Child Welfare Education and Research Programs

Mission: 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.

Degree programs: Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB)
Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL)

Administered by:
University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work

Participating Schools:

CWEB:
- 21st Academic Year
- 1,339 Graduates
- Employed in 93% of Pennsylvania counties

CWEL:
- 27th Academic year
- 1,613 Graduates
- 20% of Pennsylvania child welfare workforce

99% county participation in CWEB/CWEL programs
49% of counties benefit from CWEL leadership
Many current child welfare trainers/consultants are CWEL graduates
Two CWEB graduates occupy high-level agency leadership positions
Program Evaluation:

- Annual review of administrative and survey data to evaluate how students/graduates perceive their preparation for child welfare work
- Response rates:
  - County Administrators: 82%
  - School Administrators: 82%
  - Current Students: 68%
  - Graduates: 51%

“The internship portion of the CWEB program prepared me the most for my current job. It gave me the confidence and skills I needed to start taking a caseload on my first day of work.” (CWEB Recent Graduate)

“CWEB was one of the greatest programs and accomplishments that I have been blessed to be a part of thus far. I have 2 other Master’s Degrees but being in this program helped me grow in unimaginable ways.” (CWEB Long-Term Graduate)

“Students who complete CWEB field placements get excellent hands-on experience. I think, in part, this is because the child welfare departments recognize that they are also training potential future employees.” (School Administrator)

“These programs are an opportunity to enhance the learning and professional development of students who demonstrate an interest in Child Welfare as well as enhancing their vision to contribute new thoughts and projects to ever changing policies and practices of Social Work.” (County Administrator)

Demographics of PA Child Population and CWEB/CWEL Participants

Racial disproportionality in child welfare:

- In 2021, African American children made up approximately 14% of the U.S. child population, but represented 22% of the foster care population.\(^1\,\^2\)
- In Pennsylvania, Black children were 4.5x more likely to re-enter foster care and 4x more likely to remain in foster care when compared to White children.\(^3\)

The CWEB and CWEL programs work to ensure that the workforce is reflective of the population served with 20% of participants in each program identifying as African American.


CWEL Students:
- Continued challenges in completing field hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Work-based field options were increased and online learning modules were permitted to count toward field hours.
- Gain valuable information about systems, policies, service mandates, and intervention strategies.
- Benefit from experiencing the provider end of child welfare work.
- Field experiences enable CWEL students to bring valuable information back to their county child welfare agency and prepares them to participate in new child welfare related initiatives.

CWEL Part-time students are close to half the CWEL population.

Part time students:
- Face challenges in managing work/life/school balance.
- May have limited field placement options and less freedom in course selection.
- Over the life of the program, 78% of withdrawals prior to graduation have been part-time students.

Online coursework has been presented as a solution to this issue, but has its own set of considerations:
- Little flexibility in due dates and completion of required assignments.
- Synchronous courses involve designated meeting times.
- Community-based field requirements are required.
- Students tend to prefer face-to-face contact with instructors and peers.

Changing Landscape of Child Welfare Services:
- Implementation of mandatory coronavirus vaccinations by some counties resulted in terminations and county agency transfers for some CWEB and CWEL graduates.
- A predicted increase in suspected child abuse and neglect referrals increased the stress on the child welfare system.
- Turnover in both public and private child welfare agencies continue to be an issue.
- However, new modes of practice (virtual technology, data driven decision making, predictive analytics, evidence-based interventions) are a welcome addition to enhance child welfare work.
- Passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act in February of 2018 and the implementation of state-level FFPSA Prevention Plans brings additional opportunities and expectations to the child welfare workforce.
- Pennsylvania plans to implement a universal assessment tool to enhance the workforce’s ability to identify family and child needs, strengths, risk factors and safety considerations.
Overall Recommendations:

Increase availability of accredited social work programs:
• Consolidation of 3 Pennsylvania state schools in the western portion of the state (Clarion, Edinboro, California University of PA) and north central region (Lock Haven, Mansfield, Bloomsburg) may provide a benefit to the CWEB program by establishing one Director of Field Education over the partnering schools.
• MSW programs at Slippery Rock and Bloomsburg are in the process of obtaining full accreditation. Partnerships with these programs will be explored once accreditation status is received.

Incorporation of trauma-informed supervision at the county level.

Transition support and ongoing connection among CWEB and CWEL graduates.
• The post hire contact program with CWEB students has been a great success
• A similar program is being proposed for CWEL graduates in the next academic year

Program Specific Recommendations:

CWEB:
• Further guidance to university faculty on the details of civil service requirements and other technical aspects related to county internship and employment
  • Targeted discussions occur during school visits and informational meetings
• Increase county participation in CWEB program
  • Informational sessions with county child welfare agencies including CWEB faculty and staff and Program Improvement Specialists from the Child Welfare Resource Center
  • Creation of CWEB Internship Guidance document to provide counties with suggestions for potential field experiences for CWEB students
• Improve successful job placement following graduation:
  • Ongoing assistance from CWERP faculty in identifying vacancies, facilitating referrals for interviews, and counseling graduates regarding employment
  • Collaboration with state civil service counties and merit hire counties
  • Post hire interviews with CWEB graduates
• Improve dissemination of child welfare career development opportunity through CWEB and CWEL to prospective and current participants

CWEL:
• Opportunity for students to focus on administration or macro practice:
  • Students can take administration courses as electives; those approved for macro study can take direct practice electives
  • Explore cross-over options between direct practice and macro practice specializations among schools of social work
• Increase in full-time enrollment:
  • Encourage county agencies to permit full-time enrollment and hire replacement staff using the reimbursement for the CWEL participant
  • Inclusion of advanced level child welfare coursework in school curricula, particularly in evidence-informed and evidence-based practices
  • Offer courses targeted toward effective family engagement and teaming practices, motivational interviewing skills, enhanced assessments, and evidence-based practices
  • Continued review of additional child welfare course offerings
• Gather more information on the career trajectory of CWEL graduates
  • Development of a comprehensive database for public child welfare workers in PA including a dashboard for each county in the Commonwealth

Website: https://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/researchtraining/child-welfare-education-and-research-programs