

# **Child Welfare Education and Research Programs**



## **2015-2016 Executive Summary**

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

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**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

# Child Welfare Education and Research Programs 2015-2016 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, 2015-2016, marks the fifteenth academic year of operation for the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates program (CWEB) and the twenty-first 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 1,058 students have graduated from CWEB during the program's fifteen years and they have been employed in 60 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 2015-2016 academic year, nearly 20% 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 76% of county agencies, 91% of enrolled students, and 65% of our

*“Having experienced CWEL students in class that contribute to clinical courses is invaluable. They are able to round out the curriculum content and provide practice examples from their work.” (Participating University Faculty)*

*“Excellent entry-program into the world of Children, Youth and Families. Perfect way for students to be educated for a year, then complete a salaried year with vast knowledge/practice.” (CWEB Student)*

*“Providing caseworkers with the opportunity to pursue a master's degree that they may not otherwise be able to afford and in a field (social work) that prepares students/caseworkers for working with the population served in child welfare is invaluable in making a positive impact on child welfare as well as retaining experienced and highly qualified workers in child welfare.” (CWEL student)*

*“CWEB program was a good way to get experience in an agency/field which contributes to people's lives in more than one way.” (CWEB Long-term Graduate)*

*“It gave me the opportunity to improve my skills in order to better serve my clients. I would not have had the time or the financial resources to take these classes without the CWEL program. I learned so much about myself, about my clients, and how our interactions are so much more connected than I would have ever imagined.” (CWEL Long-term Graduate)*

*“Our recruitment efforts toward CWEB internships and for [CWEB] graduates [to enter] casework positions have yielded quality and informed workers for our agency.” (Agency director)*

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 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**

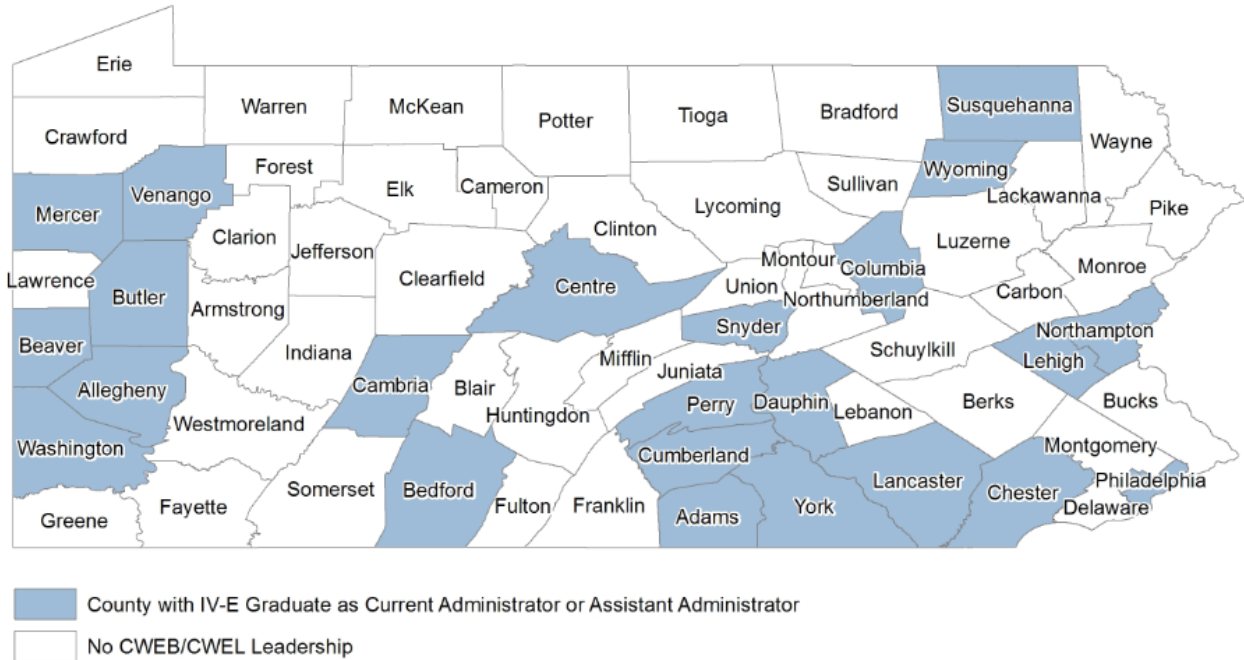
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- The CWEB and CWEL programs create an educational career pathway for social workers in child welfare.



