

**Center for State Foster Care and Adoption Data**  
National Continuous Quality Improvement Seminars

# Measuring Permanency Outcomes

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**ChapinHall** at the University of Chicago  
Policy research that benefits children, families, and their communities

**APHSA**  
American Public Human Services Association



# Two-Part Web Seminar

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- Today
- December 1, 1:00-2:30 EST

Today's session:

- Review homework and learn pitfalls of certain measures of permanency.
- Introduce “best practices” in permanency measurement.
- Shift to measuring permanency for a period of performance improvement.

# Starting Points

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- **Analytic focus of seminar:**  
Permanency and duration for children placed in out-of-home care.
- **Not in focus, but an important dimension of permanency:** Rate of placement per thousand in the population of children.
  - ➔ *Jurisdictions with high placement rates may have shorter durations in out-of-home care and vice versa.*

# Two dimensions of permanency outcomes

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- Likelihood of return to a permanent family
  - ➔ *How likely is it that a child placed in out-of-home care in my jurisdiction will exit by returning home, discharge to a relative or adoption vs. aging out, running away or some other non-permanent exit?*
  
- Duration
  - ➔ *How much out-of-home care is used transitioning to one of these outcomes?*

# Two types of measurement

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- Diagnostic measures
  - ➔ *Good for measuring change unconstrained by a specific performance initiative.*
  
- Measures during a period of performance improvement (“CQI period”)
  - ➔ *Good for measuring change that is connected to implementation of specific strategies during a CQI period.*



In either case...

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*When measuring outcomes,  
what you see depends  
on how you look.*



# So let's review some fundamentals

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1. Know your data. Define your box.
2. Know your question. Write it down. Measurement starts with a question.
3. Know the population being used to measure. Make sure the population matches the question.
4. Use an entry cohort to answer general questions about characteristics or outcomes.
5. The Window: Reform can only influence that which has yet to happen.



# 1. Know Your Data

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- **Longitudinal File** A longitudinal file allows the study of populations over time. For example, in the foster care system, a longitudinal file tracks children from the point they enter into care and follows their changes over the course of time until they exit from the care.
- **Spell (episode, period of service)**. Spell records describe a period of interest and always have a start, stop and a variable indicating whether or not the period of service is still in progress. Spell records typically reflect a series of decisions about how to summarize events during the period.






# 1. Know Your Data, continued.

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- **Censor Date** The end date of a longitudinal file. The date through which information is available.
- **Censored Observation or Spell** An observation or spell that is still in progress as of the end date of file. Both the final duration and final outcome of process are unknown.



### 3. Know the population being used to measure.

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- When reading a table or chart in someone else's report, identify the population.
- Then, make sure you can formulate the question the data is answering. Then ask yourself, is it a meaningful question? Is it the question that the authors of the data intend to answer?

# Review populations

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- Point-in-time - only children in care
- Exit cohort - only children who left care
- Entry cohort - all children who entered

} These two approaches depend on whether the child is still in care.

- By definition, these are very **different** samples.



