Applied Learning Communities (ALC)

2020

ALC Overview

Annual Stakeholder's Report

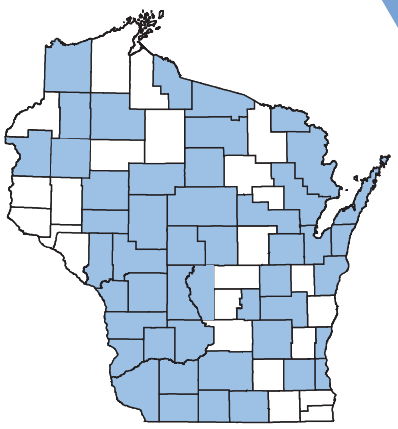
In 2019 the Applied Learning Communities (ALCs) program launched in Wisconsin. The ALCs provide space and structure to self-selected, regional learning cohorts, eager to engage in a facilitated study of a child welfare policy, or area of practice. Facilitated by the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (WCWPDS), the ALCs incorporate adult learning strategies to facilitate dialogue among Child Welfare Professionals in each of Wisconsin's five regions.

WCWPDS departed from the scheduled topic for 2020 and instead designed, developed, and delivered a distance learning course to meet emerging training needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The learning experience specifically focused on the use of virtual contacts in child welfare practice.

Over four hundred participants joined one of the initial, informative sessions offered on May 5th or 7th, 2020. The subsequent series consisted of weekly, 1 ½ hour virtual sessions offered in each of Wisconsin's five regions for three weeks. Of the participants who attended the informational session, 50% enrolled in the series.

87% of participants strongly agreed or agreed the sessions provided practical ideas that can be used on the job

"The materials were able to be used immediately. The scheduling was perfect and not too demanding with already full schedules."

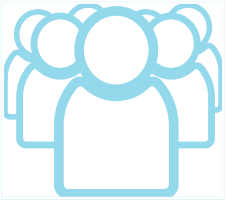


51 agencies and **1 tribe** were represented at the ALCs

= attended

= did not attend

210 total learners



15%	36%	23%	26%
CPS Initial Assesment	CPS On-Going	CPS Supervisor/ Manager (Access, Initial Assessment, On-going)	Other

Of those who attended the Informational Session

50%

enrolled in the series

Times are uncertain. Every day feels like a race to keep up with changing news stories, latest updates, and related anxieties. Child Welfare Professionals now balance concerns for public health and child safety. Naturally they wonder what aspects of their practice remain the same when the world looks vastly different from a year ago. Questions like the ones below represent some of their wonderings.

"How many times do I attempt Initial F2F contact?" It feels like the family is avoiding me."

"What do I do when the family answers 'yes' to COVID-19 screening questions just to avoid contact with CPS?"

"What if a child is in danger and I miss something during the virtual contact?"

"How will our agency demonstrate and ensure reasonable efforts during this time?

The COVID-19 pandemic surfaces these questions and others. They're not new questions; in fact, they're ones we asked before the pandemic. Perhaps, most surprising is how little the actual work has changed. Child Welfare Professionals continue to gather the same information and apply the Wisconsin Safety Model to their decisions. Their skillset remains intact, despite the universal change in circumstances. The workforce needs access to reliable technology with stable connections and training in how to consistently use platforms to help them get the job done. With these tools, they can continue to approach their work with competence and mastery.

At the 2020 Virtual Applied Learning Community (ALC), WCWPDS provided a handbook with relevant resources to aid Child Welfare Professionals as they move aspects of their practice online (Fig. 1). We highlighted the application of handbook materials through live demonstration and facilitated discussion during synchronous virtual sessions, and an asynchronous online discussion forum (Fig 3).

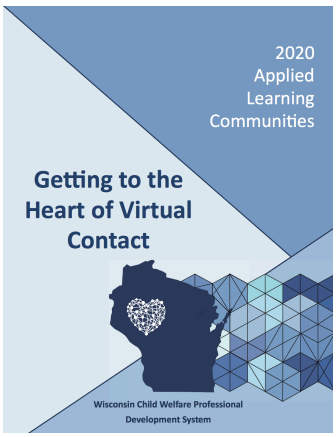


Fig 1.

Have you used any of the virtual practice skills discussed in the 2020 Virtual Applied Learning Communities?

