

Department of Children & Families Stakeholder Annual Report

In 2019 the Applied Learning Communities (ALCs) program launched in Wisconsin. ALC learners self-select to participate on agency teams, and enroll in a regional learning cohort. Each cohort is eager to engage in a facilitated study of a particular child welfare policy that governs an area of practice.

Facilitated by Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (WCWPDS), the ALCs incorporate adult learning strategies to facilitate dialogue among and between Child Protective Services (CPS) practitioners in each of Wisconsin's five regions.

In 2019, the area of focus was on the Case Transition Process policies that specifically address transitions to Ongoing Services when the agency takes protective action using a Safety Plan (not Placement). Study of these policies occurred through a course of four consecutive sessions, delivered over the span of 8 months. Enrolled participants committed to all four sessions in advance. At the completion of the ALCs, agency teams advanced recommendations to local leaders and state policy makers for their consideration.

213

total learners



CPS Supervisor/
Manager



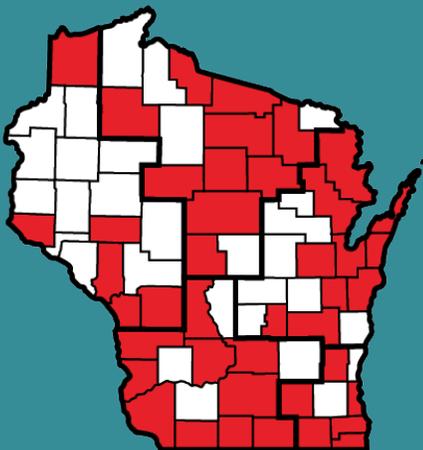
CPS Initial
Assessment (IA)



CPS
Ongoing



Other



Red counties have an enrolled team.
Thick black lines outline each region.

92% 83% 78%

strongly agreed they were able to participate in all 4 sessions

indicated they would recommend this training to others

indicated they would be able to apply what they learned to their work

46 agencies out of the five regions participated in 2019

At the ALCs participants engage in a methodical study of a discrete policy that governs CPS practice. As a result, agency teams recommend small changes to their leaders that they believe will make a difference at the local level by bringing closer alignment between written policy and its implementation in practice.

Through structured, facilitated discussion about the alignment of policy and practice, each regional cohort is also able to make related recommendations to policy makers at the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The remaining document lists the 5 collective recommendations that emerged from the 5 participating cohorts. Rationale for each recommendations is provided.

Recommendations

1. Decide if the policies describe the Case Transition process as a single event or process. Ensure the related policies reflect this decision in their description of practice expectations.

Ongoing Service Standards explicitly state case transition is a process by referring to it as such. However, elements of the policy leave the reader guessing what components comprise the process. Specifically, the case transition staffing event is often conflated with the process of transition and leaves the reader wondering if they are responsible for the occurrence of an event or process. For example, do the agency professionals, family members, and providers attend the case transition staffing? Alternatively, are there two separate meetings, both categorized as a case transition meeting?

Operationally, agencies describe both instances as impractical. If it is one meeting including agency professionals, family members, providers, and possibly representatives from tribes, it is not feasible to secure availability of all members, share all the items outlined in policy, and engage in effective decision-making about the Safety Plan in an immediate and transparent way. Instead, agency professionals indicate that to engage in the required decision-making (i.e., readiness of case for transition and sufficiency, feasibility and sustainability of the Safety Plan), more than one case transition staffing is needed; however, the policy requirements for documentation

reinforce the occurrence of a single case transition staffing, rather than a process.

It is recommended a decision is made about whether the case transitions by way of a single event or a process. Once decided, it is recommended that policy reflect this decision throughout its description of practice expectations.

Agencies are interested in clarification that is sensitive to their workload, not adding to it. Further, they desire opportunity to practice discretion when reasonable.

2. Combine practice standards into one document, or ensure alignment when policy describes behaviors in more than one set of practice standards.

Currently, Wisconsin practice standards for CPS are in three separate documents: Access & Initial Assessment Standards, Ongoing Standards and Safety Intervention Standards. The workforce reviews these practice standards to understand required decisions and their timing. The separation of practice standards may inadvertently fragment the workforce's knowledge and understanding of practice expectations.

Under the present structure, staff are most familiar with practice standards related to their specific duties. For example, professionals responsible to complete initial assessments review the Initial Assessment Standards and

implement its policies. It is less likely they review the Ongoing Standards to review practice expectations. For this reason, some learners who are primarily responsible for initial assessments were surprised to learn there are state-issued policies about the Case Transition Process, commenting that they do not typically review Ongoing Standards because it is outside the scope of their practice area.

