

Office of the Child Advocate
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families
MEETING MINUTES –APPROVED
Tuesday, September 28, 2021
9:00am-10:30am

Meeting held virtually via WebEx pursuant to the Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, s. 20 signed by Governor Baker on March 12, 2020.

Data Work Group Members and/or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides, OCA Director, Co-Chair
Linda Spears, DCF Commissioner, Co-Chair
Lauren Matteodo, Office of Senator Adam Gomez
Shayna Solomon, Office of Representative Finn
Mike Dsida, CPCS
Tammy Mello, CLM
Bob Gittens, Cambridge Family and Children's Service
Mary McGeown, MSPCC
Susan Elsen, MLRI

Government Associates:

Danielle Allard, Office of Senator Gomez
Katie Verra, Office of Senator Velis
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor

Staff:

Ruben Ferreira, DCF
Emily Hajjar, DCF
Paola Ferrer, DCF
Lian Hogan, DCF
Cristina Tedstone, DCF
Kristine Polizzano, OCA
Jessie Brunelle, OCA
Janice Neiman, OCA

Members of the Public:

Rachel Gwaltney, CLM
Kate Lowenstein, Citizens for Juvenile Justice
Polly Crozier, GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders
Kate Nemens, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee.
June Ameen, Friends of Children
Alison Cantor
Badriyyah Alsabah
Emma Moore
Other members of the public on the phone who did not self-identify

DWG = Data Work Group

OCA = Office of the Child Advocate

DCF = Department of Children & Families
CQI= Continuous Quality Improvement
CFSR= Child and Family Service Review
CB= Children's Bureau
SWA= Statewide Assessment
PIP= Program Improvement Plan
SWI= Statewide Data Indicators
OSRI- Onsite Review Instrument
OMS= Online Management System

Meeting Commenced: 9:01 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions:

Ms. Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the virtual meeting. Ms. Mossaides recognized the presence of a quorum of Data Work Group members in the session. A roll call was not held due to the number of participants in the virtual meeting; members of the public were asked to identify themselves in the Zoom chat room.

Approval of Minutes:

Draft minutes from the August 26, 2021, meeting of the Data Work Group were provided to members via email in advance of the meeting to facilitate approval. Ms. Mossaides invited questions or concerns with the draft minutes as proposed and hearing no objection she asked members to vote on their meeting minutes via roll call.

Maria Mossaides, Linda Spears, Mary McGeown, Susan Elsen, Mike Dsida, Tammy Mello all voted in the affirmative. No members abstained or voted no.

The August Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved.

Presentation and Discussion of Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) Outcome Data

Ms. Mossaides introduced the co-chair, DCF Commissioner Linda Spears. Commissioner Spears told the group that they would spend time today speaking about updates to the CFSR federal data collection tool for child welfare outcome measurements. She introduced Ruben Ferreira who presented a PowerPoint on the context and overview of the CFSR which is in its 4th round of updated measurements.

Mr. Ferreira told the group there have been three stages of CFSR data collection. During CFSR Round 3 (CFSR-3) introduced new metrics that were not uniformly reported on across jurisdictions, but during this next round- "CFSR Round 4" (CFSR-4)—all jurisdictions are expected to report the metrics. Massachusetts has been in compliance and able to report the metrics since CFSR-3.

Mr. Ferreira continued his presentation with an overview of the CFSR-4. The CFSR was developed and is utilized by the Children’s Bureau (CB) in response to federal legislation. The CFSR is a mechanism to determine whether jurisdictions are promoting safety, permanency and well-being in their child welfare systems. He explained the parts of the CFSR process including a Statewide Assessment (SWA) and an Onsite Review period. Last, he explained when jurisdictions do not meet the standards set by the CB on any given metric, jurisdictions will enter a “Program Improvement Plan” (PIP) to address areas requiring improvement. He explained to the group that for CFSR-4, Massachusetts will lead their own reviews (in partnership with the CB), and Massachusetts successfully completed their latest PIP during Spring of 2020.

Mr. Ferreira explained to the group it takes many resources over a minimum of 3 years. Statewide Assessments and Onsite Reviews are posted on the Children’s Bureau’s Website. He explained the overall goals of the CFSR to:

1. Ensure conformity with Title IV-B and IV-E Funding.
2. Determine what is happening to children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services (including the legal and judicial process).
3. Assist state child welfare systems in helping children and families achieve positive outcomes through continuous quality improvement (CQI).

