Quality education and professional preparation are components of an effective child welfare workforce. The Child Welfare Education and Research continuum includes two degree education programs, Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB) and Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL). This year, 2009, marks the eighth academic year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program (CWEB) and the fourteenth year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Leadership program (CWEL) in Pennsylvania. These programs are administered by the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators. **The mission of these programs is to strengthen child welfare services to children and families in Pennsylvania by increasing the number of educated professionals and equipping them to deal with the increasingly complex demands of public child welfare practice.** As of 2009, six hundred and sixty-three (663) CWEB students have entered into the county agency system through internships and employment. The CWEL program has returned eight hundred and six (806) graduates to county agencies with a remarkably successful record of retention, at rates of greater than 92% over the life of the program.

Yearly, we review our administrative data and survey our key stakeholders to evaluate how well students and graduates feel that they are being prepared for child welfare work. This year we heard from 100% of participating schools, approximately 90% of county agencies, 92% of enrolled students, and 60% of our graduates about their perception of the

“CWEB was the reason I considered an undergraduate field placement in child welfare and the reason that I got into the field. I’ve been working there for seven years now. I never wanted to be in child welfare and would probably not have gotten into it without a professor encouraging me to consider child welfare and the CWEB program. I stayed in child welfare because I had a great supervisor and later because of the opportunity to do CWEL. I think that every child welfare worker and supervisor should go back to school and get their MSW because it provides more educated, evidence-based decision making and opportunities for learning from professors and other students....” (CWEL graduate).

“I am learning what it truly means to be an excellent social worker...I know that I am helping my clients much more than I was before....the skills, values and ethics as well as the learning about the impact of poverty and culture have greatly improved my ability to understand my clients and to advocate for them, in a way that I wasn’t knowledgeable about doing before.” (part-time CWEL student)

“This program (CWEB) is a wonderful gift, learning, and career opportunity for students. Pitt faculty has always been available to me and to our students.” (School Faculty)

“The (CWEL) program is clearly well-administered, and provides students with the financial and academic supports to succeed at our school.” (School Faculty)
effectiveness of the professional education programs. Below you will find several key findings from the study:

- **The Title IV-E professional education programs are greatly valued by all of the stakeholders.** Part-time students feel that they are already using their new skills in their work, and full-time students feel privileged to be able to focus on their education. Faculty members in participating schools identify students as highly motivated, and the public agencies view them as valuable resources.

- **The CWEB program has greatly expanded and 600 students with child welfare experience and a BSW have been hired by agencies.** The students admitted to CWEB are racially more diverse than those enrolled in CWEL: 20% of the CWEB students are African American compared to 11% of CWEL students. In addition, 50% of the CWEB graduate respondents were African-American and male compared to CWEL, where all males who responded were white. **Therefore, the CWEB program has the potential to diversify the child welfare work force in Pennsylvania.**

- **CWEB and CWEL students are valued** by county agency directors who speak very highly of program graduates’ skills and knowledge, indicating that advanced degrees increase the quality of child welfare work. School faculty report that CWEL students add to the breadth and depth of learning in the classroom too, as they tend to bring more “real world” experience than other students.

### Participating Schools

- Bloomsburg University
- Bryn Mawr College
- California University
- Edinboro University
- Kutztown University
- Lock Haven University
- Mansfield University
- Marywood University
- Millersville University
- Shippensburg University
- Slippery Rock University
- Temple University
- University of Pennsylvania
- University of Pittsburgh
- West Chester University
- Widener University
• **CWEB and CWEL programs create an educational career ladder for social workers in child welfare.** Individuals can remain in their agencies or return to their agencies while expanding their knowledge and skills. Of the 81 CWEL respondents who were current students, 13.6% (11) were graduates of the CWEB program. Of this subgroup, nine (81.8%) were still working at the same agency that they did their post-CWEB commitment and all were part-time students. These CWEB graduates continued to work at their agency while matriculating in graduate school. Of recent graduates from CWEL, 20% identified themselves as former graduates of the CWEB program, with **82% of them still at their first CWEB commitment agency at the time of graduation.** These findings suggest that the CWEB to CWEL continuum helps to reduce job turnover by providing a clear and funded professional career path resulting in a more educated and committed work force.

![Diagram](image)

• **Graduates of the CWEL program are well-prepared to assume positions of leadership in their agencies.** Currently, **18% of Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators are graduates of the CWEL program.** An additional fifty-four percent of CWEL graduates are in supervisory positions in their agencies.
• Despite the recession and double digit unemployment rates, and the delay in passage of a state budget, 90% of the CWEB students were able to secure employment within seven months of graduation.

• **One developing trend is the increase in part-time matriculation by students.** Part-time students have the challenge of managing the work/life/school balance and may have limited field placement options and fewer choices in coursework. They are also at greater risk of dropping out of school. Full-time students have greater choice, but face a sometimes difficult transition back to fulltime employment. While continuing to monitor this trend, we are exploring additional ways to meet the changing need while continuing to provide financial and academic support.