To ensure consistency in policy implementation and comprehensive understanding, learners at the ALC recommend practice expectations be located in a single document, or duplicated in both Initial Assessment and Ongoing Standards to ensure the consistent review and implementation of practice expectations.

The 2019 ALC cohorts studied written policy about the Case Transition Process. Ongoing and Safety Intervention Standards document related policies. As it currently reads, there are differences between the two documents (see below for specificity).

Discrepancy in Practice Expectations	Explanation	Recommendation	How it helps
Classification of meeting types	The Ongoing Standards refer to a discrete event, referred to as the “Case Transition Staffing.” The Safety Intervention Standards do not formally identify such a meeting. Instead, the Safety Intervention Standards reference a “transition meeting” and it is unclear whether they are one in the same.	Define “Case Transition Staffing” and “transition meeting.” Determine if they are referring to the same meeting.	Definition of the type of meetings will promote consistent understanding of it as well as its elements: sequencing, purpose, timing, method, and attendance required.
Sequencing of meeting(s)	Inconsistent references to the type, timing, method and necessary attendance at each meeting leave agencies questioning whether the written policy expects one comprehensive meeting, or a series of meetings with distinct purposes.	Clarify if policies articulate one comprehensive meeting, or a series of meetings with distinct purposes, different timing, methods, and attendance, required.	Clarification will encourage agencies to structure their Case Transition Process to ensure the elements of the meeting are included.

Discrepancy in Practice Expectations

Explanation

Recommendation

How it helps

Purpose of meeting(s)

The Safety Intervention Standards articulate the purpose of the meeting(s): discuss expectation and oversight of plan, review understanding of it with parents/ caregivers, confirm continued commitment and involvement from its participants/providers and modify when necessary.

According to the Ongoing Standards, the purpose of the meeting(s) is to: communicate the status of the Impending Danger Threat, examine the Safety Plan to ensure it is sufficient, feasible, and sustainable, and disclose related information and decisions.

Align purposes and use consistent language to articulate the purpose, including whether the meeting is a single event or process, which includes more than one meeting.

Agencies perceive the current timeframe to be impractical and they request further exploration of the articulated timeframes (see recommendation 4 for more detail).

Discrepancy in Practice Expectations

Explanation

Recommendation

How it helps

Method to conduct meeting(s) with providers in the Safety Plan

The Ongoing and Safety Intervention Standards agree the Initial Assessment and Ongoing Services professional must meet. The method for this meeting is not specific.

Both set of practice standards require face-to-face contact when the two professionals meet with caregivers/family members.

Unlike the Ongoing Standards, the Safety Intervention Standards do not require face-to-face contact with participants/providers involved in the implementation of the Safety Plan. Instead, they allow discretion for contact with providers to be “in person, or telephone.”

Ensure the two documents clearly articulate expectations for the method of the meetings.

Clarity about expectations for the method will help agencies envision whether the meeting consists of one comprehensive event, or a series of meetings with distinct purposes and required attendances. Opportunity to use agency discretion about the method of the meetings is favorable. Agencies describe challenges to ensuring face-to-face contact (e.g., travel costs, and coordination of schedules).

Discrepancy in Practice Expectations

Attendance at meeting(s)

Explanation

The Ongoing and Safety Intervention Standards agree the meetings are to include the Initial Assessment, Ongoing Services professional, caregivers, and providers on the Safety Plan.

Ongoing Standards refer to caregivers and families, and Safety Intervention Standards refer to caregivers and parents.

The Ongoing Standards highlight agency discretion when including other partners in the meeting (i.e., supervisors, tribes, and private agencies).

Unlike the Ongoing Standards, the Safety Intervention Standards do not articulate the role of the agency supervisor, tribes, and private agencies.

Recommendation

List who is to be included in meeting(s) and when there is discretion, be specific. For example, family is more inclusive than parents.

How it helps

Articulates parameters which ensure the necessary people are included in the meeting(s) and agency staff are confident they are carrying out their duties responsibly.

3. Identify and define the decision making process more clearly.

Ongoing Standards highlight two decisions to make during the Case Transition Process: 1. Readiness for Case Transition and 2. Sufficiency, Feasibility and Sustainability of the Safety Plan. Safety Intervention Standards do not identify the need to establish the readiness of a case for transition. They provide guidance on the evaluation of the Safety Plan and circumstances and timing for its modification.

