

**MASTERS CHILD WELFARE EDUCATION PROGRAM  
2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

**LESSONS LEARNED AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT**



## LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONGOING PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT

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The authors are grateful for the cooperation of the students who took the time to give feedback on their experiences with the Masters Child Welfare Education Program (MCWEP). Without their input, this report would not have been possible. We would also like to thank our MCWEP partners, including the Graduate Program Academic Coordinators, faculty, and staff at Kean University, Monmouth University, Rutgers University and Stockton University. Additionally, the support received from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), the Office of Training and Professional Development, and the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers has been essential for the ongoing success of this project.

The Masters Child Welfare Education Program especially thanks Christine Norbut Beyer, MSW, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, for her ongoing support of efforts to improve the lives of New Jersey families through education and training of the workforce. Commissioner Beyer's vision for transforming New Jersey's child welfare system is strong and encouraging.

We are grateful for the financial support provided to this project by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. Finally, we are thankful for the support of Stockton University, without which this project and report would not have been possible.



The Masters Child Welfare Education Program (MCWEP) is a partnership among the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF), the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-NJ), and a consortium of four graduate social work programs – The MSW Programs of Kean University, Monmouth University Rutgers University, and Stockton University. This program evaluation covers the months of August 2018 – July 2019. Kean’s first cohort of MCWEP students entered in the Fall 2017 semester, so this is the second annual program evaluation that will include data from Kean University MCWEP students. The MCWEP partnership was formally initiated in June 2012, when the project was funded by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

The intent of MCWEP is to enhance the knowledge and skills of supervisors who are currently employed at the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), through completion of a Master’s Degree in Social Work (MSW). Through participation in MCWEP, DCP&P supervisors broaden their perspectives on social work and child welfare (including evidence-based public child welfare practice), develop advanced clinical skills, and deepen their supervisory skills so that they become more confident supervisors and mentors in their work with at-risk children and families and more effective leaders in promoting exemplary practice within New Jersey’s public child welfare system. In evaluating the project, the perspectives of the students were sought to capture the academic and experiential components of the program. This report includes data from respondents in seven cohorts of students accepted into MCWEP.













## Competency-Based Assessment

Program assessment in MSW education focuses on student outcomes (the extent to which students demonstrate competencies and associated practice behaviors), rather than inputs (curriculum content). Similarly, assessment in the Masters Child Welfare Education Program (MCWEP) is focused on student attainment of a set of competencies and associated practice behaviors. Under the Council on Social Work Education's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), all MSW graduates are expected to have mastered certain competencies. In addition, each participating MSW program has its own direct practice/clinical concentration and has developed a set of advanced MSW competencies to guide learning in the classroom and field. All students in MSW programs are assessed for mastery of the CSWE competencies and the specific advanced competencies established by their MSW programs. To assess the additional mastery of competencies required by MCWEP, we use the specialized competencies that students develop through their participation in MCWEP. These competencies specifically address the Division of Child Protection and Permanency requirements that child welfare supervisors have an exceptionally well-developed perspective on the knowledge base in social work and child welfare practice, are able to effectively use clinical skills and theories, and are able to supervise effectively in an organization where workers regularly make difficult decisions that affect the lives of vulnerable children and families. These two sets of competencies, trauma-informed child welfare practice behaviors and leadership and supervision in child welfare practice behaviors, are developed in two elective courses all MCWEP participants are required to take prior to graduation. These two sets of competencies are also rehearsed and reinforced during the sessions of the Learning Community.

MCWEP students completing one or both courses during the 2018-2019 academic year rated their own mastery of these specialized competencies. The following summarizes the results of those self-assessments.