# Review homework

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- Questions 1 and 2

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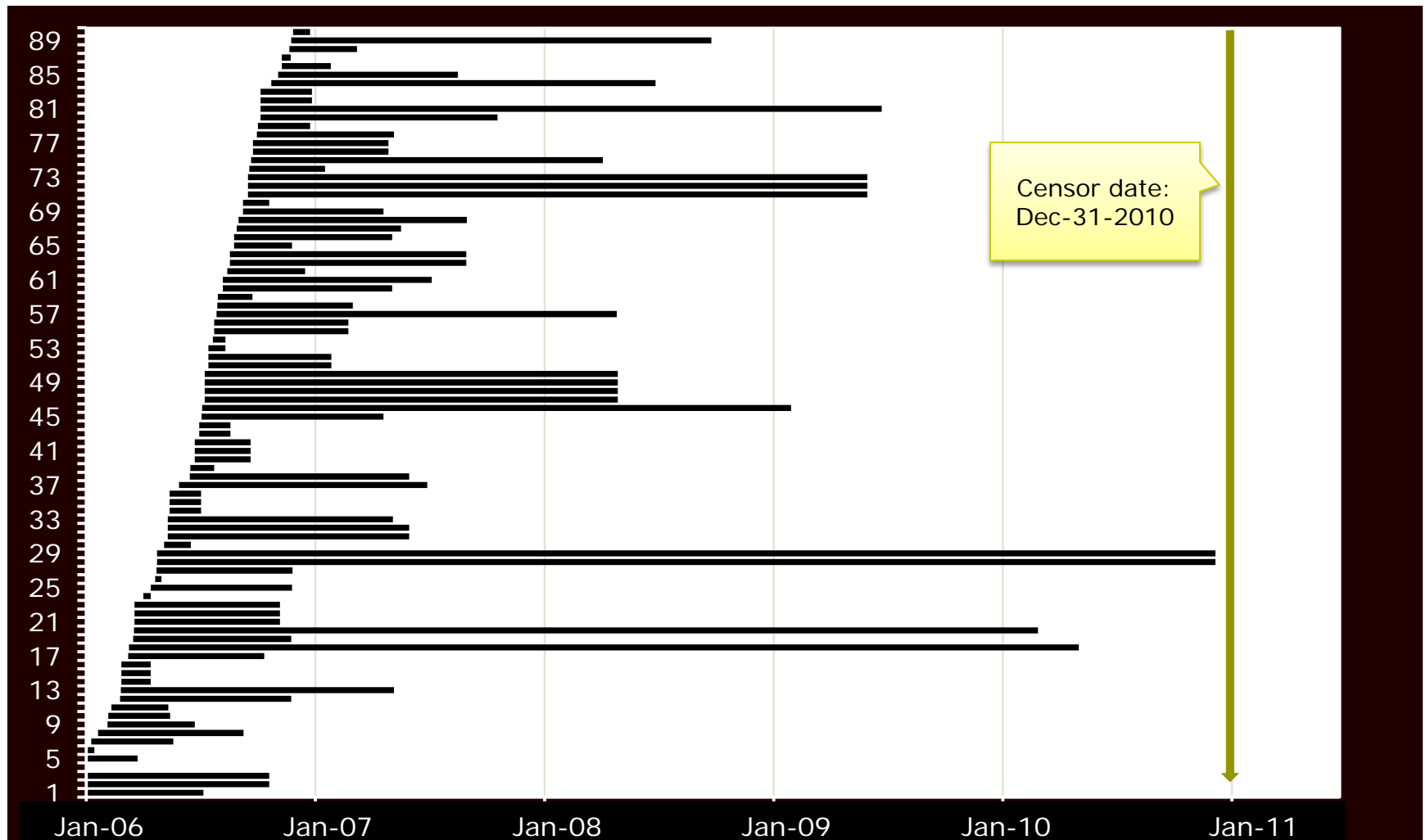
Table 1: Median Duration in Out-of-Home Care by Year of Entry, First Entries


Entry Year	Median Duration
2004	11.3
2005	9.0
2006	10.5
2007	10.5
2008	10.8
2009	10.1
2010	10.2

Table 2: Median Duration in Out-of-Home Care for Children Exiting Out-of-Home Care by Year of Exit

Discharge Year	Median Duration
2004	9.1
2005	8.8
2006	11.2
2007	11.1
2008	12.1
2009	12.6
2010	12.6

