



EDUCATING SOCIAL WORKERS FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE: THE STATUS OF USING TITLE IV-E FUNDING TO SUPPORT BSW & MSW EDUCATION

POLICY BRIEF

ABOUT TITLE IV-E TRAINING FUNDING

State child welfare agencies partner with social work education programs to strengthen and professionalize the child welfare workforce. Since the late 1980s, the training provision of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, created as part of the *Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980* [P.L. 96-272, Section 474(a)(3)(B)], has been a major public funding source supporting both staff training and the opportunity for current and prospective employees to earn BSW and MSW degrees. Using these federal funds to support social work education has been instrumental in educating a new generation of social workers to pursue child welfare careers.

Benefits of Using Title IV-E

- Creates and strengthens university–agency partnerships and collaborations, identified by the Government Accountability Office (2003) as a promising practice to address staff recruitment and retention problems.
- Provides the opportunity for workers to return to school, often full-time, to acquire an advanced degree. This re-energizes child welfare staff, supports staff retention, and improves child outcomes due to the workers' acquisition of new knowledge and enhanced skills.
- Educates a new pool of BSW and MSW students to take on this challenging work, providing agencies with new workers “ready to hit the ground running.”

Implementing the Use of Title IV-E Funds

- Funds can be used to train both current and future child welfare staff.
- Training may be short-term or long-term; long term includes degree education for those preparing for child welfare work. As payback for educational support, graduates are required to work for the agency for a specified period of time.

- The federal government provides enhanced federal match of 75 percent for Title IV-E eligible training. Usually the university provides the required match through expenditures on faculty, overhead, and curriculum development.
- Funds may be used for direct financial assistance (stipends) to students, salaries and benefits of university instructors, curriculum development, materials and books, field instructors, distance education, and evaluation of the program.

POLICY ISSUES RELATED TO TITLE IV-E TRAINING

Implementation Issues are Longstanding

In 1993, the General Accounting Office issued a report, *Foster Care: Federal Policy on Title IV-E Share of Training Costs* (www.gao.gov/assets/220/218667.pdf), identifying inconsistencies in states' interpretation and implementation of the Title IV-E training provisions.

In 1996, the Children's Bureau issued a call for comments about concerns that states and universities faced in accessing Title IV-E training funds (Federal Register, 1996). Although over 180 comments were received, no specific actions were taken to clarify the inconsistent implementation of the regulations and policy guidance. Key issues that continue include:

- Confusing interpretation of policies that developed from outdated Title IV-A regulations, policy memos, audits and Departmental Appeals Board rulings.
- Variations across and sometimes within regions on interpreting the regulations and policies, often resulting in later disallowances after audits.
- Inability to use private university match.

In 2000, the Children's Bureau authorized a study that examined how different states implement the Title IV-E training provision, especially related to the partnerships with universities to train staff and provide BSW and MSW education, however, the findings of that report were never released.

Current Policy Concerns Limit Use

- Accessing Title IV-E funding continues to be tied to a state's 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) eligibility, resulting in much lower eligibility, reducing the federal share of funding.
- The tight economic climate further decreases available funds, with some states not having sufficient matching funds or other resources to support these Title IV-E partnerships.
- Interpretations of Title IV-E training policy in some jurisdictions appears to restrict use of the program, rather than optimizing it to address the critical staff competency issues identified by states (APHSA, 2010).
- Capacity to ensure that states have a highly competent and well-prepared workforce to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families are strongly impacted by:
 - ◇ Changes in the leadership and administration of public child welfare agencies and ACF Regional Offices,
 - ◇ Conflicting opinions and Departmental Appeals Board decisions regarding cost allocation of training expenses across federal programs,
 - ◇ Privatization of child welfare services that limits graduating students from fulfilling their work requirement, and
 - ◇ Narrow interpretation of what topics can be covered by Title IV-E (see Child Welfare Policy Manual).
- New ACYF program guidance, e.g., the April 2012 Information Memorandum, *Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Children and Youth Receiving Child Welfare Services* (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/2012/im1204.pdf) indicates that improving child welfare outcomes within a state should focus, not just on the reason for intervention, but to look further to the child and family functioning, and to be able to identify evidence based practices. Thus, it is critical that child welfare workers understand child and family functioning in order to be able to provide the guidance and resources to address the issues facing the children and families. Having skills and knowledge in family engagement and family assessment, as well as dynamics of child abuse and neglect can

provide a framework for those persons who enter the child welfare workforce, giving them the tools needed to work with children and families. The application of stringent rules and outdated regulations does not support the essential development of a skilled workforce.

- The Social Work Policy Institute's recent survey of social work education programs that are using Title IV-E training funding to educate BSW & MSW highlights on-going policy issues and growing concerns related to availability of funds (see page 3).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Federal financing policies should support mechanisms that will provide consistent and sustainable funding sources and educational and training strategies to ensure the child welfare workforce has necessary practice competencies to promote the health, safety and well-being of children, across the full array of child welfare programs.
- Federal leadership should ensure consistent interpretation of Title IV-E training policies across states and regional offices targeting the goal of attracting and retaining a high quality workforce. The acquisition of social work skills to address federal child welfare policies focused on social and emotional well-being along with safety and permanence should be supported.
- Efforts should be made to support and encourage rigorous, multi-site evaluation of Title IV-E educational partnerships to better ascertain their impact on social work education, staff recruitment and retention and child welfare outcomes.
- National social work organizations, national provider organizations, child welfare advocates, and the ACYF should work together to ensure that there are strategies to support the workforce and enhance agency organizational culture and climate concerns through policy and practice improvements.
- Special attention should be made to ensure that child welfare supervisors have the prerequisite knowledge and skills to provide administrative, educational and supportive guidance to the front-line workforce.

