



Colorado Child Welfare County Workload Study

August 2014
Report Highlights

Department of Human Services

PURPOSE

Establish a comprehensive picture of the State’s child welfare county actual and estimated workload and staffing levels.

BACKGROUND

- The mission of the child welfare system is to provide services so that Colorado’s children and families are safe and stable.
- Colorado is one of only nine states in the country with a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system.
- The 64 counties in Colorado directly administer child welfare programs and services in their counties in accordance with state and federal laws and rules.
- Counties receive referrals of possible child abuse or neglect, investigate the allegations, and provide services to children and families, as necessary.
- In Fiscal Year 2013, counties received more than 83,000 referrals, screened in about 33,400 (40 percent) of them for further assessment, and provided services to about 37,500 children.

WORKLOAD STUDY METHODOLOGY

- Workload studies identify the level of work that is appropriate for staff performing different types of services. Workload studies are not designed to measure the consequences of inappropriate staff workloads, or how work can be better distributed or performed.
- We conducted a 4-week time study with 54 Colorado counties and about 1,300 child welfare workers participating. Participants recorded how much time they spent on 11 major services, 15 task categories within each service, and 69 sub-tasks within each task category during February 2014.
- We analyzed the time study data and obtained input from over 60 county child welfare staff to construct estimated workloads, which are the expected amount of time necessary to perform a service for a case if all requirements are met.
- Comparing the workload estimates to the actual amount of time workers spend performing a service and current staffing levels, we estimated the number of caseworker positions needed to meet requirements and achieve program objectives.

STUDY CONCLUSION

The estimated amount of time required to complete mandated child welfare activities and meet program objectives exceeds the amount of time available from the current number of Colorado child welfare caseworkers.

KEY FACTS AND FINDINGS

- Overall, caseworkers participating in the time study spent about 68 percent of their time on case-related activities.
- Of the 11 major services studied, time study participants spent the highest percentage of time (36 percent) on case support, which includes any work activities that are not related to a specific case (e.g., staff meetings and training).
- Of the 15 task categories studied, time study participants spent the highest percentage of time (38 percent) on documentation and administration, which includes TRAILS documentation, human resource tasks, and other general office tasks. This time may or may not be related to a specific case.
- Applying our workload model and assuming that no changes are made to current county child welfare practices, we concluded:
 - ✓ Estimated workload levels (i.e., amount of time that should be spent on a case per month) would require between 18 and 157 percent more time per month for each service than the actual amount of time child welfare workers spent on each service during the time study.
 - ✓ Based upon the county child welfare workers participating in the time study (from 54 counties), an estimated 574 additional caseworker FTE positions, plus 122 related supervisory positions, are needed to handle the caseloads associated with time study participants.
- Improving operational efficiencies in the child welfare process could help provide more staff time and resources to counties for delivering services from current resources. This could reduce the amount of additional resources needed to meet requirements and achieve desired outcomes.
- The results of the workload study provide information that the Department can use to respond to community questions and concerns regarding the time and resources it takes to provide services; identify ways to more efficiently operate programs and manage resources; determine if additional county staffing resources are needed; and conduct additional workload studies that build upon the current baseline results.

For further information about this report, contact the Office of the State Auditor
303.869.2800 - www.state.co.us/auditor