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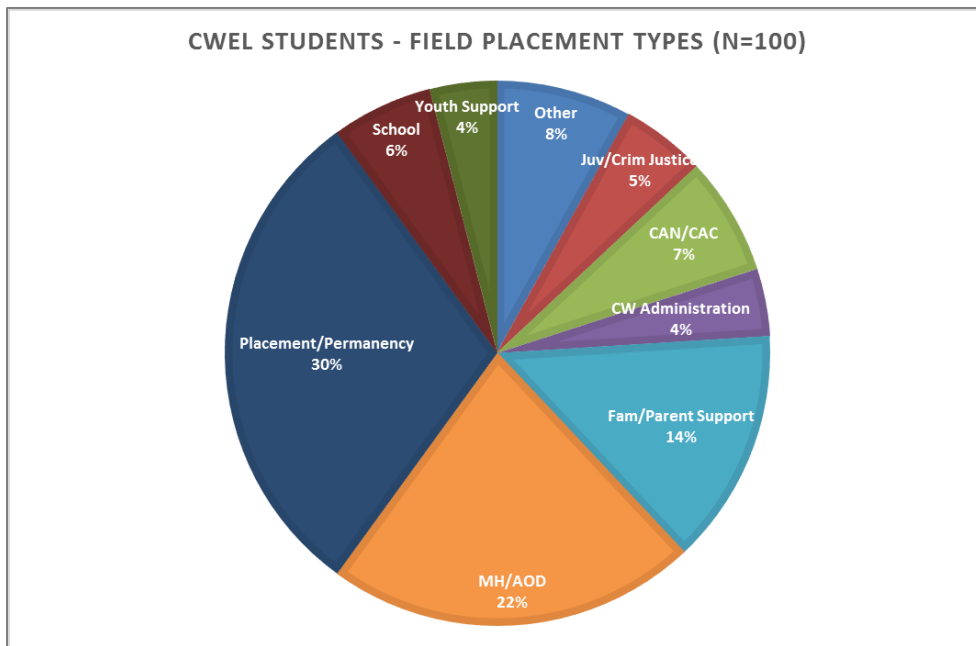
For the enrolled CWEL students who responded to the survey, 18% received their undergraduate degrees through the CWEB program. Of this group, the majority (81%) are still working in the agency in which they completed their post-CWEB commitment. We have observed this CWEB to CWEL progression pattern for 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. Over one-third of the CWEB and CWEL participants received an award or recognition during the 2015-2016 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: Phi Alpha Student Leadership Award; Outstanding Senior Research Award; and the Dawn Hicks Award. 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.



- Beginning in 2012, Pennsylvania passed 23 new pieces of legislation 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. 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