1. I am able to assess my own strengths and challenges as a leader.	5.00	4.83	4.85	4.87	4.86	4.76	4.78
2. I am able to describe key qualities of leaders and the impact on child welfare systems and staff.	4.33	4.75	4.45	4.93	4.93	4.82	4.78
3. I can demonstrate an understanding of the role of ethics and the systems perspective in leadership behavior as a supervisor.	5.00	4.83	4.85	4.87	4.86	4.59	4.78
4. I am able to describe key child welfare workforce issues, trends, and challenges from a national perspective.	4.00	4.66	4.85	4.47	4.64	4.53	4.44
5. I can demonstrate the ability to identify evidence-based practice in child welfare supervision.	4.00	4.83	4.85	4.67	4.79	4.71	4.67
6. I am able to demonstrate an understanding of the stages and key issues in the implementation of change initiatives.	4.67	4.92	4.45	4.53	4.71	4.53	4.78
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The Learning Community is an integral component of MCWEP designed to enhance students' MSW classroom and field learning experiences and meaningfully connect these experiences to child welfare practice and supervision. The purpose of the MCWEP Learning Community is to foster a state-wide network of MCWEP participants to disseminate educational information related to child welfare and encourage dialogue among participants regarding MSW education and translation of educational outcomes to workforce experiences. The Learning Community also provides an avenue for process evaluation of the needs of student participants in MCWEP.

The Learning Community consists mainly of quarterly in-person meetings where students have opportunities to gain further education, disseminate information in group presentation format, and engage in process evaluation. After each Learning Community meeting, an evaluation is administered to assess the meeting's effectiveness. Mean scores for each of the items were above 4.0 in all cases, indicating that students are highly satisfied with their experiences in the Learning Community. The following data represent information gathered from each of the four Learning Community Meetings that took place during the 2018-2019 academic year:





August 10, 2018 9:00am – 4:00pm DCF Professional Center New Brunswick, NJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation to MCWEP mission/ purpose/structure</li> <li>• Keynote Speaker – Carmen Diaz-Petti, Assistant Commissioner, DCP&amp;P</li> <li>• Recognition of MCWEP Graduates</li> <li>• “Child Welfare in Uganda: Challenges/Considerations”</li> </ul>	1. The speakers demonstrated expertise on the subject matter presented.	4.8
		2. The speakers communicated in a clear and organized manner.	4.7
		3. The speakers were able to hold my interest.	4.7
		4. The methods of the presentation were effective.	4.6
		5. The content was directly related to MCWEP.	4.7
		6. Handouts supplemented presented material.	4.6
		7. I will use content from this learning community meeting in my work as a DCP&P Supervisor	4.5
		8. The content of this learning community was helpful to me as an MSW student	4.6
November 2, 2018 9:00am – 4:00pm Kean University Union, NJ	Guided discussion in Cohorts “Self-Care as More Than a Cliché: Caring for You in Action”	1. The speakers demonstrated expertise on the subject matter presented.	4.2
		2. The speakers communicated in a clear and organized manner.	4.3
		3. The speakers were able to hold my interest.	4.1
		4. The methods of the presentation were effective.	4.2
		5. The content was directly related to MCWEP.	4.2
		6. Handouts supplemented presented material.	4.2
		7. I will use content from this learning community meeting in my work as a DCP&P Supervisor.	4.2
		8. The content of this learning community will be helpful to me as an MSW student.	4.2

Table continued on next page.



February 15, 2019 9:00am – 4:00pm Stockton University Atlantic City, NJ	"MCWEP: Frontline to National Landscape" "From Field Placement to the Unit: Transfer of Learning and Connecting Best Practices" Myers-Briggs Personality Type Test and Discussion Team-Building Activity	1. The speakers demonstrated expertise on the subject matter presented.	4.1
		2. The speakers communicated in a clear and organized manner.	4.1
		3. The speakers were able to hold my interest.	4.0
		4. The methods of the presentation were effective.	4.0
		5. The content was directly related to MCWEP.	4.1
		6. Handouts supplemented presented material.	4.0
		7. I will use content from this learning community meeting in my work as a DCP&P Supervisor.	4.1
		8. The content of this learning community will be helpful to me as an MSW student.	4.0
June 14, 2019 9:00am – 4:00pm Monmouth University West Long Branch, NJ	Team-Building Activity "Report from NASW-NJ Conference and National Title IV-E Roundtable Attendees" "Beyond the Question of Color: Expanding the Concept of Diversity in Child Welfare"	1. The speakers demonstrated expertise on the subject matter presented.	4.7
		2. The speakers communicated in a clear and organized manner.	4.8
		3. The speakers were able to hold my interest.	4.6
		4. The methods of the presentation were effective	4.7
		5. The content was directly related to MCWEP.	4.7
		6. Handouts supplemented presented material.	4.6
		7. I will use content from this learning community meeting in my work as a DCP&P Supervisor.	4.8
		8. The content of this learning community will be helpful to me as an MSW student.	4.7





