



Synthesis of Recommendations for Colorado Division of Child Welfare Services System Improvement

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Introduction and overview

Colorado Division of Child Welfare Services (DCWS) is committed to shaping and implementing practice and system reform to achieve positive outcomes for children and their families involved with public child welfare serving agencies across the state. DCWS is working with the Mountains and Plains Child Welfare Implementation Center (MPCWIC) on a three-year implementation project to explore and define a Colorado practice model and implement specific practice strategies that are directed towards improved outcomes including the following:

- Improved safety, permanency and stability for children
- Continuity and connections in family relationships
- Increased capacity for families to care for their children's needs
- Use of data to inform DCWS understanding about the experience of children and families and drive decisions that improve the quality of practice
- Development and implementation of quality assurance and quality improvement processes related to practice change and implementation
- Consumer involvement and satisfaction

Over the first year of the project, MPCWIC is working in partnership with DCWS, County Departments of Human Services, tribal agencies, clients and community stakeholders to identify the elements of a practice model (outcomes, mission, vision and values, practice principles, standards of professional practice, and the strategies, methods and tools necessary to integrate all of the elements) and to develop a plan for implementation.

Synthesis document

A significant resource that will support and guide the efforts of DCWS are eight separate reports from multiple sources generated between 2007- 2009 (note: a final report from the Governor's Action Committee is expected in early 2010) that provide specific recommendations for child welfare system and practice improvement. One of the initial MPCWIC efforts has been to review, synthesize and analyze the recommendations contained within each of these eight reports in order to maximize their contribution toward Colorado's goal of practice model implementation and system improvement, in particular in integrating priorities, initiatives, and directives.

The cross-report synthesis and analysis summarized within this document clearly identified a commonality in overall findings and in the themes reflected in the recommendations. Emerging from these findings and recommendations are a set of broad priorities that can provide both foundation and direction for Colorado's work going forward. These priorities are:

- A cohesive, clear and consistent approach to child welfare practice and service delivery.
- Data-driven decision making and practice, with transparent, measurable outcomes.
- A collective understanding and ownership of goals, objectives and outcomes among individuals both within and external to DCWS.

- Careful consideration and dedication of resources to support the individuals who are a part of this system.
- Building and maintaining strong and mutually supportive relationships among DCWS staff, clients, County departments, providers, stakeholders, and cross- system professionals as the foundation for practice and system improvement.

Assessment of the child welfare services system

Since 2007, eight reports (with a final from the CWAC pending) regarding the Division of Child Welfare Services have been generated, providing a total of 139 recommendations intended to improve the functioning of the child welfare system. A report timeline and summary found in *Figure 2* at the end of this document provides detailed information regarding each report.

From a broad perspective, the purpose and focus of the different reports fall into two categories:

- Reports with a specific, limited, programmatic or topical focus:
 - Foster Care Services Performance Audit (2007)
 - Foster Care Financial Audit (2007)
 - Child Maltreatment Fatality Report (2008)
 - Foster Care & Permanence Task Force Report (2008)
- Reports with a more general, child welfare system improvement focus:
 - Governor’s Child Welfare Action Committee Interim Report (2008)
 - Policy Studies Inc/American Humane Association Organizational Assessment (2009)
 - Policy Studies Inc/American Humane Association Structure & Capacity Report (2009)
 - Governor’s Action Committee 2nd Interim Report (2009)
 - Governor’s Action Committee Final Report (pending, 2010)

The entities, task forces and committees responsible for the studies and recommendations were convened by multiple sources of authority including state statute, commission by Colorado Department of Human Services Executive Director and by a Governor’s Executive Order.

Implementation of the recommendations

DCWS has been engaged in the review and implementation of the recommendations of these reports since 2007; the task is ongoing as new recommendations have come forth (refer to *Figure 2*). Furthermore, a number of recommendations that preceded the convening of the Governor’s Child Welfare Action Committee (CWAC) in 2008 were put forward for the CWAC’s consideration and in some instances, subsumed within the recommendations of that group. Response to and implementation of the recommendations is an expectation within the authority and directive of all of the reports, either by statute, CDHS directive or Governor’s Executive Order. However, in some circumstances, fiscal limitations and feasibility has limited the capacity for implementation. Recommendations that were not implemented were accompanied by either an explanation of disagreement with the finding, additional information and/or limitations that prevent implementation.

