

From Worker to Supervisor

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Child welfare and particularly child protective services are in a crisis. Child abuse and neglect reporting continues to escalate (CDF, 1997) as does the out-of-home placement of children. Additionally, new laws, such as The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P. L. 105-89), have added even more stress on a system that is already quite tenuous. The increased complexity of problems in the child welfare field requires higher levels of knowledge and skills for professionals who work with children and families. Additional training is needed to accommodate a new child welfare system given the ever-increasing demands on public social services agencies.

Child protection agencies are under federal and state mandates to preserve families and to create permanent living arrangements for children in out-of-home placements. The Adoption and Safe Family Act has also toughened the time limits for making decisions concerning a permanent plan for children out of their home. Under the new law, time limits for placement have been changed from 18 months to 12 months. Case decision making is also more demanding, requiring specialized expertise.

Thus, training and experience are key contributors to sound action by child welfare practitioners. Engaging child protection workers and supervisors in ongoing professional development that certifies them in the required competencies will strengthen the community's trust in the child protection agency and lead to the well-being of children.

In 1993, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, through collaboration with the Protective Services Training Institute (PSTI), began a voluntary certification process for Child Protective Services supervisors. The certification program was viewed successfully and provided validation to supervisors' knowledge and skills (Scannapieco, Molidor, & Molidor, 2000).

To provide this same successful validation for workers, in July 1999 Texas expanded certification whereby the state became connected to agency policy and promotion for supervisors. A certification plan for Child Protection Specialists and Advanced Child Protection Specialists was developed and implemented in September 1999.

Overview of the Texas Initiative

In 1991, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS), then the Texas Department of Human Services, created the Children's Protective Services Training

Institute (CPSTI). In 1999, the state of Texas expanded the role of the Institute to include all programs—Adult Protection, Child Care Licensing, and Community Projects. As a result of this initiative, the Institute was renamed (PSTI) and began operating as a consortium of the four graduate schools of social work in Texas, funded through Title IV-E funds and matching funds from the Department and the schools of social work. One of the initial projects of the Institute was certification of Child Protective Services (CPS) staff. Texas decided to certify supervisors first and then consider certification of direct service staff.

At the heart of this successful program is its function as a true collaborative effort. For example, the certification committee is formed in conjunction with PSTI. Approximately 15 representatives from the universities and the agency make up the membership. Agency representatives come from the Human Resource Department as well as state and regional offices. In addition, both a certified CPS Supervisor and CPS Certified Specialist are on the committee, and it is cochaired by an agency administrator and a university faculty member. All decisions concerning certification policy come out of this committee, which meets on a quarterly basis to discuss policy issues. Certification, like child protection practice, is an ever-evolving process of reviewing policy, and the committee is continually confronting human resource issues.

Supervisor Certification Process

Supervisors need to meet educational, professional, training, and testing requirements to be certified. Minimally, two years of supervisory experience is required along with a scheduled two-year training regimen. When all training and experience requirements are met, the supervisor takes a certification exam that is both knowledge- and skill-based. Upon successful completion, the supervisor is certified. The Supervisor Certification program has been previously described in the literature (Scannapieco, et. al., 2000), and following are the requirements:

Education and Experience Requirements

- ◆ Currently employed as a CPS Certified Specialist (Basic or Advanced)
- ◆ Currently employed as a CPS Supervisor with two years of Texas CPS supervisory experience, or a master's degree in social work or a human-service-related master's degree and 16 months of Texas CPS supervisory experience.

Performance

- ◆ Required to have applicant's supervisor certify, via his or her signature on the application, that performance evaluation and productivity are currently successful or are above

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that normally expected or required.

- ◆ Not be in violation of standards of conduct or on departmental probation at the time of application.