- Speaker from Uganda was very interesting – showed a different side to intercultural and international social work.
- Practical use of self-awareness for my personal self-care.
- Working in groups and presenting helped to prepare for class presentations.
  
- Application of what we are learning in MSW program directly to supervision/self-care.
- Presentations were related to our primary jobs and roles.

**What Suggestions Would You Offer to Improve This Learning Community?**

Suggestions for Topics and Issues Students Would Like Addressed in the Learning Community	32
Suggestions for Content Delivery/Learning Modalities and Activities	24
Various Practical and Logistical Issues	20

- Self-care, stress management, and time management.
- An actual self-care activity, such as meditation – even it was just 30 minutes or something.
- More information about supervision and leadership. That is always useful.
- How to adjust to life (work, home life, etc.) after we graduate. What's next?
- A presentation or seminar about how to write papers effectively.
- Topics related to changes in child welfare due to the widespread use of medical marijuana.
- Any interesting things related to our work – mental health, addiction, trauma, worker retention, etc..





Incorporate more films and movies.

Guest speakers on various topics always bring an interesting perspective to the learning community.

Do more group activities and interactive things.

I think decompressing longer sessions could be helpful because they can become repetitive and drag on.

More open discussion topics.

- Continue to offer food and coffee.
- These should be a half day instead of a full day.
- All Learning Communities take place in New Brunswick or another neutral location.

**What Will You Do Differently in Your Practice/Employment as a Result of This Learning Community?**

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I will use the self-care assessments with my workers.

As soon as I went through the binder, it made me think of doing a portion about self-care at my next unit meeting.

Spend more time talking about secondary traumatic stress with staff.

As a result of the learning community, some of the interventions I have learning in my field placement I will use with my unit.

Keep in mind the idea of a “single story” and ensure transfer of this knowledge occurs at the local office.

I have an increased interest in cross-cultural social work studies.

#### What Was the Most Important Thing You Took Away from Today's Learning Community Activities?

Valuable Information	29
Direction for Future Practice	16
Hope, Encouragement, and Support	15
Tangible Skills	11

The significance and importance of self-care personally and professionally.

I learned a lot about the practice of child welfare social work in Uganda.

The deeper meaning of self-care—going well beyond the standard definition.

Important information on the Family First Act.

The information on video game addiction.

I won't make assumptions about any culture. Assumptions create barriers and make our work more difficult. Being open to listen and hear our families is the way.

As a supervisor I not only need to manage my own self-care but monitor my staff's balance of self-care.

Re-prioritize self-care in my own work.



It felt good to meet my fellow MCWEPs, exchanging phone numbers, and meeting those who have graduated.

I was happy to encourage the newest 7.0 cohort!

There is a lot of support in the MCWEP community. We are not alone—we have an entire DCP&P family!

Self-care assessment tool will be utilized with my workers.

Tips for presentations. For example, I need to know my subject and express ideas clearly to the audience.

