

Child Welfare Education and Research Programs



Over 79 Years of Child
Welfare Leadership!

2016-2017 Executive Summary

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Child Welfare Education and Research Programs 2016-2017 Annual Report

Executive Summary

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, 2016-2017, marks the sixteenth academic year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program (CWEB) and the twenty-second 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, 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.**

The CWEB and CWEL programs are integrated into the framework of public child welfare throughout the state, with approximately 99% of the counties in the Commonwealth participating. Over 1,107 students have graduated from CWEB during the program's fifteen years and they have been employed in 61 out of the 67 Pennsylvania counties. CWEL has funded students from 64 counties and twelve Pennsylvania schools of social work on both a full- and part-time basis. As of the 2016-2017 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 students and graduates perceive their preparation for child welfare work. This year we heard from 94% of the participating schools, approximately 93% of county agencies, 81% of enrolled students, and 58% of our

“As a university, we have participated in the CWEB program for many years. As more of our students have graduated and gotten jobs in child welfare, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of qualified social workers at the county child welfare departments.” (Participating University Faculty)

“Having caseworkers in the field with an educational background in social work is very important. It is good to have a basic understanding of social constructs, racial disparities etc. before having authority over children and families’ lives.” (CWEB Student)

“Agency caseworkers have the opportunity to grow and expand their knowledge to excel in their field of work and to be positive role models and leaders in their careers.” (CWEL student)

“The CWEB program is a very strong and good program. If you take advantage of the hours and opportunities it can turn out to be very successful, and set you up for a career.” (CWEB Recent Graduate)

“CWEL gives workers an opportunity to grow academically in the area of Social Work which can prepare an individual for leadership in social services.” (CWEL Recent Graduate)

“We have had tremendous success with the CWEL program and encourage staff to participate. We see tremendous professional growth with staff who have attended CWEL and they have certainly been of benefit to the agency and community.” (Agency director)

“CWEB prepared me very well and gave me the tools to become a leader in the child welfare field.” (CWEB Long-Term Graduate)

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 and field placements they are receiving prepares them for the child welfare workforce. 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 caliber of the child welfare workforce. School faculty report that the CWEB program attracts great students who cultivate a love for child welfare work by participating in the program. Strong retention rates among participants indicate that educational enrichment also strengthens the stability of the workforce.
- Results from core competency questions directed toward school administrators, agency directors and CWEB/CWEL graduates who mentor or supervise CWEB students provide a wealth of knowledge pertaining to the perception of CWEB students' skills in the field. The addition of a longitudinal survey process for newly admitted CWEB students on core competencies can help guide the CWEB program to attract suitable candidates who are enthusiastic about child welfare practice, thus improving the recruitment of qualified and skilled caseworkers.

