

Cal-OAR
California Outcomes and Accountability Review
CalWORKS System Improvement Plan
Using Data to Improve CalWORKS Welfare to Work Outcomes



Background:

The CalWORKs Welfare to Work (CW WTW) Program provides support to families receiving cash assistance so they can attain self-sufficiency through job and skills training, subsidized employment and other services and supports to provide stabilization to the family. Nevada County partners with several local agencies to provide mental health and substance use support, parenting classes, domestic abuse counseling, housing supports, educational support, childcare and more. The CW WTW Program requires families to participate in WTW activities unless there is an exemption. If a customer does not participate without an approved exemption the case will be sanctioned and cash aid will be reduced, per regulation. An exemption may be approved for several reasons. Some examples are due to the need to care for someone at home or if pregnant and a doctor determines they may not participate, or if they are physically or mentally unable to participate. Currently Nevada County has 500 CW cases (8% Eastern, 92% Western) and 250 WTW cases (6% Eastern, 94% Western). Of those cases there are 175 active participants, 69 sanctioned, and 18 good cause.

California Outcomes and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR), established by the CA Welfare and Institutions Code 11523, is a new data-driven program that facilitates continuous improvement of county CW WTW programs by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating outcomes and best practices. Cal-OAR consists of three core components: performance indicators, a county CalWORKs self-assessment (Cal-CSA), and a CalWORKs system improvement plan (Cal-SIP) that must be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

The Cal-OAR continuous quality improvement takes place over five-year cycles. The first Cal-OAR cycle commenced in 2021 and Nevada County began to receive data from the State to review and verify in fall of 2021. This data fed into our self-assessment, which was submitted to the State and approved in September of 2023. Our comprehensive assessment included information on county demographics, our specific agency characteristics such as infrastructure,

partnerships, and resources. It also included stakeholder feedback, and a description of customer engagement and services offered by the county.

Our Cal-SIP Improvement plan serves as a guide to what goal we want to achieve throughout this cycle. While the goal we have selected will remain in place, our strategies may be revised during the progress report phase of our work if we find that pivoting will yield better results. Our improvement plan considers insights that we gained from peers during a required peer review. We partnered with Tehama County and spent a day together sharing best practices and brainstorming strategies to improve customer outcomes. Our first progress report will be due in 2025 and will include the status of strategies detailed in the Cal-SIP, successes, and barriers in reaching performance goals as well as any necessary adjustments to the strategies outlined in the Cal-SIP.

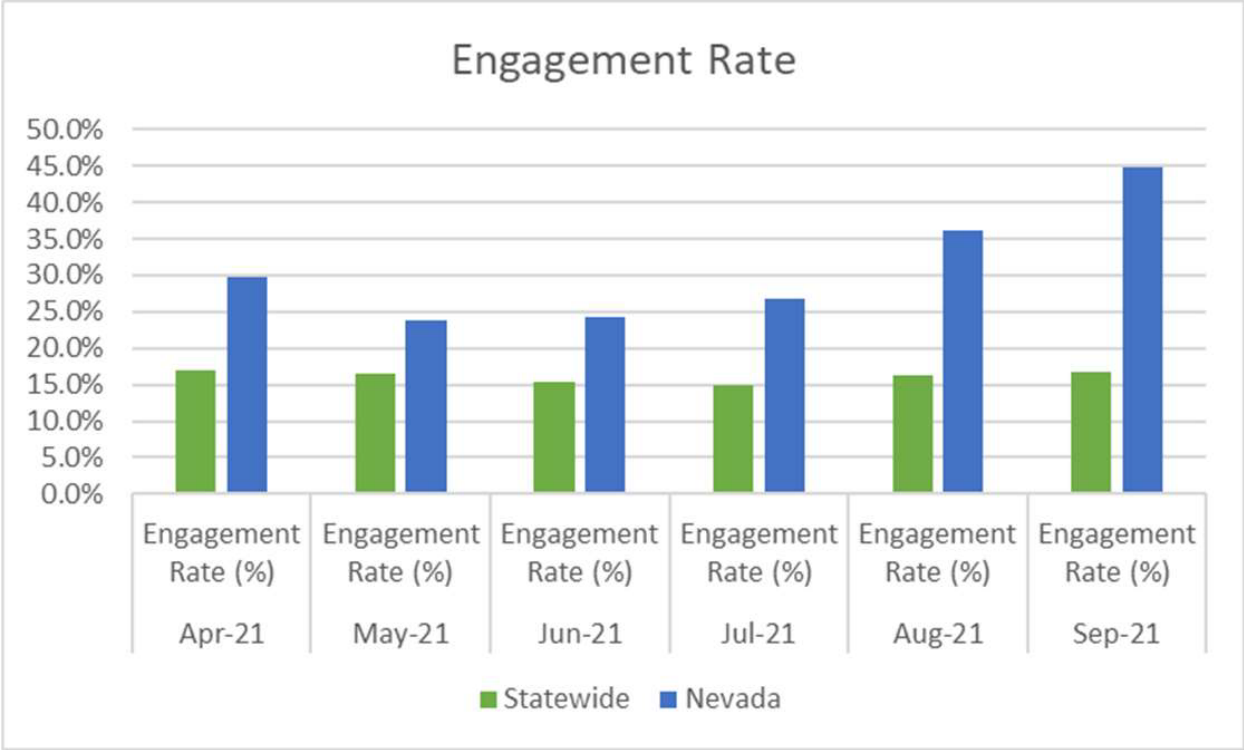
Data Analysis:

The declaration of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) in March 2020 had a dramatic impact on the CalWORKs program. The PHE shutdown led to business closures, employee layoffs and an increase in applications for assistance. Job Centers were intermittently closed, some lobbies were closed and online or self-help measures were emphasized, and WTW Blanket Good Cause was authorized and encouraged by The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) beginning in April 2020. Good cause means that the customer does not have to participate in otherwise mandatory activities, and thus avoid a decrease in their cash assistance. Good cause and exemptions for customers who were experiencing health and economic impacts from COVID-19 were authorized. COVID-19 related Good Cause ended in May of 2023.

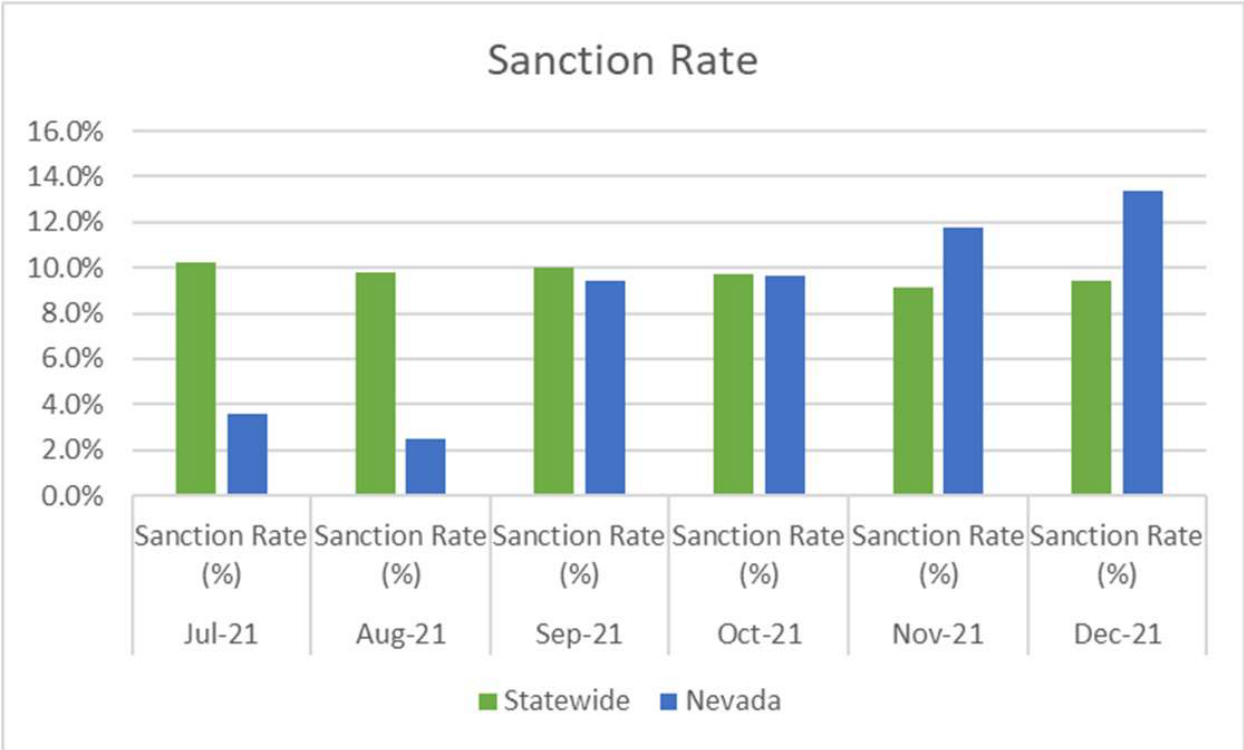
Nevada County received data on specific performance measures, and the charts below demonstrate how we compare to the Statewide average.

