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Promising Approaches to Recruiting and Retaining Quality Child Welfare Workers

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Many recent studies and reports have documented the importance of workload and caseload in maintaining and enhancing an effective workforce:

- GAO Report (2003) — A top challenge to recruitment and retention: high caseloads and workloads
- Zlotnik, et al (2005) — Reasonable workloads impact worker retention
- Ellett, (2001) — Heavy caseloads greatly diminish the quality and equity of services to children and families and strongly influence employees' decisions to leave employment

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- APHSA Survey (2005)
 - Workload can be seen as contributing to the top 5 turnover problems
 - High or demanding workloads and caseloads were rated by State administrators as preventable turnover problems
- Findings of the Child and Family Services Reviews underscore the importance of workload and caseload in terms of outcomes for children.

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For example, a strength rating for Item 19 (caseworker visits with child) was significantly associated with "substantially achieved" ratings for 5 of the 7 outcomes.

These and other findings from the CFJR's further support the need for every jurisdiction to "do the math"—find ways to ensure that workers have workloads and caseloads that provide the opportunity for quality casework to take place.

APRSA Survey:

"Reduced caseloads, workloads, and supervisory ratios were ranked first by St. administrators in the "most important agency actions and initiatives that child welfare agencies and their partners must take to successfully retain qualified workers and supervisors."

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States/counties/cities are using a variety of approaches to workload and caseload:

- Workload analysis: These studies can answer questions like, how much time do workers have to actually see children and families? What are the other tasks and requirements that may prevent more frequent client contact? How can we change that—e.g., using staff more creatively, allocating resources across offices more strategically, reducing unnecessary paperwork, etc.
- Legislation:—must be tied to funding, e.g., Delaware or some other mechanism to ensure implementation

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- Litigation: jurisdictions where caseloads are mandated through court order—recent workload study
- Accreditation: meeting caseloads as part of accreditation
- Negotiation: Unions have played a role in negotiating caseload ratios that meet, or come close to meeting CWLA or COA caseload standards

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However we come at it, better understanding and addressing workload and caseload are key to solving the workforce dilemma and, most importantly, delivering quality child welfare services throughout this country.

An important resource on caseload/workload and broader workforce issues:

Child Welfare Workforce and Training Resources Web Page
National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>