Training

- ◆ Documented completion of attendance at all the trainings required of supervisors by PRS for the first two years as a supervisor.
 - *Managing Workplace Harmony*
 - *CPS Supervisor Management Training*
- ◆ Documented completion of attendance at the following PSTI Supervisor Trainings
 - *Supervising Individuals with Diverse Needs*
 - *Developing Worker Risk-Based Competency*
 - *Leadership: Empowering Yourself and Others*
 - *What's Happening in This Family? Using a Family Systems Approach in CPS*

Knowledge and Skills Assessment

- ◆ Passing score on a multiple-choice test of supervisory knowledge and a video exam on supervisory skills.

Child Protection Specialist and Advanced Specialist Certification Process

In July 1999, TDPRS decided to offer certification to child protection workers as one means of providing professional development and accountability for its staff. A great deal of past productive collaboration allowed for the planning phase to be successful. The administration of the program was planned for the same location as the Supervisor Certification Program, the Center for Child Welfare at the University of Texas at Arlington. The Specialist Certification program has been previously described in the literature (Scannapieco & Connell, 2000), and an overview follows.

Certification is designed to recognize the specialized knowledge and skills of Texas CPS Specialists. It includes education, experience, training, performance, and evaluation components. It differs from social work licensure in that the requirements are specific to Child Protective Services, and only Texas CPS Specialists are eligible to apply. There are two levels of Specialist certification: Specialist Certification and Advanced Specialist Certification.

Eligibility for CPS Specialist Certification

CPS Specialists seeking certification are required to meet experience, performance, and training criteria but unlike CPS supervisors do not need to pass any type of exam. Applicants must have at least one year of CPS direct service experience to be eligible for Specialist Certification and three years CPS

direct service experience to be eligible for Advanced Certification. In addition and as set forth in the *CPS Specialist Guide* (PSTI, 2001), applicants must submit the following documentation:

Education and Experience

- ◆ Currently employed as at least a CPS Specialist II and have at least one year CPS direct service experience following completion of Basic Skills Development (BSD).

Performance

- ◆ Required to have applicant's supervisor certify, via his or her signature on the application, that performance evaluation and productivity are currently successful or are above that normally expected or required.
- ◆ Not be in violation of standards of conduct or on departmental probation at the time of application.

Training

- ◆ Documented completion of attendance at one-day risk assessment training and one day of child development training provided either by the agency or PSTI.
- ◆ Documented completion of attendance at agency-provided *Cultural Diversity: Building Bridges or Wall* training.
- ◆ Documented completion of attendance at agency-provided *Advanced Investigation Training* (TCLEOSE).

Eligibility for Advanced CPS Specialist Certification

Education and Experience

- ◆ Currently employed as a CPS Specialist III, IV, or V or above.
- ◆ Three years cumulative CPS direct service experience after the completion of BSD.
- ◆ Currently a CPS Certified Specialist.

Performance

- ◆ Required to have applicant's supervisor certify, via his or her signature on the application, that performance evaluation and productivity are currently successful or are above that normally expected or required.
- ◆ Not be in violation of standards of conduct or on departmental probation at the time of application.

Training

- ◆ Documented completion of 72 hours of training in the three years prior to the application date of Advanced Certification.
- ◆ Training that is applied towards Specialist Certification cannot apply to Advanced Specialist Certification.

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- ◆ Agency-provided, PSTI-provided, university and college courses and conference workshops and other workshops that are at least 3 hours in length are applicable.
- ◆ University/College technology courses are not applicable.

Skills

The Advanced Evaluation and Assessment of Advanced Certification is intended to recognize the advanced skills and expertise that an Advanced Certified Specialist would possess. The Advanced Certified Specialists are required to demonstrate superior skills, expertise, and leadership in their unit and practice with clients. Additionally, they must demonstrate that they represent CPS throughout the community in a professional way, such as

- ◆ Demonstrate completion of a total of four tasks on the *Advanced Evaluation and Assessment* instrument.
- ◆ Demonstrate completion of at least two tasks in the category of Advanced Knowledge, Skills, and Expertise, which includes the following categories: investigation, legal, community resources, sensitive cases, assessment skills, working with the mental health system, placement resources, utilization of bilingual skills, cultural and ethnic groups, and intervention techniques.
- ◆ Demonstrate at least one task in two or more of the other four categories (Leadership, Community Outreach, Development of Others, and Other Special Projects) in the *Advanced Evaluation and Assessment* instrument outlined in the Advanced Specialist application.
- ◆ Demonstration of completion should be indicated by supervisor signature and supporting documentation or written description.
- ◆ Complete and demonstrate the advanced skills and knowledge within three years prior to the application date of Advanced Certification.

