

Oklahoma Child Support Specialist Certification Program

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The Oklahoma Child Support Specialist (CSS) Certification Program is a professional development program designed to recognize proficiency, define and assess uniform standards, and provide for recognition in one, multiple, or all functional CSS areas. The Oklahoma Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) saw a need for both the establishment of a proficiency standard for field CSS staff and a formal recognition and professional credentialing program with the ultimate goal of quality customer service. The CSS Certification Program was developed to meet that need.

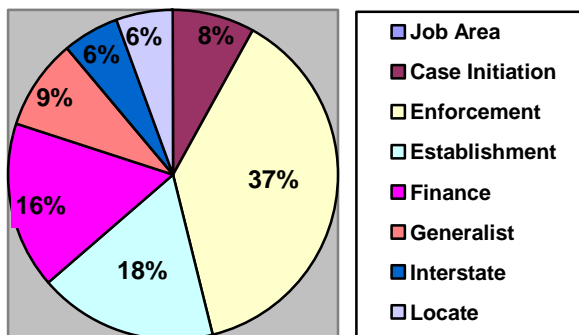
Job Analysis

In order to meet this goal, CSED felt it necessary to have a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the actual day-to-day activities of CSS staff in the field. CSED contracted with the University of Oklahoma (OU) to complete a detailed functional job analysis. The assessment tools developed were criterion referenced reflecting the actual knowledge and skill areas required by workers and indicated by them as essential in completing their work. A CSED Advisory Council comprised of field and state office staff was developed in order to interface with OU in conducting the Job Analysis.

After the Advisory council identified functional job areas, work began on job profile development. There were several resulting phases. There were focus groups and work groups developed to refine the job areas and develop specific tasks. A job shadowing exercise followed to confirm the results in multiple field settings, with observers documenting actual CSS work activities in relation to the identified areas and tasks.

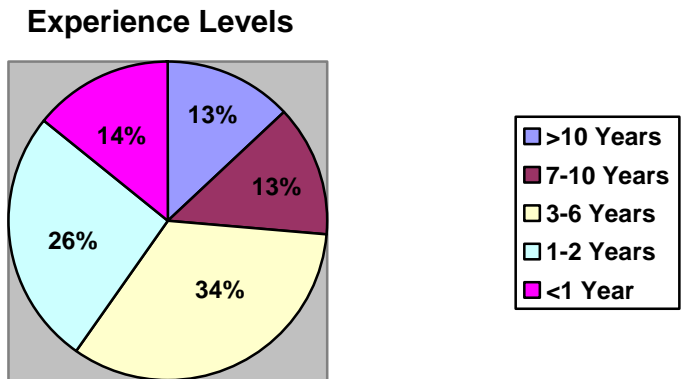
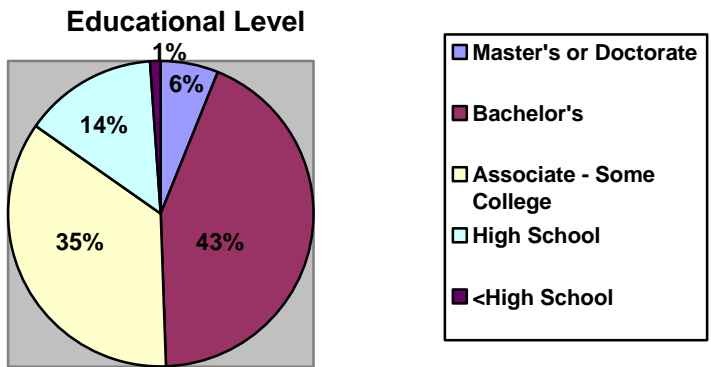
The attributes generated by these efforts were refined to non-overlapping job area concepts and an on-line survey developed. CSS survey participants were asked to choose a job area and rate the relative importance of the tasks associated with that job area, as well as indicate the time spent. The job areas indicated are depicted below.

Respondents by Job Area



Those tasks of importance across all job areas defined an area called Core. This core area was further refined by advisory council and focus groups to be inclusive of many of the Generalist and Case Initiation tasks as well as those knowledge areas requiring functional proficiency for all CSS staff to be effective in the field. The remaining Functional areas were Establishment, Enforcement, Locate, Interstate, and Finance. Not only was the Core area defined, but also the need for training in specific Core areas and some of the Functional areas was highlighted. As a part of the Certification Assessment Project, some specific training needs were established and subsequent professional development produced for those areas. The core areas identified were: Case Initiation, Ethics, Preparing a Case for Court, Microsoft Office Applications, Written Communication, Oral Communication, and Managing Your Caseload.

