

The **Demonstration Project in 23 NYS Local Social Services (2008)** was a collaborative effort among the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), 23 NYS Local Departments of Social Services (also referred to as local districts), and the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany. The focus of this effort was to learn more about the conditions and efforts needed to deploy mobile technologies statewide, as well as to investigate the impacts on CPS work and work processes.

In this effort, districts were asked to submit proposals to OCFS for mobile technology funding. OCFS then selected districts and centrally procured the devices (laptops and tablets). OCFS led the statewide deployment with some assistance from the districts. Local connectivity contracts were under the purview of the districts to select and procure, as well as training and selecting CPS staff to participate. CTG conducted an independent assessment of the use of the technology within and across the districts. The results of how the technology impacted the work and work processes are presented in findings about caseworker productivity, mobility and satisfaction

In terms of assessment and statewide deployment of any technology, it is important to understand the variability in the CPS environment across the State. In a federated, intergovernmental program such as CPS, many policies and practices are developed and implemented by the district. This, coupled with naturally embedded differences in a county's demographics can makes the statewide picture even more complex. Thus, taking a birds-eye view and confidently stating that any changes are taking place means normalizing these inconsistencies so that patterns can be detected. More importantly, recognizing the divergent and complex environments can help in larger deployment planning efforts. Although pilot and district conditions did vary throughout the State, the results show a largely positive picture and suggest that mobile technology is a useful tool for CPS work.

The assessment across the districts shows that participants used their device in remote locations, mostly at home, a little less than 7.5 hours per week. Use at other locations include in the field and then a smaller percentage in court. In terms of work function completed with the devices, the most positive impacts reported were in the areas of "access to information" and "timeliness of documentation," with over 50% of the respondents rating these results "Somewhat better" or "Much better."

The results for timeliness and number of case closings seem to be somewhat paradoxical, appearing to show a substantial improvement in the volume of case closing, but a contradictory result vis-à-vis reduction in timeliness. The number of cases closed within the 60 day period increased in the pilot period: an improvement in timeliness. However the number of cases closed in longer than 60 days increased as well, suggesting decreased timeliness. This apparent contradiction can be accounted for by the increase in the overall number of cases closed from the pre-pilot period to the pilot period, a 32% increase, suggesting that caseworkers were "catching up" on older cases during the pilot period. Since this happened with a simultaneous improvement in timeliness with the less than 60 day cases closed, these results can be interpreted to indicate improvements in both volume and timeliness of work for the pilot period.

This increase in productivity was accompanied by what initially appeared to be lower performance in the timeliness of progress notes. In all the districts, the average elapsed time between an event and progress note entry increased, thus decreasing timeliness. This pattern was consistent across all districts for the 1st through 7th days. Rather than a simple decrease in overall performance, however, this finding is most likely a direct result of the work on a backlog of closing older cases. If there is a backlog of older cases, it seems likely that there is also a backlog of progress note entry for those cases. If the workers are attempting to reduce that backlog by entering progress notes for events farther in the past, then the average delay for progress notes would increase as the "catching-up process" unfolds.

The analysis also shows evidence of a relationship between higher case closings performance and districts that had more overtime usage. Case closings in districts clustered with higher overtime were approximately 25% greater than those in the lower overtime usage. The districts are divided almost equally between the clusters as well, suggesting that the possible relationship is more general across the districts. Differences in technology conditions appear to be more strongly related to productivity results than the overtime analyses above.

Finally, in terms of overall opinion and satisfaction levels, all but one district had satisfaction ratings averaged in the positive side of the range, with three districts reporting very high overall satisfaction levels. In addition, 81% of the participants stated they would recommend that their colleagues use mobile devices to do CPS work.

Overall, the assessment showed positive results in terms of productivity, increased mobility and level of satisfaction. As OCFS and the local districts continue to meet the needs of its CPS workforce, it is apparent that mobile devices are a necessity. Throughout OCFS's three successive mobile technology efforts continuous feedback to the deployment process has been essential. While tremendous learning occurred in each initiative,

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more opportunities for investigation and improvement still exist. Thus, our recommendations present ideas for statewide deployment strategies and areas for continued exploration.
