

Overall Recommendations

Technology initiatives are rarely just about the technology. Most are about the organizational and policy environment in which these information technologies are embedded. Therefore, based on the assessment of all technologies within the Local Districts, our recommendations are divided in three categories: (1) technology, (2) management, and (3) policy.

More specifically, information technology initiatives do not take place in a vacuum and their results are significantly affected by managerial and policy factors. Thus, the results from our assessment clearly indicate that the use of mobile technologies for CPS is not different in this regard. To realize the most value in using these technologies, it is necessary to understand and act upon the management and policy factors that shape CPS work. The following recommendations describe actions within this approach.

Technology

Continue to evaluate laptop use and connectivity.

Through this study, we found the most significant potential for using mobile technology to improve CPS work was using laptops in the field. Although the initial results suggest that this solution offers the biggest payoff, continued investigation is needed into device, user, and connectivity issues. More specifically, laptops with wireless connectivity allow caseworkers to perform a number of work activities, with time and location flexibility, but investments must still be made into infrastructure, support, and determining whether access to CONNECTIONS should be continuous or synchronized.

Test additional combinations of dictation and laptops.

The possibility exists that improvement in CPS work can be multiplied by using a dictation device and a laptop together. Some caseworkers found dictating (rather than typing) to be a more efficient way to enter progress notes. This advantage, coupled with the laptop's functionality, could potentially increase caseworker productivity, but more study is needed to verify this observation.

Management

Take a broader look at caseload management.

Much discussion surrounds caseload management within the CPS environment. As with any change in a core business process, the introduction of mobile devices provides a partial mechanism to address productivity and quality issues. A continued statewide effort, including technology, that achieves an overall comprehensive improvements in CPS, such as decreased backlogs and delays, would address the particulars raised around caseload management. Attending to improved caseload management from a technological perspective only may limit the potential for success.

Focus on change management and overall support.

The introduction of mobile devices is more than an information technology initiative; it is also a significant organization wide change in CPS. Champions for change are needed at both the state and district levels to encourage and facilitate cross-boundary planning and communication. An understanding of the implications of change in any process for users for users, support staff, and both state and county executives is essential before any large-scale deployment is considered. This is necessary for any large scale deployment.

Provide training, training, and more training.

Caseworkers are more apt to incorporate new technologies in their work if they are well-trained on the technologies. Investments are needed in training for all mobile devices in order to mitigate frustrations that accompany all new learning initiatives. Providing dedicated time and resources to learn the technology may increase the likelihood will be used.

Develop additional measures for improvement.

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Additional assessments should include expanded indicators of improvements in CPS work. Enhanced productivity, decreases in the number of overdue cases, and shorter turnaround time for progress notes are all important quantitative measures of CPS performance, but they do not address essential quality concerns. Expanding the list of performance measures to include changes in quality and use of information will provide a complementary way of evaluating the effectiveness of new information technologies.

Policy

Address work place policy issues related to a more mobile workforce.

Any shift to a more mobile and connected workforce brings with it the need to revisit longstanding personnel policies. The nature of casework requires a flexible work schedule because much of the work is done in the field. The introduction of mobile technologies offers the ability to also do traditional “office work,” such as research and documentation, in the field. As a consequence, policies that govern work schedules and compensation need to be re-examined so that they reinforce rather than work against the goals associated with the use of new tools.

Align wireless security provisions with the guidance of oversight agencies.

Remote access to district and agency systems will require a shift or modification in security policies. All security policies should be developed in accordance with the NYS Office for Technology and NYS Office of Cyber Security and Critical Infrastructure Coordination forthcoming wireless security policies.
