Child Welfare Training Redesign Report

(FY 2017 Appropriation Act - Public Act 268 of 2016)

January 17, 2017

Sec. 558. (2) *The department shall conduct a workgroup consisting of members from the department, private child placing agencies, and child caring institutions, with the goal of reducing the current 4 weeks of centralized child welfare institute training class time. It is the intent of the legislature that the number of days of in-person pre-service child welfare training be reduced by 50%. Not later than November 1 of the current fiscal year, the department shall provide a report to the senate and house appropriations subcommittees on the department budget, the senate and house fiscal agencies, the senate and house policy offices, and the state budget office on the findings of the workgroup, including the timeline, feasibility, and cost for the implementation plan required to implement the child welfare training institute redesign.*

Michigan Department of
Health & Human Services

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In coordination with the Michigan Federation for Children and Families and the Association of Accredited Child and Families Agencies, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) convened a workgroup comprised of representatives from the Children's Services Agency, private child placing agencies and child caring institutions. The workgroup was facilitated by Dr. Gary Anderson, Michigan State University School of Social Work, and was supported by participants from the department's Office of Workforce Development and Training (OWDT). The workgroup made findings related to the current training content and delivery approach and alignment with needs of the work force. The workgroup assessed the impact of a reduction of in-person, centralized training and assessed resources, cost and timeline considerations associated with changing the format of the Pre-Service Institute (PSI).

The current format of PSI includes four weeks of classroom training and five weeks of field training activities. Elimination of content is not an acceptable way to reduce the in-person training. Rather the training approach must be modified to deliver critical training content through alternate modalities, for example web based or self-paced learning activities. Michigan is currently operating under a federal child welfare lawsuit, the Implementation, Sustainability, and Exit Plan (ISEP) and the training curriculum has been reviewed and approved by the plaintiffs and the federal court monitors. Any significant changes would need to be discussed with plaintiffs and federal monitors to maintain compliance in this area. The potential consequences of making significant changes without approval include the extension of court oversight.

FEASIBILITY

The OWDT conducted budgetary, process, and industry standard research and shared those findings with the workgroup for consideration in determining the implementation timeline, feasibility, and cost of reducing in-person classroom training by 50 percent. The workgroup considered multiple factors in developing an implementation timeline estimate for this PSI model including resource acquisition, technology assessment, content development, and pilot and evaluation.

The required resources, costs, and timeline for transitioning to a PSI model that includes two weeks of in-person classroom instruction and seven weeks of field training activities are provided below. No capacity currently exists for the additional field activities that would be required as a result of reducing in-person skill development training. Additional field support for trainees will be needed to support any additional on-the-job (in field) training requirements. In order for a PSI model that includes additional on the job field training to be feasible, the workgroup concluded that 18 full-time non-caseload carrying support positions would be necessary. This assumes an average PSI class size of 60 trainees, with a new cohort starting each month and the support to trainee ratio mirrors the current 1:5 supervisory ratios.

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Of the 18 support positions, approximately 12 FTEs would be located regionally around the state to support MDHHS trainees and six would be dedicated to support private agency staff. This distribution of support reflects the current distribution of trainees with two-thirds being MDHHS employees and one-third being private agency employees. The process for establishing, interviewing, onboarding and training 18 non-caseload carrying field support staff could begin immediately and occur simultaneous with the development of web-based material.

The workgroup determined that although it is feasible to change the format of the training, it is not advisable. The child welfare workforce is responsible for initiating legal proceedings to protect children. Staff are responsible for knowing and applying a myriad of federal and state laws and state policies. Equally as important, child welfare staff provide services and supports to keep families together. Their actions and decisions affect the ability of families to function autonomously without government involvement or court oversight. Child welfare staff make decisions and recommendations that lead to temporary suspension or permanent termination of a parent's physical and legal custody of his/her children. Given the magnitude and scope of responsibility demanded of child welfare staff and the very limited margin for error, it is critical that staff training be sufficient to adequately and thoroughly prepare staff to meet expected standards of performance. A critical way in which staff is prepared to meet expected standards necessitates in-person skill development which includes:

- Knowledge of case practice concepts, and opportunities to observe, practice, debrief, ask questions, problem-solve, consult, and engage in discussions in a safe, collaborative, and low-risk learning environment. In-person classroom training allows for learning to go beyond the transfer of knowledge to promote, develop and reinforce key practice skills such as engagement, critical thinking, assessment skills, interviewing techniques, decision-making, analysis, and problem solving in a team-focused, supportive setting. This is an absolute necessity to achieve minimum level of acceptable workforce decision-making and performance.