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

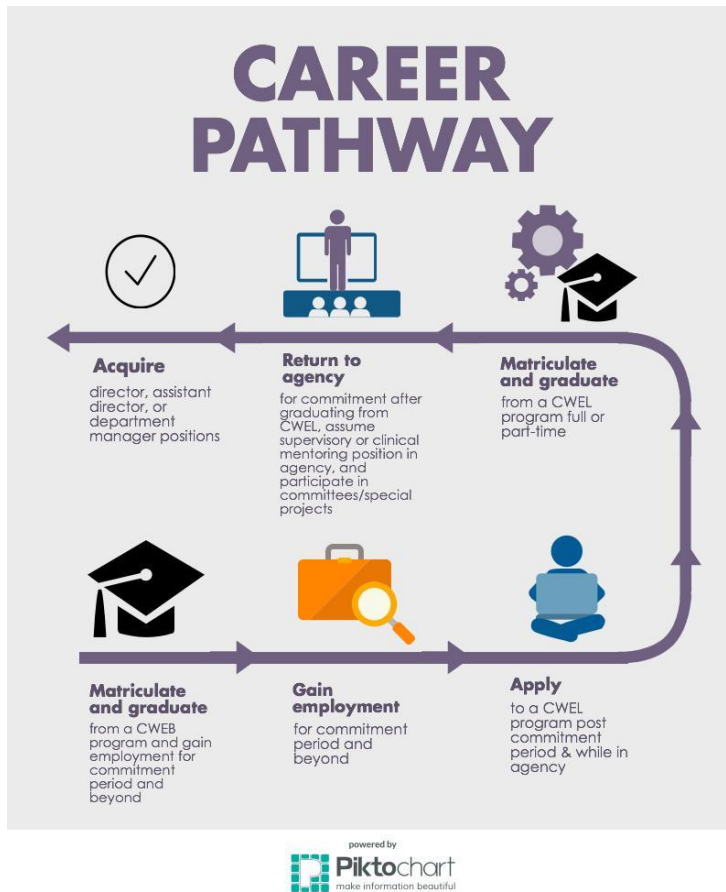
University of Pennsylvania

University of Pittsburgh

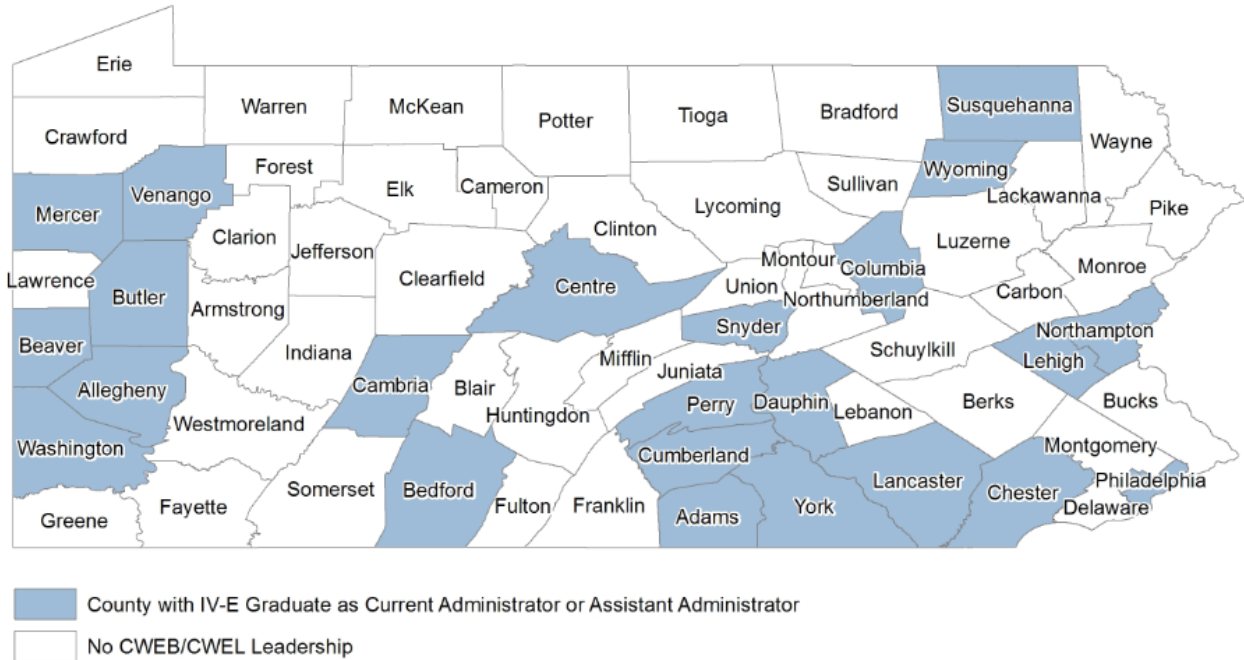
West Chester University

Widener University

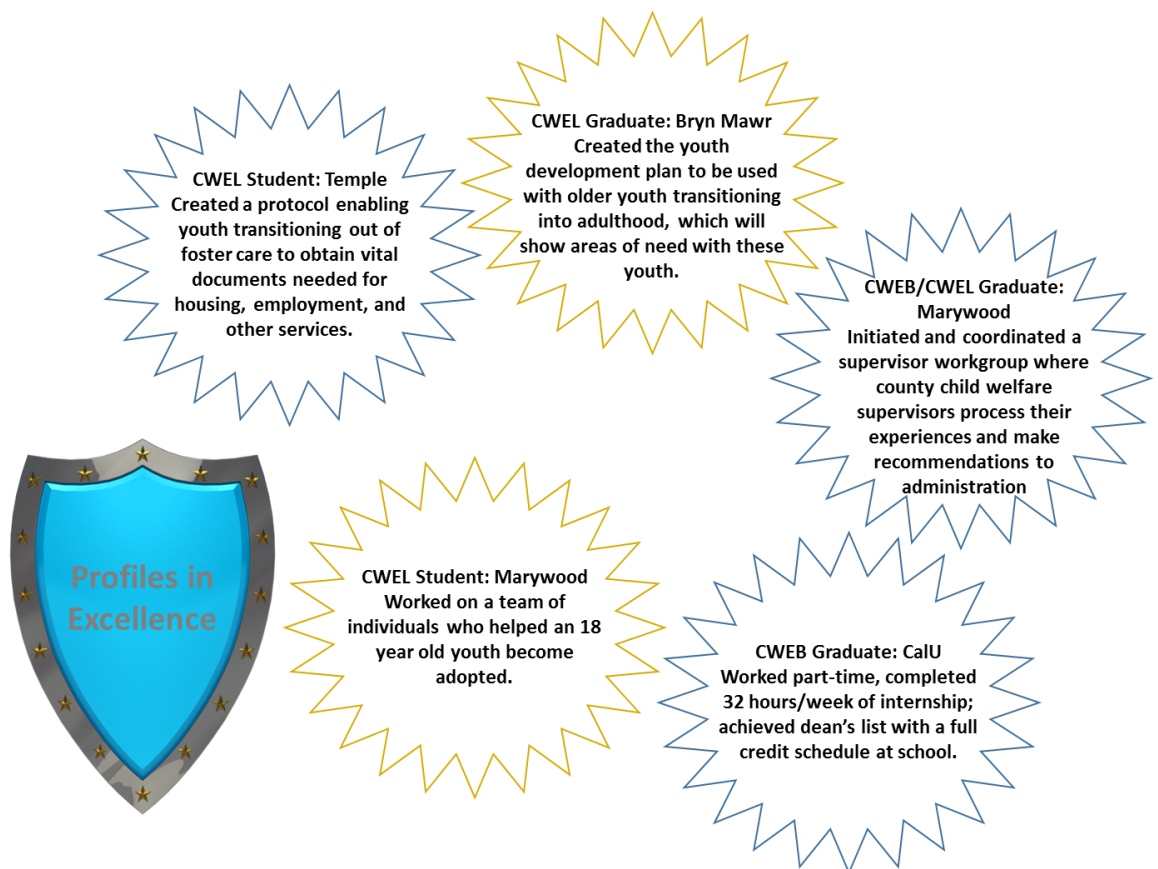
- The CWEB and CWEL programs create an educational career pathway for social workers in child welfare.



For the enrolled CWEL students who responded to the survey, 14% received their undergraduate degrees through the CWEB program. Of this group, the majority (79%) are still working in the agency in which they completed their post-CWEB commitment. We have observed this CWEB to CWEL progression pattern for the last four years and it suggests that first 3 steps are in place. Both CWEB and CWEL graduates occupy high-level leadership positions (assistant administrator; director; manager) in approximately 34% of Pennsylvania’s counties (23/67), illustrating that positive progress is being achieved on the final step of the career pathway.

