

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Final Report: California Child and Family Services Review**  
**July 2008**

**INTRODUCTION**

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of California. The CFSR is the Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. It is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS.

The California CFSR was conducted the week of February 4, 2008. The period under review for the case reviews was from October 1, 2006, through February 4, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Division of Children and Family Services
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides State child welfare data for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2005 and FY 2006 and for the 12-month CFSR target period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (39 foster care cases and 26 in-home services cases) at 3 sites throughout the State: 17 cases in Fresno County, 31 cases in Los Angeles County, and 17 cases in Santa Clara County<sup>1</sup>
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children (including youth), parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, Tribal representatives, advocacy groups, and attorneys

**Background Information**

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items relevant to 7 outcomes and 22 items pertaining to 7 systemic factors. In the Systemic Factors Section of the report, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI) based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements. Information relevant to each item comes from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the onsite CFSR. The overall rating for the systemic factors is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either "in substantial conformity" with that factor (i.e., a score of 3 or 4) or "not in substantial conformity" with that factor (a score of 1 or 2).

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<sup>1</sup> There usually are 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. However, during the Onsite Review, there was one case identified as a foster care case in which the child had not been in an out-of-home care placement during the period under review. This case was reclassified as an in-home services case.

Items relevant to the seven outcomes are discussed in the Outcomes Section of the report. An overall rating of Strength or ANI is assigned to each of the 23 items depending on the percentage of cases that receive a Strength rating in the case reviews. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed are rated as a Strength. Performance ratings for each of the seven outcomes are based on item ratings for each case. A State may be rated as having Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved the outcome. The determination of whether a State is in substantial conformity with a particular outcome is based on the percentage of cases that were determined to have substantially achieved the outcome. Specifically, for a State to be in substantial conformity with an outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome.

A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome or systemic factor must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern associated with that outcome or systemic factor.

ACF has set very high standards of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our country's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be acceptable. The focus of the CFSR process is on continuous quality improvement; high standards are set to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95-percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review at the end of their PIP implementation. ACF recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often are time consuming to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with ACF to establish a specified amount of improvement or implement specified activities for their PIP. That is, for each outcome or item that is an ANI, each State (working in conjunction with the Children's Bureau) specifies how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the ANIs and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of its PIP and still not perform at the 95-percent (for outcomes) or 90-percent (for items) level as required by the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of functioning with regard to achieving desired child and family outcomes by once more applying high standards and a consistent, comprehensive, case-review methodology. This is intended to serve as a basis for continued planning in areas in which the State still needs to improve. The goal is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the closing of the PIP.

Because many changes have been made in the onsite CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State's performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of percentages. Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews are the following:

- An increase in the sample size from 50 to 65 cases
- Stratification of the sample to ensure a minimum number of cases in key program areas, resulting in variations in the number of cases relevant for specific outcomes and items
- Changes in criteria for specific items to increase consistency and to ensure an assessment of critical areas, such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents

A somewhat unique feature of the California child welfare system is that in California, all 58 county child welfare agencies have entered into agreements with their respective county juvenile probation departments to administer title IV-E foster care services on behalf of wards who are under the purview of the probation department. In these arrangements, probation department placement officers serve in roles similar to child welfare agency caseworkers with regard to the children in their caseloads. Consequently, the Federal CFSR process considers probation department placement officers as equivalent to child welfare agency caseworkers in assessing all items in California.

### **Key CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes**

California did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven outcomes reviewed. The results of the case reviews show that Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was substantially achieved in only 41.0 percent of the cases reviewed, and Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was substantially achieved in only 58.5 percent of the cases. Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the outcomes, the State performed at a higher level on the following outcomes:

- Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect)—80.6 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved this outcome
- Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate)—76.9 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved this outcome
- Permanency Outcome 2 (Continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children)—79.5 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved this outcome
- Well-Being Outcome 2 (Children receive services to meet their educational needs)—88.0 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved this outcome

The 2008 CFSR identified three areas of strength in California. These pertained to placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11), preserving connections (item 14), and addressing children's physical health needs (item 22).

The CFSR also identified several areas of concern. The State did not meet the two national standards for the safety-related data indicators—one pertaining to recurrence of maltreatment within a 6-month period and one pertaining to maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff members. The State also did not meet the national standards for any of the four data composites pertaining to permanency. These include the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Permanency Composite 1), the

timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2), achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time (Permanency Composite 3), and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4).

