



## FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

### Court Reminder Project

September 2008

#### **Purpose of the study:**

Over the years, Juvenile Court has called juveniles/parents scheduled on the next day's arraignment calendars to remind them of their court date. These calendars included delinquency matters as well as petty misdemeanor and CHIPS issues of truancy and runaway cases. During lean economic times, the question becomes; does using personnel to call to remind litigants of their appearances make economic sense? In fact, at different times, this service has been cancelled when staffing has been limited. This study seeks to measure the effectiveness of the Juvenile Court arraignment calendar reminder calling for increasing the rates of appearance at arraignment hearings.

#### **Research Design:**

##### ***April 1, 2008 – April 15, 2008:***

Each afternoon - generally sometime between 2:00 and 4:30 - volunteers from Juvenile Probation attempted to call **all** juveniles scheduled to appear on the next day's delinquency, petty misdemeanor, and CHIPS arraignment calendars. They documented their call attempts on the calendars as follows:

Reached	{	RP =	reached - spoke with a live person
		RM =	reached - left message on voice mail/answering machine
Not	{	≠R =	not reached (phone rang, but no answer/no voice mail)
Reached	{	B =	bad phone number (disconnected, not in service, "no one by that name", etc.)
		N =	no number available in MNCIS – unable to call

As a check to the data being entered on the calendars, volunteers tallied the totals for each code each day and entered them into a spreadsheet. The calendars, with the call attempt results written on them, and a copy of the spreadsheet were sent by Juvenile Court to District Court Research on a regular basis (approximately weekly).

***April 16, 2008 – April 30, 2008:***

All calling was suspended.

***May 1, 2008 – June 30, 2008:***

Each afternoon - generally sometime between 2:00 and 4:30 - volunteers from Juvenile Probation attempted to call approximately one-half of the juveniles scheduled to appear on the next day's delinquency, petty misdemeanor, and CHIPS Arraignment calendars. Calls were randomized as follows: If a MNCIS (the court information system) case number ended in an **ODD** number a call attempt was made. Calls were **not** attempted for Case Numbers ending in an **EVEN** number.

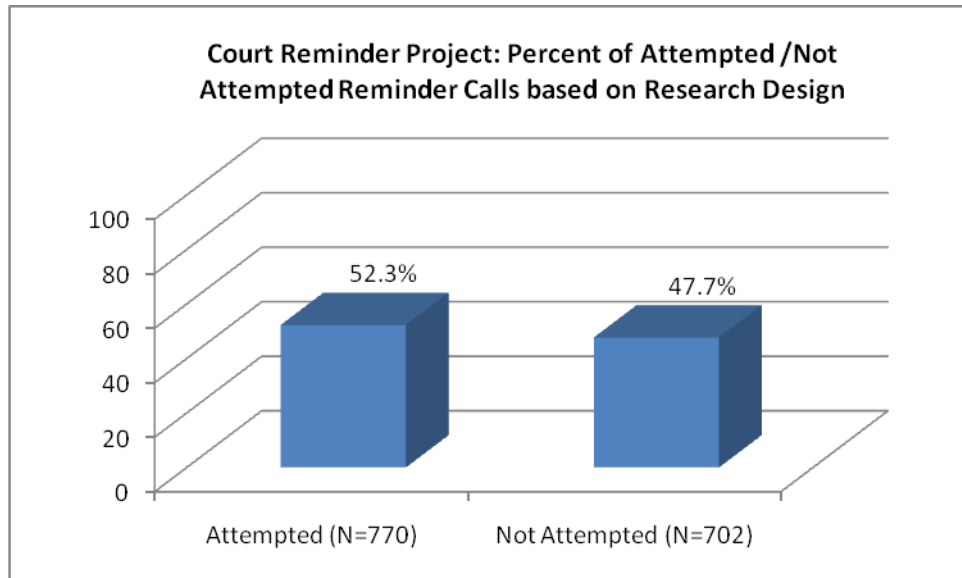
If a juvenile was scheduled to appear on more than one case, the first case number appearing on the calendar was used to determine if a call attempt would be made. If the last digit of the Case Number appearing first on the calendar was odd, a call attempt was made; if it was even, no call attempt was made. All phone calls were attempted only once.