- Effective skill development necessitates in-person classroom delivery of training rather than a web-based modality. Training can occur in different settings and using different modalities. The way training is delivered impacts learner retention. Blending modes of learning [classroom and web based] is an effective method of transfer of learning.

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IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Although the workgroup does not support reduction, the timeline to do so is as follows:

- Reduction of classroom time by 50 percent requires 60 hours of classroom content be developed in a web-based format. This includes webinars, computer-based training modules, field guides, and activities.

- Computer-based training and technology development requires a team of subject matter experts and a team of technical experts that can work together to develop relevant, accurate, effective, and technically sound modules.

- Based on industry standards, it will take 7,620 hours to develop 60 hours of web-based content.[3] With six full-time developers, or vendor dedicated resources, the timeline for content development is estimated at seven-and-a-half months.

- Acquiring resources to develop web-based content is a necessary first step in the development of infrastructure to support or reinforce learning on the job outside of the classroom, via transfer of learning activities and supportive supervision. Moreover, coaching is critical in the promotion of greater organizational effectiveness.[4] Supervisors and mentors in the field currently have extensive responsibilities limiting their ability to support new workers on the job.

- A pilot and evaluation cycle will be necessary to allow a cohort of students to complete training in the new format, conduct initial evaluations level one and level two to assess knowledge gained, and conduct subsequent level three 6 month and 12 month evaluations to assess how well training has prepared students to successfully perform their jobs.

    - The information gathered from a pilot is used to strengthen and improve course content, materials, and delivery strategies; ensuring that what is delivered meets the intended learning objectives. If training is not properly piloted and evaluated new child welfare workers may be missing critical skills and knowledge necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and families that they serve. The estimated length of time for the pilot and evaluation cycle is 14 months.

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Activity	Timeline
Resource acquisition and development	8 months
Web-based content development	7.5 months
Technology Assessment	12 months (which will occur simultaneously with the resource acquisition and content development)
Pilot and Evaluation	14 months
Total Implementation Timeline	**29.5 months**

COSTS

When estimating implementation costs, the workgroup considered multiple factors including field support, training development, and technology needs. An assessment of current technology resources, both hardware and software, would need to be conducted internally by the Department of Technology, Management and Budget and externally with private child placing agency partners and a plan to upgrade and pay for any necessary technology. If trainees do not have the necessary equipment and technology they will not be able to complete required assignments or participate in interactive web-based learning, leaving them unable to successfully complete training and assume a caseload.

As stated in the feasibility section, there would be a need to develop 18 full-time non-caseload carrying support positions to support additional on the job field training. The annual cost to maintain 18 field support positions, based on a mid-range salary and fringe cost of $101,900 for a non-caseload carrying, non-supervisory position would be $1,834,200.

In order to reduce the in-person classroom training by 50 percent the current content must be converted to web-based delivery. The workgroup explored two options for the development of these web-based materials:

1. <u>State led development of web-based materials:</u> Based on industry standards, six State of Michigan Human Resource Developers (HRDs) are needed to develop 60 hours of online content.[3] Once developed, one HRD would need to be retained to update, revise and maintain technical functionality. The salary and fringe cost for six HRDs would be $729,720 through the development and pilot adjustment period. After the development, the ongoing cost to maintain one HRD would be $121,620 annually.

2. <u>Vendor led development of web-based materials:</u> Based on industry standards, it will cost $226,080 to develop 60 hours of finished online product.[3] To ensure that

the material links appropriately with the learning points, overall content flow, policies and regulations, an internal departmental resource is needed to serve as a subject matter expert and coordinator for the vendor during the development. This HRD would be retained after development to maintain the online content. The cost for one HRD will be $121,620 bringing the total initial cost for vendor-led development to $347,700 with an ongoing cost of $121,620 annually.

