

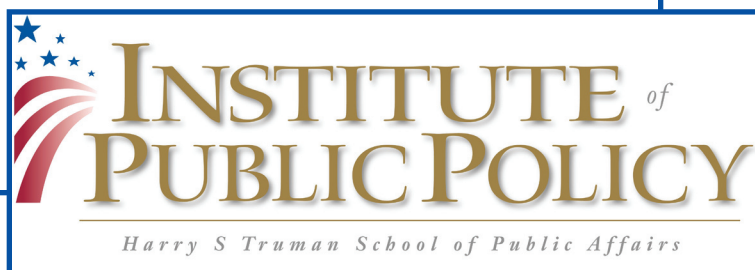
Assessing Change Following Interagency Education

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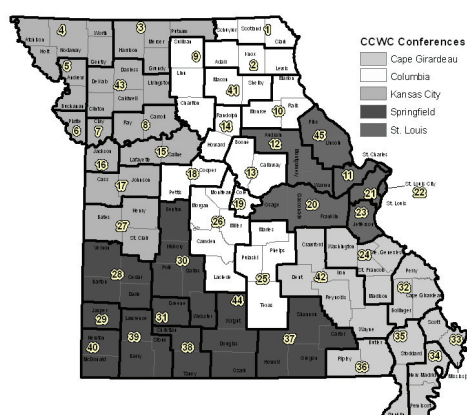
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Conference History

House Bill 1453 (2004) brought about a number of changes in the way child welfare cases are processed and approached in the State of Missouri. These statutory changes affect not only the children and families involved, but also the judges, clerks, juvenile officers, Children's Division caseworkers, CASAs and attorneys handling child abuse and neglect cases.

The Office of State Courts Administrator teamed with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Mental Health to provide multidisciplinary education on changes in child welfare laws from mid-March through mid-May in 2005. The Comprehensive Child Welfare Conference (CCWC) invited child welfare case teams to different regions of the state for education on statutory impacts of HB 1453 and provided the opportunity to develop new processes to address these changes as a group. Approximately 600 people attended one of the day and a half conferences which were composed of plenary, breakout, and workgroup sessions. Representatives from all circuits attended. The map below (Figure 1) provides information about the location of the conferences attended by each circuit.

Figure 1. Attendance by region



Conference Evaluation

Two evaluation instruments were developed, one that was administered at the close of each regional conference and a follow-up survey administered six months later. While the overall conference evaluation focused on the quality of

the conference, the follow-up survey focused on assessing changes at the circuit-level as the result of CCWC. Both surveys contained a core of common questions but the follow-up survey included questions to assess the extent to which information on HB1453 was shared and how processes in the circuit may have changed as a result of the multidisciplinary learning experience. Of particular interest was how the circuits may have shared the worksheets, completed during workgroup time, with members of the child welfare team who were unable to attend CCWC.

The overall conference evaluation was administered in paper form with responses collected at the conference registration desk at the close of the proceedings. Each participant had the opportunity to complete an overall evaluation form and 435 (62%) did so. For the follow-up survey, an email containing a letter from Missouri Supreme Court Justice Wolff and a link to the online survey was sent to the conference participants on October 26, 2005, approximately six months following CCWC. The time frame between the original conference and the arrival of the follow-up survey varied for participants due to the differences in the dates of the regional conferences. A reminder email was sent to non-respondents one week after the initial email.

The email was distributed to 693 people and 63 were returned as undeliverable due to incorrect email addresses. Others who did not respond had signed up for the conference but did not attend or did not have internet access to complete the survey. Of the 612 people who received the email and had the option to complete the survey, a total of 281 did so for a response rate of 46 percent. This response rate is high given the short time line to complete the survey (two weeks) and the lack of incentives for participation.

Survey Demographics

The demographics of the overall conference (here after referred to as the original) survey and the follow-up survey were compared for similarities or differences between respondents. The purpose of this comparison was to determine if the respondents to the follow-up survey were representative of those who completed the original survey based on factors such as location of regional conference, profession, or circuit structure.



