

PENNSYLVANIA'S COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS GRANT
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR
FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2009

OCTOBER 1, 2008 - SEPTEMBER 31, 2009



AOPC

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

*Office of Children and
Families in the Courts*

Pursuant to the Administration for Children and Families Program Instructions ACYF-CB-PI-07-09, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), Pennsylvania's Court Improvement Project (CIP) hereby submits its annual Program Assessment Report for the CIP Data Grant for Federal Fiscal Year 2009 to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration of Children and Families (ACF) Region III. This annual program report addresses all Data Collection and Analysis Activities of Pennsylvania's 2009 CIP; the outcomes of court improvement activities; and how they help provide for the safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system.

I. Description of needs and activities undertaken with CIP funds to meet those needs during the program period

The following list represents those needs as identified by the OCFC and addressed throughout the fiscal year. These identified needs are a result of the 2005 CIP Reassessment produced by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ); the Pennsylvania Children's Roundtables Initiative; and ongoing meetings with Department of Public Welfare/Office of Children, Youth and Families (DPW/OCYF) officials. Some of these identified needs include:

- Lack of an automated statewide capacity to track dependency caseloads at the local level or reliable dependency court data to enable courts to assess its key performance measures;
- No mechanism for collection of court data statewide;
- Lack of court performance measures/indicators;
- The need for local courts to become more involved in the day-to-day scheduling, operation and management of the dependency docket;
- The need to track timelines of cases through the system from the initial hearing to TPR; and
- The need for new/updated equipment to access the CPCMS Data System

II. Activities and progress towards the goals delineated in the strategic plan and results of the assessment of activities funded under this grant

Implementation of CPCMS – Dependency Data System

The AOPC Judicial Automation Department has developed a Dependency Data System with OCFC staff providing ongoing programmatic support to the Judicial Automation Department and local jurisdictions. Roll out to counties commenced in March 2008. As of November 2008, 65 of the 67 counties were live on the system. Due to the unique complexities, the remaining two counties (Allegheny and Philadelphia), scheduled to "go-live" in summer 2009 are now scheduled for a "go live" date of summer 2010.

Implementation of the statewide dependency data system has been a monumental task. In addition to gathering statistical data, Pennsylvania's dependency court system created judicial findings & orders for all dependency hearings. The forms, based on the Pennsylvania Dependency Judicial Rules of Court, require local jurisdictions to adjust business practices. The forms and court orders that are now part of the system were created using Pennsylvania Model Court orders, originally developed by JCJC, as well as information from other states.

These findings and orders were reviewed by JCJC, OCYF and the Juvenile Rules Committee for accuracy and functionality. Any changes to the forms or the CPCMS system are first reviewed by the Forms Sub-committee of the Juvenile Rules Committee and must then be approved by the full Juvenile Rules Committee before being implemented. Any change that has a potential impact of federal funding requirements is also reviewed by DPW/OCYF prior to implementation. This oversight process ensures that no change is made that conflicts with the Juvenile Dependency Rules or jeopardizes much needed financial resources for abused/neglected children. The business practice adjustments that were necessitated primarily related to how findings and orders are documented, who inputs the data and how the documents are distributed.

With 65 counties live on the system as of December 2008, Judicial Automation and OCFC staff support of counties was just beginning. Counties inputted data differently across the Commonwealth. In some counties all dependency cases were entered as of the "go live" date while in other counties cases were added as they presented on the calendar. As such, the integrity of data reports is questionable at best. At the same time, local interpretation of what system fields mean and what information must be added versus what information is optional has created mixed data results.

As such, January 2009 through September 2009 found the AOPC's Judicial Automation staff making multiple county site visits and providing multiple training sessions. In addition, OCFC staff provided significant business process technical support. As expected with any new data system during its infancy, data integrity will become a primary focus for the coming year. Judicial Automation and OCFC staff will continue to collaborate in their efforts to assist counties.