Supervisor Certification Profiles

Supervisor Certification began in 1994 as a voluntary process, and the majority of all eligible supervisors were certified. In July 1999, Supervisor Certification became associated with a promotion and pay increase, and the profile below represents the status of certified supervisors as of July 2001.

Table 1: Certified CPS Supervisors

Mean Years CPS Supervisor	4.0
Gender	
Male	59
Female	273
Total	332

Table 1 profiles the Certified CPS Supervisors in Texas. Currently there are 332 Certified CPS Supervisors, and the mean

length of employment as a CPS supervisor is four years. Eighty-two percent of the Certified Supervisors are females, a statistic aligned with the gender composition of the agency overall.

After the application process is complete and the supervisor is ready to take the test, demographic information is then recorded in order to continually validate test items. Ethnicity is collected and used only for test item validation, but not recorded on the Supervisor Certification database.

Specialist Certification Profiles

The Specialist Certification program was launched in September 1999. *The Specialist's Guide to CPS Specialist Certification* (PSTI, 2001) was developed and is available through both e-mail and mail to all CPS staff that outlines the requirements for achieving and maintaining certification. As of July 2000, Specialists profiles are as follows:

Table 3: Certified Specialists

Mean Years CPS Specialist	5.00
Gender	
Male	270
Female	1,720
Total	1,990

Table 3 profiles the Certified Specialists in Texas. Almost two thousand workers have achieved Specialist Certification, and the mean length of employment as a CPS Specialist is five years. Similar to Supervisor Certifications and the gender composition of the agency, the majority of Certified Specialists are female (86%).

Advanced Certified Specialist Profiles

In recognition that the State had many tenured child protection workers, Advanced Specialist Certification was simultaneously incorporated at the same time as Specialist Certification. Workers must first establish their Specialist Certification before they apply for Advanced Certification.

Table 5: Advanced Certified Specialists

Mean Years CPS Specialist	7.00
Gender	
Male	59
Female	354
Total	413

As shown in Table 5, 413 tenured workers have achieved Advanced Specialist Certification with 7 years average length of employment as a CPS Specialist. Similar to the Certified

Specialists, the majority of Advanced Specialists are female (85%).

Different from other certification requirements, Advanced Specialist Certification does not require specific and mandatory courses be attended. For Advanced Specialist Certification, the worker attends at least 72 hours of training (within a 3-year period) that is focused on children and families.

Conclusions

A total of 2,735 CPS employees statewide are participating in various certification programs. The Certification Office at the University of Texas at Arlington receives and processes all applications as part of the Protective Services Training Institute at the University of Texas at Austin. The information is tracked on two large databases that house all the relevant certification information of each applicant. Daily reporting of newly certified persons is communicated to TDPRS Human Resources via e-mail in order to process upgrades or promotions associated with certification. The communication between the Certification Office and Human Resources has worked very well, given the large number of certifications and the complexity of issues. The ease of communication and collaboration with TDPRS has made the inception of Specialist Certification and continuation of Supervisor Certification both efficient and successful.

The anecdotal feedback over the first nine months of Specialist Certification has been very positive. In addition, most program directors and administrators choose to renew their certification every two years, another indicator of the value of certification. Most CPS Specialists have expressed appreciation for recognizing their education, training, and experience as something that should be rewarded. Future research is planned to evaluate the program's evolution and effectiveness in meeting its objectives, but given the large number of employees already engaged in the process, it has already made progress towards better morale, accountability, and improved perception of the child protection agency.

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