Federal input and oversight of Colorado DCWS

In addition to the eight reports issued over the past three years, Colorado DCWS also receives ongoing input and oversight from the federal government through development and implementation of the five-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and the Child and Family Services Review and Program Improvement Plan (CFSR and PIP) processes. Both of these processes have recently been completed. Consequently, significant groundwork regarding a Colorado practice model already exists within these two efforts and will be considered, both within this report and the system improvement effort going forward.

Common findings

There were differences and diversity in suggested direction across the reports. However, as stated earlier, there was overall consensus and agreement of the need to improve the child welfare system and outcomes for Colorado children and families. Within the reports was a general acknowledgement of limitations of the DCWS system related to staffing, workload and resources. The reports were consistent in offering recommendations for improvements across common focus areas including systems, structures, processes, data and measurement, resources, and relationships. Within these common areas of focus, *Figure 1* below illustrates five common findings for system improvement that emerged across the 139 collective recommendations: accountability, clarity and consistency, decision making and practice, relationships and preparation and support.

Figure 1



Accountability

As the reports were compared, the need for accountability as a foundation for improvement emerged and was centered on accountability to and for:

- children and families served
- improved outcomes
- staff and providers
- cross-system professionals

Generally, the reports articulated a perceived lack of attention to accountability and a sense that attention should be devoted to developing and implementing mechanisms and structures that will increase ongoing accountability across and among those that are a part of the child welfare system.

Clarity and consistency

Another consistent area of concern identified across the reports was an overall lack of clarity and consistency, regarding general expectations specifically related to statute, rules and regulations, oversight roles, existing processes, approaches to practice and access to services. Reports identified a need for improved clarity and consistency both within DCWS and across intersecting partners and systems.

Data driven decisions and practice

The reports reflect a collective sense that DCWS would strongly benefit from improved use of data to drive decisions and practice. A number of reports identified specific deficits related to existing data systems and provided recommendations for the development of mechanisms for improvement, as well as suggesting alternative sources of data that could be beneficial. Multiple reports also suggested investing time and resources to improved data and data systems in support of measuring and monitoring processes and outcomes.

Relationships

At its core, the work of DCWS is about relationships with clients, staff, county departments, providers and professionals across systems. There was a consistent belief that these relationships needed attention, in order to clarify roles/responsibilities, improve trust and communication and build a common foundation and approach to a shared responsibility for improved interventions, services and outcomes.

Preparation and support

Building on the common theme of improving relationships was a shared belief that all of the individuals who comprise the child welfare system (clients, staff, providers, and cross-system professionals) need improved preparation and support. This was a comprehensive finding inclusive of training, supervision and resources.

Themes of recommendations

As previously mentioned, the eight reports generated a total of 139 specific recommendations. The recommendations clustered into 11 over-arching themes identified in *Table 1* below. Specifics related to the individual recommendation within the over-arching theme are reflected in the second column of Table 1. Of the eight total reports, the number of those reports whose

specific recommendations focused on the particular over-arching theme is represented in the table's final column.

Table 1

Over-arching Theme	Specifics	Number of Reports Making Recommendations with this Theme
Organizational System Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal (DCWS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Structure ○ Roles ○ Processes • Relationship with Counties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clarity regarding expectations ○ Accountability ○ Oversight ○ Technical assistance/support 	5
State Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity and accountability • Use of processes, rules, regulations and policies. 	5
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using data to drive decisions • Trails – integrity, functionality & accessibility • Use of other data sources 	5
Cross system/co-occurring issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Education, Law Enforcement, Courts 	5
Communication and information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within DCWS • Between state and counties • With clients • With other systems 	4
Policy and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance & accountability • Clarity • Clean-up 	4
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients (direct services, placement resources) • System (staff, training, service choices) • Providers (training, payment) • Allocation & equity • Maximizing existing resources 	4
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State support of consistent county practice • Assessment • Decision making • Engagement 	4

Over-arching Theme	Specifics	Number of Reports Making Recommendations with this Theme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision 	
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and providers (initial and ongoing) • Cross-training • Specific subject areas (safety, risk, assessment) 	4
Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis to inform decision making, planning & resource allocation 	3
Cultural Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCWS quality assurance and leadership on cultural diversity issues • Training 	2

Recommendations within the context of other DCWS parameters and priorities

The DCWS is involved in ongoing efforts to address needs, priorities and challenges within the Division and across the state. These efforts include compliance with statutory expectations of the US Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, specifically the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) and Program Improvement Plan (PIP) activities.

Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)

Colorado’s CFSP for 2010-2015 was submitted in June 2009. This comprehensive five-year plan articulates Colorado’s current vision, mission, philosophy and principles; goals and objectives; and anticipated measures of progress (including specific approaches and activities for accomplishment). This plan is a resource, both as a foundation for a Colorado practice model and also as a source of information and strategies likely to respond to the themes and recommendations that have been identified in the nine recent reports.

Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Colorado’s CFSR was conducted in March, 2009. The CFSR assesses state performance regarding substantial conformity with seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. According to Colorado’s Program Improvement Plan, “the Colorado 2009 CFSR onsite review results indicate that while Colorado exhibits a number of strengths and promising practices, it has not achieved substantial conformity in any of the seven outcome domains and has achieved conformity in two of the seven systemic factors and four of the six national standards.” Colorado’s PIP identifies three themes that emerged within the CFSR findings and will be a focus of the PIP:

- Engaging families
- Timely permanency achievement for children
- Assuring that children receive access to consistent services for their safety and well-being irrespective of where in the state the children live.

Colorado's PIP outlines specific proposed strategies, goals and actions to achieve compliance. As of the writing of this report, the PIP is under consideration and negotiation for final federal approval.

Discussion and next steps

Priorities for DCWS

The DCWS is actively working to create positive system change to improve outcomes for children and families in Colorado. Through its current initiatives, the implementation of multiple recommendations to date, the completion of the CFSP and the development of the PIP, DCWS has dedicated time, energy and resources toward this goal, committing to "managing by outcomes" in an effort to define success and measure progress.

As previously mentioned, when the assessments and recommendations across these eight reports are compared and contrasted, the following priorities emerge:

- A cohesive, clear and consistent approach to child welfare practice and service delivery
- Data-driven decision making and practice; with transparent, measurable outcomes.
- A collective understanding and ownership of DCWS goals, objectives and outcomes among individuals both within and external to DCWS.
- Careful consideration and dedication of resources to support the individuals who are a part of this system.
- Building and maintaining strong and mutually supportive relationships among DCWS staff, clients, County departments, providers, stakeholders, and cross- system professionals as the foundation for practice and system improvement.

Consideration, review and discussion of these priorities among the many individuals who are a part of Colorado's child welfare system will be at the heart of action planning to develop and implement a shared model of practice to improve outcomes for children and families in the state.

