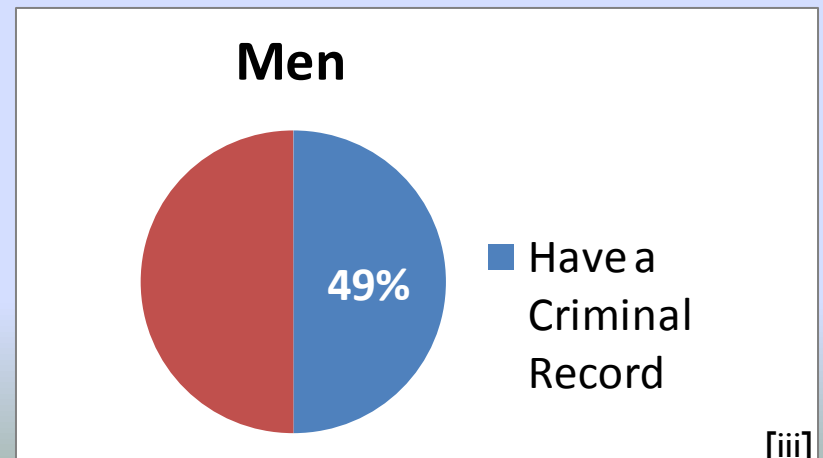
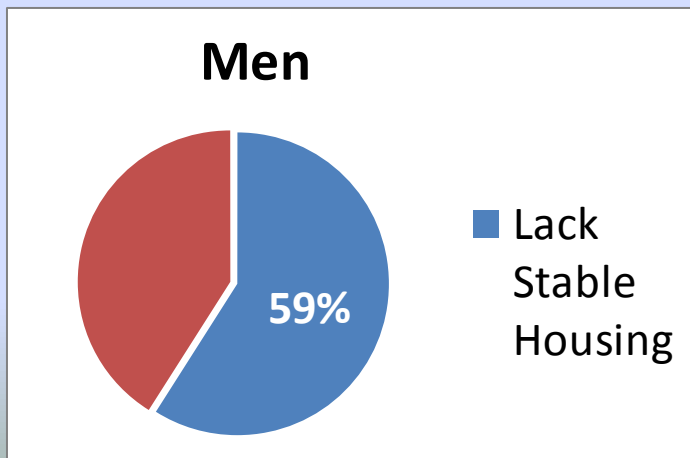
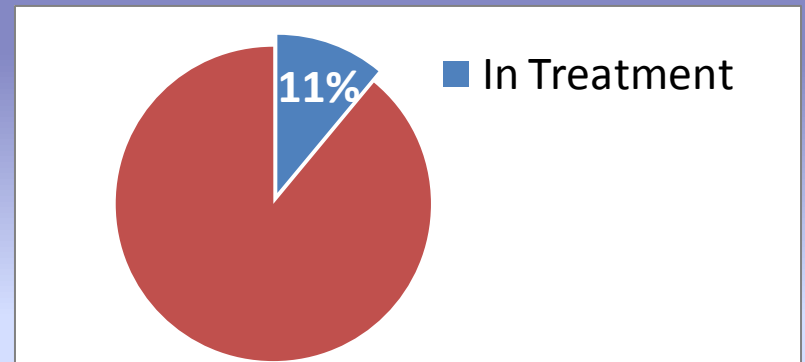
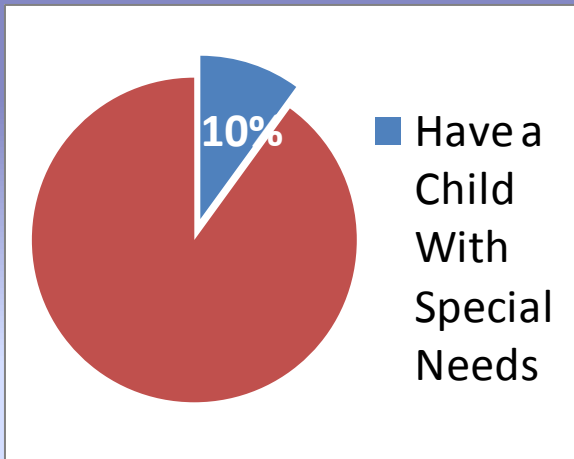
# Who comes to the paternity calendar?