Ongoing Standards acknowledge case readiness for transition may incite disagreement within and between agencies. The policy requires resolution at a local level, specifically: “Each county agency must develop a policy to address these situations for internal case transitions.” ALC cohorts across regions indicated there is typically no such policy at their agency. It is recommended, this portion of the policy articulate the purpose of this decision and define measurements of “readiness” so county agencies have parameters and a framework to develop the required policy.

The Ongoing Standards and Safety Intervention Standards elevate the primary importance of safety management during the case transition process. Both documents highlight the need to evaluate the current Safety Plan to determine if it is sufficient, feasible, and sustainable. Both documents read as if the Ongoing Services professional is responsible for this decision (although the language is not explicit). Ongoing Standards state the “worker receiving the case” is responsible for the examination of the Safety Plan and Safety Intervention Standards refer to the “newly assigned worker.” Both sets of practice standards state that when the examination results in the need to modify the Safety Plan, the same worker is responsible for the modification of the Safety Plan (i.e., Ongoing Services professional). Unlike the

Ongoing Standards, Safety Intervention Standards provide additional guidance on the evaluation of the Safety Plan and circumstances and timing for its modification.

It is recommended the policies elevate the decision making process as a collaboration between the Initial Assessment and Ongoing Services professionals rather than asking one to evaluate the other’s work. Additionally, it is recommended the policy identify how these specific decisions are made and between whom when the agency does not transition a case from one professional to another and instead maintains the same case from Initial Assessment through Ongoing services. As is, only the Ongoing Standards acknowledge this circumstance and the language to articulate it is sparse and lacks specific guidance related to safety decision making.

4. Consider required timelines and determine their value to practice, articulate the rationale

The Ongoing and Safety Intervention Standards reference the timing of meetings and there are discrepancies between the two practice standards, see page 8 for further definition, and specific recommendations and rationale.

Discrepancy in Practice Expectations

Timing of meeting(s)

Explanation

The Ongoing Standards specify the expectation that the Initial Assessment and Ongoing service professional conduct a case transition staffing “within 7 business days from the time the Ongoing Services supervisor received an approved Initial Assessment in eWiSACWIS.” The Safety Intervention Standards do not specify the timing of the meeting.

The Safety Intervention Standards are specific about the timing of the face-to-face contact with parents and caregivers (i.e., “within 7 working days from the initiation of ongoing services”).

Recommendation

Assess the nature of the timing (i.e., is it reasonable)?

Align and reinforce timing of the identified meeting(s) in both sets of practice standards.

Use the same adjective to qualify timing of events. Specifically, refer consistently to working or business days, not both.

How it helps

Analysis of the timing will reveal the rationale for initiating meetings within 7 business days to determine if it is arbitrary. Agencies perceive the current timeframe to be impractical at times and they endorse further exploration about the articulated time frames.

Alignment of timing in both practice standards, including clarification about business vs. working days ensures the CPS professional is clear about expected practice.

5. Support adherence to timeframes and documentation requirements through statewide automated system (i.e., eWiSACWIS)

Ongoing Standards indicate the timeframe for initiating the case transition staffing is “within 7 business days” from the time the Ongoing Services supervisor receives an approved initial assessment in the statewide-automated system (i.e., eWiSACWIS). Participants at the ALC who are Ongoing Supervisors indicated they do not receive notification of the approved initial assessment through eWiSACWIS. Instead, they have established their own tracking processes. It is recommended that eWiSACWIS support timely completion of required items. Some suggested eWiSACWIS generate a “tickler” after an initial assessment is approved with an unsafe finding and disposition of “open.” Others indicate a tickler would not support their organization and prioritization of the Case Transition Staffing, and that it would just be one more tickler among many others. Given the disagreement on the utility of a tickler, a decision pertaining to recommendation #4 is encouraged in order to determine if there is a need to further explore how eWiSACWIS can support timely completion of required events.

Secondly, eWiSACWIS can support documentation requirements. The Ongoing Standards require documentation that the case transition staffing occurred, and what content was addressed. According to the Ongoing Standards, the local agency is responsible to determine which “case worker” is responsible for documentation.

Due to the lack of specificity, it is recommended a dynamic template be created in eWiSACWIS to ensure collaborative completion of documentation requirements. ALC participants suggest that the template prefills with a list of documents Ongoing Standards require practitioners to review during the Case Transition Process, including

the time/date stamp for each documents most recent approval. Further, it is requested that eWiSACWIS provide check boxes for assigned practitioners to check as a signal of completion rather than text boxes requiring narrative. Additionally, it is required that drop down boxes appear with the names of staff assigned to the case. This would allow practitioners to select their name to signal responsibility for completion. Likewise, it is suggested the template include features that would document the occurrence of events and decisions prescribed in practice standards.