

Providing child protective services in New York State is a program whereby locally administered programs are supervised by a state agency. More specifically, Local Social Service Districts reside within each county and the city of New York, usually within a Department of Social Services (DSS) that are responsible for providing direct services to children and families. The state agency, OCFS, is located in Albany and responsible, among many things, for providing regulatory oversight of all local programs. In this report all references to “OCFS” means the state agency and “district” refers to the Local Social Service District or the County Department of Social Services organizations participating in the Demonstration Project.

In a federated model such as this, many policies and practices are developed and implemented by the district. Under their purview they can administer programs in a way that best suits their needs. This structure, common in intergovernmental programs, typically creates a diverse administrative environment across the state. This condition, coupled with naturally embedded differences in county geography, community make up, population, and location, makes the statewide picture even more complex.

Understanding the CPS variability across NYS is important for a couple of reasons. In terms of assessment, any statewide change in productivity, mobility, and satisfaction must take into consideration all district variability. One set of conditions exists with one district and does not within another. Taking a birds-eye view and confidently stating that any changes are taking place means normalizing these inconsistencies so that patterns can be detected.

In terms of deployment, recognizing the divergent and complex environments can help in larger planning efforts. Knowing that districts operate differently can help set expectations in how technology will/can be integrated. Further, sharing best practices among the districts can maximize the statewide investment.

The following areas show the range of variability in the district’s policies, deployment strategies, and environmental conditions. Despite this range of conditions, clear statewide patterns in productivity did emerge.

## Technology and Connectivity

**Docking stations.** Three quarters of the districts received docking stations with the mobile devices. Some of those districts removed desktop PCs and made the mobile device the primary piece of equipment while others allowed the mobile device to be used in addition to the desktop PC. The other quarter of the districts chose not to receive docking stations with the devices.

**Connectivity.** Responsibility for identifying and procuring connectivity contracts was the under the purview of the districts. More than half of the districts procured external broadband cards in hopes of having ubiquitous connectivity in the field. The other districts either opted not to obtain external broadband cards or were not able to do so during the pilot period. This meant that they relied on the internal wireless cards to use free wireless “hot spots” within the county or relied on their own connectivity solution at home. Although regardless of the network connections used, all access to the State network was through a virtual private network (VPN) that secures the transmission to and from the portable device and the network. In addition, PointSec encryption software was installed on each device before deployment. Of those districts that procured external broadband cards, most of them were deployed at the same time as the devices although some districts were delayed in obtaining and distributing them.

## Deployment

**Training and Security.** Although each district participated in the deployment of the mobile technologies, some districts took more of lead role while others relied on assistance from OCFS. One district held a kick off celebration before the two-hour group training, while others held individual sessions or only provided training as needed. In following this pattern, some districts asked CPS staff to sign receipts for the mobile devices, others simply handed them out. Finally, even though discussion of security precautions were mentioned within every district, some districts spent extra time going over preferred practices, while others discussed it informally. Only a few districts handed out written security information and procedures.

## Policies

**Working At Home.** During the pilot period, twelve districts created policies that stated they would allow working from home on the mobile devices after regular work hours. One district created a policy stating that working from home (during or after regular work hours) with the mobile device was prohibited. The other seven districts did not

provide information or did not address a working from home policy

**Overtime and Compensation.** During the pilot period, nine districts stated that they would provide compensation for time spent **working from home** after regular work hours with the mobile device. Five districts created policies stating that they would **not** compensate for time spent working from home using the mobile device after regular work hours. Six districts did not report any information about whether they would compensate for time worked at home after regular work hours.

Seven districts stated that they would provide compensation for work done on the mobile device after regular work hours **in the field**. Two districts created policies that stated they would not provide compensation for any work completed with the mobile device after regular work hours in the field. Ten districts did not report any information about whether they would or would not compensate for time worked in the field with the mobile device after regular work hours.

## Pilot Conditions

**Participants and Deployment Strategy.** Each of the districts were responsible for identifying participants in the assessment. Some districts selected the entire CPS staff, while others asked for volunteers. One district selected participants based on seniority. Districts also created the deployment and device assignment strategy. In some districts each CPS staff person received their own mobile device while others had a group of CPS staff share a pool of devices. Also, in a couple of districts they employed both tactics including having some devices assigned to each person and the others shared among the “on-call” staff.

**Pilot Period.** Deploying devices to 20 districts across NYS is a large undertaking and it cannot be done within one day or even one week. Delivering devices to the districts is just one step in getting them ready for training and distribution. Districts assisted in the deployment but not every district had the resources to pick up where OCFS staff left off. Therefore, deployment was phased over a two month period and each district had a different pilot period length. Those districts that deployed the devices to their staff early had the longest pilot period (Putnam County DSS deploying on (10/22/08) and those who deployed last (Niagara County DSS deploying on 12/17/08) had the shortest pilot period. All district pilot periods had to end on 1/9/08 because of state reporting deadlines. Subsequently, the range of pilot period lengths ranged from 79 days to 23 days.

**Available Cases To Be Worked On (Pre-Pilot vs. During-Pilot).** When looking at potential changes in productivity during the pilot period, it is important to assess the level of work available to be done during that same time. In looking at the number of open cases available for CPS staff to work on during the pre-pilot period and during the pilot period, the overall number stayed relatively consistent. With this said, there were four districts that changes in their available cases to work on changed significantly. Two districts had about 22% less cases during the pilot period as opposed to their pre-pilot period. In addition, two different districts had approximately 12% more cases in the pilot period as opposed to their pre-pilot period (see AppendixF for changes in caseload from pre- pilot to during pilot periods).

## Local Context

**Geographic Variability.** New York State boasts counties that run the spectrum of geographic variability, from concentrated urban environments to scattered rural communities. Some districts are very large in square miles (St. Lawrence County with over 2,800 square miles), while others are quite small in comparison (Putnam County with 246 square miles). In addition, populations are also quite diverse with Nassau County at 1.3 million residents and Seneca County with just over 34,000 residents. The size, location, and population determine the make up of the counties with a range of metro, urban, and rural areas.

**CPS Experience.** CPS staff within the districts that participated in the Pilot, varied in years of CPS experience. About half of the districts had CPS staff with below five years experience while the other half had staff with more than five years experience. The range spanned from one district having approximately 1.3 years average experience to another that averaged 9.3 years experience. Four districts had between 1.3 and 2.9 years experience, five districts had between 3.5 and 4.8 years experience, six districts had between 5.7 and 6.6 years experience, and three districts had between 9.2 and 9.3 years experience.

## Conclusion

The variation in conditions described above is a natural and unavoidable characteristic of locally administered

programs in NYS. If a technology initiative such as this is to yield the desired outcomes, it must be adapted to local conditions, as was the case here. The resulting mix of strategies and adaptations presents serious challenges to an assessment effort, since so many factors can influence the outcomes, both positively and negatively. In spite of these challenging conditions, the results presented in the following sections do show a largely positive picture and suggest that mobile technology is a useful tool for CPS work.

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