

# **Early Intervention in Child Support**

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## **CPR** --- *Center for* --- **POLICY** --- **RESEARCH**

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## **Executive Summary**

This report presents the results of a study of the impact of workers using early intervention techniques in child support agencies in five jurisdictions: Lane County, Oregon; Mesa County, Colorado; Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; Suffolk County, Massachusetts; and Tarrant County, Texas. Four of the five sites used proactive, front-end strategies in cases with new or modified child support orders; Oregon uses early intervention at all state child support agencies as part of an “upfront discovery process” for new cases that are current or past recipients of public assistance and/or public health benefits. At all sites, workers were asked to record the contacts they made with parents and employers and other actions related to establishment and enforcement of orders.

At four of the five sites, a comparison group was generated from comparable cases processed using conventional techniques. At least 16 months following the assignment of cases to early intervention, information was collected on payment behaviors and enforcement actions for cases in both groups.

The study had a number of limitations including some significant differences in the types of cases in the early intervention and comparison groups in Texas, an inability to generate a non-treatment comparison group in Oregon, and inconsistent record keeping of early intervention activities in Wisconsin.

Despite these limitations, the analysis showed:

- The primary goal of the early intervention effort varied by site: relationship building (Colorado), establishing orders at the right level (Oregon), and faster enforcement actions (Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Texas).
- The sites differed in the percentage of cases in which the early intervention workers made contact with noncustodial parents: Wisconsin (3%), Texas (14%), Massachusetts (33%), Oregon (34%), and Colorado (54%).
- At none of the sites did workers commonly refer parents for services to address barriers to employment.

- Workers made direct contact with one or more parties (custodial, noncustodial parent, and/or an employer) in a majority of cases: Colorado (76%), Massachusetts (63%), Oregon (61%), and Texas (55%).
- Early intervention in Oregon produced orders that were rarely challenged. The process led to enforcement actions being instituted more quickly in non-paying cases in Wisconsin (contempt, credit bureau reporting) and Massachusetts (credit bureau and driver's license).
- The treatment and comparison groups in Massachusetts and Wisconsin were identical in the percent paying any support and the average percent paid. In Texas, payment patterns favored the comparison group which had significantly higher order levels and wage withholding orders. In Colorado, the average percent of support paid was higher in treatment cases where the worker made direct contact with the noncustodial parent than in comparison cases (57% versus 40%).
- Colorado early intervention cases with brand new orders were significantly more likely than comparison cases to have at least some payment activity (87% versus 71%) and to have lower arrears balances after 12 months (\$2,688 versus \$5,984). In Massachusetts, payments were significantly higher for cases with brand new orders when the worker made direct contact with the noncustodial parent (64% versus 49%). At the other sites, payment patterns were statistically equivalent for both groups, except in Texas where lower order levels in the treatment group led to lower arrears balances even though the average percent paid was higher in the comparison group.
- Arrears balances at 12 and 24 months following order promulgation for cases in the full, early intervention and comparison groups were not statistically different in the three sites with information: Colorado, Massachusetts, and Texas.
- Any payment benefits for cases in the treatment group at any site occurred during the first 12 months following the intervention and disappeared by the second year.

Comparing this study with other OCSE studies of early intervention revealed the following:

- The lack of good telephone numbers for noncustodial parents was a barrier to early intervention in every project;
- The rates of telephone contact with noncustodial parents were higher when outreach was done by specialized call center workers who made multiple attempts (Nebraska);
- Referrals to address barriers to employment were rare, but were more common when workers had a directory of services on a shared drive (Tennessee);
- Early intervention reduced rates of default (Iowa) sped up order establishment, especially in public assistance cases (Tennessee and Oregon), and produced orders that were rarely challenged (Oregon);
- Statistically significant differences in payment and arrears balances were only achieved for some sub-groups and some payment measures (*e.g.*, TANF clients in Tennessee);
- Payment increases among early intervention cases were most common in new order cases that experienced direct worker-obligor contact soon after the order was established (Colorado, Nebraska); and
- Statistically significant differences between early intervention and comparison cases on enforcement actions were only achieved for some enforcement actions and at some sites (Wisconsin, Massachusetts) and failed to materialize in other projects (Tennessee).

Early intervention has clearly not achieved many of the goals hoped for by project architects. Only a few sites in this and other OCSE-funded projects exhibited improvements in payment performance that were statistically significant, and they tended

to be modest and occur for only some sub-groups (e.g., brand new orders and those with actual worker-client contact). Most of the differences between treatment and control groups to date have not been statistically significant or what would be expected on the basis of chance alone. At the project site in Texas, all statistically significant differences in payment favored the comparison group which had significantly higher order levels and wage withholding orders.

More to the point, the sites that have perhaps exhibited the most substantial improvements in payment (Nebraska and Mesa County, Colorado) have certain caseload and agency characteristics that may make them more receptive to early intervention treatments. For example, Nebraska's treatment and control groups were evenly divided between IV-D and non-IV-D cases and the treatment group was restricted to only those cases where telephone contact was made by specialized call center workers. In Colorado, nearly half (46%) of the cases in the treatment and comparison groups generated in Mesa County's small agency of approximately 5,000 open cases were previously married. Mesa County also had the lowest unemployment rate. Workers in smaller agencies may be better able to personalize service than their counterparts in big agencies, previously married parents may be more receptive to early intervention overtures than their never-married counterparts, and local economic factors may be compelling in explaining payment

Despite these shortcomings, most child support agencies that have experimented with early intervention techniques see value in the approach, and want their staff to work more closely with parents at earlier stages of the child support process and take steps immediately if payment is missed. As administrators and line staff attempt to utilize proactive strategies, they will need a variety of approaches and tools to ensure that their efforts are effective.

- **Realistic Expectations:** Payment benefits were extremely modest, even at the site with the most intense, proactive interventions. It would be wise to temper expectations about early intervention and its potential impact on payment. Other possible benefits to early intervention are improved customer service, agency image, client knowledge, and heightened agency efficiency at the front end of case processing.

- **Case Selection:** To better target the efforts of early intervention workers, agencies need reliable ways of grouping their cases and identifying those that might benefit from proactive approaches. Some jurisdictions have identified some objective client characteristics that are useful predictors of payment compliance.
- **Automation:** To effectively monitor payment behavior, child support workers need better automated prompts to let them know when payments are missed and flags to remind them to make relevant calls or send notices.
- **Agency Practices and Legal Tools:** To utilize proactive strategies, agencies need to collect and update home, work, and cell phone numbers for noncustodial parents and to gather information for a secondary contact. They also need legal authority to subpoena cell phone numbers in a batch fashion.
- **Resources:** To use personalized outreach techniques, workers need realistic caseloads and/or appropriate specialization arrangements.
- **Defining the Intervention and Staff Training:** If intensive front-end approaches are to be used, workers need to be trained on intervention goals and how to build rapport and connect with noncustodial parents.
- **Future Research:** Future studies need to be large in scale and should include randomly generated treatment and comparison groups to permit the analysis of outcome patterns for various relevant sub-groups. They should also use standardized measures of payment, such as the percent of the obligation due that is actually paid.



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## **Introduction**

In June 2004, the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement awarded a Special Improvement Grant (SIP) to the Center for Policy Research (CPR), to assess the use and impact of early intervention techniques in child support agencies in five jurisdictions. The goal of the multi-site evaluation of early intervention strategies was to generate empirical information on (1) how different child support agencies use early intervention techniques in the course of processing cases; and (2) how effective such techniques are in encouraging payments, avoiding the build up of arrears, and, if necessary, initiating timely enforcement actions.

### **Background**

Early intervention encourages workers to focus on child support cases at initial stages of case processing and to engage in proactive contact with noncustodial and custodial parents for the purpose of establishing a positive working relationship. Caseworkers typically have no routine contact with the noncustodial parent after the order is entered. When they do have contact, normally months into the child support process, the noncustodial parent often owes back-due support and faces bank attachments, license revocations, liens, and other enforcement actions.

Early intervention may occur at a variety of points in case processing. Prior to order establishment, early intervention involves contacting the obligor to identify income and address barriers to payment through appropriate service referrals. Following the establishment of an order, early intervention involves contacting the obligor to explain the terms of the order and the payment procedures prior to the initiation of automatic wage withholding. Following the first episode of delinquency, early intervention involves contacting the noncustodial parent to determine reasons for non-payment, and taking appropriate steps to collect support.

Early intervention may also involve contact with custodial parents and employers to locate noncustodial parents, ensure that wage withholding orders have been sent to the right payroll office, and identify barriers to payment. The most important aspects of early intervention include setting reasonable, enforceable orders from the outset; promoting voluntary compliance with child support obligations; monitoring cases; and enforcing them swiftly (Legler, 2003).

## **Innovative Consumer Debt Practices**

Child support agencies are not alone in seeking more effective ways of preventing and collecting consumer debt. In recent years, many industries including hospitals, utilities and even the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), have taken steps towards implementing more consumer friendly and effective debt collection tactics. For example, the California Healthcare Association (2004) recently put out new billing and collection practice guidelines for low-income, uninsured patients. These guidelines state that the hospitals must disclose financial assistance opportunities to their patients and that if a patient is working with the hospital or with a government-sponsored agency to get funding and arrange payment, the hospital is not to send the bill to a collection agency. Additionally, this new policy states that the hospital is not to use severe collection tactics such as wage garnishments or property liens with low-income, uninsured patients.

Utility companies, which attempt to collect payment every month from their customers and incur expensive costs when they disconnect those who do not pay, have implemented a debt management collection process that encourages understanding the customer through customer segmentation. As part of this process, customer payment records are examined early in the collection process. This allows the utility to “fast track” chronically delinquent customers to a professional collection agency while helping other customers arrange payment plans (Boone and Roberts, 2004).

Even the IRS has developed more flexibility in arranging payment for back taxes. In addition to traditional filing extensions and installment agreements, the IRS allows what is called an Offer in Compromise. An Offer in Compromise is a last resort option available to those who absolutely cannot pay the amount of taxes they owe. These taxpayers can make a reasonable offer of a reduced amount of taxes to the IRS. If the IRS accepts, they can then arrange a payment plan. Recently, the IRS revamped the Offer in Compromise to waive the \$150 application fee and the 20 percent down payment requirement for low-income people (Internal Revenue Service, 2006).

Industries have many motivations for this recent change in collection practices. Some may finally be responding to the Fair Debt Collection legislation enacted in the late 1970s to prevent aggressive and harassing debt collection tactics (Azcuena, 1994). Others may be trying to stem the number of lawsuits they incur (Pryor, 2005). A strong motive, however, is the realization that practices that encourage customer interaction and

collection planning may result in the fastest, most complete collection of the obligation. Collecting money quickly is important because the longer a debt remains unpaid, the less likely it is ever to be paid. According to a survey of members of the Commercial Collection Agency Association, collection probability drops to 73 percent after three months and 57 percent after six months. After one year of non-payment, there is only a 29 percent probability of obtaining a payment (Commercial Collection Agency Association, 2004, cited in Legler, 2006).

### **Barriers to the Payment of Child Support**

Despite dramatic increases in child support collections, only about 58 percent of current support is collected and the majority of poor children who live in single-parent families do not receive child support (OCSE, 2005). A key factor in non-payment is the limited ability of many low-income fathers to provide support. Nationally, 70 percent of child support debt is owed by noncustodial parents with documented earnings of \$10,000 or less (OCSE, 2004). A related problem in the non-payment picture is the alienation of many low-income, noncustodial parents from the child support system. Several features of the child support system are believed to drive many low-income fathers away from legitimate employment, into the underground economy, and away from their children. They include: unrealistic child support orders and retroactive debt policies, confusing legal notices and proceedings, and aggressive enforcement remedies after the build-up of high arrears balances (Legler, 2003).

The following are some additional practices by state and local CSE agencies that may be contributing to the problem of low payment and parental alienation:

- **Service of Process:** Noncustodial parents often do not receive legal documents about their child support obligations because of service of process practices such as serving any adult who is present at the party's residence.
- **Complexity of Documents:** Many jurisdictions serve documents that are long and complex; most only produce documents in English. Relatively few jurisdictions have taken special measures to simplify legal documents.

- **Response Requirements:** Some state and local practices make it difficult for noncustodial parents to respond and charge filing fees
- **Default Order Practices:** Many jurisdictions focus on establishing orders regardless of whether they are by “default.” These orders are essentially “rubberstamped” without a hearing, and provide no relief other than a subsequent modification filing to show that the order amount is too high.
- **Imputing Income:** In the absence of other income information, most jurisdictions impute a minimum wage order for 40 hours per week. Many states are not very aggressive about obtaining realistic income information from electronic databases such as state employment and hiring information, prison and jail records, welfare assistance records, and Social Security insurance records.
- **Unrealistic Orders:** Child support orders can be unrealistically high for poor parents, comprising up to 61 percent of gross income for those who earn less than \$500 per month (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003). Recent California research suggests that child support often consumes over 50 percent of poor noncustodial parents’ gross income (Sorensen, *et al.*, 2003).
- **Modification Procedures:** Judicial processes for review can be slow, costly, and cumbersome, with few states using automation to capture income information and perform review and adjustment on an annual basis (Venohr, 2001).

As a result of these practices, a noncustodial parent may not be aware that he has a child support obligation or may not know the amount of the obligation, and/or the obligation may be unrealistic given his financial circumstances. Failing to know about, understand, participate in, and/or become part of the process, the noncustodial may not accept the child support responsibility or feel an obligation to pay. Automated enforcement actions such as license revocations and bank account liens may not start for six months. From the beginning, the noncustodial parent’s only contact with the child support agency may be antagonistic as he experiences an excessive order, arrears obligations, hostile and confusing legal actions, and no opportunity to communicate about changes in financial circumstances.

## **Use of Early Intervention Techniques in Child Support Cases**

Early intervention efforts may be initiated at a variety of times during the life of a child support case. The following are some opportunistic moments for early intervention practices:

- **Pre-Order Establishment:** Agencies might target noncustodial parents who receive a notice of financial responsibility and are summoned to appear for an administrative or judicial proceeding to establish a child support order. The intervention would be made prior to the generation of an order to promote understanding of child support and encourage parent participation in order-establishment procedures. These efforts might improve the appearance rate, reduce the incidence of default orders, and ensure that income information is available and that orders are based on actual rather than imputed earnings.
- **Order Establishment:** Agencies might target noncustodial parents as soon as their order is established to remind them of their obligation, explain how they can contact the agency with questions or concerns, and make them aware of the range of services available to assist them with employment and other social services.
- **Missed Payment:** Agencies might contact noncustodial parents as soon as the first payment is missed. The goal would be to telephone noncustodial parents soon after a payment is missed to establish the reason for non-payment and offer assistance and referrals for social services.

At all stages of case processing, the goal of early intervention is for the child support agency to approach noncustodial parents in a non-threatening manner before any legal action is started. Ideally, the worker verbally explains in an understandable manner the need for child support and the child support process. Next, the worker determines whether unemployment or underemployment are barriers to payment and offers employment and training services so that the noncustodial parent can work and better support himself. The worker might also determine whether parent-child contact is established and make appropriate referrals to community-based agencies and court programs offering mediation, and other services to promote access and visitation. If the noncustodial parent's circumstances have changed since the promulgation of the order,

the worker would determine whether a review and adjustment is warranted. During the ensuing few months, the worker would monitor payment behavior and assist a parent in meeting his or her obligations. Child support might also contact employers to make sure that they have received legal papers instructing them to garnish wages for child support purposes.

Early intervention is used extensively in Australia and New Zealand. In New Zealand, special teams of workers handle cases during the first 90 days after the order is entered. In Australia, early intervention continues for the first nine months. According to a recent account of child support practice in Australia and New Zealand (Legler, 2000), the focus in both locations is on achieving an early pattern of compliance. Australian caseworkers are instructed to telephone clients within 10 days after a payment is missed, and approach them “sensitively” in order to establish the reason for non-payment. The strategy stems from the belief that the most important payments are the very first ones paid after an order is entered and that the likelihood of regular payment increases with proactive outreach. According to Legler (2000), the child support agency in New Zealand has found that 85 percent of noncustodial parents made the first payment on time if early educational contacts were conducted by the agency, compared to 63 percent if no contacts were made.

Child support agencies in the United States are just beginning to experiment with early intervention techniques. Reflecting an emphasis on prompt, proactive steps to generate timely and consistent payments in the National CSE Strategic Plan for 2005-2009, the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement has funded several projects to promote the use of early intervention techniques in child support cases. They are:

- Making Connections, Improving Collections (MCIC) in Iowa (Iowa Bureau of Collections, 2006);
- Knox County Case Stratification and Early Intervention Project in Tennessee (Policy Studies Inc. 2006); and
- Child Support Outreach Project in Nebraska (Social Sciences Research Center, 2006).



All three projects utilized front-end contacts with noncustodial parents, compared cases exposed to early intervention strategies with a comparison group of similar cases that were treated in a traditional manner, and compared the treatment and control groups for differences in a variety of outcomes including payments, arrears balances, and enforcement actions. We compare findings from these studies with those obtained in the current project in the final chapter of this report, although certain differences between and among the projects, make direct comparisons difficult.

**Nebraska** focuses exclusively on cases that involve new noncustodial parents in a mixture of IV-D and non-IV-D cases. The agency utilizes experienced customer service personnel to make outreach calls to new noncustodial parents within 90 days of the judgment date. The calls are made systematically during regular business hours as well as evenings and weekends. Ultimately, researchers tracked payment information for 4,391 cases, including 632 cases exposed to outreach using both telephone and mail techniques, 925 cases exposed to mail outreach only, and 1,844 cases with no early intervention contact.<sup>1</sup> A sample of 183 noncustodial parents was tested for changes in child support knowledge prior to and following the receipt of information by mail and telephone. Project staff also experimented with delayed telephone and mailed contacts that were initiated with noncustodial parents who were delinquent after 90 days. The researchers developed a matrix to predict payment compliance and target future early intervention contact based on client factors including income and monthly support obligation, retroactive judgments, race/ethnicity, gender, age, age of dependents, and marital status.

**Tennessee** focuses on new establishment cases and tries to engage noncustodial parents in developing “good orders” that reflect their ability to pay. Cases continue to receive early intervention at the enforcement phase. This involves frequent courtesy calls, payment monitoring, referrals to services, and aggressive enforcement in non-paying cases. Early intervention in Tennessee is also coupled with case assessment and stratification to identify cases that are likely or unlikely to pay. Unlike Nebraska, which utilizes specialized customer services workers to make outreach calls, early intervention and case assessment strategies in Tennessee are undertaken by caseworkers who participate in a day-long training. To facilitate referral activity, a service directory was

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<sup>1</sup> The results of research in Nebraska, Tennessee, and Iowa are presented and discussed in the final chapter of this report.

created and put on a shared drive for all caseworkers. Ultimately, the project tracked information on 175 cases targeted for early intervention and a comparable number of comparison group cases treated using conventional techniques.

**Iowa** offers front-end services to noncustodial parents in three types of cases: administrative establishment; newly established court orders; and older, previously compliant cases that begin to miss payments. Regular caseworkers participated in 12 hours of training covering project goals and methods of building rapport and connecting with noncustodial parents. They also participate in biweekly conference calls to ask questions and share what strategies are working. Contact with noncustodial parents and/or employers may occur at numerous time points prior to and following order establishment, including after missed payments. The intervention ultimately was extended to all child support offices. Ultimately, the treatment group consisted of 607 cases and the control group consisted of 387.

- An evaluation of this program examined how the process worked in five jurisdictions of different size and geography. A sample of cases in each setting was designated for early intervention treatment and workers recorded the special actions that they took. In four of the five settings, cases in the early intervention group were compared with a randomly generated sample of comparable cases that were treated in the ordinary manner and not exposed to early intervention contacts. For up to two years after identification, the two groups were compared on payment patterns and enforcement activity.

In the next chapter, we describe the five project sites in the present study in greater detail, the steps we took to generate samples of cases for the early intervention and comparison groups, and the information that was collected.