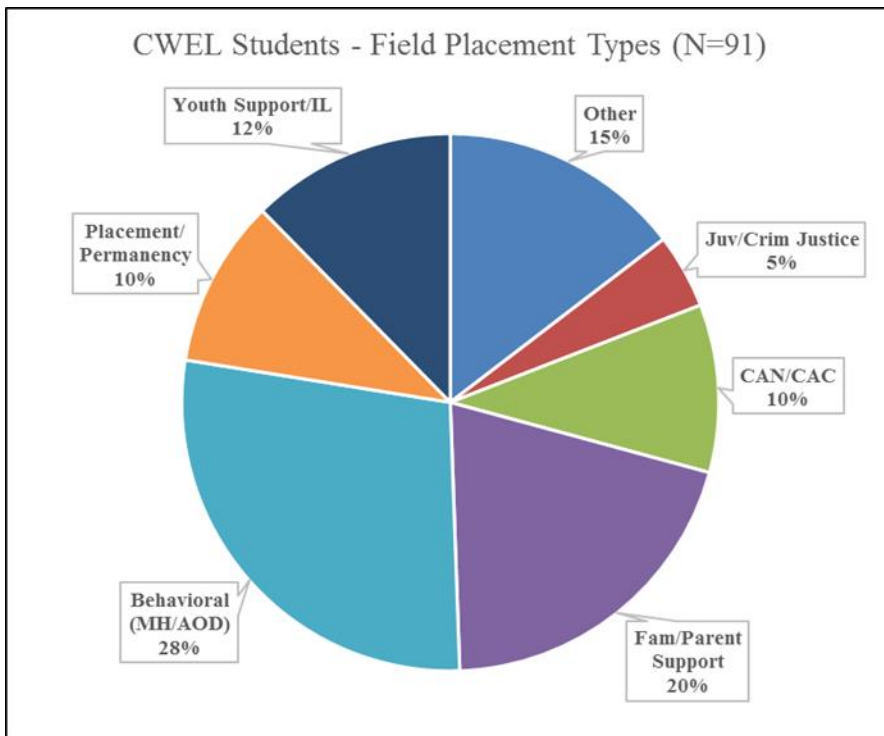


- Participants of the CWEB and CWEL programs continue to excel both academically and in their casework practice. Close to one-third of the CWEB and CWEL participants received an award or recognition during the 2016-2017 academic year. These program participants have shown significant academic achievement by placing on the dean’s list, graduating with honors, and becoming members of national honor societies. In addition, the CWEB and CWEL students/graduates were recognized for their superior casework by receiving promotions, employee of the month awards, and creating new initiatives within their agencies to promote well-being for the children and families they serve. Some program participants received official awards for their academic or field work such as: Rosa Wessel Award and a grant funding for research. CWEB and CWEL students and graduates are recognized each year during social work month on the program’s Facebook page to showcase their dedication and contributions to the field.



- As mentioned in previous reports, Pennsylvania passed 23 new pieces of legislation in 2012 to provide better protection for the Commonwealth's children. Since the implementation of the new amendments to the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL), referrals of suspected abuse and neglect increased as much as 200% in some counties without a substantial increase in the amount of staff within the county child welfare agencies. Added to this is the nationwide epidemic of opioid abuse and the increased rate of substance exposed infants coming to the attention of child welfare agencies. The resulting increase in work demands, new requirements and multiple changes within a short period of time added to the stress of an already taxed child welfare system. At the same time, new opportunities to employ more efficient and effective modes of practice, including the use of more sophisticated data systems and evidence-based interventions, became more available. All of these factors have contributed to exponential changes in the landscape of Pennsylvania public child welfare during the past several years.
- **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. By completing a field experience at an agency in the private sector or within another publically-funded program, students are able to gain valuable information regarding systems, policies, service mandates, and intervention strategies. They, in turn, are able to transmit their experience and knowledge of child welfare

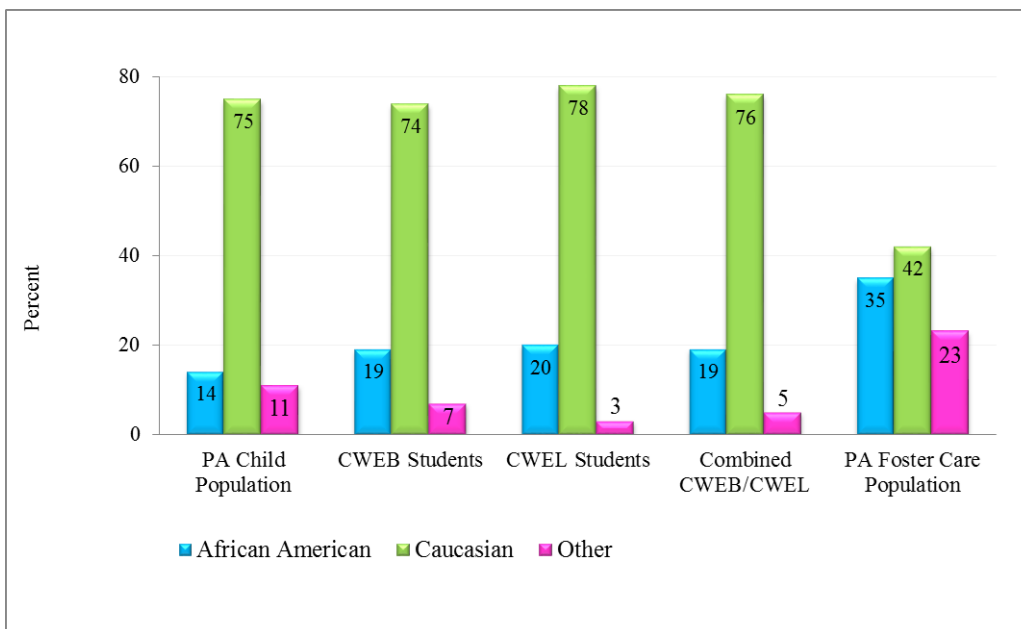
policies and procedures within provider agencies that may have limited to no understanding of child welfare services. CWEL students and graduates are participating in the state Quality Service Reviews, committees associated with Pennsylvania’s CPSL Implementation, specific workgroups (i.e., Pennsylvania’s implementation of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Safety Assessment and Management, Diversity Taskforce, CAST curriculum, TA Collaborative, CWIS) and in practice initiatives such as the early developmental screening of young children, family teaming and conferencing (e.g., Family Group Conferencing, Family Teaming, Family Group Decision Making) Family Finding, and enhancing the use of data-driven decision making. CWEL graduates are invited to become mentors and supervisors of CWEL students in their agencies; many assume prominent roles in leading youth and family engagement practices and are active in continuous quality improvements initiatives within their counties. 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.



