

Child Welfare Education and Research Programs



Over 85 Years of Child Welfare Leadership!

2022-2023 Executive Summary
School of Social Work
University of Pittsburgh



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



University of
Pittsburgh

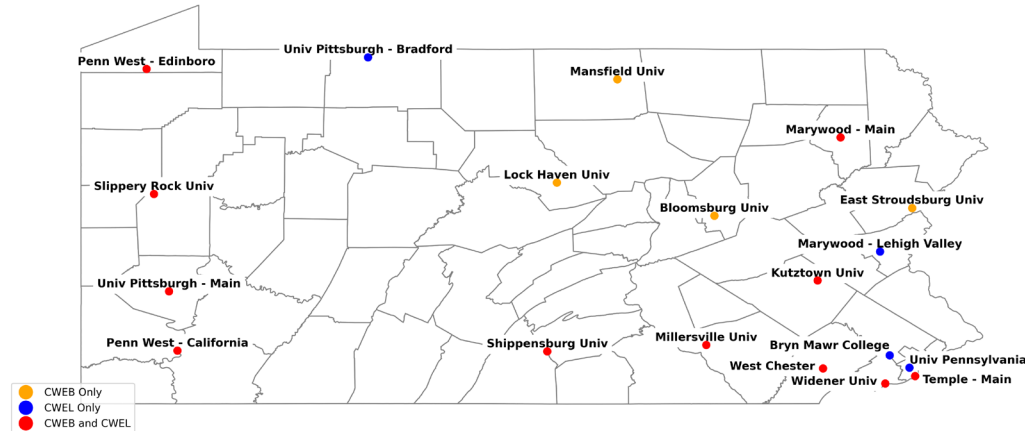


pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES



Child Welfare Education and Research Programs
Participating Schools

Updated: 11/15/2023



Highlights:

CWEB:

- 22nd Academic Year
- 1,371 Graduates
- Employed in 93% of Pennsylvania counties

CWEL:

- 28th Academic year
- 1,673 Graduates
- 19% of Pennsylvania child welfare workforce
- 99% county participation in CWEB/CWEL programs
- 51% of counties benefit from CWEL leadership
- Many current child welfare trainers/consultants are CWEL graduates
- Five CWEB graduates occupy high-level agency leadership positions



Challenges in the Field of Child Welfare

- Racial disproportionality continues to be a challenge in the field of child welfare. To combat this issue, 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.
- Recruitment and retention of child welfare caseworkers continues to be a challenge, with some county agencies having over a 50% vacancy rate. This increase in staff vacancies puts additional pressure on remaining caseworkers by increasing their caseload. More counties have opted to outsource their ongoing services to private providers.
- High profile child welfare cases have been in the news, which influences negative and skeptical perceptions of child welfare services.
- Undergraduate enrollment has decreased significantly in the past several years nationwide. This trend makes it difficult to attract new students into the field of social work and the child welfare profession through CWEB.



Programmatic Areas of Improvement

- CWEL graduates speak about needing more opportunities to utilize their enhanced skills in their child welfare agencies.
- Part-time CWEL students struggle with the workload of full-time work, part-time school and family responsibilities.
- CWEL graduates recommend funding from the program to help offset the costs of the social work licensure exam.
- CWEB students reported conflict between Zoom meeting times and their internship schedules.
- CWEB students and graduates discussed the difficulty meeting 975 internship hours and want the requirement lowered.
- CWEB students and graduates inquired about an adjustment to the stipend amount to account for inflation and cost of living.

Solutions to Child Welfare Challenges

- Partnering schools of social work have implemented unique ways to attract new students into their programs and increase diversity. Strategies include attending various college fairs, hosting a “social work summer camp” to introduce social work to high school students, and providing mentoring to social work students from child welfare experienced faculty.
- County administrators have made concerted efforts to reduce the vacancy rate in their agencies by providing tuition reimbursements for staff and inquiring about the CWEB program for existing staff with associate’s degrees.
- Pennsylvania’s state schools have seen increases in new enrollment crediting tuition freezes and the availability of desirable majors.¹ CWERP anticipates adding additional undergraduate programs to the CWEB consortium in the 2024-2025 academic year to increase the number of caseworkers entering the workforce.
- Realistic job previews on the CWERP web page, provides those interested in child welfare a well-rounded view of the job.

¹ Schakner, B. (2023, October 9). As PennWest struggles, 1st-year enrollment up again at other Pa. state-owned universities. *Trib Live*, <https://triblive.com/local/regional/1st-year-enrollment-up-again-at-pa-state-owned-universities-as-pennwest-struggles/>.