## Methods

### Site Selection

The project was implemented in five jurisdictions. They ranged in size from Mesa County, Colorado, with a caseload of 5,000 cases to Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, which has 141,376 open child support cases. Selected caseload and child support performance statistics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Jurisdictions  
Participating in Early Intervention Assessment Project**

State (County)	Colorado (Mesa )	Massachusetts (Suffolk )	Oregon (Lane)	Texas (Tarrant)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)
Total Population	119,281	682,062	324,316	1,595,115	932,012
Female Household Poverty Rate	27.3%	28.8%	31.6%	28.0%	23.1%
Unemployment Rate (Feb. 2005)	6.6%	9.0%	8.1%	6.7%	9.8%
Administrative Format	County	State	State	State	County
Open CSE Cases	5,000	40,301	22,127	60,141	141,376
Collections	\$9,802,908	\$51,538,667	\$29,230,992	\$164,238,578	\$106,646,411
Percent PA Cases	25.0%	26.6%	11.5%	7.0%	12.4%
Percent Open Cases with Orders	86.0%	61.6%	N/A	82.0%	77.2%
Percent Current Support Collected (2002)	54.34%	54.10%	59.50%	N/A	56.60%

The participating jurisdictions had varying experiences with early intervention at the inception of the grant in June 2004. Lane County, Oregon, had been using early intervention techniques since 1999. Mesa County in Colorado and Suffolk County in Massachusetts began experimenting with the approach in 2003. Tarrant County, Texas, adopted early intervention procedures in 2004; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, used the current project as a catalyst to begin early intervention outreach in January 2005.

Each site developed its own approach to early intervention. This included selecting the strategies to highlight and the pool of cases to target. Administrators in all participating jurisdictions hoped that proactive outreach to noncustodial parents and their employers by child support workers would improve child support payment by clarifying the obligation, identifying and addressing barriers to payment, and/or initiating aggressive enforcement actions in a timely manner.

## Generation of Treatment and Comparison Groups

Where feasible, the project employed an experimental or quasi-experimental research design. It was possible to use an experimental design in Wisconsin; a quasi-experimental design in Colorado, Massachusetts, and Texas; and a single-shot treatment group with no comparison in Oregon. Table 2 shows the time frame for the generation of cases in the experimental (early intervention) and comparison groups at the sites. It also shows the dates when follow-up information was collected on payments and enforcement actions for cases in both groups.

**Table 2. Time Frame for the Generation of Cases in Experimental and Comparison Groups and Conduct of Follow-up Data Collection, by Site**

State (County)	<b>Oregon (Lane)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant)</b>
Experimental Group Generation	January – June 2005	November 2003 – March 2005	January – March 2005	October – December 2004	January – March 2005
Follow-Up Data Collection	August 2006	March 2006	July – August 2006	July – August 2006	October 2006
Comparison Group Generation	N/A	January 2002 – June 2003	January – March 2005	July – August 2002	January – March 2003
Follow-Up Data Collection	N/A	January 2006	June – July 2006	June – July 2006	October 2006

**Experimental Design:** Wisconsin initiated early intervention in January 2005. During January to March 2005, cases with new orders were randomly assigned to two treatment groups: (1) an experimental group that received early intervention treatments, and (2) a control group that was processed using regular techniques. The pool of eligible cases consisted of intrastate child support matters with new or modified court orders promulgated during that three-month period. A worker collected follow-up data on cases in both groups during the summer of 2006.

**Quasi-Experimental Design:** Colorado, Massachusetts, and Texas generated a non-treatment comparison group by identifying a group of comparable cases processed during the year preceding the introduction of early intervention. This led to the generation of a group of cases that was “comparable” to those in the treatment group but not identical in a strict statistical sense.

In Massachusetts, cases in the early intervention treatment group were generated from new court orders promulgated during October to December 2004. Cases in the comparison group were drawn from the list of cases heard at court for the establishment of new orders during July 1, 2002, to August 15, 2002. An experienced child support

worker reviewed new orders generated in the earlier time period and retrospectively imposed the same selection criteria used by the early intervention worker in 2004. As a result, both groups consisted of cases with new orders with evidence of no or only partial payment during the 10 weeks following order promulgation. Cases involving noncustodial parents on general relief, disability (SSI), and/or a new incarceration were eliminated from consideration from both groups. A worker collected follow-up information on payments and enforcement actions for cases in both groups during the spring and summer of 2006.

Colorado's sample of early intervention cases consisted of newly established orders, existing orders on new child support cases, and recently modified orders that were promulgated from November 2003 to March 2005. As in Massachusetts, an experienced child support worker retrospectively reviewed older orders promulgated earlier in 2003 and during 2002, and imposed the criteria used to generate cases for early intervention treatment. Per the instructions of the early intervention worker, the data collector eliminated cases with perfect payment over a six-month period. A worker collected follow-up information on payments and enforcement actions for cases in the comparison group during January 2006 and cases in the early intervention group during March 2006.

The Texas sample of early intervention cases consisted of new child support orders promulgated by the court during January to March 2005. New orders promulgated during 2004 were avoided in both the treatment and comparison groups because early intervention was just being introduced and its use was uneven. Cases in the comparison group were generated electronically by the automated child support system. They consisted of new child support orders promulgated by the court within the January to March 2003 time period. Programmers generated an extract showing follow-up information on payment and enforcement actions for cases in both the early intervention and comparison groups in October 2006.

**Non-Experimental Design:** In Oregon, where early intervention techniques were introduced in 1999, it proved impossible to generate a comparable group of non-treatment cases among cases processed prior to 1999. Child support administrators in Lane County felt that there had been too many other changes in the law, economic and agency policies and practices in the years following the introduction of early intervention in 1999 and the onset of the research project in 2004 to ensure the comparability of the two groups. All early intervention cases were generated from January to June 2005. A

worker collected follow-up information on payments and enforcement actions for cases in the early intervention group during August 2006.

Table 3 shows the numbers of cases generated in the experimental and comparison groups by site. Across the sites, the study involved 731 cases handled using early intervention techniques and 586 cases processed in a conventional manner.

**Table 3. Experimental and Comparison Group Cases in Early Intervention Project, by Site and Totals**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)	Total
Experimental	137	98	200	98	198	731
Control	N/A	107	199	80	200	586
Total	137	205	399	178	398	1,317

### Data Collection

Workers and administrators at all sites participated in the development of a common, manual data collection form for cases subject to early intervention treatments. The form noted key characteristics of cases exposed to early intervention and the actions that were taken with each case. Early intervention workers agreed to record the number of letters and brochures that were mailed, and telephone calls and face-to-face meetings that were attempted and held with custodial parents, noncustodial parents, and employers. To gauge the workload impact of various actions, workers were asked to record the length of calls and meetings that were held with parents and employers. To assess the feasibility of making direct contact with noncustodial parents, workers noted the availability of a telephone number in the records at the inception of their case processing activities.

At all sites except Oregon, early intervention was performed by one to three specialized workers. In Oregon, early intervention is a standard feature of the establishment process and 10 different workers participated in the data collection process. A copy of the manual data collection form that workers at the five participating project sites maintained for cases in the experimental groups appears in Appendix A.

Similar information was also collected on cases in the comparison group. The manual data collection form designed for this group of cases noted the interstate and public assistance status of the case, the type of order the case involved, the date of the order, the order amount and effective date, and the presence of an arrears balance at order entry. An

experienced child support worker in Colorado, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin, respectively, was retained to review child support records and complete the manual data collection form for cases in the comparison group. In Texas, programmers generated an automated extract for cases in the comparison group that included most of the data elements being produced manually at the other sites. As previously noted, it was impossible to generate a comparison group in Oregon.

Outcome information was collected using manual and automated data extraction for cases in both the treatment and comparison groups. In Colorado, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin, experienced child support workers were retained to look up the cases in both groups on the child support system and extract relevant information in a manual fashion. In Texas, programmers generated an automated extract. The data elements pertaining to outcomes included the monthly amount due and paid for up to 36 months following order promulgation; the initiation of various enforcement activities within the first 12 months following order promulgation, and ever; and the presence of various factors that impede and enhance child support payments among noncustodial parents, including verified employment and wage withholding orders. A copy of the manual data collection form that data collectors used to extract outcome information on cases in the treatment and comparison groups appears in Appendix B.

Table 4 shows the number of days that elapsed between the generation of cases in the early intervention and comparison groups and the collection of follow-up information on payments and enforcement actions. With the exception of Wisconsin, which generated both groups and collected follow-up information for both groups simultaneously, a substantially longer period of time elapsed between sample generation and data collection for cases in the comparison group relative to the early intervention group. The shortest average amount of time between sample generation and follow-up data collection was in Oregon (16 months) and Wisconsin (17 months). The longest gaps between sample generation of follow-up data collection occurred among comparison group cases in Colorado (44 months), Massachusetts (48 months), and Texas (45 months). In the analysis, we control for these time differences by comparing payment patterns during discrete time periods such as 12 and 24 months following the promulgation of child support order and/or enrollment in the group slated for early intervention treatment.

**Table 4. Days from Project Entry (Early Intervention) or Order Effective Date (Comparison) to Data Collection, by Group and Site ★**

State (County)	<b>Oregon (Lane)</b>	<b>★ Colorado (Mesa)</b>		<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee)</b>		<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk)</b>		<b>★ Texas (Tarrant)</b>	
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison
Range	273-2,404	365-790	426-6,301	396-1,583	120-851	212-912	1,430-1,461	334-2,465	699-2,830
Mean	482	703	1,317	525	452	559	1,459	640	1,370
Median	457	730	1,249	518	457	546	1,461	638	1,368
	(122)	(53)	(65)	(164)	(194)	(95)	(73)	(185)	(200)

★ Excludes cases with existing orders being opened to IV-D at group assignment.

The project also involved the collection of qualitative information. As part of that effort, evaluators conducted interviews and focus groups with line staff and administrators at each of the participating sites to discuss their experiences with the use of early intervention and to gauge the perceived utility of various interventions and their workload impacts. Another topic of discussion was plans for the continued use of early intervention and its revision and/or adoption on a broader scale. Evaluators also reviewed the literature on early intervention and the results of other OCSE demonstration and evaluation projects.

## Analysis

All the quantitative information generated on cases in the experimental and control groups was entered on a computer and analyzed using SPSS. The information on Texas cases extracted from the automated child support system was merged with the files generated at other sites from the manual data collection forms. Treatment cases across the sites were compared as were the actions taken by early intervention workers. Among the items of particular interest were the percentages of cases with telephone information for noncustodial parents (making contact potentially feasible) and the percentage with actual telephone or face-to-face contact. Since most sites restrict early intervention contact to cases with partial or non-payment, we examined the feasibility and actual incidence of telephone contact with noncustodial parents in cases with payment problems.

The analysis also included a comparison of cases in the treatment and comparison groups at each site to ensure that the two groups were equivalent and that differences in



outcome could be attributed to treatment differences rather than those pertaining to the underlying cases and clients. Finally, we assessed the two groups of cases at each site for differences in outcomes. Naturally, the outcomes of key interest pertained to payment behavior and the speed with which enforcement actions were initiated in non-paying cases. Thus, our indicators of outcome included:

- The percentage of cases with any payment activity;
- The percentage of owed child support that was actually paid;
- The arrears that were generated; and
- The percentage of cases with various enforcement actions within proscribed time periods.

## **Sites**

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Each jurisdiction targeted a different group of cases and used a somewhat different approach to early intervention. Oregon was the only site in the project to use early intervention techniques prior to the generation of a child support order (although workers retain their cases after they leave establishment and some workers may well have continued to use front-end techniques at the establishment phase). The other four sites in the project used early intervention following the promulgation of a new or modified child support order.

The sites also differed in the specific aspects of the early intervention approach they emphasized. Colorado was the only site that used early intervention to try to “build a relationship” with noncustodial parents, custodial parents, and employers. Oregon workers focused on contacting noncustodial parents to obtain accurate income information and generate appropriate orders. Texas, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts all used early intervention to monitor payments, flag cases with payment problems, and initiate enforcement actions in a timely manner. Massachusetts targeted cases with partial or no payments during the first two months following order establishment and initiated driver’s license suspension. Wisconsin and Texas used early intervention to target cases with complete non-payment and initiate contempt actions on an expedited basis. At all the sites, workers had discretion about which parties to contact (noncustodial parent, custodial parent, and/or employer) and the method of contact (mail, telephone, or both.). The following describes each jurisdiction’s approach to early intervention in greater detail.

### **Oregon**

Oregon uses early intervention at all state child support agencies as part of an “upfront discovery process” for new cases that are current or past recipients of public assistance and/or public health benefits. The District Attorney’s Office handles cases that have never involved welfare or medical benefits. A key objective of early intervention in Oregon is to generate proposed orders that reflect the actual financial circumstances of noncustodial parents and consequently eliminate the incidence of amended child support

orders and hearings. Unlike many jurisdictions, noncustodial parents in Oregon do not routinely appear at agency meetings to set child support; they only appear if they object to the proposed order amount that the child support worker issues based on their “upfront discovery” procedures.

Case managers in Oregon contact noncustodial parents using mail and/or telephone techniques to search for actual income information. They also search automated records and wage reports. During March 2004 to November 2006, in an effort to avoid generating orders that could not be paid, child support workers issued a “stop code” and refrained from establishing orders in cases for which they were unable to obtain information on earnings or employment and reviewed the cases every six months for evidence of income and employment. Currently, workers promulgate orders in cases with no income information, although they are allowed to propose zero or minimal dollar orders.

Workers say that when early intervention was adopted in 1999, they used to refer noncustodial parents to employment, training, and social services referrals. In recent years, however, there have been cuts in funding for such programs and as a result, the most common referrals they now make are for no- and low-cost legal services for custody and visitation issues.

## **Texas**

Texas began using early intervention procedures in Tarrant County for intrastate cases with new court orders during 2004. The key objectives of the intervention were to ensure that wage withholding orders were properly implemented, quickly detect non-payment problems, and rapidly initiate enforcement actions.

Tarrant County assigned three workers to perform early intervention duties. The first step they took was to attempt to contact employers within seven days of order promulgation to confirm the receipt of a wage withholding order at the appropriate payroll office. The next step was to attempt to telephone noncustodial parents who failed to make payment within 30 days to determine whether they were employed and whether they faced barriers to payment. If no payment was received within 60 days, the same worker filed an enforcement action requiring the delinquent noncustodial parent to return to court for a hearing on an expedited basis with the goal of implementing supervised probation and jail in cases of continued non-payment.

Early intervention workers in Tarrant County did not attempt to telephone noncustodial parents who were making payments. Compliant cases were rapidly transferred to an enforcement worker for routine monitoring. Except in cases of default, noncustodial parents routinely attend conferences at the child support agency or court hearings to establish new child support orders.

## **Wisconsin**

Wisconsin used this project as an opportunity to initiate early intervention procedures in Milwaukee County. Child support administrators chose to apply early intervention techniques to 200 new and modified child support orders promulgated by the court during January to March 2005. A child support worker was assigned to handle all actions and responses for this pool of cases.

The early intervention procedure that Milwaukee County developed called for the worker to mail noncustodial parents an introductory letter, brochure, and payment coupon. Parents were instructed to contact the agency with payment problems or concerns, and were given the worker's direct phone number and email address to facilitate communication. Parents were also urged to participate in a workforce program, to avoid enforcement actions in instances of unemployment.

After the mailing, the early intervention worker monitored payments for three months. Those with complete or sporadic payments were referred to enforcement workers for routine monitoring and enforcement activity such as tax intercepts and license revocations. Attempts were made to telephone non-payers and talk about the workforce program, Children's First. Parents who pursued the Children's First referral were exempt from immediate enforcement activity. Other non-payers who failed to respond to child support's overture for assistance were subject to a contempt filing that was scheduled and heard by the court on an expedited calendar.

Wisconsin has no minimum support order but does not issue an order in cases with no employment or earnings. Cases with such "held open" orders were excluded from early intervention treatment.

**Massachusetts**

Massachusetts began using early intervention in the Metro Area Office, which covers Suffolk County (Boston), in March 2003. As part of that effort, a worker reviewed cases with new court orders approximately eight weeks after the order had been promulgated. Most of the reviewed cases consisted of new child support orders or newly modified orders. No action was taken in cases with full and timely payment during the eight weeks between order promulgation and the review by a worker. Rather, early intervention was used with cases with missed or partial payment. In these instances, the worker searched for evidence of employment and, if feasible, initiated a wage withholding order. If employer information was not available, the worker attempted to contact the noncustodial parent by telephone to inform him of his delinquency and determine the reasons for non-payment. Those who complained that they could not afford to pay their support were instructed to request a modification. Noncustodial parents who failed to make full and timely payments were immediately referred for driver's license suspension.

**Colorado**

Colorado began using early intervention techniques in Mesa County in November 2003 for newly established orders, existing orders with new cases, and recently modified orders in both interstate and intrastate cases. The worker handling this pool of cases was instructed to develop a "professional, working relationship" with noncustodial and custodial parents and engage in appropriate monitoring, location, and enforcement activities for up to six month before transferring the case to an enforcement worker for long-term attention. The worker handling the early intervention caseload was encouraged to attempt to contact both parties in order to communicate expectations, determine problems with payment, and make appropriate referrals to start or restart payments. Another duty of the early intervention worker was to contact employers and follow up with payment problems in cases with wage withholding orders. In cases where the noncustodial parent could not be located, it was expected that the early intervention worker would contact the custodial parent to try to locate the noncustodial parent and begin the case closure process for uncooperative custodial parents. The worker also was expected to review public records and automated resources to locate the noncustodial parent. Finally, the early intervention worker was responsible for initiating enforcement actions against those who continued to be delinquent. After four to six months of regular

payment activity, exhaustive search work, or the initiation of enforcement, the case was transferred to an enforcement technician for routine monitoring or continued enforcement activity.

## **Description of Early Intervention Cases**

### **Description of Early Intervention Cases**

Table 5 provides an overview of the types of cases assigned to early intervention at each of the sites. The sites had total discretion in the types of cases they targeted for early intervention. Each site also had a different demographic profile. Accordingly, there were some differences in the profiles of cases in the early intervention groups.

At the four sites that provided information,<sup>1</sup> the majority (75% to 96%) were intrastate cases, although in Colorado, 15 percent of custodial parents lived out of state. The four sites providing information on the marital status of participating parents were heavily comprised of cases involving never-married parents (54% to 86%), although the incidence of divorced parents was highest in Colorado.

Massachusetts was the only site with a significant proportion of current TANF cases (55%). In Texas and Colorado, only 10 and 14 percent of cases in the early intervention samples, respectively, were current recipients of public assistance. At the other sites that provided information, between 25 and 44 percent of the early intervention groups were composed of former TANF clients, and about half had never been on TANF, although in Oregon, clients in the “never TANF” category were current or past recipients of Oregon Health Plan. Child support matters for those who have truly never received welfare or public health benefits are handled by the District Attorney’s Office.

Table 5 shows the status of cases when they entered the early intervention project. Only Colorado served a large percentage of cases (50%) with older child support orders that had newly entered the child support caseload seeking enforcement services. In Wisconsin and Texas, virtually all of the early intervention cases had just received child support orders when they were assigned to the project. In Oregon, cases were subject to early intervention techniques prior to the promulgation of a child support order. Just over

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<sup>1</sup> The portrait of cases exposed to early intervention and the treatments they received comes from manual records maintained by workers. The early intervention worker in Wisconsin did not routinely record information on case characteristics and actions on the data collection form developed for this project. As a result, we lack an accurate picture of the characteristics of cases in the early intervention group and the strategies that were used to elicit payments at that site.

a quarter of project cases in Oregon were cases that involved reimbursement of Medicaid benefits.

Finally, Table 5 shows the proportion of obligors at each site with single versus multiple child support orders. A third of Colorado cases and more than half of the obligors in Wisconsin and Texas had more than one child support order. Massachusetts had the highest proportion of obligors with single orders (81.9%).