- Results of a survey of single mothers and fathers involved with Hennepin County Family Court (N=167)
- Data collected January-February 2007

# Unmarried Parents in Hennepin County Family Court



# Unmarried Parents in Hennepin County Family Court



# Relationship Stability:

Unmarried Parent Contact as a Function of a Child's Age

<b>Child's Age</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Cohabiting</b>	<b>Romantically involved</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>No Contact</b>
Birth	0%	50%	32%	8%	10%
Age 5	17%	19%	3%	20%	42%

# Contact With Children by Non-Resident Fathers

	<b>Regular Contact</b>	<b>Limited Contact</b>	<b>No Contact by Father</b>
Age 1	62%	26%	13%
Age 3	47%	24%	29%
Age 5	43%	20%	37%

# The Co-Parent Court Model



**Co-Parent Court**

*Establishing Paternity, Supporting Families and Strengthening Communities*

# Problem Solving Court Model

- Problem solving courts focus on addressing underlying issues rather than just mechanically processing cases
- Uses a problem-solving judicial officer, specialized professionals to serve as liaisons to the court, connections to community organizations for services
- Periodic return visits to court

# Goals and Objectives

- Target unmarried parents needing paternity established and who can benefit from social services
- Improve parenting skills, parental relationships, and paternal participation in the lives of their children;
- Increase child support payments from non-custodial parents by providing them information on how the child support system works and providing them services they need to better provide financial support.
- Promote agreed upon child support orders and custody and parenting time orders for unmarried parents.
- Improve outcomes for children by helping unmarried parents work together to parent their children.



# Case Selection

**In order to be accepted the case must meet the following criteria:**

- All parents live in the greater Twin Cities metro area and one or more of them reside in North Minneapolis or the surrounding suburbs (Using zip codes to determine).
- There are no interpreters necessary.
- There are no active CHIPS cases.
- There is no Order for Protection or criminal No Contact Order between the parties.
- Neither parent is a minor.

# Scope of Project

- Services to 300 parents each year for 3 years (up to 100 parents may be discretionary Referee referral cases).
- Control group of 300 additional parents.
- Grant funding: \$450,000 per year (a combination of an 1115 grant from ACF coupled with local foundation funding.)



# Project Elements

- Intake assessment and domestic violence screening conducted in court by Co-Parent Court Navigators.
- Referral to the “Together We Can” education program for single parents designed by the University of Minnesota Extension and taught at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center.
- Couples with domestic abuse issues referred for appropriate Co-Parent Education and counseling to the Domestic Abuse Project and other area providers.



# Project Elements

- Mothers with social services needs referred for case management to the Gateway Project at NorthPoint.
- Fathers with social service needs referred for case management to the FATHER Project (a division of Goodwill/Easter Seals).
- Following completion of the classes, mediation and family group conferencing services by the Legal Rights Center provided for couples unable to agree on a parenting plan.



# Implementation

- Hired two Co-Parent Navigators in May of 2010
- June 2010: Began with discretionary Referee referrals
- September 2, 2010: Began with regular Co-Parent Court at Hennepin County Government Center



# Adapting “Together We Can” for the Hennepin County Co-parent Court





<http://www.togetherwecan.fcs.msue.msu.edu/Curriculum/tabid/54/Default.aspx>

## In co-parent education:

- Focus on family process not family form
- Address attitudes and behaviors that can be changed
- Be cautious about using traditional, marital education programs
- Build co-parenting skills – communication and conflict management
- Need to get beyond skill building to building self efficacy
- Be culturally competent

# A few words about domestic violence

- Promote healthy, non-abusive relationships
- Do no harm – do not do anything to exacerbate the risks
- Go through a process of creating a protocol for domestic violence
- Implement the protocol

# What Have We Learned So Far

- The involvement of multiple systems – State, County, Judicial, community, makes the project comprehensive but also complicated
- Parents are multiply challenged but eager to help their children
- Once the Navigators reach parents and start to build a relationship, parents participate

# Matching the needs of the parents to the content of “Together We Can”

- Gender specific classes
- Offer 6 – two hour classes (12 hours)
- Build a relationship with participants
- Address safety and DV
- Target skills for co-parenting
- Deal with the issues parents bring to class
- Address cultural values and history
- Referral to other services



