

NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report 2023

I. Introduction

A. About National Parents Organization

National Parents Organization (NPO) advocates for children's true best interests after parental separation or divorce. We are working to improve the lives of children and strengthen society by protecting every child's right to the love and care of both parents after separation or divorce. We seek better lives for children by reforming the norms of separated parenting. One crucial facet of our work is family court reform that establishes equal rights and responsibilities for fathers and mothers. More information about National Parents Organization can be found at [SharedParenting.org](https://www.SharedParenting.org).

B. Description of Project

The Ohio Revised Code requires each Ohio court of common pleas to adopt "standard parenting time guidelines" for dividing children's time between the parents when parents are living apart ([ORC 3109.51\(F\)\(2\)](#)). Courts are empowered to deviate from this guideline schedule based on a number of statutorily-specified factors. These guidelines serve as a baseline for establishing a parenting time schedule and, in most cases, are explicitly specified as a default schedule, to be imposed when parents cannot agree on a different schedule.

In 2018, NPO undertook the first-ever study of the standard parenting time guidelines of each of Ohio's 88 county courts of common pleas. In 2020, NPO published an updated report that detailed the changes since 2018, all of which were all improvements to a greater or lesser degree. This 2023 report updates the results of those previous studies, highlighting changes that some Ohio courts of common pleas have made to their guidelines since 2020.

NPO believes that the standard parenting time guidelines adopted by courts play a very significant role in determining the parenting practices of separated parents,¹ perhaps especially when parents come to the court without legal representation, which they frequently do in divorce and paternity cases. While parents can have reasonable confidence that courts will

¹ Research shows that default options significantly influence individuals' choices. See, for example, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, Penguin Books (2009).

approve most schedules that are mutually agreed to by the parents, the default schedules influence parental choices; furthermore, parental agreements are “made in the shadow” of these default schedules. NPO was motivated to undertake this series of studies because Ohio counties’ standard parenting time rules strongly influence the actual schedules parents follow and those parenting arrangements are instrumental in determining the well-being of children of divorced and separated parents.

It is important to emphasize that the Ohio Parenting Time Rule Project is not an evaluation of Ohio counties’ domestic relations courts’ actual patterns of awarding parenting time or the actual behavior of parents, which sometimes diverges from court orders. Courts do not compile records of the frequency with which any given parenting time schedule is ordered.² Accordingly, there is no feasible way to determine how frequently courts in any county order a default (or any other) parenting time schedule. ***NPO’s Ohio Parenting Time Rule Project is an evaluation of the default parenting time rules that Ohio county courts provide.***

C. Brief Summary of Results

In the three years since the last *NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report*, there has been some significant progress. Eleven Ohio counties have updated their local parenting time rules. All of these changes have been improvements, benefiting the families in these counties who are dealing with the difficulties of divorcing.

However, the overall picture remains both bleak and shocking. Even now, in 2023, the majority of Ohio county courts of common pleas have not updated their rules in light of the best scientific research on child well-being when parents are living separately. For reasons explained below, the NPO study focuses on “ordinary parenting time”, which we define as non-vacation, non-holiday time, and examines only the schedules that apply to “local” parenting time, for parents living in what the court considers close proximity. With respect to this ordinary parenting time, NPO has determined that:

- Forty-five of Ohio’s 88 counties have a parenting schedule that allows the children only two overnights and 60 hours or less with one of their parents in a two-week period. This means that the children are with their non-residential parent less than 20% of the ordinary parenting time. None of these counties’ schedules provide for the children to be with the non-residential parent overnight on a school night. (One other Ohio county provides a schedule only slightly enhanced from this outdated model, by adding one additional overnight with the non-residential parent in a two-week period. This still accords the children just 20% of ordinary parenting time with one of their parents.) The number of counties employing such outdated and harmful parenting schedules is down from 56 in 2020.

² This is a significant problem. NPO strongly recommends that Ohio courts handling child custody cases be required, by statute or Supreme Court rule, to maintain records of the division of parenting time, tracked by overnights or equivalent, for all cases of divorce involving minor children and for paternity cases, and to compile and publish these statistics annually, separating marital from non-marital cases and agreed judgments from court-imposed judgments.

- Eighteen Ohio counties provide default schedules that allow the children 4-5 overnights with the non-residential parent in a two-week period, and substantially more time with the non-residential parent, between 25% and 30% of the ordinary parenting time. In 2020, only 14 counties provided such schedules.
- As of June 2023, the number of Ohio counties that provide default schedules allowing the children equal, or nearly equal, time with each parent remains at seven, up one from 2020 as a result of recently enacted local rules by the Harrison County Court of Common Pleas.
- Seventeen Ohio counties provide multiple schedules for children of the same age groups with none identified as the default schedule. Eleven of these counties include as options one or more schedules that allow the children equal time with each parent.

II. Parenting Time and Child Well-being

Divorce or separation of parents is an [adverse childhood experience](#), which can, if not handled properly, contribute to long-term health and behavioral problems for children. There is a large and growing body of scientific evidence establishing that, when parents are living separately, the best strategy for minimizing the risk to children is to ensure that both parents are kept fully engaged in the children's lives, including being directly involved with the day-to-day child care responsibilities. (See the NPO website for citations and links to some of the most [recent, compelling research articles](#) on shared parenting. NPO has also made available, at no cost, videos from the most significant conference ever held on child-well-being and separated parenting. These videos of world-renowned researchers reporting on the most important contemporary research—research that clearly demonstrates the benefits of establishing presumptions of equal shared parenting³—are available at www.sharedparenting.net.)