# Entry and Duration Patterns for All Children First Placed in 2006 Observed Through Dec. 31, 2010, Sample FCDA County



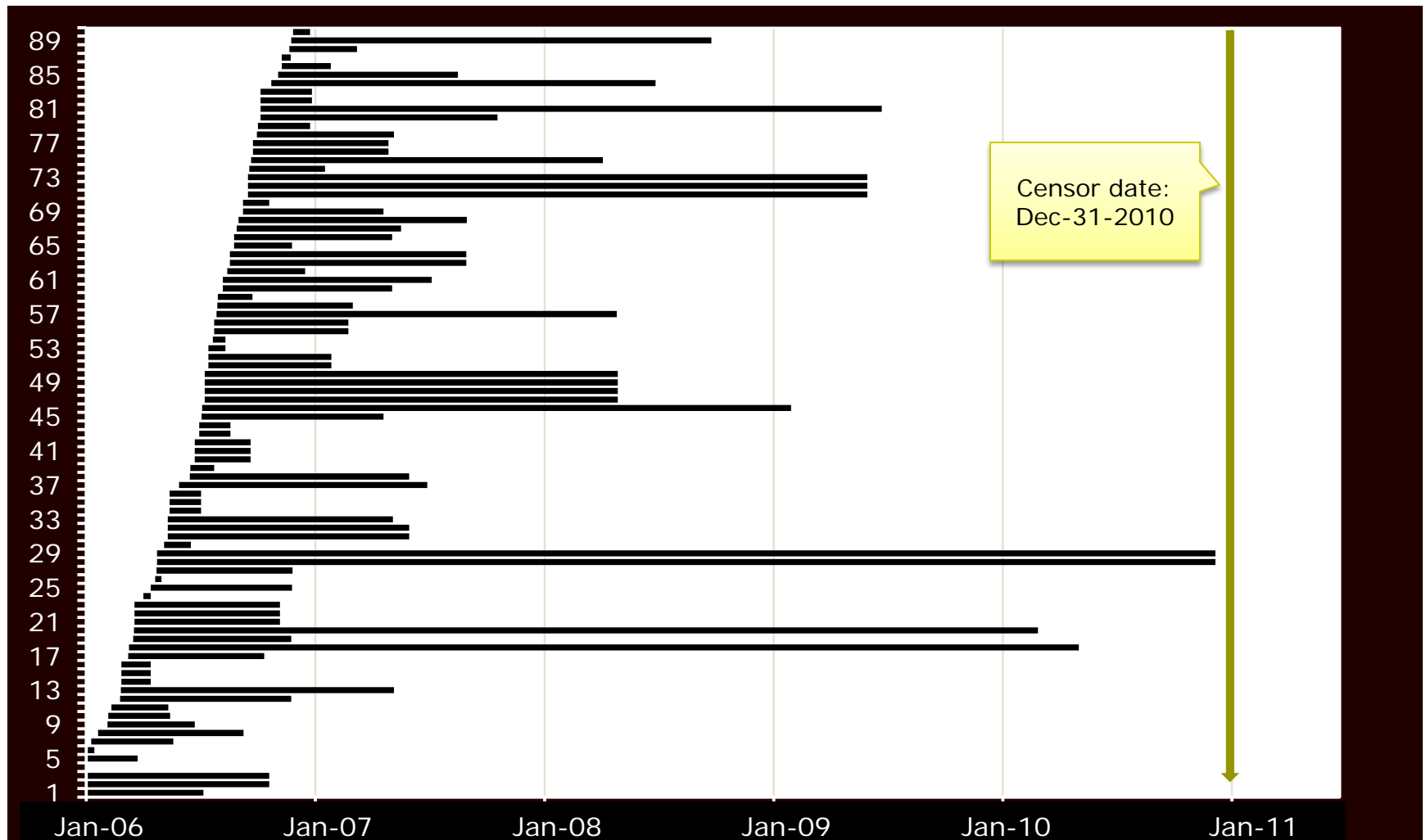


# So how *should* we measure permanency?

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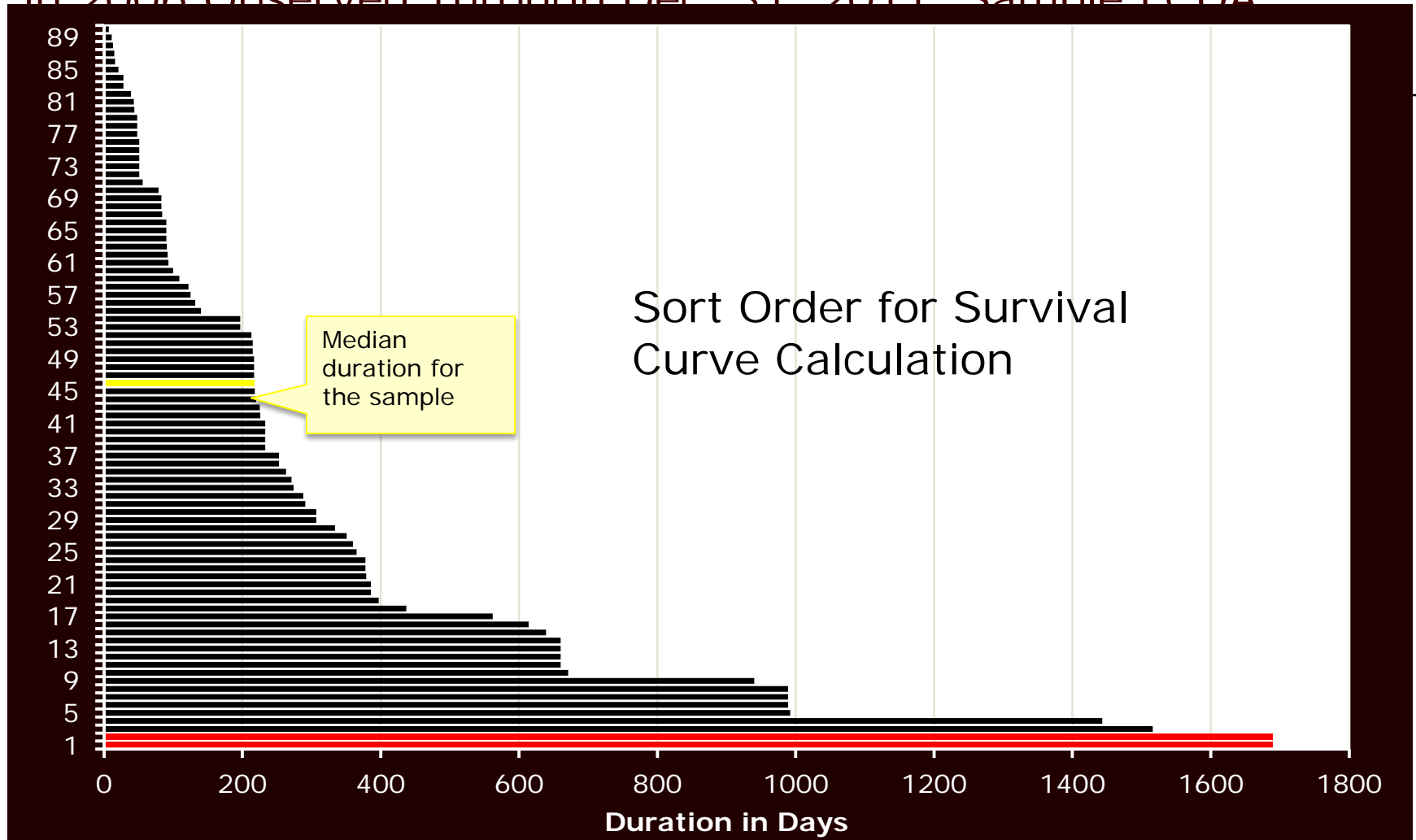
- Lily will show us some examples on the FCDA web tool.
- You will study your state's data (or a sample state) for your homework.

