

## **Intervention by Specialty Courts Can Lead to Decreased Time in Foster Care, Study Shows**

*(Continued)*

The shorter time in foster care also translated into improved school performance, an indicator of better emotional health, according to the study, which was released in June in *Evaluation Review*. “The shortened time in foster care seen in this study can be attributed to the efficiency of unified family courts, which translates into savings for the court system and benefits to children seen through improved educational outcomes,” according to Dr. Sloan.

The study also examined the impact of drug treatment courts on the length of time in foster care and the type of placement a child receives after foster care. The study found that the presence of adult, family, and juvenile drug treatment courts in a county did not affect the length of time a child spent in foster care, but it did have an impact on the possibility that a child would be reunited with a parent or primary caregiver. The presence of an adult drug treatment court in a county reduced the probability of reunification; whereas, family and juvenile drug treatment courts in the county increased the probability of reunification.

The study looked in depth at the school performance of children in third grade through eighth grade. Children spending time in foster care during the school year performed less well on standardized reading and math scores than children not placed in foster care during the school year. School performance was also negatively affected during the school years before and after a child was placed in foster care.

The University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) provides technical assistance and guidance to jurisdictions considering the establishment of a unified family court. Professor Barbara Babb, CFCC's director, is nationally and internationally recognized as a leading expert on unified family courts and their therapeutic, ecological, and service-based approach. She comments: “This study reaffirms the power of the unified family court model to improve the lives of families and children and the health of the community. It also demonstrates that this model contributes significantly to efficiency, which is critical in this time of shrinking court budgets.”