



**National Association
of Counsel for Children**



J E R I T T
The Judicial Education Reference, Information and Technical Transfer Project

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM



The Role of Courts in Child Welfare

The courts are often the “unseen partners” in child welfare, yet they have enormous responsibility. Together with child welfare agencies, courts have an obligation to ensure that children are protected from harm. No child enters or leaves foster care without a judge’s approval. However, decision-makers and the public are often unaware of the role of the courts in child welfare, and the obstacles they face in fulfilling their responsibility to the children before them. The often crowded courts are staffed by highly motivated and well-intentioned but often overworked and, with respect to this issue, undertrained judges, attorneys and staff. Courts frequently lack the information needed to assess the compliance of parties, the effectiveness of treatment, and the well being of children in foster care. In the end, children and families pay the price when courts lack the tools and resources to do their job well.

Despite many efforts, children remain too long in foster care during the time that their dependency cases are pending in juvenile courts. Part of the reason: unnecessary delays in the court process.

Why is a National Curriculum Needed?

Ensuring safe, timely permanency for children in foster care depends on the collection and sharing of sufficient and reliable information so that judges can make the best and most informed decisions for the children before them. Child welfare agencies personnel and judges are the “gatekeepers” of the foster care system and must work together to ensure improved outcomes for children in care. The curriculum is a readily available, proven method for teaming court and agency personnel so that they can work together to identify shared goals, areas of delay and devise a specific strategy for collaboration that will work in their community.

About the National Curriculum

The *National Curriculum for Caseflow Management in Juvenile Dependency Cases Involving Foster Care* was inspired by a desire to recognize and eliminate the case processing delays that often plague child welfare cases.

The goal of the *National Curriculum* is to improve the juvenile dependency system’s ability to oversee the movement of dependency cases involving foster care to shorten the time needed for children to reach permanent placement.

The curriculum was produced through collaborative effort by the following organizations:

- Fostering Results
- The Justice Management Institute
- The Judicial Education Reference, Information and Technical Transfer Project
- ABA Center on Children and the Law
- National Center for State Courts
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

- American Public Human Services Association
- National Association of Council for Children
- Conference of State Court Administrators
- Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts
- Ohio Administrative Office of the Courts
- New York Administrative Office of the Courts
- Texas Office of Court Administration

The curriculum was designed to encourage collaboration between multidisciplinary, interagency teams of those engaged in foster care. **Under the leadership of a judge, the curriculum teams child welfare agency personnel with court administrators and personnel, and the attorneys who represent children and parents in court in order to encourage all parties to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the children that they serve.**

The interagency “team” of suggested participants in the curriculum:

- A judge with juvenile dependency jurisdiction
- A court manager
- A court clerk
- A court information systems professional
- An attorney who represents the government in juvenile dependency cases
- An attorney who represents parents in juvenile dependency cases
- An attorney who represents children in juvenile dependency cases
- A representative of the child welfare agency

Curriculum Development

The curriculum consists of exercises, evaluation, critique and revision. The curriculum is comprised of highly interactive workshops, discussions and team activities. All are designed to foster collaboration among the wide variety of individuals engaged in child welfare. The curriculum even includes information on and suggestions concerning the location, site, facility and “team” facilitators to be involved in the training.

The *National Curriculum* was piloted in Flagstaff, Arizona by teams in three separate counties with significantly different populations and demographics: Cochise, Maricopa and Yavapai. Final changes were suggested and made based on this piloting.

Elements of the Curriculum

The curriculum is designed to provide all of those individuals who work in the child welfare arena with an overview of the fundamental role and purpose of the courts in child welfare and how best to fulfill this role.

This includes a general discussion of courts and their role, a summary of the elements of caseload management and the importance of information and data to this process.

The curriculum uses adult learning techniques to present information and then allows the attendees to apply what has been presented to their own situations, ensuring that everyone is familiar with the goals of effective case management. The curriculum then moves to collaborative design of a site-specific improvement plan that the team members agree upon and commit to work together to implement; identifying particular tasks and reaching consensus on responsibilities and a completion schedule.