In addition to identifying the specific knowledge, skill and ability tasks of individuals performing CSS functions, a demographic profile was developed. That profile provided a description of the education and experience of the field staff performing CSS functions. It should be noted that the Core area of Case Initiation was sometimes performed by support staff rather than CSS staff, particularly in larger offices. This did have an impact on the overall educational level. The education and experience levels indicated are presented below:



Almost half of the staff surveyed indicated that they had at least one college degree and that increased to almost eighty-five per cent when associate degrees and some college were included. Forty per cent of the staff had worked for Child Support for less than three years. This is indicative of the relatively high turn over rate experienced in CSED and confirms the need for a professional credentialing program that is both rigorous to meet appropriate standards and flexible to meet the needs of a versatile population. A decision was made to focus on demonstrated competency of CSS job related subject matter.

Assessment Development

The CSS Certification program was developed as a criterion referenced, competency based program for CSS professionals to provide both recognition and professional credentialing. Criterion referenced indicates that job tasks or criteria identified through the job analysis were used to develop assessments in each of the Core and Functional areas. Competency based indicates that certification applicants must demonstrate overall knowledge proficiency or competency in those areas relative to each assessment.

Overall there were seven Core and five Functional area assessments developed by teams of field and state office staff and supported by OU staff with psychometric expertise. The assessments were piloted on individuals with expertise in the particular Core or Functional area, and subsequent focus groups were also held. An item analysis was conducted by OU with dysfunctional items identified. Assessments were then revised to accommodate recommendations from the pilot test group and item analysis. Passing points were established based on pilot administrations and set at one standard deviation below the mean. The assessment administrations ranged in length from forty minutes for some of the Core area assessments to four hours for the Finance assessment, which was administered in two sessions.

Implementation (Planned for the Fall of 2004)

In preparation for project implementation, interactive electronic pre-assessments were developed for each Core and Functional assessment in an online setting. Each of the pre-assessments was approximately one fifth the length of the full assessment and referenced sources. Upon completion of a pre-assessment, the candidate will receive a diagnostic study guide including relevant resources for areas where further work is needed, as well as listings for specialized training opportunities recommended for successful completion.

CSS Certification candidates will successfully progress through all seven Core assessment areas before becoming eligible to take any of the Functional area assessments. While other CSED staff will be eligible to take the Core assessments, they will not be eligible to take assessments for the CSS job related Functional areas or for Certification. Upon successful completion of all core areas, the CSS Certification candidate may begin to schedule assessments for Functional areas as they are offered. In order to ensure success, the assessments will be offered in conjunction with related specialized training. It is expected that the certification process will require both time and commitment on the part of CSS Certification candidates.

Certification

The CSS Certification Program is a collaborative effort with CSED, OU and the Oklahoma Child Support Enforcement Association (OSCEA). OCSEA will be the Certificate awarding body. OU will maintain all applicant assessment records for full confidentiality and will inform applicants of the successful completion of any Functional area and their eligibility for a Certificate in that area. Upon successful completion of all Functional areas, OU will notify the Candidate of eligibility for full CSS Certification. The candidate will apply directly to OCSEA for the Certificate or for full CSS Certification. OCSEA will review the submitted material and award certificates and full CSS Certification.

The CSS Certification Program has been designed as a professional development program to enhance services, but it will also promote intrastate and national mobility for increased job opportunity, security and adequate compensation. In addition to enhanced career mobility for CSS Certified staff, CSED is working to establish an incentive package to recognize CSS Certified staff for their expertise.

National CSS Certification

CSED, along with the collaborative partners in the Oklahoma CSS Certification program, will be working with the National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA) and the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) initiatives to ensure coordination of efforts in the area of CSS Certification. National Standards for CSS Certification reciprocity should be clearly established as well as a process for deeming. That would enable state programs to evolve that were in keeping with National Standards. NCSEA has a process currently underway with which the Oklahoma CSS Certification effort will be coordinated. The Oklahoma CSS Certification program will seek to demonstrate comparability with NCSEA Criteria.

CSS Certification will become a way of ensuring professional standards and establishing a credentialing process for Child Support Specialists across the nation. It will facilitate a secure workforce to provide child support services to the children of this country. Oklahoma is pleased to be a participant in this effort.



Oklahoma CSED Certification Advisory Council members pictured bottom row left: Barbara Perkins, Diddy Nelson, Darendia McCauley, Jane Torres; top row left: Barbara Milikan, Paul White, Shade MaKinde, Rebecca McLeod, Vicki Spurgeon.

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