

# Social Worker Qualifications Study

Prepared for:



WA

IL

MA

OR

MI

CA

MN

OH

KY

TN

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**Washington State Legislature  
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee**

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## **Step One : Identify National Experts**

### **Deliverable 1 – List of National Experts**

## Deliverable 1 - Recommended Experts (National and State levels)

The first step in the Social Worker Qualifications Study involves the recruitment of a group of national experts with expertise in the areas of social work qualifications, salary schedules, practice level designations, certification, and other related issues. The individuals listed below bring this expertise and will assist in focusing the analysis on the critical issues. In addition, these individuals will be an excellent source of ideas for the comparison states to include in the study.

All of the individuals identified below have confirmed their willingness to participate in the study.

### National Experts

#### 1. **Richard Gelles, Dean, University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Policy & Practice, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

##### **Key Qualifications**

- Internationally known expert in child welfare and domestic violence
- Author of 24 books and over 100 articles, chapters, and papers on child welfare and family violence
- Co-Director, Field Center for Children's Policy Practice & Research
- Director, Center for Research on Youth & Social Policy
- Holds Joanne and Raymond Welsh Chair of Child Welfare and Family Violence
- Influential in passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997

##### **Educational Background**

- PhD, Sociology, University of New Hampshire

##### **Link to Curriculum Vitae**

<http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/people/faculty/gelles/gelles.pdf>

#### 2. **Mark Courtney, Executive Director, Partnership for Children, University of Washington, School of Social Work**

##### **Key Qualifications**

- Newly appointed director of a new initiative at the University of Washington, School of School Work
- Former McCormick Tribune Professor, University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration
- Former Director, University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children
- Former Associate Professor of Social Work at University of Wisconsin at Madison
- Areas of research include child protection, foster care, residential care, and adoption, professionalization of social work

## **Educational Background**

- PhD, University of California, Berkeley, School of Social Welfare

## **Link to Additional Background Information**

<http://www.ssa.uchicago.edu/faculty/markcourtney.shtml>

### **3. David Berns, Executive Vice-President for Child and Family Services, Casey Family Program, Seattle**

#### **Key Qualifications**

- Provides strategic direction to Casey Family Programs' nine field offices in Arizona, California, Idaho, Texas, and Washington and to its Indian Child Welfare office in Denver
- Directs Casey field office staff in foster care, kinship care, family reunification, guardianship, and adoption
- Served as the Director of the Arizona Department of Economic Security; managed a staff of 10,000 employees and a budget of \$2.7 billion, leading Arizona's Welfare Programs, Development Disabilities Services, Employment Services, Child Welfare, Child Support, Aging, and Community Services
- Served as Director of the El Paso County Department of Human Services in Colorado; worked to integrate child welfare and public assistance systems
- Served as director of two social services agencies in Michigan from 1978 to 1997; during his tenure, the state's adoptions increased from 950 annually to over 2,000 through a contracting system that created a partnership between public and private systems

#### **Educational Background**

- MSW, Michigan State University
- MA, Public Administration, Northern Michigan University

#### **Link to Additional Background Information**

<http://www.casey.org/AboutCasey/Leadership/ExecutiveTeam/Berns.htm>

## State Expert

**Dee Wilson, Executive Director, Northwest Institute for Children and Families, University of Washington, School of Social Work**

### **Key Qualifications**

- Chair, Joint Task Force on Administration and Delivery of Services to Children and Families (Washington State)
- Twenty-six years experience with Children's Administration as a social worker, unit supervisor, middle manager, and regional administrator
- Administrator for the Child Welfare Training and Advancement Program, a partnership between the State of Washington's Children's Administration and the School of Social Work at the University of Washington

### **Educational Background**

- MSW, Eastern Washington University

### **Link to Additional Background Information**

<http://depts.washington.edu/nwicf/index.html>



## **Step Two : Research Other States and Develop Systems for Comparison**

**Deliverable 2 – List of States Recommended for Comparison**

**Deliverable 3 – Taxonomy and Framework for Comparison of Equivalent Categories**

**Deliverable 4 – Initial Draft of Rubric**

## Deliverable 2 - Identification of Eight to Ten States for Comparison

In order to identify eight to ten comparison states and counties, Clegg & Associates developed a set of criteria to guide the selection process. These criteria built on the key characteristics inherent in the Washington State system, as well as incorporating other important features of high performance states and counties.

Following review of relevant literature, discussion with the expert panel, and review by JLARC (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee) staff, the final set of criteria included:

1. The child welfare social workers are state/county employees, i.e., the social worker function is not contracted out to another agency
2. The child welfare social workers' functions include case management, assessment, brokerage to services, and clinical interventions such as treatment (the provision of treatment services by Washington State child welfare social workers is limited to a small number of programs)
3. Social workers are unionized
4. Social worker qualifications are set by statute

In addition to these qualifications, research staff also considered the following two factors when selecting comparison states/counties:

1. The degree of similarity between Washington State's demographics and those of the comparison state/county
2. The availability of comparison data regarding salary from the recent Washington State Department of Personnel's 2007 salary study

This set of criteria guided the identification of the following states/counties as relevant for comparison of child welfare social worker qualifications:

- Illinois
- Massachusetts
- Oregon
- Michigan
- Tennessee
- Kentucky
- Iowa
- Los Angeles County, California
- Ohio (alternate)
- Minnesota (alternate)

# Deliverable 3 - Taxonomy for Identifying Equivalent Social Worker Positions

## Introduction

The child welfare arena presents an ongoing set of complex and difficult-to-solve challenges. Over the last 50 years, policymakers, social scientists, academicians, and child welfare agencies have attempted to identify the critical factors that will assure the delivery of high quality services to at-risk children and their families.

The impetus to identify effective means of achieving child welfare outcomes increased in 2003 with the implementation of the federal government's Child and Family Service Reviews. These reviews track each state's progress in attaining a diverse array of child welfare outcomes and system-related performance measures.

Deep within this quality improvement challenge lies the issue of social worker qualifications and its impact on the quality of care children and families receive. As states and counties across the nation struggle to improve their child welfare services and avoid the headlines-producing tales of child abuse and neglect, personnel departments, schools of social work, social work organizations, and child welfare advocacy organizations work diligently to identify the qualifications schemes that have the most potential to improve service quality.

The resulting approaches at the state and county levels reflect this indigenous approach: there is little agreement nationally regarding the role social worker qualifications play in achieving quality of care for children and their families. However, there is some alignment among states and counties regarding the questions the debate over social worker qualifications should address, including:

- What job responsibilities are child welfare systems asking social workers to perform, e.g., case management, mental health treatment, etc.?
- What qualifications does it take to carry out these job responsibilities effectively?
- What is the appropriate balance among social worker qualifications related to educational achievement, experience, and skills?
- Is it important to attach requirements regarding completion of child welfare coursework to social work education requirements?
- How does a competency-based qualifications model compare in achieving the intended outcomes to a model that is based on educational achievement?
- Does requiring licensing of child welfare social workers increase the child welfare system's chances of achieving its intended outcomes?
- What impact does requiring continuing education and/or training have on the quality of services?

The information included in this report documents the approaches a number of states and one county have taken in tackling the social worker qualifications issue. The sample states and county represent those that an expert panel viewed as offering reasonably high quality child welfare services. While not linked directly to child and family outcomes, the selection of these states and counties does reflect the collective wisdom of individuals who have worked at top management levels in many of the country's largest child welfare systems and/or the nation's leading schools of social work.

Note: While many states provide child welfare services directly, particularly the case management function social workers provide, in some states these services are delegated to the county level. Notable among these is California, where child welfare services are delivered at the county level. For this reason, we selected Los Angeles County, California as our county representative in the comparison sample.

## **Methodology for Identifying Equivalent Categories of Social Workers**

In order to create comparable categories for comparison purposes, Clegg & Associates will use the elements below to assign social worker position levels in other states and our sample county to those in Washington. These elements, most of which are described in the social worker job descriptions in Washington and the comparison states, will enable us to correlate the qualifications for social work positions that are similar in nature. The resulting taxonomy will form the foundation for the next step – the identification of strengths and weaknesses in Washington State’s social worker qualifications.

The key elements in the taxonomy include:

*Element #1: Responsibilities Associated with Position*

*Element #2: Independent Decision-making Authority Vested in the Position*

*Element #3: Level of Supervision Received by the Position*

*Element #4: Level of Supervision the Position Provides to Others*

Implementation of this taxonomy will occur through the development and use of a series of comparison tables. These tables will capture the information describing the elements above from each of the sample states/county and enable us to identify the positions in each of the comparison states/county that are equivalent to each of the four Washington State social worker (SW) positions under study.

**Table 1A: Position Description Information from Washington State**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1</b>	<b>Element 2</b>	<b>Element 3</b>	<b>Element 4</b>
<b>SW 1</b>	Coordination, interviews, case records for low risk clients	None	“Close/detailed”	None
<b>SW 2</b>	Routine licensing, intake, admin, case management (under supervision)	Some	“Little”	None
<b>SW 3</b>	Advanced specialized case management, licensing decisions, investigations, complaint screenings	Great Deal	“Functions independently”	?
<b>SW 4</b>	First line supervisor of unit of social workers	Complete (within context of larger organization)	Independent	Yes

**Tables 1B – 1K: Position Description Information from each Comparison State/County**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>

**Table 2: Equivalent Positions across States**

<b>WA Positions</b>	<b>IL</b>	<b>MA</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>MI</b>	<b>TN</b>	<b>IA</b>	<b>KY</b>	<b>Los Angeles County</b>	<b>OH (alt)</b>	<b>MN (alt)</b>
<b>SW 1</b>										
<b>SW 2</b>										
<b>SW 3</b>										
<b>SW 4</b>										

# Deliverable 4 – Draft Rubric for Analyzing Social Worker Qualifications

## Introduction

The completion of the taxonomy and the resulting identification of equivalent social worker positions for Washington and the comparison states/county will enable Clegg & Associates to compare the educational, experience, licensing, competency exam, and required/desired qualifications for equivalent social worker positions across the comparison states. This intermediate step is necessary to ensure that the comparison of qualifications involves like positions.