What this research shows is that, while divorce is an adverse childhood experience, children of divorced parents who share physical custody to a very significant degree do not suffer long-term adverse effects. In fact, on all measures of child well-being, they score about as well as children of parents living together. And they score *much higher* than children raised in sole physical custody arrangements. *The adverse effects of divorce for child well-being are caused largely not by parental separation but by parental deprivation.*

This research confirms what common sense has always declared: *both* parents matter! We harm our children by placing one parent in a secondary, and marginalized, role.

With respect to the value of shared physical custody, two sorts of cases deserve special discussion. Those unfamiliar with the research often concede that shared physical custody is best in many cases; but they believe it is not appropriate for infants and toddlers, and they

³ Fabricius, William V. "[Equal Parenting Time: The Case for a Legal Presumption](#)," *The Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law*, ed. by James G. Dwyer, Oxford University Press, 2020 (DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190694395.013.22)

believe it is not appropriate when parents are in conflict, including simply about whether to engage in shared parenting.

- **Shared Physical Custody of Infants and Toddlers:** Recent research endorses the value even to infants and toddlers of spending significant time with each parent, including overnights.⁴ Infants, toddlers, and very young children perceive time differently than do older children and need more frequent times with each parent in order to develop a strong bond. This means that it is desirable for the parenting schedule to provide shorter and more frequent times with each parent. It does *not* mean that children should be in the care of one parent significantly less than the other.
- **Shared Physical Custody in Parental Conflict Cases:** Many who are unfamiliar with recent research acknowledge that shared physical custody is beneficial to children when parents are able to cooperate closely and co-parent in harmony, but believe it is inappropriate when parents are in conflict. Furthermore, failure to agree on shared physical custody is often taken as dispositive evidence that parents can't co-parent their children. Contemporary research undermines this view.⁵ In fact, even when parents are in (non-violent) high-conflict relationships, shared physical custody is beneficial to children.

III. Methodology and Limitations

A. Scope

NPO's review of Ohio counties' parenting time rules was restricted to what we call 'ordinary parenting time', which we define as non-vacation, non-holiday time. There are two reasons for this. First, including vacation and holiday time renders the analysis significantly more complex. But, much more importantly, the value of parenting time is not measured merely in hours or overnights. What is important in order for children to have a full parent/child relationship with both parents is for both parents to be engaged in the ordinary tasks of child rearing: providing meals, ensuring that homework is done, getting children ready for school, being involved in the children's routine activities. Holidays and vacations are, by definition, exceptions to the ordinary

⁴ See, for example, Warshak, R. "[Social Science and Parenting Plans for Young Children: A Consensus Report](#)," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(2014) No. 1, 46 – 67; and, Fabricius, William V. and Go Woon Suh, "[Should Infants and toddlers Have Frequent Overnight Parenting Time with Fathers? The Policy Debate and New Data](#)," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 23(2017) No. 1, 68 – 84.

⁵ See the meta-analyses, based on scores of studies, provided by Dr. Linda Nielsen in these two articles: Nielsen, Linda. "[Joint Versus Sole Physical Custody: Outcomes for Children Independent of Family Income of Parental Conflict](#)," *Journal of Child Custody* DOI: 10.1080/15379418.2017.1422414; and, Nielsen, Linda. "[Re-Examining the Research on Parental Conflict, Coparenting, and Custody Arrangements](#)," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 23(2017)2, 211-231. See also Dr. Nielsen's presentation at the 2017 *International Conference on Shared Parenting* available at www.sharedparenting.net/videos/dr-linda-neilsen/. These conclusions are further established by recent research reported in Vowels LM, Comolli CL, Bernardi L, Chacón-Mendoza D, Darwiche J (2023) "Systematic Review and Theoretical Comparison of Children's Outcomes in Post-separation Living Arrangements," *PLoS ONE* 18(6): e0288112, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288112>.

rhythms of family life. To the degree that a child's time with a parent is restricted to these times, the parent is not fully engaged in the child rearing activities. Accordingly, NPO focused this study on ordinary parenting time.

Because the feasibility of parents sharing equally in the physical custody of their children depends on the distance between the parents' households, this study is restricted to an examination of the county court's rules that apply for parents living in close proximity, which is determined differently by different counties.

B. Counties with Age-Specific Parenting Time Schedules

An increasing number of Ohio counties employ parenting time guidelines that are age-specific, offering different schedules for children of different ages, but many still do not. To compare the parenting time rules of counties with age-specific schedules with those counties with schedules that are not age-specific, NPO chose the age category that covered the broadest range of ages. In each case, we have indicated the age category that was used in evaluating the parenting time rule.

C. Gathering Data

NPO collected current local parenting time rules from each of Ohio's 88 counties. Often, these were available on the county court's website. For those counties that did not post their local rules on the Internet, NPO acquired copies from [the Ohio Supreme Court's page of local rules](#) or requested, and received, copies by email.

D. Data Validation

The data collected were verified by three NPO researchers, working independently, and reconciling any discrepancies in their analyses. After the data were verified internally, NPO shared the data with the Ohio Judicial Conference. At NPO's request, the Ohio Judicial Conference shared the data with all Ohio county courts that handle domestic relations cases. NPO requested that these courts review the data to ensure the accuracy of the data on which NPO's evaluation would be made. Five county courts responded to this request, in one case conveying a very recently enacted local parenting time rule. Prior to publication of the report, the Ohio Judicial Conference shared a pre-release version of the report for a final opportunity to make corrections. No responses were received to this invitation.