2012 Survey on the Use of Title IV-E to Support BSW & MSW Education: Highlights

In the past few years several universities reported that their states have eliminated or suspended long-standing Title IV-E partnership programs. This occurred just at the time when provisions in the reauthorizations of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the Safe and Stable Families Program provided renewed attention to addressing workforce concerns. In addition, the Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) has spoken extensively about the absence of the desired skills and competencies for child welfare workers to more fully address children's social and emotional well-being (Samuels, 2011). A key to acquiring the necessary skills and competencies for child welfare staff is having staff equipped with general social work skills as well as those directed specifically for the child welfare population.

To better understand the current status of Title IV-E educational partnerships, in December 2011, the Social Work Policy Institute (SWPI) launched an on-line survey, asking BSW and MSW programs that currently have, or in the last 3 years have had a Title IV-E partnership to provide information about their programs.

The following information is drawn from the survey responses that included 94 social work education programs in 31 states. CSWE's 2010 statistics report that at least 147 programs in 35 states actually access Title IV-E funds (CSWE, 2011). This was about a response rate of 64%.

- **Number of students participating in 2011-2012:**
Respondents indicated that at least 1853 students receive Title IV-E support in the 2011-2012 academic year to acquire either a BSW or MSW degree; a little less than 1/2 of the students were employed by public child welfare agencies while completing their degree.
- **Length of time the partnership has been in existence.**
The majority (63 out of 94) of the educational partnerships have operated for more than 15 years, and only three have been operating for less than 5 years.
- **Changes in the size of the IV-E partnership over the past three year.** During the past three years about 70% of the Title IV-E educational partnership programs have remained the same or decreased, including 5 programs that have been terminated during this time. About 30% of the programs have grown during this period. For those schools whose program changed over the past three years, more than 50% of respondents indicated that it was due to funding and about 1/3 indicated it was due to policy interpretations.
- **Termination of programs.** Five schools from four states reported that their Title IV-E program had been terminated. Reasons provided for these program terminations included:
 - ▶ Budget cuts resulting in hiring freeze of new personnel.
 - ▶ Lack of and confusing communication between the state, the federal regional office and the university.
 - ▶ Increased documentation challenges to support the acceptability of the courses taught for Title IV-E funding.
 - ▶ Changes in cost allocation, as it relates to distribution among benefitting programs and the reimbursement rate and match.
 - ▶ Continuing changes in leadership at the state level, the loss of institutional knowledge with attrition.
- **Positive outcomes of Title IV-E educational partnerships.**
 - ▶ Agency-focused outcomes include:
 - ▷ Enhanced professionalization of the child welfare workforce and increased number of MSWs in child welfare.
 - ▷ Facilitation of a career ladder by having BSW graduates move on to receiving an MSW degree.
 - ▷ Increased number of agency administrators and supervisors who have a social work degree.
 - ▶ University-focused outcomes include:
 - ▷ Enhanced child welfare curricula.
 - ▷ Opportunities for students to have access to high quality training offered both locally and nationally.
 - ▷ Universities are more attuned to agencies' needs.
 - ▷ Social work education programs recruit more ethnically diverse students.

These findings, drawn from the perspective of social work education programs provide an important snapshot of the importance of Title IV-E partnerships and the extent to which they have become a major resource to educate social workers for child welfare practice over the past two decades.

It is also important to note that since the survey was completed in early 2012, several additional states have reported that their Title IV-E partnerships are being eliminated or curtailed. Thus, the vulnerability of these programs continues. This is due to inadequate availability of funds to cover program costs, difficulty of identifying sufficient match to the federal funding and as well as inconsistent policy interpretations. This is just at the time when there is increased attention to the importance of a highly skilled workforce in order to achieve improved child and family outcomes.

Thank you to Jessica Pryce, MSW, doctoral student at Howard University, for her assistance with the Title IV-E survey.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

TITLE IV-E INFORMATION EXCHANGE AMONG UNIVERSITY AND AGENCY PARTNERS.

- In-person meetings at the Child Welfare Symposium at the Council on Social Work Education's Annual Program Meeting.
- Listserv maintained by the University of Georgia (aellett@uga.edu).
- Website, maintained by the University of Houston (www.sw.uh.edu/community/cwep/title-iv-e/index.php) including research, reports, and information on program characteristics.

NASW SOCIAL WORK POLICY INSTITUTE (SocialWorkPolicy.org)

houses useful information and resources including the reports *Investing in the Social Work Workforce*; *Supervision: The Safety Net for Front-Line Child Welfare Practice*; and *Children at Risk: Optimizing Health in an Era of Reform*.

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR TITLE IV-E TRAINING.

NASW developed a toolkit with background and resource information on the importance of Title IV-E training that can be used with policy makers. It can be accessed at www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/answer/cwResources/default.asp.

CHILDREN'S BUREAU'S CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL

regarding Title IV-E training can be found at www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=116. Information on what topics can be covered by Title IV-E training funds can be found in Sections 8.1H 8 and 21 at this link.

NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE INSTITUTE,

a service of the Children's Bureau (www.ncwwi.org), provides valuable information regarding child welfare workforce issues.

COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

The framework developed as part of a national policy initiative focused on the child welfare workforce and led by the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights can be accessed at www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/components-of-an-effective-child-welfare-workforce.pdf.

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ABOUT THE SOCIAL WORK POLICY INSTITUTE

The **Social Work Policy Institute** was established in 2009 and is a division of the NASW Foundation. Its mission is:

- To strengthen social work's voice in public policy deliberations.
- To inform policy-makers through the collection and dissemination of information on social work effectiveness.
- To create a forum to examine current and future issues in health care and social service delivery.

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