Moving into the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of Washington State qualifications relative to the other states requires that we identify certain assumptions regarding the impact of these qualifications on the quality of services for children and their families and the resulting outcomes. While there is a range of opinions on which qualifications are most important, based on our literature review and discussions with experts in the field, our initial assumptions include:

- Educational background that is closely linked to the staff member’s job responsibilities, including related coursework, will be more effective in preparing the individual for the job than education at the same level in a marginally related field
- Educational requirements should increase as the complexity of client issues, demands of job responsibilities, and independence of decision-making grow
- Experience in jobs with similar content, functions, and decision-making processes to those carried out by social workers in child welfare settings is beneficial and should also increase with the complexity of client issues, demands of job responsibilities, and independence of decision-making
- Requirements addressing cultural competency, either through experience, training, or language capacity, increase the likelihood that social workers will be more effective in carrying out their job responsibilities with children and families from different backgrounds
- Competency exams, implemented correctly, can be helpful in identifying staff’s ability to carry out specific job responsibilities
- Licensing staff increases the likelihood that they have the knowledge and skills to carry out roles directly linked to the licensing subject matter
- Evidence-based continuing education and training directly linked to the child welfare social worker roles increases the likelihood that the staff person will be able to carry out their job responsibilities
- Qualifications that are “required” or “minimum” for child welfare social worker positions will be more likely to recruit employees that have the necessary qualifications than those systems that use a “desired” approach

The tables on the following pages build on the assumptions above to summarize the qualifications the comparison states/county use for their child welfare social worker positions. Each social worker position described for each comparison state/county is the equivalent of one of the four levels of social workers in the Washington State system. (See the taxonomy completed as a component of this study for more information about the identification of the equivalent child welfare social worker positions in the comparison states/county.)

**Table 1A: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 1 Position**

Position	Educ	Substitutes allowed	CW courses	Exp	Substitutes allowed	CW exp	Cultural Comp	State License	Comp exam	Cont. Educ	Req or Des
WA SW 1											
IL equiv											
MA equiv											
OR equiv											
MI equiv											
TN equiv											
IA equiv											
KY equiv											
LA County equiv											
OH equiv (alt)											
MN equiv (alt)											

**Table 1B: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 2 Position**

Position	Educ	Substitutes allowed	CW courses	Exp	Substitutes allowed	CW exp	Cultural Comp	State License	Comp exam	Cont. Educ	Req or Des
WA SW 2											
IL equiv											
MA equiv											
OR equiv											
MI equiv											
TN equiv											
IA equiv											
KY equiv											
LA County equiv											
OH equiv (alt)											
MN equiv (alt)											

**Table 1C: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 3 Position**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Educ</b>	<b>Substitutes allowed</b>	<b>CW courses</b>	<b>Exp</b>	<b>Substitutes allowed</b>	<b>CW exp</b>	<b>Cultural Comp</b>	<b>State License</b>	<b>Comp exam</b>	<b>Cont. Educ</b>	<b>Req or Des</b>
<b>WA SW 3</b>											
<b>IL equiv</b>											
<b>MA equiv</b>											
<b>OR equiv</b>											
<b>MI equiv</b>											
<b>TN equiv</b>											
<b>IA equiv</b>											
<b>KY equiv</b>											
<b>LA County equiv</b>											
<b>OH equiv (alt)</b>											
<b>MN equiv (alt)</b>											

**Table 1D: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 4 Position**

Position	Educ	Substitutes allowed	CW courses	Exp	Substitutes allowed	CW exp	Cultural Comp	State License	Comp exam	Cont. Educ	Req or Des
WA SW 4											
IL equiv											
MA equiv											
OR equiv											
MI equiv											
TN equiv											
IA equiv											
KY equiv											
LA County equiv											
OH equiv (alt)											
MN equiv (alt)											

**Table 2A: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Education**

*H, L, S = comparison state's qualifications are Higher, Lower, or the Same as Washington's (includes degrees, whether substitutions are allowed, whether child welfare coursework is required)*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2B: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Experience**

*H, L, S = comparison state's experience requirements are Higher, Lower, or the Same as Washington's (includes years, whether substitutions are allowed, whether years in child welfare is required)*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2C: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Cultural Competency**

*Y/N = Yes/comparison state has a cultural competency requirement; or No/comparison state does not require cultural competency*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2D: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- State License**

*Y/N = Yes/comparison state requires state license; or No/comparison state does not required state license*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2E: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Competency Exam**

*Y/N = Yes/comparison state requires competency exam; No/comparison state does not required competency exam*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2F: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Continuing Education and Training**

*Y/N = Yes/continuing education/training is required in comparison state; or No/continuing education/training is not required*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2G: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Qualifications required (minimum) or desired (desirable)**

*R/D = Required/qualifications are required (minimum) in comparison state; or Desired/qualifications are desired (desirable) in comparison state*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2H: Comparison State Qualifications Relative to Washington -- All Qualifications Combined**

*H/S/L = comparison state's qualifications are Higher/Similar/Lower than Washington based on qualifications for equivalent positions*

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County	OH (alt)	MN (alt)
SW 1										
SW 2										
SW 3										
SW 4										

**Table 2I: Washington State Qualifications Compared to Other States -- Summary**

*H/S/L = Washington State's qualifications are Higher/Similar/Lower than comparison states based on qualifications for equivalent positions*

Position	Educ	Substitutes allowed	CW courses	Exp	Substitutes allowed	CW exp	Cultural Comp	State License	Comp exam	Cont. Educ	Req or Des
WA SW 1											
WA SW 2											
WA SW 3											
WA SW 4											





## **Step Three : Survey Comparison States**

**Deliverable 5 – Survey Instrument**

**Deliverable 6 – Summary of Survey Results**

## Deliverable 5 - Survey Questions

1. After being hired, is there any training that is required before child welfare social workers begin working/handling cases? If so, what is the nature of the training? (Is it to understand laws, rules and regulations specific to the child welfare system or is it Social Work 101 types of classes?) What training and/or continuing education is required over time?
2. What is or was the driving force behind the current requirements (for example, legislation, accreditation, court cases, etc.)? (If the web research doesn't provide qualification adoption dates.) When were the current requirements adopted? Are there any plans or work underway to update the requirements?
3. Roughly, how many employees fall within each classification? (Is one or more of the classifications far more common than others?) If one is more common – why?
4. How would you assess the strengths and weaknesses of your state's required (or desired) qualifications for social workers at various levels?
5. In your experience, what are the most important qualifications for child welfare social workers?
6. Would you say that experience or education is more important in preparing job applicants for child welfare work? Are there points where you think education and experience become equivalent (for example, so many years of experience equals a masters, or vice versa)?
7. In your experience, have you found that there is a connection between child welfare social worker qualifications and client outcomes?
8. How closely aligned are officially required (or desired) qualifications and the qualifications that are actually hired for in the state?
9. Are you aware of any issues around employee recruitment and retention related to your state's qualifications (for example, how long it takes to fill vacant positions or how long employees stay in a position)?
10. (If the web research doesn't provide...) Are social workers assigned to different areas of work within the child welfare system? For example, do the social workers who place children in a foster home also investigate any complaints of child abuse or neglect in the foster home?

**Questions for national experts Joan Levy Zlotnick, Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research; and Gary Cyphers, APHSA:**

1. What are the most important qualifications for child welfare social workers?
2. Would you say that experience or education is more important in preparing job applicants for child welfare work?
3. What kinds of job experience and kinds of education are most valuable in preparing social workers for child welfare work?
4. What is your opinion about requiring a "degree in social work or a comparable human service field"? Are there comparable fields, or is there something unique about a degree in social work that makes someone more qualified? Can you point us to research studies/literature along these lines?
5. Is it important to require direct child welfare experience?
6. Is there a strong connection between child welfare social worker qualifications and client outcomes?
7. Which states have good qualification requirements for social workers? Which states have good child welfare programs?
8. Should there be a job classification for expert and exceptional caseworker staff?

# Deliverable 6 - Summary of State Surveys

## Introduction

In order to compare Washington State's qualifications for social workers in state child welfare and child protective services with other states' qualifications, Clegg & Associates conducted a series of interviews with 11 people in eight states. The states/county selected for comparison were Illinois, Massachusetts, Oregon, Michigan, Tennessee, Iowa, Kentucky, and Los Angeles County in California. The comparison states were selected due to similarities in their social workers' job responsibilities, state employee and/or union status, accreditation, state demographics, and/or previous inclusion in state personnel studies.

Survey questions addressed a range of issues, including training, the comparative benefits of education and experience, strengths and weaknesses, and recruitment and retention. Responses to the questions highlighted key trends in social worker qualifications, such as an increase in required social work degrees, as well as areas of divergence, such as the many and varied forces driving changes in social worker qualifications in different states.

The following people participated in phone interviews. They are referred to in the report as "respondents." They offered their feedback as knowledgeable and at times opinionated individuals rather than official state representatives.