# Entry and Duration Patterns for All Children First Placed in 2006 Observed Through Dec. 31, 2010, Sample FCDA County





# Entry and Sorted Duration Patterns for All Children First Placed in 2006 Observed Through Dec 31, 2011 Sample ECDA





## Measures during a period of performance improvement (“CQI period”)

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- ❑ Change takes place over time, in a “window”.
- ❑ There is a gap between current performance (baseline) and what’s possible (the goal).
- ❑ Both the baseline and the goal may differ by subpopulations
- ❑ Given that there is a gap, it will take *time* for the gap to close. Innovation takes place in the window.

# The Continuous Quality Improvement Process: Numerators and Denominators

At the Start of  
the Window:

Zero

Population for  
which you  
want to make  
improvement

*During window, the  
hoped-for result is  
to move members  
of the population  
into the numerator.  
Previous windows  
provide information  
about the baseline  
success rate. Goal  
is to increase  
success rate.*

At the End of the  
Window:

Successes

Population for  
which you tried to  
make improvement  
  
(successes +  
failures)

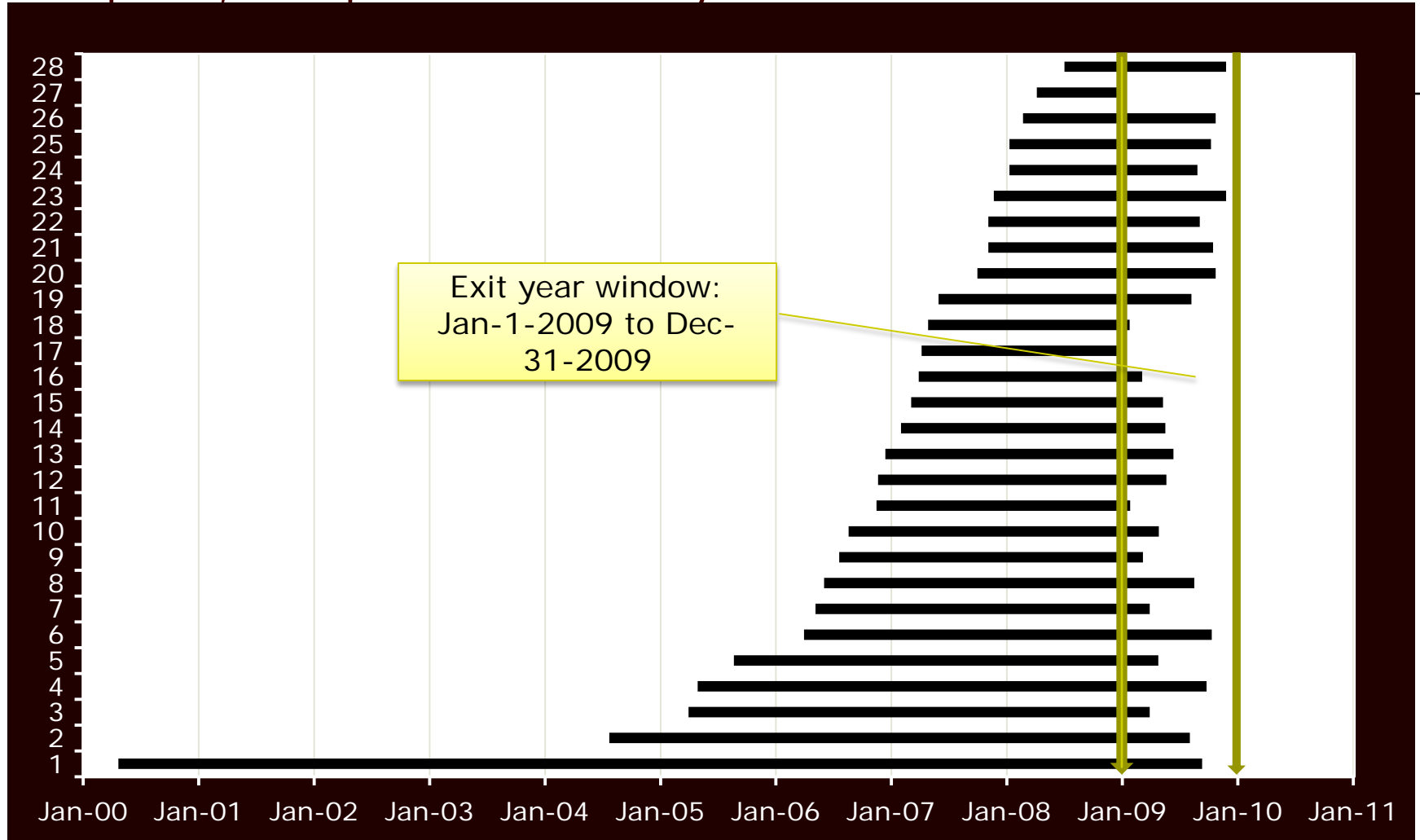


# Review homework

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- Questions 3 - 6

# Exit and Duration Patterns for All Children Exited in 2009 to Adoption, Sample FCDA County



# Unpacking an Exit Cohort

Entry Year	Number	Number	Total in Entry Year
	Longer Than 12 Months	Within 12 Months	
1987	1	0	1
1988	1	0	1
1989	1	0	1
1991	6	0	6
1992	1	0	1
1993	1	0	1
1994	9	0	9
1995	10	0	10
1996	14	0	14
1997	16	0	16
1998	46	0	46
1999	54	0	54
2000	87	0	87
2001	265	0	265
2002	511	0	511
2003	1,046	0	1,046
2004	1,079	1,781	2,860
2005	0	2,856	2,856
All 2005 Discharges	3,148	4,637	7,785
Of 2005 Discharges, Percent Reunified In Under 12 Months			
			60%

Notice that:

- 1) Members of entry cohorts from at least two years ago comprise the failures. But what proportion were those failures of the original entering group? You don't know.
- 2) Remainders of the last two year's entry cohorts comprise the successes. But what proportion were those successes of the original entering group?

Data Center Members: Get data for this table by selecting records where **oy**=2005 and **exit** = XRF or XRL and do a cross tab of **iy** and **durcat**.



# Three strikes: You're out.

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1. The exit cohort is a biased diagnostic measure of duration change.
  - Can show change when duration has not changed.
2. The exit cohort drags in time prior to the CQI period.
  - Does not provide an adequate measure of change during a CQI period.
3. Duration measured from an exit cohort will get longer if you are successful with long-stayers.



# What's Next

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- ❑ Homework exercise allows you to work with two dimensions of permanency, using the diagnostic type of analysis.
- ❑ Homework exercise exposes you to an approach to the CQI type of analysis.
- ❑ Next session: short review of concepts, review homework/group discussion.