- **We are committed to increasing racial diversity in CWEL and CWEL enrollment.** According to a recent report by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, there were more

than 24,500 Pennsylvania children living in foster care in 2016. Thirty-five percent of these children are Black or African American, yet African American children comprise just under 14% of the state’s child population^{1,2}. Caucasian children make up almost 75% of the state’s child population and comprise approximately 43% of Pennsylvania’s foster care population^{1,2}. Within the CWEB and CWEL programs combined, African Americans represent 19% 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 composition of the child welfare workforce.

Demographics of PA Child Population and CWEB/CWEL Participants



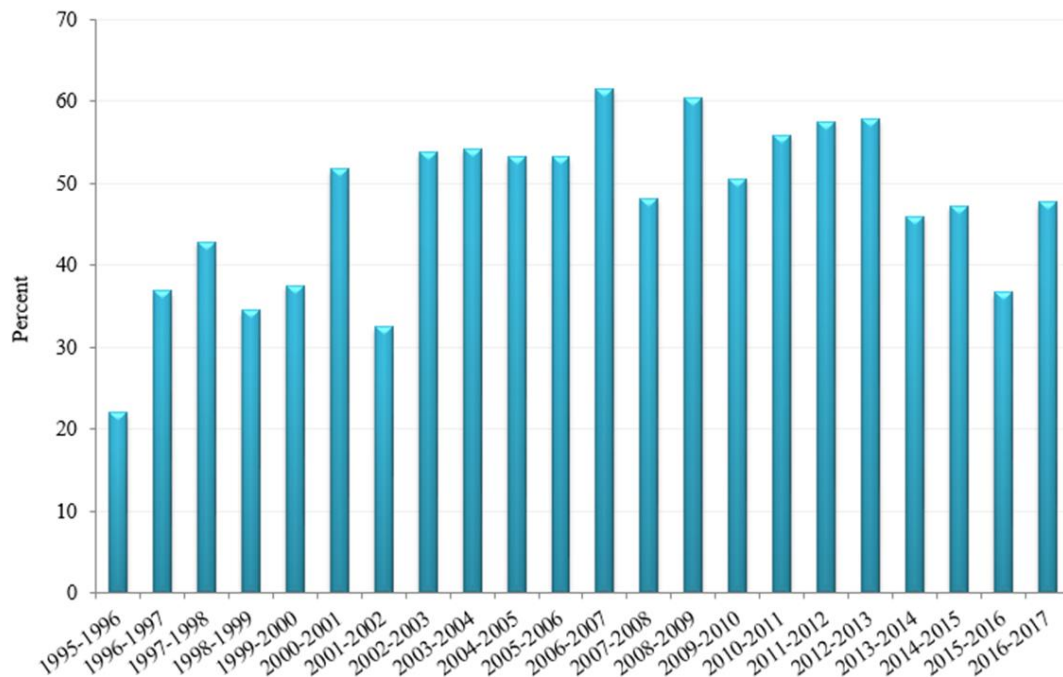
- Although the last few years have seen a decrease in part-time matriculation by students, part-time admissions continued to comprise well over a third of the CWEL student population.** Part-time students have the challenge of managing the work/life/school balance and may have limited field placement options and fewer choices in coursework. With increased caseloads emanating, in part, due to changes to the CPSL, part-time students face a greater burden in trying to balance academic activities and a full-time child welfare job. They are also at greater risk of dropping out of school and may have less opportunity to take elective courses. Full-time students have greater choice, but face a sometimes difficult transition back to full-time