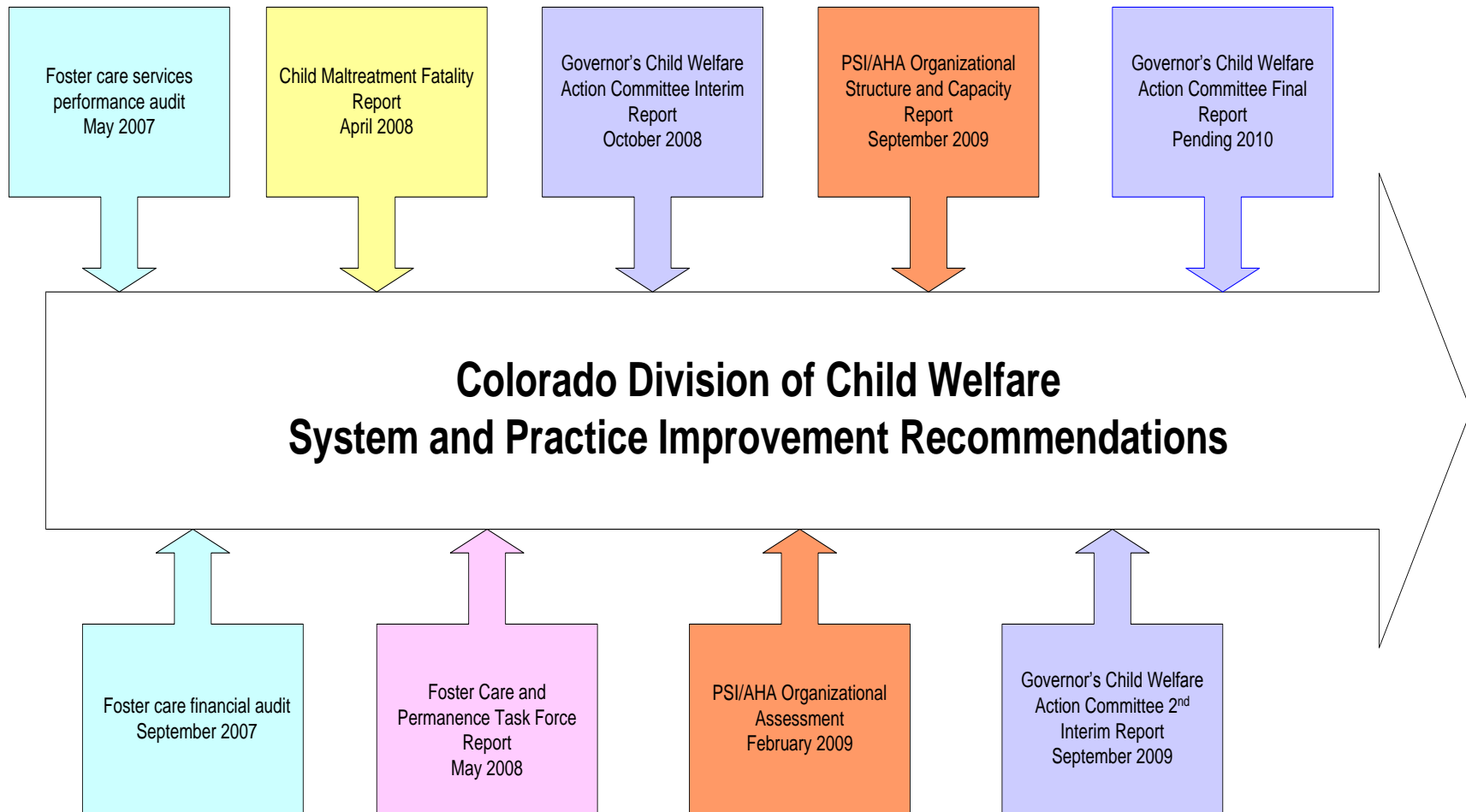
Defining and implementing a practice model

DCWS's decision to define and implement a practice model is consistent with the current focus and emergent priorities for the Division. The inclusive process of developing a clearly articulated practice model has the capacity to provide a comprehensive and consistent foundation and framework for child welfare practice in Colorado. DCWS's plan to build consensus among internal staff, working in partnership with clients, county departments of human services, tribal agencies and community stakeholders to identify the elements of a practice model (outcomes, mission, vision and values, practice principles, standards of professional practice, and the strategies, methods and tools necessary to integrate all of the elements) and develop a plan for implementation will allow for a purposeful approach building on current efforts, integrating existing priorities, maximizing resources and measuring outcomes; it is a significant investment and long-term commitment, requiring strong leadership.

Conclusion

The review, synthesize and analysis of the recommendations contained within each of the eight reports is intended to maximize their contribution toward Colorado's goal of practice model implementation and system improvement, in particular in integrating priorities, initiatives, and directives. The Colorado DCWS has made a commitment to undertaking a change process that will provide for an inclusive, purposeful and strategic approach to practice and system improvement and to using the feedback provided through the eight reports summarized in this document as an important first step on the journey.