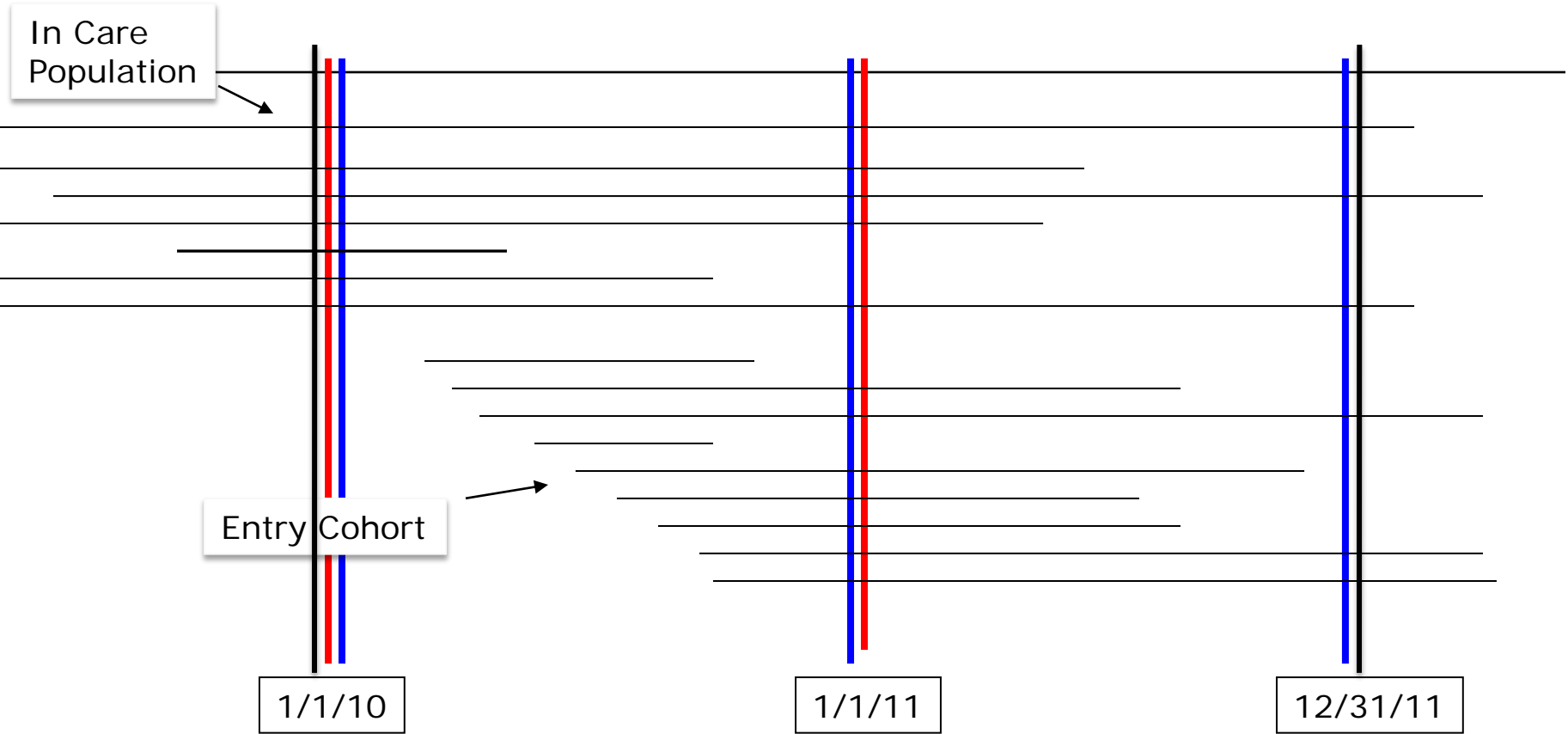




# Introduce homework

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The Window: Reform can only influence that which has yet to happen.



The blue lines are calendar years.  
The red boundary is the first annual entry cohort.  
The black lines are the 2-year performance period.

# Structure of Foster Care Expenditures

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Volume & Duration



Number of units x

Level of care



Average cost/unit

= Expenditures (\$)



# Two-Part Web Seminar

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- November 17, 1:00-2:30 EST
- Today

Today's session:

- Review concepts from last week
- Go over homework and ask questions
- Parting exercise

# Two dimensions of permanency outcomes

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- Likelihood of return to a permanent family