Solutions to Student/Graduate Concerns

- County child welfare administrators are involving graduates in trauma informed care, family engagement, and CQI work.
- While full-time work and part-time schooling for CWEL students remains a challenge, allowing work based field placements reduces some of the burden for this group of students.
- In academic year 2023-2024 CWEB/CWEL graduates who take the social work licensure exam will be eligible for partial reimbursement.
- The CWEB Zoom meetings have been adjusted for academic year 2023-2024 to accommodate student’s schedules and are recorded.
- The CWERP program is considering a sliding internship bonus for CWEB graduates, providing more financial assistance and rewarding graduates completing over the minimum amount of hours.

Online Learning:

- CWERP has offered CWEL students the ability to complete their degree program online through partnership with Millersville, Shippensburg, Temple and Widener universities.
- The newly merged PennWest University (including Edinboro and California University of PA) has transitioned all their graduate studies into an online format, allowing more students across the state to participate in a graduate degree program.
- Although online programs provide great benefits to CWEL students not living near a campus-based program, there are some challenges inherent with online learning.
- CWEL online learners may need to acquire internship sites in their local jurisdiction on their own.
- Online classes may require synchronous learning.
- Online learning is not for everyone. Some students struggle with technology and finding a distraction-free study environment.
- County administrators may view online learning as a way for child welfare staff to obtain their graduate degree without a disruption to their full-time jobs. However, online study is just as rigorous as campus based learning and requires a significant time commitment.
- Given the increase in online learning programs, the CWERP program began surveying those participating in online learning regarding their experiences.
- Overall, online CWEL learners rate their learning ability positively. However, their connectedness is rated lower and may indicate the desire for more in-person exposure to classmates and professors.

Field Experiences

- CWEL graduates talk about the internship providing them the necessary skills to start employment as a child welfare caseworker.
- CWEL graduates discussed the value of observing different work styles of casework and deciding which methods would benefit them in their work.
- CWEL graduates emphasized how their time in the field helped them gain confidence in completing the work of a child welfare caseworker.
- CWEL graduates who were hired by their internship agencies were grateful of the opportunity to build relationships with the caseworkers who became their co-workers.
- CWEL graduates were able to network with other agencies in their home counties and gave them insight on how provider agencies interact with the child welfare system.
- CWEL graduates who completed a work based field placement experienced a different aspect of their agency which gave them a deeper appreciation for how different units work toward the same goals.
- CWEL graduates were able to get valuable insight on how families experience services which deepened their empathy and understanding of their clients.
- CWEL graduates were able to work with a wide variety of populations through their internship experiences, allowing them to work with diverse families and in a different way.

Program Evaluation:

Annual review of administrative and survey data to evaluate how students/graduates perceive their preparation for child welfare work

Highlights:

Response rates:

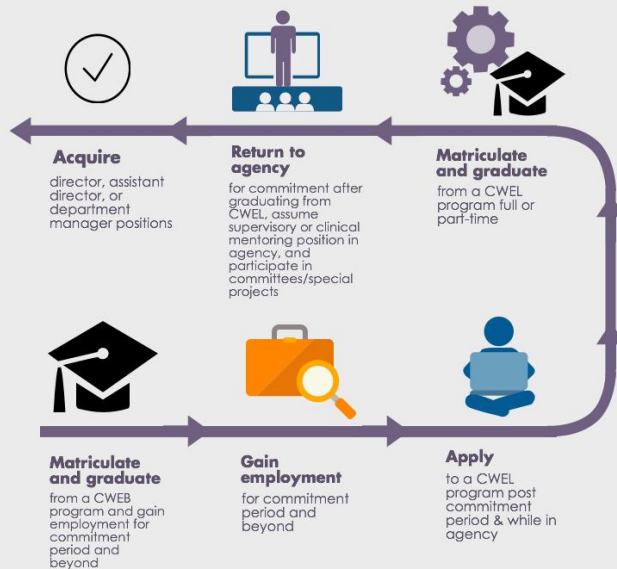
- County Administrators: 85%
 - School Administrators: 75%
 - Current Students: 69%
 - Graduates: 42%
-
- 7% of CWEL students participated in the CWEB program
 - 86% of CWEL students remain in the agency where they completed their post-CWEB commitment
 - Of those who completed a survey, 77% of CWEB graduates and 93% of CWEL graduates remain employed in child welfare services one-two years post graduation

Major Findings:

- CWEB students and graduates rated items regarding their child welfare agency as more positive. Significant findings included the ability and authority to make professional decisions, utilizing the knowledge to make an impact in the field, and using their newfound knowledge and skills within their child welfare agencies.
- Organizational climate subscores were generally neutral with long-term graduates. Significant differences were seen between those graduates employed 5 years and under and those with 6 years or more tenure regarding Teamwork and Information flow. Those with longer child welfare work history rated these items lower.
- School agency administrators had high satisfaction ratings for the overall program administration and the CWEB/CWEL specific items.
- County administrators were satisfied with the CWEB/CWEL programs and noted that CWEB graduates were more prepared to carry a caseload when compared to other new hires.



