

Western Citizen Review Panel
Minutes of the Meeting
June 13, 2008

Attendees:

Ellen Kennedy	Stefan Perkowski	Dennis Walczyk
Augusta Welsh	Paula Mazur	Dennis Wittman
Dan Sklarski	Wendy Nilsen	Christine Schnars

OCFS Staff: Theresa Palumbo

SCAA Staff: Diane Mastin

Handouts:

Agenda

Questions for the second portion of the meeting with Commissioners

Attendance list

Revised Western Panel member information

Calling the Question: Can Oversight Improve Outcomes in Public Child Welfare? PowerPoint Presentation by Sue D. Steib, LCSW, Ph.D.

An Examination of Oversight and Review in the Child Welfare System: The Many Watch the Few Serve the Many, Wendy Whiting Bloome and Sue Steib, Journal of Public Child Welfare, Vol. 1(3) 2007, Haworth Press, Inc.

2007 Kids Count Essay and Data Brief, The Annie E. Casey Foundation publication

OCFS Response to the 2007 Report and Recommendations of New York State's Citizen Review Panels

Chart: CRP Recommendations and the 2008-2009 NYS Budget

Administration for Children and Families Exit Conference giving preliminary feedback on NYS CFSR

Addressing the Health Care Needs of Foster Care Children, First Focus, May 2008

Babies Sleep Safest Alone information

Minutes from the March 14, 2008 meeting

The meeting began with a review of the agenda for the second portion of the meeting with the panel's invited guests from the 17 local districts of social services in the western region of the state. Panel members received an overview of the 2008 OCFS response to the panels' 2007 report and recommendations. The response emphasized the need to work in partnership, the difficulty in building the skills necessary to engage families in a non-punitive manner across districts, and the importance of strength-based, outcome-based interventions. Support is needed to bring programs to scale, to improve the state's ability to measure outcomes, and to increase availability of data across systems. The report on the federal Child and Family Service Review will inform the State's Performance Improvement Plan and will determine how best to move forward. Panel members received an update on OCFS Forum on Oversight as a first step towards forming the Task Force called for in the panels' report and child welfare legislation under consideration during the 2008 session.

Western Panel and
Western Region Commissioners of Social Services or their Representatives.
June 13, 2008
Discussion Highlights

Educational Neglect

- Several districts reported receiving very few Education Neglect reports from private schools.
- Several districts reported ongoing meetings with school district personnel to identify areas in need of improvement. They emphasized relationships are key to this work. Building and sustaining relationships becomes difficult with high turnover rates.
- Other districts have been able to co-locate caseworkers at schools.
- Many have worked towards early identification to provide services for families before the situation rises to the level for which a call must be made to the SCR.
- Some schools wait too long before making an educational neglect report, waiting till a child has missed 60 to 80 days before making a report.
- Erie County Juvenile Justice Team personnel (Social Services, Probation, School Superintendent, Judge, etc.) meet regularly to identify programs needed that will help children who have been socially promoted return to school before a PINS petition is filed.
- Alleghany County sent a letter to all schools in the county detailing the criteria for an educational neglect case. This information helped school personnel understand when a report is required and consequently, the number of reports decreased.
- Some indicated their interest in having schools assigned more authority in situations where children miss school so that those cases do not have to come to CPS. They expressed encouragement that Commissioner Mills and Commissioner Carrion have held a series of discussions.
- Typically, children in elementary grades miss school due to family issues, while older children self select not to come to school. Less than half of students graduate. Solutions are complex. In Monroe County, one high school installed washers and dryers for students to use so they will have clean clothes and therefore be more willing to attend.
- They emphasized that PINS cases represent missed opportunities to provide services and supports to families at an earlier stage.
- Livingston County assigns a social services worker on every PINS case where there is family involvement (effectively changing PINS to FINS) and cross trains all workers in CPS.
- Changes in PINS legislation has led to more CPS cases as schools look for a different door to obtain services.
- Local districts do not collect information on the number of SCR reports coming from school districts that involve special education students.

Cross Systems Prevention and Early Identification

- Some local districts have created cross systems collaborations to provide support and services to families. They question whether or not the Department of Education is making any investment of its own in these efforts.
- The question was raised as to whether or not school district personnel can receive Bridges Out of Poverty training. Helpful to have cross systems training.

Family Court

- Erie County has one judge who is assigned all educational neglect cases allowing for consistency across cases. The district has criteria for such cases which Commissioner Weiner agreed to share with the panel.

Family Assessment Response (FAR)

- Chautauqua County will offer a small FAR pilot which they hope will help them with assessment by eliminating the need to blame someone.
- Erie County will offer a FAR for educational neglect cases only.

Funding

- Commissioners emphasized the importance of maintaining prevention funding, COPS dollars, and funding for the Youth Bureaus.
- MFT and MST services keep a lot of kids out of placements.
- OCFS has placed a moratorium on any new proposals for COPS funding.
- In Erie County, preventive services cost \$4,500 per family per year. Foster Care costs \$43,000 and \$80,000 for residential placement.

Workforce Issues

- Enhanced funding is needed for preventive workers. This state funding must be available to sustain the workforce.
- CORE training takes too long to bring a new caseworker up to speed with a full case load. Needs revising. Engagement skills need to be frontloaded in the training and may be overemphasized in the investigation of CPS cases when respectful disbelief might be more appropriate. There is no advanced training offered for supervisors. Forensic interviewing is more helpful than common core training.
- Monroe County added 114 workers and promised a savings of \$13.4 mil in 4 years.
- Several districts reported staffing problems and high caseloads due to turnover, training requirements, difficulties in recruitment, and civil service constraints. Such staffing problems lead to delinquent reports, decreased frequency of family visits, and delays in permanency.
- Some believe that the state should reimburse counties 100% for these services because they serve a high need population. Other services such as mental health are reimbursed at a 100% rate.
- Erie County now hires part-time workers at 39 hours per week, offering benefits at half the rate of full time, 40 hour per week employees.
- The pay equity issue still exists with probation. Often caseworkers are trained in CPS and move to probation quickly where they can earn more money and have more predictable hours.
- Local districts need support from OCFS to improve retention rates, to decrease burn out rates, and to support workers recovery from the secondary trauma they experience.
- Chemung County experienced a 60% turnover rate in 2007.
- Worker surveys indicate that workers don't leave the field due to low pay, but due to low morale, high caseloads and/or demands made on them with little support. In Chemung County they wanted flexibility in their schedules and support for obtaining master's degrees.

- Instead of contracting out clinical services, lower caseloads would allow caseworkers to provide clinical supports and reduce the need for FST and MST.
- Several mentioned their counties will not pay for staff to work from home.
- One county is thinking of expanding the MDT/CAC approach to additional cases. The approach does a good job of assessing safety and risk.
- Outcome of increasing the number of mandated reporters is that more cases have been reported and caseloads have risen. Question is: are we really keeping more kids safe? Workers simply do not have the time to do the job asked of them.
- One district bought all their workers dictation equipment to use. They record their case notes and clerical staff enters it into Connections freeing up caseworker time.

Accountability

- Often local districts do not have control over staffing levels or funding for services. In CPS the blame is often put on the caseworker. In Probation, the blame is directed towards the family. Careful consideration is needed to build in accountability at the local level. If caseloads are reduced to recommended levels, then accountability could be addressed.

The discussion ended with a comment about the panels' recommendation for system reform and not wanting to lose sight of how important that recommendation is. Until we stop the 65% of reports that are unfounded, the system has a lot of problems.