The location of attendance for the regional conference was determined by the judicial circuit chosen by the respondent. In rare cases, a participant may have attended CCWC without a circuit team in a region other than the one assigned. Further, almost seven percent of the respondents to the follow-up survey declined to indicate a judicial circuit and two percent marked “other” so the conference location could not be determined for these 25 individuals (less than 9 percent of total respondents). Despite these limitations, the percentage of individuals responding from each regional location remained fairly stable, although Cape Girardeau had slightly less representation in the follow-up survey (5 percent).

Table 1. Percentage of respondents by region

Region	Original	Follow-up
Cape Girardeau	12.6	18.1
Columbia	22.9	20.0
Kansas City	21.3	20.0
St. Louis	22.5	22.4
Springfield	20.4	19.2

As illustrated in Table 2, the professions responding to the original and the follow-up survey were similar. There was a slight increase in the number of respondents who classified themselves as the Children’s Division (5%), Judge and Commissioner (3%), and Juvenile Officer (2%) but overall the numbers were consistent.

Table 2. Percentage of respondents by profession

Profession	Original	Follow-up
CASA	2.3	1.8
Children's Division	31.0	36.3
Court Clerk	6.2	5.7
DMH	1.6	1.8
Legal Services Attorney	3.4	3.2
Family Court Administrator	0.2	0.4
Guardian ad Litem	7.8	5.0
Judge and Commissioner	9.9	13.2
Juvenile Court Attorney	5.5	3.9
Juvenile Officer	22.3	24.9
Other	4.4	3.9
Total	94.7	100.0

Note: 5.3 percent of the respondents in the original survey did not indicate a profession.

A different way to look at the comparability between the original and follow-up survey is by both region and profession. A profession may be equally represented between the two surveys but not equally represented across the regions. For example, all of the judges in the follow-up

survey could be located in Kansas City skewing the responses of that profession to a geographical location. To see if this occurred, a bivariate analysis of regions and professions was performed. As shown in the table below, five percent more of the follow-up respondents from the Children’s Division attended the Cape Girardeau conference than respondents to the original survey. Almost nine percent more of the judges in the follow-up were from the St. Louis region than in the original survey. Seven percent fewer of the Juvenile Officers responding to the follow-up were from the Springfield region. While interesting to note, the differences do not dramatically skew a profession or region when compared to the original survey.

Table 3. Respondents by conference region and profession

Region	Children’s Division		Judge		Juvenile Officer	
	Original	Follow-up	Original	Follow-up	Original	Follow-up
Cape Girardeau	13.3	18.5	16.3	17.6	16.5	21.5
Columbia	18.5	18.5	25.6	23.5	26.8	24.6
Kansas City	22.2	20.7	16.3	14.7	22.7	23.1
Springfield	23.7	23.9	18.6	11.8	20.6	13.8
St. Louis	22.2	18.5	23.3	32.4	13.4	16.9

Finally, circuit structures were analyzed for differences between the two surveys. Respondents who work with multiple circuits were slightly more represented in the follow-up survey as compared to the original survey. This increase could be the result of the small increases in certain professions, such as Guardian ad Litem and CASAs, responding to the follow-up survey. These professions are more likely to work in more than one circuit than others completing the survey. There was also a slight decrease (3%) in the number of respondents from single county circuits between the original and the follow-up survey as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents by circuit structure

Circuit Structure	Original	Follow-Up
In a single county circuit	26.4	22.4
In a multi-county circuit	67.7	68.7
With multiple circuits	5.8	7.8
Decline to answer	5.3	1.1

Based on these analyses, the respondents to the original and follow-up surveys are similar in demographic characteristics and representative of those who attended the conference.

Comparison Questions

The follow-up survey contained questions on the quality of CCWC that were identical to the questions posed in the original survey. These questions were geared to understand



how different aspects of the conference were viewed by the respondents at the time of the proceedings and after the respondents had an opportunity to reflect on the experience. Overall, the participants related positive feelings in both the original and the follow-up surveys. A few interesting differences did emerge, however, in the follow-up survey. For example, judges were less likely to express strong agreement or agreement with any of the statements. While not shown in Table 5 below, 50 percent of the 37 judges responding to the follow-up survey indicated they strongly disagreed to the statement “Overall, I was satisfied with this conference.”

