



**CENTERS OF
EXCELLENCE**
A Judicial Branch Initiative

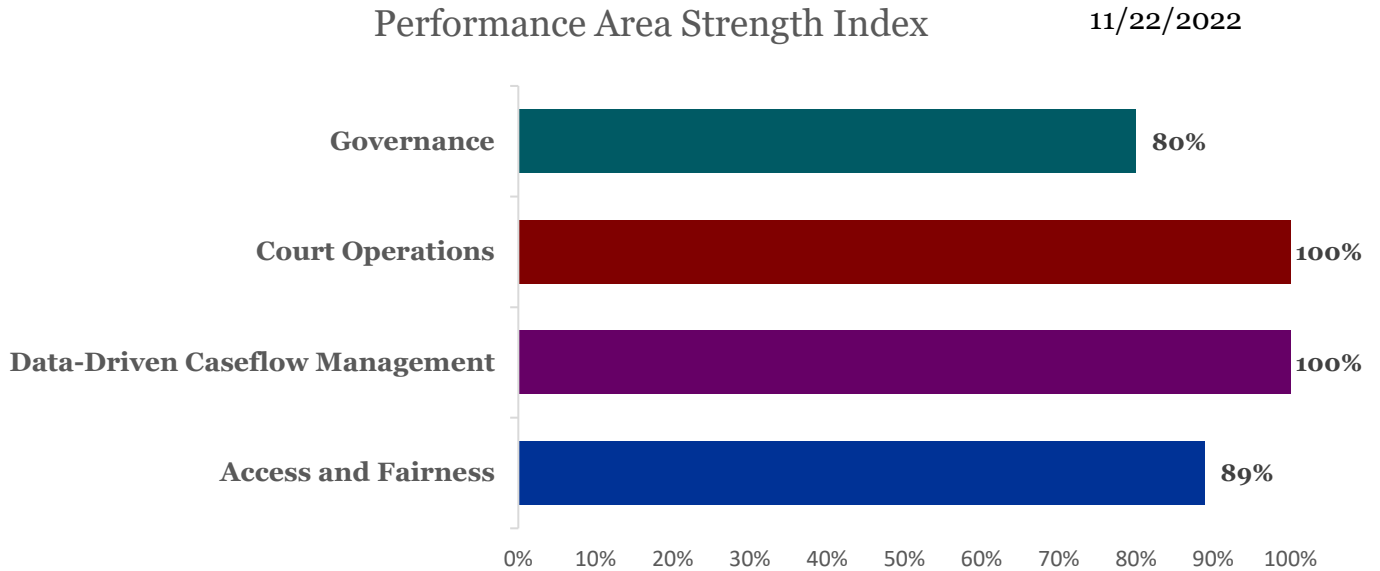
**Centers of Excellence Nomination Report on Rockwall County
Justice of the Peace Precinct 3, Rockwall, Texas**

Presiding Judge: Honorable Mark Russo
June 30th, 2023

Introduction to Rockwall County Justice of the Peace Precinct 3

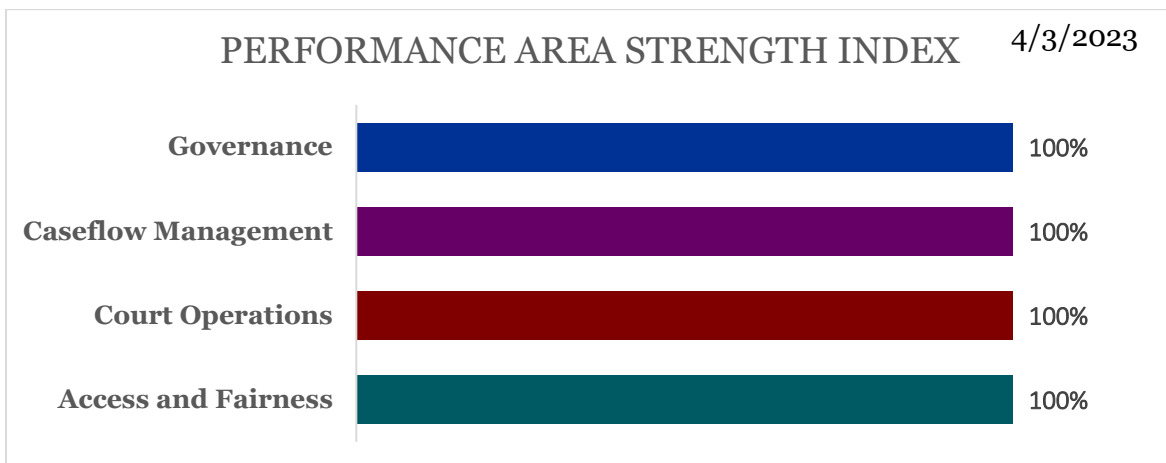
Justice of the Peace Precinct 3, Rockwall County, is one of four justices of the peace for Rockwall, serving approximately 116,000 residents with jurisdiction on Class C misdemeanors, traffic violations, small civil claims, landlord/renter conflicts, truancy, magistrate duties, and inquests.