CAREER PATHWAY



“The opportunity to gain advanced an degree is tremendous. Learning new skills as well as developing leadership to bring back to your respective agency can provide for positive outcomes for children..” (CWEL Current Student)

“Having gone through both programs, I can say that they absolutely contributed to my professional and personal growth and my ability to stay in child welfare for the past 19 years. CWEB prepared me for my work in child welfare and CWEL helped me stay in it.” (CWEB/CWEL Long-Term Graduate)

“The positive aspects of CWEB is the opportunity to work with CYF experiencing different aspects of the child welfare experience. This helped build my confidence working with families prior to being hired.” (CWEB Recent Graduate)

“The quality of the education and training offered to CWEB students is extremely high. Students are consistently prepared to enter the workforce and the field of child welfare at the time of graduation.” (School Administrator)

“Both are amazing, valuable programs that help to develop employees into proficient child welfare professionals.” (County Administrator)

In 2021 a Pitt CWEL student received the Georgia Hernandez Award for Excellence in Child Welfare Practice. This award is presented annually to one Allegheny caseworker who exemplifies excellence in case practice; a commitment to the DHS vision and values; and consistently demonstrates CYF core competencies.

A Pitt CWEL student is the 2023 recipient of Pitt's Graduate and Professional Student Government's Leadership and Service Award. This award recognizes current University of Pittsburgh graduate and professional students for their service and leadership to the university, community, and world at large.

A Long-Term Pitt CWEL Graduate received the 2021 Washington County "One Kid At A Time" Community Award presented by the Academy for Adolescent Health. The graduate received this award through fostering community partnerships to increase child abuse prevention. The graduate says of her award: "I was grateful to be presented with this award and continue to support the work of the Academy for Adolescent Health of educating, advocating, inspiring and empowering one kid at a time!"



A Bloomsburg CWEL Graduate received the Outstanding Competence in Fieldwork Award for her internship at Juniata County Children and Youth Services. This award is given to a student who exhibits exemplary achievement in their field placement. Other areas that are considered for this award include contributions to political action and social justice as well as evidence of sensitivity and excellence in cross-cultural practice.

A Long-Term Shippensburg CWEL Graduate was nominated by her peers for the 2021 Franklin County Government Values award for Continuous Improvement. She was presented with the award in March 2022.

A Pitt CWEL student received the Grady H Roberts Jr. Endowed Student Resource Fund for Outstanding Performance in Field for her work at Wesley Family Services (WFS). While interning at WFS, the student committed herself to all aspects of child permanency.



Overall Recommendations:

Increase availability of accredited social work programs:

- Budget request was made to OCYF/DHS to include seven additional schools of social work at the undergraduate level. Preliminary meetings with the school faculty received enthusiastic endorsement
- Slippery Rock University received accreditation from CSWE for the MSW program in June, with the first cohort of CWEL students targeted for Fall 2024.
- Bloomsburg University is in the candidacy phase and will join the CWEL consortium after receiving full accreditation from CSWE.

Increase the caliber of the PA child welfare workforce at the front door.

- Continue to advocate at the county, state, and federal level that salaries must be adequate to compensate for the demands and responsibility of public child welfare jobs
- Develop specific county child welfare casework classification within the State Civil Service System while also navigating merit hire systems.

CWEB Recommendations:

Increase county participation in the CWEB program

- Collaboration with counties through CWEB information sessions that include CWEB program faculty and staff, as well as Practice Improvement Specialists and Resource Specialists from the PA Child Welfare Resource Center.
- School-county-program collaboration in the field practicum process, including the use of the CWEB Internship Guidance tool that was jointly developed between county agency staff and CWEB program staff.

Improve leadership and professional development skills

- Students encouraged to develop leadership and self-care skills during their academic/field experience.
- Graduates are encouraged to register for the BSW licensure exam. Reimbursement for a portion of the exam cost will be available to graduates in Fall 2023.
- Detailed information regarding the CWEL program is presented to CWEB students in the last Zoom meeting of the academic year to promote enrollment into master's level study.

CWEL Recommendations:

Promote leadership opportunities for CWEL graduates

- Graduates are encouraged to register for the LSW licensure exam. Reimbursement for a portion of the exam cost will be available to graduates in Fall 2023.
- CWEL graduate involvement in ongoing organizational effectiveness/CQI processes within counties.
- County agency directors are encouraged to utilize CWEL graduates as field instructors, task supervisors, and mentors to CWEBs.
- Link graduates to statewide practice improvement initiatives.

Inclusion of advanced level child welfare coursework in school curricula, particularly in evidence-informed and evidenced-based practices

- Offering of courses targeted toward effective family engagement and teaming practices, motivational interviewing skills, enhanced assessment, trauma-informed care, and evidence-based practices.
- Continued review of potential child welfare course offerings.
- Curricular consultation and technical assistance to schools.



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