**Table 5. Profile of the Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane) (n=137)	Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=200)	Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=98)	Texas (Tarrant) (n=198)
Parents' marital status					
Never married	79%	54%	<i>Not available</i>	86%	79%
Married	21%	46%		14%	21%
★ Interstate status					
Intrastate	91%	75%	<i>Not available</i>	96%	95%
Interstate, initiating	4%	6%		1%	1%
Interstate, responding	5%	15%		3%	4%
Direct/Interstate wage assign	0%	4%		0%	0%
Number	(125)	(96)		(91)	(187)
★ TANF status					
Current TANF	26%	14%	<i>Not available</i>	55%	10%
Former TANF	25%	34%		1%	44%
Never TANF	48%	52%		44%	46%
Number	(126)	(91)		(82)	(194)
★ Order status					
New order, child support/paternity and child support	60%	40%	82%	<i>Not available</i>	96%
Medicaid only	26%	1%	0%		1%
Foster care	0%	4%	7%		0
Modification	13%	5%	11%		0
Existing order, new IV-D application	2%	50%	0		3%
Number	(124)	(95)	(176)	(97)	(193)
Number of child support cases					
Single case	70.1%	66.3%	43.2%	81.9%	36.7%
Multiple cases	29.9%	33.7%	56.8%	18.1%	63.3%
Number	(134)	(95)	(192)	(83)	(188)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

In Colorado, Texas, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Massachusetts, two-thirds to three-quarters of noncustodial parents attended the court or administrative hearing at which the order was generated. By contrast, almost half of the cases in Wisconsin and over 80 percent in Oregon had child support orders established without the participation



of the noncustodial parent. In Oregon, noncustodial parents rarely participate directly in order-making proceedings and administrative or judicial hearings only occur if the noncustodial parent objects to the order proposed by a child support worker. At all the other sites, participation by noncustodial parents in order-making settings is encouraged. Attendance by the custodial parent was quite similar to attendance by the noncustodial parent, although at three of the five sites custodial parents were more apt to appear.

**Table 6. Order Establishment by Default Among Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
★Did the NCP attend the court or administrative hearing where the child support order was established?					
No	82%	32%	48%	37%	23%
Yes	18%	68%	52%	63%	78%
	(73)	(95)	(180)	(65)	(191)
★Did the CP attend the court or administrative hearing where the child support order was established?					
No	86%	31%	34%	31%	5%
Yes	14%	69%	66%	70%	95%
Number	(72)	(62)	(173)	(59)	(188)

★Chi square significant at .05.

Table 7 shows the source of information about the noncustodial parent's income that was used to establish child support obligations for cases in the early intervention groups. The information was only routinely available in Oregon, where early intervention was used as part of the process of establishing orders. At the other sites, cases came to workers after orders had been established and workers usually did not know the information that had been consulted to generate the order. The limited information that was provided shows that relatively few of the orders at any site were based on imputed incomes or reports from the custodial parent. In Oregon, Colorado, and Massachusetts, most order levels were set using objective income information such as pay stubs, letters from employers, tax returns, quarterly wage data, or new hire reporting. In the few Wisconsin cases with information, both objective sources and affidavits were used. Texas administrators report that the agency normally uses quarterly wage data from the Texas Workforce Commission, new hire information and tax information for those who are self employed. Unemployed individuals are presumed to be able to earn the minimum wage.

**Table 7. Income Information Used to Establish Orders Among Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
★ Source of income information:					<i>Not available</i>
Objective data source such as quarterly wage data, new hire, tax returns, pay stubs	87%	93%	39%	86%	
Only data source was NCP affidavit	4%	3%	46%	9%	
Only data source was CP affidavit	6%	0%	0%	5%	
No information, income was imputed	3%	3%	15%	0%	
Number	(91)	(30)	(13)	(22)	

★ Chi square significant at .05.

Table 8 provides information on the child support order in effect at the time the case entered the early intervention project. The average monthly support obligation ranged from a low of \$144 in Wisconsin to a high of \$338 in Massachusetts. Only 5 percent of Colorado cases and 6 percent of Massachusetts cases were set at minimum levels of \$50 per month. Wisconsin establishes zero-dollar orders when income and/or employment information is missing, but these cases were excluded from the project. In Oregon, workers refrained from establishing orders in cases with no income or employment during this project. The Texas minimum order level is based on earnings at the minimum wage for 40 hours per week.

Most of the noncustodial parents with orders in effect at project entry at every site also had arrearages. The average arrears amount ranged from a low of \$1,533 in Wisconsin (where orders are generally set fairly low) to a high of over \$6,000 in Colorado. Half of Colorado cases in the early intervention group had older orders and were being newly opened in the child support agency for enforcement services. Less than 20 percent of the noncustodial parents at any site entered the project with arrears balances in excess of \$10,000, although those with multiple orders might have had additional child support debts for other cases.

**Table 8. Order Levels and Arrears Among Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
★ Amount of current monthly support:					
Mean	\$325	\$321	\$144	\$338	\$271
Median	\$266	\$250	\$120	\$292	\$242
Range	\$126-957	\$45-3,000	\$25-575	\$80-1,436	\$50-723
Number	(64)	(91)	(193)	(95)	(173)
Total arrears:					
Mean	\$2,670	\$6,533	\$1,533	\$3,228	\$5,690
Median	\$1,859	\$2,210	\$1,672	\$1,335	\$2,460
Range	\$189-17,685	\$1-99,949	\$15-4,570	\$75-11,502	\$43-66,884
Number	(61)	(88)	(130)	(21)	(196)
Percent with no arrears	22%	5%	22%	5%	1%
Percent with arrears balance:					
under \$500	8%	16%	19%	38%	12%
\$501-1,500	33%	23%	30%	14%	23%
\$1,501-2,500	26%	14%	47%	5%	15%
\$2,501-5,000	20%	18%	5%	24%	15%
\$5,001-10,000	8%	10%	0%	5%	18%
Over \$10,000	5%	19%	0%	14%	17%
Number	(61)	(88)	(130)	(21)	(196)
★ Amount to be paid toward arrears:					
Mean	\$91	\$120	\$21	\$130	\$68
Median	\$61	\$54	\$10	\$118	\$50
Range	\$25-464	\$1-1,176	\$5-500	\$52-224	\$50-500
Number	(36)	(70)	(126)	(10)	(132)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

Table 9 shows the proportion of cases with telephone information in the child support system when the case was assigned to the early intervention worker. Texas workers appear to have had telephone information for most (83%) noncustodial parents, although staff maintains that many of these numbers subsequently proved to be disconnected or wrong. At the other sites, phone numbers were only available for between 35 and 45 percent of the parents targeted to receive early intervention treatments. At most sites, a somewhat greater percentage of cases arrived at the early intervention project with an employer shown in the records. The percentage of cases with known employers at entry to the project ranged from a low of 28 percent in Wisconsin to a high of 61 percent in Oregon. Although these employers provided a starting point for contacting noncustodial parents, the information would not always prove to be current.

Having either a telephone number for the noncustodial parent and/or a known employer is a first step to potentially being able to reach him. Table 9 shows that at project entry, early intervention workers had phone numbers and/or employer information for between 50 and 90 percent of the noncustodial parents in cases in the

treatment group. The next section of this report describes efforts that workers made to contact parents and employers and their success in reaching them.

**Table 9. Information Available at Project Entry, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
★NCP telephone number provided:					
No	53%	60%	65%	58%	17%
Yes	47%	40%	35%	42%	83%
Number	(137)	(98)	(199)	(98)	(198)
★When the case arrived at early intervention, was there a known employer?					
No	39%	58%	72%	52%	45%
Yes	61%	42%	28%	48%	55%
Number	(120)	(91)	(174)	(85)	(184)
★ Either NCP phone and/or known employer at group assignment?					
No	29%	38%	50%	38%	9%
Yes	71%	62%	50%	62%	91%
Number	(137)	(97)	(199)	(98)	(196)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

## Description of Early Intervention Actions

### Description of Early Intervention Actions with Noncustodial Parents

Table 10 provides an overview of the actions early intervention workers attempted at each site.<sup>2</sup> The most common action was mailing materials on child support. At least half of the noncustodial parents at every site were mailed a letter or brochure explaining their child support situation and options, and mailings occurred in 99 percent of Texas cases.

There was far greater variation across the sites in the attempts workers made to reach noncustodial parents by phone. They attempted phone contact with a low of 17 percent of noncustodial parents in Wisconsin and a high of 77 percent in Colorado. At each site, the percentage that actually could be reached was significantly lower than the level of attempts: from 3 percent in Wisconsin to a high of 54 percent in Colorado. Wisconsin personnel say that “phone service is the first to go” among the economically distressed and transient clients in their caseload. The low rate of telephone contact in Wisconsin also reflects irregular record keeping by the child support worker.

Early intervention workers in Oregon and Massachusetts ultimately spoke with a third of the noncustodial parents, while early intervention workers in Texas ultimately spoke with only 14 percent. Colorado and Oregon were the only sites to use telephone calls for general outreach and information. Texas, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin used telephone calls in non-paying cases, with Texas only attempting to phone non-payers in cases with no listed employer.

<sup>2</sup> The portrait of cases exposed to early intervention and the treatments they received comes from manual records maintained by workers. The early intervention worker in Wisconsin did not routinely record information on case characteristics and actions on the data collection form developed for this project. As a result, we lack an accurate picture of the characteristics of cases in the early intervention group and the strategies that were used to elicit payments at that site.

**Table 10. Actions Taken or Attempted with NCPs in Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports:	Oregon (Lane) (n=137)	Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=200)	Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=98)	Texas (Tarrant) (n=198)
★ Sent NCP a letter or brochure	66%	70%	58%	57%	99%
★ Attempt to contact NCP by telephone	47%	77%	17%	60%	42%
★ Spoke with the NCP by telephone or in-person	34%	54%	3%	33%	14%
★ Chi square significant at .05.					

Only two sites provided information regarding the length of successful introductory calls with noncustodial parents. In Oregon, call length ranged from one to 15 minutes and averaged seven minutes for the 30 cases with information. In Colorado, information was available for 46 calls. The average length of a call with noncustodial parents at this site was 21 minutes, with a median of 15 minutes and a range of three to 45 minutes.

Reaching noncustodial parents in the child support caseload who lack any type of phone number at intake and have no known employer understandably is very difficult. Table 11 shows the percent of cases with attempted versus actual contact with noncustodial parents for whom phone numbers or employer identities were known at referral to early intervention workers. When the analysis was restricted to those noncustodial parents who had contact information at group assignment, there was only a slight increase in the incidence of attempted phone calls with this more accessible group. The increase ranged from 2 percent in Wisconsin to 17 percent in Massachusetts. There were similar, slight increases in the percentage of cases with actual worker-parent contact. Since workers did not keep reliable records on the number of phone attempts that they made to reach noncustodial parents, we do not know whether more effort would have yielded more results.

**Table 11. Actions Taken or Attempted with NCPs in Early Intervention Cases with Known Phone Numbers or Employers, by Site**

During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports:	Oregon (Lane) (n=97)	Colorado (Mesa) (n=60)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=99)	Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=61)	Texas (Tarrant) (n=179)
★ Sent NCP a letter or brochure	64%	62%	58%	61%	98%
★ Attempted to contact NCP by telephone	56%	80%	19%	77%	42%
★ Spoke with the NCP by telephone or in-person	43%	54%	3%	46%	15%
★ Chi square significant at .05.					

Another action that early intervention workers might have taken with project cases (except in Oregon, which pursues early intervention prior to the establishment of a child support obligation) was to review payments in the months immediately following order establishment. The goal of payment monitoring is to flag nonpayment problems earlier than they are detected by the automated system and either initiate relevant enforcement actions or obviate the need for enforcement by identifying and addressing barriers to payment. Table 12 shows that, with the exception of Wisconsin, most workers did report making such checks.

**Table 12. Worker Checks of Child Support Payment in Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=97)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=199)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=98)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=196)</b>
During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports checking child support payments for at least three months	100%	39%	100%	100%

★Chi square significant at .05.

Arguably, the actions discussed above — sending letters or brochures or attempting to contact the noncustodial parent — are most relevant in cases where the obligor is not compliant. Indeed, early intervention workers in Massachusetts, Texas, and Wisconsin readily acknowledge that they made no attempt to contact obligors in paying cases. Table 13 shows the actions that workers took in cases that lacked full payment in one or more of the first three months of the obligation. We further restrict the analysis to cases with relevant contact information. In those non-compliant cases with phone numbers or employer information available at referral, the percentage of attempted phone calls increased appreciably only in Wisconsin, where attempted calls went from 19 to 27 percent. In Colorado and Massachusetts, workers attempted to contact 78 percent of delinquent noncustodial parents by telephone to discuss their non-compliance. In Texas, they attempted to reach nearly half (44%). Actual contact with delinquent, noncustodial parents occurred less frequently and stood at 49 percent in both Colorado and Massachusetts, 17 percent in Texas, and 2 percent in Wisconsin.

**Table 13. Early Intervention Outcomes with NCP in Non-Paying Early Intervention Cases with Known Phone Numbers or Employers, by Site**

	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=51)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=41)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=37)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=72)</b>
During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports:				
★ Sent NCP a letter or brochure	57%	68%	65%	99%
Attempted to contact NCP by telephone	78%	27%	78%	44%
★ Spoke with the NCP by telephone or in-person	49%	2%	49%	17%
★ Chi square significant at .05.				

A final type of action that early intervention workers might take with noncustodial parents, is offering referrals for issues such as unemployment or access and visitation problems. Of course, such referrals can be made only if the worker is able to contact that parent. Tables 14 shows the percentage of workers at each site who reached a noncustodial parent and reported making referrals. At the three sites that could be included in the analysis, referrals were fairly rare and occurred in 8 to 16 percent of the cases with contact and 2 to 12 percent of all cases in the sample.

**Table 14. Referrals Provided to NCPs in Early Intervention Cases with Worker Contact, by Site**

	<b>Oregon (Lane)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant)</b>
During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports:					
★ Provided referrals to the NCP if spoke with or met	8%	16%	<i>Too few cases</i>	Unavailable <sup>3</sup>	11%
	(25)	(56)			(26)
Referrals as a percentage of all NCPs	2%	12%			3%
	(81)	(76)			(192)
★ Chi square significant at .05.					

### Description of Early Intervention Actions with Custodial Parents and Employers

Workers typically contact custodial parents to learn the whereabouts of the noncustodial parent. Table 15 shows that early intervention workers in Oregon, Colorado, and Massachusetts reported contact with the custodial parent in about half of their cases. In Texas, workers reported such contact in about a third of the cases. In Wisconsin, the figure was less than 5 percent. At most sites, these rates were higher than the level of contact reported with noncustodial parents. Thus, Oregon workers spoke directly with 51

<sup>3</sup> These data are not included because the early intervention worker at this site included referrals for enforcement action as well as referrals for services.



percent of custodial parents but only 34 percent of noncustodial parents. In Massachusetts, the percentages of cases with custodial and noncustodial parent contact were 46 and 33 percent, respectively. In Texas, workers spoke with 31 percent of custodial parents and 14 percent of noncustodial parents. In Colorado, the early intervention worker had telephone or in-person contact with 53 percent of custodial and 54 percent of noncustodial parents.

**Table 15. Actions Taken or Attempted with CPs in Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports:	Oregon (Lane) (n=92)	Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=179)	Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=87)	Texas (Tarrant) (n=197)
★ Spoke with CP by telephone or in-person?	51%	53%	2%	46%	31%
★ Sent CP a letter or brochure	64%	48%	0%	21%	11%

★ Chi square significant at .05.

We repeated the analysis but restricted it to cases with less than complete payment in the early months of the obligation. The results are presented in Table 16. It shows that the percentage of cases with custodial parent contact remained relatively constant. Thus, workers were not more diligent about pursuing contact with custodial parents in non-paying cases.

**Table 16. Actions Taken or Attempted with CPs in Non-Paying Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

During the time the case was open at early intervention, worker reports:	Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=179)	Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=87)	Texas (Tarrant) (n=197)
★ Spoke with CP by telephone or in-person	58%	4%	50%	33%
★ Sent CP a letter or brochure	51%	0%	23%	11%

★ Chi square significant at .05.

A final set of actions that the early intervention worker took were aimed at employers. In these interactions, workers attempted to confirm employment and ensure that income withholding orders had been sent to the appropriate payroll office and were being properly processed. As shown in Table 17, when there was a known employer at the time the case was referred to them, early intervention workers reported an attempted contact in half of the cases and most of these attempts were successful.

**Table 17. Actions Taken or Attempted with Employers in Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

	<b>Oregon (Lane) (n=137)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=199)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=98)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=197)</b>
During the time the case was open at early intervention, did the following happen?					
★ Attempted to phone the NCP's employer	47%	40%	14%	32%	34%
★ If case had employer listed at referral, attempted to contact employer	55% (73)	50% (38)	16% (49)	42% (41)	50% (101)
★ Contacted the NCP's employer (for those attempted)	79% (65)	97% (39)	64% (28)	94% (31)	82% (67)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

### Attempted and Actual Contact with Parents and Employers

Tables 18 and 19 provide a final look at the type of direct contact early intervention workers attempted to make and achieved with any of the relevant individuals in a child support case. This analysis does not differentiate among noncustodial parents, custodial parents, and employers. It simply assesses the incidence of contact with any of these parties. This table indicates that, with the exception of Wisconsin, early intervention workers attempted some type of phone or in-person contact with a relevant party in 70 to 90 percent of the cases. At each of the sites, the worker was able to reach successfully one or more parties in a majority of cases (55% to 76%). In 15 to 20 percent of the cases at every site, no contact was achieved with any of the relevant parties where contact was attempted.

**Table 18. Attempted and Actual Contact with Noncustodial Parents, Custodial Parents, and Employers in Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

	<b>Oregon (Lane) (n=137)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=97)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=199)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=98)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=196)</b>
During the time the case was open at early intervention, did the following happen?					
★ Attempted to phone or meet with the noncustodial parent, custodial parent, and/or employer	75%	91%	28%	83%	69%
★ Worker spoke with the noncustodial parent, custodial parent, and/or employer	61%	76%	12%	63%	55%

★ Chi square significant at .05.

Outreach efforts are arguably most needed in cases where obligors fall behind in their payments. Table 19 shows attempted and actual contacts made by early intervention workers in cases where the obligor paid 50 percent or less of his monthly support obligations during the first year. With the exception of Wisconsin, it appears that workers typically made more concerted efforts to make contact parents or employers in

non-paying cases and were usually successful in reaching one or more parties in 78 to 93 percent of the cases.

**Table 19. Attempted and Actual Contact with Noncustodial Parents, Custodial Parents, and Employers in Early Intervention Cases Paying Half or Less the Monthly Support Due During the First Year Post-Group Assignment, by Site**

	<b>Oregon (Lane) (n=29)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=46)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=169)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=41)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=75)</b>
During the time the case was open at early intervention, did the following happen?					
★ Attempted to phone or meet with the noncustodial parent, custodial parent, and/or employer	83%	85%	26%	78%	93%
★ Worker spoke with the noncustodial parent, custodial parent, and/or employer	67%	52%	10%	42%	40%

★ Chi square significant at .05.

### Information Gained

Some of the information gained through contacts with parents and employers is summarized in Table 20. While the percent of cases with a verified employer was approximately the same when the case entered and exited early intervention, the worker appears to have learned about employment changes. For example, in Colorado and Wisconsin, early intervention workers were able to learn that a noncustodial parent had lost employment in 28 and 44 percent of the cases they handled, respectively. And at four of the five sites, early intervention workers were able to document with some frequency that a noncustodial parent found employment. While this information does not directly lead to a wage withholding order, it is a necessary first step. It was rarer still for workers to report learning about cash employment and/or disabilities and other barriers to employment through their telephone and in-person contacts.

**Table 20. Information Gained in Early Intervention Cases, by Site**

	<b>Oregon (Lane) (n=92)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=179)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=87)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=197)</b>
Information gained while the case was open:					
★ Percent of cases with known employer on the date the case arrived at early intervention	61%	42%	28%	48%	55%
★ Percent of cases with known employer on the date the case closed at early intervention	58%	58%	22%	42%	49%
★ Worker confirmed the NCP is unemployed	20%	44%	28%	20%	10%
★ Worker learned NCP works for undocumented cash	3%	5%	2%	1%	0%
★ Worker learned the NCP found employment	21%	58%	21%	6%	20%
Worker confirmed NCP is disabled/unable to work	2%	2%	5%	2%	1%

★ Chi square significant at .05.