• The climate surveys among CWEB and CWEL graduates have been administered and results analyzed for nearly 10 years, spanning graduates of the program as far back as 1995 (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). Results show stable, moderate ratings of child welfare work environments. Many graduates report feeling accomplished, committed, and invested in the work that they do. However, the rating of program graduates on the climate of their work environment is moderate, at best. Graduates predominantly feel that their work environment is strained, and find limited opportunities for advancement. Workers report role overload—feeling that they can’t accomplish what they need to in a day, or frequently working long or evening and weekend hours. This is necessarily some of what child welfare work entails, but likely contributes to worker burnout. Conversely, graduates also report feeling satisfied and accomplished in their work with families. **Process-oriented supervision with a focus on the secondary trauma inherent in the child protective services field is identified as a critical element in worker satisfaction.** We believe that climate is an important factor that impacts the quality of services (Glisson, 2010) and one that can be successfully addressed. Agencies, however, need to take advantage of new opportunities to increase the skills of valuable agency leaders through national Child Welfare Workforce Initiatives, such the newly created Leadership Academy. Opportunities such as this help agency leaders stay abreast of national trends in practice and management, keeping skills fresh, while providing a network of other professionals who perform the same work nationally.

**Recommendations**

Educational programs such as CWEB and CWEL prepare the workforce but they are one component of an overall strategy for educating and retaining a quality workforce. The federal government has stepped up its efforts through the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, regional implementation and technical assistance centers, and Quality Improvement Centers for progressive initiatives. There is evidence that climate does impact child level outcomes: A study using a national sample of child welfare agencies confirms what has long been suspected—caseworkers who provide services in a child welfare system that have more
engaged climates are more likely to provide a better quality of service (Glisson, 2010). In partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators, we are committed to extending the reach of the CWEL and CWEB programs through the following recommendations:

**Addition of a doctoral-level CWEL option**

This option can provide an additional research arm for the Commonwealth and further our mission of establishing evidence-based child welfare practice across the state. Research at the doctoral level would make an even greater contribution to the Commonwealth and the field through the development of “practice-based” researchers. Finally, it would provide one more “rung” on the career ladder for child welfare professionals who desire an advanced degree while remaining committed to the field.

**Inclusion of additional social work degree programs in Pennsylvania as they become accredited**

Pennsylvania has many remote areas that have a shortage of professionals in specialized services, such as social work, child psychiatry and nursing. Increasing the number of participating CWEB and CWEL schools would allow for greater student access, reducing student commuting time and decreasing program costs.

**Consideration of an additional component to the CWEL program in order to recruit new employees for the counties**

Currently, only CYS employees are CWEL program participants. The additional component would allow the CWEL program to admit persons who have never worked in a county CYS before, but who have been adequately trained and have the same length of work commitment that is currently required of CWEL participants. The provision in the federal Title IV-E
regulations which permits the training of persons “preparing for [public child welfare] employment”\(^1\) provides this opportunity. A principal advantage of this additional component is cost savings.

**Increase depth of undergraduate child welfare curriculum among schools through the development of a certificate in Child Advocacy Studies in collaboration with the National Child Protection Training Center**

Undergraduates in the CWEB program currently complete one child welfare course and a public child welfare internship. We are in the process of developing the first of three courses for the Child Advocacy Studies certificate in an online, hybrid format. This will strengthen the child welfare course options for students and provide elective options for students in other degree programs who receive little, if any, content on child abuse and neglect.

**Continue to expand enrollment in the CWEB program**

The CWEB program is an effective way to increase well-educated and trained child welfare workers into the workforce. Our research suggests that a sizable group of CWEL students were once CWEB students, and the majority have remained in their post-commitment agency. In addition, CWEB graduates come into the agency ready to assume a caseload and with most of their required training completed.

**Transition support and ongoing connection among CWEL graduates and mentoring CWEB graduates**

CWEL graduates are a group of well-educated and trained professionals who feel positive about their skills and ability to work productively with families, but are skeptical about the opportunities available to them in a career in child welfare. CWEB graduates have the hope of promotion and the opportunity to continue their education by continuing in CWEL—but no such educational opportunity exists for CWEL graduates. Full-time CWEL students also report that transitioning back to their agencies full-time can be difficult. Finally, we have a diverse CWEB cohort, but our CWEL students do not have the same diversity of race and gender. To address these issues, we are suggesting a formal program starting with a “transition seminar” for second semester full and last semester part-time graduates; this seminar will provide them transition support and an opportunity to interact and make contacts with other CWEL participants. Mentoring opportunities for CWEB graduates by CWEL graduates (particularly male and African American) can help with their transitions into the workforce and recruitment into the CWEL program.

References


\(^1\) 45 CFR, Ch. II, §235.63 (a).