It is difficult to estimate the level of technology enhancements needed for potential hardware and software without a full inventory of all existing private agency and local office equipment, networks, operating systems, and software packages. Trainees would require immediate access to computers that have video, audio, and microphone capabilities and access to a network with sufficient bandwidth to support streaming audio and video. The workgroup was able to estimate the following costs associated with technology:

- Refresh/upgrade 5 percent of trainee laptop stock (36 laptops per year) at a cost of $959 per laptop for a total of $34,524 annually.

- Developer laptop package at $2,576 each. If the internal development option were used, six packages would be needed for a total of $15,456. If the vendor option were used, one package would be needed for the State of Michigan subject matter expert who would be coordinating and maintaining the online content.

- Development software purchase and licenses for the online content is estimated at $6,495 for initial costs and $4,233 for ongoing software subscription fees.

- Local office/private agency costs for supplemental hardware such as speakers, microphones, headphones, and dual monitors are unknown.

- Local office/private agency operating system and software upgrade costs are unknown.

To pair at least half of the new web-based content with an associated webinar will add 30 hours of webinar participation to the PSI. Estimating an annual volume of 720 trainees taking 30 hours of webinar at a cost of $.018 per participant, per minute, the total cost for additional webinar service is estimated at $23,328 annually.

The workgroup determined that protected time will be a necessary condition to the reduction of in-person classroom time by 50 percent. Protected time is a specific period of time granted to an employee allowing dedicated focus, in this case, for the purposes of participating in training activities and completing assignments. Protected time will ensure trainees have time to complete all necessary on the job training activities while they remain in the field.

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Providing dedicated space in local offices/agencies for trainees to participate in online training away from their workstations is also necessary. Webinars, online activities, and computer based training modules necessitate a learning environment with ample time and limited distractions to achieve an appropriate transfer of learning. The workgroup also recommended delaying the assignment of cases to new workers, which currently occurs between week one and week four, until the completion of the entire nine weeks of PSI. The reduction of classroom training by 50 percent will require on the job training requirements to be increased. This issue would need further assessment and a cost estimate. If trainees are not provided protected time it is unlikely that they will be able to complete the necessary assignments.

Resource	Development and Implementation Costs (Vendor Led)	Development and Implementation Costs (State Led)	Recurring Annual Costs
Field Support (18 FTE's)	$1,834,200	$1,834,200	$1,834,200
Web-based Training Development	$347,700	$729,720	$121,620
Development Hardware	$2,576	$15,456	$0
Development Software	$6,495	$6,495	$4,233
Webinar Service	$23,328	$23,328	$23,328
Trainee Computer Upgrades	$34,524	$34,524	$34,524
Delay of Assignment of Cases			TBD (Minimally estimated at over $1,000,000)
TOTAL ANTICIPATED COSTS	$2,248,823	$2,643,723	$3,017,905
Local hardware/software		Unknown	Unknown

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CONCLUSION

Michigan's child welfare workforce are first responders to suspected child abuse and neglect. Their decisions, actions, and interventions directly impact the health, safety, and well-being of children. Sometimes these decisions and interventions are lifesaving. The workgroup found that reduction of classroom time by 50 percent may significantly compromise critical workforce skill development, including the ability to understand and adhere to law, policy, practices, and procedures; accurately analyze facts and evidence and, meet expected standards of performance. An in-person training reduction this significant may lead to greater error in practice and decision-making that directly impacts the safety,
stability, and health of Michigan families. The primary strategy for achieving the reduction is to shift the delivery of training content to web-based training. The estimated cost for implementing this model ranges from $2,248,823 to $2,643,723 in initial costs and approximately $ 3,017,905 in ongoing annual costs. The estimated timeline for implementation of this model is 29.5 months.

CITATIONS

[1]U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development. (2010)

[3] Chapman, B., Chapman Alliance LLC. (2010). [Research Study] *How Long Does it Take to Create Learning?*

[4] Dickinson, Nancy S. *A Comprehensive Workforce Strategy To Advance Child Welfare Outcomes,* National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (2013).

[5] Children and Family Research Center (CFRC), 2004

[6] Flower et al. 2005; Graef & Hill, 2000

[7] Barth et al., 2006; Bess, Andrews, Jantz, Russell & Geen, 2002; Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2000.

[8] CWLA & ABA Center on Children and the Law, 2005; Bertelli, 2004; Geen & Tumlin, 1999; Gluck Mezey, 1998