This division can accept one or two students who are already a part of the NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative or who deeply care about the welfare of children in NC. The Division of Child Welfare Services covers a broad range of programs: prevention of child abuse and neglect, dealing with domestic violence, child protection, foster care and adoption, building the capacity of parents and families, and opportunities for youth aging out of the foster care system. The division handles research, policy design and implementation, grant-making to community-based organizations, program monitoring, and it provides technical assistance to county DSS agencies and others. They deal with placement of children across the nation and internationally, as well as the welfare of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. They relate to county child welfare systems in a variety of ways—technical assistance, policy enforcement and revision, and collaborations with nonprofit and other child-related agencies. A prime effort at this time is assessing what is most effective to increase child welfare, and reforming systems to bring about a number of specific beneficial outcomes for children and families.

Division areas and potential tasks for an MSW student:

Policy, with Patrick

This area writes the child welfare policies for the counties. Sometimes these are federal mandates that are sent to counties as is. Some have a “problem/solution focus.” County child welfare offices may find some issues with mandates and policies, and the state division works with them to modify the policy so it is more workable. This group engages with supervisors and staff from county child welfare branches to elicit input. There are monthly meetings with a child welfare committee of the DSS Directors’ Association. A focus is how to improve practice. A student would take part in this policy work and also might engage with a new national Youth in Transition project. This is a database project on youth aging out of foster care, and their welfare. Someone familiar with social networking technology would enjoy this component.

Prevention (Community-Based Programs), with Kristin O’Connor
This area of the division channels federal funds into local community-based organizations that work to prevent child and neglect through a variety of approaches. This is a grant process, in which the division awards, supervises, monitors, and evaluates the granted programs. They fund core services such as 66 domestic violence shelters in NC. They have a contract with the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence (research on needs, stakeholders meetings). They collaborate with many other groups, such as the Duke Center for Child and Family Health, and the NC Child Fatality Task Force. A new emphasis is to help all child-welfare related organizations be more “trauma informed,” to be more aware of and equipped to deal with the real and persistent effects of neglect and abuse on children (there is a pilot program in Wilson County). They also are working on being more family-inclusive in the policy and programming work of child welfare. A large part of their time is spent on the contract agreements with grantees. A student would learn about all these areas of prevention and grant management.

**Local Support, with Jeff Olson**

This area deals with division assistance to local child welfare agencies to improve their system of care. They work closely with county DSS child welfare staff to examine: “Is what you are doing actually working?” Jeff’s section is partnering with the National Resource Center to develop and pilot a technical assistance (TA) model to help counties identify what they think they need to improve outcomes for children and families. This is an evolving process that involves close interaction between teams of state and county Co-Leads, who identify stakeholders, elicit their opinions and ideas, gather and evaluate data, and then modify programs and policy accordingly. A student would work on technical assistance with local partners from eight pilot counties. They will develop Achievement Plans: *Are the county people asking the right TA questions? What do they really need and how can that happen?* A student interested in gathering data and making sense of both paper data and personal feedback, for program improvement, would enjoy this work.

**Interstate Compact on Placement, with Carla McNeill**

This section deals with foster care, adoption, juvenile detention, and other placements across state and international lines. They handle about 250 new referrals/month, and engage with DSS and private and public adoption agencies and facilities. They review home studies from out of state. They do not do home studies themselves; county agencies do that. A large piece of their work is contracted to the Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. They make residential placements with psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTF) out of state. Four consultants handle cases that take from 6 months to 2 years on average. A student would work with the consultants on these cases, and learn the whole system of interstate/international child protection and care. As with other branches of this division, they are continually reviewing and amending policies, to improve programming for families and children.

Also…the federal government requires that each state develop three Citizen Review Panels, to provide oversight of governmental child welfare systems. These have 51% citizen and 49% professional participation. A student may be part of this process as well.

---

**Assets of this placement for a macro student:**

You would get a broad overview of the entire state child welfare system, and interact with a broad range of collaborating agencies.

You would learn about grant-making, program design and evaluation, best practices, interagency collaboration, data management, policy design and revision, legislative impact on policy (you could attend legislative committee meetings, etc.), and more.

The staff are part of a large bureaucracy but are warm and dedicated professionals, from whom one could learn a lot.