In sum, students indicated that they value and benefit from the information and materials disseminated in the Learning Community. This reflects the significant time and effort that MCWEP staff put into planning and arranging these meetings. Students also expressed strong appreciation for the sense of community and support aspect that is one of the most consistent strengths of our Learning Community, and MCWEP as a whole. We continue to devote time at each meeting to foster this strong sense of solidarity and collegiality between the cohorts and with program staff. Students also seem interested and encouraged to engage in further exploration and research into areas of interest, aiming to promote change in their units and across the organization. The students also related that they will continue to transfer the skills and knowledge gained through their MSW courses to their staff and also apply it to their own practice in child welfare. This has been a consistent finding of our Learning Community assessment over time, and connects with one of its objectives: to facilitate meaningful transfer of learning from students' MSW courses to DCP&P practice. Students are eager to apply their learning, whether specific content areas or practice approaches, to their work setting and with their supervisees. Students voiced a clear appreciation for their colleagues' support, and the desire to offer support to both colleagues and supervisees. Students expressed a longing for additional information, more interactive group activities, and ideas for self-care within the child welfare environment.

Additionally, the students provided feedback related to the areas of content, learning modalities and topics for which they have preferences. This feedback will be integrated in the 2019-2020 Learning Community and beyond. As the Learning Community curricula is explored, adjusted, and solidified, student feedback has been perhaps the strongest guiding input for improvement. The Learning Community environment has been a laboratory for MCWEP staff and faculty to explore effective pedagogical strategies and have meaningful impact with a captive and invested audience of engaged MSW students and DCP&P supervisors.



1. What are the strengths of MCWEP?
2. How well do you think MCWEP is preparing you to be a more impactful supervisor at DCP&P (consider your MSW coursework, The Learning Community Meetings, and the MCWEP electives, if taken [Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice, and Child Welfare Leadership & Supervision] all as a part of MCWEP)?
3. Is there anything about MCWEP that you think should be changed? If so, what and why?
4. Do you feel you are being prepared to play a role in the transformation of New Jersey's public child welfare system? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about MCWEP?

Students offered a great deal of insight about the program, their experiences, and their aspirations for moving forward in the organizations transformation. Their ideas and trepidations are a major component in our considerations for MCWEP program enhancement.

#### What Are the Strengths of MCWEP?

Supportive Community of MCWEP Students, Faculty, and Staff	22
Knowledge Gained; Academic/Professional Enhancement	13
Program Design and Structure	12
Learning Community Meetings	6

- I appreciate all the support from everyone involved in the MCWEP program and I feel like everyone involved, especially Dawn and Joe, want all of the MCWEP students to succeed and have our best interests at heart. I can see that a lot of thought and hard work has gone into making this program a success and I am proud to be a part of this program.
- The strengths of MCWEP lie in multiple people being accepted into each institution at once, creating cohorts of support. Trying to juggle work demands, grad school demands, and life's uncontrollable occurrences can be cumbersome, so having a team of support has been everything to me. The supportive administration also helps in that they understand what we do at DCP&P as well as the demands of graduate school, so the advice given has been paramount during difficult times.
-



MCWEP provides the opportunity for supervisors to increase their social work skills and knowledge to improve the case practice. MCWEP includes educational work in the clinical field to enhance our skills.

MCWEP reignites passion within seasoned DCP&P employees.

This program strengthens my ability to assess underlying needs and develop case plans with appropriate evidence-based interventions..

MCWEP allows full-time employees to continue their graduate education part-time, in a manner that supports continued success at work and encourages a transfer of learning. MCWEP unites colleagues from across New Jersey in a way that promotes greater consistency of case practice for DCP&P.

MCWEP learning communities provide a venue for colleagues to network and exchange ideas.

#### How is MCWEP Preparing You to be a More Impactful Supervisor?

MSW Program Knowledge/Experiences, Strengthening the Social Work Perspective	19



The education and experiences that I have been exposed to during MCWEP has been very beneficial. It has given me a better understanding of the challenges and struggles that our families face every day. It has taught me to advocate for the families under my supervision and provide them with the help that they need. I have been able to directly apply the knowledge that I have learned in the classroom to case practice. It has made me a better supervisor.

