

# MSW Curriculum Competencies

*for Public Child Welfare  
in California*



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## Introduction

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*The Curriculum Competencies for Public Child Welfare in California were formulated in 1991 from a number of primary MSW competency sources<sup>1</sup> as well as sets of child welfare field placement and in-service training competencies used within the state. The California competencies were designed not to recapitulate the full MSW generalist social work curriculum but to provide the foundation for a competency-based curriculum for graduate students in the public child welfare specialization.*

*In addition to drafting the initial competencies with the assistance of a statewide advisory group, the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) convened a forum of 100 stakeholders representing the state's Department of Social Services, university social work faculty, county social service departments, and non-profit child welfare organizations. Their task was to identify specific curriculum elements for the child welfare specialization as well as a public child welfare research base that could be translated into new, empirically based curricula with child welfare content.*

*After the initial formulation in 1991, the competencies have been revised periodically to reflect current practice. A major revision, completed in August 2002, marked the culmination of a revision process initiated by the CalSWEC Board of Directors' Curriculum Committee and Title IV-E Project Coordinators from participating graduate schools of social work throughout the state. The resulting comprehensive draft included the suggestions of human services stakeholders throughout California who participated in statewide focus groups. A workgroup, drawn from the Project Coordinators*

*and Curriculum Committee members, then met several times to refine the draft.*

*In undertaking revisions, the goal is to integrate the educational guidelines and accreditation standards set forth by the Council on Social Work Education, while preserving the essential elements, general sequence, and usefulness of the prior version. An additional goal is to render the competencies more readily usable by MSW students and faculty in classroom and field. The 2007 revision, also the product of an inclusive statewide process, continues the tradition of refining and clarifying the competencies while reflecting current practice emphases. These emphases include knowledge and appropriate use of research evidence, increasing cultural competence, equitable access to resources, and enhancing professionalism in the work force.*

*As in the previous version, the current formulation divides the competencies into Foundation and Advanced categories, which correspond roughly to the first and second years of the MSW program. CalSWEC educational competencies continue to be woven into training models for ongoing professional development in California's Regional Child Welfare Training Academies. For example, competencies and learning objectives derived from the in-service Common Core Curricula for California were explicitly included in the 2007 revision process to facilitate development of a consistent learning continuum linked to in-service training as well as to social work education.*

<sup>1</sup> Rycus, J.S., & Hughes, R.C. (1994). *Child Welfare Competencies: Promoting Family Centered, Culturally Relevant, and Interdisciplinary Child Welfare Practice and Training*. Columbus, Ohio: Institute for Human Services.

<b>California Child Welfare Curriculum Principles</b>
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<b>Foundation Competencies (First Year)</b>
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I. Ethnic Sensitive and Multicultural Practice
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III. Core Child Welfare Practice
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V. Human Behavior and the Social Environment
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VII. Workplace Management
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<b>Advanced Competencies (Second Year)</b>
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II. Culturally Competent Child Welfare Practice
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IV. Advanced Child Welfare Practice
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VI. Human Behavior and the Child Welfare Environment
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VIII. Child Welfare Policy, Planning, and Administration
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## California Child Welfare Curriculum Principles

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1. *The goal of child welfare is to promote the health and safety of children and their development toward a positive, productive adulthood.*
2. *Every child has a right to a permanent home for his or her care and upbringing.*
3. *A caring family is the best and least restrictive environment for raising children.*
4. *A wide range of parenting practices, varying as a result of ethnic, cultural, community, and familial differences, can provide adequate care for children.*
5. *In the circumstances of danger to a child, the state has a right to intervene in family affairs to protect the child. In such circumstances the safety of the child takes precedence over the rights of the parents.*
6. *Every reasonable effort should be made to preserve and strengthen a child's existing family before an alternative placement is considered.*
7. *Services must be available, accessible, timely, and effective.*

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## **I. Ethnic Sensitive and Multicultural Practice Foundation Competencies**

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*A working knowledge of and sensitivity to the dynamics of ethnic and cultural differences are at the core of child welfare services. Culturally competent practice acknowledges that an individual's culture is an integral part of overall development and selfhood and strives to use concepts of culture in a manner that enhances individual and family functioning. Given the increasingly diverse service population, cultural competency and understanding of the cultural norms of California's major ethnic groups should be a criterion for competent performance throughout the curriculum. This section includes foundation knowledge, values, and skills for culturally competent child welfare practice.*