The performance measures are:

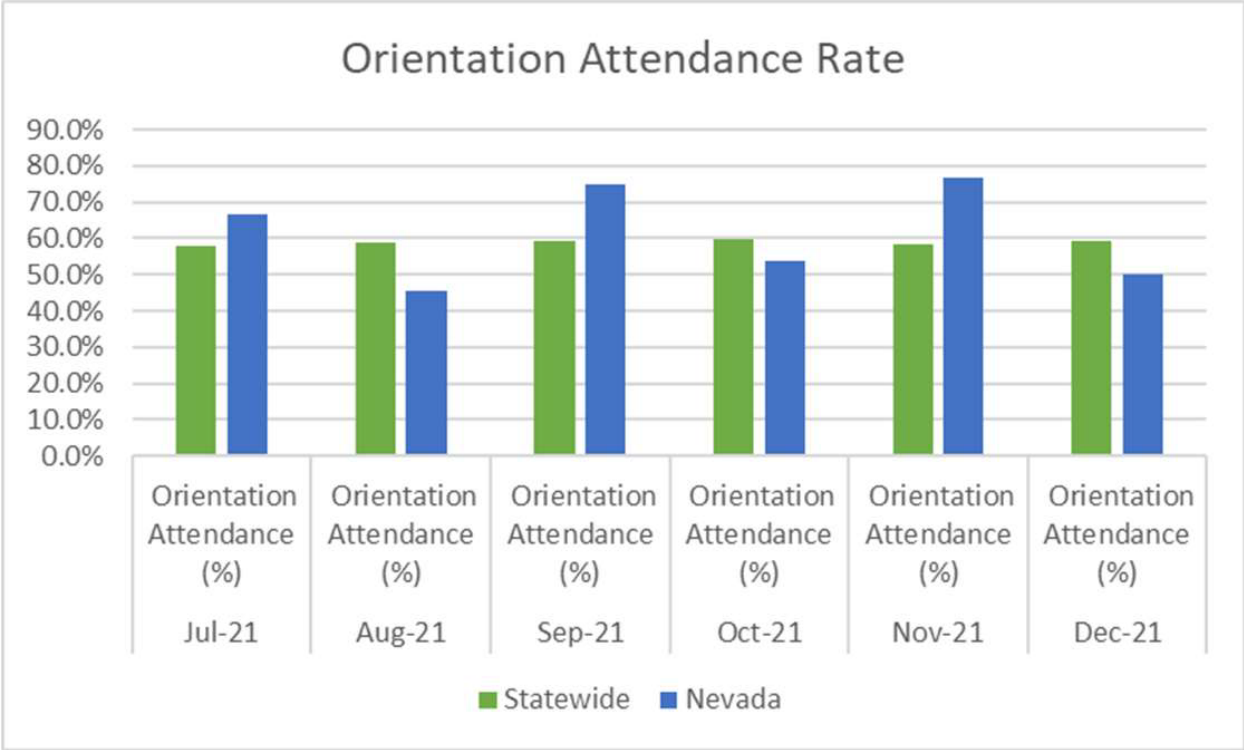
- Engagement Rate
- Sanction Rate
- Orientation Attendance
- OCAT Completion Timeliness
- First Activity Attendance Rate
- Sanction Resolution Rate