## **Session 1**

**Introduction – Getting started on creating a healthy future for our child**

## **Session 2**

**Building a strong co-parenting relationship**

## **Session 3**

**Skills for working together as co-parents**

## **Session 4**

**Supporting our child financially**

## **Session 5**

**Making the most of parenting time**

## **Session 6**

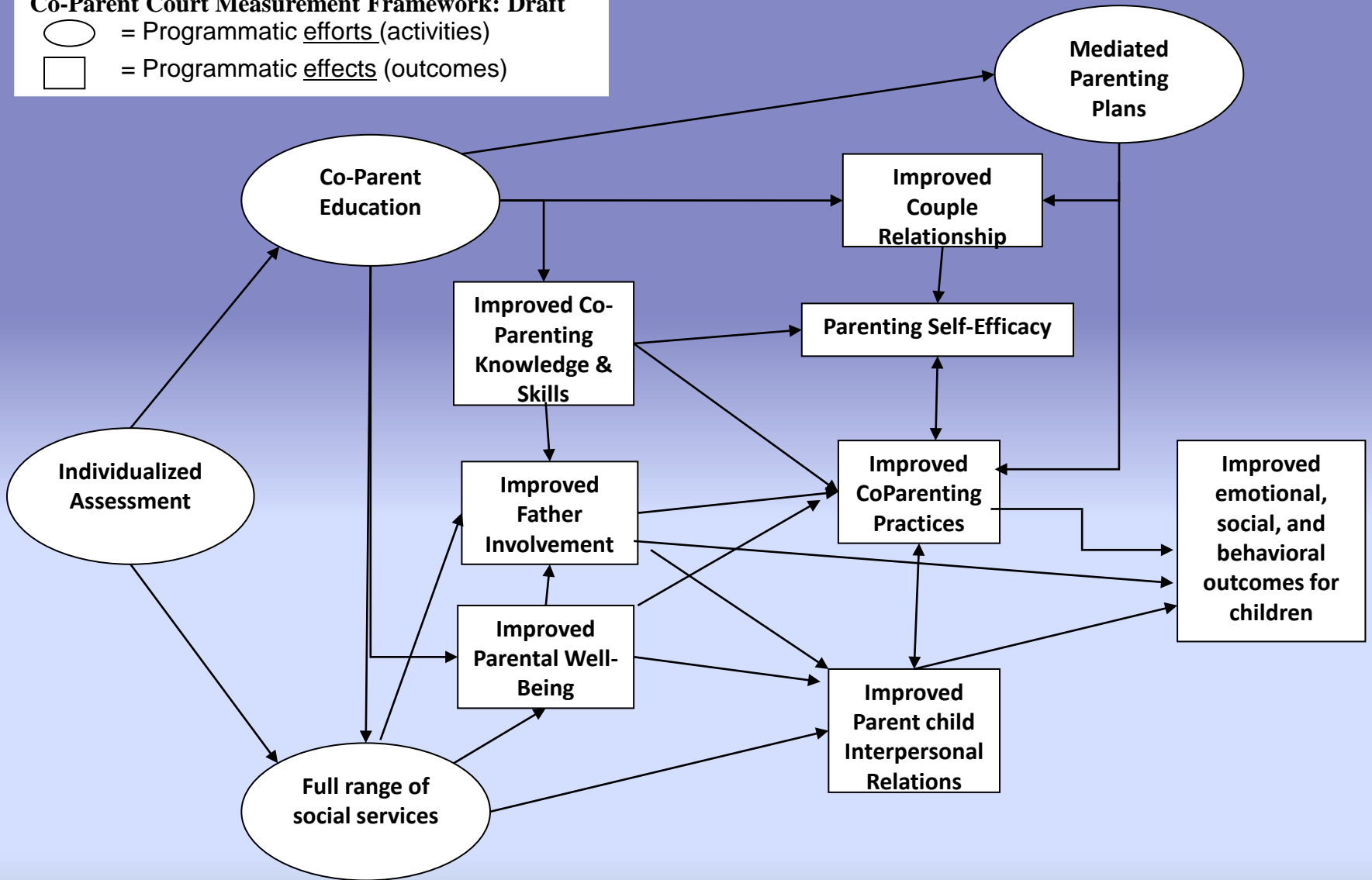
**Looking to the future**

# Co-Parent Court Evaluation



**Co-Parent Court Measurement Framework: Draft**

- = Programmatic efforts (activities)
- = Programmatic effects (outcomes)



# Measuring Program Effects (Outcome and Impact Evaluations)

Quasi-experimental, control group, pre-post-follow-up impact evaluation design.

# Measuring Program Effects

- Improved Father Involvement: parenting time, frequency of contact, monetary, emotional, resource supports, etc.
- Improved Co-Parenting Relationships/Practices: dealing with disagreements, problem-solving, facilitating (Co-Parent Alliance Scale; Norton's Quality of Relationship Index).
- Improved Parenting Self-Efficacy: competency, satisfaction, know-how (Parenting Sense of Competence Scale-PSOC).

# Measuring Program Effects

- Improved Parental Well-Being: stress and coping (Coping Health Inventory for Parents-CHIP).
- Improved Parenting Knowledge and skills: building positive relationships with their child, importance of parents in terms of child outcomes, child development and needs, etc.)
- Child Outcomes: Child-Behavior Check List (CBCL)- measures child well-being, can be used with infant children.

# Measuring Program Effects

- Key Demographics: Work status, health conditions, job changes, race/ethnicity, education, public assistance, household income, personal income, household (who lives with you?), couple relationship status, # of children (Gender, age, how the child is related, who the child lives with).
- Other Critical Data: child support payments (amount/timeliness); subsequent court action; quality and implementation of a co-parenting plan; DV and other social support education and impacts, etc. Cost data for CBA.

# Important Early Lessons

- Understanding partner organization characteristics, norms, beliefs, and values
- Flexible evaluation- critical balance between community realities, academic research rigor, and funding requirements
- Importance of involvement of a multi-disciplinary evaluation staff
- ETO – Management Information System

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- x. Carlson, M.J. *supra*, 472-474.

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- xvii. Carlson & Hognas, *supra*, at 7, 15-16, 19.
- xviii. Amato, *supra*, at 83-84.

