



A Message From
Commissioner Martin D. Brown



Last week, I attended a meeting of the State Executive Council with senior executives and agency heads from the Virginia Departments of Education, Juvenile Justice, Behavioral Health & Developmental Services and the Office of Comprehensive Services. As we discussed the Children's Services Practice Model, I was heartened to hear each of them express their support and commitment to fully integrate and embed it into their prospective agencies, specifically at the local level.

As many of you are aware, in 2008, public and private stakeholders identified the need for a unifying framework that would help establish the standards of practice across all of Virginia's child-serving agencies.

Since the implementation of the Children's Services System Transformation (CSST) the Practice Model has significantly improved outcomes for children in Virginia.

- Due to the policies implemented during CSST, the foster care caseload has been safely reduced by more than 1,600 children (24%).
- There has been a 7% increase in the number of children that achieve permanency (adoption, relative custody transfer, and reunification).
- The number of children in group care setting – the most expensive placement setting with low chances of permanency – has been reduced by 1,019 children (47% reduction).
- All of this has been accomplished while still maintaining recurrence of abuse and neglect and re-entry rates significantly below the national average

Let's be honest. Our efforts to embed the Practice Model across Virginia's child serving agencies have met with mixed results: from enthusiastic endorsement by the original 13 Council on Reform communities and others, to lack of clarity about it, to varying levels of engagement and adoption overall. In determining its effectiveness, we must continue to consider:

How are Juvenile Court Judges and Court Services Units making juvenile commitment decisions based on the Children's Services Practice Model? How are CSB's making care and placement decisions based on the Model? How are local schools incorporating the principles of family engagement in the Individual Education Planning (IEP) process?

The unanimous support of the Council underscores the value of the Model as principled *and* practical guidance. Virginia's Practice Model provides a framework of practice that helps guide the daily interactions of employees, families, stakeholders, and community members across all child-serving

agencies. That's exactly what we're aiming for with this year's agency goal to complete the expansion of Children's Services Transformation.

For instance, when a social worker from Chesapeake is grappling with a tough case, the Practice Model is there to provide the same consistent guidance as it does for her counterpart in Washington County. A Model that really describes our beliefs about the role of individuals, social services and the community in caring for children will continue to improve our service delivery, as well as long-term outcomes for families.

I'll leave you with this from the [Children's Services Practice Model](#): *We believe that how we do our work is as important as the work we do.*

Thanks for your attention. Have a terrific and productive week!

Martin D. Brown

Commissioner