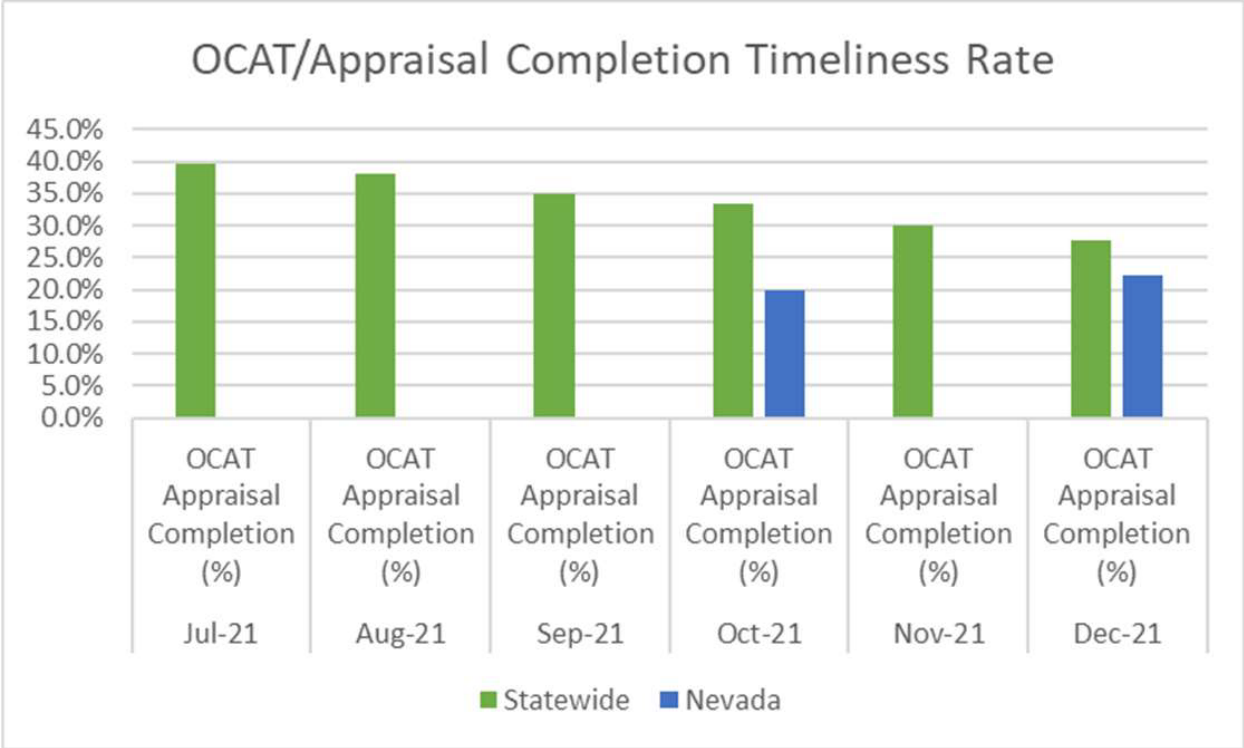
This chart shows that Nevada County performed above the Statewide average for engagement. Engagement means attendance hours which is an indicator of program participation. Several strengths have been instrumental in enhancing our performance, including our staff's highly communicative partnership with Connecting Point, who administers the customer assessment. During this time, we were in the middle of the PHE and so we pivoted to meet the needs of our customers by completing the orientation process over the phone and creating an online orientation.