In addition to the 65 counties live on the system, special attention and support has been provided to Philadelphia and Allegheny counties (two largest jurisdictions in the Commonwealth). Ironically, their issues are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Allegheny already has an incredibly sophisticated court computer system which allows for e-filing (something not currently possible in CPCMS) while Philadelphia has a combination of several independently functioning systems. Both Philadelphia and Allegheny are committed to fully implementing the CPCMS system and have county court teams working with AOPC staff to accomplish such. Monthly project update conference calls for both counties have been scheduled. These calls will include the Administrative Judge of the County (and any county staff the judge may want to include), AOPC's Judicial Automation Director, AOPC's Judicial Automation CPCMS Project Manager and OCFC's Administrator. The primary purpose of these calls is to identify problems early,

create and implement solutions and, to the extent possible, meet the current implementation timeline.

In support of implementation and in accordance with FFY 2009 Data Grant Strategic Plan, mini-grants were provided to counties requesting such assistance. Primarily mini-grants were used to support the migration of data either through staff directly performing the transaction or through automated transfer processes. All counties were strongly encouraged to take advantage of the mini-grant process.

Beginning summer 2009, counties began running data reports which listed county specific case loads. These reports were developed based on national court performance measurements for dependency courts. Upon doing so, the need for system revisions became evident and AOPC staff identified and fixed system flaws. AOPC staff is currently creating a multitude of statistical report which will pull information from the data reports for each county.

During the 2009 Spring Leadership Roundtables (March & April), AOPC's Judicial Automation Department provided an overview of system updates, including forms and court orders as well as distributed initial caseload data reports. Comments and feedback from each Leadership Roundtable were used to further improve the CPCMS Dependency Module.

Mini-Grants for Data Input and Backlog Clean Up

While development of the overall CPCMS Dependency Module was done using state only funding, the OCFC provided counties, who requested services for data entry, with CIP funding and support to allow each county to input backlog data and clean up any current data in Dependency Data System. This allowed each jurisdiction in the Commonwealth to be online using the Dependency Data System with all case data entered correctly.

Additionally, OCFC provided funds to counties requesting such assistance for the purchase of computers, printers and small copiers for use in dependency court rooms. OCFC and the State Roundtable are encouraging all counties (not just PPI counties) to implement expedited judicial reviews. With such implementation, courts are being encouraged and supported to implement a practice whereby parties leave the court hearing with a copy of the Findings & Orders.

Development & Initiation of Data Reports

The AOPC-OCFC is revising the CPCMS Dependency system as data reports indicate the need for such revisions. All counties (except Allegheny and Philadelphia) are currently able to print county specific case load data reports. OCFC staff is working with counties to ensure data integrity of these reports. Upon ensuring data integrity of the data caseload reports, statistical reports will be implemented. These reports will provide statewide aggregate Dependency data information as well as county specific data. Data

will be provided to local jurisdictions as well as Children's, Leadership and Statewide Roundtables. OCFC staff will support counties by sharing data trends within the county and support strategic planning, development of programs and implementation of practices that may correct any concerns.

Research reports are yet to be developed. In May 2009, at its annual meeting, the State Roundtable approved the addition of a judicial analyst research position to assist counties with the development and comprehension of their county specific reports and with statewide data/research information. This position has yet to be hired.

Equipment

The OCFC purchased equipment for counties, as needed, to aid in accessing and utilizing the CPCMS Dependency Data System. Various counties requested new or replacement equipment to access the data system for the purposes of accessing data and information on the bench; reviewing cases and providing court orders immediately following the conclusion of the hearings. The equipment purchased for the 2008 Fiscal Year includes:

- Laptops – portable desktop computers that provide all the function of a desktop computer and can be moved between various hearing rooms
- Thin Clients – These are similar to laptops, used solely for the purpose of accessing the Dependency Data System.
- Printers – Printers are provided in the courtrooms and allow for the printing of court orders following hearings.
- LCD Monitor – computer monitors
- Real Time Technology – allowing counties to speed transcript development in keeping with Dependency Data/Case Management Module.