Yes-74%	No-26%

Fig 2.

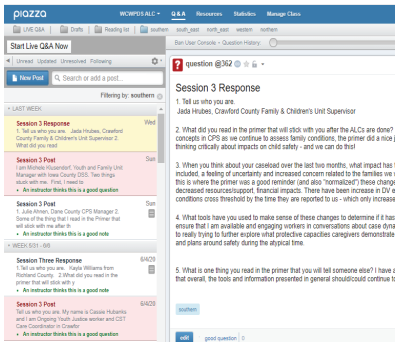


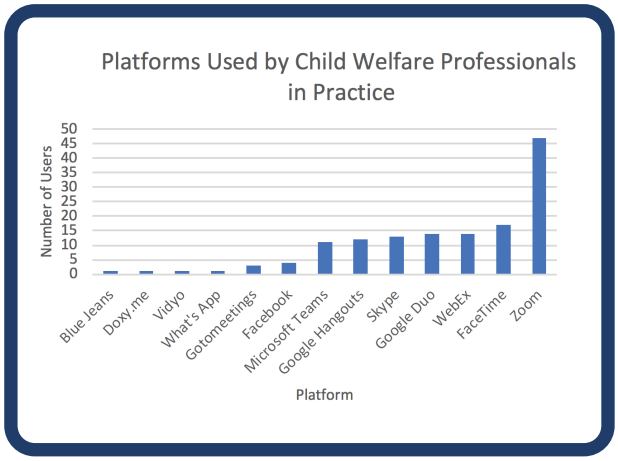
Fig 3.

Child Welfare Professionals, local leaders, and state policymakers alike are experiencing the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic in real-time. For this reason, WCWPDS seeks to report the status of child welfare work in the virtual environment, as told by ALC participants. Contained in this report is a description of the pandemic's impact on the workforce. Through this report, we seek to leverage our learning and contribute to an ongoing dialogue related to COVID-19 and its impact on child welfare practice in Wisconsin.

> "To best serve families we must ensure we are taking care of ourselves to match the demands our jobs place on us. To be able to do this we must be calm, collected, focused, and "regulated". If we can maintain these states, we can better help to regulate families."
>
> -Southern Regional Cohort

2020 Virtual Contacts in Child Welfare

Pros	Cons
Decreases risk to public health and probability of exposure to COVID-19	Increases number of families who avoid subsequent, virtual contact, or say they have COVID-19 like symptoms to avoid in person contact
Increases engagement with some families	Increases worry and fear that workforce is unable to correctly interpret environmental and non-verbal cues
Improves opportunities to team with family and informal/formal providers by reducing barriers related to transportation and availability	Access to stable connectivity and technology is inconsistent, making it a less viable option for some, raising issues of equitability
Increases cross-county collaboration (e.g., courtesy requirements)	Knowledge and utilization of web-conferencing platforms varies across the state
Ensures adherence to face-to-face requirements that require Child Welfare Professionals to travel great distances (i.e., scenarios in which the child is placed in a different county or state)	
Improves workforce satisfaction to have virtual option	
Decreases travel expenses	



Dialogue during the 2020 Virtual ALC highlighted key learnings to pay attention to as the conversation about the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

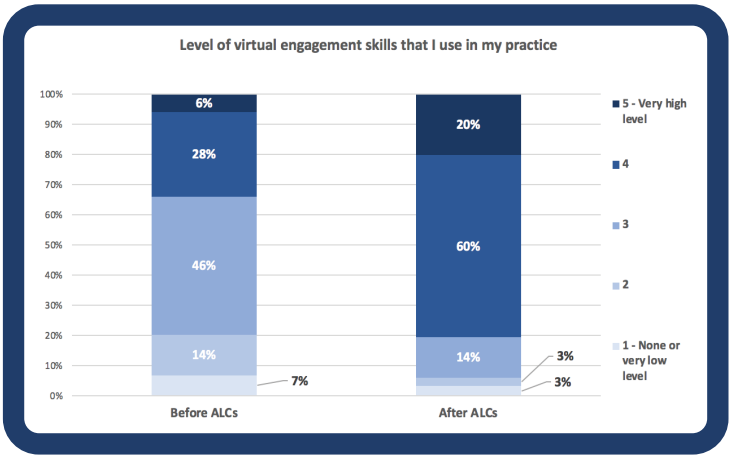
Caseload study- prioritizing the study of Child Welfare Professional's caseloads will aid in recruitment and retention efforts in the future. Being fully staffed is more important than ever. Recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce is further supported by:

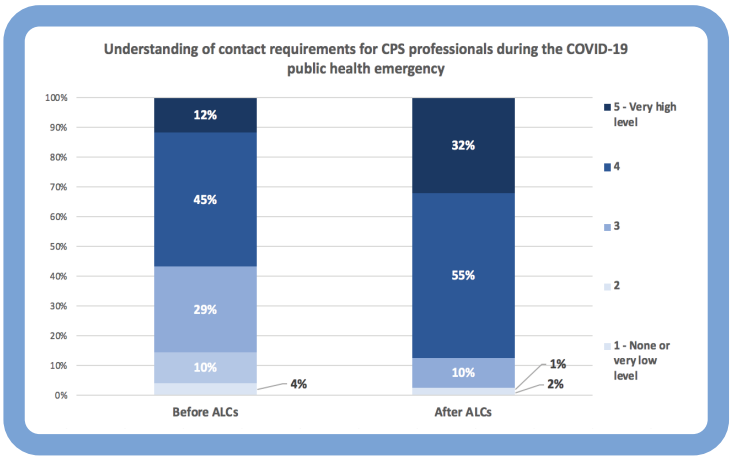
- Advocating for Child Welfare Professionals to be identified and acknowledged as essential, frontline staff. Classifying them as such goes a long way and ensures they have proper and related protections (i.e., PPE, childcare, compensation, etc.).
- Ensuring communication between state and local leaders occurs and includes predictable channels to communicate back to frontline staff assures the workforce understands changes to requirements and takes action
- Offering the flexibility of an adjusted work schedule and ability to use sick and vacation time supports the workforce to meet the demands of their personal lives while balancing the competing demands of work.

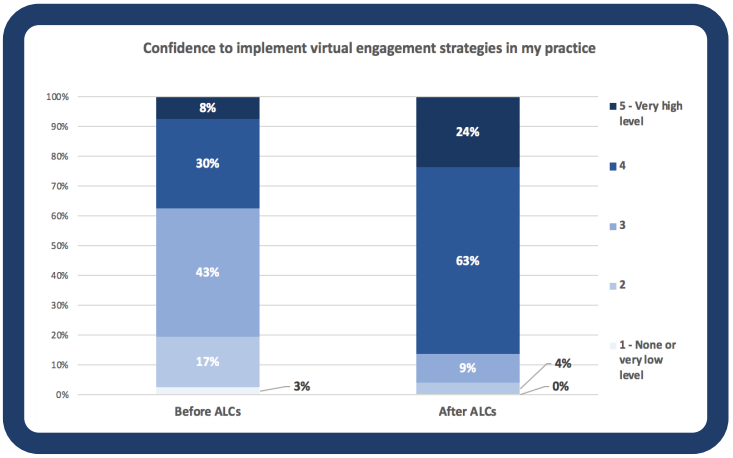
> "There are systemic changes that would support my well-being, and the well-being of my fantastic coworkers. These things need to happen to retain staff now and in the future."
>
> -Southeastern Regional Cohort