Baseline Performance Measures:



Rockwall JP3 was a strong performer across all **Performance Areas**. In preparation for its involvement in the program, the court began a significant review of court processes and procedures and was finalizing improvements at the time of review. In **Governance**, the court was reviewing county rules regarding Judicial Administration, working with the Sheriff’s Office in ongoing procedural improvements related to magistration and bail duties. In **Access and Fairness**, the court was working in partnership with Waller County Justice of the Peace 2, to formalize a language access plan suitable for use by Justices of the Peace.

Post Centers of Excellence Performance Measures:

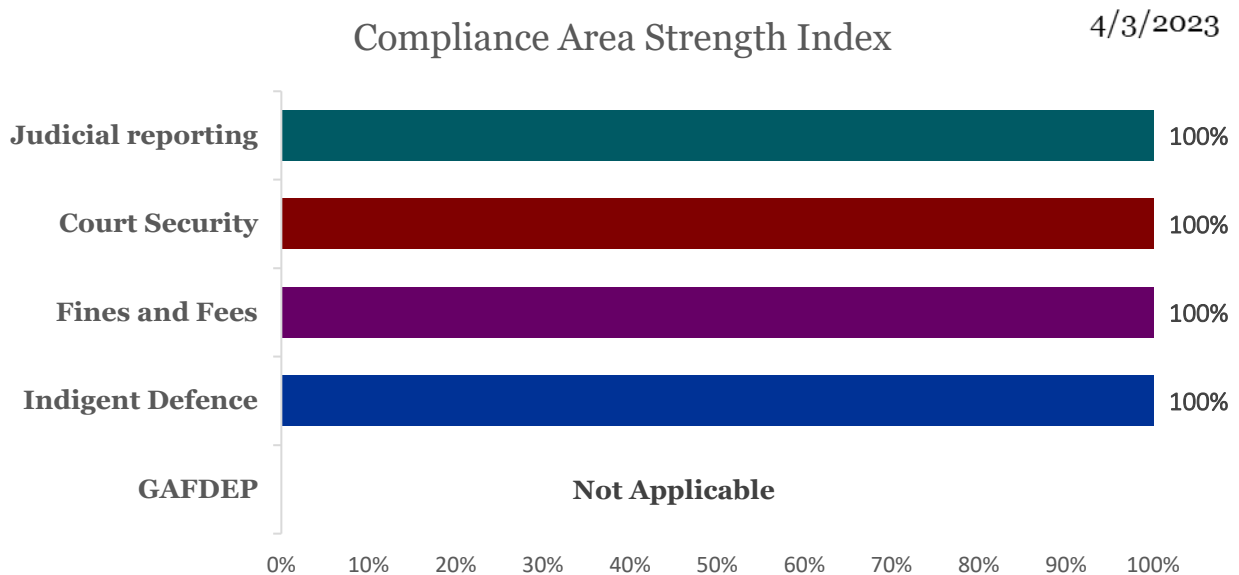


Judge Mark Russo, and by extension, Justice of the Peace 3, is dedicated to improving access to the courts and justice system for his court users. Judge Russo engaged the Rockwall County Commissioner’s and county IT to add the Google Translate function to his court’s website page in **2013**, in the hopes of expanding user access to the site. As a Justice of the Peace, he understands that ease of access with regards to paying fines and fees and engaging the court is paramount to the timely resolution of civil and criminal matters. As he worked with the program, he was genuinely focused on improving access to impartial and fair justice to both his court users and the detainees he magistrates.

To that end, he maintains and strengthens his connections and working relationships with the County Sheriff and jail staff, the Rockwall County Commissioners, the Rockwall District and County Courts, the Rockwall District Attorney, and the local school district to ensure that cases that begin in his court are resolved in a fair and just manner. As a Justice of the Peace, Judge Russo has a full picture of the various systems and processes that move court cases through the criminal and civil justice systems and ensures that his office works with other county government offices and his court users to access the resources available to them to successfully resolve cases—whether that be by encouraging them to access the law library onsite, pointing them in the direction of legal services, or helping them successfully navigate the courthouse through adequate and appropriate signage.

Compliance Areas

Justice of the Peace 3 maintained strong compliance with each required reporting area. Compared to County Courts at Law and District Courts with dual civil and criminal jurisdictions, Justices of the Peace have a narrower set of standards with regards to mandated reporting. However, they have a traditionally higher caseload overall as they are the court of first recourse for traffic violations and class C misdemeanors and simple civil matters in their respective counties. As such, they hold primary responsibility for the collections of fines and fees issued from their court. Judge Russo ensures that his cases, payment plans, and fines are collected, paid, and reported accurately. Moreover, he ensures that his court users avail themselves of every opportunity to resolve their obligations to the court including conducting ability to pay hearings on the spot when requested.



Summary of Findings

Judge Russo's approach to running the Rockwall County Justice of the Peace Precinct 3 is predicated upon the basis of individualized justice. He is primarily concerned, first and foremost, in ensuring that each court user and detainee is heard on their issues fairly, openly, and without prejudice; a perspective he shares with all other recognized Centers of Excellence.

From that stance, Judge Russo has strived to improve access to his court, ensure the rights of his court users are upheld, and integrated Justice of the Peace 3 into both the Rockwall County Government as well as part of the larger community. He is a model for public service, extending out his hours to volunteer and support the community he resides in. He is resolute in his ongoing commitment to excellence in judicial administration.