Figure 2 – Timeline and summary of reports



Report	Date	Authors/Directive	Purpose	Reporting To	Recommendations	Current Status
CO State Auditor, Foster Care Services Performance Audit	May 2007	CO State Auditor's Office C.R.S 2-3-103	Audit to review how the CO DCWS supervises foster care services provided by County Departments and CPAs – focus on safety, federal standards, licensing & monitoring, effectiveness of CORE services	Legislative Audit Committee	16 recommendations (safety of foster children, quality of care & Core Services)	8/2009 - State response and implementation (Oct 2007 – Dec 2009)
CO State Auditor, Foster Care Financial Activities	Sept 2007	CO State Auditor's Office C.R.S. 2-3-103	Audit to review DCWS methods for ensuring that foster care funds are used effectively, including review of costs & controls for cost containment	Legislative Audit Committee	15 recommendations (foster care rates, child welfare funding & controls over expenditures)	8/2009 - State response and implementation (July 2008 – Dec 2009)
Child Maltreatment Fatality Report 2007	April 2008	Administrative Review Division (ARD)	Identify common individual and system characteristics of 13 child fatalities and make recommendations for system & practice improvements	Executive Director CDHS	39 recommendations 16 short-term (90 days) & 23 long-term (regulations, initiatives, training, communication & collaboration, oversight, workload, TRAILS)	5/2009 Implementation in progress (2008-present). 16 short-term recommendations implemented. 23 long-term recommendations either incorporated into CWAC, tabled due to budget constraints or in process.
Foster Care & Permanence Task Force	May 2008	FC & Permanence Task Force C.R.S 26-6-5-4	Examine state of CO's foster care & adoption system to identify problems & concerns and identify/recommend solutions	Governor, Chief Justice, Judiciary Committee, Health & Human Services Committees of Senate & House, CO 66 th General Assembly	16 recommendations (systems, caregivers; child well being & permanency)	8/2009 – implementation in progress. Note: recommendations 5, 11, 13 & 15 incorporated into Child Welfare Action Committee (CWAC). Implementation in

Report	Date	Authors/Directive	Purpose	Reporting To	Recommendations	Current Status
						progress.
Interim Report of the Governor's Child Welfare Action Committee	Oct 2008	Prepared by CDHS on behalf of CWAC action committee members Executive Order B 006 08	Provide recommendations on how to improve CO's child welfare system (policy, budgetary & legislative). Inclusive of state-county org capacity and structure; quantity/quality of training; public access to state-county human service department; role of independent oversight; public-private partnerships to improve services; evidence-based practice standards.	Governor	13 (administrative structure, child & family outcomes, cultural competency, training)	12/2009 – implementation in progress (2008 – 2011)
PSI/AHA Organizational Assessment	Feb 2009	Policy Studies Inc and American Humane Association (response to request for bid)	Evaluate overall effectiveness of DCWS and provide recommendations for organizational improvement	Executive Director CDHS	9 recommendations (operations, evaluation & communication)	8 (all but reco regarding structure) were incorporated into CWAC recommendations. 12/2009 - Implementation in progress.
PSI/AHA CO Child Welfare Org Structure & Capacity Project	Sept 2009	Policy Studies Inc and American Humane Association (response to request for bid from CDHS on behalf of CWAC Subcommittee on Administrative Structure)	Determine the efficacy of child welfare services and to evaluate & provide recommendations related to state/county service delivery structure, staffing, policy and service delivery processes	Report commissioned by the Gov's CWAC, subcommittee on administrative structure.	5 recommendations (structure, practice and process)	Recommendations incorporated into CWAC recommendations. 12/2009 - Implementation in progress, excluding state/county structure and centralized call center.
2 nd Interim Report of the Governor's	Sept 2009	Prepared by CDHS on behalf of CWAC	Provide recommendations on how to improve CO's child	Governor	16 (administrative	12/2009 – implementation in

Report	Date	Authors/Directive	Purpose	Reporting To	Recommendations	Current Status
Child Welfare Action Committee		action committee members Executive Order B 006 08	welfare system (policy, budgetary & legislative). Inclusive of state-county org capacity and structure; quantity/quality of training; public access to state-county human service department; role of independent oversight; public-private partnerships to improve services; evidence-based practice standards.		structure, child & family outcomes, cultural competency, training)	progress (2008 – 2011) Note: recommendation 14 (call center) and 19 (structure) tabled for further study.
Final Report of the Governor's Child Welfare Action Committee	Pending	Prepared by CDHS on behalf of CWAC action committee members Executive Order B 006 08	Provide recommendations on how to improve CO's child welfare system (policy, budgetary & legislative). Inclusive of state-county org capacity and structure; quantity/quality of training; public access to state-county human service department; role of independent oversight; public-private partnerships to improve services; evidence-based practice standards.	Governor	(administrative structure, child & family outcomes, cultural competency, training, co-occurring issues)	Pending