

# **Child Welfare Education and Research Programs**

**Over 76 Years  
Of Child Welfare  
Leadership**



## **2013-2014 Executive Summary**

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

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**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

# Child Welfare Education and Research Programs 2013-2014 Annual Report

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## *Executive Summary*

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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 academic year, 2013-2014, marks the thirteenth academic year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program (CWEB) and the nineteenth 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 Human Services (formerly 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.**

These programs are integrated into the framework of public child welfare throughout the state, with approximately 99% of the counties in the Commonwealth participating in CWEB and CWEL. Over 920 students have graduated from CWEB during the program's twelve years and they have been employed in 60 out of the 67 Pennsylvania counties. CWEL has funded students from 63 counties and twelve Pennsylvania schools of social work on both a full- and part-time basis. As of the 2013-2014 academic year, nearly 25% of the state's child welfare positions are occupied by a CWEB graduate, a CWEL graduate, or a currently enrolled CWEL student.

Every year 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 the participating schools,

*"The CWEL students appear to be very dedicated students who are invested in their education and child welfare. They are often the most mature students who seem to help mentor the younger students in the classroom. They appear to be open in looking at their practice and how they can better serve the child welfare population. (Participating University Faculty)*

*"(Through the CWEB Program) I have learned invaluable communication skills, developed policy knowledge, and grown remarkably as a professional in the social work field by working my own cases, communicating with a variety of clients and families, and working in a professional atmosphere" (CWEB Student)*

*"It (CWEL Program) has allowed me to make a valuable contribution to my Agency and families/children and this is what makes my work matter to me" (CWEL student)*

*"The CWEB program helped solidify my passion for child welfare." (CWEB Graduate)*

*"I truly believe that the CWEL program has given me the tools necessary to work as effectively as possible with the families who we serve..." (CWEL Long-term Graduate)*

*"We fully support the CWEB and CWEL programs and have seen a positive change in our workforce due to the employees that participate." (Agency director)*

approximately 92% of county agencies, 92% of enrolled students, and 76% of our graduates about their perception of the effectiveness of the professional education programs. Below are a few key findings from this year's study:

- **The Title IV-E professional education programs are greatly valued by all of the stakeholders.** Both CWEB and CWEL students feel grateful for the opportunity to participate in these programs and feel the education they are receiving prepares them for work in the field of child welfare. Faculty members in participating schools identify students as highly motivated and committed to working with children and families, and the public agencies view them as valuable employees in their efforts to improve child welfare practices and outcomes.
- **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 and retention of employees. School faculty report that former CWEL students are now serving as field instructors, task supervisors and mentors to current students.
- Results from a new set of questions asked to agency administrators and school program directors regarding core competencies in child welfare will be used to drive a communication plan between these two partners to continue to improve the quality of students in the CWEB and CWEL programs.

