

# CONTINUING UPWARD FROM THE SUMMIT

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AN E-NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING IMPLEMENTATION  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS & EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

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LISTSERV

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## How States Have Implemented Their Summit Action Plans – An Overview

A year after the National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children in Minneapolis, NCSC surveyed each state Chief Justice and State Court Administrator. The survey was designed to determine how implementation of the Action Plans resulting from the Summit was proceeding. Responses were received from 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The responding states include Louisiana which was unable to participate in the Summit because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This article summarizes the responses. The articles that follow illustrate the progress being made around the country.

*Priorities Address:* Nearly two-thirds of the jurisdiction (33) reported fostering collaboration. The form of the collaboration varies. For example, 12 states have created a high-level task force, committee or commission (AK, CA, FL, KY, ME, MI, MS, NV, NH, NM, TX, VT). Six have held state summits (AR, DE, MT, NE, SC, WY) or are planning or considering a state summit. Four states are enlarging the table by reaching out to education agencies (NY), mental health agencies (MI), the legislature (OR), or juvenile delinquency programs (AZ). Others are focusing on their CIP advisory committees as a forum for collaboration.

Nearly half the reporting jurisdictions (23) are developing performance measures and improving management information capabilities. These include 10 that are identifying and disseminating best practices (AR, CO, MN, NV, NM, OH, PR, SD, VT, VA); 10 that are developing a new management information system or enhancing the capabilities of their current system (AR, CO, DE, FL, IL, KY, MD, NJ, VA, WA); and 9 that are implementing a performance measurement process (AR, CA, CO, CT, ID, IA, MA, MN, NM).

About 40% of the jurisdictions (21) have undertaken leadership initiatives ranging from personal involvement of the chief justice in collaboration initiatives, to inclusion of child protection in the annual state of the judiciary address and creating a new division within the state administrative office of the courts focused on child protection matters.

About 40% are planning or have offered special training on foster care-related issues. This includes training for trial judges in nine jurisdictions (AK, AZ, KS, KY, MA, MI, PR, VA, WA); training for appellate court judges in three states (CO, KS, KY); attorney training in six states (KS, KY, MA, MI, NE, NC); enhanced training for

CASAs or GALs in three (KY, NV, NC) and for social workers in three (KS, KY, NJ), and multidisciplinary training in five states (FL, ID, LA, MN, and UT).

A substantial proportion of the states are also addressing timeliness at the trial court level (21) and/or the appellate level (11). Nineteen are implementing best practices, new rules, or standards. Finally, about one-third (17) are enhancing representation of parents and children or other types of services affecting families and children (19).

### *Barriers Encountered:*

The most frequently identified barrier to implementing the action plans was the absence of or delay in receiving the necessary funding or staff (16). Eight jurisdictions commented on the amount of time required for collaboration and implementation or cited other timing issues. A total of six cited the need to and difficulty of coordinating plans. Other barriers cited included lack of support for or active resistance to change, the need to balance collaboration with the constitutional separation of powers among the branches of government and state and local government.

*Lessons Learned:* Of those states listing the key important lessons learned, the most frequent lesson cited was the importance and power of collaboration (19). The others are reflective of the barriers noted – the time required to implement change; the need to coordinate all child protection plans; and the importance of leadership.



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## The Nebraska Children's Summit and Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative

The Nebraska Children's Summit was held on September 25-27, 2006, at the Lied Conference Center in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Every judge with juvenile court jurisdiction, which included county judges and separate juvenile court judges, was required by the Supreme Court to attend. Twenty-five of these judges were directed to assemble community-based, inter-disciplinary teams of professionals to attend the summit. In all, over 200 stakeholders from every district in Nebraska attended, including HHSS administrators, supervisors and workers, parents' attorneys, county attorneys, guardians ad litem, court appointed special advocates (CASAA) and foster care review board (FCRB) members.

