



**CENTERS OF
EXCELLENCE**
A Judicial Branch Initiative

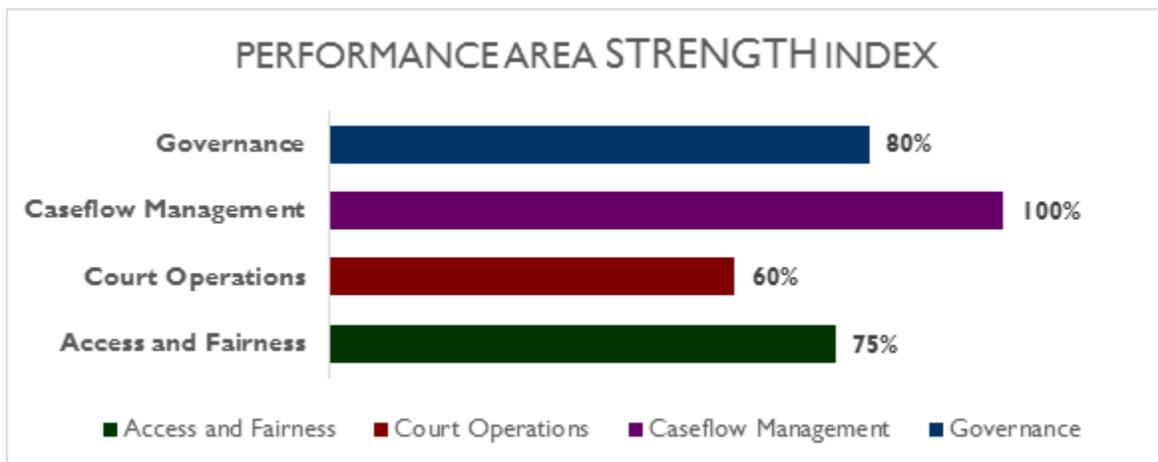
Centers of Excellence Nomination Report on Webb County Court-at-Law II, Laredo, Texas

Presiding Judge: Honorable Victor Villarreal
Court Administrator: Cesia Rodriguez
November 15, 2019

Introduction to the Webb County Court-at-Law II

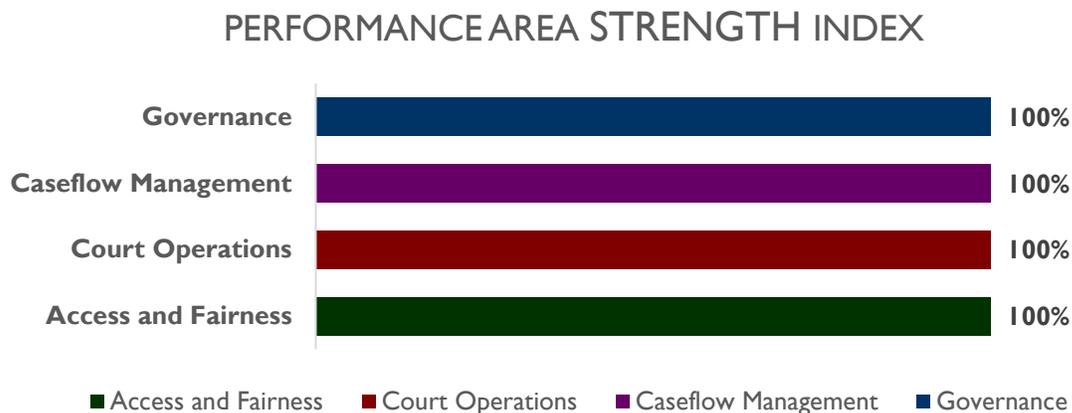
County Court-at-Law II (CCL II) is one of two county courts-at-law in Webb County and is presided over by Judge Victor Villarreal. Judge Villarreal was appointed to take over CCL II in 2017 by the Webb County Commissioner’s Court and won election to the bench in 2018. In that time, Judge Villarreal has introduced a civic education mock trial program in his court, achieved 100% compliance with Guardianships cases, and participated fully in the Centers of Excellence Program.

Baseline Performance Measures:



Webb County Court-at-Law II scored perfect marks in **Caseflow Management** and near perfect marks in **Governance**, only lacking in a written communications plan. CCL II scored lowest in **Court Operations** for not utilizing case data and reports to inform policies, conducting regular audits of cases, and establishing written data entry rules. CCL II showed room for improvement in **Access and Fairness** categories where a simple complaint process and a court user survey were not yet in place.

Post Centers of Excellence Performance Measures:



After participating in the Centers of Excellence program, Webb County made substantial improvements in the **Court Operations** area. CCL II regularly uses case management data to inform reports, audit processes, and seek efficiencies and improvements to court operations. In **Access and Fairness**, the court added a complaint and comments section to their website and has begun a survey process, asking court customers questions in English and Spanish and reviewing the responses on a regular basis. In **Governance**, the Court has implemented simple a communications plan, which allows the court to strategize and promote its work.

Compliance Areas



From a compliance perspective, after participating in the program, County Court-at-Law II is in full compliance with the standards set by the State of Texas. Initially there were concerns regarding **Court Collections**, and Webb County's involvement in the Collection Improvement Program. To rectify this, the court investigated internal procedures and met with a former regional collection specialist to discuss proper collection procedures. They consistently engaged with county stakeholders to resolve ongoing collection issues. In OCA's estimation, the court has ensured it is complying with all parts of its responsibilities regarding court collections. Furthermore, CCL II is the first court in the state to reach 100% compliance with the **Guardianship** program, demonstrating both Judge Villarreal's and his staff's, commitment to excellence in all aspects of their daily work.

Summary of Findings

County Court-at-Law II, led by Judge Villarreal, is an exemplary court dedicated to finding unique and innovative solutions to court administration. Along with his energetic and dedicated staff, he has revamped court procedures to effectively clear his backlog and decrease case disposition times dramatically, while ensuring that defendants, victims, claimants, and court visitors are fairly heard on their matters. They have conducted in depth reviews of court processes, case level data, and local rules to revamp and organize CCL II into an efficient and truly admirable county court which represents Webb County, and the state as a model for excellence in court administration.

Judge Villarreal has shown quick aptitude and dedication to public service in his time with CCL II. In his staff, he has found other committed individuals willing to put in the time and energy required to serve Laredo's diverse community. His court was not budgeted a dedicated court interpreter yet continues to serve the majority Spanish speaking population through his Court Administrator, Cesia Rodriguez, and prompt scheduling of part time interpreters when she is not available. Which is only made possible by efficient and consistent calendaring processes and docket management.

Their dedication extends beyond the courtroom and into the classroom through the *Court in Classroom* program which brings in local students to engage directly with the court. This program allows students of all ages to see firsthand the important role courts play in the State of Texas and gives them hands on experiences outside of standard curriculum.

The Office of Court Administration believes that the County Court-at-Law II in Webb County has satisfied all the standards required to be considered a Judicial Center of Excellence in the State of Texas effective November 15th, 2019.