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Put another way...

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WHAT

HOW  
LONG

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# Put another way...

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I want to  
get a  
general  
sense

I want to  
measure  
the impact  
of a policy  
or  
program





# Review key vocabulary

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- **Longitudinal File** A longitudinal file allows the study of populations over time. For example, in the foster care system, a longitudinal file tracks children from the point they enter into care and follows their changes over the course of time until they exit from the care.
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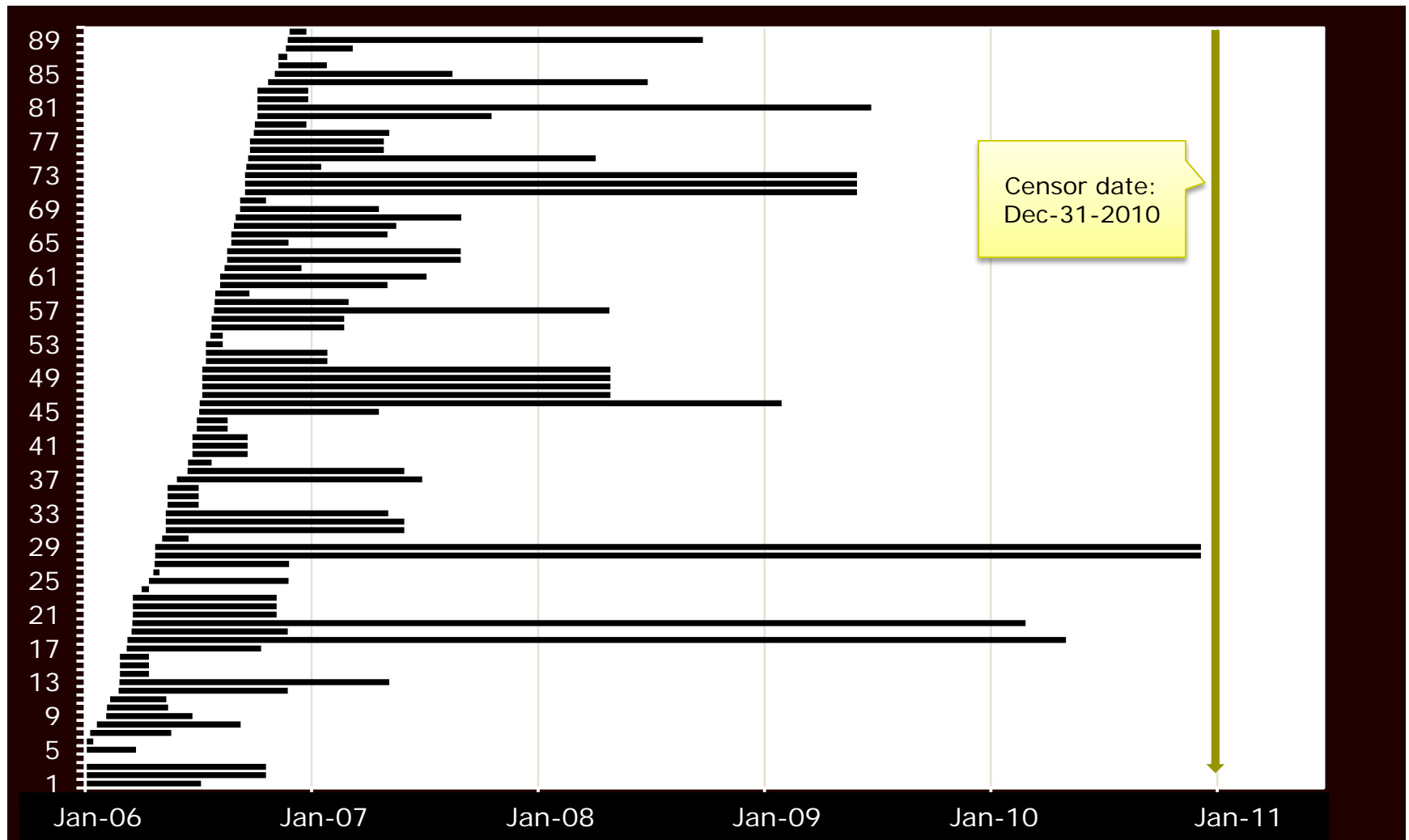