On the last day of the summit, the participants voted for the new name of this project: Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative. Chief Justice Hendry directed the teams to return to their communities to finalize development of their collaborative teams and begin implementing the best practices from the Resource Guidelines.

Through a combination of local team efforts, judicial leadership and statewide assistance and information sharing, the Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative is a long-term, Nebraska Supreme Court-led initiative with the mission to improve processing in the abuse/neglect court system.

The goals of the Initiative are: (1) to develop a child protection court system collaborative aimed to ensure permanent, safe and stable families for children, and a fair process for children and families; (2) to implement best practices statewide through local and state collaborative efforts; and (3) to establish a continuing assessment system statewide to ensure continual improvement of court processes and use of best practices.



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## South Carolina Judicial Department Family Court Mini-Summit

On August 22, 2006, the South Carolina Judicial Department sponsored a Family Court Mini-Summit at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center in Columbia, SC. Participants of the Mini-Summit included South Carolina Family Court Judges, as well as SC Department of Social Services County Directors and Attorneys. The Mini-Summit represents South Carolina's continuous effort to achieve Federal Court Improvement Project grant objectives.

Chief Justice Jean Toal of the South Carolina Supreme Court welcomed over 50 SC family court judges, nearly 80 SC child care professionals, and members of the SC Court of Appeals to the Mini-Summit. Key seminars included "Creating a New Normal", "Federal and State Guidelines for Child Protection Cases", "Timeliness and Docketing of Foster Care Cases",

"Barriers to Ensuring Hearings are Held in a Timely Manner", and "Emotional and Psychological Impact of Delays on Children". Former Minnesota Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz discussed the "Minnesota Plan", a project implemented to improve the administration of foster care cases in Minnesota.

Other highlights included small group discussion sessions. Conference participants were grouped by the counties and circuits they represented to discuss foster care issues unique to their circuits. The goal was to create action plans that promote timely scheduled child welfare hearings and that ensure foster care children achieve permanency expeditiously. The plans contained recommendations for improvement, steps towards solutions, and proposed completion dates. These plans were distributed to all members of the SC family court bench.

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## Montana Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children

The Supreme Court of Montana, the Attorney General's Office, the Montana Public Defender's Office and DPHHS Child and Family Services Division co-sponsored the first Montana State Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children, which was held August 29 & 30, 2006 in Helena. The purpose of the Summit was to promote timely permanency for children and to improve the consistency, continuity, and uniformity of court practice statewide. Chief Supreme Court Justice Karla Gray, Attorney General Mike McGrath, Chief Public Defender Randi Hood, and Shirley Brown, Administrator of the Child and Family Services Division each had an opportunity to share their thoughts about the issues beleaguering child abuse and neglect cases.

Regional working groups were formed which combined the various disciplines from geographic areas in the state. Chief Justice Gray charged these groups with the task of identifying

the reasons timely permanency for children was being delayed and to report their findings to her. The response to her request has been very positive, with the groups reporting changes statewide such as:

- collaborative meetings being held on a regular basis,
- a mini-summit being planned,
- a family justice coordinating council being formed
- additional timely court reviews/status hearings,
- changing court calendars from "cattle call" scheduling to specifying set times for hearings,
- several jurisdictions exploring the possibility of a Family Court,
- promotion of open adoptions, and development of an "open discovery" process to expedite cases.

A second Summit is being planned for August 22-23, 2007 with the focus continuing on permanency for children.