- Gary Anderson, Director, Michigan State University, School of Social Work
- Katherine Cahn, Executive Director, Child Welfare Partnership, Portland State University
- Daniel Ciha, Services Supervisor, Iowa Department of Human Services
- Ramona Foley, Assistant Director, Department of Human Services, Oregon Children, Adults and Families Division
- Randy Gibson, Recruiter, Department of Child and Family Services, Illinois Office of Employee Services
- Anne Hesson, Tennessee Department of Children's Services
- Ruth Huebner, Child Welfare Researcher, Kentucky Department of Social Services
- Ann Kelly, Human Resources Liaison, Massachusetts Human Resources Division
- Joan Levy Zlotnick, Executive Director, Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research
- Greg Rose, Assistant Deputy Director, Children & Family Services Division, California Department of Social Services
- Judy Sieffert, Manager, Michigan DHS Personnel Services

## Training and Continuing Education

All surveyed states require training before social workers in child welfare and protective services begin handling cases. In most cases, the training is substantial and includes both classroom instruction and job shadowing. Length of training ranges from four weeks in Oregon to three months in Kentucky, with an average of about two months in states such as Michigan.

Training topics are generally practical, intended to prepare social workers for hands-on work with clients and interpretation of state regulations. There are differences, however, in whether states' training topics are general – preparing a social worker for any position in child welfare or child protective services – or tailored in preparation for job responsibilities in a specific program area, such as adoption or investigations. In Illinois, for example, training is highly specific to area of responsibility. Some training processes, such as

Oregon's, begin with a shared general component and follow with more specific instruction based on social workers' specific areas of responsibility. Iowa has a similar training process, starting with general training, following with more specific information, with additional classes spread over the first year in order to avoid overwhelming social workers with training time upfront.

Many states are also working with training academies and schools of social work to ensure consistency in the core topics that are covered both before social workers assume a caseload and before students can receive a degree in social work. Respondents noted that while this standardization can be useful preparation for social workers in generalist positions, where social workers perform a range of introductory job functions, it usually excludes preparation for more specialized responsibilities and can fail to properly prepare social workers for county-level differences in populations, resources, and processes.

Many states use training to compensate for perceived weaknesses in their qualifications and recruitment. For example, many states have had difficulty recruiting social workers from communities of color and bilingual caseworkers, and use trainings to teach cultural competency and strengths-based approaches. Similarly, in California, social workers can be hired without academic training in social work and a thorough training process is used to compensate, particularly to increase new hires' practical knowledge about how to interact with clients.

Surveyed states are increasingly turning their attention to training for supervisors. In addition to training on how to coordinate and evaluate employees, many states have implemented or are currently developing new training for supervisors on mentoring.

Most states provide opportunities for continuing education. However, they vary in whether continuing education opportunities are voluntary or mandatory, with most states offering a mix of required and optional classes. Some states target their initial training and continuing education opportunities to help social workers obtain licenses or graduate degrees. For example, Kentucky's extensive training program incorporates nine hours of graduate credit, ensuring that social workers are earning credit toward MSW degrees.

## **Factors Driving Changes in Requirements**

Respondents named a wide range of factors that encouraged their states to modify requirements for social workers. Many states made changes in response to reviews of their systems from outside entities. For example, Oregon is currently in the process of revising their job descriptions in response to a University of Southern Maine study that identified areas where roles and responsibilities were unclear. Similarly, a Child and Family Services review has driven reforms in California's training, encouraging the state to standardize its curriculum and continuing education requirements. Iowa has also modified its requirements in response to a review, although the review was conducted by an internal state body, the Service Business Team, which identified areas for increased consistency and implementation of best practice approaches.

Accreditation was a driving force for many states, including Kentucky and Illinois. Respondents from states that made major changes in their systems to become accredited or to maintain accreditation noted that although the changes in required qualifications were often difficult at the beginning of the process, overall they now found the changes to be quite positive.

Some states also changed their social worker qualification requirements during departmental reorganization. For example, in Tennessee, qualifications changed during a major merger of departments, including family services, that had previously been separate. The newly unified department created more uniform job titles and descriptions to encourage consistency within the department.

Although a wide range of factors played a role in states' decisions to change their qualifications, respondents spoke of a common and increasing desire to professionalize their staff, which often resulted in more stringent education and training requirements. Michigan was an exception, where economic difficulties and hiring difficulties have resulted in a relaxation of required qualifications. While a BSW or MSW was previously

required, degrees may now fall within a number of fields. Respondents also noted that unions may fight against increased education requirements. For example, unions opposed requiring a social work degree for social workers in Oregon.

## **Distribution of Social Workers across Classifications**

States range considerably in the distribution of employees across classifications. While some are fairly even, many report that certain classifications are rarely used. It is not uncommon for states to unofficially collapse their lower two classifications of social workers, or to rarely use the first level. For example, while Massachusetts job classifications include Social Workers A and B, which are both considered entry-level positions, nearly all entry-level social workers are classified Social Worker B.

In some states, the third tier of social workers is considerably larger than lower and higher classifications. For example, in Kentucky there is a nearly even split between Social Workers I and II (550 and 425, respectively) but nearly twice as many at Social Services Clinician I (approximately 900 employees).

Respondents noted that a glut of social workers in one category may or may not indicate a problem. For example, classifications in Oregon previously included a CET (Consultant, Education, and Trainer) category that was a grade higher than a regular case-carrying social worker. Many social workers with MSWs gravitated to the CET position because it offered higher pay without managerial responsibilities. However, the state ultimately found that more supervisors and direct caseworkers were needed, and therefore eliminated the position.

In stepped-tier job classification systems such as Michigan's, where new hires start at the first classification, move to the next classification after one year, and achieve the third tier classification one year later based primarily on length of service, distribution of employees across classifications primarily reflects hiring dates and freezes and has little connection to qualifications.

## **Division of Responsibilities**

States varied widely in their organization of functions. Most states separate foster care, adoptions, and protective services. In Oregon, intake and assessment, permanency, foster care, and certification are wholly separate functions and positions. Some states also organize their social worker classifications so that those with the most experience work on the most difficult cases. However, particularly in smaller rural areas, social workers sometimes play a generalist role, fulfilling a wide range of responsibilities in child welfare and child protection.

An idea with momentum in many states is organizing social workers in teams. For example, Massachusetts is moving away from an approach previously highly specialized by function with wholly separate units for investigation and intake, assessment, and case management. The state is seeing success in its pilots of a new approach where cases are worked as a team, which allows for multiple perspectives in making decisions and allowing social workers to conduct multiple interviews simultaneously. Kentucky, Iowa, and Illinois also use team approaches. Teams often perform more than one function, such as investigation and case management, but rarely span wider areas such as investigations of abuse and adoption placements.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

Generally, respondents spoke positively about the increasing drive to professionalize staff and its impacts on requirements for education and training. Respondents suggested that stronger requirements for degrees are beneficial, particularly degrees in social work. Good training programs were also frequently mentioned as state strengths. For example, in Kentucky, the opportunity to take advantage of training opportunities to earn an MSW, which many caseworkers do, is perceived to be a key underpinning of the system. The training program and link to an MSW degree not only increases knowledge among the workforce but also creates incentives for employee retention, as employees can see attainable means of advancement.

Weaknesses in state qualifications varied substantially. In Oregon, a previously perceived weakness was a lack of consistency in job duties for positions with the same titles and qualifications. On the other hand, lack of writing ability among new hires was perceived as a weakness in Michigan. Respondents from states that did not require a social work degree, such as Michigan, also considered that a weakness.

## Comparative Importance of Qualifications

Respondents most frequently cited a social work degree as one of the most important qualifications. Some noted that a program-specific social work degree is even better. Social work degrees are valuable because they provide both a theoretical orientation and practical experience through field placement. Many respondents thought that a MSW degree for supervisors is particularly important. Respondents also noted that accreditation requirements emphasize degrees more than experience.

However, most respondents believed that both education and experience are essential and complementary. While some respondents felt that perhaps individual social workers could replace education with experience, and vice versa, many believed that a minimum of a BA was essential and could not be substituted. In a few cases, respondents noted that some supervisors actually prefer younger, less experienced workers with a degree who can more easily be shaped.

Many of the most frequently mentioned desirable qualifications for social workers fell outside of education and job experience, although they were not wholly unrelated. For example, respondents highlighted the importance of cultural knowledge, empathy, flexible thinking, mediation skills, time management skills, communication skills, and the ability to work in hostile and stressful environments. Respondents suggested that dedication to working with children and families is highly important, and that education and experience may demonstrate this commitment. Respondents also emphasized that relevant experience may occur outside of paid work experience. For example, volunteer work or a personal history with the child welfare system can be relevant.

## Qualifications and Client Outcomes

The large number of variables contributing to client outcomes makes it difficult to weigh the direct impact of social worker qualification on client outcomes. However, while many respondents thought that qualifications were likely not the most important factor in client outcomes, they also suggested that qualifications likely had some impact on client outcomes. Several respondents cited studies showing that education requirements are linked to longer retention, which likely improves client outcomes as clients interact with case workers who are more experienced with assessment and decision making. In addition, a 2003 Public Child Welfare Certification Program study found that graduates were more likely to make more frequent home visits and that their clients made fewer moves among homes over time. Despite some evidence that qualifications and outcomes are not wholly unrelated, respondents were reluctant to offer a definitive statement about the extent of the connection. Many respondents emphasized that other factors, such as caseload and resources for prevention and follow up, are likely more important than social worker qualifications.

## **Alignment between Requirements and Hiring**

Respondents noted little discrepancy between state-required qualifications for social workers and hiring. Exceptions are not made lightly. For example, in Oregon, if an applicant does not have all of the required qualifications, an official decision about whether an exception can be made must be approved by the central state body. Exceptions are rare, but might, for example, occur in rural areas where recruiting a bilingual social worker is highly desirable and a promising bilingual candidate has limited time remaining before obtaining their degree.