The State's low performance with regard to the CFSR outcomes may be attributed at least in part to the following key factors:

- In most of the State, caseworkers carried high caseloads, and there was a high rate of turnover in the caseworker position in many areas of the State. Stakeholders suggested that these factors make it difficult for basic case management services to be provided in an appropriate manner and in accordance with Federal, State, and county statutes and regulations.
- The number of regular foster homes and therapeutic foster homes is insufficient, and there is insufficient support and specialized training for caregivers. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that these problems result in an over-reliance on unnecessary placements in group homes and residential treatment facilities and hamper the ability of the agency to achieve children's permanency goals and ensure their overall well-being.
- Many of the State's high-quality, innovative, and effective practices are not implemented on a statewide basis and are not fully institutionalized in the locations where they are implemented. Stakeholders indicated that gaps in key services in many areas result in inconsistent performance with regard to achieving permanency goals for children and well-being objectives for children and families.
- There is a general lack of high quality mental health services, inpatient substance abuse treatment services for children and parents, and, in general, affordable services for parents, particularly parents of children who are probation wards.

#### **Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors**

With regard to systemic factors, California is found to be in substantial conformity with the factors of Statewide Information System, Quality Assurance (QA) System, and Agency Responsiveness to the Community. California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Case Review System; Service Array; Training; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

The specific findings with regard to the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance with regard to the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following sections, key findings are summarized for each outcome and systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each outcome and systemic factor during the Federal FY 2002 CFSR.

### **I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES**

#### **Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect**

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment (item 2). Safety Outcome 1 also incorporates two national data indicators for which national standards have been established—the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The State Data Profile indicates that California did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators. In addition, the outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 80.6 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Case-review performance on the outcome varied across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 100 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 79 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 69 percent of Santa Clara County cases. In the 2008 CFSR, both items assessed through this outcome were rated as ANIs.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during its first CFSR conducted in Federal FY 2002 and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. The key concerns at that time were that the State did not meet the national standards for the measure pertaining to children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period or the national standard for the measure pertaining to children maltreated in foster care.

To address these concerns, California included the following strategies in its PIP:

- Implemented a differential response approach to maltreatment allegations in 11 pilot counties (including Los Angeles) to reduce repeat maltreatment by engaging families in services to protect children and strengthen parental protective capacity as well as child and family well-being
- Developed and implemented a Standardized Safety Assessment System in all 58 counties, which is used throughout the life of a case to determine safety, risk, and needs
- Modified State legislation (effective January 1, 2005) to allow family maintenance services (i.e., for in-home services cases) to be continued beyond a 12-month period and to be extended in 6-month intervals if it can be shown that the objectives of the service plan can be achieved within the extended periods and if the extended services can be provided within the county's child welfare allocation
- Collaborated with other State departments to ensure that children and families in the child welfare system receive the appropriate priority for Proposition 36 mental health services funding
- Provided technical assistance to high-priority counties (i.e., counties with performance indicators that are at or below the 50th percentile) to identify challenges with regard to maltreatment recurrence and maltreatment of children in foster care
- Worked with counties to determine where additional support services may be needed for caregivers and identified resources that can provide support services for caregivers in counties

The State met its PIP target goals established for this outcome.

**Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate**

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the issue of child welfare agency efforts to prevent children's removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children.

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 76.9 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Performance on this item varied across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 82 percent of Fresno County cases and 81 percent of Los Angeles County cases, compared with 65 percent of Santa Clara County cases. Both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs in the 2008 CFSR.

Although there are indications that the Standardized Safety Assessment System is effective in assessing risk and identifying the services needed to address risks, the following concerns were identified in the cases reviewed for the 2008 CFSR:

- In a few cases, no services were provided to the children and families, and the children remained at risk in the home.
- In a few cases, some services were provided, but they did not adequately address the safety issues in the family, and the children remained at risk in the home.
- In several cases, there was a general lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the child's home during the period under review.

**Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2 in its 2002 CFSR. At that time, although item 3 (Services to family to protect children in their homes and prevent removal) was rated as a Strength and item 4 (Risk of harm to children) was also rated as a Strength, together the percentage of cases rated as substantially achieved (85.1 percent) was less than the 90 percent needed for the State to be found in substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 2.

The following key concerns were noted in the 2002 CFSR case reviews:

- There were inadequate needs assessments in some cases, leading to failure to address underlying risk factors that left children at risk of harm.
- There was insufficient follow-up with families to ensure that services were being received.

The strategies the State implemented in its PIP to address the concerns identified under Safety Outcome 1 also were intended to address the concerns identified under Safety Outcome 2. The State met its PIP goals for this outcome.