### *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**

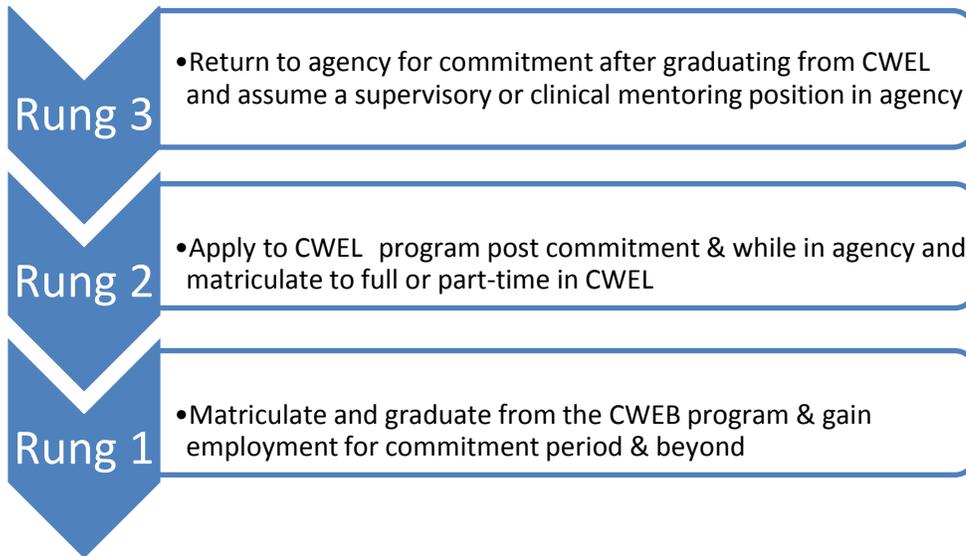
**University of Pittsburgh**

**West Chester University**

**Widener University**

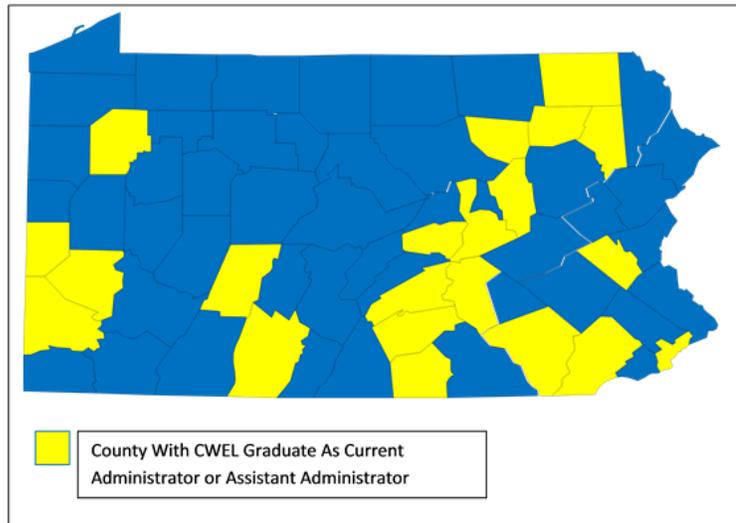
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- **CWEB and CWEL programs create an educational career ladder for social workers in child welfare.**

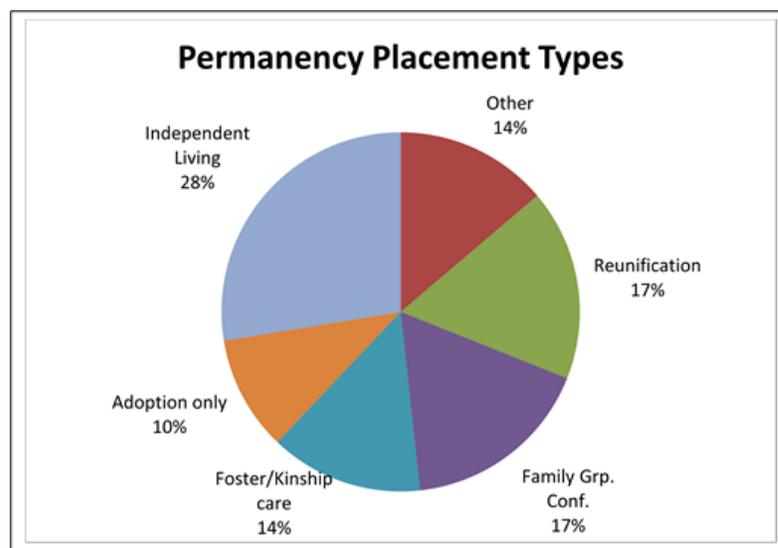
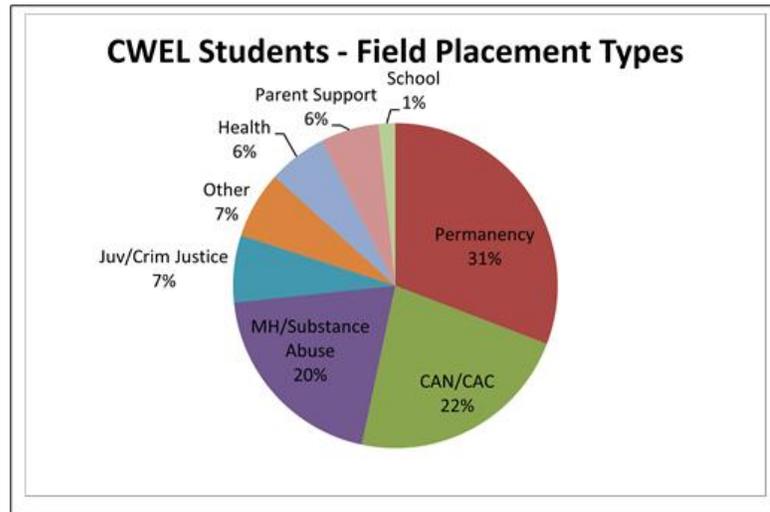