Next, Mr. Ferreira explained some of the primary changes in this round of the CFSR. Mainly, these changes integrate the principles of CQI, and statewide data indicators (SWDI) will function as the framework for the CFSR and PIP development. He continued to explain to the Work Group what data metrics are used as SWDI and what datasets are used. He told the group Massachusetts has state outcome measurements that mirror many of these data metrics, but the CB drop some values so final numbers may be off by a tenth or hundredth of a percent.

Mr. Ferreira cautioned that SWDI are used to establish substantial conformity on safety and permanency outcomes, but the CB advises against using measures to compare jurisdictions. A Work Group member asked Mr. Ferreira to hypothesize why that is the case, and Mr. Ferreira suggested the main concern lies in legal and policy definitions that may differ across jurisdictions. He stated in order to do a true comparison, one must base everything on the unique qualities of the jurisdictions. Mr. Ferreira agreed that set benchmarks are useful.

Mr. Ferreira went through all the SWDI measures. Each of the 7 metrics measures safety, permanency or wellbeing. He told the group which measures were currently reported in DCF’s Annual Report.

Statewide Assessments (SWA)

Mr. Ferreira continued his presentation to the group and explained the process of conducting a Statewide Assessment (SWA) to start the CFSR process. This is then reviewed by the CBI and guides the onsite review process. Depending on the strengths/weaknesses in the SWA, certain stakeholder group interviews will be set up as part of the onsite review. Mr. Ferreira explained that Round 4 of this process includes increased input from Child Welfare system stakeholders, and SWDI used as anchors for the review. He continued to present on each section of the SWA.

Onsite Review

Mr. Ferreira explained the Onsite Review process to the group. The reviews are twofold: review of the case record and interview caseworkers, supervisors, parents, and sometimes children. The CB provides jurisdictions with an onsite review instrument (ORI) that guides the case reviews and interviews. The results from both reviews are entered into the online management system (OMS) which collects both quantitative and qualitative data.

The group discussed how the case record review uses stratified random sampling to get a sample of cases. Mr. Ferreira explained that this would mean a representative sample, but sometimes case reviews do not necessarily represent state trends across all caseloads. There is a risk of over and under identifying concerns, Mr. Ferreira explained that Massachusetts' DCF does this sampling in their own CQI unit every 6 months as one way to address any over or under sampling concerns. The group also discussed the mechanisms for stakeholders to provide feedback during the interview portion of this review if they are not formally invited to participate. Mr. Ferreira told the group he would check with the local CB Office for more information on this. He did tell the group that, previously, Massachusetts has led their own case reviews and have been "docked" by the CB as being too critical in their review.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Jurisdictions that do not reach the indicated standard set by the CB develop—in partnership with the CB—a "Program Improvement Plan" (PIP). Mr. Ferreira gave the group an overview of the PIP development process and how the PIP is grounded in quantitative and qualitative data.

Questions & Discussion

Mr. Ferreira ended his PowerPoint presentation and asked the group for questions.

A guest asked if other reports or audits about the agency were required to be submitted to the CB. Mr. Ferreira said those reports/audits were not required as part of this process.

Mr. Ferreira clarified for a group member that "foster care" is defined as any out of home placement and when reporting "array of services" to the CB, all state funded services that DCF uses (not just DCF funded) should be documented. The CB encourages states to be as expansive as possible in that regard.

The group discussed the fact that Round 4 is starting in the coming months, but no formal date has been set yet. The group asked Commissioner Spears to explain the consequences of this review on other initiatives and Department-led activities. Commissioner Spears explained the CFSR is a large part of Mr. Ferreira's work, as well as the CQI team at DCF. Caseworkers and other staff also dedicate some time to the onsite review process, and leadership is brought in during PIP development. Commissioner Spear's explained her view that the review does not stop everything else from moving forward.

A data work group member asked the group how they could use the data and information reported in the CFSR for Massachusetts' own state-level data reporting needs. Another Data Work Group member agreed to that discussion and suggested creating a plan to determine targets for the Department to hit for future data collection and reporting. A conversation ensued around the legislative mandate of this group, if the right stakeholders were in the membership of the data work group to hold those discussions, and how to best go about that work in the coming months.

Concluding remarks:

In closing, Commissioner Spears said there are many folks who need to be part of the discussion of setting targets that are different from those who will select that data measures. She viewed these as two separate tasks. Both Commissioner Spears and Ms. Mossaides agreed to think about this topic more. She reiterated to the group that the Department has a significant amount of outcome data, but wants to keep reporting these fields reasonable, doable, and targeted in ways that will fill gaps or respond to perceived needs.

Ms. Mossaides suggested looking at the legislative bills and asked about the future agendas of these meetings. She asked the group to fill out a Doodle poll to determine when future meetings should take place. The Commissioner and Ms. Mossaides thanked everyone for their time.

Adjournment: 10:45am