I immediately applied concepts learned in the Trauma course in my conferences with workers and continue to utilize these concepts in my current role as Case Practice Specialist. The trauma curriculum changed the lens through which I view cases. I have encouraged workers to use the Adverse Childhood Experiences questionnaire with the parents they work with in order to better understand parents' behaviors.

MCWEP is benefitting me a great deal as a supervisor. I am better able to guide my workers with the children and families we serve. I am more compassionate and am gaining a greater understanding of social work practice.

- Trauma in Child Welfare has really opened my eyes in terms of why our clients act and react in situations and this class has changed my mindset in terms of how I now think and react to not only the clients but to my staff. I am now working on changing the mindset of my staff when they come to conference cases in terms of blaming our clients and focusing my staff on the client's traumatic experiences instead of blaming and becoming frustrated with the clients. Trauma in Child Welfare has been the most informative and challenging course I have taken thus far in the MCWEP program.
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provide additional support/encouragement to currently enrolled MCWEP students, promote more extensive transfer of learning opportunities, and provide networking opportunities.

I think the learning communities should be half a day. While a couple of the earlier “workshops” have been helpful, others have not. The morning “support group” sessions are redundant at times and have become complaining sessions for my cohort.

It should go back as it was before, where students were able to take off fully for a time to complete their internship. It is a hardship in busy offices to be out so many days per week.

MCWEP should develop their own pool of suitable internships. My first internship was excellent and definitely developed my clinical skills. My current internship is more case management, which I enjoy but is not pushing me to grow as much.

### **Do You Feel You Are Being Prepared to Play a Role in the**



In summarizing students' responses to the open-ended questions that constitute our overall program assessment, there is a largely positive trend in terms of the program's strengths. It is clear that the program strengths more than balance the challenges. Students perceived the program as being very supportive, especially because of their MCWEP colleagues, MCWEP staff, and the DCF administration's consistent support for the program. Students were very grateful for the educational information and skill attainment they are gaining through MCWEP and are transferring that knowledge to their local offices. They perceive the Learning Community in particular as a strong asset of MCWEP, reporting that they gain a lot of confidence, information, support, and camaraderie through its quarterly meetings. Students also indicated that structure of MCWEP was a strength in itself, specifically that program design takes into consideration their work responsibilities. They also indicated that being able to use educational leave was very helpful. The data suggests that fieldwork, along with the knowledge that they are obtaining through their core courses, the specialized information in the MCWEP electives, and the information relayed in the Learning Communities is preparing participants to be more impactful supervisors. Students also mentioned how they are already sharing the information they are learning with those they supervise in local offices and also with the families they work with, either directly or indirectly. They support the transformation goals of New Jersey's public child welfare system and report an eagerness to be part of that process.

Despite their overall enthusiasm for the program, students identified several areas where the program could be strengthened. A few students discussed the possibility of having the MCWEP elective courses structured differently, as the increased demand during the summer session felt stressful to students and precluded them from retaining some of the material. Students requested a number of other miscellaneous logistical and programmatic changes, related mostly to their fieldwork requirements and the Learning Community, citing the large volume of work they are already responsible for in the office and the classroom. Indeed, students continue to report difficulty juggling the multitude of demands on their time.

In the 2017-2018 MCWEP Annual Report, four recommendations were made in order to improve students' experiences. The first recommendation evolved from students' comments in multiple evaluations that they desired changes to the modality of the summer elective courses exclusive to MCWEP (Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice and Leadership and Supervision in Child Welfare). We have continued to monitor this situation because student feedback seems to change from year to year, depending on the unique needs and character of various cohorts. Due to the limited negative feedback received this year, we have decided to continue with the current course format. A 12-week format, with some class sessions being offered online at the discretion of the professor.

The second recommendation from the 2017-18 report related to difficulty integrating field placement experiences with their responsibilities as supervisors for DCP&P. It was suggested that MCWEP staff conduct a survey of students to catalog their experiences with field placement and office duty expectations. We did conduct this survey and are now analyzing the results. We hope that, in consultation with DCP&P, we might use this information to revise MCWEP field placement policies, as well as local office expectations and understanding of program requirements.





