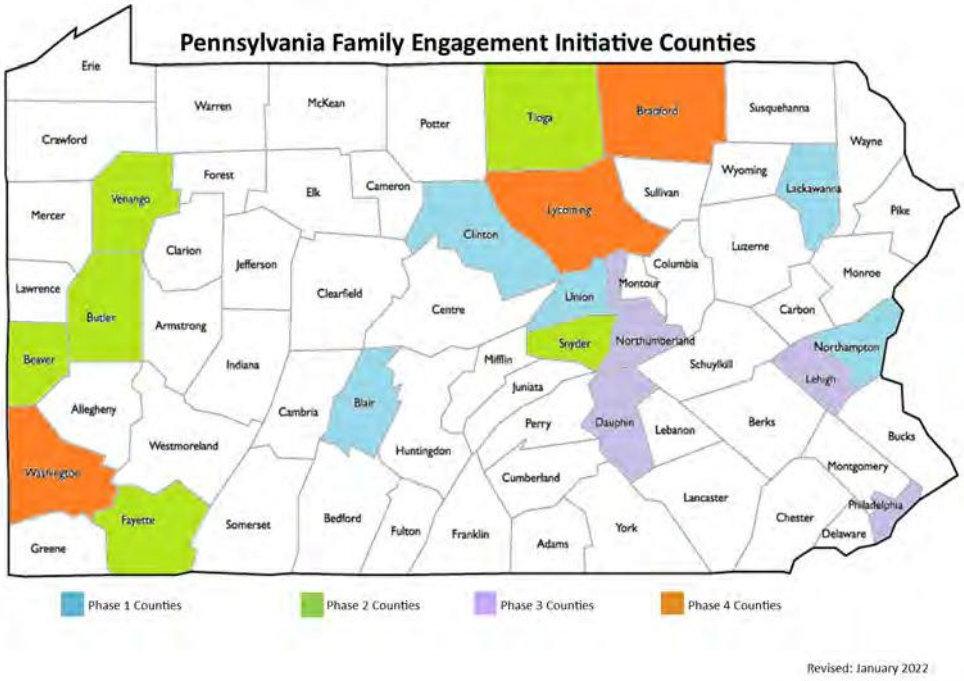
OCFC Expands Family Engagement Initiative; Develops New Judicial Resources



Continuing its efforts to enhance meaningful family involvement in Pennsylvania's child dependency system, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) recently developed and released new online resources for attorneys and judges navigating the system.

Family Engagement Initiative – Phase 4

Established by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable in 2017, Pennsylvania's Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) is designed to assist select counties in furthering collaborative efforts between the judiciary and child welfare agency.

Earlier this year, three more counties joined the expanding initiative – Bradford, Lycoming and Washington – bringing the current total number of participating counties to 18.

The long-term goal of the initiative is to increase the likelihood that children will safely remain in their own home or will be placed with family if out-of-home placement is necessary.

All participating FEI counties must have demonstrated strong court/child welfare agency collaboration and a desire to enhance family engagement strategies to produce the best possible outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system.

Online Training for Attorneys

Core One: An Attorney's Introduction to Pennsylvania's Dependency System

OCFC developed this online training session for attorneys practicing in dependency court—guardians ad litem, child counsel, parent attorneys and solicitors.

The session provides information that can help attorneys understand common issues and better advocate for clients. Issues like trauma, safety, visitation, child development, family finding and family group decision making are not topics taught in law school, but attorneys need to understand when participating in dependency court.

Benchbook Resource Companion

In February, the second edition of the Pennsylvania Benchbook Resource Companion was released.

The new resource companion contains an updated collection of social science resources and three new topic sections – Autism, Implicit Bias and Reasonable Efforts.

Revised by the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook Committee, a group of seasoned trial court judges overseeing dependency proceedings, the resource companion is intended to provide judges with a compilation of social science resources, pertinent to their work in dependency court, that can be easily accessed.

While this resource was created by judges for judges, all of those involved in Pennsylvania's child dependency system are encouraged to access and utilize this resource. ▲