

How Legal Professionals Can Use the *Compendium of Measures and Data Sources: Understanding Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare*

Understanding Research Terms

Measure: A research tool that is used to gather information on a topic of interest.

Examples:

- **Judicial Expertise and Decision-Making Survey.**¹ A web-based survey asking attorneys to rate how much they agree with statements about judges' expertise and decisions in child welfare cases.
- **Parent Engagement Measure.**² A paper-and-pencil survey asking parents to rank how engaged they were in their case.

Measurement Strategy: How the measure was administered or used in practice for the specific study for which it was designed, as well as how it could be used in practice (when known). This includes data collection method.

Examples:

- court observation
- case file review
- survey
- interview
- focus group

Data Source: A publicly available dataset(s) of state or national child welfare court data.

Example:

- **State: California Child Welfare Indicators Project.**³ A dataset on all children in California's foster care system maintained by the University of California, Berkeley.

As a legal professional who focuses on child welfare cases, research and data can be a crucial guide for improving hearing practice.

Consider these examples:

- Your county child welfare working group is developing a plan to evaluate the impact of a new court project. You want to explore what administrative data may be used to assess key components of the plan including case outcomes. You also want to know what measures, including surveys and interview protocols, could be used to examine other topics such as how judges make decisions and hearing quality that may not be available in existing administrative data.
- A judge is using a new court order template. She needs a measure to evaluate whether the new template helps judges tailor their findings to the specific facts of each case.
- An attorney thinks engaging parents in court hearings will improve parents' case outcomes and experiences with the legal system. She wants to find a measure to use when observing court hearings to see how judges and attorneys engage parents.

A new resource—the *Compendium of Measures and Data Sources: Understanding Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare*—can help in these situations. Available here, the *Compendium* can help identify research measures and strategies to use in your court improvement work.

What is the *Compendium*?

The *Compendium* summarizes information on research measures and data sources used in child welfare court hearing research (see sidebar for definitions). It presents this information in several ways:

- **Table of Measures.** A table summarizing child welfare court hearing research measures, which of nine topics they assess, and how they were administered (e.g., survey, court observation, interview).
- **Measures Profiles.** Detailed profiles of 49 measures used to evaluate child welfare court hearings. Each profile describes the measure, how it was administered, key topics studied, how it was scored, and reference/source. Some of the actual measures are included in the appendices.

- **Table of Data Sources.** A table listing 13 state and national datasets used to assess topics related to hearing quality and judicial decision-making in child welfare cases. Datasets can be a useful source for context about a jurisdiction’s child welfare caseload (such as number of cases per judge/court), case characteristics (such as race/ethnicity of children in the child welfare caseload), case processing information (such as timeliness of court events), and case outcomes.


Why is the *Compendium* important for the legal community?


Why it is important	How to use it
Shows you how child welfare court hearings have been evaluated and what research measures have been used.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Learn about common measures used to study child welfare court hearings. › Learn about the breadth of components measured in the child welfare court hearing literature. › Access detailed information on existing measures and easily compare them. › Identify measures that can be used for your research and evaluation efforts, with the ability to search by measurement strategy or component.
Helps you understand the role of research, measures, and data sources in your court’s efforts to improve child welfare court hearings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Share how measures have been used in research efforts with community partners. › Learn about data that is available for secondary analysis to answer new research questions.
Helps you partner with researchers to strengthen child welfare court hearings through research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Share research with potential partners, such as universities, other organizations, and funders. › Discuss and agree on research goals and questions, important topics to measure, and appropriate measures. › Identify opportunities to reuse measures.


Endnotes

1. Zinn, A. and Orlebeke, B. (2017). “Juvenile court judicial expertise and children’s permanency outcomes,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 77, pp. 46-54. Available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019074091730258X>
2. Alpert, L. T., & Britner, P. A. (2009). Measuring parent engagement in foster care. *Social Work Research*, 33(3), 135-145. Available at <https://academic.oup.com/swr/article-abstract/33/3/135/1617139?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
3. Available at <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/>

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