For the enrolled CWEL students who responded to the survey, 11% received their degrees through the CWEB program. Of this group, the majority (92%) are still working in the agency in which they did their post-CWEB commitment. We have observed this CWEB to CWEL progression pattern for the last four years and it suggests that Rungs 1 and 2 are in place.

- With close to one-third of CWEB and CWEL students and graduates reporting the receipt of awards or recognition for superior academic achievement, clinical knowledge, community service, and social work values, it is clear that the Title IV-E education programs are having a positive impact on the child welfare workforce. Students have excelled academically as shown by graduating with honors, appearing on the dean’s list, and being inducted into national honor societies. CWEB and CWEL graduates have had also become leaders in the workforce as witnessed by increased responsibilities, spearheading new initiatives, being recognized for superior work ethic as employee of the month and receiving praise from families, colleagues, and other professionals. This cohort of CWEB and CWEL respondents has also received various awards such as the Child Advocacy Center Star Award, the Outstanding Field Education Award, and the Crusader Award.
- Graduates of the CWEL program are well-prepared to assume positions of leadership in their agencies. Currently, 21% of Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators are graduates of the CWEL program. An additional 12 CWEL graduates hold Assistant Administrator positions. Of note, a CWEB graduate also occupies a county leadership position.



- **CWEL students contribute to human service programs in both the public and private sector during the course of their graduate studies through active engagement in field work in a variety of agency settings.** County agencies, in turn, benefit from the expanded knowledge that CWEL students bring to the county as a result of their field and classroom experience. CWEL students have been instrumental in improving cross-systems collaboration, educating provider agencies about child welfare mandates and services, and, in some instances, shifting a pre-existing, negative perception of child welfare practice. CWEL students and graduates are participating in the state Program Improvement Plan, Quality Service Reviews, development of the PA Child Welfare Practice Model, and contributing to committees focusing on the state-wide effort to improve child level outcomes. Participants develop a greater appreciation and understanding of the services, mandates, philosophy, delivery and outcome goals of child welfare provider agencies and programs. All of this occurs as our child welfare students share their expertise and enrich their skills through internships with community and private provider agencies.
- Throughout the 2013-2014 academic year, major legislative changes occurred to Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law. These changes have significant implications for child welfare practice. CWEL and CWEL graduates possess the knowledge and expertise to contribute to the manner in which these practices changes will be implemented at the state and county level.



- We are committed to increasing racial diversity in CWEB and CWEL enrollment.**

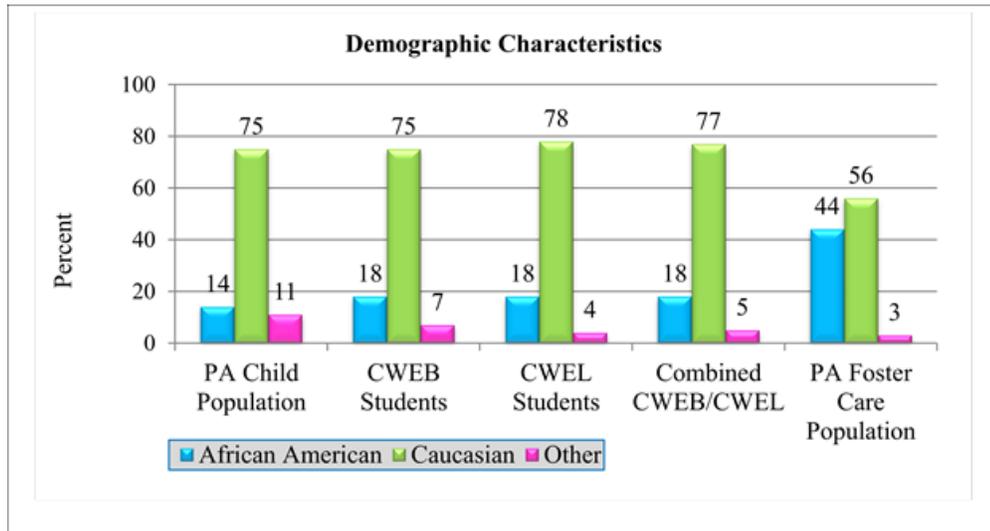
According to a recent report by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, there were more than 21,000 Pennsylvania children living in foster care in 2013. Forty-five percent of these children are Black or African American, yet African American children comprise only 13% of the state's child population<sup>4</sup>. Caucasian children make up 70% of the state's child population and comprise approximately 57% of Pennsylvania's foster care population<sup>1,2</sup>. Within the CWEB and CWEL programs combined, African Americans

<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau, Department of Commerce. (n.d.). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/ranks/rank01.html>

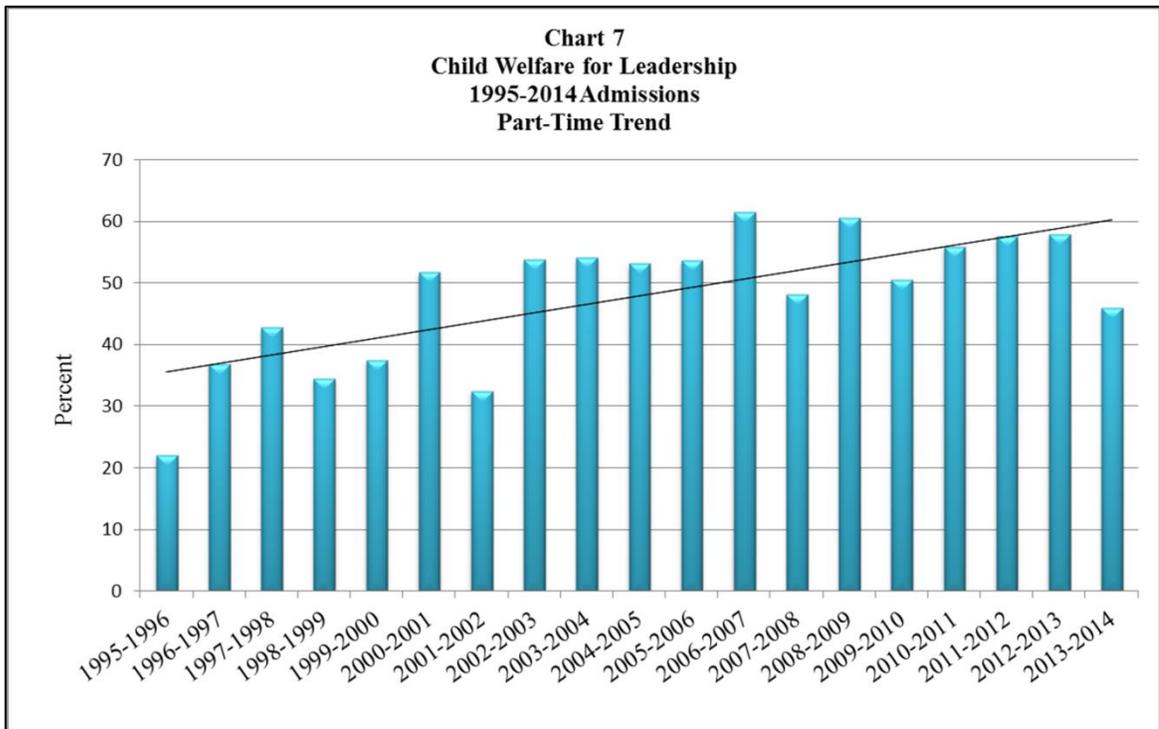
<sup>2</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation (n.d.), KIDS COUNT data center. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/103-child-population-by-race?loc=40&loct=2#detailed/2/40/false/36.868.867.133.38/66.67.68.69.70.71.12.72/423.424>

represent 18% of participants. While the causes and solutions for the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system are complex, we believe that it is crucial that the workforce be reflective of the populations served. We specifically target recruitment of students with diverse backgrounds at the entry level in order to broaden the racial and ethnic diversity of the child welfare workforce.

