

Regular Meeting 7/13/00

TO: Juvenile Welfare Board Members

FROM: James E. Mills, Executive Director 
Marshall Touchton, Program Consultant, Research and Evaluation 

Requested Action

The Board is requested to allocate up to \$26,760 in FY 1999-2000 for two research projects identified by the University of South Florida Collaborative for Children, Families, and Communities. (1) "Characteristics and Service Patterns of Children in the Florida Child Protection System", and (2) "Pre-Literacy Skills in Spanish-Speaking Children: Development of a Test of Spanish Phonological Awareness".

Options

- 1a. Approve the request for one of the proposals.
- 1b. Approve the request for both proposals.
2. Deny the request for both proposals.
3. Any other action as determined by the Board.

Recommended Action

Approve the request for both proposals. 1) Allocate up to \$11,761 for the one year research project titled "Characteristics and Service Patterns of Children in the Florida Child Protection System". 2) Allocate up to \$14,999 for the one-year research project titled and "Pre-Literacy Skills in Spanish-Speaking Children: Development of a Test of Spanish Phonological Awareness".

Source of JWB Funds

FY 1999-2000 Research & Evaluation Unallocated Funds and FY 2000-2001 Budget.

Fiscal Impact

If only the first request is approved, the FY 1999-2000 Research & Evaluation Unallocated Fund would be reduced by \$2,940 from \$50,000 to \$47,060. The FY 2000-2001 Budget would include \$ 8,821 for this project.

If only the second request is approved, the FY 1999-2000 Research & Evaluation Unallocated Fund would be reduced by \$3,750 from \$50,000 to \$46,250. The FY 2000-2001 Budget would include \$ 11,249 for this project.

If both requests are approved, the FY 1999-2000 Research & Evaluation Unallocated Fund would be reduced by \$6,690 from \$50,000 to \$43,310. The FY 2000-2001 Budget would include \$ 20,700 for the two projects.

Narrative

The Juvenile Welfare Board has been a member of the USF Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities Board of Advisors since it was formed in 1997. This year, JWB assisted in the process of reviewing Requests for Proposals submitted to the Collaborative. During the review process this spring, staff identified two proposals that would have a direct impact on families in Pinellas County. The first proposal, "Characteristics and Service Patterns of Children in the Florida Child Protection System", would provide a detailed analysis of the Child Protection System to be shared with the Juvenile Welfare Board, District 5 of the Florida Department of Children and Families, and Family Continuity Programs, Inc. The second proposal, "Pre-Literacy Skills in Spanish-Speaking Children: Development of a Test of Spanish Phonological Awareness", would serve members of Pinellas County's Hispanic community enrolled in Pinellas County Public Schools. Below are brief summaries of the two projects.

Characteristics and Service Patterns of Children in the Florida Child Protection System

The recent transition to community-based care in the Florida child protection system has produced an increased reliance on the use of existing data to make informed local policy decisions. This research project consists of a collaboration between the Center for Child Welfare Studies (at the Department of Child and Family Studies, University of South Florida), the Policy Services Research Data Center (at the Department of Mental Health Law and Policy), the Child Welfare Institute (Tampa, Florida), and the Florida Department of Children and Families to examine three previously unexplored aspects of Florida's Child Protection System. After integrating statewide administrative data from the Florida Department of Children and Families, the project team will:

- Conduct a multilevel statistical analysis of child, family, and community risk factors for child maltreatment and service use
- Develop a computer simulation model to graphically display the flow of children through the child protection system comparing service patterns before and after passage of the Kayla McKean Child Protection Act
- Conduct a survival analysis of the recurrence of maltreatment and reentry into service for children who have had previous contact with the child protection system

The primary goal of this study is to provide information that will allow for improved decision making with regard to the child protection system in Pinellas County. Given this goal, study results will directly benefit children in Pinellas County by identifying children who are at increased risk of maltreatment and consequent service use and patterns of service use throughout the system. This information will provide a better understanding of the ability of the system to serve children in need, as decisions based on accurate and complete information will result in a more efficient use of system resources. Study findings will be shared with the Juvenile Welfare Board, Florida Department of Children and Families District 5, Family Continuity Programs, Inc. (the local lead agency for community-based care), The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, and The USF Collaborative.

Dissemination of study findings to each of these entities will be in the form of a final written report, which also will be accessible online via the World Wide Web. . The Louis

de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida will act as fiscal agent for the funds.

Pre-Literacy Skills in Spanish-Speaking Children: Development of a Test of Spanish Phonological Awareness- Hispanic students are approximately twice as likely as non-Hispanic white students to read below average for their age, and national research has demonstrated that a majority of Hispanic fourth graders are reading below basic literacy levels. In Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas Counties, 69.2% of students in Limited English Proficiency (LEP) classes speak Spanish. There are several explanations for the difficulties some children have in learning to read and write. One explanation involves children's lack of "phonological awareness"- that is, the ability to think about how words sound, apart from what words mean. Phonological awareness is correlated with the development of reading skills in young children. Phonological awareness allows one to think of and talk about the form and substance of words, and is a crucial step toward learning to read because it helps children sound words out.

The purpose of the proposed grant is to initiate the development of a test of Spanish phonological awareness. The proposal is for the first phase of the project, which entails the development and piloting of a Spanish version of the widely used Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP). The CTOPP measures reading-related phonological skills and reveals children's phonological strengths and weaknesses. Creating a Spanish version of the CTOPP is complex, because one cannot simply translate the test items into Spanish as they would have different phonological characteristics. Items must be devised that take into account the unique features of Spanish sounds and spelling. The Spanish items must also be equivalent to the English items in that they are equally difficult for children, words used are equally familiar to children, and the items test the same characteristics of words. The research team will complete three tasks during the first phase of the grant.

- 1) The team will create a pool of possible Spanish items during the Fall of 2000.
- 2) The team will ask native Spanish-speaking English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas County schools for their input. The team will facilitate focus groups of teachers to eliminate, change, or add test items. This will take place during the Fall of 2000 and Spring of 2001.
- 3) The team will synthesize the input from the teachers and assistants for the next phase of test development following the completion of the proposed project. This synthesis will occur during the Summer of 2001.

By the end of the project year, a pilot test will be devised through the collaborative efforts of language experts at USF and teaching staff in the three county school districts. Longer term aims include further development of the test and its use for screening and research purposes. The three school districts participating in the two phases of test development (Pinellas, Pasco, and Hillsborough) will receive copies of the final instrument free of charge. The research team will provide appropriate training in test administration and interpretation as part of in-service workshops. The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida will act as fiscal agent for the funds.