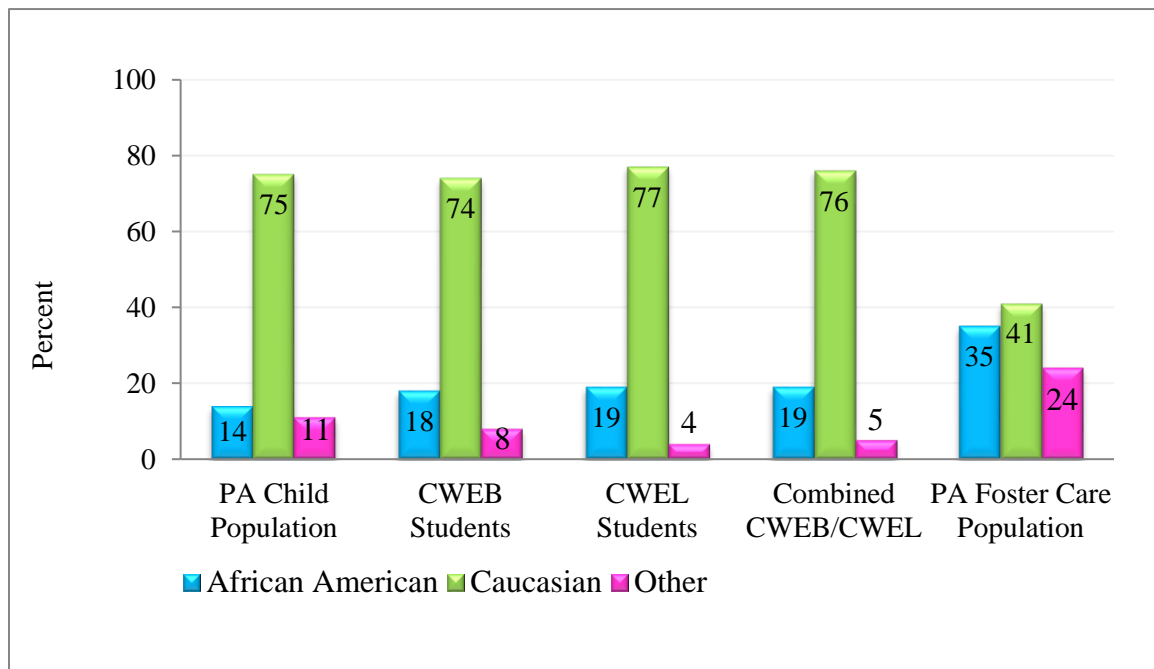


understanding of child welfare services. CWEL students and graduates are participating in the state Quality Service Reviews, committees associated with Pennsylvania’s CPSL Implementation, specific workgroups (i.e., Pennsylvania’s implementation of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families 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 mobile technology in the field. 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 CWEB and CWEL enrollment.**

According to a recent report by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, there were more than 23,000 Pennsylvania children living in foster care in 2015. 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<sup>1,2</sup>. Caucasian children make up almost 75% of the state’s child population and comprise approximately 41% of Pennsylvania’s foster care population<sup>1,2</sup>. 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

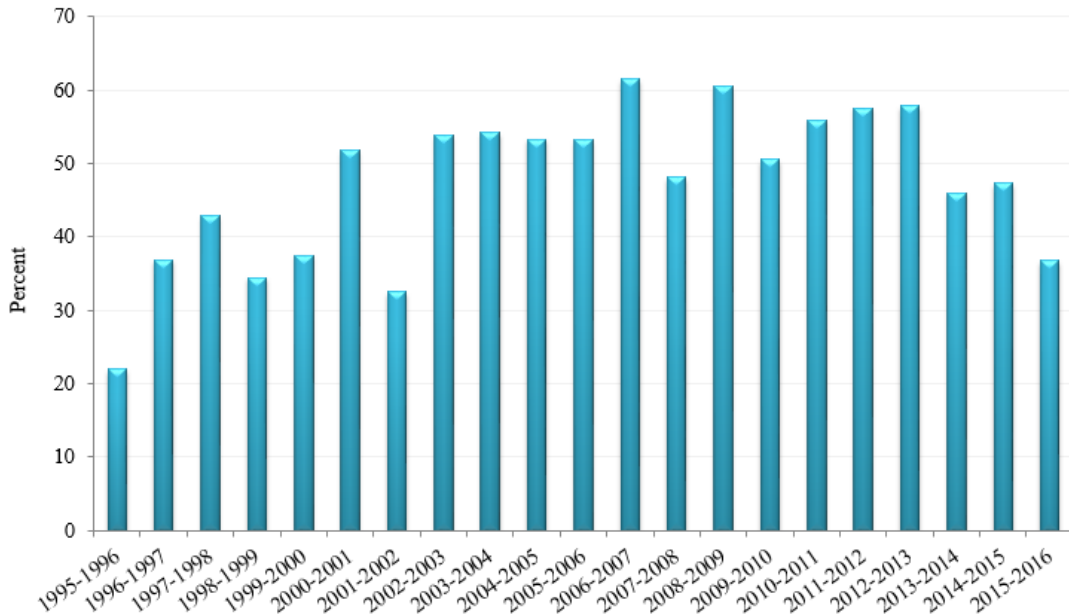
<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau, Department of Commerce. (n.d.). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/42>

<sup>2</sup> 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>



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

**Chart 7**  
**Child Welfare for Leadership**  
**1995-2016 Admissions**  
**Part-Time Trend**



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 employment. While continuing to monitor this trend, we are exploring additional ways to meet this population’s evolving needs while still ensuring quality education.

- 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 (Glasern, 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 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. Unlike previous years, 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.

As this was our fifth 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 CWEB long-term graduates rated certain aspects of agency organizational culture more negatively, while CWEL graduates rated certain aspects of their organizational climate higher this year. These findings must be placed in the context of the current child welfare environment which is stretched to capacity at this time and operating under revised laws, policies, and procedures that have dramatically changed the daily practice of child welfare in Pennsylvania.