### ***Assessment and referral***

- 1.1 Student demonstrates respect, fairness, and cultural competence in assessing, working with, and making service decisions regarding clients of diverse backgrounds.
- 1.2 Student demonstrates self-awareness and the ability to address and overcome personal bias in assessing and working with clients of diverse backgrounds.
- 1.3 Student demonstrates the ability to conduct an ethnically and culturally competent assessment of a child and family and to develop an effective intervention plan.

- 1.4 Student recognizes personal knowledge limitations regarding specific groups and seeks consultation and expertise as needed to assess and work effectively with clients.

***Family engagement and case plan development***

- 1.5 Student understands the importance of a client's primary language and supports its use in providing child welfare assessment and intervention services.
- 1.6 Student understands the influence and value of traditional, culturally based childrearing practices and uses this knowledge in working with families.

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**II. Culturally Competent  
Child Welfare Practice  
*Advanced Competencies***

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*This section builds upon the skills developed towards cultural competence in the foundation. A comprehensive understanding of the cultural norms and values of California's major ethnic, cultural, and immigrant groups is critical in order to make appropriate assessments and to work effectively with members of these groups. Advanced culturally competent practice requires knowledge of the specific challenges faced by different ethnic and cultural populations and the ability to apply that knowledge in legal, social, and psycho-social contexts.*

***Case management, placement, and supervision***

- 2.1 Student demonstrates knowledge of legal, socioeconomic, and psychosocial issues facing immigrants, refugees, and minority groups and is able to devise culturally competent and effective interventions.
- 2.2 Student is able to critically evaluate the relevance of commonly utilized assessment criteria and intervention models in terms of their usefulness with diverse ethnic and cultural populations.
- 2.3 Student demonstrates knowledge of the rationale for and requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act and applies its provisions in working with tribal representatives and families.
- 2.4 Student demonstrates knowledge of the rationale for and requirements of the Multi-ethnic Placement Act and applies its provisions in working with families.

***Policy and participation in judicial process***

- 2.5 Student demonstrates the ability to collaborate with individuals, groups, community-based organizations and government agencies to advocate for equitable access to culturally competent resources and services.

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### **III. Core Child Welfare Practice**

#### ***Foundation Competencies***

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*This category includes the basic knowledge and skills for practice of social work in any setting, with emphasis on child welfare practice. Content in this foundation category covers interviewing, assessment, and intervention, with special attention to problems and concerns related to child protection and family preservation. Students learn to apply a strengths perspective in an environmental context and to work collaboratively. At this level, students are able to evaluate child and family information and to take appropriate steps toward permanency planning. In addition, students demonstrate the professional use of self within the values and ethics of social work practice.*

#### ***Assessment and referral***

- 3.1 Student is able to practice basic principles and techniques of interviewing children and families for purposes of assessment, intervention, and service planning.
- 3.2 Student demonstrates the ability to perform a preliminary safety assessment and to monitor the safety of the child through ongoing assessment of risk.
- 3.3 Student is able to identify the major family, health, and social factors contributing to child abuse and neglect, as well as positive factors that act to preserve the family and protect the child.

- 3.4 Student recognizes and accurately identifies the physical and behavioral indicators of abuse, family violence, and neglect, and can assess the dynamics underlying these behaviors.
- 3.5 Student demonstrates an understanding of basic child development and how developmental level affects a child's perception of events, coping strategies, and physical and psychological responses to stress and trauma.
- 3.6 Integrating knowledge of individual, family, and cultural dynamics, the student can recognize signs and symptoms of substance abuse in children and adults and assess its impact.
- 3.7 Student is able to gather, assess, and present pertinent information from interviews, case records, and collateral sources in evaluating an abuse or neglect allegation and making effective referrals for services or further evaluation.