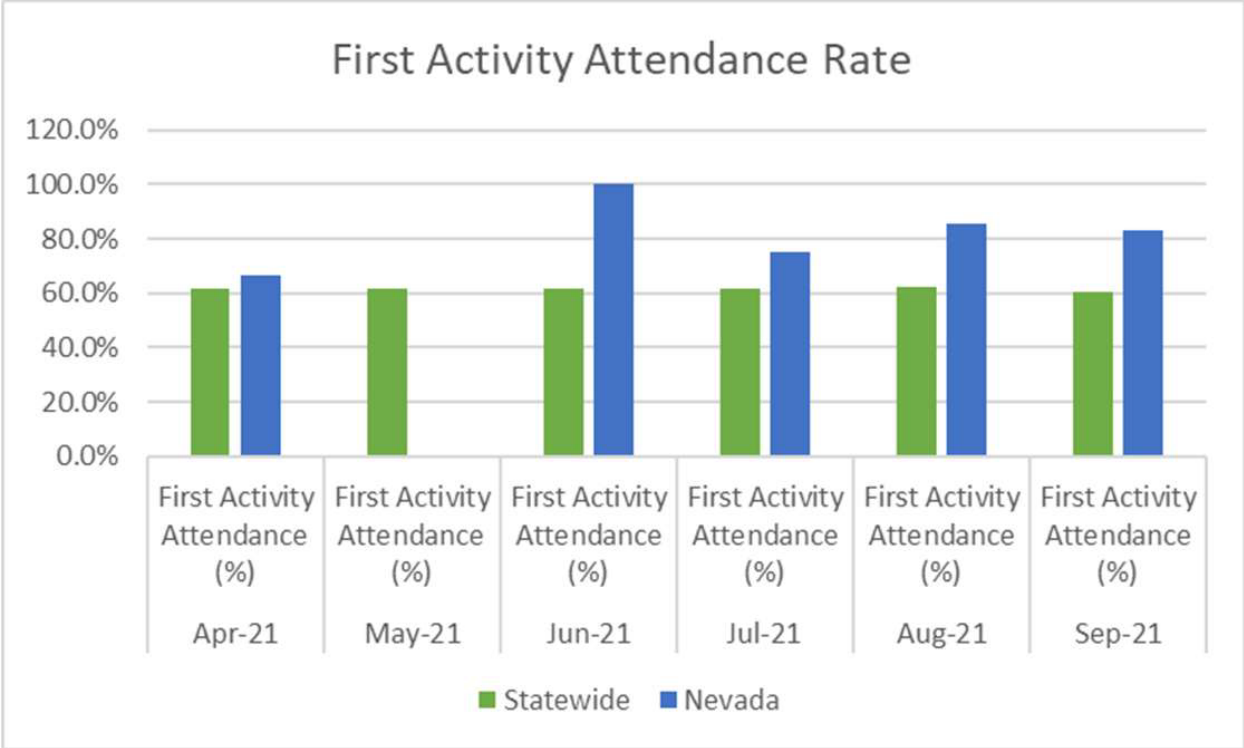
This chart shows that Nevada County’s sanction rate increased from August of 2021 through December, and we were about on trend with the rest of the State. Sanction rate means the customer’s aid was reduced because participation requirements were not met. When Nevada County sanctioned participants again due to the end of COVID-19 Good Cause, we began re-engaging participants and sanctioning those who did not re-engage. The engagement rate began to increase when we implemented re-engagement conversations. Since this time Nevada has continued to be higher than the State average. We believe this can be attributed to several factors and barriers unique to smaller counties, such as transportation barriers and lack of childcare. Mental health services were a barrier to participation, and we contracted with Victor in April of 2023 to meet that need. We also see that single parent customers with a child under 24 months and younger are a larger portion of the sanctioned rate.



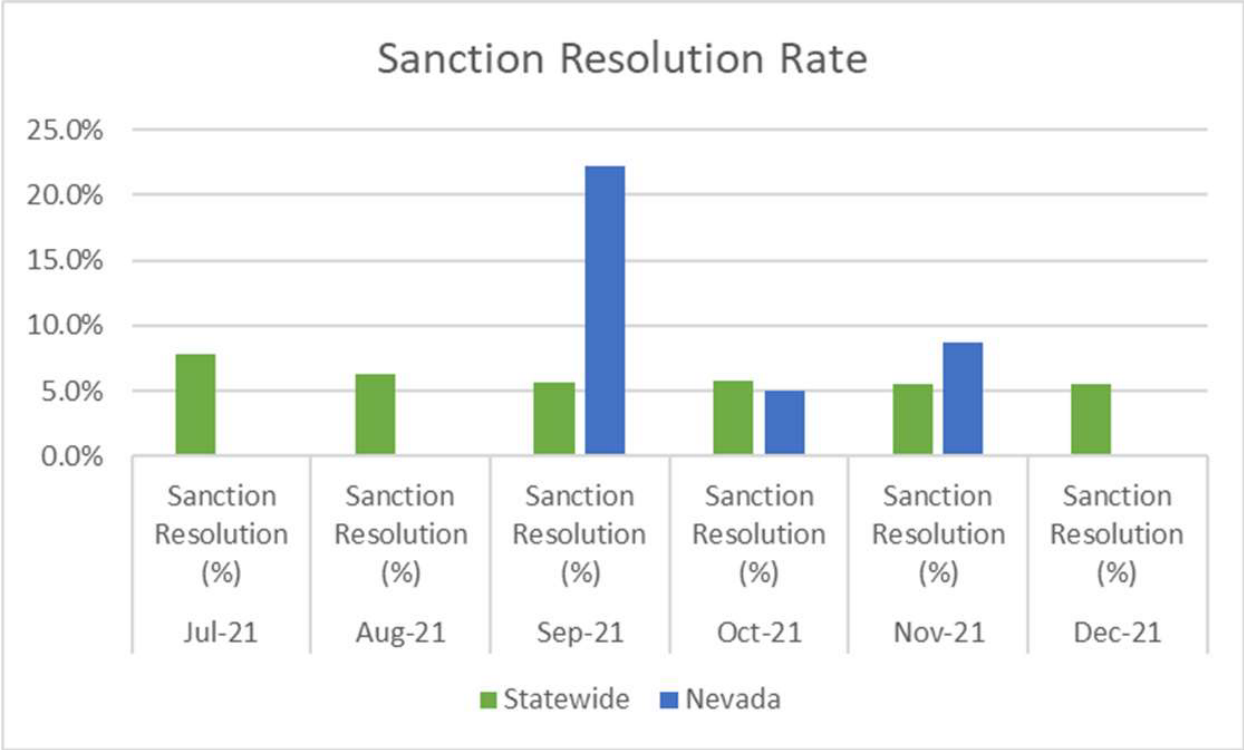
This chart shows that Nevada County’s orientation attendance fluctuates greatly from month to month due to our smaller caseload compared to the Statewide average. This rate is measured by how many customers are scheduled for and then complete the required orientation. Again, during this time we provided orientation by phone and online to meet the needs of our customers during the PHE.