¹ United States Census Bureau, Department of Commerce. (n.d.). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/42>

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation (n.d.), KIDS COUNT data center. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/4201-population--children-age-0-17-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/2/any/false/133,11/144,107,9,167,172,4,185,12/9030,9031>

employment. While continuing to monitor this trend, we are exploring additional ways to meet this population’s evolving needs while still ensuring quality education. On-line degree programs are often viewed as a solution for decreasing the stress associated with part-time study. While offering accessibility, on-line coursework of quality and merit is both rigorous and time-consuming. Field placements are required, and synchronous courses involve the same designated meeting time as in-person classes. There is often little flexibility regarding due dates and completion of required assignments. A small pilot study conducted with CWEL students enrolled in an on-line child welfare course found that although the students valued the convenience of the on-line option, they missed the interpersonal connection with their faculty and peers and would have preferred face-to-face contact.³

Chart 7
Child Welfare for Leadership
1995-2017 Admissions
Part-Time Trend



- **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). The Organizational Culture Survey (Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987) was utilized to gauge the organizational climate in child welfare services. Results are consistent with previous findings in that long-term graduates rate the organizational climate as neutral on this scale. However, graduates of both the

³ Child Welfare Education and Research Programs (2017, November). *Ready to learn? An analysis of online education and training*. University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work.

CWEB 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. Respondents who worked in child welfare for more than five years rated every domain (teamwork, morale, information flow, employee involvement, supervision, and meetings) as lower than those who have been working in child welfare less than five years. Nearly all the graduates report that they are working in direct services in a county child welfare agency.

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

Quality educational programs such as CWEB and CWEL provide opportunities to acquire new skills and provide a strong foundation for work in the child welfare field, 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**

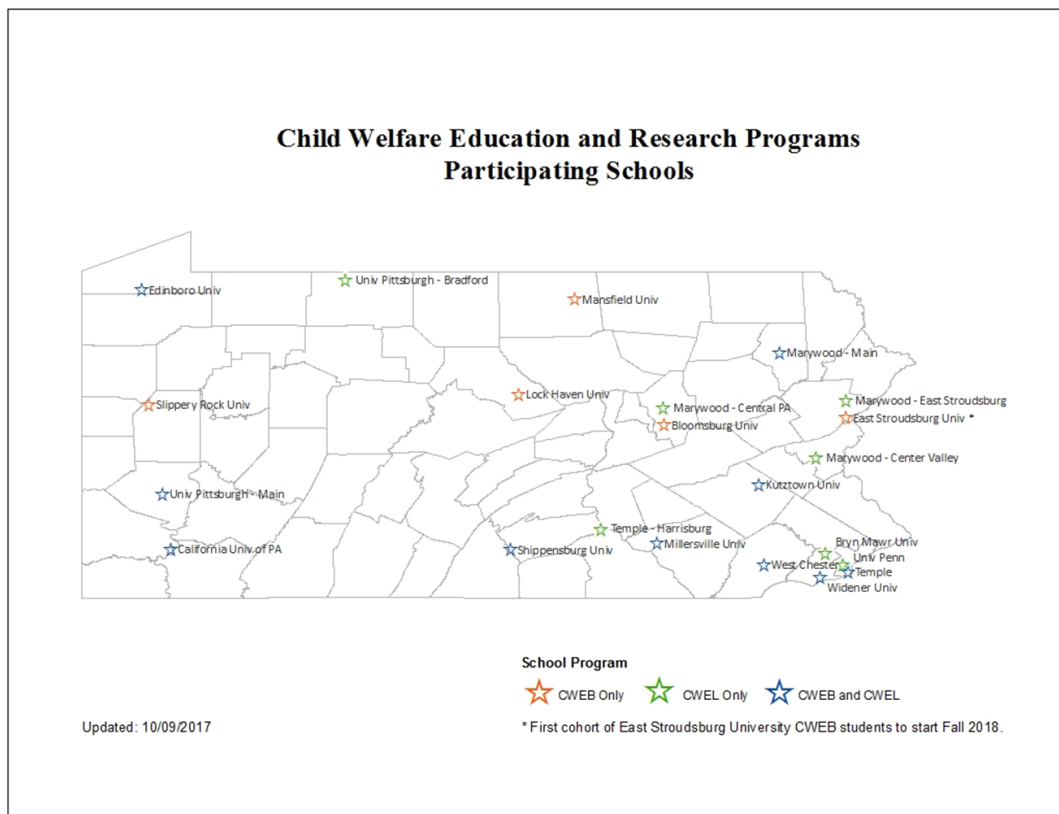
Undergraduates currently complete one child welfare course and a public child welfare internship. The second of three courses in Child Advocacy Studies has been developed in an on-line, hybrid format. Providing these courses across schools will strengthen the child welfare course options for students and also has the benefit of providing an elective option for students outside of social work who receive little, if any, content on child abuse/neglect.