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UP COMING  
SUMMIT  
EVENTS

March 8-9,  
2007

New York  
City, New  
York



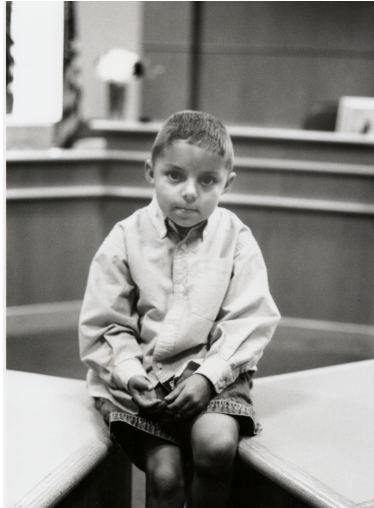
# Improving Performance Measurement in Dependency and Neglect Cases

## Colorado's attention to timelines

With the support of SANCA funds, the Colorado Courts have been able to further enhance the capabilities of the case management system ("ICON/Eclipse") to track key outcomes for neglected and abused children. The ICON/Eclipse now:

### 1. Enables court personnel to effectively manage their child welfare caseload.

ICON/Eclipse will help judges, magistrates, family court facilitators and clerks monitor compliance with state and federal timelines for child abuse and neglect cases.



Timelines reports will reveal, at a glance, compliance rates for each significant event of a case. This will help judicial officers to trouble-shoot specific areas, and maintain more control over their cases. For example, if a judge notices that her disposition hearings meet the 90 day requirement only 75 percent of the time, she is able to work to correct the issues: she can meet with her court staff to establish a tickler system, or she can meet with social services to determine what needs to be done to get the treatment plan in on time.

### 2. Helps judicial officers to address systemic issues.

Colorado set the ambitious goal of being able to report on 19 of the 22 performance measures promulgated by NCSC, ABA and NCJFCJ through the ToolKit Project. The performance measures enable the court to analyze how children fare during the child welfare case on a case-specific or a systemic level. One family court facilitator reported that there were instances where the court would have to continue the termination hearing because a respondent, usually the unknown father, had not been properly served or proof of service was not provided to the court. The service report will aid in the prevention of this situation and to prevent delay of services and development of a treatment plan to a known respondent parent. In another judicial district, the court is using the removals report to show the trends in children being removed from the home. Its has been able to identify increases at certain times of the year (i.e. holiday season)

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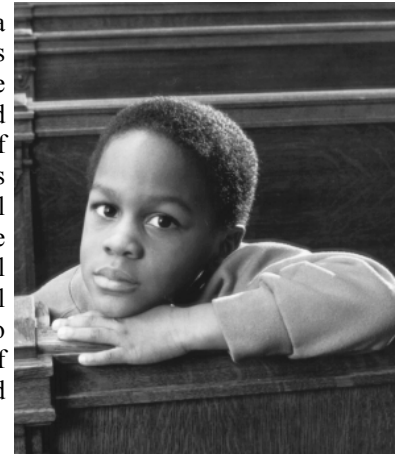
and when the local department of social services appointed a new director. This information was previously only available through written reports provided to the courts and could be aggregated only with significant human effort. Being able to generate easily reports that shed light on the systemic handling of abuse or neglect cases makes the judicial officer much more likely to act as a leader in addressing system deficiencies.

### 3. Helps keep children in safe, permanent environments.

Judicial officers in Colorado have been particularly impressed by the Centralized Information Screen. As one judicial officer reported, "The centralized information screen helps provide judicial officers with succinct information to make decisions in the best interests of the children." Through real-time data exchange with social services, the judicial officer can access a comprehensive snapshot of a child or family's progress through the courts: how many times the child has been moved, what sort of services a family has received, what other cases a family is involved in, to aid judicial decision-making. This is the hallmark of the family court: that a better informed judiciary will serve a family more appropriately by issuing appropriate orders.

### 4. Improves communication and data transfer across agencies.

Integrated justice is a system where agencies and departments share the collection and electronic transfer of information. This process makes critical information more readily available to all interested governmental entities in order to enhance the quality of decision making and public safety.



Real time data exchange is occurring between the court and the agency that allows for numerous fields in each system to be populated by entries from the other system. Data transfer from Human Services informs the Courts as to placements and treatment. Conversely, CDHS receives a vast quantity of important court case information such as case numbers, judicial officers, future hearing dates, and orders that benefit the functioning of their agency.