Information Gathering/Sharing with the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF)

The OCFC and OCYF arranged to share various data reports. The Dependency Data system will provide information related to children and families involved with the court system. Additional data can be gathered from OCYF related to abuse/neglect and services provided prior to court involvement. The mutual sharing of data will offer a wider picture of the dependency system in Pennsylvania and show the need of improvement.

One of the ways in which OCYF and OCFC have collaborated has been through the sharing of data for the purposes of the National Governor's Association (NGA) – Policy Academy. Staff from the OCFC participates in local team meetings and provides support to counties in meeting their NGA goals. Each county participating as an NGA county has received extensive data packets regarding children in care.

According to the most recent OCYF data, all Phase One PPI counties have safely decreased the number of placements within their jurisdictions. Overall, the number of children in out-of-home placement has significantly reduced for the Commonwealth.

Judicial Analyst Angela Sager has worked to develop a data tracking/reporting document for PPI counties. The tracking tool is scheduled to be implemented in January 2010 and will be further discussed in the 2009 Data Grant Program Assessment Report.

Finally, extensive work was completed in FFY 2009 related to the creation of a centralized website where dependency data, PPI data and outcome research would be made available to counties. As data becomes available such will be placed onto the OCFC website and made available to system professionals as well as the general public.

III. Pennsylvania's overall activities and progress towards meeting the recommendations delineated in the 2005 CIP Reassessment

Recommendation # 3: The Pennsylvania Statewide CIP Committee should examine ways to encourage and support local efforts to develop an automated capacity to track its dependency caseload. This may include developing a common automated solution that can be offered to local counties – especially medium and smaller sized counties – that currently have little on tracking capabilities in this area. – The CPCMS Dependency System has been implemented in 65 of 67 counties with the two largest jurisdictions (Allegheny and Philadelphia) scheduled to go live in summer 2010.

Recommendation # 5: Statutory changes should be considered to expand jurisdiction in the juvenile court to include any termination of parental rights (TPR) and adoptions matters resulting from an original dependency filing. In addition, specific timelines should be established for the filing of the TPR petition after the court has determined a goal change to adoption is appropriate, for the scheduling of the initial hearing on this petition, and for the scheduling and completion of TPR proceedings. - Currently Permanency Reviews are heard in front of a Dependency Court Judge, while Termination of Parental Rights and Adoption matters go to the Orphans Court Judge, unless one judge hears both types of cases (which is permissible under current law). Although at this time it is not anticipated that this process will change, the OCFC is aiding coordination and communication between the two courts to prevent any barriers that may occur. Additionally, as a requirement of the Pennsylvania Permanency Practice Initiative, courts are expected to enhance coordination between Dependency and Orphans Court. Scheduling hearings can be completed using the CPCMS Dependency Data System, which can be accessed by all judges.

Recommendation # 8: The Statewide CIP Committee and AOPC should examine ways to encourage the judiciary and court administration – particularly in medium-sized courts – to become more involved in the day-to-day scheduling, operations and management of the dependency docket. –The implementation of the CPCMS Dependency Data System allows local courts to be more involved in the day-to-day operations of dependency courts. The local courts will now have access to all dependency information in the

county and have the ability to schedule various court hearings; send notification to parties; and complete orders all within the system.

IV. Recommendations of the State Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee (State Roundtable)

During the 2009 State Roundtable meeting (May 28 & 29, 2009) data integrity and county/statewide statistical reports were of primary concern. To this end, the State Roundtable encouraged OCFC to add a statistical/research position to its staff compliment to assist local judicial districts and to compile statewide statistical reports.

At the State Roundtable, Mrs. Denise Aylward, Information Technology Manager, AOPC Judicial Automation Department provided an update as to the progress thus far in the Dependency Data System implementation. Mrs. Aylward provided a brief overview of system changes, data reports currently available to counties and statistical reports under development.

V. Results of any Assessments of Activities Funded Under this Grant

One additional need identified as Pennsylvania's data system was being implemented related to the ultimate goal and use of data. Local jurisdictions identified a need for training related to the use of data to inform system reform. This information was shared with the Children's Summit Planning Committee and ultimately became a core portion of the Summit program.