***Family engagement and case plan development***

- 3.8 Student demonstrates the ability to respectfully relate to, engage, and assess family members from a strengths-based "person in environment" perspective, and to develop and implement a case plan based on this assessment.
- 3.9 Student demonstrates the ability to engage and work with involuntary clients in a manner that includes the exercise of client self-determination.
- 3.10 Student understands how attachment, separation, and placement affect a child and family and how these experiences may influence a child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

- 3.11 Student recognizes the importance of working with biological families, foster families, and kin networks, as well as involving them in assessment and planning. strategies.
- 3.12 Student understands the inherent power differential in working with clients and can effectively manage and balance that power.
- 3.13 Student demonstrates the ability and self-awareness to assess his or her own value conflicts or emotional responses to clients, co-workers, and situations and seeks consultation when needed.

***Case management, placement, and supervision***

- 3.14 Student understands the principles of concurrent and permanency planning that takes into account the educational, health, and emotional needs of children.
- 3.15 Student is aware of forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination pertaining to low-income, non-traditional, and culturally diverse families and uses this knowledge to provide equitable and effective child welfare services.
- 3.16 Student demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the termination process, with clients and with systems.

***Policy and participation in judicial process***

- 3.17 Student understands the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles, and practices accordingly.

- 3.18 Student understands the dual responsibility of the child welfare social worker to protect children and to provide services that support families as caregivers.
- 3.19 Student understands state and federal policy issues and child welfare legal requirements and demonstrates the capacity to fulfill these requirements in practice.
- 3.20 Student understands child welfare legal process and the roles of social workers and other professionals in relation to the courts.

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#### **IV. Advanced Child Welfare Practice** *Advanced Competencies*

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*The practice competency expected in the advanced year addresses the complexity of child protection, special needs, family maintenance, court procedures, and legal requirements. The student builds upon foundation practice and develops knowledge of federal and state child welfare policy.*

##### ***Assessment and referral***

- 4.1 Student demonstrates skill in interviewing children and families for assessment, service planning, intervention, and forensic purposes.

##### ***Case plan development and case management***

- 4.2 Student demonstrates the ability and knowledge both to utilize pre-placement preventive services, and to construct a supportive system for clients that may include

collaboration with multiple agencies and disciplines.

- 4.3 Student works collaboratively with biological families, foster families, and kin networks, involving them in assessment and planning and helping them access services and develop coping strategies.
- 4.4 Student demonstrates the ability to identify service/treatment plan requirements and to construct measurable objectives for the service plan.
- 4.5 Student demonstrates the ability to recognize abuse occurring in out-of-home placements and to take corrective action to protect children.
- 4.6 Student demonstrates knowledge of after-care services and skill in developing independent living plans with foster youth.

***Policy and participation in judicial process***

- 4.7 Student demonstrates knowledge of the philosophy, purpose, requirements, and application of federal and state child welfare policy and legislation.
- 4.8 Student understands the requirements for effectively serving and making decisions regarding children with special needs, including the balancing of parental and child rights.
- 4.9 Student demonstrates the ability to prepare written reports for court that are clear, concise, pertinent, and objective.

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## **V. Human Behavior and the Social Environment**

### ***Foundation Competencies***

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*The competencies in this section concern the stages of child and adolescent development, and the multiple socioeconomic factors influencing that development. The knowledge acquired regarding human developmental processes provides a foundation for assessment and intervention.*

#### ***Assessment and referral, case plan development, and case management***

- 5.1 Student demonstrates understanding of child and youth development, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional components, and can recognize developmental indicators of abuse or neglect.
- 5.2 Student demonstrates understanding of the primary stages and processes of adult development and family life.
- 5.3 Student demonstrates understanding of the potential effects of poverty, bias, inequity, and other forms of oppression on human behavior and social systems.
- 5.4 Student demonstrates understanding of the influence of culture on human behavior and family dynamics.
- 5.5 Student demonstrates understanding of how the strengths perspective and empowerment approaches can positively influence growth, development, and behavior change.