**Demographics of PA Child Population and CWEB/CWEL Participants**



- A continuing 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 full-time employment. While continuing to monitor this trend, we are exploring additional ways to meet this population’s evolving needs while still ensuring quality education along with financial and academic support.



- The perception of agency work climate by CWEL and CWEL graduates has been rated as moderate.** The climate surveys among program graduates have been administered and results analyzed for nearly 10 years, spanning graduates of the program as far back as 1995 (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). This year, the Organizational Culture Survey (Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987) was utilized to gauge the organizational climate in child welfare services. Results are consistent with previous years' findings in that long-term graduates rate the organizational climate as neutral on this new scale. However, graduates of both the CWEL and CWEL program rated the supervision subscale positively indicating that the graduates are satisfied with the quality of the supervision they receive in their agencies. Common areas of work climate strain are role overload (feeling unable to accomplish what is needed) and lack of opportunities for promotion. In addition, graduates' climate ratings did not improve when considering the amount of time that they have spent in the child welfare workforce. While still regarding public child welfare practice positively, seasoned workers rate the climate similar to less experienced workers, and in some aspects, they feel that the climate is more challenging (routinization and role conflict). Nearly all the graduates report that they are working in direct services in a county child welfare agency. As this was our third year using the Organizational Culture Survey, we were able to compare the ratings from last year's long term graduate cohort to this year's cohort. The results of this analysis showed that this year's CWEL long-term graduates rated certain aspects of agency organizational culture more positively, while this year's CWEL graduates remained consistent in their ratings of the organizational environment.

The consistency of agency work climate as perceived by multiple samples of program graduates over time suggests that the work climate in Pennsylvania is stable, and not influenced to a large degree by individuals or where they are working. Therefore, interventions that target problem areas such as "role overload" and "opportunities for advancement" may not need to be individualized to a particular agency or region.

## *Recommendations*

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Educational programs such as CWEB and CWEL prepare and enrich the workforce, but they are only 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. Child welfare workforce development continues to be a national-level imperative, bolstered by evidence that the quality of the workforce, in addition to agency climate, impact child level outcomes. For example, a study using a national sample of child welfare agencies confirmed that 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 Human Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators, we are committed to extending the impact of the CWEB and CWEL programs through the following recommendations:

