

Evaluation and Assessment Workgroup (EAW) Conclusions and Recommendations

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The EAW invited a wide representation of researchers and research consumers to join our conversations about priorities for the evaluation of programs and assessment of youth. The EAW discussed all the existing recommendations listed in the "Juvenile Services (OJS) Committee Strategic Recommendations (December, 2013) in view of the OJS's charge to the sub-committee and reached several conclusions and recommendations. The sub-committee applied the highest standards of evaluation, assessment and research in the social sciences to our understanding of the existing needs of youth in Nebraska to reach the conclusions and recommendations offered below.

Conclusions:

1. The EAW reviewed the six Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) Principles and endorsed their value as an overarching framework for evaluation and assessment. The EAW recognizes the importance of the CASSP principles as guides for action but does not envision a specific plan of action that this committee should take to advance each of the principles in terms of actionable steps. Therefore, the EAW supports the continued use of those principles as guidelines for all future work in evaluation and assessment rather than identifying specific objectives that the committee should take to realize each of these foundational principles.
2. The EAW reviewed current efforts across multiple state and private agencies at early intervention and endorsed the current emphasis on actions that prevent initial contact with the juvenile justice system. These efforts act to promote youth adjustment and positive health programs through early assessment, intervention and diversion.
3. The EAW strongly endorses the principle that all systems should measure, track, and evaluate, both recidivism and/or initial contact with the juvenile justice system.

Recommended Actions for adoption by the OJS Committee:

1. ***Education of Stakeholders.*** The OJS committee should adopt an education action plan for judges, other legal professionals and other significant stakeholders (e.g., service delivery staff, administrators and educational specialists) who carry out significant roles in the juvenile justice system and the health and human service system. The action plan should include seminars, webinars and websites that teach the value and importance of assessment, evaluation and research to bring about successful youth and family outcomes. This training should be accessible to all relevant stakeholders across the state. The content should include the basics of evidence based practice, valid assessment and current models of treatment and rehabilitation including but not be limited to a discussion of the following topics:
 - a. The appropriate use of assessment devices in making evidence based decisions and the importance uniform standards and procedures in assessment practices.
 - b. The nature of Evidence Based Practice and the importance of program evaluation in successful treatments.
 - c. The importance of adequate and consistent dosage in EBP treatments delivered by qualified service delivery staff.
 - d. The role of valid assessment and evidence based treatments in bringing about successful youth and family outcomes.

2. ***Evidence Based Practice.*** The OJS committee should adopt a system-wide categorization of Evidence Based Practice (EBP) in Juvenile Justice in Nebraska. The EAW recommends the University of Nebraska White Paper (Lincoln and Omaha – Wiener, Hobbs, & Spohn, 2014) to provide a working definition of what does and does not constitute EBP programming in Nebraska. The UNL/UNO White paper discusses several routes to evidence based practice status described in the evaluation literature and concludes with a continuum of EBP that includes seven stages from most effective to least effective: Fully Evidence Based, Effective, Promising, Inconclusive, Ineffective, Harmful, and Insufficient Evidence. The White Paper delineates the criteria that programs must satisfy at each stage on the EBP continuum. Ultimately, all agencies providing services in Nebraska must demonstrate the EBP status of its programming on a continual basis.
3. ***Assessment Survey.*** The OJS Committee should perform a statewide study of existing assessment techniques that state and private agencies use with youth across the state of Nebraska. This study would ask and answer the following questions: a) What areas of intervention and service utilize assessment? b) Who is performing assessments and how are the assessors reaching their conclusions? c) What constructs (i.e., risk, needs, social support, education and so on) are included in the assessments? d) Which assessment tools are currently in use? e) How are follow-up services matched to the assessment results? f) What is the level of standardization within and across agencies? g) What are the existing barriers to successful assessment?
4. ***Shared Database.*** The OJS Committee should adopt a resolution to create a unified and shared database for agencies that assess, service, and treat youth across the state. An OJS taskforce should determine if there is a need for a new committee to assess the problem of data match across agencies, data sharing across agencies and establishing uniformly coded data elements or if an existing group can assume those responsibilities. In either case, the OJS should pursue the development of a shared database between systems that allows for enhanced case management, as well as prediction of needs across the state and individualized data outcomes for research. The EAW recognized that one of the most difficult issues to resolve for a shared database is the adoption of a unique and common identifier for youth in the system. The difficulty in adopting a common identifier appears to be more of a problem of conflict among stakeholders than a technical problem.
5. ***Data Mapping and Analysis.*** The OJS Committee should adopt a resolution to support the continued work of the Data Mapping and Analysis (DMA) Taskforce. The DMA Taskforce should continue its efforts focusing on identifying both the needs of the juvenile justice population and the resources available to them throughout the state. The OJS committee recognizes this work as critical to future service delivery and successful treatment of youth and their families in the State of Nebraska and especially endorses the DMA Taskforce's efforts to identify youth needs, service opportunities and barriers to service provision in various locations across the state. The OJS committee recommends that DMA Taskforce receive the resources it needs to continue this work.