NPO is committed to ensuring the accuracy of the data on which its analysis and grading are based. Reports of errors or material changes in courts' local parenting time rules should be sent by email to the report's lead author, [Donald C. Hubin](#), PhD. The [online interactive map](#) associated with this report has been and will continue to be updated in a timely fashion as we learn of changes to courts parenting time schedules.

E. Criteria for Evaluation

Time and Overnights: The focus of NPO is on improving child well-being by promoting the true sharing of parental rights and responsibilities when parents live apart. Accordingly, the primary factors on which NPO's evaluation is based are the time and number of overnights that children were accorded with the non-residential parent in a two-week period. The period of two weeks was chosen because it provides an accurate, representative sample of the division of parenting time and overnights during ordinary parenting time.

Parental Equality - Language and Concepts: In addition, NPO seeks to promote parental equality. Accordingly, our evaluation takes into account whether the parenting time rule uses language that denigrates one parent's status with respect to the children. Except in unusual cases, parents do not *visit* with their children and language that describes a parent's time with a child as 'visitation' is offensive and demeaning. It encourages the mistaken perception that one parent is the *real* parent and the other has a second-class status as a parent. Our courts should know better than to characterize post-separation parenting in this way—and they should have learned this decades ago.

Nevertheless, 30 of Ohio's 88 counties' parenting time rules still contain significant references to one parent's time with the child as 'visitation'. We note, though, that since the 2020 Report, three Ohio counties—Harrison, Marion and Ottawa—that then referred to time in the care of the non-residential parent as 'visitation' have largely purged their rules of this anachronistic language.

More than a handful of county courts demonstrate that they have not really understood the research that led many states, including Ohio, to remove from their statutes talk of 'visitation' when discussing the time the child is in the care of a parent. Numerous local rules have statements such as:

- "Parenting time is a time for children to do things with the parent they do not reside with";
- "Companionship is a time for children to be with the non-residential parent"; or,
- "Parenting time is an opportunity for the nonresidential parent to spend time with and be involved in the activities of the children".

This avoids the use of 'visitation' language but does not engage in the conceptual change that the research supports. If one thinks the problem is only with the *word* 'visitation', it is easy to think of the change as a pointless nod to political correctness. In fact, the research is urging us to change the way we *think*—not simply the way we *talk*—about time children spend in the care of a parent.

Children have "parenting time" with *each* of their parents, not with only one. The contrast is not between *custody* and *parenting time* (understood as a euphemism for 'visitation'). The only contrast is between the parenting time of one parent and the parenting time of the other parent.

Whether or not these periods are equal in length, they should be recognized by the law as being equal in the nature of the relationship and the parenting taking place.

Age Sensitivity: Research confirms the commonsense judgment that age-sensitive parenting schedules are appropriate. Infants and toddlers need more frequent time with each parent in order to bond with the parent. As children get older, their relationship with each parent can sustain longer periods apart. In light of the research supporting age-sensitive parenting schedules, NPO considers it a positive factor when a county's parenting time rule is *appropriately* age sensitive.⁶

Forty-five of Ohio's 88 counties' standard parenting time schedules are age specific—providing different schedules for children of different ages—up three from 2020. The age categories vary widely among these 45 counties. Several of these schedules are *minimally* age sensitive, with very crude age categories.⁷ This is not the sort of age-sensitivity that is supported by research on child well-being. Furthermore, being appropriately age sensitive does not mean depriving young children of significant time with each of their parents. Doing so is not supported by research on outcomes for children; the research supports shorter gaps between the child being with each parent, not less time or less frequent time with one of the parents.

Parental Equality - Transportation: NPO believes that both parents have a responsibility to facilitate their children's opportunity to enjoy time with each parent. While it might be reasonable to have a parent provide all transportation for short, midweek parenting time in those cases where that parent does not exercise this time at his or her own home, it is inappropriate to impose on only one parent *all* of the responsibility for the exercise of parenting time.

Sixty of the counties' local rules specify that the transportation of the children as they move between their homes with each of their parents is to be shared equally (up from 57 in 2020). Eleven counties' rules specify that transportation is to be shared equally except for short evening periods, when the non-residential parent is responsible for picking the children up and returning them (the same as in 2020). Eight county rules do not explicitly specify which parent is

⁶ Again, see, for example, Warshak, R. "[Social Science and Parenting Plans for Young Children: A Consensus Report](#)," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(2014) No. 1, 46 – 67; and, Fabricius, William V. and Go Woon Suh, "[Should Infants and toddlers Have Frequent Overnight Parenting Time with Fathers? The Policy Debate and New Data](#)," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 23(2017) No. 1, 68 – 84.