Once all call attempts were documented, the Research Division looked up each case individually to determine if the juvenile had in fact made his or her appearance. Most cases were looked up using MNCIS, while a few necessitated a manual look up using the paper files stored at Juvenile Court. For the cases where a juvenile did not show up, a note was taken regarding if a bench warrant was issued due to failure to appear or if there was a date reset and summons issued.

There were 1,472 cases that were used in the analysis of this study. Calls were attempted for about 52% (770) of these scheduled arraignments, and the remaining 48% (702) of the arraignment appearances were the 'control' group of hearings where no call attempt was made. Of the 770 calls that were supposed to be attempted according to the research design, 52% (403) could not be attempted or reached because there was no phone number in MNCIS. Of those with phone numbers listed in the court information system (367), 52% were reached. The following tables show the breakdown of call reminder attempts and how many were successfully reached. Clearly, District Court should take every opportunity to collect and enter phone numbers for children appearing on our delinquency calendars.

**Court Reminder Project: Research Design Reminder Calls**

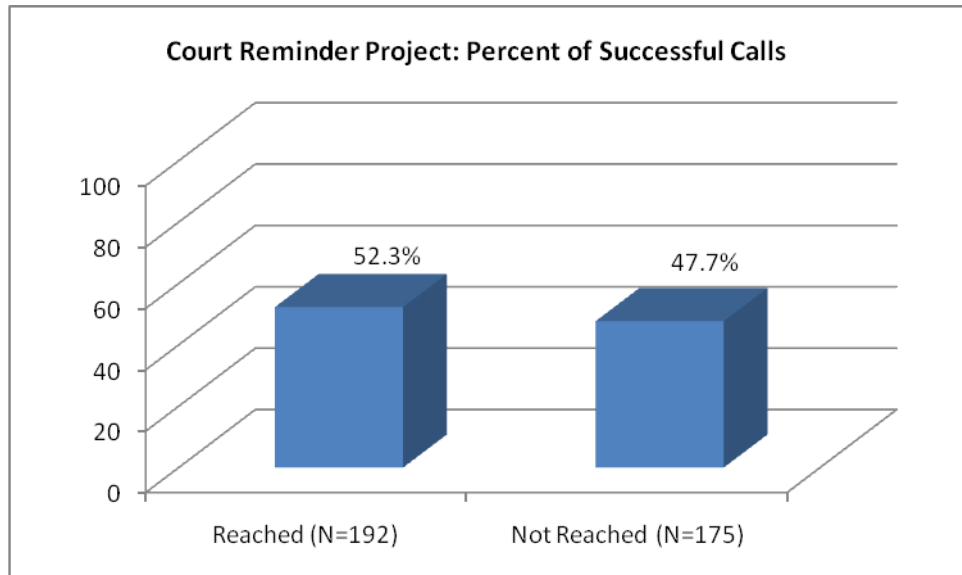
Research Design	Number of Cases	Percent
Should attempt to be called	770	52.3%
Should not attempt to be called	702	47.7%
Total	1,472	100.0%



After removing appearances for which no phone number was listed in the court information system (403 of the 770), the following table and graph depict the percent that the callers were able to reach.

**Court Reminder Project:  
Number and Percent of People Reached for Reminder Call**

Of Call Attempts:	Frequency	Percent
Reached	192	52.3%
Not Reached	175	47.7%
Total	367	100.0%



### Research Question #1: Do reminder calls increase the rate of appearance at arraignment?

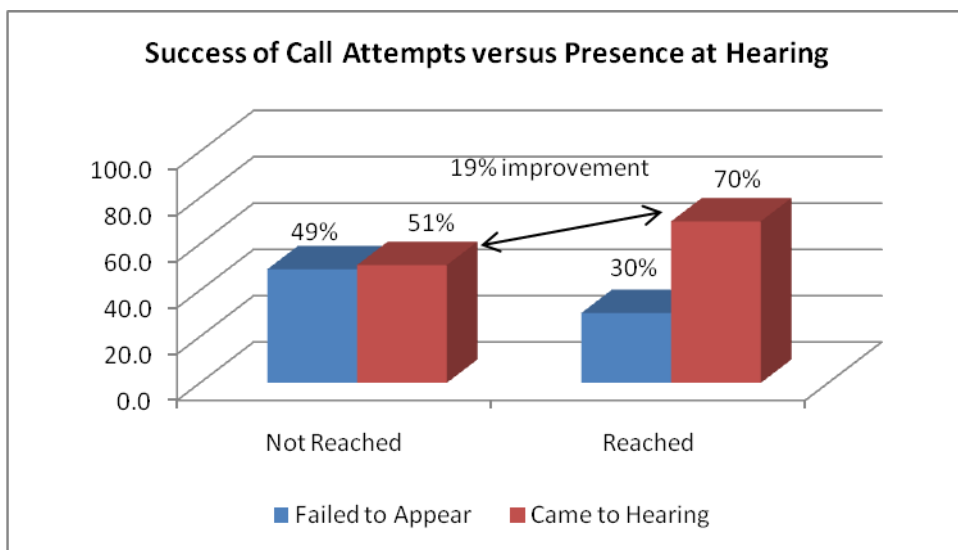
The original hypothesis was that if the effort was made to call and remind individuals of their upcoming hearing that it would increase the likelihood of their appearance.

To determine whether this hypothesis was correct, appearance rates were compared based on whether or not the home was called and reached (either in person or by leaving a message). The results show a highly significant correlation between a juvenile's home receiving a reminder call and making their appearance the next day. In other words, juvenile defendants are much more likely to show up for their hearing if they are given a reminder call the day before. In fact, we can improve the appearance rate to nearly 70% with reminder calls. Without reminder calls, the appearance rate is about 51%<sup>1</sup>. The results are displayed below.

**Court Reminder Project:  
Call Attempts versus Juveniles Present at Hearing\***

Of Call Attempts		Juvenile Present at Hearing		
		No	Yes	Total
Not Reached	Count	86	89	175
	Row %	49.1%	<b>50.9%</b>	100.0%
Reached	Count	58	134	192
	Row %	30.2%	<b>69.8%</b>	100.0%
Total	Count	144	223	367
	Row %	39.2%	60.8%	100.0%

*\* Significant at  $p < .0001$  level (highly significant)*

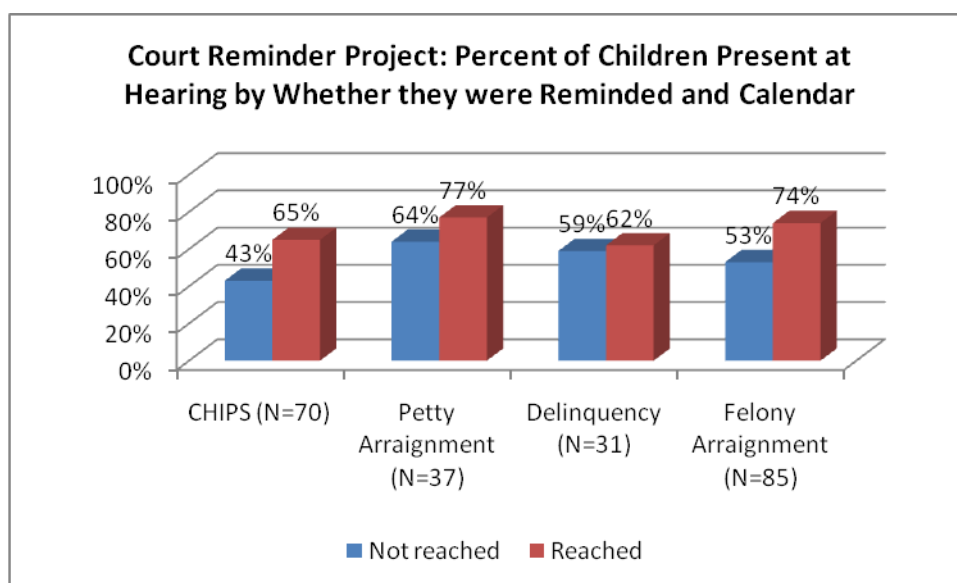


<sup>1</sup> This appearance rate can go as high as 60% when all 1,472 cases are reviewed.

Even if we include the 403 appearances that had no phone number listed with the 'not reached' group, we still improve the appearance rate by 13%.

**Research Question #2: Do reminder calls make a difference in appearance rates regardless of the calendar?**

The results from the previous table have been broken down here by calendar type to look for differences in appearance rates. The graph below shows that each of the calendars showed improvement over the 50/50 rate of appearance we saw for cases that had no reminder calls. The CHIPS and Felony Arraignment calendars do show statistically significant improvement in juveniles appearing for their hearings. Although the other two calendars also show improvement, the appearance rates were not significantly different for those who were reached and those who were not reached. One caveat is needed, these two calendars (Petty Arraignment and Delinquency) had a fairly small number of cases and thus, these results may be due to insufficient cases.

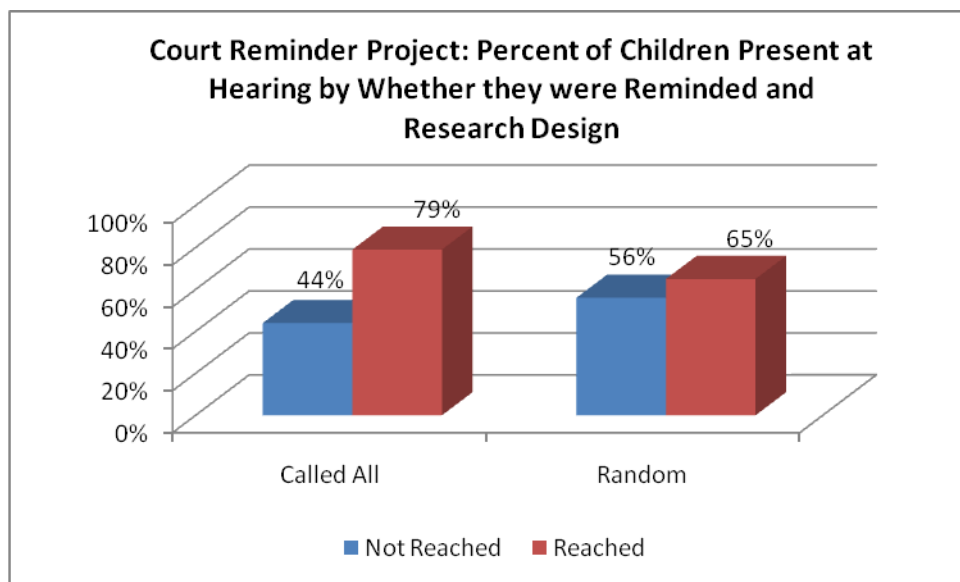


*\*Most significant are Felony Arraignment ( $p < .009$ ) and CHIPS cases ( $p < .009$ ),*

**Research Question #3: Does the method of calling make a difference?**

We used two different methods of calling families with upcoming appearances: 1) called everyone for a two week period and, 2) called only those families whose child happened to have an odd-numbered court case number. Numbers are randomly assigned by the computer system when a new case is entered so this process should also be random. Theoretically, there should be no difference, since a family would either get a call or not get a call but the data does show a difference in appearance rates based on the method of calling that was used. Hearings that were in the 'call everyone' time period, had a higher appearance rate than those where only the odd numbered cases were called. There could be two reasons for this difference: a)

how the calls were implemented was different between the two systems (i.e., it might be more difficult to accurately implement a random design rather than a 'call everyone' design, and b) the time periods were different and perhaps there is a differential rate of appearance endemic to these different months. For whatever reason, we did find a different appearance rate based on our research design differences.



*\* Significant at  $p < .0001$  level (highly significant)*

## **SUMMARY**

In conclusion, results indicate that the reminder phone calls for upcoming court appearances significantly impact the number of children who appear for their hearings. By calling juveniles and their parents to remind them of upcoming arraignment hearings, we can increase the appearance rate by 20%.

### **The data suggest the following recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1:** Continue to call parties prior to court appearances since it will ultimately make for more productive hearings with critical parties present and this will contribute to less cancelled or rescheduled appearances.

**Recommendation 2:** If budget woes continue and the court needs to target only some calendars, the data would suggest that the Felony Arraignment and CHIPS calendars continue to be a priority.

**Recommendation 3:** The data also suggest that calling all people with appearances rather than some sort of random calling is more effective. Theoretically this has to do with proper implementation. It may be easier to call everyone rather than skipping some calls.

**Recommendation 4:** Most importantly, District Court staff should make extra efforts to ask for and record up-to-date phone numbers for litigants. In addition, more accurate numbers may allow District Court to explore electronic means of reminder calling in the future.