Respondents from the Children’s Division remained positive in their perceptions of the conference, in some cases increasing the percentage who agreed from the original survey. This change in attitude by Children’s Division employees was particularly evident in the statements about how working with other circuits helped identify barriers and resolve issues for implementing child welfare reforms. Juvenile officers showed a similar tendency as the Children’s Division on these same statements with almost 20 percent more showing strong agreement or agreement on the value of working with other circuits. Fewer respondents marked agreement or strong agreement on the value of the conference as a professional development experience or satisfaction with the conference in the follow-up survey. Overall, judges showed less approval of the conference on all factors.

Table 5. Percentage strongly agreeing and agreeing by profession

Affect on Circuit	Original			Follow-up		
	Judges	Children’s Division	Juvenile Officers	Judges	Children’s Division	Juvenile Officers
I gained knowledge that will be helpful in performing my job responsibilities.	83.3	88.7	90.8	22.9	73.2	47.2
Working with people in my judicial circuit helped me identify potential barriers to implementing the child welfare reforms.	65.0	76.5	75.3	23.1	73.0	53.9
Working with people in my judicial circuit helped me identify new ways to resolve issues for implementing child welfare reforms.	70.0	67.5	71.6	24.4	65.2	57.2
Working with people from other judicial circuits helped me identify potential barriers to implementing the child welfare reforms.	29.0	34.4	45.2	19.5	57.0	65.5
Working with people from other judicial circuits helped me identify new ways to resolve issues for implementing child welfare reforms.	36.9	36.0	46.3	18.8	59.2	65.5

The survey asked participants to assess how the CCWC affected their circuit and almost 72 percent of respondents saw some impact on their circuit as the result of the conference. Six percent viewed the conference as having substantial impact while only seven percent did not see any affect on their circuit following the conference.

Information Sharing

Educating participants on HB 1453 was the primary goal of CCWC but the conference also encouraged information sharing with individuals from the circuit who were not able to attend. Conference speakers and organizers encouraged participants to discuss the process changes made during circuit workgroups with others in the circuit and to distribute the completed worksheets. To see if the conference achieved these goals, a series of questions on the follow-up survey focused on the changes that had been made within the circuits since the end of the conference.

In terms of sharing information presented by the speakers at CCWC, almost 61 percent of respondents indicated informal, one-to-one talks were the preferred method of transmission in their circuit. For judges, this form of information sharing was the in the clear majority with 81 percent stating information was shared in their circuit on an informal basis. Department of Mental Health employees were the least likely to use informal methods to convey information from the conference with only 20 percent specifying this option. Formal information sharing may be a more common approach in the Department of Mental Health. Agency and interagency staff meetings were also a popular method of providing information from the conference to team members not in attendance. Only ten percent of those responding believed that no information sharing occurred in their circuit.

Table 6. Methods of sharing information presented by speakers

Method	Percentage
Informal, one-to-one talks	60.9
Agency staff meetings	43.4
Interagency staff meetings	18.1
Court en banc meetings	2.5
Newsletter	0.7
Memo	6.4
No information sharing occurred	10.0

Note: Multiple responses were allowed so percentages do not equal 100.

Speakers provided only a portion of the information at CCWC as circuits were encouraged to develop new processes and approaches during workgroup times. In some respects,



sharing the circuit workgroup discussions are of the most value to those not attending CCWC as these conversations have the potential to change the processes of the circuit. A little over half of the respondents stated workgroup information was shared in the circuit on an informal basis while another 52 percent conveyed the discussions through agency and interagency staff meetings. Combined, these responses demonstrate a strong level of sharing among those who attended CCWC and those who could not attend.

Table 7. Methods of sharing information discussed by circuit

Method	Percentage
Informal, one-to-one talks	53.0
Agency staff meetings	35.6
Interagency staff meetings	17.1
Court en banc meetings	1.8
Newsletter	0.7
Memo	5.7
No information sharing occurred	9.6
Other	7.8

Note: Multiple responses were allowed so percentages do not equal 100.

During CCWC, Circuits had the opportunity, during circuit workgroup time, to complete circuit worksheets to identify barriers to implementing child welfare reforms, strategies to overcome these barriers, and action steps. Circuits were encouraged to take the worksheets at the close of the conference to share with others and to put the strategies into place. When asked if the circuit worksheets were distributed to other team members, 66 percent did not know if the worksheets had been provided to those not in attendance. Of the total respondents, 19 percent stated they or someone from their circuit distributed the worksheets to others in the circuit. Conference organizers should continue to stress the importance of sharing information from learning sessions at future meetings.