⁷ For example: Franklin County (birth - 18 months, 18 months - 18 years); Hancock County (birth - 14 years, 14 years - 18 years); Harrison County (birth - 6 months, 6 months - 18 years); Highland County (birth - 1 year, 1 year - 18 years); Knox (birth - 2 years, 2 years - 18 years); Pickaway County (birth - 12 months, 12 months - 18 years); Shelby County (birth - 12 years, 13 years - 18 years); Washington County (birth - 2 months, 2 months - 1 year, 1 year - 18 years). Washington County is a special case. While its age categories are broad, its actual schedule is much more age-sensitive than those categories suggest. For children in daycare or school, up to seventh grade, the nonresidential parent's time can begin at the end of school/daycare, providing additional time; and for children in seventh grade or above, the midweek times with the nonresidential parent can be overnights. For those older children, the schedule will allow 6 overnights and 118 hours with the nonresidential parent in a two-week period. When there are multiple children subject to the same parenting time order, Wayne County determines the applicable schedule based on the age of the oldest child—a practice that might well be common in many Ohio courts but is explicit in the Wayne County rules.

responsible for transportation (down from 10 in 2020). Unfortunately, nine counties still have rules specifying that the non-residential parent is responsible for *all* of the transportation to allow the children to benefit from the care and companionship of each of the parents (down from 10 in 2020).⁸

Parental Guidance: The Supreme Court of Ohio has published a useful guide to help divorcing parents construct a parenting time schedule that will work for their family, [Planning for Parenting Time: Ohio's Guide for Parents Living Apart](#). While it is no substitute for enacting a good parenting time rule, NPO considers it a desirable feature of a county's rule to include a reference to or significant text from this pamphlet in order to assist parents in creating their own parenting schedule. NPO found ten county rules—one more than in 2020—that included references and/or links to or significant selections from this helpful pamphlet.

F. Counties with Multiple Schedules and No Default

Seventeen Ohio counties⁹ have parenting time rules with multiple schedules for children of the same ages, none of which is indicated as the default for children of a given age (up from eleven in 2020). NPO has declined to provide an overall grade for these county's parenting time rules. To understand why, one must recall the nature of NPO's Ohio Parenting Time Rules Project.

[As was indicated earlier](#), the Ohio Parenting Time Rules Project is *not* an evaluation of the parenting schedules that are actually ordered by courts. Ohio courts do not collect and publish aggregate information on *actual* parenting time orders. Because this project evaluates the *default* parenting time schedule and these sixteen counties do not have such a default schedule, a grade for these counties' local parenting time rules would be meaningless and potentially misleading.

In a number of counties with multiple schedules, the quality of the schedules varies widely—some providing equal or nearly equal parenting time and some providing only the old standard “every other weekend and one evening a week” model. As a guide to readers, NPO has, when possible, indicated a grade that each of the schedules in these fifteen counties would receive if it were a default schedule.¹⁰ While eleven of these multi-schedule counties include at least one equal parenting time schedule, six do not.¹¹

⁸ These counties are: Licking, Meigs, Montgomery, Morgan, Noble, Sandusky, Shelby, Washington, and Wyandot.

⁹ These counties (with the number of schedules they provide for children in the same age category) are Adams (2), Belmont (3), Fairfield (3), Fayette (2), Franklin (4), Greene (3), Highland (2), Knox (2), Mahoning (5), Marion (4), Miami (4), Portage (4), Sandusky (2), Stark (3), Summit (3), Van Wert (4), and Warren (2).

¹⁰ In several cases, it is impossible to assign such a grade. For example, Mahoning County's first option is a “make your own schedule” option. This unique approach to providing a parenting time rule—and especially the decision to list this option first—might well be a desirable strategy to encourage parents to reflect on what will work in their individual case. But, of course, it is impossible to evaluate this option on the time and overnight criteria that are the primary basis of NPO's evaluation.

¹¹ The counties that include at least one equal parenting schedule are: Adams, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Mahoning, Marion, Miami, Portage, Stark, Summit, and Van Wert. The multi-schedule counties that do not include an equal parenting time schedule, followed by the grades their optional schedules would receive, are: Belmont (D, C-), Fayette (D-, C+), Highland (D, C), Knox (C+, C+), and Warren (D, C+).

Offering multiple schedules in a county's local rules, at least when some provide for equal parenting time, is certainly an improvement over offering only one, very asymmetric parenting schedule. However, in light of the research on child well-being, NPO believes that the best approach would be for courts to strongly encourage equal shared parenting and not suggest that unequal and equal parenting schedules are on a par with respect to promoting children's well-being. To promote children's interests, courts should encourage equal parenting schedules and indicate that an equal parenting time schedule will be given preference over an unequal one, other things being equal.

Of course, the value of providing parents with multiple options for parenting schedules—even ones that include equal parenting time—is virtually erased if the court in question, as a matter of practice, defaults to a very unequal schedule when parents don't agree. There is some value in at least letting parents see options. But to provide good parenting time schedules as options but default to bad ones when the parents don't agree is to provide for many parents and their children an illusory option.

Among those counties offering multiple, optional schedules, Stark and Summit Counties are unique in offering an explicit "Transitional Parenting Time Schedule" option. These schedules (Stark's "[Schedule #4](#)" and Summit's "[Schedule E](#)") are designed to provide a transition, over a 12-week period, from a situation where a parent is exercising no parenting time to a standard parenting time schedule. NPO lauds Stark and Summit counties' decision to provide parents with a template for making this transition in a way that is sensitive to the needs of children.