- **Increase the 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**

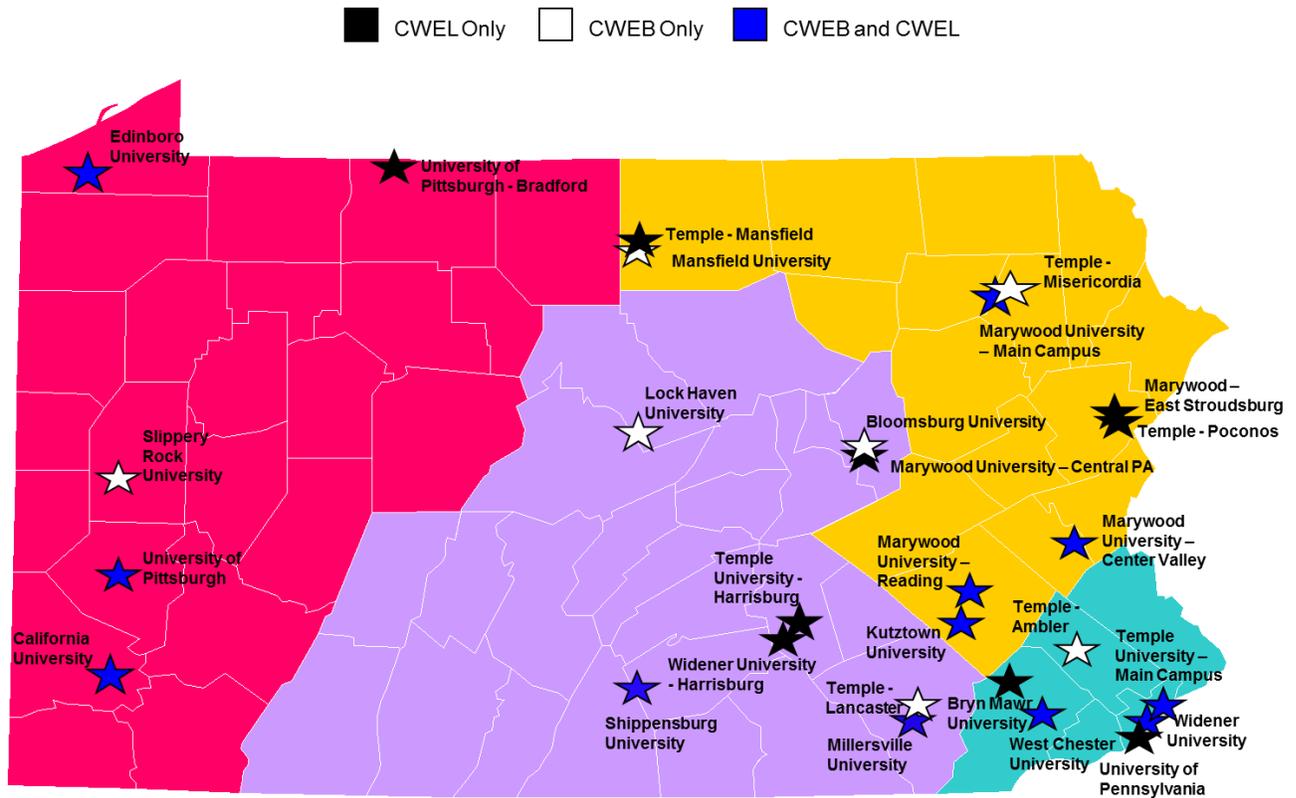
Undergraduates currently complete one child welfare course and a public child welfare internship. We are currently in the process of developing the second of three courses in Child Advocacy Studies in an on-line, hybrid format. One or more Child Advocacy Studies courses completed during the senior year, or through the Child Welfare Resource Center shortly following graduation, will strengthen the child welfare knowledge among CWEB participants. An added benefit during undergraduate studies is providing an elective option for students outside of social work who receive little, if any, content on child abuse and neglect during the course of their undergraduate enrollment. This is consistent with the vision of the National Child Protection Training Center, of which the University of Pittsburgh is a consortium member.

- **Include 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. The map below shows the PA schools of social work currently participating the CWEL and CWEL programs.

### Child Welfare Education and Research Programs Participating Schools



Consideration may also be given to include the fourteen private, accredited undergraduate social work programs in Pennsylvania in the CWEL consortium. This offers the potential to double the CWEL enrollment, would provide educational opportunities to a larger network of students interested in child welfare, and would develop a greater pool of eligible employees for the counties.

Although the need among counties for new bachelor-level social work graduates is high, budgetary challenges complicate what may appear as a relatively simple solution. Many counties have had to freeze vacant positions secondary to state budget issues. Secondly, additional funding would be needed from the Department of Human Services to expand the CWEL program to additional schools.

- **Continue to promote enrollment in the CWEL program in order to provide a professional career ladder**

The CWEB program is an effective way to introduce well-educated and trained child welfare workers into the workforce. Because many counties have experienced periodic hiring freezes for caseworker positions over the past several years, the CWEB program has had to be careful in terms of balancing enrollment with position openings. Nonetheless, it remains one of the most promising aspects of creating a skilled workforce. After fulfilling the legal work commitment and remaining at their county agency for an additional length of time, CWEB graduates are able to apply to the CWEL program. This professional ladder provides a unique opportunity for enriching the child welfare workforce through advanced social work education. An informational video featuring current and former CWEB participants has been developed to assist in recruitment for the CWEB program.

