Overview

The overarching goal of the Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services was to inform the field and the Children’s Bureau about the most current research, knowledge, and practice related to how public child welfare agencies contract with private partners for some or all of their care services. After an initial comprehensive needs assessment and knowledge gap analysis conducted by the QIC-PCW team in 2005–2006, performance-based contracting (PBC) and quality assurance (QA) systems were selected as the primary focus of further in-depth study and evaluation. Through a competitive RFP process, three demonstration sites were selected, each of which were implementing PBC/QA through a public-private partnership in some aspect of their child welfare service system. In September 2007, the QIC-PCW and its partners began the national cross-site evaluation of these three demonstration sites. This executive summary highlights findings from the final report of that three-year evaluation.


- Performance-based contracting is a mechanism by which public agencies can move toward a more quality and data-driven monitoring approach with accountability built into it. In turn, private agencies are given the freedom to determine how services are best delivered to meet contract expectations while achieving fiscal goals.
- PBC is even more directly linked to contract monitoring and ongoing Quality Assurance (QA) since private agency performance is tied to payment. Therefore, contracts are either being revised or provided based on their compliance with performance standards.
- A successful PBC that leads to improved outcomes for children and families requires more than just collaboration and a contract. The way in which the public agency enforces policies or procedures, such as contract monitoring, to adapt and support this new contractual relationship are important. (Collins-Camargo, McCubbin & Ensign, in press).
- Equally important are the ways in which private agencies create innovative strategies or systems to help them achieve their contract outcomes and quality service metrics. (McCubbin & Meezen, 2010). These kinds of supports may evolve over time as new data is used in a continuous quality improvement process.

Planning Process: Public-Private Partnerships in Collaboration

- Given the complex relationship between public and private partnerships within a PBC system, each site identified the collaborative planning process as one of the most important factors in the success or failure of their efforts. The structure of the decision-making process was different across sites; sites took an inclusive approach when negotiating PBC and designing QA systems.

In Florida, the lead CBC developed a supervisor roundtable between the lead agency and the private providers to work on PBC/QA activities together.

In Illinois, an existing public-private decision-making committee (CCMC) and data team was used to plan and implement PBC/QA.

In Missouri, they used an existing meeting that included CEOs of the private providers and key public agency staff to plan and implement activities.

Survey data showed that there was general agreement in all sites that those involved in the planning and implementation of this initiative had the right level of collaborative communication structure, process, purpose, goal, environment, and partners.

- Finally, undertaking this level of system change requires sufficient time to plan since it affects all levels of an organization or agency. Each site emphasized that sufficient time is needed to ensure that all parties understand the outcomes being measured, how they are measured, and how these contracts affect each side financially. Additionally, time is needed upfront to make sure the right data is available to measure each outcome or to make the necessary changes to guarantee accurate and reliable data to inform the system as a whole.

Outcomes Promoting Performance and Achieving Goals

Overall, data from this cross-site evaluation showed that there are almost outcomes in all sites, agencies showed improvement in performance and demonstrated that they consistently improved their ability to meet their contract targets from QIC Project Year 1 to QIC Project Year 2. Regardless of the outcome or how it was measured, this improved performance was consistently positive.

Percent Change in Performance Across Outcome Areas

The following graph shows the standardized percentage of change from QC P31 to QC P32 across all outcomes aggregated within sites. Positive values above 0 indicate increased performance on all outcomes from Year 1 to Year 2. Negative values below 0 indicate that performance decreased.

RESULTS: Regardless of the outcome or how it was measured, performance increased over time relative to 0 (means/no change) in all sites. This increase was significant for Illinois and for the aggregated outcomes across all three sites.

Demonstration Sites: Florida, Illinois Missouri

In the January 2007, three demonstration sites were selected to participate in the QIC-PCW. These three sites had previously privatized their child welfare service delivery system and were now implementing Performance Based Contracting and Quality Assurance (PBC/QA) systems within some aspect of their system.