## **Leaving Early Intervention**

With the exception of cases in Oregon, over 85 percent of project cases at the other sites had been transferred to another worker at the child support agency by the time we collected follow-up information approximately 17 to 23 months after group assignment. In Oregon, the figure was 65 percent. Oregon used early intervention prior to order establishment and held off on establishing orders in cases that lacked reliable income information while this project was conducted. On average, Oregon cases had been receiving early intervention attention by establishment workers for 16 months before we collected follow-up information.

Table 21 shows that there was considerable variation in the length of time that early intervention workers kept their cases open. The Colorado worker held cases the longest, with an average of 248 days or 8.2 months. The low was 30 days in Massachusetts. The difference reflects the different goals posited for early intervention at the two sites. In Massachusetts, the goal was to identify non-compliance as soon as possible and refer the case to a specialized enforcement worker for driver's license suspension and other relevant enforcement actions. The early intervention worker in Colorado felt as though she needed more time to develop a relationship, identify non-compliance, and intervene with obligors after automated enforcement remedies began in order to develop new payment behaviors.

In Texas, most of the cases closed by early intervention workers were transferred to enforcement workers for routine monitoring. In Oregon, nearly all cases were monitored for payment and possible enforcement actions by an establishment worker who received cases after their orders were developed. In Colorado and Massachusetts, most cases were sent for either routine monitoring or enforcement action due to non-compliance. In Wisconsin, cases were generally either sent for routine monitoring (47%) or for court action for contempt.

**Table 21. Time Open at Early Intervention, by Site**

State (County)	<b>Oregon (Lane) (n=137)</b>	<b>Colorado (Mesa) (n=98)</b>	<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee) (n=200)</b>	<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk) (n=98)</b>	<b>Texas (Tarrant) (n=198)</b>
Average days open:	123	248	133	30	55
Number	(88)	(96)	(165)	(85)	(169)
Reason or action post-closure:					
Set for monitoring as needed	92%	63%	47%	27%	78%
Set for enforcement due to non-compliance	0%	31%	9%	57%	14%
Court action for contempt	0%	0%	24%	2%	1%
Additional locate needed	5%	5%	16%	1%	0%
Set for order modification	2%	1%	2%	1%	0%
Closure and sanctions	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Sent for review	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Review pending release	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Continued for court	0%	0%	1%	0%	5%
Sent to UIFSA	0%	0%	1%	5%	0%
Serious domestic violence issues	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%
Number	(89)	(83)	(189)	(95)	(169)

## **Comparison of the Groups and Outcomes**

### **Similarities and Differences Between the Early Intervention and Comparison Groups**

The analysis of outcomes associated with conventional case processing and early intervention begins with a comparison of the two groups on a few selected characteristics. It is intended to address the extent to which the comparison group is similar to or different from the early intervention group. To the extent that the two groups differ significantly on key characteristics, outcomes between the two groups might be attributed to these factors, rather than differences in case processing, and specifically the use of early intervention techniques.

Table 22 shows that the two groups were generally comparable at most sites. In Colorado, the only significant difference between early intervention and comparison cases was the greater number of telephone numbers available at the start of the project for cases in the early intervention group. This was also true in Massachusetts. At both sites, the sample for the early intervention group was generated in 2004, while the comparison group sample was generated in 2002. Staffs at both sites feel that the significant increase in telephone information in the more recent samples reflects the fact that the child support agency has become more sensitized in recent years to the importance of obtaining telephone numbers for noncustodial parents.

Another difference in Massachusetts was a higher proportion of modified orders and cases with multiple orders in the comparison group. In contrast, the comparison group in Wisconsin consisted entirely of new orders, while the early intervention group had significantly more modification cases. In Texas, the primary difference between the early intervention and comparison groups was a higher percentage of comparison cases that were in the system for medical support orders, and a higher incidence of single rather than multiple support orders. Cases in the comparison group also had significantly higher monthly support obligations and wage withholding orders (see table 27). At both sites, the two groups of cases were drawn from the same sources.

In other respects, the groups were very similar. For example, there were no statistically significant differences between comparison and early intervention cases with

respect to whether the child support obligation was interstate or intrastate, its public assistance status, or the marital status of the custodial and noncustodial parents. Nor were there significant differences between the two groups with respect to whether the noncustodial parent attended the hearing (administrative or judicial) at which the child support obligation was established. This is important, given the fact that default orders tend to be associated with poorer payment patterns.

**Table 22. Comparison of Early Intervention and Traditional Case Processing at Group Assignment, by Site**

State (County)	<b>Colorado (Mesa)</b>		<b>Wisconsin (Milwaukee)</b>		<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk)</b>		<b>Texas (Tarrant)</b>	
	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison
Number	(95)	(100)	(11)	(188)	(83)	(75)	(192)	(200)
NCP telephone number available at group assignment:								
No	★60%	38%	65%	<i>Not available</i>	★58%	10%	17%	<i>Not available</i>
Yes	40%	62%	35%		42%	90%	83%	
Parents' marital status:								
Never married	54%	55%	<i>Not available</i>		86%	80%	79%	79%
Married	46%	45%			14%	20%	21%	21%
Intrastate:	76%	73%	★90%	100%	★96%	83%	94%	95%
Interstate, initiating	5%	7%	3%	0%	1%	6%	1%	1%
Interstate, responding	15%	17%	3%	0%	3%	3%	4%	5%
Direct/Interstate wage assign	4%	2%	5%	0%	0%	9%	1%	0%
TANF status at group assignment:								
Current TANF	14%	10%	100%	87%	54%	29%	10%	1%
Former TANF	34%	41%	0%	13%	1%	12%	44%	38%
Never TANF	51%	49%	0%	0%	43%	59%	46%	62%
Order status at group assignment:								
New order	46%	59%	★89%	99%	★99%	69%	★97%	57%
Medical only	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%
Modification	10%	3%	11%	1%	0%	31%	0%	7%
Existing order, new IV-D application	44%	39%	0%	0%	1%	0%	3%	8%
Number of child support orders:								
Single orders	66.3%	73.1%	43.2%	36.7%	★81.9%	68.8%	★36.7%	56.0%
Multiple orders	33.7%	26.9%	56.8%	63.3%	18.1%	31.3%	63.3%	44.0%
NCP attended court/administrative hearing where child support order was established:								
No	32%	27%	48%	41%	37%	35%	22%	<i>Not available</i>
Yes	68%	73%	52%	59%	63%	65%	78%	
Monthly current support amount:								
Mean	\$299	\$266	\$144	\$154	\$327	\$353	★★\$265	\$315
Number	(79)	(105)	(166)	(163)	(73)	(79)	(160)	(190)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

★★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .002.

### Outcomes: Order Establishment in Lane County, Oregon

Oregon was the only site to use early intervention prior to order establishment. At all other sites, order establishment had already occurred prior to the case being assigned for treatment. Oregon was also the only site where workers stopped case processing if the noncustodial parent had no income — a practice that has since been dropped. Table 23 shows that almost a third of the cases assigned to early intervention were “stopped” because of a lack of income or employment information. Other reasons why orders were not established included a request by a custodial parent (26%) or a parental reconciliation (10%).

**Table 23. Lane County, Oregon, Early Intervention Cases in Which Case Processing Stopped Due to Lack of Noncustodial Parent Income**

Stop processing code entered:	(137)
Yes	31%
No	69%
Reasons for stopping case processing:	
No income, no NCP employer	36%
CP requests case be closed, not interested in receiving support	26%
Shared custody of child	3%
Parties reconciled	10%
Order terminated due to incarceration	8%
NCP excluded as father based on genetic testing	5%
Other	13%
	(39)

Table 24 shows the amount of time between assignment to the early intervention group and establishment of the order in Oregon for the 68 cases that proceeded to order entry. On average, it took 120 days, while the median was 113. As previously noted, it was impossible to generate a comparison group in Lane County since early intervention has been used since 1999. Overall, the time required to establish orders in project cases was consistent with statewide patterns. According to workers, orders can be established in two months under a “best case” scenario.

**Table 24. Time to Order Establishment in Oregon Early Intervention Cases**

Mean days to order establishment	120
Median days to order establishment	113
Range in days to order establishment	0 – 334
Percent of orders established within:	
60 days	20%
90 days	40%
120 days	56%
180 days	82%
334 days	100%
	(52)



Table 25 shows that relatively few of the orders established by the early intervention workers were challenged. Only 13 percent of the noncustodial parents requested an administrative hearing on the order, and only one parent requested a court hearing. Further, only 15 percent of the 13 cases that progressed to an administrative or court hearing resulted in the proposed order being amended. Workers are happy to amend orders if parents can provide updated financial information, but many challenges are based on emotional and legal factors that cannot be addressed by child support.

**Table 25. Incidence of Hearings and Challenges in Oregon Early Intervention Cases**

Administrative hearing requested	No	87%
	Yes	13%
Court hearing requested	No	99%
	Yes	1% (109)
If administrative or court hearing was requested, proposed order amended	No	85%
	Yes	15% (13)

### Outcomes: Location of Noncustodial Parents

Data collectors were asked to indicate the locate status of the noncustodial parent at the time of the follow-up data collection effort. In the early intervention group, this was 16 to 23 months after the case was assigned to early intervention and subjected to special interventions. It was 17 to 48 months following order establishment for cases in the comparison group. At each site, and for both early intervention and comparison cases, the majority of noncustodial parents were classified as “located” in the child support records when they were reviewed by data collectors. The only difference between the early intervention and comparison cases was found in Massachusetts, where a greater proportion of early intervention cases (15%) were not located at data collection, or approximately 18.6 months following the establishment of child support orders. Only 3 percent of cases in the comparison group were classified as “not located,” although data collection for this group occurred approximately 48 months after the establishment of child support orders. The similar classification patterns for noncustodial parents in both groups suggest that early intervention, and the theoretical increase in contact it implies,

may not improve the agency's ability to locate absent parents and keep tabs on them over time.

**Table 26. Locate Status of NCP at Data Collection for Early Intervention and Comparison Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
At data collection, NCP was:					
Not located	1%	17% 11%	16% 12%	★ 15% 3%	0% 0%
Located	99%	83% 89%	84% 88%	85% 97%	100% 100%
Number	(131)	(95) (106)	(195) (199)	(82) (80)	(189) (200)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

### Outcomes: Wage Withholding Orders and Sources of Payments

There were relatively few differences between early intervention and comparison cases in the sources of payments during the first 12 months following group assignment, nor were there many significant differences in the source of payments over the life of the cases. As in every child support agency, wage withholding and tax intercepts were the primary mechanisms by which child support payments were made. For example, in the first 12 months and over the entire post-assignment period, wage withholding was in place for over 80 percent of the early intervention and comparison cases in Colorado. Tax intercepts were generated in 91 and 95 percent of the two groups of cases, respectively.

No information was available on wage withholding in the first 12 months in Texas, but over the life of the case, wage withholding was in effect for a significantly higher proportion of cases in the comparison group, as compared with the treatment group (95% versus 87%). This may explain why cases in the comparison group consistently showed better rates of child support payment.

In Massachusetts, the early intervention cases were less likely to have a wage assignment in place in the first 12 months following group assignment, but these differences disappeared over time. The two groups were also similar in the proportion of cases with tax intercepts during the first 12 months following group assignment, although the comparison group ultimately had significantly more tax interception. This probably

reflects the fact that cases in the comparison group had been in the child support system for 48 months, compared with 18.6 months for early intervention cases, when we reviewed these patterns and thus had many more opportunities for interception.

Both Wisconsin and Oregon had wage assignments in place for no more than half of the early intervention or comparison cases, and these patterns did not change significantly over time. On the other hand, 96 percent of early intervention cases had tax intercepts, which was significantly higher than the 87 percent rate of intercepts in the comparison group.

Intercepts of unemployment benefits were common only among early intervention cases in Colorado. Colorado made this enforcement remedy more automated in 2004, which coincided with the generation of many early intervention cases. The comparison group was comprised of cases generated in 2002 and 2003.

**Table 27. Comparison of Wage Assignments for Early Intervention and Traditional Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent with wage withholding within:					
12 months post group assignment	50%	80% 83%	43% 44%	★70% 82%	<i>Not available</i>
Any time post group assignment	50%	84% 91%	43% 45%	80% 89%	★87% 95%
Percent with a payment through tax intercept within:					
12 months post group assignment	<i>Not available</i>	95% 91%	★96% 87%	44% 55%	<i>Not available</i>
Any time post group assignment	<i>Not available</i>	97% 95%	★96% 87%	★60% 80%	<i>Not available</i>
Percent with a payment through intercept of unemployment benefits within:					
12 months post group assignment	10%	★26% 2%	13% 11%	6% 2%	<i>Not available</i>
Any time post group assignment	10%	★30% 16%	14% 11%	8% 11%	1% 1%
Number	(132)	(96) (103)	(193) (199)	(83) (78)	(188) (200)

★Chi square significant at .05.

### Outcomes: Enforcement Activity

Tables 28 and 29 present the enforcement actions taken in cases with less than half of the monthly support obligation paid during the first 12 months following assignment to the early intervention and comparison groups. There were a few noteworthy differences.

For example, early intervention cases with delinquencies in Massachusetts and Wisconsin were more likely to be the subject of credit bureau reporting within the first 12 months. In Wisconsin, this pattern continued beyond the first 12 months, while in Massachusetts the differences between the two groups disappeared over time. Credit bureau reporting typically occurs without worker intervention and is a function of the accumulation of arrears and automated exchanges between the child support agency and credit bureau reporting agencies.

Non-compliant cases in the early intervention group in Massachusetts were also more likely to have driver's license suspension initiated during the first 12 months. Although driver's license suspension is automated, workers can initiate the process; early intervention appears to have sped up its implementation. Driver's license suspension was used with great frequency with both groups in Colorado, but was rarely used with cases in either group in Wisconsin. Staff at that site feels it is a less effective remedy since many noncustodial parents in the caseload lack licenses or have had them suspended for other reasons. The limited ability of the county to incarcerate those who drive without licenses also deters workers from using this remedy with any frequency.

Bank liens are system-generated enforcement remedies, but they can be manipulated by child support workers. According to the early intervention worker in Colorado, they were sometimes used as a bargaining tool. The Colorado early intervention worker reported contacting delinquent noncustodial parents and offering to quash the bank lien in exchange for a payment. The proportion of cases with bank liens was significantly higher in cases in the comparison group in Colorado and Massachusetts.

**Table 28. Comparison of Enforcement Actions for Early Intervention and Traditional Cases Paying Less than Half of the Amount Due in the 12 Months Following Group Assignment, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)		Wisconsin (Milwaukee)		Massachusetts (Suffolk)		Texas (Tarrant)	
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison	Early Intervention	Comparison
Percent with credit bureau reporting within:									
12 months post group assignment	85%	93%	95%	★57%	44%	★82%	0%	<i>Not available</i>	
Any time post group assignment	85%	93%	100%	★59%	45%	90%	94%	★95%	82%
Percent with drivers' license reporting within:									
12 months post group assignment	7%	71%	73%	1%	1%	★78%	52%	<i>Not available</i>	
Any time post group assignment	7%	80%	86%	1%	1%	83%	74%		
Percent with a bank lien within:									
12 months post group assignment	93%	★0%	9%	78%	75%	★29%	50%	<i>Not available</i>	
Any time post group assignment	93%	★0%	31%	78%	75%	★49%	73%	41%	50%
Number	(27)	(45)	(66)	(166)	(66)	(41)	(36)	(75)	(62)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

Only one site, Wisconsin, showed differences between the early intervention and comparison group with respect to contempt actions initiated in non-paying cases. Among cases paying less than half of the monthly support obligation during the first 12 months after order establishment, over a third of the early intervention cases in Wisconsin, compared to about 10 percent of the comparison cases, were the subject of a contempt action. Most of these contempt actions occurred within the first 12 months. Texas showed the highest level of contempt activity in both the treatment and control groups. No information was available on actions during the first 12 months after the order, but since the treatment group was generated two years after the comparison group and both groups had identical levels (89%) of contempt action in non-paying cases, it appears that early intervention may have led to faster initiation of actions. Other sites reported avoiding contempt actions because they are costly, time consuming, and rarely result in incarceration.

**Table 29. Comparison of Contempt Actions for Early Intervention and Traditional Cases Paying Less than Half of the Amount Due in the 12 Months Following Group Assignment, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent with contempt actions:					
Within 12 months post group assignment	0%	4%    0%	★34%   10%	12%    25%	<i>Not available</i>
Any time post group assignment	0%	9%    3%	★36%   11%	17%    43%	89%   89%
	(29)	(45)   (59)	(161) (166)	(41)   (36)	(75)   (62)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

Table 30 compares the use of multiple enforcement measures in treatment and comparison groups: contempt actions, credit bureau reporting, drivers' license reporting, and bank liens. In Colorado, Wisconsin, and Texas, both groups tend to show identical patterns of enforcement activity during the first 12 months following the promulgation of a child support order. The exception was the treatment group in Massachusetts, where enforcement was significantly more likely to occur during the first 12 months after the order, but fell off during months 13 to 24. Thus, at least in Massachusetts, early intervention did lead to the faster initiation of enforcement activity, although the intensity was not sustained during months 13 to 24.

When the analysis was restricted to non-paying cases — those in need of enforcement — the percentage of cases with actions increased in both the early intervention and comparison groups. At most sites, between 90 and 100 percent of non-complying cases in each group were the subject of some enforcement action. In both Massachusetts and Wisconsin, non-paying cases in the early intervention group were significantly more likely to be the subject of enforcement activity as compared with their counterparts in the comparison group. This suggests that early intervention did speed up the enforcement process in those settings, and that a key goal of the intervention was achieved. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the proportions of cases with some type of enforcement activity in Colorado and Texas. In the first 12 months, 93 percent of non-paying cases in both groups in Colorado had some type of enforcement activity, and in Texas, an identical 61 and 63 percent of both groups of non-paying cases showed some enforcement action.

**Table 30. Comparison of Enforcement Actions for Early Intervention and Traditional Cases Following Group Assignment, by Site and Payment Status**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent of all cases with credit bureau reporting, driver's license reporting, bank lien, or contempt within:					
12 months post group assignment	50%	75% 78%	80% 78%	★55% 40%	<i>Not available</i>
Any time post group assignment	50%	83% 85%	81% 78%	★57% 75%	52% 55%
	(137)	(97) (107)	(199) (199)	(98) (80)	(196) (200)
Percent paying less than half of their obligation during the first 12 months who had credit bureau reporting, driver's license reporting, bank lien, or contempt within:					
12 months post group assignment	97%	93% 93%	87% 81%	★98% 73%	<i>Not available</i>
Any time post group assignment	97%	93% 98%	★88% 81%	98% 100%	61% 63%
	(27)	(45) (66)	(166) (66)	(41) (36)	(75) (62)

★Chi square significant at .05.

## **Early Intervention and Payment Outcomes**

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### **Outcomes: Payment Performance**

#### **All Cases**

There are a variety of ways to assess payment performance. We compared early intervention and comparison groups on the percent of cases making any payment, the percent of cases paying various amounts of the monthly support owed, and the average percentage of the obligation due that was paid. Table 31 presents patterns for the first 12 months following group assignment; Table 32 presents patterns for months 13 to 24.

There were few statistically significant differences at any site in payment patterns by group. In Colorado, a significantly higher percentage of cases in the early intervention group paid at least some support during both time periods. However, they appear to be sporadic, single-shot payments since the average percentage paid for the treatment and comparison groups and the percentage paying various amounts of what was owed were not statistically different.

There were no statistically significant differences in payment at the other sites except for Texas, where the comparison group cases paid, on average, a higher percentage of the amount due relative to the early intervention cases. This was true for both the first and second 12-month period. The stronger payment patterns for cases in the Texas comparison group may be due to the significantly higher incidence of wage withholding orders for cases in that group (see table 27). The patterns reported in these tables continued to hold when subsequent analyses were conducted in Texas, excluding cases involving medical support orders, which were fairly common in the comparison, but not the early intervention group. Medical support cases were believed to involve more affluent families, but when the exclusion of these cases did not alter payment patterns, they were retained in all subsequent analyses.