### **Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations**

There are six indicators incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the child welfare agency's efforts to prevent foster care re-entry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the child welfare agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, and permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9) or to ensure that children who have other planned permanent living arrangements (OPPLA) as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

#### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination is based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 41.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- As indicated in the State Data Profile, California did not meet the national standards for any of the four data composites pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunifications (Permanency Composite 1), timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2), achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time (Permanency Composite 3), and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4).

Although California's performance on the case reviews was low at all sites, there was some variation across sites. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 37 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 50 percent of Santa Clara County cases, compared with 40 percent of Fresno County cases. Of the six items assessed for this outcome, five were rated as ANIs. Only item 5 (Foster care re-entry) was rated as a Strength.

The following are key concerns identified through the 2008 CFSR case reviews:

- Many children were in multiple placement settings during the period under review, and most of the placement changes they experienced were not planned by the agency and not intended to achieve a specified goal for the child.
- The child's current permanency goal was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child.
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner.
- Not all permanency options were thoroughly considered before establishing a goal of OPPLA.
- There was a lack of concurrent planning for children with a goal of reunification.
- Caseworkers were not consistently filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and were not documenting compelling reasons for not filing.

- In several cases, concerted efforts were not made to achieve the child's permanency goal.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California also was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2002 CFSR. At that time, all items included in this outcome were rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in California's 2002 CFSR were the following:

- There were delays in achieving permanency for children through reunification. In many cases, the goal of reunification was maintained for too long a period of time even when there was a lack of evidence that reunification was likely to occur.
- The courts were reluctant to approve TPR petitions unless the agency had identified an adoptive home for the child.
- There was a practice of using non-relative guardianship rather than adoption as a permanency option so that foster families would not lose access to services or financial assistance that they would lose if they adopted the child.
- Children experienced placement instability because placements were not appropriate to their needs. Case reviewers determined that, at the time of placement of the child, there was a lack of attention to the foster parent's ability to meet the child's needs.
- The goal of OPPLA was established for children without adequate exploration of other possible goals, such as adoption or guardianship.

To address these concerns, California implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Strengthened concurrent planning, including providing training to the courts on concurrent planning and TPR
- Identified and addressed unmet placement resource needs through Assembly Bill 636: Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability Process
- Worked with and provided technical assistance to high-priority counties (counties that are below the 50th percentile on the measures incorporated in the data composites) to identify and address challenges, including Los Angeles County's 2003 adoption initiative, and worked with all counties in integrating issues of fairness and equity toward racial or ethnic groups into all decisions made by the child welfare service system
- Improved county-level data collection efforts
- Implemented a common core curriculum for training new line workers and supervisors and ongoing training requirements that included a focus on training about concurrent planning, achieving timely permanency, continuing to reassess appropriateness of goals, compelling reasons not to seek TPR, and other issues related to achieving permanency for children in a timely manner

The State did not meet its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period. Specifically, the goals for performance on the national data indicators pertaining to foster care re-entry and placement stability that were established for the first round of the CFSR were not achieved.

### **Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children**

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12);

(3) ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 79.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 79 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 70 percent of Santa Clara County cases. In the 2008 CFSR, items 11 and 14 are rated as a Strength. However, items 12, 13, 15, and 16 are all rated as ANIs.

The key concerns identified in the 2008 case reviews with regard to items 12, 13, 15, and 16 are the following:

- The agency is inconsistent in making concerted efforts to place siblings together.
- The agency is inconsistent in ensuring adequate visitation between children and their parents and siblings. The case review found that children visited with their fathers at least once a month in 53 percent of the cases, with their mothers at least once a month in 62 percent of the cases, and with their siblings at least once a month in 70 percent of the cases.
- The agency is inconsistent with regard to making concerted efforts to seek and evaluate relatives as potential placement resources.
- The agency is inconsistent with regard to making concerted efforts to support the bond between children in foster care and their parents by involving parents in critical aspects of the child's life and by providing family therapeutic situations.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR, although five of the six items assessed for this outcome were rated as a Strength. The key concern in 2002 pertained primarily to a lack of sufficient agency effort to ensure that the children's connections to extended family and friends were maintained while the child was in foster care (item 14).