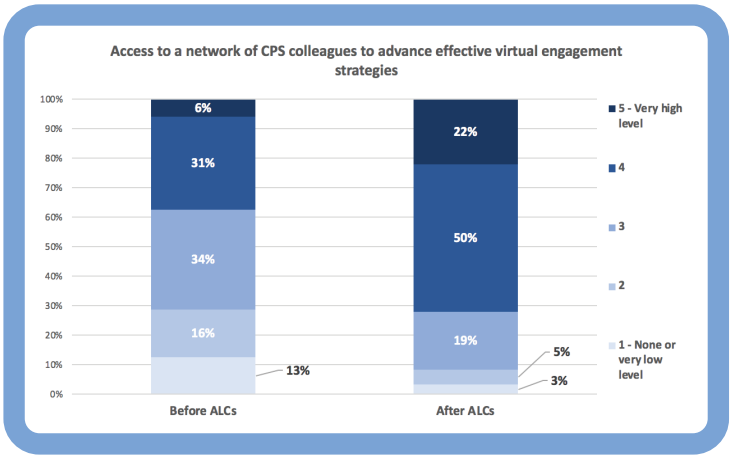
ALC Evaluation Results

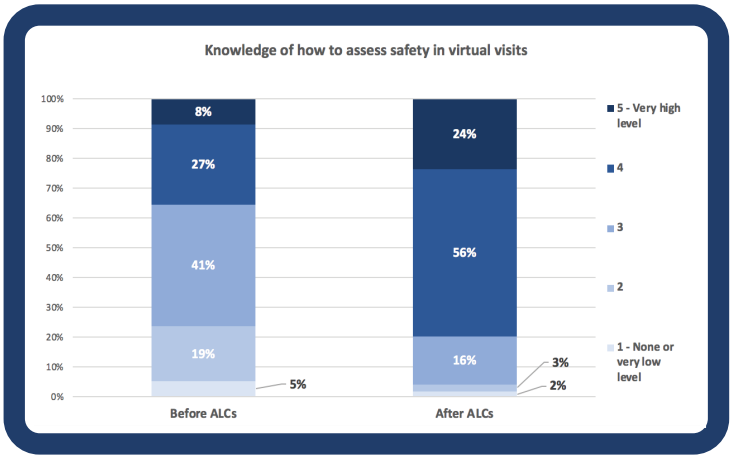
WCWPDS asked ALC participants to rate specific competencies before and after attending the 2020 Virtual ALCs. In total 60%, or 125 participants, completed the survey to evaluate their learning experience.









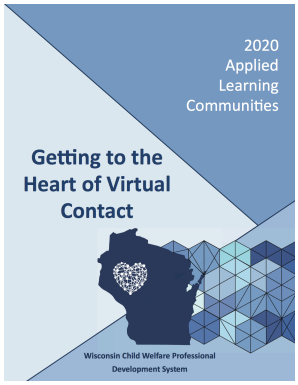


Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System's

ALC Learning Collaborative: Putting the 2020 Virtual Contacts Handbook to Work

Do you wish you could have attended the 2020 Virtual ALCs?

Did you attend the 2020 Virtual ALCs and want time to practice the tools and learn from your peers?



If you answered "yes," read on for more information!

Participants at the 2020 Virtual ALC on "Virtual Contacts," requested additional opportunities to practice the tools in the handbook and learn from their peers. WCWPDS thought it was a great idea! With your input, we designed a learning opportunity to meet the need. **Attending the 2020 Virtual ALCs is NOT a prerequisite for attending the learning collaborative. Anyone interested is welcome.**

WCWPDS will spotlight the most popular tools in the handbook once a month on the first Thursday. During this segment, participants will review the tool, including how and when to use it. There will be an occasional live demonstration and time for Q & A. **Participants will commit to testing out the featured tool and return on the third Thursday to talk with their peers about how it went.**

Interested? **Register by Friday, July 31st on PDS Online for "ALC Learning Collaborative: Putting the 2020 Virtual Contact Handbook to Work." You only need to register once for all 5 sessions.** After registering you will receive the calendar invite and Zoom link to join each session. From there you can attend as your schedule allows. **The cost for all 5 sessions is a one-time, standard training fee of $25 regardless of how many sessions participants attend.** At the time of completion (December 2020), participants are granted CEH's for the sessions attended (up to 12.5 hours), and agencies are billed. Participants who withdraw on or before August 5th, 2020 will not be billed.

To download the ALC Virtual Contact handbook go to:
https://wcwpds.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/147/2020/06/Sessions.pdf

Topic	First Thursday of the Month 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.	Third Thursday of the Month 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.
Engaging Children Virtually	August 6th	August 20th
Engaging Children Virtually	September 3rd	September 17th
Engaging Parents Virtually	October 1st	October 15th
Engaging Safety Service Providers on Protective & Safety Plans Virtually	November 5th	November 19th
Virtual Family Interactions	December 3rd	December 17th

https://wcwpds.wisc.edu/appliedlearningcommunities/

alc@wcwpds.wisc.edu

ALC website: https://wcwpds.wisc.edu/organizational-development-unit/appliedlearningcommunities/