

Western Citizen Review Panel
Minutes of the Meeting
March 9, 2007

Attendees:

James A. Vazzana
Dennis Walczyk

Christine Schnars
Augusta Welsh

Ellen Kennedy

OCFS Staff: Renee Rider, Linda Kurtz

SCAA Staff: Diane Mastin, Karen Schimke (by phone)

Handouts:

Meeting Agenda

Chart: Panel Recommendations and 2007-8 Executive Budget

Executive Summary: NYS Child Welfare Workload Study

2007 Joint Panel Meeting Survey

Differential Response Legislation

2007 Draft Plan for Western Panel Meetings

Draft NYS CRP Operating Guidelines

Testimony of Gladys Carrion to the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee

Report: Families Connections to Services in an Alternative Response System

Note: 6th Annual CRP National Conference

Minutes from the 11/17/06 meeting

Engaging Families: The Use of Family Meetings

Meeting began with introductions and an update on the Citizen Review Panels' Annual Reports. Panel members asked that the Eastern/Western Panel Report be distributed to the same list as used by the NYC Panel with one change – use of a different colored cover to differentiate the two reports. This decision will be brought before the Eastern Panel for discussion. Panel members were given an overview of the new legislation for differential response that will be introduced this year in the Assembly by Amy Paulin and in the Senate by Mary Lou Rath. It differs in four ways from the legislation that has been introduced in previous years: instead of dual track it uses differential response, permits any interested district to apply rather than having seven demonstration projects, excludes NYC, and allows for reports to move from the assessment track to the investigation track with only a notice given to SCR and no need to file a new report. Panel members reiterated their support for this legislation. Larry Brown, Executive Deputy Commissioner, OCFS, has again offered to meet with panel members to review the panel's 2007 recommendations.

Linda Kurtz, Director of the Rochester Regional Office of OCFS presented information about New York State's efforts to engage families. She is the Strategy Coordinator for Family Engagement.

OCFS efforts to engage families began with a focus on outcomes rather than compliance with regulations and with a firm belief that the way to achieve safety and permanence is through building relationships with families. OCFS began by holding focus groups with parents to learn

from them what it would take to engage families. They learned that those who were most fearful about involvement with CPS were those families for whom their case was unfounded. Those who felt the best about their involvement with CPS were those families whose children were put into foster care. They stated that finding support and resources through their informal networks was more helpful than the support offered through institutions.

This information from parents led OCFS staff to focus on the use of family meetings conducted by a facilitator. OCFS has some seed money to offer local districts to support this work. About 20 counties in NYS are holding family meetings and finding them quite powerful. She stated a clear preference for counties to use a skilled facilitator to conduct the family meetings. The OCFS strategy is to imbed the expectation of holding family meetings throughout the term of the case.

OCFS is also working on the following to achieve family engagement:

- 1) Developing a tool kit to help workers locate and engage fathers and the father's extended family.
- 2) Building parenting training into visitation plans.
- 3) Enlisting parent consultants, parents who have gone through an investigation themselves who will then mentor another family through the investigation. A study on the use of parent mentors is being conducted by the University of Rochester.

Panel members received a summary of the Workload Study conducted in 2006 and a report from OCFS staff. OCFS is now working with individual commissioners to go over the study numbers and results, focusing on those districts with caseloads over 20. They are meeting with representatives from the courts to see if the courts can implement specific schedules to hear cases, easing the amount of time caseworkers would spend waiting until their case is called. They are also looking at technology tools such as digital pens and looking into transportation issues to free up more caseworker time to meet with families. Local Districts are concerned about unfunded mandates. Also, the discussions on workloads must be related to outcomes and other factors that do have an influence on performance. Currently, the statute prohibits OCFS from setting workloads for local districts.

The discussion reiterated how important having skilled facilitators are to this approach, the training that is needed, that stakeholders must understand that this approach is one that gets at the hard issues and that having a differential response in NYS would support their efforts to have successful outcomes for families.

Panel members received an update on the 2007-8 Executive Budget, the 2007 CRP budget, and learned that the second CSFR in NYS will be conducted in May, 2008. They agreed that they are interested in a joint panel meeting in Albany, and are interested in changing their meeting time to the morning. SCAA staff will poll members for their responses and input.