As shown in Table 8, there was some variation on the distribution of worksheets by region. The Columbia region had the greatest percentage of respondents who knew the worksheets were circulated following the conference. A smaller percentage of people in the Springfield region (14%) knew the worksheets were passed on to those not in attendance. Kansas City had the largest proportion of respondents who indicated that the worksheets were not distributed.

Table 8. Worksheet distribution by region and percentage of participants

	Cape Girardeau	Columbia	Kansas City	Springfield	St. Louis
Yes	19.6	23.5	15.7	14.3	21.1
No	13.0	13.7	21.6	10.2	7.0
Don't Know	67.4	60.8	60.8	73.5	70.2

Attitudes Toward Professional Roles

A secondary goal of CCWC was to promote a better understanding of the role each profession plays in child welfare cases. Members of child welfare teams frequently have conflicting agendas, based on professional roles and agency differences. These competing methods and purposes can cloud the ultimate goal of the child welfare team – to protect the best interests of the child. To assess if a multi-disciplinary learning environment assisted in a better understanding of professional roles by all team members, a series of questions on the follow-up survey focused on the attitudes and perceptions of the respondent.

A little over half (54%) of those answering this question did not see any changes in the attitudes of other team members toward the respondent's professional role. Sixty-eight percent of judges indicated they did not see any changes in the attitudes of team members toward their professional role. Given the fairly well defined role of a judge and commissioner in the child welfare process, this finding is not surprising. A quarter of the court clerks who responded, stated team members were more understanding of their professional role in the process. These findings for court clerks were confirmed by comments provided by respondents regarding the benefits of including court clerks in the circuit teams.

At the same time, 60 percent of Department of Mental Health employees also indicated there was no change in attitudes among team members. Interestingly, Juvenile Court Attorneys viewed the conference as no effect (54%) or causing less understanding (18%) of other team members towards their professional role.



Table 9. Attitude of other team members toward my professional role by profession

Profession	Percentage	
	Unchanged	More Understanding
CASA	40.0	20.0
Children's Division	50.0	12.7
Court Clerk	50.0	25.0
Department of Mental Health	60.0	20.0
Legal Services Attorney	33.3	11.1
Guardian ad Litem	50.0	14.3
Judge and Commissioner	67.6	13.5
Juvenile Court Attorney	54.5	0.0
Juvenile Officer	51.4	12.9
Other	36.4	18.2

Note: One Family Court Administrator responded to the follow-up survey and is excluded from analysis.

Concerns Addressed

Almost 87 percent of respondents felt that some to all of their concerns with changes in child welfare processes were adequately addressed by the conference. A little over 12 percent felt the conference “very much so” responded to their concerns. A slightly smaller percentage (84%) of the respondents felt their circuit team adequately addressed their concerns. Twelve percent of Children’s Division employees and judges felt the circuit team did not adequately address concerns to changes in the child welfare processes. The large number of changes brought about with HB 1453 and the limited time available to discuss these changes as a circuit team at the conference may play a role in these findings.

Case processing changes

Almost 50 percent of respondents felt their circuit made changes to the way cases are processed as a result of the conference. When asked to describe the changes made to case processing, closer adherence to timelines was the most frequently mentioned. Detailed worksheets on cases, more effective use of JIS, and communicating timeline expectations were the most prevalent methods of ensuring timelines are met. Others mentioned new approaches to reasonable efforts, locating relatives, and procedures “to address the open records aspect of the legislation”.

“Using more of a multidisciplinary approach to our practice” was another theme in the comments from respondents. Increased interagency cooperation was achieved by including new people in Family Support Team meetings and having more frequent meetings with team members, neither of which occurred prior to the conference. As one participant stated, there is “more communication and a better understanding of each other’s role in the system”. Another respondent explained the process changes in this manner:

The process, although very similar, is handled slightly different in that [each agency] understand their roles better. I believe the process itself was misunderstood until we were able to attend the CCWC.