- **Continue to promote enrollment in Charting the Course to CWEB students**

CWEB graduates are better prepared to enter the workforce following completion of their undergraduate social work studies when they have a child welfare internship at a county agency and have begun the competency and skills-based training for new caseworkers. A case management system has been developed in which each CWEB student is assigned to a Regional Training Specialist at the PA Child Welfare Resource Center who facilitates enrollment in Charting the Course (CTC) and begins the students' certification training record. The availability of CTC in an on-line format will permit CWEB students to complete all of the modules during the course of their senior year in school. This will benefit both the students and the county agencies.

- **Mentor CWEB graduates**

Mentoring opportunities for CWEB graduates by CWEL graduates (particularly male, Hispanic and African American) can help with their transitions into the workforce and recruitment into the CWEL program. Many CWEB graduates speak of the positive impact that mentoring by a more experienced child welfare worker made on their professional development, especially their sense of competence in managing complicated tasks and responsibilities. CWEB students are a rich resource for the child welfare workforce and are eager to contribute to practice improvement efforts at the county level.

- **Consider an additional component to the CWEL program in order to recruit new employees for the counties**

Currently, only current CYS employees are CWEL program participants. An additional component will allow the CWEL program to admit persons who have never worked in a county child welfare agency 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”<sup>3</sup> provides this opportunity. A principal advantage of this additional component is cost savings.

In operationalizing this recommendation, consideration must be given to the ability of the county child welfare agencies to hire MSW-prepared candidates as well as the impact of additional CWEL graduates on the hiring of CWEL program graduates.

- **Improve leadership and professional development skills of CWEL students**

CWEL students are new to child welfare casework and may not realize the realities of a career in child welfare. By providing both leadership and professional development opportunities to CWEL student before they enter the field, the CWERP program is providing valuable skills to the CWEL student that will showcase the true nature of child welfare casework and better prepare them for a career in child welfare. Pilot groups are being established in two locations to examine the effects of this effort.

- **Provide transition support and ongoing connection among CWEL 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. CWEL 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. To address these issues, we suggest a “transition seminar” for students in their last semester of school to provide them transition support and an opportunity to interact and make contacts with other CWEL participants. Practice Improvement Specialists from the Child Welfare Resource Center can also facilitate contact with program graduates during the course of their work with counties.

- **Utilize the advanced clinical skills of the CWEL graduates**

Because CWEL students have advanced skills, we suggest creating specialty positions to capitalize on their expertise. A repeated theme among CWEL graduates is the satisfaction that comes from new challenges and opportunities for leadership within child welfare, and the frustration and discontent that results from no recognition of their advanced skills and abilities. Our retention research with long-term graduates has consistently shown that opportunities to utilize advanced skills can often make the difference between staying within public child welfare or seeking new opportunities. We also see evidence of this through the qualitative feedback we receive from program participants. Those who have become involved in state-level initiatives, and who have had the opportunity to develop new programs, provide supervision, and offer mentorship to junior colleagues report much higher levels of job satisfaction compared to those who have not become involved in leadership endeavors.

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<sup>3</sup> 45 CFR, Ch. II, §235.63 (a).

- **Incorporate trauma-informed, reflective supervision at the county level**

Current students and graduates speak poignantly about needing supervisory and peer support to manage work-related stress, and of the impact of secondary trauma upon their ability to remain in the field of child welfare. Process-oriented supervision, with a focus upon the impact of secondary trauma, is a concrete way of supporting the workforce and assuring that workers have the capacity to remain committed to child welfare. We believe it is critical to address this issue. Revisions to the Supervisor Training Series developed by CWRC have placed increased emphasis on this particular workforce need and many child welfare course curricula now include this content.

- **Maximize participation by CWEB and CWEL graduates in the implementation of practice changes following revisions to PA's child abuse laws**

A unique opportunity exists to capitalize on the skill and expertise of program graduates to assist with implementation of changes in practice emanating from substantial revisions (current and forthcoming) to Pennsylvania's child protection legislation. CWEB and CWEL graduates are in an excellent position to provide guidance for the implementation of these practice changes and can be leaders in this important process for both public and private child-serving agencies.

- **Consider the addition of a doctoral-level CWEL option**

This option can provide an additional evaluation arm for the state and further our mission of establishing evidence-based child welfare practice across the state. Research at the doctoral level can 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.

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