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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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.

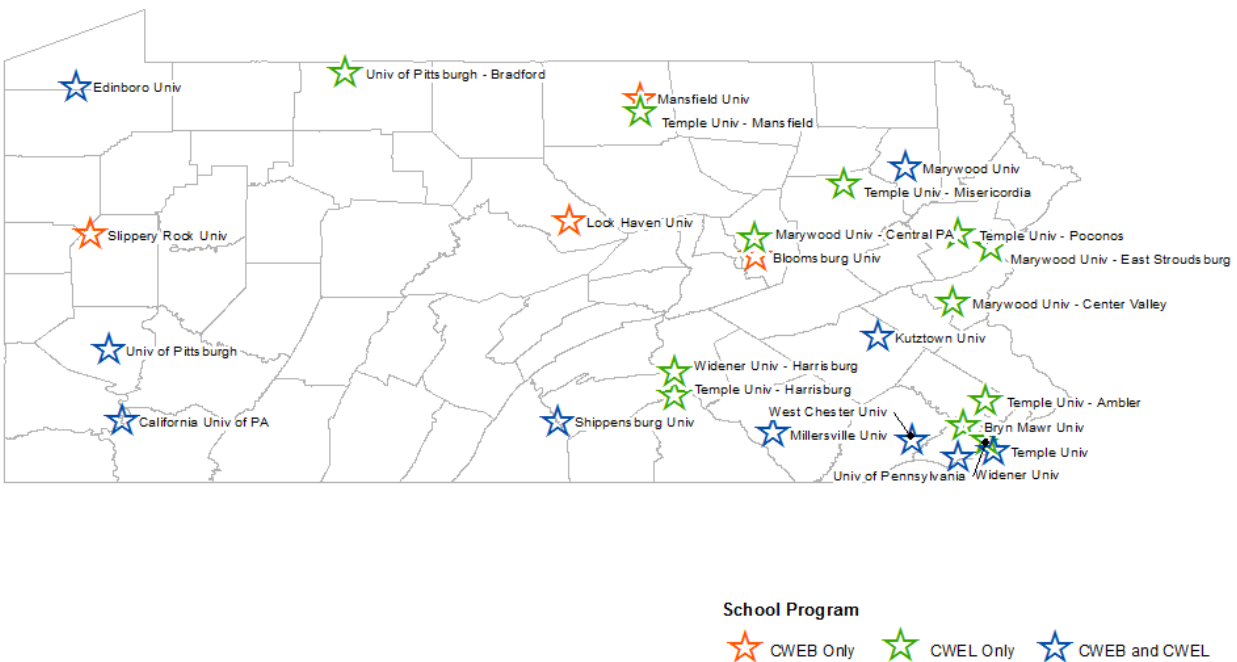
- **Provide additional guidance to CWEB students and CWEB school administrators regarding civil service exam requirements**

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.

- **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.

### 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 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 recently implemented a pilot program at two CWEB schools to develop leadership skills with CWEB students and provide a framework on self-care. These skills will further enhance the assets CWEB students bring into the county child welfare agency and help address worker burnout, thereby increasing 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 Training 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.

- **Development of CWEB/CWEL Advisory Network to provide input on emerging program issues.**

CWEB/CWEL school partners endorsed the development of an advisory network among school faculty, program graduates, county administrators and CWERP faculty to provide guidance for the programs. Several faculty have joined the Training Steering Committee of the PA Child Welfare Resource Center.

- **Incorporation of trauma-informed 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. We believe it is critical to address this issue. Revisions to the Supervisor Training Series developed by CWRC will place increased emphasis on this particular workforce need.

- **Transition support and ongoing connection among CWEB and CWEL graduates.**

All graduates benefit from ongoing connection and support, and coaching is particularly important for CWEB graduates who are new to public child welfare. Additionally, portfolio and resume development is essential.

Transition back to the county agency is a distinct issue among CWEL graduates, and is most problematic for those who have been full-time students. Increased attention has been paid to preparing these students for their return to the agency. Greater network support and participation in transition groups for returning graduates are helpful strategies.

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

This option can provide an additional evaluation arm for the Office of Children, Youth and Families and can 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 step on the career pathway for child welfare professionals who desire an advanced degree while remaining committed to the field.

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**Child Welfare Education and Research Programs  
University of Pittsburgh  
School of Social Work  
2329 Cathedral of Learning  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260**

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