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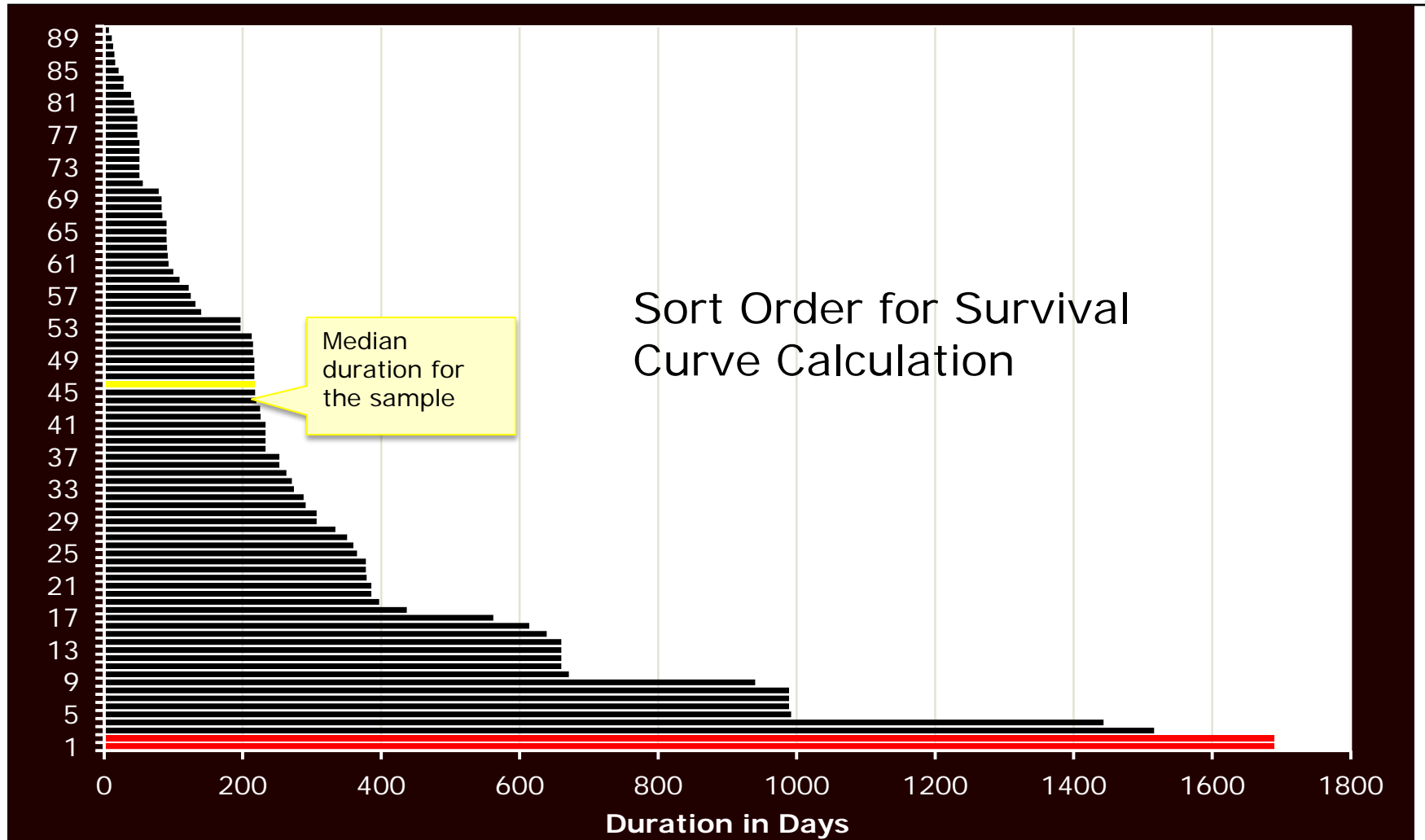
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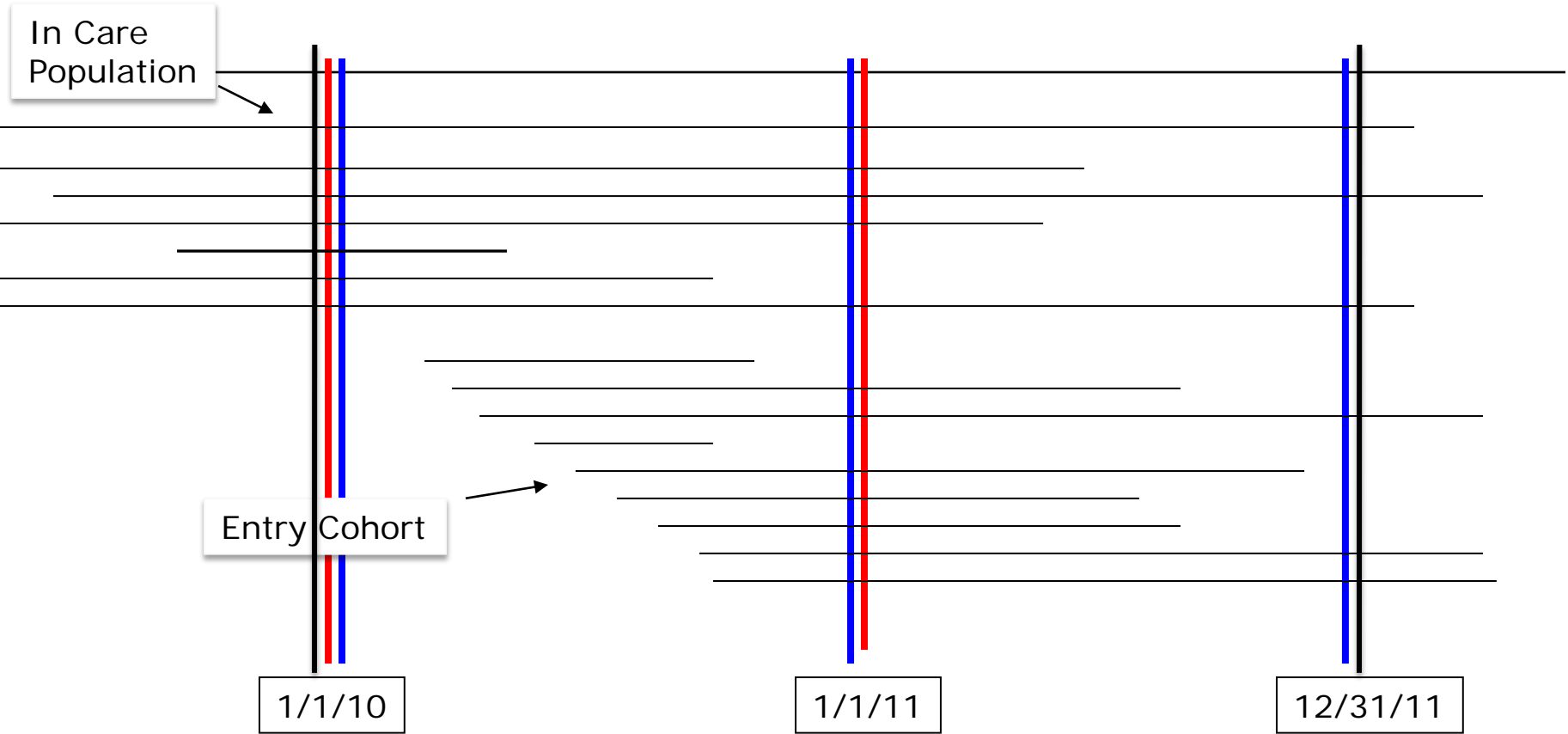
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# More “window” questions...

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- Of all children entering foster care for the first time in during a given year, the percent who were discharged to reunification in less than 12 months from the date of the first entry into foster care. (change in time to reunification)



# More “window” questions...

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- Of all children who exited foster care with a discharge reason of emancipation prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or who reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday while in foster care, the percent who were in foster care for three years or longer. (change in proportion of children who spend at least three years in foster care and exit to emancipation)