B. Grades

Below are all Ohio counties listed by the grade NPO assigned to their local parenting time rule. Changes from the 2020 Report are **highlighted in blue** followed by the 2020 grade in parentheses. *All changes since 2020 are improvements!*

A	Ashtabula Carroll	Clermont	Holmes	Tuscarawas
A-	Harrison (D)	Jefferson		
B+	(none)			
B	(none)			
B-	Guernsey			
C+	Athens Cuyahoga	Lake Licking	Ottawa (D)	
C	(none)			

C-			
Butler Defiance (D) Erie Fulton (D)	Hamilton Henry (D) Logan	Preble ¹² Richland Scioto	Seneca Vinton Williams (D)
D+			
Pickaway			
D			
Allen Ashland Auglaize Brown Champaign Clark Clinton Columbiana Coshocton Crawford	Darke Delaware Gallia Geauga Hancock Hardin Huron Jackson Lawrence Lorain	Lucas Medina Mercer Monroe Montgomery Morrow Muskingum Noble Paulding Perry	Pike Putnam Ross Shelby Trumbull Union Washington Wayne Wood
D-			
Hocking Madison	Meigs Morgan	Wyandot	
F			
(none)			

¹² Due to a calculation error, Preble County’s grade in the 2020 Report was mistakenly reported as a ‘D’. This was corrected on the online map shortly after the publication of the 2020 Report when the error was discovered.

Counties with Multiple Schedules for the Same Age Group, No Default

Adams	Greene (D)	Miami	Van Wert
Belmont	Highland	Portage (D+)	Warren
Fairfield (C-) ¹³	Knox	Sandusky (D)	
Fayette	Mahoning	Stark	
Franklin	Marion (D)	Summit (D)	

Analysis of Counties with Multiple Schedules

Those counties offering parents multiple schedules for children of the same age range with no option indicated as the default vary significantly in the quality of the schedules they offer. Of the 17 counties with multiple schedules, 11 offer at least one schedule that allows the children equal time in the care of each of their parents. Of those 11 counties, six also have a standard “every other weekend and one evening a week schedule as an option, sometimes as the first listed option. But five counties that offer equal parenting time schedules as options have as their most unequal schedule option one that is at least either slightly or significantly enhanced from that standard schedule.

The six multiple-schedule counties that do not offer at least one equal parenting time schedule vary in the kinds of schedules they do offer. Three offer options that have at least five overnights with each parent in a two-week period.¹⁴ Two of these six counties offer options that allow the children at most four overnights with the lesser-time parent. And one, Highland County, offers two schedules one of the “every other weekend and one evening a week” type and one that adds only one overnight in a two-week period.

See [Appendix A](#) for details and grade of each of the parenting time schedules provided by those counties with multiple, optional schedules.

V. Longitudinal Analysis

Progress Since 2020: Court Rules

While the majority of Ohio county courts of common pleas are still providing families with outdated parenting schedules that modern science clearly indicates are not in children’s best interest, there has been notable progress since the *2020 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report*. Every county court of common pleas that revised its local parenting time rule *improved* that rule—some significantly. NPO congratulates all of these counties for better aligning their default parenting

¹³ Due to a calculation error, Fairfield County’s grade in the 2020 Report was mistakenly reported as a ‘D’. This was corrected on the online map shortly after the publication of the 2020 Report when the error was discovered.

¹⁴ Knox County, is unusual in that both of the two schedules it offers as options afford the children at least five overnights with each parent in a two-week period.

time schedules with the best scientific research concerning the well-being of children whose parents are living apart.

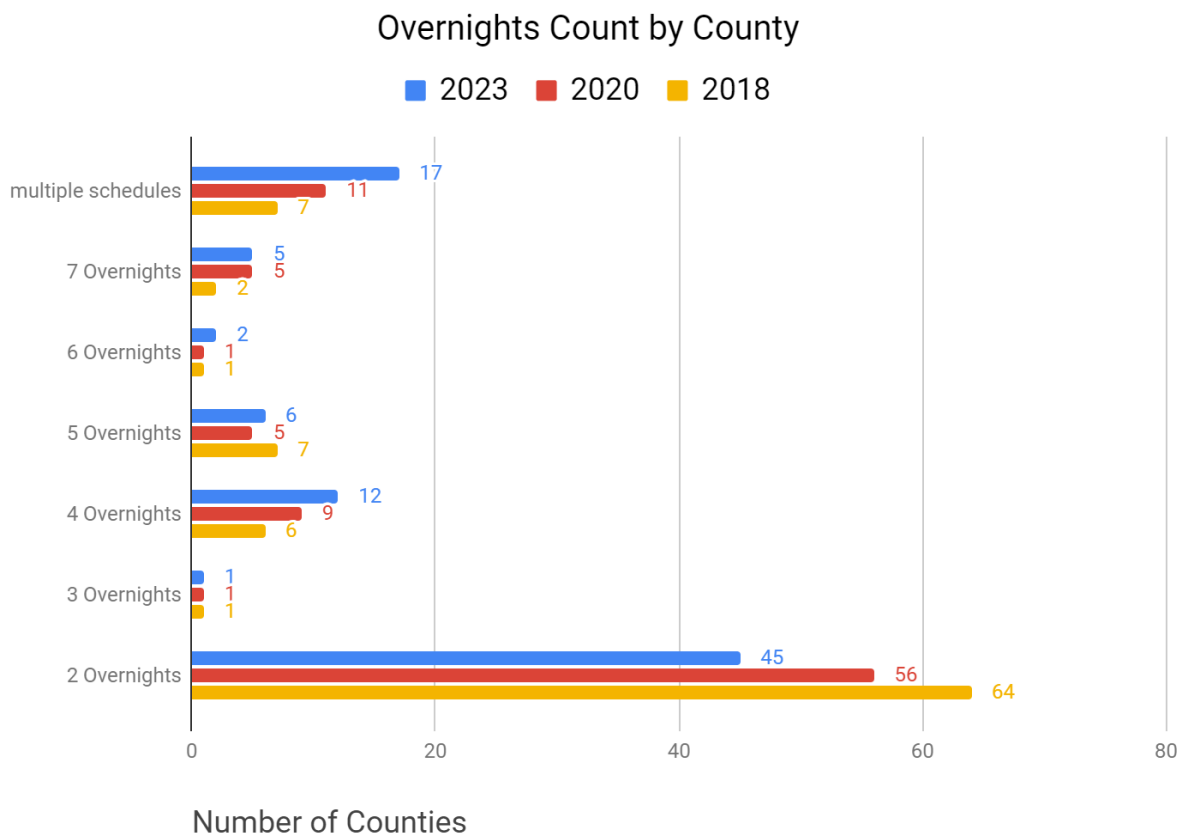
Fairfield, Greene, Marion, Portage, Sandusky, and Summit counties updated their local rules to offer parents multiple options, at least one of which afforded the children equal time in the care of each parent. Summit County's local rule is to be commended for including a presumption that parents should share time equally. These changes constitute improvements over the previous default schedules which had earned grades of 'D' or 'D+'. Of course, the value of offering multiple schedules is diminished if the court does not strongly encourage the parents, when possible, to select ones that provide substantially equal parenting time or if the court, in fact, defaults to very unequal schedules in the absence of parental agreement.