In some states, qualifications are structured to incorporate flexibility. For example, Massachusetts requirements permit a probationary period for social workers without a license, giving them a six-month period to obtain their license. Similarly, Tennessee's Case Manager 1 is an infrequent classification used for new hires that have a BA but lack the experience required for entry-level work as a Case Manager 2, the more common designation.

## **Recruitment and Retention**

Opinions varied about the impact of qualifications on recruitment and retention. Many respondents identified several other factors that they believed were more or equally important, such as pay scale and supervision.

Although respondents highly valued MSW degrees as qualifications for social workers, they noted that the supply of social workers with MSW degrees is insufficient to require MSW degrees for all positions, particularly in rural areas. Qualifications may generally play a greater role in recruitment and retention in rural areas. Many respondents noted that rural areas sometimes struggle to find fully qualified candidates. For example, California made its decision to require that 50 percent rather than all emergency workers possess an MA degree because of anticipated rural recruitment issues. At the same time, some suggested that retention in rural areas benefits from less intensive competition from other job opportunities. However, respondents cautioned that retention is not always desirable when people remain in jobs they dislike due to lack of alternatives.

Some respondents believed that licensing requirements tend to improve retention rates. Generally, respondents felt that the least prepared case workers were most likely to leave quickly. Respondents felt that less-prepared social workers may not know what to expect in their jobs and therefore retention suffers. For example, in Michigan, many case workers are hired without a social work degree, and personnel found that many dropped out of the program after the training period. They addressed this issue by developing a DVD, "Is this Job for Me?," and requiring all applicants meeting required qualifications to watch it. They also developed a job fit test and adopted a behavior-based interview to clarify expectations and the competencies and skills that workers bring.

Qualifications can impact recruitment and retention of bilingual case workers. Some respondents noted that more stringent education requirements can decrease the number of bilingual applicants who do not speak English as a first language. Illinois noted that recruiting case workers became harder when the state adopted new requirements to become accredited, but the state addressed the issue with a concerted recruitment effort, including visits to junior colleges, advertisements, and a five percent pay differential for language skills.

Some states, such as Massachusetts, experienced an initial difficulty in recruitment after revising their qualifications but were able to resolve recruitment issues over time with on the job training programs and assistance aimed at helping case workers obtain licenses and MSWs. Respondents also felt that investing in workers' qualifications could improve retention. For example, in Kentucky, the child welfare certification program begins with a specialized BA program that trains students for employment in the state child welfare

system. Their tuition is paid in exchange for a two-year commitment. However, retention after the two-year commitment is quite high, at 85 percent.

## **Conclusion**

While states have been successful with a range of approaches, a few themes emerged in interviews. Training for all workers, and particularly for supervisors, is receiving growing attention. States also increasingly require degrees in social work. While respondents spoke highly about the value of MSW degrees, none recommended requiring MSWs for all social worker positions, due to the difficulty that would ensue in recruitment, although some thought that MSW requirements are appropriate for supervisors. Respondents were also unanimous in valuing a combination of education and experience in social worker qualifications.





## **Step Four : Compare Washington Qualifications with Other States**

**Deliverable 7 – Matrix of Washington’s  
Qualification Requirements**

**Deliverable 8 – Comparative Analysis of  
States’ Social Worker Qualifications**

## Deliverable 7 - Matrix of Washington State Social Worker Qualifications

<b>Position</b>	<b>Minimum Required Education</b>	<b>Minimum Desired/Required Experience</b>	<b>Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency Exam, Skills Competency Exam,)*</b>
<b>WA: Social Worker 1</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, or allied field	(Desired): None with MA in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field, or 1 year experience with BA	None
<b>WA: Social Worker 2</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, or allied field	(Desired): 18 months as SW 1 since 7/1/88, or 2 years paid social service experience performing functions equivalent to SW 1	None
<b>WA: Social Worker 3</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field	(Desired): 1 year as SW 2 since 7/1/88, 2 years with MA paid social service experience performing functions equivalent to SW 2, or 3 years experience with BA	None
<b>WA: Social Worker 4</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field	(Desired): 2 years as SW 3, 4 years as SW 2, or 4 years of equivalent experience with MA, or 6 years paid social service experience performing functions equivalent to SW 2 with BA	None

**Does not include training that takes place following hiring.**

# Deliverable 8 - Completed Analysis of States' Social Worker Qualifications

## Introduction

The completion of the taxonomy and the resulting identification of equivalent social worker positions for Washington and the comparison states/county enables comparison of the educational, experience, licensing, competency exam, and required/desired qualifications for equivalent social worker positions across the comparison states. This intermediate step is necessary to ensure that the comparison of qualifications involves like positions.

Moving into the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of Washington State qualifications relative to the other states requires that we identify certain assumptions regarding the impact of these qualifications on the quality of services for children and their families and the resulting outcomes. While there is a range of opinions on which qualifications are most important, based on our literature review and discussions with experts in the field, our initial assumptions include:

- Educational background that is closely linked to the staff member's job responsibilities, including related coursework, will be more effective in preparing the individual for the job than education at the same level in a marginally related field
- Educational requirements should increase as the complexity of client issues, demands of job responsibilities, and independence of decision-making grow
- Experience in jobs with similar content, functions, and decision-making processes to those carried out by social workers in child welfare settings is beneficial and should also increase with the complexity of client issues, demands of job responsibilities, and independence of decision-making
- Requirements addressing cultural competency, either through experience, training, or language capacity, increase the likelihood that social workers will be more effective in carrying out their job responsibilities with children and families from different backgrounds
- Competency exams, implemented correctly, can be helpful in identifying staff's ability to carry out specific job responsibilities
- Licensing staff increases the likelihood that they have the knowledge and skills to carry out roles directly linked to the licensing subject matter
- Evidence-based continuing education and training directly linked to the child welfare social worker roles increases the likelihood that the staff person will be able to carry out their job responsibilities
- Qualifications that are "required" or "minimum" for child welfare social worker positions will be more likely to recruit employees that have the necessary qualifications than those systems that use a "desired" approach

**The tables on the following pages summarize the qualifications the comparison states/county use for their child welfare social worker positions. Each social worker position described for each comparison state/county is the equivalent of one of the four levels of social workers in the Washington State system. (See the taxonomy completed as a component of this study for more information about the identification of the equivalent child welfare social worker positions in the comparison states/county.)**

**Table 1A: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 1 Position**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Minimum Required Education</b>	<b>Minimum Desired/Required Experience</b>	<b>Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)</b>
<b>WA: Social Worker 1</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, or allied field	(Desired): None with MA in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field or 1 year experience with BA	
<b>IL: Child Protection/Child Welfare Associate Specialist</b>	BA in related human service field - with 3 years of directly related professional experience for child protection and 1 year for child welfare (Desired: MSW)	1 year directly related professional experience with MSW for child protection, None with MSW for child welfare	
<b>MA: Social Worker A</b>	BA (Desired: BA in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, counseling education, or human services)	None	Social work license or state certification is required
<b>OR: Social Service Assistant</b>	None	None with 30 semester hours of college course work in sociology, psychology, early childhood education, criminal justice, human services, juvenile corrections, or occupational skills training, or certification in Child Development, Early Childhood Education, Addiction Counseling Preparation, or Juvenile Corrections	Some positions may require bilingual skills or test
<b>MI: Services Specialist 9</b>	BA in human services (wide range of accepted majors)	None	

Position	Minimum Required Education	Minimum Desired/Required Experience	Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)
<b>TN: Children's Service Case Manager 1</b>	BA	None	
<b>IA: Social Worker Associate</b>	AA in social work, human services, case management, public administration, sociology, psychology, or nursing, or 1 year (30 credit hours of above subjects) and one year experience	None	Designated positions may request 18 semester hours or 6 months experience or certification in mental health, mental retardation and developmental disabilities, social work, or bilingual Spanish
<b>KY: Social Service Worker I</b>	BA in social work, sociology, psychology, marriage and family therapy, or related field	None	
<b>LA County: Children's Social Worker Trainee</b>	BA	None with BA and major in psychology, sociology, social work, child development, or related field	

**Table 1B: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 2 Position**

Position	Minimum Required Education	Minimum Desired/Required Experience	Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)
<b>WA: Social Worker 2</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, or allied field	(Desired): 18 months as SW 1 since 7/1/88 or 2 years paid social service experience performing functions equivalent to SW 1	
<b>IL: Child Protection/Child Welfare Specialist</b>	BA in related human service field - with four years directly related professional experience for child protection and 2 years for child welfare (Desired: MSW)	2 years directly related professional experience with MSW for child protection, 1 year for child welfare	
<b>MA: Social Worker B</b>	BA (Desired: BA in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, counseling education, or human services)	None	Social work license or state certification is required
<b>OR: Social Service Specialist (Entry)</b>	60 semester hours of college coursework (and BA within 2 years of hire)	None	May require test
<b>MI: Services Specialist 10</b>	BA in human services (wide range of accepted majors)	1 year professional experience equivalent to Services Specialist 10	
<b>TN: Children's Service Case Manager 2</b>	BA	1 year professional work providing child welfare systems	
<b>IA: Social Worker 2</b>	None with 4 years technical work experience involving direct client contact	None with BA	

<b>Position</b>	<b>Minimum Required Education</b>	<b>Minimum Desired/Required Experience</b>	<b>Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)</b>
<b>KY: Social Service Worker II</b>	BA with 1 year professional social work experience or BSW with certification	None with MA in social work, sociology, psychology, marriage and family therapy, or related field	
<b>LA County: Children's Social Worker I</b>	BA with one year as Children's Social Worker Trainee	None with BA and major in psychology, sociology, social work, child development, or related field	

**Table 1C: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 3 Position**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Minimum Required Education</b>	<b>Minimum Desired/Required Experience</b>	<b>Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)</b>
<b>WA: Social Worker 3</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field	(Desired): 1 year as SW 2 since 7/1/88, 2 years with MA paid social service experience performing functions equivalent to SW 2, or 3 years with BA	
<b>IL: Child Protection/Child Welfare Advanced Specialist</b>	Required: MSW	2 years directly related professional experience as Child Welfare Specialist or Child Protection Specialist within department	
<b>MA: Social Worker C</b>	BA (Desired: BA in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, counseling education, or human services) / MA in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, counseling education, or human services is required for adoption, foster care, assessment, child welfare, investigation, and screening assignments	2 years professional experience - as licensed social worker or post-state certification	Social work license or state certification is required
<b>OR: Social Service Specialist 1</b>	BA with 1 year of human services related experience	None with BSW or closely related field	May require test
<b>MI: Services Specialist 11</b>	BA in human services (wide range of accepted majors)	2 years professional experience in social services, including 1 year of experience equivalent to Services Specialist 10	

Position	Minimum Required Education	Minimum Desired/Required Experience	Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)
<b>TN: Children's Service Case Manager 3</b>	BA	1 year with graduate degree in social work or related behavioral science field, or 2 years professional experience providing child welfare services	
<b>IA: Social Worker 3</b>	BA with 3 years social work experience	None with MA	Designated positions may request one year experience in direct client service with chronic mental illness, developmental disabilities, or mental retardation, or Spanish fluency, and/or major/30 semesters hours in behavioral sciences, education, health care, human services administration, or social sciences, and/or nursing license, and/or certification as Certified Addiction Counselor
<b>KY: Social Service Worker II</b>	BA with 1 year professional social work experience or BSW with certification	None with MA in social work, sociology, psychology, marriage and family therapy, or related field	
<b>LA County: Children's Social Worker II</b>	BA with 1 year experience as Children's Social Worker I	None with MA in Social Work, Marriage and Family Counseling, Psychological Counseling, or Clinical Psychology	

**Table 1D: Equivalent Positions and Qualifications -- Washington State Social Worker 4 Position**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Minimum Required Education</b>	<b>Minimum Desired/Required Experience</b>	<b>Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)</b>
<b>WA: Social Worker 4</b>	(Desired): BA in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field	(Desired): 2 years as SW 3, 4 years as SW 2 or 4 years of equivalent experience with MA, or 6 years paid social service experience performing functions equivalent to SW 2 with BA	
<b>IL: Child Protection/Child Welfare Advanced Specialist</b>	Required: MSW	2 years directly related professional experience as Child Welfare Specialist or Child Protection Specialist within department	
<b>MA: Social Worker D</b>	BA (Desired: BA in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, counseling education, or human services)  Required for adoption, foster care, assessment, child welfare, investigation, and screening assignments: MA in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, counseling education, or human services	3 years professional experience - as licensed social worker or post-state certification – including 1 year supervisory experience	Social work license or state certification is required
<b>OR: Social Service Specialist 2</b>	BA with 2 years experience with child welfare case management	1 year experience with child welfare case management	May require test

<b>Position</b>	<b>Minimum Required Education</b>	<b>Minimum Desired/Required Experience</b>	<b>Other Requirements (Licensing, Cultural Competency, Competency Exam, Continuing Education, Other)</b>
<b>MI: Services Specialist – A/12</b>	BA in human services (wide range of accepted majors)	3 years professional experience in social services including 1 year experience equivalent to Services Specialist 11	
<b>TN: Children’s Service Case Manager 4</b>	BA with 5 years child welfare case work experience	3 years child welfare case work or equivalent with MA in social work or related behavioral science field	
<b>IA: Social Worker 5</b>	BA with 5 years experience in social work	2 years social work experience with MSW degree or 1 year social work experience in Iowa’s Human Services with MSW degree	
<b>KY: Social Service Clinician II</b>	BA with 2 years professional social work experience	2 years professional social work experience	
<b>LA County: Children’s Social Worker III</b>	BA with 4 years social work experience including three years as equivalent of Children’s Social Worker II	2 years social work experience as equivalent of Children’s Social Worker II with MA in Social Work, Marriage and Family Counseling, Psychological Counseling, or Clinical Psychology	

**Table 2A: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Education**

*H, L, S = comparison state's/county's qualifications are Higher, Lower, or the Same as Washington's The following point system assigns quantitative values for the social worker qualifications in Washington and each of the comparison states/county. The point system is cumulative, i.e., the system receives points for each qualification required to obtain the position. For example, a system that requires a Master of Arts degree would receive 1 point for the AA, 1 point for the BA, and 1 point for the MA degree. If a system also requires that the degrees are in a related field, that system would receive an additional .5 points.*

Comparison Factor	Points Assigned
Associate of Arts (AA) or credits less than a Bachelor of Arts (BA)	+0.5
BA	+1.0
Master of Arts (MA)	+1.0
Degree in human services or related field	+0.5
Social work specific degree	+1.0
Promotion from previous level in department required	+0.5
Desired, rather than required qualification	-0.5

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County
SW 1	H	S	L	H	S	S	H	S
SW 2	H	S	L	H	S	L	S	H
SW 3	H	H	S	H	S	S	S	S
SW 4	H	H	S	H	S	S	S	H

**Table 2B: Strengths and Weaknesses in Washington State Qualifications -- Experience**

*H, L, S = comparison state's/county's qualifications are Higher, Lower, or the Same as Washington's The following points system assigns quantitative values for the social worker qualifications in Washington and each of the comparison states/county. The point system is cumulative, i.e., the system receives points for each qualification required to obtain the position. For example, a system that requires experience in child welfare or protective services would receive .5 points for that in addition to 1 point for each year of required work experience.*

Comparison Factor	Points Assigned
Each year of experience	+1.0
Child welfare or protective services experience required	+1.0
Supervisory experience required	+ .5
Promotion from previous level in department required to qualify for fewer years (direct exp in field)	+ .5
MSW required to qualify for fewer years (MSW includes field exp)	+ .5
Desired, rather than required qualifications	- .5
License required	+1.0

WA Positions	IL	MA	OR	MI	TN	IA	KY	Los Angeles County
SW 1	H	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
SW 2	H	L	L	L	H	L	L	L
SW 3	H	H	L	H	L	L	L	L
SW 4	S	H	L	L	H	L	L	S

## **Analysis**

### ***Educational Requirements***

Washington State's social worker qualifications compare relatively well across states for the Social Worker 1 and 2 positions. For the Social Worker 1 position, the equivalent positions in three of the comparison states call for higher qualifications than Washington and four states have the same level of qualifications. Washington's qualifications are lower than one of the comparison states. For the Social Worker 2 position, three states have higher qualifications and three states have the same qualifications as Washington. Washington's qualifications are lower than two of the comparison states.

For the Social Worker 3 level, three of the comparison states require higher qualifications and five call for the same level of qualifications as Washington. The Social Worker 4 qualifications compare similarly to the other levels – four of the comparison states have higher educational qualifications than Washington and four have the same level.

One key ingredient in the mix of qualifications is the required vs. desired factor. Because Washington State's social worker qualifications are desired, i.e., not required, they leave more room for hiring individuals with fewer qualifications for the positions described above. However, staff in the Children's Administration currently list the requirements in their job announcements as "required," somewhat offsetting this weakness in the system. However, an examination of actual hiring practices is beyond the scope of this study.

### ***Experience***

The comparison states' experience requirements are generally lower than Washington's desired qualifications, particularly above the Social Worker 1 level. At the Social Worker 2 level, only two of the comparison states have higher experience qualifications, while six reflect lower requirements. The Social Worker 3 position demonstrates a similar pattern – three comparison states have higher qualifications while five have lower experience requirements. For the Social Worker 4 position, a slightly different pattern emerges – two comparison states have greater qualifications, two have the same qualifications, and four have a lower level of qualifications.

# Supporting Information – Completed Taxonomy for Identifying Equivalent Social Worker Positions

## Introduction

The child welfare arena presents an ongoing set of complex and difficult-to-solve challenges. Over the last 50 years, policymakers, social scientists, academicians, and child welfare agencies have attempted to identify the critical factors that will assure the delivery of high quality services to at-risk children and their families.

The impetus to identify effective means of achieving child welfare outcomes increased in 2003 with the implementation of the federal government's Child and Family Service Reviews. These reviews track each state's progress in attaining a diverse array of child welfare outcomes and system-related performance measures.

Deep within this quality improvement challenge lies the issue of social worker qualifications and its impact on the quality of care children and families receive. As states and counties across the nation struggle to improve their child welfare services and avoid the headlines-producing tales of child abuse and neglect, personnel departments, schools of social work, social work organizations, and child welfare advocacy organizations work diligently to identify the qualifications schemes that have the most potential to improve service quality.

The resulting approaches at the state and county levels reflect this indigenous approach: there is little agreement nationally regarding the role social worker qualifications play in achieving quality of care for children and their families. However, there is some alignment among states and counties regarding the questions the debate over social worker qualifications should address, including:

- What job responsibilities are child welfare systems asking social workers to perform, e.g., case management, mental health treatment, etc.?
- What qualifications does it take to carry out these job responsibilities effectively?
- What is the appropriate balance among social worker qualifications related to educational achievement, experience, and skills?
- Is it important to attach requirements regarding completion of child welfare coursework to social work education requirements?
- How does a competency-based qualifications model compare in achieving the intended outcomes to a model that is based on educational achievement?
- Does requiring licensing of child welfare social workers increase the child welfare system's chances of achieving its intended outcomes?
- What impact does requiring continuing education and/or training have on the quality of services?

The information included in this report documents the approaches a number of states and one county have taken in tackling the social worker qualifications issue. The sample states and county represent those that an expert panel viewed as offering reasonably high quality child welfare services. While not linked directly to child and family outcomes, the selection of these states and counties does reflect the collective wisdom of individuals who have worked at top management levels in many of the country's largest child welfare systems and/or the nation's leading schools of social work.

Note: While many states provide child welfare services directly, particularly the case management function social workers provide, in some states these services are delegated to the county level. Notable among these is California, where child welfare services are delivered at the county level. For this reason, we selected Los Angeles County, California as our county representative in the comparison sample.

## **Methodology for Identifying Equivalent Categories of Social Workers**

In order to create comparable categories for comparison purposes, Clegg & Associates will use the elements below to assign social worker position levels in other states and our sample county to those in Washington. These elements, most of which are described in the social worker job descriptions in Washington and the comparison states, will enable us to correlate the qualifications for social work positions that are similar in nature. The resulting taxonomy will form the foundation for the next step – the identification of strengths and weaknesses in Washington State’s social worker qualifications.

The key elements in the taxonomy include:

*Element #1: Responsibilities Associated with Position*

*Element #2: Independent Decision-making Authority Vested in the Position*

*Element #3: Level of Supervision Received by the Position*

*Element #4: Level of Supervision the Position Provides to Others*

Implementation of this taxonomy will occur through the development and use of a series of comparison tables. These tables will capture the information describing the elements above from each of the sample states/county and enable us to identify the positions in each of the comparison states/county that are equivalent to each of the four Washington State social worker positions under study.

**Table 1A: Position Description Information from Washington State**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1</b>	<b>Element 2</b>	<b>Element 3</b>	<b>Element 4</b>
<b>SW 1</b>	Coordination, interviews, case records for low risk clients	None	“Close/detailed”	None
<b>SW 2</b>	Routine licensing, intake, admin, case management (under supervision)	Some	“Little”	None
<b>SW 3</b>	Advanced specialized case management, licensing decisions, investigations, complaint screenings	Great Deal	“Functions independently”	?
<b>SW 4</b>	First line supervisor of unit of social workers	Complete (within context of larger organization)	Independent	Yes

**Tables 1B: Position Description Information from Illinois**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Child Protection Associate Specialist</b>	Interviews, assesses risk, prepares case file	None	Direct supervision for all responsibilities	None
<b>Child Protection Specialist</b>	“Journeyman level” investigations, interviews, assesses risk, removes child from home into protective custody	Some	Some direction	None
<b>Child Protection Advanced Specialist</b>	Advanced complexity and difficulty casework and case management, substitute supervisor, technical consultant and mentor to lower level staff, peer reviewer for quality improvement, assists with assigning and reviewing cases, guides lower level staff on investigations	A great deal	Limited	Yes

<b>Child Welfare Associate Specialist</b>	“Beginning level casework intervention and case management”	None	“Close guidance, Direct supervision”	None
<b>Child Welfare Specialist</b>	Case management	Some	“General supervision,” duties performed independently except “problem cases,” which receive oversight from MSW-qualified supervisor or Advanced Specialist	None
<b>Child Welfare Advanced Specialist</b>	Advanced level case management, substitute supervisor, technical consultant, guardianship liaison, mentor and casework lead to lower staff, peer review on quality improvement	A great deal	Limited	Yes
<b>Child Welfare Administrative Case Reviewer</b>	Conducts case review conferences, advises case workers and management, consults on services planning	A great deal	General direction	May supervise clerical staff

**Tables 1C: Position Description Information from Oregon**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Social Service Assistant</b>	Supervise visits, provide transportation, provide in-home instruction on child care and homemaking skills; Collaborates with other staff to assess, review progress of case plans, link to services	None	Close - administrative superior observes work	None
<b>Social Service Specialist (Entry)</b>	Investigates reports of neglect and abuse, conducts intake, provides counseling, develops case plans; conducts group sessions, recruits and certifies temporary foster homes and permanent adoptive homes (all under supervision)	None	“Close” – all responsibilities are under the “guidance and close review” of a supervisor or experienced social service specialist	None
<b>Social Service Specialist 1</b>	Counseling, treatment and permanency planning, group sessions, recruits and certifies temporary foster homes and permanent adoptive homes	Some	General supervision – assigned cases, reviewed through conferences and records	None
<b>Social Service Specialist 2</b>	Consultation and technical assistance to direct service staff, assign and review specialists’ work, case review and audit	Complete	General supervision of social services supervisor or other administrative superior	Yes

**Tables 1D: Position Description Information from Los Angeles County**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Children's Social Worker Trainee</b>	Less difficult investigation, placement, routine and emergency child welfare cases	Very little	Close supervision	None
<b>Children's Social Worker I</b>	“Wide variety” of casework and child welfare duties, investigates, evaluates, arranges emergency placements, arranges service links,	Some	General supervision	None
<b>Children's Social Worker II</b>	More difficult cases and adoptions – investigate, evaluate, supervise and place children, make recommendations, licenses foster homes	A great deal	Limited	None
<b>Children's Social Worker III</b>	“Wide range” including protective services, adoptions, and special needs such as sexually abused and severely physically disabled, provide emergency response and therapy, supervise lower level staff	A great deal	“High level of independence”	Yes

**Tables 1E: Position Description Information from Massachusetts**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Social Worker A</b>	Entry level	None	Detailed instructions and review of intermediate steps, on- the-job training	None
<b>Social Worker B</b>	Full range of competencies, typical work assignments	Some	Without detailed instructions or review	None
<b>Social Worker C</b>	First-level supervisors and most complex assignments	A great deal	General	Yes, supervise Social Workers A/B
<b>Social Worker D</b>	Lower-level supervisors, supervise expert employees	Complete	General	Yes, supervise Social Workers C

**Tables 1F: Position Description Information from Michigan**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Services Specialist- E/9</b>	Entry level trainee	Some	Close	No
<b>Services Specialist- E/10</b>	Intermediate level – expanding range of services in developing capacity	Some	General	No
<b>Services Specialist- E/11</b>	Experienced level – full range of professional services	“Considerable”	General	No
<b>Services Specialist- A/12</b>	Advanced level – lead worker, oversees lower level specialists, assignments of significantly greater complexity (particularly family to family facilitation)	Complete	Limited	Yes

**Tables 1G: Position Description Information from Tennessee**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Children's Service Case Manager 1</b>	Case management of routine difficulty (trainee/entry-level) – learns to provide case management, investigations, residential care, adoptive and foster care services	Limited	“General supervision,” but considered in-training period	No
<b>Children's Service Case Manager 2</b>	Average difficulty case management – investigates, reviews permanency plans, recruits and trains adoptive and foster parents, places children in adoptive or foster home	A great deal	General supervision	No
<b>Children's Service Case Manager 3</b>	Difficult case management; leads, trains, and supervises subordinates	A great deal	General supervision	Yes
<b>Children's Services Case Manager 4</b>	Supervisory work of average difficulty – first full supervisor role	A great deal	General supervision	Yes

**Tables 1H: Position Description Information from Kentucky**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Social Service Worker I</b>	Entry level social work services to families, individuals, and/or juveniles offenders – assessment of needs, investigation of reports, provision of services for child protection, adoption services, recruits adoptive and foster care homes	None	Direct supervision of all duties	None
<b>Social Service Worker II</b>	Assessment, child protection, guardianship services, adoption services, Interviews, refers, investigates complaints, Trains foster parents and adoptive parents, recruits and makes recommendations concerning adoptive and foster home and family care home applicants, coordinates placements	A great deal	General	None
<b>Social Service Clinician I</b>	Intensive and/or therapeutic counseling and social work services in complex cases and special health care needs	Some	General	None
<b>Social Service Clinician II</b>	Interim supervisor or intensive social work services on complex cases, mentoring, training,	A great deal	General	Yes
<b>Social Service Specialist</b>	Intensive family services, consultant to social service workers, reviews cases that are more complex, provides therapy, plans and coordinates statewide program, program activities for special health care needs	A great deal	General	None

**Tables 11: Position Description Information from Iowa**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Element 1: Responsibilities</b>	<b>Element 2: Independent Decision Making</b>	<b>Element 3: Supervision Received</b>	<b>Element 4: Supervision Provided</b>
<b>Social Work Associate</b>	“Assists professional social workers,” assesses, prepares service plans, makes recommendations for casework planning	Limited	Close	No
<b>Social Worker 2</b>	Basic social work services and placement for dependent and neglected children, assists in facilitating reintegration of children in institutions into community, full caseload	Grows with time in position	Immediate to general as training and experience are gained	No
<b>Social Worker 3</b>	Intensive social work services, protective service assessments/evaluation	A great deal	General supervision	Yes
<b>Social Worker 4</b>	Specialized and difficult cases, reviews case records	A great deal	General supervision	No
<b>Social Worker 5</b>	Basic supervisory duties, develops policies, budgets, statistical analysis	A great deal	Independent	Yes

**Table 2: Equivalent Positions across States**

<b>WA Positions</b>	<b>IL</b>	<b>MA</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>MI</b>	<b>TN</b>	<b>IA</b>	<b>KY</b>	<b>Los Angeles County</b>
<b>SW 1</b>	Child Protection/ Child Welfare Associate Specialist	Social Worker A	Social Service Assistant	Services Specialist – E/9	Children’s Service Case Manager 1	Social Worker Associate	Social Service Worker I	Children’s Social Worker Trainee
<b>SW 2</b>	Child Protection/ Child Welfare Specialist	Social Worker B	Social Service Specialist (Entry)	Services Specialist – E/10	Children’s Service Case Manager 2	Social Worker 2	Social Service Worker II	Children’s Social Worker I
<b>SW 3</b>	Child Protection/ Child Welfare Advanced Specialist	Social Worker C	Social Service Specialist 1	Services Specialist – E/11	Children’s Service Case Manager 3	Social Worker 3	Social Service Worker II	Children’s Social Worker II
<b>SW 4</b>	Child Protection/ Child Welfare Advanced Specialist	Social Worker D	Social Service Specialist 2	Services Specialist – A/12	Children’s Services Case Manager 4	Social Worker 5	Social Service Clinician II	Children’s Social Worker III

## Supporting Information – Social Worker State Comparison Matrix

State (county administered system with specific county named)	Social Worker Functions (e.g. assessment, case management, srvc. brokerage)	Social Workers are State Employee vs. Contracted	Social Workers are Unionized	How are Qualifications Set?	State Demographics	COA Accreditation	DOP Benchmark State
Washington	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	Yes	Statute requires the state to be accredited. Accreditation requires minimum qualifications	NA	In process	NA
Illinois	Assessment Case management Brokerage	State employee	Yes	To meet COA accreditation standards	Larger percentage of African Americans	Accredited	Yes
Los Angeles County	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	County employee	Yes	By legislative initiative and in response to findings from federal child and family services review	Larger percentages of communities of color	3 counties accredited and 1 in process – don't know if LA Co. is one of these	No
Massachusetts	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	Yes		Similar	Application anticipated within next year	No
Oregon	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	Yes	Union bargaining	Similar	No	Yes

State (county administered system with specific county named)	Social Worker Functions (e.g. assessment, case management, srvc. brokerage)	Social Workers are State Employee vs. Contracted	Social Workers are Unionized	How are Qualifications Set?	State Demographics	COA Accreditation	DOP Benchmark State
Michigan	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	Yes		Larger percentage of African Americans, smaller percentages of Latinos and Asian Americans	No	Yes
Tennessee	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	Yes		Larger percentage of African Americans, smaller percentages of Latinos and Asian Americans	In process	No
Kentucky	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	No	Consider themselves to be ahead of the curve, but have adjusted qualifications at times to meet needs for accreditation.	Larger percentage of non-Hispanic whites	Accredited	No
Iowa	Assessment Case management Service brokerage	State employee	Yes		Larger percentage of non-Hispanic whites	No	Yes
Minnesota		County level				No	No
Ohio		County level				18 counties accredited and 4 in process	No

## Supporting Information – Social Worker Position Description Summary, Children’s Administration, DSHS, WA

Position	Duties and Responsibilities	Knowledge, Abilities	Desirable Qualifications
<p><b>Social Worker 1</b> Entry level trainee Class Code: 351O (7/1/07) Salary Range 41 Salary range: \$32,052 to \$41,748 Represented position Supervision: “Close, detailed;” extensive on- and off-site structured training in risk assessment, licensing, protective services, information and referral, case monitoring</p>	<p>Assigned clients are limited in number and complexity; prescreened to identify low risk only</p> <p>Participates in in-house case staffings, multi-disciplinary meetings</p> <p>Studies and applies principles of casework</p> <p>Interviews children, parents, and others for basic information relating to social history</p> <p>Identifies economic, social, cultural, and other factors that support or limit family functioning</p> <p>Implements and monitors service objectives in treatment plans</p> <p>Coordinates with internal and external agencies</p> <p>Identifies needs requiring services and makes referrals</p> <p>Maintains case records</p> <p>Explains policies and laws to individuals, families, members of the community</p>	<p>Knowledge of child welfare, social case work principles, rules and regulations, practices, interviewing techniques; conditions which impact child welfare, e.g., economic, family</p> <p>Ability to learn and act on new information, work cooperatively with individuals and groups, exercise mature judgment in decision-making, properly and accurately document activities</p>	<p>Desirable: Masters degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Bachelor’s degree in same as above with 1 year experience</p> <p>Qualifications revised 6/15/90</p> <p>Must remain in position for 18 months; then automatically move to Social Worker 2 level</p> <p>Employees must complete the formal training course sponsored by their division within 18 months of their appointment</p> <p>There may be additional legal and/or certification requirements for specific positions (there are none for the classification as a whole)</p>

Position	Duties and Responsibilities	Knowledge, Abilities	Desirable Qualification
<p><b>Social Worker 2</b></p> <p>Provides professional level social services</p> <p>Class Code: 351P (7/1/07)</p> <p>Salary Range 49</p> <p>Salary range \$38,736 to \$49,572</p> <p>Represented position</p> <p>“Little supervision”</p> <p>“Responsible for devising own work methods”</p> <p>Some duties – “under moderate supervision”</p>	<p><i>Licensing</i></p> <p>Carries out routine licensing functions (not including recruitment and monitoring)</p> <p>Conducts on-site inspections of applicant’s home to assess compliance with licensing requirements</p> <p>Processes paperwork and submits for central registry and criminal background checks</p> <p>Contacts by mail references provided by applicant and evaluates responses</p> <p>Maintains information on foster homes and day care availability</p> <p><i>Intake</i></p> <p>Records information from telephone referrals</p> <p>Contacts collateral sources to complete intake form</p> <p>Refers intake information to supervisor for decision on sufficiency screening, risk assessment, and staff response time</p> <p><i>Indirect Services</i></p> <p>Completes forms and determines financial eligibility for day care and out-of-home placements</p> <p>Monitors case plans developed by private agencies for clients in DSHS-funded placements</p> <p>Monitors private agencies for contract compliance and payment authorization</p> <p><i>Case Management (under moderate supervision)</i></p> <p>Participates in staffings and training as appropriate</p> <p>Interviews children, families, others to assess degree of risk (using model)</p> <p>Refers cases for investigation (requires supervisory approval)</p> <p>Monitors group home placements</p> <p>Assesses need for out-of-home placements</p> <p>Conducts case management activities</p> <p>Develops and implements service plans</p> <p>Participates in court proceedings</p> <p>Provides crisis counseling and intervention to children and families</p> <p>Provides transportation for clients</p> <p>Supervises visitation between children and adult family members</p>	<p>Knowledge of child development and child rearing methods; family culture; functional and dysfunctional family dynamics; indicators of sexual and emotional abuse and neglect; family conflict</p> <p>Knowledge of state and federal laws regarding abuse, neglect, guardianship, adoption, family reconciliation</p> <p>Knowledge of interviewing techniques; psychology; community resources</p> <p>Ability to listen, observe, communicate, engage in problem solving and conflict resolution, prepare child for separation, interact with substitute parents</p> <p>Ability to establish service plan, evaluate and report progress, present materials, manage a large caseload</p>	<p>18 months as Social Worker 1 since July 1, 1988</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Master’s degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or allied field, and 1 year as a Social Worker I or equivalent paid social service experience</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Bachelor’s degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field, and 2 years paid social service experience equivalent to Social Worker 1</p> <p>A 2 year Master’s degree that included a practicum in fields above will be substituted for 1 year of paid social service experience</p> <p>Employees must successfully complete the formal training course sponsored by their division within 1 year of hiring</p> <p>For promotion only:</p> <p>Bachelor’s degree and 2 years as a Caseworker 2 or 3, Social Worker 1A or B (?), Juvenile Rehabilitation Supervisor 1 or 2, Juvenile Rehabilitation Counselor 2 in state services</p> <p>There may be additional legal and/or certification requirements for specific positions (there are none for the classification as a whole)</p>

Position	Duties and Responsibilities	Knowledge, Abilities	Desirable Qualification
<p><b>Social Worker 3</b>            Class Code: 351Q (7/1/07)            Salary Range: 51            Salary range \$40,692 to \$53,436            Represented position              Performs advanced level of specialized case management            “Little supervision”            “Responsible for devising own work methods”            “Functions independently”</p>	<p><i>Licensing</i>            Licensing activities same as Social Worker 2 plus recruitment, orientation, and training for applicants and/or providers of foster and day care homes</p> <p>Provides social services (problem resolution, guidance, referrals) to foster home and day care providers</p> <p>Approves or denies applications to license or relicense foster care homes or day care providers; prepare related documentation</p> <p>Presents documentation at administrative hearings, relicensing, revocations, suspensions</p> <p>Conducts investigations of minimum licensing requirement violations; cooperates in investigation of abuse at foster homes and day cares; provides follow up on plan of correction</p> <p>Maintains information on availability of foster homes and day cares</p> <p>Researches appropriate placement resources to match individual needs of children</p> <p>Provides public education, liaison, and support</p> <p><i>Risk Assessment Intake</i>            Interviews and records information from telephone referents</p> <p>Contacts collateral sources, such as doctors, schools, neighbors, etc.</p> <p>Evaluates complaint information as to sufficiency</p> <p>Screens complaints according to department policy</p> <p>Evaluates complaint information and determines degree of risk</p> <p>Evaluates information and determines need for emergency response</p> <p>Processes complaint or refers to appropriate direct service unit?</p> <p><i>Case Management</i>            Case management activities same as Social Worker 2, except that moderate supervision is not required for activities, plus the responsibilities below</p> <p>Provides permanency planning case management for children in out-of-home placements</p> <p>Authorizes appropriate funds to implement service plans</p> <p>Provides department training, peer consultation, and mentorship on cases</p> <p>Provides training and consultation to community agency personnel and community groups</p> <p>Serves as program liaison between the agency and community social services, educational, law enforcement, medical, and judicial agencies</p>	<p>Knowledge of social casework principles and practices, parenting skill enhancement content, teaching methods for natural and foster parents, principles of individual and social development</p> <p>Knowledge of risk assessment and decision-making, interviewing techniques</p> <p>Knowledge of role of expert representative in court proceedings and multidisciplinary team service delivery</p> <p>Knowledge of current literature on child welfare practices, concepts of community organization</p> <p>Knowledge and application of federal and state laws</p> <p>Ability to work cooperatively with groups and individuals, organize and prioritize own work, manage a large caseload, assist other workers to develop and implement techniques for caseload management, present materials in written and oral form</p> <p>Ability to identify cultural, physical, and environmental factors which limit or support family or individual functioning</p> <p>Ability to work independently and make decisions around program issues</p>	<p>One year as a Social Worker 2, since July 1, 1988</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Master’s degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field, and 2 years of paid social service experience equivalent to a Social Worker 2</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Bachelor’s degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field, and 3 years of paid social service experience equivalent to a Social Worker 2</p> <p>A 2 year Master’s degree in one of the above fields with a practicum will be substituted for 1 year of paid social service experience</p> <p>Employees must successfully complete the formal training course sponsored by their division within 1 year of appointment</p> <p>For promotion only:</p> <p>Bachelor’s degree and 3 years experience as a Caseworker 3, Social Worker 1A or B (?), Social Worker 2, Casework Supervisor Trainee, Casework Supervisor, Juvenile Rehabilitation Supervisor 1 or 2, Juvenile Rehabilitation Counselor 2 in state service</p> <p>There may be additional legal and/or certification requirements for specific positions (there are none for the classification as a whole)</p>

Position	Duties and Responsibilities	Knowledge, Abilities	Desirable Qualification
<p><b>Social Worker 4</b> Class Code: 351R Salary Range: 56 Salary range \$46,092 to \$58,944 Represented position Functions as first line supervisor of unit of social workers</p>	<p>Assigns, prioritizes, and reviews work assignments; provides consultation and direction; delegates duties as appropriate; schedules staff</p> <p>Hires and trains new and existing professional staff in law, policies, and procedures governing their job assignments; conducts formal training specific to job assignments and career development; trains staff in gathering accurate and complete information</p> <p>Sets expectations for performance of line staff; prepares written performance evaluations; initiates corrective or disciplinary action</p> <p>Prepares written and oral reports</p> <p>Performs liaison education and program expert functions between agency and law enforcement, community agencies, medical and judicial</p> <p>Conducts case staffings, unit meetings</p> <p>Seeks resolution of problems and conflicts, both internal and external</p> <p>Implements and interprets policies and procedures at the case level</p> <p>Reviews levels of risk in cases of alleged abuse or neglect of children; ensures that levels of agency intervention match levels of assessed risk to children; and considers permanency needs</p> <p>Reviews and monitors decisions related to placement of children into agency alternative care</p> <p>Assists staff to understand their professional responsibility to carry out duties and comply with laws</p> <p>Develops resources directly associated with program area</p> <p>Approves or denies staff requests for expenditures of funds in exceptional case plans</p>	<p>Knowledge of current state systems for delivery of services to children and families</p> <p>Knowledge of federal and state laws, policies, and directives governing services to vulnerable children and families</p> <p>Knowledge of management and supervisory theory and practice</p> <p>Knowledge of theory and practice of social work</p> <p>Knowledge of community resources</p> <p>Knowledge of the personnel system</p> <p>Knowledge of the principles of interviewing</p> <p>Ability to teach and train staff; manage a large volume of work; supervise staff</p> <p>Ability to communicate with other agencies and community groups</p> <p>Ability to communicate up and down the chain of command and develop positive working relationships with a wide range of staff</p> <p>Ability to evaluate job performance, interview job applicants</p> <p>Ability to make professional judgments</p>	<p>2 years experience as a Social Worker 3 since July 1, 1988</p> <p>Or</p> <p>4 years experience as a Social Worker 2 since July 1, 1988</p> <p>Or,</p> <p>Master's degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field, and 4 years of paid social service experience equivalent to a Social Worker 2</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Bachelor's degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field, and 6 years of paid social service experience equivalent to a Social Worker 2</p> <p>A 2 year Master's degree in one of the above fields with a practicum may be substituted for 1 year of paid social service experience</p> <p>Employees must successfully complete the formal training course sponsored by their division within 1 year of appointment</p> <p>For promotion only:</p> <p>Bachelor's degree and 6 years experience as a Caseworker 3, Social Worker 1A or B (?), Social Worker 2, Casework Supervisor Trainee, Casework Supervisor, Juvenile Rehabilitation Supervisor 1 or 2, Juvenile Rehabilitation Counselor 2 or 3 in state service, or Community Service Program Manager in Children and Family Services</p> <p>There may be additional legal and/or certification requirements for specific positions (there are none for the classification as a whole)</p>

Note: The only social work classifications in Washington State that have legal requirements for the whole class (vs. for specific positions within the class) are Social Worker 1 – Academic Medical Centers, Social Worker 2 – Academic Medical Centers, and Social Work Supervisor – Academic Medical Centers. The Social Worker 1 position must be registered as a Counselor in Washington State within 30 days of employment. The Social Worker 2 and the Social Work Supervisor must meet the 30 day registration as a Counselor requirement and be licensed as social worker by the State of Washington within one year of employment.

In addition, the social worker positions in academic medical centers call for a Master of Social Work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. However, the “or” exists in this class as it does in the other social worker job descriptions, and is stated as “equivalent education/experience.”



## **Step Five : Develop potential Recommendations**

### **Deliverable 9 – Recommendations**

## Deliverable 9 - Recommendations

### Issues for Discussion

The Washington State Legislature's interest in comparing this state's qualifications for child welfare social worker with those in use by other states is an important step in defining one of the potential factors in improving the quality of the state's child welfare service delivery system. By gaining a perspective on the approaches in place in other states, the Legislature may be better able to gauge the appropriateness of Washington's approach to defining the qualifications necessary for social workers delivering child welfare services.

However, it is important to recognize that there are multiple variables at play in determining the quality of the social services provided through any state's child welfare system. In fact, the relative importance of qualifications is not known compared to caseload size, employee training, supervisor competence, availability of community-based resources, and other similar factors. Nonetheless, the focus on social worker qualifications does indicate a concern about one of the ingredients involved in providing quality services to the children and family the state's child welfare system serves.

As a result of the analysis conducted for this study, the following issues emerge as ones that could inform policy makers' future efforts to address the role of qualifications in improving the quality of child welfare services in this state. These issues represent areas for future discussion and do not constitute recommendations.

### ***Professionalization of Social Workers***

Many of the individuals interviewed for the study described the importance of "professionalizing" the role of social workers in the child welfare system. Individuals mentioned the importance of recruiting and retaining social workers that have an educational background in child welfare and a commitment to become experts in the issues impacting at-risk children. In order to achieve this type of *professionalization*, a number of those interviewed pointed out the need to upgrade the qualifications for social workers in the child welfare field.

The Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has developed a model job classification proposal in keeping with this approach. The NASW proposal reorganizes the duties and responsibilities of the state social workers and describes a stricter set of minimum qualifications, skills, and competences for each new position. Of particular note with the NASW proposal, the educational requirements are specific to degrees in social work at the bachelor's degree and master's degree levels and state licensing is called for at the lead and supervisory levels (the equivalents of the current Social Worker 3 and Social Worker 4 positions).

### **Licensing of Social Workers**

The concept of requiring licensing for social workers in certain capacities is gaining some attention across the country. Related to the issue of *professionalization*, licensing offers an additional contribution to the qualifications child welfare systems require of their social work personnel, particularly at the lead social worker and supervisory positions. As discussed in the prior section, the NASW proposal calls for specific levels of licensing for social workers in Washington State's system.

## **Competency Testing for Social Workers**

The issue of competency testing is also under discussion throughout the country. While approaching the issue from a different perspective than *professionalization*, it is another strategy for improving the quality of social worker staff in child welfare organizations. While not a current practice in the comparison states, competency testing may become a more common approach in the future.

In addition to competency testing regarding the basic content of social work in child welfare systems, the importance of cultural competency cannot be overstated. Many child welfare systems serve a disproportionate number of children of color. The responsibilities of social workers in these systems require that they be thoroughly competent in the many cultures their clients reflect. At present, none of the comparison states employs cultural competency testing as part of its qualifications process (nor does Washington state).

## **The Importance of Training**

It is clear from the analysis of the comparison states, that training child welfare social workers after their hire is important. All of the comparison states implement training programs to assist their social workers in carrying out the duties of their positions. These training programs range from generic training to fill any child welfare position to more specific training for job duties associated with particular positions.

It is not clear, however, where the optimal balance point lies between the qualifications necessary to obtain a child welfare social worker position and the additional competency gained post-hire through training. States are taking different approaches to using training to compensate for weaknesses in their qualifications or challenges in hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds who meet all of the job qualifications.

One key question relates to the cost-effectiveness issue, i.e., what is the cost impact of hiring minimally qualified staff and providing them with needed intensive on-the-job training vs. hiring staff with higher qualifications who need less training.

## **Qualifications as a Moving Target**

It is important to note that the study analyzed the qualifications for equivalent positions as of August 2007. The Washington State information may be superseded by revised qualifications in the fairly near future. For example, the position descriptions and associated qualifications for the Social Worker 4 may change and a Social Worker 5 position may be added. At that point it will be important to re-analyze the data to determine whether the revised qualifications have improved or degraded Washington's social worker qualifications relative to the eight comparison states.

It is also of interest to note that it is unlikely that any of the comparison states has the perfect approach. The individuals interviewed shared their perceptions of weaknesses in their qualifications methods. One person explained that his or her state would be revising its entire qualifications system for social workers in the near future. Again, the point in time analysis captures only the present methods for determining the appropriate qualifications for each state's child welfare social workers or their equivalents.