Changes to the Family Support Team Meetings

While changes to case processing seemed evident for many of the respondents, those who attend Family Support Team (FST) meetings did not see dramatic changes in how the meetings are conducted. Of the individuals who attend FST meetings, 76 percent stated they did not see any changes. For the 25 percent who did see changes, most of the changes focused on having a stronger understanding of roles and more frequent meetings. The structure of meetings also improved as a result of team members having a shared understanding of the purpose of FST meetings. Finally, several respondents indicated that Guardian ad Litem are now included in FST meetings when they had not been in the past. The inclusion of Guardian ad Litem may make for more productive team meetings now that the child’s representative is a part of the conversation.

Conference Structure

The structure and format of the conference was appealing to majority of respondents. The slight preference for increasing circuit workgroup time and implementation strategies may demonstrate a need for more team-based learning opportunities in the future. A small percentage of respondents also saw a need for more question and answer opportunities. Table 10 below presents the findings for time allocation preferences for all elements of the conference structure.

Table 10. Time allocation for conference elements

Format	Percentages		
	Much Less Time	About Right	Much More Time
Plenary Sessions	3.6	60.5	3.2
Implementation Strategies	2.5	50.2	7.8
Circuit Workgroup Time	4.6	50.9	9.3
Breakout Sessions	2.5	55.2	7.1
Question & Answer Opportunities	1.1	64.8	6.8

When asked what topics or approaches should be included in future multidisciplinary training, 147 respondents provided suggestions. Technical topics for future training included termination of parental rights, concurrent planning, diversion protocols, and mental health services for children. A review of changes in case law and legislation were also frequently cited as topics for future trainings.



Beyond specific topics, a common theme that emerged from the responses was a need for more sharing of best practices among the different circuits. Respondents were interested in learning how other circuits “handle problems” or “implemented changes”. In addition to learning from other courts, respondents were interested in obtaining more team building skills. Several indicated a desire for more time during the conference to work together as a team. Others wanted more education on the role differences between the team members or suggestions on conflict resolution techniques.

Conclusion

Participants indicated an impact at the circuit level as a result of CCWC. A little over half (54%) saw changes in the attitude of other team members towards the respondent’s professional role. Almost 87 percent of respondents felt that some to all of their concerns with changes to child welfare processes were adequately addressed by the conference. Almost 50 percent of respondents felt their circuit made changes to the way cases are processed as a result of the conference. These results point toward a successful educational experience for participants and circuit teams.

Respondents also expressed support for CCWC in terms of working as a circuit team. Several respondents seemed quite pleased to be included in the circuit team for the conference and others were happy to see professions typically not included in training participate. One person stated that all Children’s Division staff should attend this training in the future “as it is BY FAR the most informative and helpful training we receive.” Several respondents felt “all clerks in the circuit” should have attended or that “guardian ad litem should be invited to attend every conference.” One person summed up the sentiment by stating “The juvenile court system can only be improved by a continuing process of regular dialogue involving the widest possible variety of individuals and groups having an interest in the system.”

Judges expressed a lower level of satisfaction with the conference after six months but other members of the circuit teams felt the judge’s presence was a vital aspect of the learning experience. When a judge was perceived as not participating, respondents lamented the lack of “active and cooperative work” or the lack of involvement on the part of the judges during the conference. Even if a judge was not perceived as actively participating, his or her presence at the conference held value for the rest of the team. One person explained that “it is so important for Judges to see the staff that do the front line work and interact with them.” Another stated:

I enjoyed the conference and thought it was worthwhile to sit down at the table with our Judge and openly discuss issues. I generally don’t have any access to the Judge . . . [I] have to go through the Juvenile Office and they relay my message.

I have been at this job for the last nine years and this is the first time I got to speak to him. I felt like an equal partner. Thanks for the opportunity.

Overall, CCWC provided a venue for circuits to work and learn together. Future efforts should include more time for circuits to discuss issues as teams and more time to learn from other circuits. Additionally, including a variety of professions in the composition of the circuit team was viewed as one of the greatest benefits of the conference. The follow-up survey allowed the participants an opportunity to explain if and how changes have been made at the circuit level. Any future follow-up surveys for judicial education should be conducted approximately two months after the last training date. This time frame allows for some changes to occur while keeping the memory of the conference fresh in the minds of participants. If more information is desired, an additional survey could be administered six months following the conference.

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