Five counties—Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Sandusky, and Williams—improved their local rules slightly by allowing children four overnights and between 86 and 96 hours with one of their parents in a two-week period. This is still far from what the best social science indicates is in children's best interest but still better than the old rules these counties used which provided children with only 2 overnights and significantly less time with one of their parents in that time period.

In 2023, the Harrison County Court of Common Pleas enacted a local parenting time rule that allows the children to be with the nonresidential parent for six nights and 134 hours in a two-week period provided that parent can get the children to their school, moving it from receiving a 'D' in NPO's 2020 report to an 'A-' in this report. (In the case where the nonresidential parent cannot get the children to school, Harrison County's rule reverts to a very slightly enhanced "every other weekend and one evening a week" schedule.)

While 21 counties now provide "slightly enhanced" or "significantly enhanced" parenting time schedules¹⁵—up from 16 in 2020—it is still the case that more than half (45) of Ohio's 88 counties have default parenting time schedules that fit the outdated "every other weekend and one evening a week" model, or are even worse. This affords the children practically no ordinary parenting time with one of their parents.

¹⁵ NPO classifies a schedule as "standard" if it affords children time with one of their parents every other weekend and one evening a week. "Slightly enhanced" schedules include at least one school night overnight, either a Sunday night or a mid-week overnight. "Significantly enhanced" schedules include multiple school overnights.



Progress Since 2020: Population Affected

Counting the number of counties imposing various default parenting time schedules and the number of counties that have updated and improved their schedules provides important information about how Ohio’s 88 county courts of common pleas address this issue. It tells us how many of them are adjusting their default schedules in light of the recent research on the well-being of children whose parents are living separately. It does not, however, provide a picture of how many Ohio families are subject to each of the different default parenting schedules. To address this question, NPO used the latest (July 1, 2021) [population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau](#).

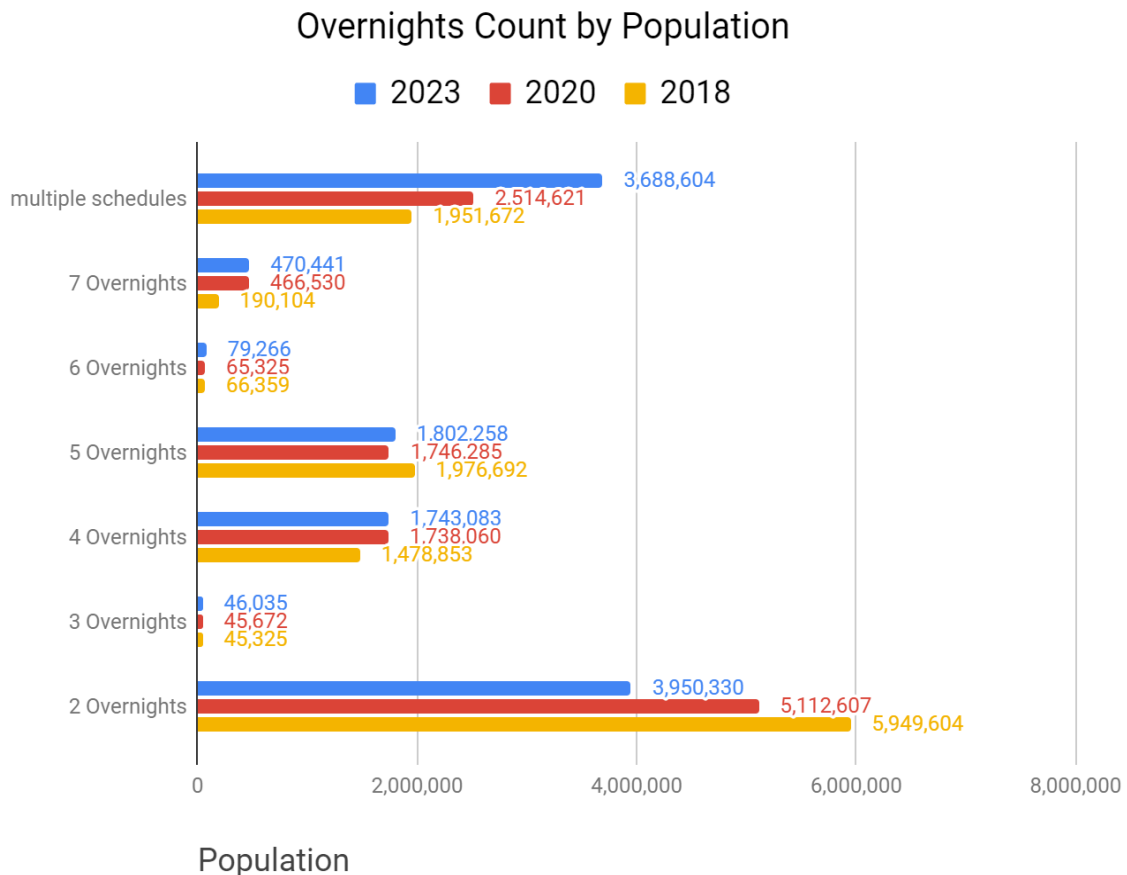
Of the approximately 11.8 million Ohio residents, just over 8 million live in counties with a single default parenting time schedule.¹⁶ Of this number, over 3.9 million are subject to a default parenting schedule that accords children only two overnights and 60 or fewer hours in a two-week period with one of their parents. This means that a third (33.05%) of Ohioans are, by

¹⁶ Precise number are as follows, based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2021 estimates: Ohio population, 11,780,017; Ohio population living in counties with a single default parenting time schedule, 8,311,192; population subject to default parenting time schedule of two overnights and less than 60 hours in a two week period, 3,964,807; population enjoying a presumptive parenting time schedule of equal parenting time and overnights, 470,411.

default, subject to a parenting time schedule that is outdated, contraindicated by scientific evidence, and unjustifiably denies them a full parent/child relationship. Children in these families are, by default, denied any significant amount of ordinary parenting time with one of their parents.

At the other end of the scale, only about 4.7% of Ohio families—about 549,707 people—are living in counties that presumptively afford the children an approximately equal number of overnights and amount of time with each of their parents.

However, it is gratifying to note that, since NPO published the 2020 report, there has been significant progress for many Ohioans. The number of Ohio citizens who are subject by default to the old “every other weekend and one evening a week” schedule *dropped by well over a million (1,162,277), a decline of more than one fourth!* Unfortunately, the number of Ohioans who enjoy the presumption of equal or almost equal parenting time has increased only slightly due merely to the increase in the population growth of those counties that established such a presumption in 2020 and the addition of Harrison County.



VI. Conclusions

In 2018 and 2020, National Parents Organization reported that most Ohio courts were failing our children. That is *still* true. They are doing so by not providing a default schedule—and most not even providing an optional schedule—that affords the children equal or almost equal time with each of their parents.

Ohio law directs courts to choose a parenting time schedule that will be in the best interest of the children (ORC 3109.051). Research on child well-being when parents live apart clearly establishes that, in the vast majority of cases, children do best when they enjoy at least 35% of their time and overnights with each parent. And, *the more closely parenting time approaches equality, the better children generally do.*¹⁷ If Ohio courts are truly aiming to promote children's best interest, they should be encouraging equal shared parenting by setting default parenting schedules that provide the children with substantially equal time with each parent. At a minimum, they should definitely *not* be providing outdated default schedules that sideline one parent and overburden the other.

In light of the best scientific research on child well-being, and given the role that default schedules play in determining actual parenting schedules, National Parents Organization concludes that the majority of Ohio courts still have a very long way to go in order to achieve the goal of promoting children's best interest. There has been notable progress since 2020 in several counties, most markedly in Harrison County. Unfortunately, it is still the case that more than two-thirds of Ohio courts have default parenting schedules that deprive the children of a full parent-child relationship with one parent. We now know that this approach to separated parenting is very seldom in the best interest of children.

NPO notes with satisfaction and optimism that ***every Ohio county court of common pleas that has revised its local parenting time rule has improved the rule***—almost always either to one that provides a presumption of equal parenting time or one that offers multiple schedules, at least one of which provides for equal parenting time.

If other Ohio courts would undertake a serious review of their parenting time rules in light of the best research on child well-being, we believe they too would update their rules to align with that research and modern parenting practices. For the sake of Ohio's children, we urge Ohio courts to do this!

VII. About the Authors

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¹⁷ See Fabricius, William (2023) "Attachment and Parenting Time for Children Under Three Years of Age," in *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology and the Law*, ed. By Allison Redlich and Jodi Quas, Oxford University Press.

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Appendix A: Analysis of Counties with Multiple Schedule Options

Below we present the schedules of those counties that provide multiple schedules for the same age groups of children with no indication that one is the default schedule, to be used in the case where parents do not agree. For each schedule, where possible, we indicate the characteristics of the schedule and what grade it would have received if it were a default schedule. This is helpful for determining the range of schedules that each county is presenting as options.

	NPO Grade	Guide	Visitation Language?	Age Specific?	Age Categories	Hours/ 2Weeks	Overnights/ 2Weeks	Transportation
Adams County								
2/2/3 Schedule	A	No	Yes	Yes	b-3y, 3y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Every Other Weekend	C-	No	Yes	Yes	b-3y, 3y-18y	70	3	Equally except mid-week
Belmont County								
Option 1	D	No	Yes	No	n/a	54	2	Shared equally
Option 2 (6y-12y)	C-	No	Yes	Yes	b-3m; 3m-3y; 3y-5y; 6y-12y;13y-18y	80	4	Shared equally
Option 3 (6y-12y)	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	b-3m; 3m-3y; 3y- 5y; 6y-12y;13y-18y	n/a	n/a	
Fairfield								
Option A	A	Yes	No	Yes	b-12m; 12m-18m; 18m-18y	168	7	Equally except mid-week
Option B	A	Yes	No	Yes	b-12m; 12m-18m; 18m-18y	168	7	Equally except mid-week
Option C	C-	Yes	No	Yes	b-12m; 12m-18m; 18m-18y	76	4	Equally except mid-week
Fayette County (Note: The schedule for the domestic relations court was unavailable so the juvenile court schedule was used.)								
Option One	D	No	Yes	No	n/a	56	2	Shared equally
Option Two	C-	No	Yes	No	n/a	93	5	Shared equally
Franklin County								
Plan A	A	No	No	Yes	b-18m; 18m-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Plan B	A	No	No	Yes	b-18m; 18m-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Plan C	C+	No	No	Yes	b-18m; 18m-18y	100	5	Equally except mid-week
Plan D	D	No	No	Yes	b-18m; 18m-18y	54	2	Equally except mid-week
Greene County								
Schedule A	D	No	No	No	n/a	54	2	Shared equally
Schedule B	C+	No	No	No	n/a	100	5	Shared equally
Schedule C	A	No	No	No	n/a	168	7	Shared equally

	NPO Grade	Guide	Visitation Language?	Age Specific?	Age Categories	Hours/2Weeks	Overnights/2Weeks	Transportation
Highland County								
Option One	D	No	Yes	Yes	b-1y; 1y-18y	54	2	Shared equally
Option Two	C-	No	Yes	Yes	b-1y; 1y-18y	78	3	Shared equally
Knox County								
Option One	C+	No	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-18y	93	5	Shared equally
Option Two	C+	No	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-18y	102	5	Shared equally
Mahoning County								
Option A	n/a	Yes	No	Yes	b-6m; 6m-1y; 1y-3y; 3y-18y	n/a	n/a	Shared equally
Option B	A	Yes	No	Yes	b-6m; 6m-1y; 1y-3y; 3y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Option C	C-	Yes	No	Yes	b-6m; 6m-1y; 1y-3y; 3y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Option D	C-	Yes	No	Yes	b-6m; 6m-1y; 1y-3y; 3y-18y	72	3	Shared equally
Marion County								
Option 1	D	Yes	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-5y; 5y-13y ; 13y-18y	52	2	Shared equally
Option 2	C-	Yes	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-5y; 5y-13y ; 13y-18y	92	4	Shared equally
Option 3	A	Yes	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-5y; 5y-13y ; 13y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Option 4	A	Yes	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-5y; 5y-13y ; 13y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Option 5	A	Yes	No	Yes	b-2y; 2y-5y; 5y-13y ; 13y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Miami County								
Option A	D	No	Minimal	No	n/a	54	2	Equally except mid-week
Option B	C+	No	Minimal	No	n/a	102	5	Equally except mid-week
Option C	A	No	Minimal	No	n/a	168	7	Shared Equally
Option D	A	No	Minimal	No	n/a	168	7	Shared Equally
Portage County								
Schedule 1	D	No	No	Yes	b-3m; 3m-12m; 12m-30m; 30m-18y	60	2	Shared equally
Schedule 2	C-	No	No	Yes	b-3m; 3m-12m; 12m-30m; 30m-18y	74	3	Shared equally
Schedule 3	A	No	No	Yes	b-3m; 3m-12m; 12m-30m; 30m-18y	168	7	Shared equally

	NPO Grade	Guide	Visitation Language?	Age Specific?	Age Categories	Hours/ 2Weeks	Overnights/ 2Weeks	Transportation
Sandusky County								
Standard Order	C-	No	Yes	Yes	0-12mo; 12-24mo; 24mo-18yr	96	4	Non-resident Parent Only
Alternative	D	No	Yes	Yes	0-12mo; 12-24mo; 24mo-18yr	60	2	Non-resident Parent Only
Stark County								
Schedule 1	A	No	Minimal	No	b-2y; 2y-13y ; 13y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Schedule 2	C-	No	Minimal	No	n/a	84	3	Shared equally
Schedule 3	C-	No	Minimal	No	n/a	68	3	Shared equally
Schedule 4	This is a transitional schedule - an "on ramp" for establishing a regular parenting schedule. See text for discussion.							
Summit County								
Schedule A	A	No	Minimal	Yes	b-12m; 12m-2y; 3y-13y ; 12y-18y	168	7	Shared equally
Schedule B	C-	No	Minimal	Yes	b-12m; 12m-2y; 3y-13y ; 12y-18y	82	3	Shared equally
Schedule C	C-	No	Minimal	Yes	b-12m; 12m-2y; 3y-13y ; 12y-18y	78	3	Shared equally
Schedule D	This is a schedule for long-distance cases; it was not evaluated as part of this project.							
Schedule E	This is a transitional schedule--an "on ramp" for establishing a regular parenting schedule. See text for discussion.							
Van Wert County								
Option A	A	Yes	Minimal	No	n/a	168	7	Shared equally
Option B	A	Yes	Minimal	No	n/a	168	7	Shared equally
Option C	B-	Yes	Minimal	No	n/a	120	5	Shared equally
Option D	D	Yes	Minimal	No	n/a	54	2	Shared equally
Warren County								
Basic I	D	No	No	Yes	b-6m; 6m-12y ; 13y-15y; 16y-18y	54	2	Shared equally
Basic II	C+	No	No	Yes	b-6m; 6m-12y ; 13y-15y; 16y-18y	94	5	Shared equally