This chart shows our OCAT Timeliness Rate has a very small denominator. The completion of OCAT is mandatory for customers as it serves as an assessment tool to evaluate preparedness for employment. There are some months in this date range where Nevada County did not have any participants complete an OCAT; this is due to PHE exemptions that did not require our customers to participate. October of 2021 shows a low completion rate because this was the beginning of the re-engagement period. This rate is measured by customers who were granted aid and completed the required assessment and appraisal within 30 days.



This chart shows that Nevada County was significantly higher than the Statewide average for attendance in a first activity. This rate is measured by customers who were scheduled to complete their first activity and those who participated. The lack of data in May reflects that we didn't have any customers scheduled. It is vital to engage and commence services as soon as practically possible for best outcomes. Our staff was diligent in ensuring a high attendance rate for the first activity by proactively calling and providing options for virtual and online activities, again because of the PHE. We offered virtual engagement activities and employment services classes, and there were numerous open subsidized positions available for customers to pursue.



In WTW, sanctions are financial penalties imposed on customers who don't meet certain requirements, such as job search or participating in training programs. This chart shows Nevada County did not resolve sanctions for a few months and was at or above statewide average for a few months. This measure was chosen to be our focus due to the importance of re-engaging customers in the WTW Program. Improving the sanction resolution rate will improve self-sufficiency outcomes with families.

Nevada County's Self-Improvement Plan Overview: Sanction Resolution Rate

Through our data analysis and self-assessment process, we identified that we could improve our Sanction Resolution Rate by setting intentional goals and strategies. We chose this area to focus on because it aligns with our value of supporting families in their goals, overcoming barriers and gaining self-sufficiency.

Our goal is to increase the resolution rate in the next 24 months with targeted strategies. We aim to increase our resolution rate by at least 5% over the next 2 years of this cycle. We intend to review our active and sanction caseloads quarterly and assign a worker to contact those customers in a sanction status to explain the benefits of the program and begin the re-engagement process. We will discuss our incentive policy with customers to continue to incentivize participation and we will use a whole person approach offering customers other services and supports as necessary. We will also review our policy to determine if there are any additional incentives we can offer that may be useful in curing sanctions.

We will offer incentives to parents for attending Orientation, completing the OCAT (Assessment Tool), and attending assessment sessions. Once assigned to these activities, customers are eligible for additional incentives upon participation in Job Readiness activities. Most Job Readiness activities are conducted with our contractor, Connecting Point, who also offers incentives. Since implementing our incentive policy, our attendance rate has increased by 10%.

We will also begin tracking the sanction rate among our Spanish speaking customers to ensure services are being offered and utilized equitably.

Nevada County has very strong partnerships and good processes in place to work with our customers. We are confident that by improving our Sanction Resolution Rate we will see increased positive outcomes for our customers. We respectfully request the Board of Supervisor's approval of the attached Cal-SIP.

Please see attached full CalWORKS System Improvement Plan Report.