- **Provide additional guidance to CWEB students and CWEB school administrators regarding civil service exam requirements**

Both CWEB students and CWEB school administrators expressed confusion with the requirements of the civil service exam and how completing an internship in a non-civil service county will impact employment in a civil service county. To help address these issues, the CWERP department has created a detailed diagram illustrating various civil and non-civil service scenarios. This diagram is incorporated into the CWEB student handbook and is also published as a standalone document on the CWERP web page. More discussion surrounding this issue also takes place during the annual school visits. In addition, the CWERP department has the most recent county civil service status on the website so CWEB students and school administrators have ready access to this information. CWEB students are to register as a county casework intern so they are eligible for jobs in civil service counties.

- **Include additional accredited social work degree programs in Pennsylvania**

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 in the CWEB and CWEL programs.



Consideration may also be given to include the fourteen private, accredited undergraduate social work programs in Pennsylvania in the CWEB consortium. This

offers the potential to double the CWEB 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 CWEB program to additional schools.

- **Improve leadership and professional development skills**

The CWEB program provides social work students with an opportunity to specialize in child welfare and enables county child welfare workers to train and shape the future of casework in Pennsylvania by providing invaluable internship opportunities. The CWERP program implemented a pilot program at two CWEB schools to develop leadership skills with CWEB students and provide a framework on self-care. Additional content on racial disproportionality and race consciousness has been added to the curriculum. These efforts further enhance the knowledge and skill that CWEB students bring into the county child welfare agency and help in addressing worker burnout, thereby targeting the retention of CWEB graduates.

- **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 Resource Specialist at the PA Child Welfare Resource Center who facilitates enrollment in Charting the Course (CTC) and begins the students' certification training record. Enrollment in CTC during the CWEB students' senior year and initiation of the training record to document completion of modules is in effect.

- **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.

- **Continued focus upon agency working environment and opportunities for CWEL graduates to use their expanded skills and abilities within the agency and at the state level**

In order to retain CWEL graduates, opportunities to use the skills developed during graduate study must be available. Although opportunities for advancement might be difficult in some agencies due to lack of turnover in higher positions, CWEL graduates enjoy both support and a sense of appreciation when they are able to create new programs or showcase their research skills to verify the relevance of an existing program. CWEL graduates can also use their expertise by participating in the implementation of new legislative mandates and by joining state and local work groups to improve the landscape of child welfare work.

- **Improve dissemination of child welfare career development opportunity through CWEB and CWEL to prospective and current participants**

Considering the importance of CWEB and CWEL graduates to the field of child welfare in Pennsylvania, it is imperative that the CWERP faculty continue to find new ways to attract burgeoning social workers to child welfare work. A CWEB informational video has been developed along with a realistic job preview. A CWEL informational video is planned to showcase the CWEB to CWEL career pathway. In addition, starting in the 2018-2019 academic year, East Stroudsburg University will begin to offer the CWEB program.

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