**Table 31. Comparison of Payments in Year 1 by Early Intervention and Traditional Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent making any payment	81%	★★ 88% 76%	50% 51%	82% 84%	82% 88%
Percent paying nothing	19%	12% 25%	51% 49%	18% 16%	19% 12%
Percent paying 1-25%	6%	20% 23%	24% 28%	16% 20%	13% 10%
Percent paying 26-50%	20%	19% 11%	12% 9%	16% 10%	13% 10%
Percent paying 51-89%	34%	29% 30%	10% 11%	18% 29%	20% 29%
Percent paying 90-100%	20%	19% 11%	3% 4%	35% 25%	36% 40%
Percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	52%	49% 40%	17% 17%	50% 51%	★56% 65%
	(64)	(89) (106)	(195) (199)	(83) (80)	(168) (200)

★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .002.

★★ Chi square significant at .05.

**Table 32. Comparison of Payments in Year 2 by Early Intervention and Traditional Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent making any payments		★★ 87% 74%		79% 85%	★★ 85% 93%
Percent paying nothing		13% 26%		21% 15%	15% 7%
Percent paying 1-25%		19% 11%		4% 15%	6% 7%
Percent paying 26-50%		13% 11%		8% 5%	5% 5%
Percent paying 51-89%		31% 25%		9% 17%	11% 7%
Percent paying 90-100%		24% 27%		58% 48%	64% 74%
Percent of obligation due in the second year that was paid		55% 50%		68% 62%	★73% 81%
Number		(70) (100)		(76) (79)	(143) (197)

★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .002.

★★ Chi square significant at .05.

Table 33, and Figures 1 through 4, show that payment patterns did not change significantly from month-to-month during the first year after group assignment or order establishment. In Texas, the comparison group began with higher payment levels and maintained this pattern for all 12 months. In Oregon and Colorado, payments increased over time, but the increases occurred at a similar rate for cases in both the early

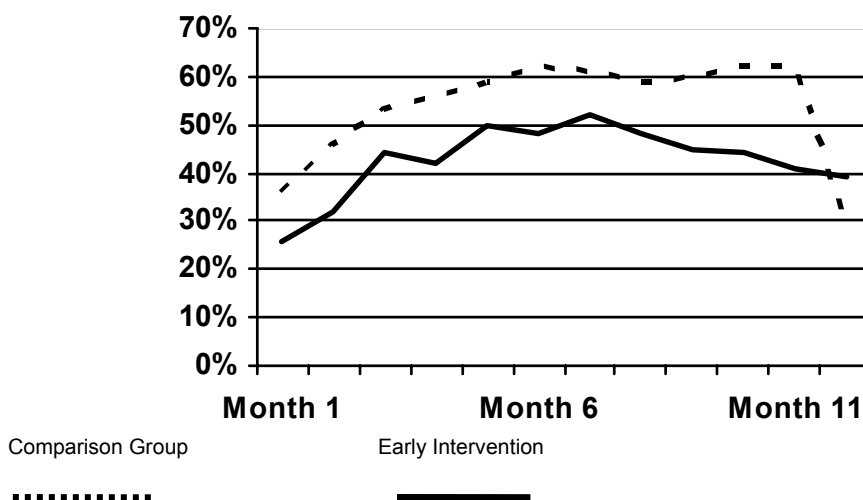
intervention and comparison groups. In Wisconsin and Massachusetts, payment levels did not change significantly over 12 months for either the early intervention or the comparison groups.

**Table 33. Comparison of Payments by Early Intervention and Traditional Cases, by Site**

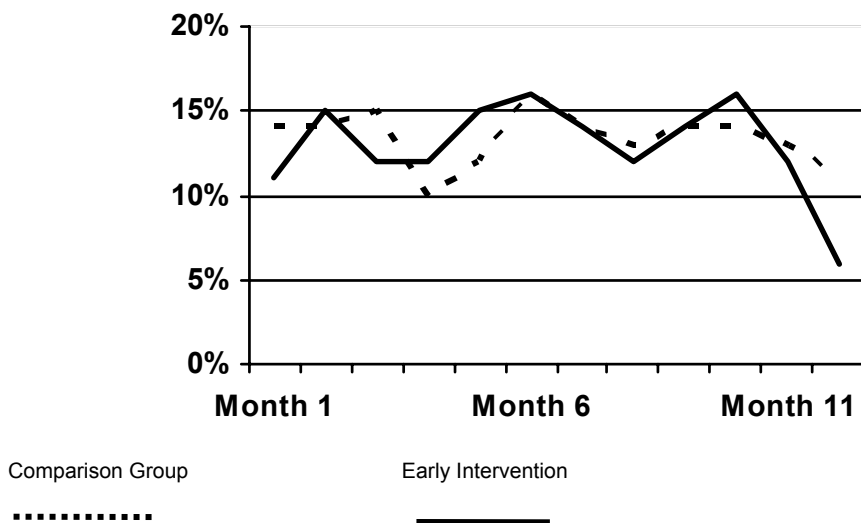
State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
	(62)	(80) (103)	(194) (195)	(83) (80)	(165) (200)
Percent of obligation due in the first quarter post-assignment that was paid	42%	33% 29%	15% 16%	51% 49%	★42% 51%
Percent of obligation due in the second quarter post-assignment that was paid	59%	45% 46%	16% 15%	51% 53%	★53% 65%
Percent of obligation due in the third quarter post-assignment that was paid	60%	47% 44%	14% 15%	49% 52%	★54% 65%
Percent of obligation due in the fourth quarter post-assignment that was paid	63%	51% 48%	15% 14%	49% 52%	★48% 61%

★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .002.

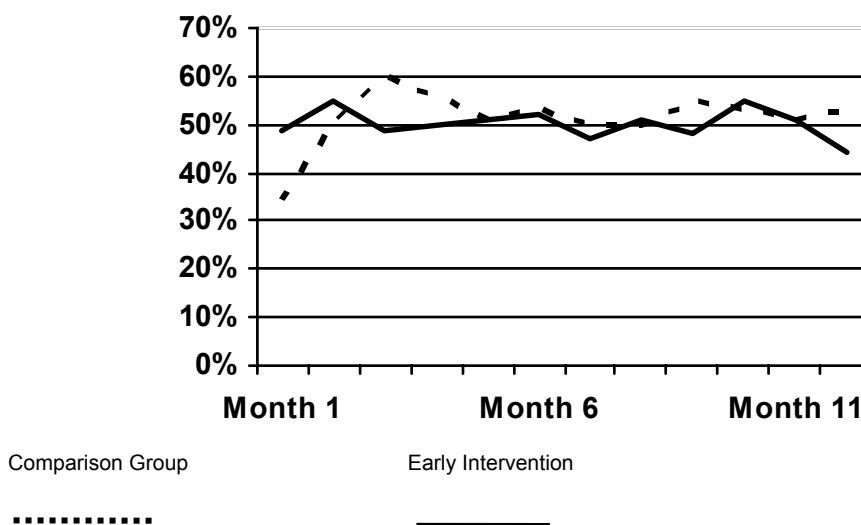
**Figure 1. Mesa County, Colorado:  
Payments for 12 Months Following Group Assignment**



**Figure 2. Milwaukee County, Wisconsin:  
Payments for 12 Months Following Group Assignment**



**Figure 3. Suffolk County, Massachusetts:  
Payments for 12 Months Following Group Assignment**



**Figure 4. Tarrant County, Texas:  
Payments for 12 Months Following Group Assignment**

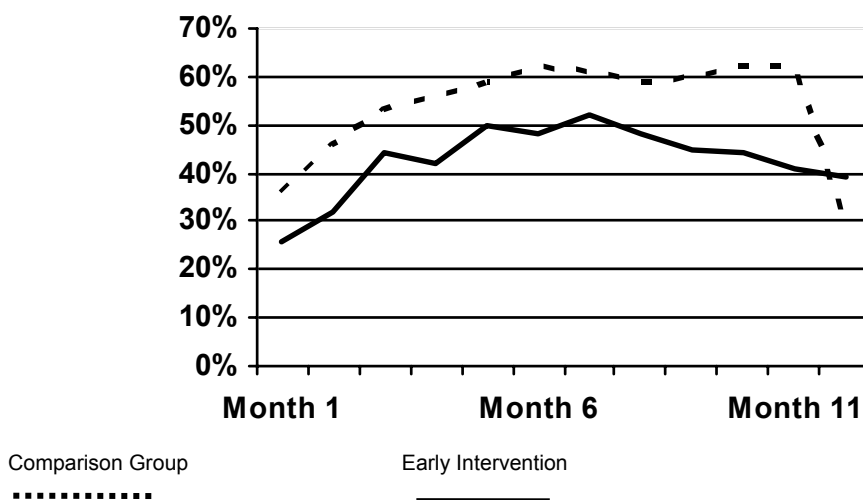


Table 34 tests the hypothesis that greater personal contact by early intervention workers is associated with better payment patterns. Like the previous tables, it compares the groups on the percentage making any payment and the percentage of the obligation due that was paid in the first year. However, it restricts the early intervention group to those cases where the early intervention worker actually spoke with the noncustodial parent. In Colorado alone, worker-parent contact was associated with better payment and the difference was statistically significant. At the other sites, there was no difference in payment for the two groups, and in Texas, cases in the comparison group continued to exhibit better payment patterns relative to cases in the early intervention group that received at least one phone call by a child support worker.

**Table 34. Payments for Early Intervention Cases with NCP Contacted by the Worker  
and Traditional Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent making any payment	85%	★ ★ 89% 76%	Too few cases	93% 84%	72% 88%
Percent of obligation due In the first year that was paid	56% (26)	★ 57% 40% (42) (79)		62% 51% (28) (80)	★ 47% 65% (47) (200)

★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .002.

★ ★ Chi square significant at .05.

Another method of assessing payment performance is to examine arrears balances over time. In Colorado, Massachusetts, and Texas, mean and median arrears balances at 12 months and 24 months were not significantly different for the early intervention and comparison groups. At all sites, both groups experienced increases over time, but average arrears balances were statistically comparable, nor were there differences in the percent of cases with no arrears at either time point. In Wisconsin, there were too few cases with data over a 24-month period to allow for a comparison.

**Table 35. Average Arrears Balances for Early Intervention and Traditional Cases, by Site**

State (County)	<b>Colorado (Mesa)</b>		<b>Massachusetts (Suffolk)</b>		<b>Texas (Tarrant)</b>	
	<b>Early Intervention</b>	<b>Comparison</b>	<b>Early Intervention</b>	<b>Comparison</b>	<b>Early Intervention</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
Average arrears 12 months after group assignment	\$6,855	\$5,788	\$2,377	\$7,982	\$5,780	\$6,868
Median arrears after 12 months	\$2,298	\$3,190	\$1,199	\$626	\$3,356	\$3,070
Percent with no arrears after 12 months	10%	7%	8%	16%	4%	3%
	(88)	(104)	(83)	(80)	(164)	(200)
Average arrears 24 months after group assignment	\$8,053	\$8,989	\$2,532	\$3,448	\$6,541	\$7,250
Median arrears after 24 months	\$3,050	\$4,420	\$1,099	\$1,200	\$4,242	\$4,182
Percent with no arrears after 24 months	12%	15%	15%	18%	4%	6%
	(68)	(100)	(76)	(79)	(143)	(197)

Table 36 shows the percentage of cases in the early intervention and comparison groups with a request for an order modification at the time of data collection. Differences between the early intervention and comparison groups were only significant in Colorado. At this site, the early intervention cases showed a higher rate of modification requests, relative to the comparison group. This may indicate that the early intervention worker learned about job loss in the course of his or her call and was successful in communicating with noncustodial parents about the need to request a modification. The rate of modification requests was higher but equivalent for both experimental and comparison cases in Texas and Massachusetts.

**Table 36. Requests for Order Modification at Data Collection, by Group and Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	★ Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	★ Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
No request for modification	92%	81% 96%	97% 99%	74% 70%	78% 80%
Request for modification	8%	19% 4%	3% 1%	26% 30%	22% 20%
	(131)	(95) (106)	(193) (199)	(83) (79)	(188) (200)

★ Chi square significant at .05.

### New Order Cases

Early intervention is believed to be most effective with obligors in new child support cases who have not had a long history with the agency or accumulated arrears balances and enforcement actions. To determine whether this pool of cases exhibited more favorable payment patterns, we compared payment in the two groups, but restricted both groups to cases that involved new child support orders. We excluded from the analysis all modification cases, all older orders that were newly filed with the child support agency, and all cases that involved medical support orders. The results of that analysis are presented in Table 37.

As was previously the case, Colorado was the only site to show a number of statistically significant differences that favored the early intervention group. The percent making any payment in the first 12 months, the percent with no arrears after 12 months, and mean and median arrears balances at 12 months were all significantly better for new order cases in the treatment group. With the elimination of medical support cases in Texas, new cases in the early intervention group looked comparable to the treatment group, with the exception of arrears balances, which were significantly lower for early intervention cases. It is possible that this was due to the fact that monthly order levels were significantly lower in the treatment group. Payment and arrears patterns for new order cases at all sites except Colorado were statistically identical in both groups.

**Table 37. Comparison of Payments in Year 1 by Early Intervention and Traditional New Order Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent making any payments	83%	★ ★ 87% 71%	50% 50%	82% 80%	80% 88%
Percent paying nothing	17%	13% 30%	50% 50%	18% 20%	20% 12%
Percent paying 1-25%	4%	23% 23%	25% 27%	15% 20%	13% 12%
Percent paying 26-50%	27%	18% 8%	12% 9%	16% 9%	13% 7%
Percent paying 51-89%	33%	31% 23%	11% 10%	18% 28%	20% 27%
Percent paying 90-100%	19%	15% 16%	3% 4%	33% 22%	35% 41%
Average percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	50%	45% 38%	18% 17%	51% 49%	55% 65%
Average arrears due after 12 months	\$3,555	★ \$2,688 \$5,984	\$1,384 \$1,483	\$2,403 \$1,620	★ \$5,388 \$7,411
Median arrears due after 12 months	\$1,855	\$1,589 \$3,214	\$1,200 \$1,236	\$1,237 \$517	\$3,356 \$3,539
Percent with no arrears after 12 months	8%	10% 7%	0% 0%	9% 19%	4% 2%
Number	(48)	(39) (61)	(145) (195)	(82) (54)	(160) (114)

★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .002.

★ ★ Chi square significant .05.

Table 38 presents the same array of payment and arrears patterns for new order cases in the early intervention and comparison groups during the second year of the order. It shows that the positive patterns observed in Colorado during the first year do not maintain over time and both groups at the three sites with data had similar payment and arrears patterns. At least some payment was made in a high proportion of cases at all the sites and every group. The average percent of support paid for both groups, however, was slightly under 50 percent in Colorado, 60 to 68 percent in Massachusetts, and 73 to 80 percent in Texas.

**Table 38. Comparison of Payments in Year 2 by Early Intervention and Traditional New Order Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent making any payments		80% 73%		79% 80%	84% 92%
Percent paying nothing		20% 27%		21% 20%	16% 8%
Percent paying 1-25%		23% 15%		4% 13%	5% 7%
Percent paying 26-50%		10% 14%		8% 6%	5% 5%
Percent paying 51-89%		27% 17%		9% 15%	10% 7%
Percent paying 90-100%		20% 27%		57% 46%	63% 72%
Percent of obligation due in the second year that was paid	Too few cases	47% 45%	Too few cases	68% 60%	73% 80%
Average arrears due after 24 months		\$3,624 \$10,963		\$2,565 \$3,158	\$6,062 \$7,574
Median arrears due after 24 months		\$2,935 \$4,838		\$1,200 \$951	\$4,241 \$4,206
Percent with no arrears after 24 months		13% 15% (30) (59)		13% 19% (75) (52)	5% 5% (135) (112)

Table 39 repeats the analysis of payment in cases with new child support orders but restricts the early intervention group to cases where the worker actually made contact with noncustodial parents. Thus, it compares payments for new cases processed using normal procedures with payments for new cases where workers actually reported contact with obligors. The measures of payment we utilized were the percentage making any payments and the percentage of the obligation due that was actually paid in the first year following order establishment. The only statistically significant difference occurred in Massachusetts, where the pattern favored the early intervention group. None of the differences at the other sites were statistically significant, although the small number of cases in the Colorado (19) and Texas (23) treatment groups reduces the ability to detect statistically significant differences.



**Table 39. Comparison of Payments for Early Intervention and Traditional New Order Cases With NCP Contacted by the Early Intervention Worker, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
Percent making any payments	89%	90% 71%	Too few cases	93% 80%	70% 88%
Average percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	56%	47% 38%		★64% 49%	66% 78%
	(18)	(19) (61)		(25) (43)	(23) (114)

★ T-test between early intervention and comparison group significant at .08.

### Noncustodial Parents with New Orders and Only One Case

Many noncustodial parents in the child support system have multiple cases. These individuals may be less responsive to early intervention techniques in their new child support cases because of their previous experiences with the agency and their prior financial obligations. Table 40 tests whether early intervention techniques are associated with better payment patterns among new order cases where the noncustodial parent only has one child support case in the system. The only statistically significant difference was the average percent of child support paid in Texas and the pattern favored the comparison group. While several percentages at other sites were higher for cases in the early intervention group, none was statistically significant. The small number of cases in the Colorado treatment group (n=24) reduces the statistical power to detect significant differences at that site.

Table 41 repeats the same analysis with the same pool of cases but uses payment and arrears patterns for Months 13 through 24 following the promulgation of orders. The only statistically significant difference was in the percentage making any payment in Colorado, which was higher for cases in the early intervention group, although the small number of cases in the early intervention group may mask more substantial differences at that site.

**Table 40. Comparison of Year 1 Payments By New Order NCPs with Only One Case by Early Intervention and Traditional Processing, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
<b>Year 1</b>					
Percent making any payments	79%	88% 76%	42% 35%	81% 80%	85% 89%
Percent paying nothing	21%	13% 24%	42% 35%	19% 21%	15% 11%
Percent paying 1-25%	4%	17% 24%	22% 35%	15% 24%	12% 6%
Percent paying 26-50%	25%	17% 5%	17% 13%	12% 8%	15% 3%
Percent paying 51-89%	32%	38% 24%	15% 10%	19% 21%	15% 23%
Percent paying 90-100%	18%	17% 24%	3% 7%	34% 26%	44% 57%
Average percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	50%	50% 45%	22% 21%	51% 47%	★61% 76%
Average arrears due after 12 months	\$3,295	\$2,918 \$5,049	\$1,600 \$1,513	\$2,077 \$1,753	\$4,826 \$6,732
Median arrears due after 12 months	\$1,745	\$1,871 \$2,936	\$1,314 \$1,365	\$1,199 \$401	\$2,635 \$3,586
Percent with no arrears after 12 months	11%	13% 5%	0% 0%	10% 24%	12% 3%
Number	(28)	(24) (42)	(59) (71)	(67) (38)	(61) (65)

★ T-test shows differences between early intervention and comparison group mean is significant at .05.

**Table 41. Comparison of Year 2 Payments By New Order NCPs with Only One Case by Early Intervention and Traditional Processing, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
<b>Year 2</b>					
Percent making any payments		★95% 71%		81% 80%	89% 94%
Percent paying nothing		5% 29%		19% 21%	11% 6%
Percent paying 1-25%		21% 5%		5% 16%	2% 6%
Percent paying 26-50%		11% 20%		7% 3%	6% 2%
Percent paying 51-89%		32% 10%		10% 11%	13% 5%
Percent paying 90-100%		32% 37%		60% 59%	67% 81%
Average percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	Too few cases	61% 51%	Too few cases	70% 60%	79% 86%
Average arrears due after 24 months		\$3,701 \$11,466		\$2,310 \$3,353	\$5,610 \$7,067
Median arrears due after 24 months		\$3,325 \$4,419		\$983 \$620	\$3,049 \$3,464
Percent with no arrears after 24 months		15% 20%		15% 21%	10% 8%
Number		(19) (41)		(62) (38)	(52) (64)

★ Chi square significant .05.

## TANF Status

The financial status of obligors certainly comes to play in explaining child support payment patterns. Tables 42 and 43 repeat the analysis of payment for new order cases in the treatment and experimental groups, but distinguish between those that were never involved with the public assistance system and those that involved current or former recipients. The tables show that at every site, the percent making any support payment and average rates of payment were understandably lower in cases with current and former recipients of public assistance. On the other hand, there were no differences in payment patterns between the early intervention and comparison groups, suggesting that early intervention techniques were no more effective than traditional approaches in eliciting payments in new cases with public assistance or non-public assistance backgrounds.

**Table 42. Comparison of Payments in Cases Never on TANF by Early Intervention and Traditional New Order Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
<b>Year 1</b>					
Percent making any payments	83%	88% 79%	Not available	86% 89%	90% 92%
Percent paying nothing	17%	12% 21%		14% 11%	10% 8%
Percent paying 1-25%	6%	19% 17%		14% 15%	15% 11%
Percent paying 26-50%	22%	19% 8%		11% 11%	13% 5%
Percent paying 51-89%	39%	31% 29%		25% 41%	24% 37%
Percent paying 90-100%	17%	19% 25%		36% 22%	37% 39%
Average percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	51%	50% 50%		55% 58%	62% 68%
Average arrears due after 12 months	\$3,732	\$3,414 \$8,773	Not available	\$2,707 \$1,386	\$4,578 \$6,193
Median arrears due after 12 months	\$2,254	\$1,346 \$3,765		\$932 \$310	\$2,636 \$2,862
Percent with no arrears after 12 months	0%	13% 4%		0% 22%	5% 3%
Number	(18)	(16) (24)		(28) (27)	(78) (75)

★ T-test shows differences between early intervention and comparison group mean is significant at .05.

**Table 43. Comparison of Payments in Cases Currently or Formerly on TANF by Early Intervention and Traditional New Order Cases, by Site**

State (County)	Oregon (Lane)	Colorado (Mesa)	Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	Massachusetts (Suffolk)	Texas (Tarrant)
	Early Intervention	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison	Early Intervention Comparison
<b>Year 1</b>					
Percent making any payments	85%	83% 62%	<i>Not available</i>	75% 64%	71% 80%
Percent paying nothing	15%	17% 38%		25% 36%	29% 21%
Percent paying 1-25%	4%	28% 27%		18% 27%	9% 15%
Percent paying 26-50%	27%	11% 9%		18% 5%	12% 10%
Percent paying 51-89%	35%	39% 15%		12% 14%	17% 8%
Percent paying 90-100%	19%	6% 12%		27% 18%	33% 46%
Average percent of obligation due in the first year that was paid	51%	39% 28%		43% 33%	50% 57%
Average arrears due after 12 months	\$3,708	\$2,438 \$3,910		\$2,584 \$1,926	\$6,290 \$9,754
Median arrears due after 12 months	\$1,792	\$1,871 \$3,023		\$1,847 \$2,286	\$3,871 \$4,294
Percent with no arrears after 12 months	11%	6% 9%		15% 9%	5% 0%
Number	(26)	(18) (34)		(40) (22)	(76) (39)

## **F**indings, Comparisons with Other Projects, and Conclusions

### **Summary of Key Findings**

This report presents the results of a study on the impact of workers using early intervention techniques with child support cases in agencies in five jurisdictions: Lane County, Oregon; Mesa County, Colorado; Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; Suffolk County, Massachusetts; and Tarrant County, Texas. Four of the five sites used proactive, front-end approaches in cases that involved newly established child support orders. One site (Oregon) used early intervention techniques in conjunction with the process of establishing a child support order.

Workers recorded the characteristics of the cases targeted for early intervention and the actions they took, including telephone contacts with noncustodial and custodial parents and employers. Information was extracted from child support records on payment behaviors and enforcement actions at least 16 months following the assignment of cases to the early intervention group.

At four of the five sites, a comparison group was generated consisting of comparable cases processed using conventional techniques. With the exception of one site where the comparison group was generated simultaneously with the early intervention group, the comparison group consisted of cases that had obtained child support orders one to two years prior to the order date for cases in the early intervention group.

Cases in the early intervention and comparison groups were similar to one another in most respects. To the extent they differed, there was a higher proportion of modification or medical support cases in the comparison group at some of the sites (Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Texas), and higher average child support order amounts and wage withholding orders among cases in the comparison group in Texas. Another difference was that Colorado had a higher percentage of cases involving divorced parents (46%). At the other sites, the cases were overwhelmingly comprised of never-married parents.

Using manual extraction techniques at four of the five sites and an automated extract at one site, identical information on obligor payment patterns and enforcement actions

was obtained for cases in the comparison group and the two groups at every site were compared for differences.

There were several limitations to this study. Although cases in the treatment and comparison group were generated from the same case pools, there were some inexplicable, significant differences in case type at some of the sites. For example, cases in the comparison group in Texas had significantly higher order levels, wage withholding orders, and better payment patterns. These differences persisted even when we controlled for the higher incidence of medical support cases in that group. Another limitation was our inability to generate a non-treatment comparison group in Oregon. Early intervention strategies have been used in Oregon since 1999. The lack of a comparison group meant that we could not draw any conclusions about the relative benefits of using early intervention strategies at that site.

Our study was weakened by the inconsistent data recording activities of the early intervention worker in Wisconsin who kept track of some proactive actions on the automated child support system and some on the project data collection form. The information on early intervention strategies in our analysis came exclusively from the manual data collection form, and we consequently we lack an accurate picture of the strategies that were used to elicit payments at that site.

Finally, our study focused on objective outcomes dealing with payments and arrears balances. We did not assess client reactions, changes in knowledge about the child support system, and/or possible changes in the image of the child support agency.

Our analysis led to the following conclusions.

**The sites had different goals for early intervention.**

- The early intervention worker in Colorado aimed to build a relationship with noncustodial parents, identify and address barriers to payment, and induce NCPs to increase their payments once enforcement actions had been taken. The worker at this site made contact with the largest proportion of noncustodial parents in the treatment group, conducted the lengthiest telephone calls, and held cases for the longest amount of time.

- Establishment workers in Oregon used early intervention techniques to identify income and generate child support orders that would not be challenged by noncustodial parents in administrative or judicial settings.
- Early intervention workers in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Texas used the procedure to more closely monitor payments following the promulgation of orders, identify and address problems with income assignments, and initiate enforcement actions more quickly than had been done in the past.
- The average amount of time cases received the attention of the early intervention worker ranged from 30 days (Massachusetts) to 248 days (Colorado), with the other sites falling in between: 123 days (Oregon), 133 days (Wisconsin), and 55 days (Texas).

**The sites differed in how they defined early intervention and the strategies they used, especially those involving direct contact with noncustodial parents.**

- Workers had discretion about which early intervention techniques they used. For example, workers in Texas sent letters to noncustodial parents in every case but made telephone contact with only 19 percent. In contrast, the Colorado worker sent letters to 70 percent and made telephone contact with 54 percent.
- Attempts were made to telephone noncustodial parents, with a low of 17 percent in Wisconsin to a high of 77 percent in Colorado.
- Workers reported reaching noncustodial parents in fewer cases: 3 percent in Wisconsin; 14 percent in Texas; 33 and 34 percent in Massachusetts and Oregon, respectively; and 54 percent in Colorado.
- Workers made somewhat more effort to contact noncustodial parents in non-paying cases with a home, work, or cell phone number, with the percentage of attempts rising to 27 percent in Wisconsin, 44 percent in Texas, and 78 percent in Colorado and Massachusetts.
- Actual rates of contact with noncustodial parents in non-payment cases with a home, work, or cell phone number was substantially lower and stood at 2 percent in Milwaukee, 17 percent in Texas, and 49 percent in both Colorado and Massachusetts.

- Workers provided no information on the number of phone attempts that they made. The limited information on referrals to services to address barriers to payment suggests that it was rarely done at any of the sites.

**At every site except Colorado, it was as or more common for workers to attempt and to achieve personal contact with custodial parents and employers than with noncustodial parents.**

- Early intervention workers were more apt to make telephone contact with custodial than with noncustodial parents, with the proportions standing at 53 percent in Colorado, 51 percent in Oregon, 46 percent in Massachusetts, 31 percent in Texas, and 2 percent in Wisconsin.
- Workers attempted to contact employers in about a third of Massachusetts and Texas cases, 40 percent of Colorado cases, 47 percent of Oregon cases, and 14 percent of Wisconsin cases.
- Workers were highly successful in reaching employers and spoke with 94 to 97 percent of those they attempted to contact in Colorado and Massachusetts, 82 percent of those they attempted to reach in Texas, 79 percent of those they attempted in Oregon, and 64 percent in Wisconsin.
- In Colorado, workers made contact with identical proportions of noncustodial parents (54%), custodial parents (53%), and identified employers (50%).

**Taken together, workers at every site except Wisconsin made direct contact with a custodial parent, a noncustodial parent, and/or an employer in a majority of early intervention cases, especially those paying 50 percent or less of the monthly support due during the first year following order promulgation.**

- Workers spoke with a parent and/or an employer in 76 percent of Colorado cases, 63 percent of Massachusetts cases, 61 percent of Oregon cases, 55 percent of Texas cases, and 12 percent of Wisconsin cases.
- Workers attempted to speak with a parent and/or an employer in 78 to 93 percent of early intervention cases with payment problems but were successful in a somewhat lower proportion at most sites: 67 percent of Oregon cases, 52 percent



of Colorado cases, 42 percent of Massachusetts cases, 40 percent of Texas cases, and 10 percent of Wisconsin cases.

**Early intervention achieved some of the objectives posited for it at the sites, specifically speedy orders that were rarely challenged in Oregon, and the faster implementation of some enforcement remedies in non-paying cases in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Texas.**

- Only 14 percent of obligors in Oregon establishment cases requested an administrative or court hearing to review the child support order proposed by the worker, and only 15 percent of those requesting a change were granted one. The mean and median number of days to establish orders was 120 and 113, respectively.
- Some types of enforcement actions were more common among early intervention cases at earlier stages of case processing than in the comparison group. For example, credit bureau reporting was significantly more likely to occur within the first 12 months following order establishment among early intervention cases in Wisconsin and Massachusetts, as was driver's license suspension in Massachusetts.
- Early intervention cases in Wisconsin were significantly more likely to have a contempt action initiated in non-paying cases than in the comparison group; in Texas, non-paying cases in the early intervention and comparison groups had identical rates of contempt activity, even though the former group was generated two years after the latter.
- Bank liens were sometimes used as bargaining tools in early intervention cases and were significantly less likely to be used in the treatment group than in the comparison group in both Colorado and Massachusetts.

**With the exception of Colorado, early intervention treatments did not translate into better child support payment patterns during the first or second year following order establishment.**

- In Colorado, a significantly higher proportion of obligors in the full, early intervention group made at least some child support payment during the first and second year of the obligation. In Texas, the percentage making any payment was significantly higher in the full comparison group during the second year. At the other sites, the groups were identical.
- The average percent of child support paid in cases in the full, early intervention and comparison groups was statistically equivalent at most sites during the first and second year following the promulgation of the order.
- The only statistically significant difference in the percent of current support paid for the full groups occurred in Texas, with the pattern favoring cases in the comparison group. Cases in the Texas comparison group had significantly higher order levels and wage withholding orders.
- With the exception of Texas, where patterns favored the comparison group, there were no differences in payment patterns during the first, second, third, or fourth quarters of the first year following the promulgation of the child support order, suggesting that early intervention did not lead to the more rapid initiation of payment.

**Payment patterns were significantly better in Colorado for early intervention cases where the worker made direct contact with noncustodial parent in the first year of the obligation. In Texas, payment patterns were better for cases in the comparison group.**

- Payment patterns for cases in the full, early intervention group with direct contact between workers and noncustodial parents were statistically identical to payment patterns for cases in the comparison group in Massachusetts and Wisconsin.
- Payment patterns were significantly better for cases with direct contact between workers and noncustodial parents in the full early intervention group in Colorado.
- Payment patterns continued to be significantly better for cases in the comparison group in Texas, even when they were compared with cases that experienced direct contact between the worker and the noncustodial parent.

**Early intervention treatments did not translate into lower arrears balances during the first or second year following order establishment.**

- Arrears balances at 12 and 24 months following order promulgation for cases in the full, early intervention and comparison group were statistically identical in the three sites with information: Colorado, Massachusetts, and Texas.

**Among cases considered to be most suitable for early intervention, namely brand new child support orders, Colorado had significantly better child support payment patterns in the treatment group during the first year following order establishment. In Massachusetts, payments were significantly better for cases with new orders with direct worker contact with the noncustodial parent.**

- Among cases with new child support orders, the percent of the monthly obligation that was paid was statistically equivalent at all sites during the first and second year after order promulgation, except Colorado, where the patterns favored the treatment group.
- Payment patterns in Massachusetts were significantly better for treatment cases with new orders where the worker made direct contact with the noncustodial parent.
- In Colorado, the percentage making any payment in the first 12 months, the percentage with no arrears after 12 months, and mean and median arrears balances at 12 months were all significantly better for new order cases in the treatment group.
- In Texas, the average arrears balance for cases in the early intervention group was lower than the comparison group at 12 months following order promulgation, reflecting lower average monthly support orders for this group. Arrears balances were statistically equivalent for treatment and comparison groups in Massachusetts and Wisconsin.
- All improvements favoring the treatment group disappeared over time, and by 24 months following order promulgation, the groups were statistically equivalent at all sites.

## **Comparisons with Other Projects**

Proponents of early intervention have posited many benefits: increased contact with noncustodial parents, better relationships, more referrals for help with barriers to payment, higher levels of user satisfaction and knowledge, rapid generation of child support orders, improved child support payments, lower arrears balances, and speedier enforcement actions. The following compares key findings reached in this project with the other previously described OCSE-funded studies conducted in Tennessee, Iowa, and Nebraska (see Chapter 1).

**Contact with Parents:** Early intervention workers in Nebraska achieved the highest rates of telephone contact. In telephone contacts attempted within 90 days of the order generation, these workers reached 68 percent of targeted noncustodial parents in a mixed sample of IV-D and non-IV-D cases with new orders. Efforts to contact obligors who were behind in their payments at 90 days post-order were more difficult, and fewer than half (44.6%) were reached by telephone. Nebraska call center staff expended tremendous effort to reach noncustodial parents, making an average of 6.44 calls to reach parents in the full sample and 8.5 attempts to reach delinquent obligors.

Tennessee caseworkers contacted 46 percent of targeted noncustodial parents and 77 percent of targeted custodial parents, while Iowa provided no details on telephone contact with customers.

Telephone contact was achieved with a varying proportion of noncustodial parents in this project: 3 percent in Wisconsin, 14 percent in Texas, 33 percent in Massachusetts, 34 percent in Oregon, and 54 percent in Colorado. Texas relied much more heavily on mail contact and sent letters and brochures to 99 percent of noncustodial parents in the treatment group. The other sites used mail in half to two-thirds of cases.

At all sites, the lack of accurate telephone information for noncustodial parents was viewed as the chief barrier to effective early intervention.

**Referral Activity:** Tennessee went the furthest in facilitating caseworker referrals by developing a directory of services dealing with employment and access and visitation, and placing it on a shared drive for all caseworkers to utilize. Despite this unique resource, only 44 referrals were made in the 175 cases targeted for early intervention (36 noncustodial parents and eight custodial parents). This represents 20 percent of

noncustodial parents in the project. All were for employment services and/or to mediation for visitation issues.

Although Nebraska reported that call center workers made referrals for one-third of the noncustodial parents with whom they spoke, they were exclusively to the Clerk of the District Court (46.7%), Child Support Customer Service (23.4%), and a caseworker at the child support agency (16.8%). They dealt with issues pertaining to the order and payment rather than for employment or visitation problems. Iowa did not provide information on referral activity.

At the sites in this study with information on referrals, the percentage of noncustodial parents receiving referrals was 2 percent in Oregon, 3 percent in Texas, and 12 percent in Colorado. When the analysis was restricted to cases in which noncustodial parents were contacted by the early intervention workers, the percentages receiving referrals ranged from 8 to 16 percent. Oregon workers attributed low levels of referrals to cuts in funding for job training and placement services. Although proponents of early intervention stress the importance of identifying and addressing payment program, referrals for services are rarely made.

**User Satisfaction and Knowledge:** One goal of early intervention is to increase client understanding of child support, the obligation, and enforcement remedies. Although this project, like the one in Tennessee, did not assess client satisfaction or changes in knowledge as a result of outreach calls, the results of other studies are promising. For example, the interviews in Iowa with 17 noncustodial parents revealed that the agency was “meeting its objectives of providing information and presenting courteous service.”

Nebraska conducted pre and post knowledge surveys with approximately 100 noncustodial parents and focus groups with 19 noncustodial parents. The pre and post-call assessments revealed significant increases in knowledge following the informational and relationship-building call conducted by call center workers. The focus groups revealed frustration with the bureaucratic and legal nature of child support information, and appreciation of the personal contact.

**Child Support Orders:** Agencies that use early intervention strategies as part of the establishment process hope to see quicker orders that reflect actual earnings and greater

participation of noncustodial parents in order-making sessions. This was accomplished in Tennessee, which generated child support orders more quickly in the early intervention group, with 56.1 percent under order by the end of the year. The impact of early intervention was most profound in public assistance cases, where the percent of cases under order a year in the treatment and control group was 50 and 22.1 percent, respectively. In a similar vein, Iowa reported that the average number of days from service to order establishment was reduced by over two weeks for establishment cases exposed to early intervention and that these cases had significantly lower rates of default.

Since Nebraska and most of the sites in the current project only used early intervention after the child support order was promulgated, outcomes related to speed of order establishment were not relevant. However, in Oregon, which was the only site to use early intervention during the process of establishing order, the mean and median number of days required to establish orders was 120 and 113 days, respectively, and only 14 percent of order amounts proposed by workers were challenged in administrative or court hearings. Although it was impossible to generate a non-treatment, comparison group, workers believed that these patterns were faster than those observed prior to the adoption of early intervention.

**Child Support Payment:** The major benefit hypothesized for early intervention is better compliance with child support orders. Prior research suggests that statistically significant differences were only achieved at some sites, only with some sub-groups, and on selected payment measures. For example, while Iowa reported that the percentage of cases with some current support paid during the month of January 2006 was 64.0 percent in the control group and 66.9 percent in the treatment group, the difference between the two was not statistically significant. No information was provided on whether the difference in the average percentage of current support paid on time during January 2006 for the treatment and control groups (56.7 and 51.9 percent, respectively) was statistically significant. Iowa also reported that in a targeted month, half of all the cases in the control group paid 25.4 percent of the child support they owed, while half of the cases in the treatment group paid 46.1 percent of what they owed, but conducted no tests of significance.

Nebraska found statistically significant differences in payment compliance among its treatment and control groups. In June 2006, compliance ratios, which compare the total arrearage balance with the monthly support obligation, were significantly better for the

group that received mailings and a telephone call (1.79) as compared with the control group (2.79) and the group that only received mailings (2.33). On the other hand, compliance ratios for obligors who were contacted after they became delinquent were lower for the mail and telephone group (6.41) as compared with the mail-only and control groups (7.45 and 6.72), but the difference was not statistically significant.

Tennessee found that the percentage of cases with orders that had any child support payments was 78.1 percent for project cases and 73 percent for control group cases, a difference that was not statistically significant. Payments, measured as a percent of current support due, averaged 85.9 percent in all project cases and 72.8 percent in all control cases, a difference that was also not statistically significant. The difference that was greatest, and statistically significant, occurred for public assistance cases where the percentage paid averaged 80.7 percent in project cases and 44.2 percent for control cases.

In this project, the percentage paying any support and the average percentage paid in during the first and second years of the obligations showed no statistically significant differences between early intervention and comparison cases in Massachusetts and Wisconsin. The groups were consistently different in Texas, but they favored the comparison group, which had significantly higher order amounts and wage withholding orders. In Colorado, payment patterns consistently favored the early intervention group, especially in cases where the worker made direct contact with the noncustodial parent and in new order cases. For example, in cases where the worker actually spoke with the parent, the percentage of obligors making any child support payment was 89 percent versus 76 percent in the comparison group. The average percentage of the obligation paid in the first year was 57 versus 40 percent.

**Arrears Balances:** Another key goal of early intervention is avoidance of arrears and lowering of arrears balances. As with payment, past research shows statistically significant differences between treatment and control groups only at some sites and among some sub-groups. For example, the difference in the average amount of current support owed in treatment (\$252.72) and control group cases (\$240.60) in Iowa was not a statistically significant.

Nebraska, on the other hand, found that average arrears balances were highest in the groups of cases processed using conventional techniques (\$568.56) or mailed information (\$509.42), and were significantly lower in the group of 632 cases where noncustodial

parents were actually contacted by telephone (\$346.55). In a similar fashion, Tennessee found that one year after the case was open, mean and median arrears balances were \$1,365 and \$942 for project cases and \$4,002 and \$2,442 for control cases, a difference in means that was statistically significant.

In the present study, early intervention with new order cases in Colorado resulted in significantly lower average arrears balances at 12 months following order promulgation (\$2,688 in the early intervention group versus \$5,984 in the comparison group). The same was true for new order cases in Texas, which showed arrears of \$5,388 in the early intervention group versus \$7,411 in the comparison group. In all other sites, there were no statistically significant differences between early intervention and comparison cases on the arrears owed at 12 and 24 months following order promulgation.

**Enforcement Actions: A final goal of early intervention is to uncover non-payment quickly and start aggressive enforcement actions.**

The research evidence on whether early intervention leads to faster enforcement is limited since Nebraska and Iowa did not include enforcement actions in their assessment. Tennessee compared rates of contempt actions, income withholding orders, warrants, and credit bureau referrals but found no statistically significant differences in the percentage of project and control cases with enforcement actions of any type.

In this project, credit bureau reporting was significantly more likely to occur within the first 12 months following order establishment among early intervention cases in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Texas (at any time following group assignment), as was driver's license suspension in Massachusetts. Early intervention cases in Wisconsin were significantly more likely to have a contempt action initiated in non-paying cases than in the comparison group; early intervention cases in Massachusetts were significantly more likely to have wage withholding orders initiated in the first 12 months. However, in all other respects and at all other sites, the proportion of cases with wage withholding orders and various enforcement actions were statistically equivalent for the early intervention and comparison groups, except the Texas comparison group, which had a higher incidence of wage withholding orders.



**Staff Reactions**

Although early intervention failed to yield better payment patterns at all sites but one, child support personnel at the participating sites support the idea of agencies using at least some early, proactive strategies. They agree that non-payment is generally detected late in the process, after arrears have mounted and collectibility has declined. They support the idea of monitoring payments from the inception of a child support order, quickly determining whether enforcement actions are needed, and initiating them. As the child support administrator in Texas put it, “What is helpful about EIM (Early Intervention Monitoring) is that we are doing something within days of the order, not months.”

There is less consensus on the feasibility and utility of routinely making phone contact with noncustodial parents and the nature of telephone exchanges between workers and noncustodial parents. Workers and administrators are often skeptical about the value of “relationship-building calls,” “soft-glove approaches,” and other strategies to stimulate voluntary compliance with child support orders. They question whether it is worth the time and effort, believe that resources might better be spent doing aggressive enforcement actions, and limit the situations in which they pursue direct contact with noncustodial parents.

For example, early intervention workers in Texas are instructed to focus their initial telephone efforts on employers with the goal of verifying new or existing employers in order to initiate wage withholding orders. If no employer can be found, and a telephone number is available, the early intervention worker is instructed to attempt to contact the noncustodial parent. In the absence of a telephone number, the worker generates various types of mailings: contact letters, lump sum demand letters and delinquency questionnaires. Next, the worker begins locate activity on delinquent cases. Given the protocol of only phoning noncustodial parents in nonpaying delinquent cases that lack an identified employer, the administrator is comfortable with workers attempting to reach 42 percent of noncustodial parents and achieving contact in 14 percent of the cases. He attributes the lack of additional contact to the mobile nature of the child support population, the high rate of phone disconnections, and the absence of working telephone numbers.

Massachusetts also sees the greatest benefit of early intervention in the identification of problems with wage withholding and the rapid initiation of enforcement actions. As the data reveal, early intervention cases in Massachusetts move to driver's license suspension more rapidly than those processed conventionally. Line staff and administrators, on the other hand, tend to downplay the value of a phone call with noncustodial parents. Although the telephone exchange sometimes answers questions or dispels misconceptions that noncustodial parents have (*e.g.*, "What do you mean I owe money if she's getting welfare!"), they question whether outreach of this type makes much of a difference and have chosen not to focus on building a relationship. Indeed, cases in Massachusetts were treated by the early intervention worker for an average of only 30 days before they were sent to an enforcement worker for additional action or released from further scrutiny if payment was current.

Wisconsin child support personnel contend that telephone contact is infeasible with Milwaukee's highly mobile and financial distressed clientele. When clients have trouble paying their bills, telephones are the "first to go." As a result, workers find telephone numbers to be wrong and contact unrealistic in most cases.

The early intervention worker in Colorado, on the other hand, was heavily committed to contact and the personalization of child support practice. This worker conducted telephone calls with 54 percent of targeted noncustodial parents that lasted an average of 21 minutes and held cases for 248 days, or eight months, before transferring them to an enforcement worker for routine monitoring or additional enforcement activity. Shorter or less intensive efforts struck her as inadequate.

You need time to develop a relationship. I reviewed the cases I got from A to Z. Many of my cases were older orders that were new to child support. So I checked their past history. If they were brand new child support cases, you needed 4 to 6 months for them to develop a track record and see a payment pattern. Once the enforcement remedies start happening, you contact them or they contact you and you can work with them. And then it takes a few more months to develop a habit of payment.

Unlike her counterparts in Texas and Massachusetts, the Colorado early intervention worker downplayed the enforcement opportunities that the intervention presented. In her view, since enforcement remedies are generated by the computer system on an automatic basis, the focus of the early intervention worker is to "work with noncustodial parents."

Child support personnel in Texas, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Wisconsin were not surprised that payment patterns were identical for cases in the early intervention and comparison groups at most sites (and better for the comparison group in Texas). Most have a low-income caseload and feel that economic factors are pretty decisive in explaining payment. For example, Oregon child support workers handle a caseload that is exclusively comprised of current or former recipients of public assistance and/or Medicaid. More than half (55%) of the Massachusetts cases in this project were current recipients of public assistance. Only 28 percent of noncustodial parents in Wisconsin's sample of new cases had a known employer when the case was referred for early intervention. As one worker put it, "You can establish a relationship, but if they don't have the money, they are not going to pay."

Other workers were more skeptical about the whole enterprise of outreach and relationship building. According to these workers, money comes from wage withholding and automated remedies and there is consequently little need for communication.

If they are going to pay, they are going to pay. If they are not, they don't.  
A phone call is not going to make a difference.

Indeed, the higher incidence of wage withholding orders among cases in the comparison group in Texas is believed to explain that group's consistently stronger payment patterns.

Even though early intervention was not associated with payment gains at their sites, child support personnel at every site saw some value in the intervention. According to a Texas administrator, the process has tightened agency efficiencies.

We strongly believe in the EIM concept. It has made us sit down and evaluate our current processes and increase our up front efficiency measures. It has made us look closely at the way we monitor our wage withholding orders once the after court order entry process has been completed. We now set up automated monitoring tickles two days out from order entry to ensure all wage withholding orders have been issued. This new automated tracking process helps us ensure that 100 percent of the cases with employers have a wage withholding order issued on them. From a customer service standpoint, the EIM process has helped us deliver child support dollars to our custodial parent customers in a more efficient and timely manner. And getting money to families is what it is all about.

Another perceived benefit is improved customer service. Across all the sites, staff feels that early intervention shows custodial parents that the agency is trying hard to collect child support, while employers see the agency catch its errors. Everyone also feels that noncustodial parents get a more favorable image of the agency. According to some workers, user satisfaction and improved attitudes among noncustodial parents ultimately will translate into more voluntary payment of child support. Many workers echoed the view of one Oregon respondent who observed that “it is good customer service even if it doesn’t have a financial impact.”

The early intervention group in Colorado stood alone in exhibiting significantly stronger payment patterns. As previously noted, the worker in Colorado aimed to build a relationship with noncustodial parents and persuade them to increase their payments. Compared with the other project sites, she made contact with the largest proportion of noncustodial parents, conducted the lengthiest telephone calls, and held cases for the longest amount of time.

Other demographic, economic, and agency factors, however, may help to explain the Colorado patterns. Colorado had treatment and comparison group cases that were comprised of many previously married parents (46%) who may have been more responsive to early intervention overtures than the never-married parents at the other sites. Mesa County, Colorado, also had the lowest unemployment rate among the sites. For example, it was 6.6 percent in February 2005, as compared with 9.0 and 9.8 percent in Suffolk and Milwaukee counties, respectively. It is also undoubtedly relevant that Mesa County, Colorado, has only 5,000 open child support cases, which is only a fraction of the caseload at the project sites in Massachusetts (12.5%), Texas (5.5%), and Wisconsin (3.5%). Indeed, individual enforcement workers in Milwaukee carry caseloads that range from 5,623 to 6,874 cases. It may well be the case that workers in smaller agencies are better able to personalize service because they are less overwhelmed than their counterparts in big agencies. Additional research with larger samples and agencies of varying size is needed to control for the effects of agency size, staffing arrangements, and relevant client characteristics

The post-project status of early intervention at the sites has taken different turns since the conclusion of the project. In Massachusetts, the number of early intervention workers in the region has expanded from one to three, one for each enforcement team. All three continue to review all new and modified court orders with the objective of doing a “quick

work up.” This consists of spotting payment problems, and initiating driver’s license suspension before passing the case along to a case manager in their team.

In Texas, the specialized early intervention team was dissolved, but its function has been perpetuated in other ways. First, a private vendor was retained to follow up with employers for all new cases with a wage withholding order to ensure that the order is received and properly implemented. Second, the automated child support system has been programmed so that all enforcement workers in the agency get a daily listing of noncustodial parents to telephone in new order cases that lack an identified employer. Everything is date stamped so managers can detect whether required follow-up calls have been made.

Oregon continues to use early intervention in all establishment cases but leaves it up to the discretion of the worker in enforcement cases. Since Oregon workers retain their establishment caseload, many are inclined to “pick up the phone” when payments stop and make contact. On the other hand, child support workers in Lane County have average caseloads of 900 making extensive personalization unfeasible.

Wisconsin credits the early intervention project with a greater emphasis on mailing materials to noncustodial parents and encouraging the use of review and adjustment procedures among those who can not pay. Although staff does not feel that personalization is practical on an individual level among enforcement workers with caseloads of approximately 6,000 cases, there is interest in using case sorting techniques to identify groups of cases that require various treatments. The agency’s next area of experimentation is likely to deal with case stratification.

Instead of having a specialized early intervention worker deal with cases with new orders in Colorado, all enforcement workers are now doing more “personalized interventions.” The agency’s newer focus is to build rapport with noncustodial parents and avoid default orders at the establishment phase. The early intervention worker favors this shift in agency emphasis.

I’ve moved early intervention into the very beginning of the process. And maybe it is a better place. We give them their first impression of child support and the agency. It sets the precedent for how they will behave. I send them letters before they are served and I invite them to work with me. I try to get them to come to see me. If they don’t have a good

experience at establishment, they are not receptive later on. Having done both, I think the key is at establishment.

This appears to be the conclusion of program architects at other sites too. Following the conclusion of Making Connections, Improving Collections (MCIC), the Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit decided to adopt the approach as a “way of doing business” in all establishment cases. Although enforcement cases with existing orders were part of the project, it was decided to drop the protocol developed in the MCIC for contacting noncustodial parents and employers in these cases and return to previous case review criteria. Based on their analysis of monthly compliance ratios for parents who were contacted by call center personnel after they were delinquent for 90 days, the evaluators of the Nebraska project conclude that payment benefits only accrue to those who are contacted right after order promulgation. As they put it, “To the question, ‘Can personal contact be delayed until an NCP is delinquent,’ the answer is ‘No’.”

Oregon workers also stress the importance of engaging noncustodial parents at the “earliest stages,” and favor the use of early intervention techniques in establishment cases. They find no evidence to support the traditional view that early contact with noncustodial parents leads them to hide and evade service. On the contrary, they believe that parents who participate and become more involved in generating their orders will feel more accountable. They also believe that direct contact yields better income information and that cases consequently obtain a child support order at a much faster pace.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Early intervention has clearly not achieved all the goals hoped for by project architects. Only one site in this study and only one or two other OCSE-funded projects exhibited improvements in payment performance that were statistically significant, and they tended to be modest and occur for only some sub-groups (*e.g.*, brand new orders, TANF cases, those with actual worker-client contact). Most of the differences between treatment and control groups to date have not been statistically significant or what would be expected on the basis of chance alone. At the project site in Texas, all statistically significant differences in payment favored the comparison group, which had higher order levels and wage withholding orders. More to the point, the sites that have perhaps exhibited the most substantial improvements in payment (Nebraska and Colorado) have

certain caseload and agency characteristics that may make them more receptive to early intervention treatments. For example, Nebraska's treatment and control groups were evenly divided between IV-D and non-IV-D cases and the treatment group was restricted to only those cases where telephone contact was made by specialized call center workers. In Colorado, nearly half of the cases in the treatment and comparison groups generated in Mesa County's small agency of approximately 5,000 open cases were previously married.

Nevertheless, the results from Nebraska and Colorado suggest that payment patterns may be better for cases where noncustodial parents are actually reached by telephone, especially if contact is achieved soon after the order is promulgated. The Tennessee finding showing significantly better payment patterns for public assistance cases suggests that early intervention might elicit some payment from those who would otherwise pay nothing. Results from projects in Tennessee, Iowa, and Oregon suggest that when early intervention is used at the order establishment phase, it results in orders being generated orders more quickly than is normally the case, and that rates of default, nonappearance, and objection to orders are lower.

Other benefits to early intervention in other OCSE funded projects include documented and perceived patterns of customer satisfaction, high levels of knowledge about the child support system, and an improved image of the agency. At some sites in the current study, enforcement remedies such as contempt proceedings and driver's license suspensions were initiated sooner than would otherwise be the cases in non-paying cases.

Although there is ambivalence about the value of large-scale efforts to telephone noncustodial parents on a routine basis, there is strong interest in monitoring cases more closely at earlier stages of the child support process and taking steps immediately if payment is missed. As administrators and line staff attempt to utilize proactive strategies, they will need a variety of approaches and tools to ensure that their efforts are effective.

- **Realistic Expectations:** Payment benefits were extremely modest, even at the site with the most intense, proactive interventions. It would be wise to temper expectations about early intervention and its potential impact on payment. Other possible benefits to early intervention are improved customer service, agency

image, client understandings and agency efficiencies at the front end of case processing.

- **Case Selection:** To better target the efforts of early intervention workers, agencies need reliable ways of grouping their cases and identifying those that might benefit from proactive approaches. The Nebraska and Tennessee projects identified some objective client characteristics that were useful predictors of payment compliance. These matrixes and case sorting techniques need to be refined and made accessible to workers so that limited resources are wisely spent on higher-risk clients likely to respond to the motivation and support provided by early intervention.
- **Automation:** To effectively monitor payment behavior, child support workers need better automated prompts to let them know when payments are missed. They need flags to remind them (and their supervisors) to make relevant calls or send notices. As one administrator observed, “We need more automated processes to support early intervention. We need to have automatic flags showing if payments are consistent or missed.” Automated prompts or ticklers on the child support automated system are key ways to ensure that some matters receive priority and are actually acted upon. One example is the automated, daily report that Texas generates showing required calls or actions in cases with new orders that lack a verified employer.
- **Agency Practices and Legal Tools:** Effective monitoring and proactive outreach also require the routine collection and update of telephone numbers for noncustodial parents. Although agencies appear to be doing a better job of collecting telephone information than they did a few years ago, staff members at all project sites were frustrated by the lack of working telephone numbers for noncustodial parents. Given the highly mobile nature of the child support caseload, special efforts need to be taken to obtain and update home, work, and cell phone numbers for noncustodial parents. Staff recommends that during every telephone or in-person contact, all child support personnel routinely inquire about, record, and review telephone numbers for parents. Agencies might also consider collecting secondary contact information such as the number of a noncustodial parent’s mother or aunt. Nebraska evaluators speculate that phone information



may be collected but is not consistently entered on the child support system. Evaluators who studied Tennessee's stratification and early intervention project recommended that child support workers obtain legal authority to subpoena cell phone numbers in a batch fashion, so that they can more effectively contact targeted parents.

- **Resources:** Many workers support the use of newer front-end techniques but struggle to meet the increasing demands of the job with growing caseloads. They know good practice and want to do a good job, but are overwhelmed by the amount of work they have on the hundreds, or even thousands, of cases they juggle. High caseloads limit the amount of personal contact that child support workers can make. Rates of telephone attempts and contacts were lowest at the largest sites, suggesting that staff may be particularly overwhelmed in big agencies and less able to provide personalized treatments. Some sites used specialized workers; others assigned early intervention duties to all staff. Nebraska's specialized call center workers made the greatest number of call attempts (including evening and weekend hours) and achieved the highest rates of contact. Agencies should be realistic about the capabilities of general versus specialized staff to use various outreach techniques and the amount of effort that telephone contact requires.
  
- **Defining the Intervention and Staff Training:** To the extent there were any measurable payment benefits, they occurred at the site that used more intense relationship-building calls over a longer period of time. Brief, perfunctory calls to apprise a parent that he was non-compliant did little to generate any measure of compliance. If intensive front-end approaches are to be used, workers need to be trained on how to build rapport with noncustodial parents and connect with them. The approach entails a basic change in agency culture and worker behavior. None of the sites in this study conducted specific training with staff on the objectives of early intervention, effective listening techniques, identifying barriers to payment, and making referrals. Worker training was a core feature of the programs in Iowa and Tennessee. Future program architects should consult these sites for their approaches and materials.

- **Future Research:** It remains to be seen whether a more wholehearted use of the many “soft-glove” practices that are associated with the process have the potential to yield more promising outcomes with respect to payments and arrears balances. Future studies need to be large and include randomly generated treatment and comparison groups that permit the analysis of sub-groups and control for the many characteristics of cases and clients that are associated with payment. It would also help if future studies employed consistent measures of payment performance that track with those utilized by child support agencies, such as the percentage of the obligation due that is actually paid.

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## A Appendix A

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# Early Intervention

Center for POLICY RESEARCH

Site: ☐ Lane County, Oregon ☐ Mesa County, Colorado ☐ Suffolk County, Massachusetts  
☐ Milwaukee County, Wisconsin ☐ Tarrant County, Texas

Worker ID Number:

Case ID Number:

NCP ID Number:

NCP name:

NCP social security number (if easily available):

NCP telephone number(s): home: work: cell:  
☐ No number available at Project entry

Date assigned to Early Intervention: Month Day Year

Interstate status: ☐ Intrastate ☐ Interstate, initiating ☐ Interstate, responding ☐ Direct/Interstate wage assign

TANF status: ☐ Current TANF ☐ Former TANF ☐ Never TANF

Order status: ☐ New order, child support only ☐ New order, paternity and child support ☐ Medicaid only ☐ Existing order, new IV-D application  
☐ Foster care ☐ Medical support only  
☐ Modification ☐ Paternity and medical support only

Order establishment date: Month Day Year

Order effective date: Month Day Year

Did the NCP attend the court or administrative hearing where the child support order was established? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Did the CP attend the court or administrative hearing where the child support order was established? ☐ No ☐ Yes

When the case arrived at Early Intervention, was there a known employer? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Source of income information: ☐ NCP Affidavit ☐ New Hire ☐ Employment verification letter  
☐ CP report ☐ Tax return ☐ Imputed  
☐ Quarterly wage ☐ Pay stubs ☐ Other (describe)

Amount to be paid in current support: \$ ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly  
☐ Bi-weekly ☐ Other

Total arrears: \$ ☐ Check here if no arrears  
☐ Check here if no payment amount is specified

Amount to be paid toward arrears: \$ ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Not applicable  
☐ Bi-weekly ☐ Other

Payment performance checked [ ☐ No checks performed]

Payment source

Month	Day	Year	Payments	<input type="checkbox"/> full	<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign	<input type="checkbox"/> UI	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month	Day	Year	Payments	<input type="checkbox"/> full	<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign	<input type="checkbox"/> UI	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month	Day	Year	Payments	<input type="checkbox"/> full	<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign	<input type="checkbox"/> UI	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month	Day	Year	Payments	<input type="checkbox"/> full	<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign	<input type="checkbox"/> UI	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month	Day	Year	Payments	<input type="checkbox"/> full	<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign	<input type="checkbox"/> UI	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month	Day	Year	Payments	<input type="checkbox"/> full	<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign	<input type="checkbox"/> UI	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

## Massachusetts only

Was case referred to DV Specialist?

☐ No  
☐ Yes on / /

## Oregon Only

Proposed order amended? ☐ No ☐ Yes / /

Admin hearing request? ☐ No ☐ Yes / /

Court hearing requested? ☐ No ☐ Yes / /

## NCP Early Intervention Actions

### Sent brochure or letter #1

Date:        /        /

Content:

- ☐ General CSE information  
☐ Nonpayment notice/enforcement notice  
☐ Other

Delivery status:

- ☐ Not delivered  
☐ Yes, delivered  
☐ Yes, returned as undeliverable  
☐ Sent, do not know if it was delivered

### Sent brochure or letter #2

Date:        /        /

Content:

- ☐ General CSE information  
☐ Nonpayment notice/enforcement notice  
☐ Other

Delivery status:

- ☐ Not delivered  
☐ Yes, delivered  
☐ Yes, returned as undeliverable  
☐ Sent, do not know if it was delivered

### General phone call #1

Number of attempts:        or

- ☐ No phone number  
☐ Call not needed  
☐ Could not reach  
☐ Contacted

Spoke with NCP on:        /        /

Length of call:        minutes

### General phone call #2

Number of attempts:        or

- ☐ No phone number  
☐ Call not needed  
☐ Could not reach  
☐ Contacted

Spoke with NCP on:        /        /

Length of call:        minutes

Topics discussed in either call:

- ☐ Explained he owes child support/CSE in general  
☐ Employment issues  
☐ AV situation  
☐ Proof of wages  
☐ Set meeting  
☐ Meeting reminder  
☐ Special expenses  
☐ Medical insurance  
☐ Arrears  
☐ Nonpayment/Enforcement  
☐ Other (describe)

### Non-compliance call # 1

Number of attempts:

Spoke with NCP on:        /        /

- ☐ No phone number  
☐ Call not needed  
☐ Could not reach  
☐ Contacted

### Non-compliance call # 2

Number of attempts:

Spoke with NCP on:        /        /

- ☐ No phone number  
☐ Call not needed  
☐ Could not reach  
☐ Contacted

Topics discussed in either call:

- ☐ Payment reminder  
☐ Payment plan  
☐ AV situation  
☐ Order modification  
☐ Employment issues  
☐ Nonpayment  
☐ Nonpayment/Enforcement  
☐ Other (describe)

### Meeting # 1 with NCP

- ☐ Not needed  
☐ Attempted, NCP did not show  
☐ Meeting held

Meeting initiated by:

- ☐ Agency  
☐ NCP  
☐ Other

Meeting held on:        /        /

Length of meeting:        minutes

### Meeting # 2 with NCP

- ☐ Not needed  
☐ Attempted, NCP did not show  
☐ Meeting held

Meeting initiated by:

- ☐ Agency  
☐ NCP  
☐ Other

Meeting held on:        /        /

Length of meeting:        minutes

Topics discussed in any meeting:

- ☐ CSE in general  
☐ Employment issues  
☐ Proof of wages  
☐ AV situation  
☐ Order established  
☐ Order modification  
☐ Arrears/debt/interest  
☐ Sent for genetic test  
☐ Set for court  
☐ Special expenses  
☐ Medical insurance  
☐ Arrears  
☐ Nonpayment/enforcement  
☐ Other (describe)

### Referrals provided to NCP

- ☐ None  
☐ Workforce center or other job services on        /        /  
☐ AV services on        /        /  
☐ Fatherhood Program on        /        /  
☐ Other (describe        ) on        /        /

### Other responses to NCP

- ☐ None  
☐ Told to go to court or to get an attorney  
☐ Told that AV and child support are separate issues  
☐ Told to modify his child support order  
☐ Other (describe        )

### Contempt actions against NCP

Was contempt action initiated? →

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes, on        /        /

Was contempt hearing held? →

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes, on        /        /

Nature of contempt action:

- ☐ Contempt without probation  
☐ Contempt with probation  
☐ Jail time  
☐ Other

## NCP Early Intervention Actions Continued

### Enforcement actions

Driver's license suspension initiated?

☐ No

☐ Yes, on / /

Case set for court hearing?

☐ No

☐ Yes, on / /

Other actions?

☐ No

☐ Yes, describe:

Date of action / /

### As part of the Early Intervention Project was there ever negotiation of...

Debt ☐ No ☐ Yes From \$ to \$

A good faith or partial payment ☐ No ☐ Yes Amount \$

Retroactive support ☐ No ☐ Yes From \$ to \$

Fees ☐ No ☐ Yes From \$ to \$

Interest rate ☐ No ☐ Yes From % to %

## CP Early Intervention Actions

### Sent brochure/letter # 1

☐ No

☐ Yes, delivered

☐ Yes, returned as undeliverable

☐ Sent, do not know if it was delivered

### Sent brochure/letter # 2

☐ No

☐ Yes, delivered

☐ Yes, returned as undeliverable

☐ Sent, do not know if it was delivered

Did letter request NCP contact info?

☐ No

☐ Yes

Did letter request NCP contact info?

☐ No

☐ Yes

If requested, did you receive NCP contact information?

☐ No

☐ Yes

If requested, did you receive NCP contact information?

☐ No

☐ Yes

### Phone call #1:

Number of attempts:

☐ No phone number

☐ Call not needed

☐ Could not reach

☐ Contacted

Spoke with CP on / /

Length of call: minutes

### Phone call #2:

Number of attempts:

☐ No phone number

☐ Call not needed

☐ Could not reach

☐ Contacted

Spoke with CP on / /

Length of call: minutes

Topics discussed in any call:

☐ CSE in general

☐ AV situation

☐ Collect NCP contact info

☐ NCP income information

☐ DV assessment/referral

☐ Special expenses

☐ Medical insurance

☐ Arrears

☐ Other (describe)

### Meeting # 1 with CP

☐ Not needed

☐ Attempted, CP did not show

☐ Meeting held

Meeting initiated by:

☐ Agency

☐ CP

☐ Other

Meeting held on / /

Length of meeting: minutes

### Meeting # 2 with CP

☐ Not needed

☐ Attempted, CP did not show

☐ Meeting held

Meeting initiated by:

☐ Agency

☐ CP

☐ Other ☐

Meeting held on / /

Length of meeting: minutes

Topics discussed in any meeting:

☐ CSE in general

☐ AV situation

☐ Collect NCP contact info

☐ NCP income information

☐ DV assessment/referral

☐ Special expenses

☐ Medical insurance

☐ Arrears

☐ Other (describe)



## Employer Actions

### Phone call #1:

Number of attempts:

- ☐ No phone number  
☐ Not applicable, paying  
☐ Not applicable, no known employer  
☐ Could not reach

Spoke with employer on        /        /

Length of call:        minutes

### Phone call #2:

Number of attempts:

- ☐ No phone number  
☐ Not applicable, paying  
☐ Not applicable, no known employer  
☐ Could not reach

Spoke with employer on        /        /

Length of call:        minutes

Topics discussed in any call:

- ☐ Verified employment  
☐ Insurance  
☐ Initiated wage assign  
☐ Explained wage assign  
☐ Reminder to remit  
☐ Levels exceed CCPA  
☐ Other (describe)

## Other Actions

Were the following done during the time the case was open at Early Intervention?

- FIDM match        ☐ No ☐ Yes  
State wage check        ☐ No ☐ Yes  
Prison data match        ☐ No ☐ Yes  
Order modified        ☐ No ☐ Yes

## Case Closure

Date case was closed at Early Intervention:    Month        Day        Year

During the time the case was open at Early Intervention did the following happen?

- You were able to talk with the NCP by telephone or in-person? ☐ No ☐ Yes  
You were able to confirm that the NCP is unemployed? ☐ No ☐ Yes  
You learned that the NCP is working for cash or "under the table"? ☐ No ☐ Yes  
You learned that the NCP found a job or began working? ☐ No ☐ Yes  
You were able to confirm that the NCP is disabled or unable to work? ☐ No ☐ Yes  
You put a wage withholding order in place? ☐ No ☐ Yes

You learned that the wage withholding order exceeds CCPA? ☐ No ☐ Yes

The NCP told you that he/she does not plan to pay child support? ☐ No ☐ Yes

On the date the case closed at Early Intervention, was there a known employer? ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Don't know

What happened to the case when it **closed** at Early Intervention?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set for routine monitoring and enforcement as needed | <input type="checkbox"/> Agency closed the case. Reason: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set for enforcement action due to noncompliance      | <input type="checkbox"/> NCP incarcerated                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set for court action (contempt)                      | <input type="checkbox"/> CP noncompliance                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set for additional locate due to noncontact          | <input type="checkbox"/> NCP on SSI or SSD               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set for order modification                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                           |

Oregon only: Stop code entered? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Case Notes and Comments:

## Appendix B

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# Early Intervention

Experimental Group

Child Support Data Collection

Center for POLICY RESEARCH

**A**

Site: ☐ Lane County, Oregon ☐ Mesa County, Colorado ☐ Suffolk County, Massachusetts  
☐ Milwaukee County, Wisconsin ☐ Tarrant County, Texas

Case ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_ NCP ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

NCP and CP marital status: ☐ Never married ☐ Married ☐ Can't determine

Number of obligees on the case: \_\_\_\_\_

NCP name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date assigned to early intervention \_\_\_\_\_

Amount to be paid in current support: \$ ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly  
☐ Bi-weekly ☐ Other

Total arrears: \$ ☐ Check here if no arrears  
☐ Check here if no payment amount is specified

Amount to be paid toward arrears: \$ ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Not applicable  
☐ Bi-weekly ☐ Other

## Payment Data on Sampled Case

**B**

### Payments in the 12 month time period following entry into the project

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

	Current support due	Current support paid	Total payments (current and toward arrears)
Month 1:	\$	\$	\$
Month 2:	\$	\$	\$
Month 3:	\$	\$	\$
Month 4:	\$	\$	\$
Month 5:	\$	\$	\$
Month 6:	\$	\$	\$
Month 7:	\$	\$	\$
Month 8:	\$	\$	\$
Month 9:	\$	\$	\$
Month 10:	\$	\$	\$
Month 11:	\$	\$	\$
Month 12:	\$	\$	\$

### Summary of current support payments in the first 12 months after project entry

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Total due: \$ Total paid: \$ Arrears balance at end of year: \$

### Summary of current support payments in months 13-24 months after project entry

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Total due: \$ Total paid: \$ Arrears balance at end of year: \$

### Summary of current support payments in months 25-36 months after project entry

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Total due: \$ Total paid: \$ Arrears balance at end of year: \$

C

## Enforcement Actions on Sample Case After Project Entry

	Any evidence of this <b>in the first 12 months</b> after project entry?	Any evidence of this <b>at any time</b> after project entry?
Wage withholding initiated?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Unemployment Insurance intercept?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Credit bureau reporting?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
DLS action?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info <input type="checkbox"/> Already suspended	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info <input type="checkbox"/> Already suspended
Bank or property lien or attachment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Tax refund offset?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
25% acceleration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Contempt action?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info Contempt Outcome <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing held Date: __/__/__ <input type="checkbox"/> Continued Contempt <input type="checkbox"/> Contempt with probation <input type="checkbox"/> Jailed <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot determine	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info Contempt Outcome <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing held Date: __/__/__ <input type="checkbox"/> Continued Contempt <input type="checkbox"/> Contempt with probation <input type="checkbox"/> Jailed <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot determine

### Status of sample case at data collection

- ☐ Active enforcement case due to nonpayment  
☐ Routine monitoring by enforcement, NCP paying  
☐ Case closed, Reason:   
     ☐ CP requested closure    ☐ Long-term incarceration    ☐ Child emancipated, no arrears  
     ☐ Long-term non-locate    ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

D

## Summary and Subsequent Action at Data Collection

**Total cases in the system with this NCP:**

**Total arrears on these cases: \$**

**Total number of these cases that were set by default:**

**At data collection was there a known employer?** ☐ No ☐ Yes

**At data collection was a wage assignment in place?** ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Cannot determine

**Following order establishment/modification, was there a (subsequent) modification request filed?**

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes

**If yes, status of request:**

- ☐ Pending  
☐ Denied: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
☐ Modification granted: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

### Locate status at data collection

- ☐ NCP located  
☐ NCP not located  
☐ Verified employer name  
☐ Verified NCP home address

E

## Additional Information About NCP

**NCP Date of birth:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**Criminal Status**

Any evidence of incarceration?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Cannot determine
- ☐ Check here if Department of Corrections database was not checked

Did the NCP ever show verified employment?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Cannot determine

# Early Intervention

## Control Group

Center for POLICY RESEARCH

**A**

Site:	<input type="checkbox"/> Mesa County, Colorado	<input type="checkbox"/> Suffolk County, Massachusetts
	<input type="checkbox"/> Milwaukee County, Wisconsin	<input type="checkbox"/> Tarrant County, Texas
<del>Worker ID number:</del>		
Case ID Number:	NCP ID Number:	
NCP and CP marital status: <input type="checkbox"/> Never married <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Can't determine		
Number of obligees on the case: _____		
NCP name: _____		NCP social security number (if easily available): _____
NCP telephone number(s):	home: _____	work: _____ cell: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No number available in file		
<del>Date assigned to early intervention</del>		
Interstate status: <input type="checkbox"/> Intrastate <input type="checkbox"/> Interstate, initiating <input type="checkbox"/> Interstate, responding <input type="checkbox"/> Direct/Interstate wage assign		
TANF status: <input type="checkbox"/> Current TANF <input type="checkbox"/> Former TANF <input type="checkbox"/> Never TANF		
Order status:	<input type="checkbox"/> New order, child support only	<input type="checkbox"/> New order, paternity and child support
	<input type="checkbox"/> Medicaid only	<input type="checkbox"/> Existing order, new IV-D application
	<input type="checkbox"/> Foster care	<input type="checkbox"/> Medical support only
	<input type="checkbox"/> Modification	<input type="checkbox"/> Paternity and medical support only
Order/last modification establishment date:	Month _____	Day _____ Year _____
Order/last modification effective date:	Month _____	Day _____ Year _____
Did the NCP attend the court or administrative hearing where the child support order/last modification was established?		
<input type="checkbox"/> No (order set by default)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (order set by stipulation of court order)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Cannot determine		
Did the CP attend the court or administrative hearing where the child support order was established? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
When the order was established, was there a known employer? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
Source of income information:	<input type="checkbox"/> NCP Affidavit	<input type="checkbox"/> New Hire
	<input type="checkbox"/> CP report	<input type="checkbox"/> Tax return
	<input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly wage	<input type="checkbox"/> Pay stubs
	<input type="checkbox"/> Employment verification letter	<input type="checkbox"/> Imputed
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe)	
Amount to be paid in current support:	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
		<input type="checkbox"/> Bi-weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Total arrears:	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Check here if no arrears
		<input type="checkbox"/> Check here if no payment amount is specified
Amount to be paid toward arrears:	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
		<input type="checkbox"/> Bi-weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<del>Payment performance checked [ <input type="checkbox"/> No checks performed ]</del>		
<del>Payment source</del>		
Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	Payments <input type="checkbox"/> full <input type="checkbox"/> partial <input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign <input type="checkbox"/> UI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	Payments <input type="checkbox"/> full <input type="checkbox"/> partial <input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign <input type="checkbox"/> UI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	Payments <input type="checkbox"/> full <input type="checkbox"/> partial <input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign <input type="checkbox"/> UI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	Payments <input type="checkbox"/> full <input type="checkbox"/> partial <input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign <input type="checkbox"/> UI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	Payments <input type="checkbox"/> full <input type="checkbox"/> partial <input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign <input type="checkbox"/> UI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	Payments <input type="checkbox"/> full <input type="checkbox"/> partial <input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> wage assign <input type="checkbox"/> UI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<b>Massachusetts only</b>		
Was case referred to DV Specialist?		
<input type="checkbox"/> No		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes on _____ / _____ / _____		

Case ID Number:

NCP ID Number:

### Payment Data on Sampled Case

**B**

#### Payments in the 12 months following order/modification became effective

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

	Current support due	Current support paid	Total payments (current and toward arrears)
Month 1:	\$	\$	\$
Month 2:	\$	\$	\$
Month 3:	\$	\$	\$
Month 4:	\$	\$	\$
Month 5:	\$	\$	\$
Month 6:	\$	\$	\$
Month 7:	\$	\$	\$
Month 8:	\$	\$	\$
Month 9:	\$	\$	\$
Month 10:	\$	\$	\$
Month 11:	\$	\$	\$
Month 12:	\$	\$	\$

#### Summary of current support payments in first 12 months after the date the order/modification became effective

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Total due: \$ Total paid: \$ Arrears balance at end of year: \$

#### Summary of current support payments in first 13-14 months after the date the order/modification became effective

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Total due: \$ Total paid: \$ Arrears balance at end of year: \$

#### Summary of current support payments in first 25-36 months after the date the order/modification became effective

Time period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ thru \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Total due: \$ Total paid: \$ Arrears balance at end of year: \$

### Enforcement Actions on Sample Case Since Order Establishment or Modification

**C**

	Any evidence of this in the first 12 months after the order/modification became effective?	Any evidence of this at any time after the order/modification became effective?
NCP contacted by telephone?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
NCP contacted by letter?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Employer contacted by telephone?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Employer contacted by letter?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Wage withholding initiated?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Unemployment Insurance intercept?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Credit bureau reporting?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
DLS action?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info <input type="checkbox"/> Already suspended	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info <input type="checkbox"/> Already suspended
Bank or property lien or attachment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Tax refund offset?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
Passport denial?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info <input type="checkbox"/> Already suspended	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info <input type="checkbox"/> Already suspended
25% acceleration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info

Contempt action?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No info
	Contempt Outcome	Contempt Outcome
	<input type="checkbox"/> Hearing held   Date: ____/____/____	<input type="checkbox"/> Hearing held   Date: ____/____/____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Continued Contempt	<input type="checkbox"/> Continued Contempt
	<input type="checkbox"/> Contempt with probation	<input type="checkbox"/> Contempt with probation
	<input type="checkbox"/> Jailed	<input type="checkbox"/> Jailed
	<input type="checkbox"/> Cannot determine	<input type="checkbox"/> Cannot determine

**Status of sample case at data collection**

- ☐ Active enforcement case due to nonpayment  
☐ Routine monitoring by enforcement, NCP paying  
☐ Case closed, Reason:

- ☐ CP requested closure   ☐ Long-term incarceration   ☐ Child emancipated, no arrears  
☐ Long-term non-locate   ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**D**

**Summary and Subsequent Action**

**Total cases in the system with this NCP:**

**Total arrears on these cases: \$**

**Total number of these cases that were set by default:**

**At data collection was there a known employer?**   ☐ No   ☐ Yes

**At data collection was a wage assignment in place?**   ☐ No   ☐ Yes

**Following order establishment/modification, was there a (subsequent) modification request filed?**

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes

**If yes, status of request:**

- ☐ Pending  
☐ Denied: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
☐ Modification granted: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**E**

**Locate status at data collection**

- ☐ NCP located  
☐ NCP not located  
☐ Verified employer name  
☐ Verified NCP home address

**Additional Information About NCP**

**NCP Date of birth:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**Criminal Status**

Any evidence of incarceration?

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes  
☐ Cannot determine  
☐ Check here if Department of Corrections database was not checked

Did the NCP ever show verified employment?

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes  
☐ Cannot determine