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## **VI. Human Behavior and the Child Welfare Environment**

### *Advanced Competencies*

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*These competencies address advanced understanding of human behavior in the complexity of situations addressed in child welfare practice, including poverty, teen sexuality, violence, trauma, and suicide. At this advanced level, the student demonstrates the capacity to apply theories of human behavior in developing intervention plans.*

#### ***Assessment and referral, case plan development, and case management***

- 6.1 Student demonstrates the ability to assess the effects of family transitions and the potential impact of becoming a client of the child welfare system.
- 6.2 Student can apply theories of human development and attachment in creating and managing effective case plans with clients.
- 6.3 Student demonstrates the ability to recognize, assess, and devise case plans and referrals to address potential for violence, suicide, and complex psychological difficulties.
- 6.4 Student demonstrates understanding of the dynamics and effects of trauma resulting from family conflict, divorce, and family or community violence.
- 6.5 Student demonstrates understanding of the dynamics of human sexuality and gender identity.

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## **VII. Workplace Management**

### ***Foundation Competencies***

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*This section contains a group of competencies concerning important aspects of agency practice. The competencies address internal relations, organizational requirements, and interdisciplinary and community collaboration. In this foundation competency, the student has acquired strategies for self-care and safety on the job.*

#### ***Assessment***

- 7.1 Student is able to identify the strengths and limitations of an organization, including its cultural competence and commitment to human diversity, and can assess the effects of these factors on services for children and families.
- 7.2 Student understands client and system problems and strengths from the perspectives of participants in a multidisciplinary team and can effectively integrate the positive contributions of each member.

#### ***Case management and supervision***

- 7.3 Student is able to plan, prioritize, and effectively complete activities and tasks within required time frames.
- 7.4 Student is aware of organizational risk management issues and is able to prevent or resolve potentially harmful situations.

- 7.5 Student is able to work respectfully and effectively with clients and agency personnel in an environment characterized by human diversity.
- 7.6 Student is aware of potential work-related stress factors and is able to develop and advocate for self-care and other strategies to reduce their effects.

***Policy, data collection, and planning***

- 7.7 Student understands the need to negotiate and advocate for the development of resources that children and families require to meet family and service goals.
- 7.8 Student understands the purpose of outcome measurement and is able to seek client, organization, and community feedback for purposes of monitoring practice, service refinement, and outcome evaluation.
- 7.9 Student is able to utilize collaborative skills and techniques to enhance service quality in organizational settings.

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**VIII. Child Welfare Policy, Planning,  
and Administration**  
*Advanced Competencies*

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*These competencies build upon basic knowledge of the work environment to include a broader understanding of policies that affect the delivery of child welfare services. Competencies extend to an*

*understanding of management, political processes, research, and technology, as well as other strategies to enhance organizational effectiveness. The section includes knowledge of funding streams for various services, and planning for service improvement.*

### ***Case management and planning***

- 8.1 Student understands how professional values, ethics, and standards influence decision-making and planning in public child welfare practice.
- 8.2 Student demonstrates the ability to negotiate and advocate for the development of resources that children and families need to meet personal and administrative goals.
- 8.3 Student understands basic principles of contracting for services in public child welfare.

### ***Supervision***

- 8.4 Student demonstrates a beginning understanding of the roles/responsibilities of a leader/manager to plan and develop systems that enhance staff diversity and alleviate racial and ethnic disproportionality in the child welfare service population.
- 8.5 Student understands how leader/managers use the collaborative process for the purpose of planning, formulating policy, and implementing services.
- 8.6 Student demonstrates knowledge of how organizational structure, climate, and culture affect service effectiveness, worker productivity, and morale.

***Policy, data collection, planning, and participation  
in judicial process***

- 8.7 Student understands how political activities and regulatory, legislative, and judicial processes at local, state, and national levels influence agency policies, procedures, and programs.
- 8.8 Student demonstrates basic knowledge of various federal, state, and local child welfare funding sources and their influence on agency policy, objectives, and service delivery.
- 8.9 Student is able to identify agency and legislative policies and procedures that may negatively affect child well being and the success of permanency and family reunification.
- 8.10 Student understands how to use information, technology, and evidence-based research to evaluate and improve policy, practice, and program effectiveness.





*The California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) is a partnership between the schools of social work, public human service agencies, and other related professional organizations that facilitates the integration of education and practice to assure effective, culturally competent service delivery to the people of California.*

— CalSWEC Mission Statement, 2001

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Created in 1990, CalSWEC is the nation's largest state coalition of social work educators and practitioners.