MCWEP has cultivated and expanded its many strengths, which will continue to shape the direction and institutional capacity of the program in the future. In 2018-2019, MCWEP has had the opportunity to reflect upon the structure of the program, the needs and strengths of the students, and the demands of the agency as it continues to evolve.

The program has been successful in providing an avenue for transfer of knowledge from social work programs to the DCP&P workforce for these supervisors. The structure of the program allows students flexibility to be able to matriculate in graduate courses while still being able to engage in work responsibilities. MCWEP also reinforces the need for impactful leadership and supervision through specialized electives and consistent connection between core social work courses and the future vision of DCP&P. As DCP&P moves forward in its efforts to become a trauma-informed organization, MCWEP provides students with knowledge of trauma-focused work and catalyzes the infusion of this knowledge from the mid-level out. The Learning Community component encourages students to gain confidence as social work professionals, exposes them to new research and literature in Child Welfare, and provides support and camaraderie among their peers. Finally, the program consistently encourages students to actively engage in the reform effort of the New Jersey public child welfare system, and this year recommends renewed efforts to get students involved that effort.

The following recommendations are made based on student feedback and MCWEP staff deliberation for the 2019-2020 academic year:

1. Continuing our efforts to support the MCWEP students who sometimes feel overwhelmed with the competing demands of their offices and schoolwork, we hope to gain more information about the way students are currently addressing this challenge. This will take the form of another survey of MCWEP participants, specifically aimed at discerning how students make sure their responsibilities are covered when class and fieldwork take them out of the office. Results of this effort will be shared in the 2019-2020 annual report.
2. In the coming year, it is our goal to continue to foster the efforts of the subset of MCWEP graduates who continue to seek opportunities to serve the public child welfare system. Thus, it is our aim in the 2019-2020 academic year that MCWEP and the DCF continue to partner to expand the roles and usefulness of MCWEP graduates. This includes nourishing existing efforts, and also investigating other avenues by which our MCWEP students and graduates could be given opportunities to utilize their skills and contribute to the continuing growth and transformation of DCP&P.
3. Lastly, we plan in 2019-2020 to continue our focus on making the Learning Community an engaging, beneficial, and stimulating experience for all MCWEP participants. Creative meeting formats, new topics, various learning modalities, and expert guest speakers will all be considered. We want to ensure that our students continue to look forward to the Learning Community and benefit maximally.

Among MCWEP's greatest strengths is the persistent partnership between New Jersey's public child welfare system and the academic community, with the consistent support from professional organizations like NASW. As the recommendations for enhancement are implemented, MCWEP will carry on its improvement and enhance its goals. Bringing DCP&P supervisors back to school to pursue social work education continues to fan the flame of passion for child welfare among this great workforce. MCWEP hopes to maintain this important partnership with DCF as we all work toward improving and enhancing the lives of New Jersey's children and families.

The Learning Community is an integral component of MCWEP designed to enhance students' MSW classroom and field learning experiences and meaningfully connect these experiences to child welfare practice and supervision. The purpose of the MCWEP Learning Community is to foster a state-wide network of MCWEP participants to disseminate educational information related to child welfare and encourage dialogue among participants regarding MSW education and translation of educational outcomes to workforce experiences. The Learning Community also provides an avenue for process evaluation of the needs of student participants in MCWEP.

The Learning Community has two components in which MCWEP participants are expected to be involved. In the bi-weekly online discussion board, students respond to discussion threads posted by Learning Community Faculty facilitators. The second component involves quarterly in-person meetings where students have opportunities to gain further education, disseminate information in group presentation format, and engage in process evaluation.

After each Learning Community Meeting, an evaluation was administered to capture how effective the meeting was. Students typically expressed satisfaction with their experiences in the Learning Community.

The following data represents information gathered from each of the four (4) Learning Community Meetings that took place during the 2013-2014 academic year: