



## Implementation of Concurrent Planning Practice in California: Implementation and Outcomes

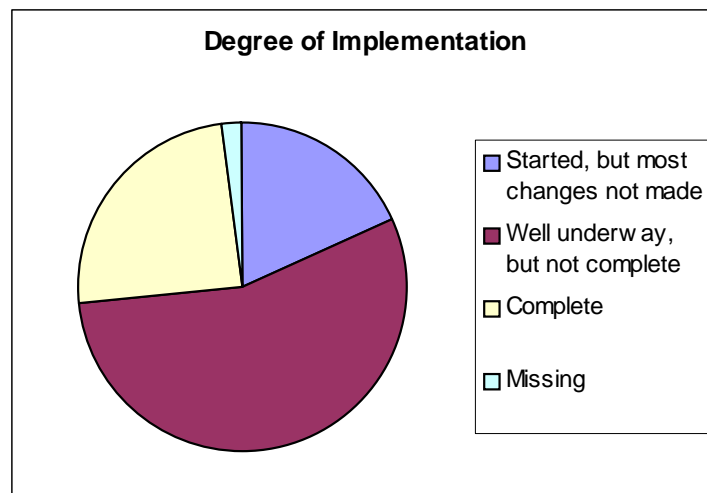
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Concurrent planning is the practice of simultaneously offering reunification services to a child’s family while searching for adoptive or guardianship homes — if the child’s family fails to reunify, a permanent home is already available for the child. Concurrent planning has been heralded as a valuable tool for improving permanency outcomes within federally mandated timelines. However, concurrent planning models were developed in small, private agencies; how and with what success public agencies have been able to implement the practice with their larger caseloads and fewer resources is unclear. This document highlights the results of a survey of implementation of concurrent planning in California – the first study to systematically address how concurrent planning is being implemented in public child welfare.

In 1997, with the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, concurrent planning received national attention and endorsement. In 1998, California’s legislature adopted AB1544, which required a concurrent plan to be developed for every child entering out-of-home care. (This means each case plan must identify the child’s alternative to reunification, be it adoption, guardianship or emancipation.) This sheet highlights the progress of -- and challenges to -- implementation of concurrent planning practice in California’s child welfare agencies. This implementation study involved a survey of child welfare directors in 49 counties during 2003.

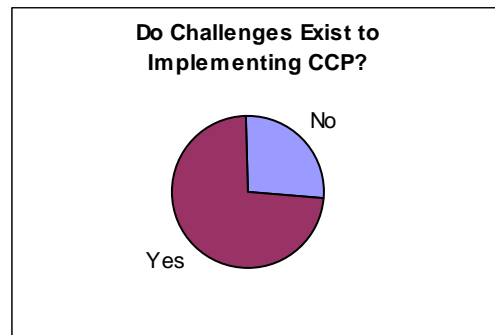
### ***Implementation***

- Most counties (73%) began practicing concurrent planning upon passage of AB1544, although a sizeable portion (18%) had been practicing concurrent planning prior to that point.
- More than half of counties reported that concurrent planning was “well underway, but not complete.” Only about one-fourth of counties felt able to state that their implementation of concurrent planning was “complete.”



## Challenges

- About three-fourths of counties indicate they are experiencing barriers or challenges to the implementation of concurrent planning.



Of counties that reported experiencing challenges:<sup>1</sup>

- 83% reported difficulty recruiting foster-adopt parents.
- 86% said social worker time constraints are hampering their concurrent planning implementation efforts.
- 25% stated that lack of available services is a problem.
- Only 5% found that judicial resistance hindered the implementation of concurrent planning.

## Analysis

It is not surprising that most agencies did not implement concurrent planning until it became state law. Previously, most child welfare administrators had interpreted the “reasonable efforts” requirement to mean that efforts to secure an alternative placement for a child had to wait until efforts to reunify with the parent had failed. It appears that most administrators needed the assurance provided by the new law before they were willing to develop concurrent planning programs.

Although the survey was administered over two years after the law went into effect, most agency administrators felt they had not fully implemented concurrent planning. This may be related to the barriers to implementation many administrators reported confronting.

While many practitioners of concurrent planning assert recruitment of foster-adopt parents is not a problem<sup>2</sup>, foster caregivers of any kind are in high demand and short supply across the country<sup>3</sup>; the increased demands of foster-adopt caregiving may be intensifying the difficulty of recruitment for concurrent planning program administrators.

In terms of the court environment, the finding that judges are not seen as resistant to concurrent planning is consistent with other literature that suggests judges are generally supportive of concurrent planning<sup>4</sup>.

1. Respondents could indicate more than one challenge.

2. Katz, L. (1999). Concurrent planning: Benefits and pitfalls. *Child Welfare*, 78(1), 71-87.; Monck, E., Reynolds, J., & Wigfall, V. (2003). *The role of concurrent planning: Making permanent placements for young children*. London, England: British Association for Adoption and Fostering.; Williams, L. (1998). *Concurrent planning implementation guide*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Social Services.

3. U.S. Government Accounting Office (May, 1997). *Foster Care: State efforts to improve the permanency planning process show some promise*. Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives. Washington, D.C. GAO/T-HEHS-97-73.

4. Katz, L. (1999)

## **Methods**

### *Technical Advisory Committee*

To enhance the use and relevance of this study to child welfare practice, views of representatives from child welfare stakeholder groups were solicited. County child welfare agencies, the state Department of Social Services, juvenile court personnel, and other child welfare researchers were invited to participate in a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). TAC members assisted in developing research strategies and refining measures based upon their expertise and knowledge of the child welfare field. Feedback from the Technical Advisory Committee was solicited via meetings, letters, or occasional direct email queries.

### *Study sample, design and analyses*

This was a cross-sectional descriptive exploratory study. A survey was mailed to child welfare directors in each of the 58 counties in California. Each child welfare director was asked to forward the survey to the employee most knowledgeable about concurrent planning implementation and practice in the county, if that person was other than him or herself. A series of mailings of letters, surveys and postcard reminders to increase response rates was done. A total of 49 of 58 surveys were returned for a response rate of 85%.

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