To address this concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Worked with, and provided technical assistance to, high-priority counties to identify and address challenges to improving outcomes
- Integrated Tribal perspectives into core training curriculum for staff and supervisors
- Conducted focused Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) training and assessed ICWA compliance through the Assembly Bill 636: Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability process
- Reviewed policies and procedures with foster family agencies and group home facilities to ensure caseworker understanding of the need to maintain connections and to remove barriers to compliance so that agency social workers/probation placement officers maintain a child's family and community connections

## **Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs**

Well-Being Outcome 1 incorporates four indicators. One pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to ensure that the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are assessed and that the necessary services are provided to meet identified needs (item 17). A second indicator examines the child welfare agency's efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining indicators examine the frequency and quality of caseworker's contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 58.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome did not vary substantively across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 59 percent of Fresno County cases, 61 percent of Los Angeles County cases, and 53 percent of Santa Clara County cases. Performance also did not vary as a function of type of case. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 59 percent of foster care cases and 58 percent of in-home services cases. In the 2008 CFSR, all of the items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

The key concerns identified through the 2008 case reviews were the following:

- In 92 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency assessed and met the needs of the children. However, the agency is inconsistent with regard to assessing and meeting the service needs of the mothers, fathers, and foster parents.
- The agency is inconsistent with regard to involving the mothers, fathers, and age-appropriate children in developing the case plan, particularly fathers.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children is inconsistent across cases.
- There is a lack of sufficient caseworker visits with the mothers and, particularly, with the fathers.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. In that CFSR, reviewers found that the service needs of children and families were not consistently met (item 17), parents and children were not consistently engaged in case planning (item 18), and caseworker visits with parents often were not sufficiently frequent or of sufficient quality to ensure children's safety and promote attainment of case goals (item 20). However, in the 2002 CFSR, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children was an area of strength (item 19).

The State implemented the following strategies in its PIP to address the concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR.

- Implemented a comprehensive approach to assessing safety, risk, and needs

- Provided technical assistance to high-priority counties to identify and implement promising practices, developed a promising practices guide containing successful practices from high-performing counties, and increased the number of counties, including Los Angeles County, that use the Family-to-Family Initiative
- Issued guidance to counties through an All County Information Notice (ACIN) and an All County Letter (ACL) clarifying that case plans require family engagement and emphasizing the importance of documentation of child and family involvement in the case-planning process
- Worked with California Youth Connection (CYC) to ensure that youth are involved in the case planning process and have a voice in determining their case plans
- Provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on effective case-planning practices, which included involvement of all family members in case planning, the importance of visiting with parents when such visits are part of the plan, and conducting a comprehensive needs assessment for children in both foster care and in-home services cases
- Expanded the time allotted to develop an appropriate case plan from 30 days to 60 days to allow sufficient time to engage parents and children in the process
- Developed and implemented a framework for differential response
- Worked with counties to ensure that they integrate issues of fairness and equity toward racial or ethnic groups into all decisions made by the child welfare service system

### **Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs**

There is only one indicator for Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

#### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. In the 2008 CFSR, the outcome is substantially achieved in 88.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. There were no meaningful differences in performance on this outcome across sites. The item was determined to be substantially achieved in 91 percent of Los Angeles cases, 87 percent of Santa Clara County cases, and 85 percent of Fresno County cases. There was a slight difference in performance on the outcome as a function of type of case. That is, the outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 91 percent of the foster care cases compared with 82 percent of the in-home services cases. The key concern identified in the 2008 CFSR case reviews was that for some of the children in the cases reviewed, educational needs were either not assessed or identified educational needs were not addressed.

#### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. The key concern found in that review was that, in some cases, children were not receiving services to address the needs identified through educational assessments. California implemented the following strategies in its PIP to address this concern:

- Provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on assessing the educational needs of children in the in-home services cases
- Issued ACINs to instruct counties to ensure that educational needs for all children in the home were assessed and to document how the identified educational needs were addressed in the case plan
- Developed protocols for counties and local school districts to improve educational services to children with identified needs

**Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs**

This outcome incorporates two indicators that assess the child welfare agency’s efforts to meet children’s physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs.

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 81.0 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 94 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 81 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 69 percent of Santa Clara County cases. There also was some variation in performance as a function of type of case. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85 percent of foster care cases, compared with 74 percent of in-home services cases. In the 2008 CFSR, case review findings resulted in item 22 being rated as a Strength, but item 23 being rated as an ANI. In addition, item 23 was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of the 33 applicable foster care cases, compared with 69 percent of the 16 applicable in-home services cases.

The key concerns identified with regard to item 23 were the following:

- In some cases, the child’s mental health needs were neither assessed nor addressed.
- In some cases, mental health needs were assessed, but services were not provided to address the identified needs.

**Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. In that review, the case review findings were that the State was highly effective in meeting children’s physical health needs (item 22 was rated as a Strength) but was less consistent in its efforts to address children’s mental health needs (item 23 was rated as an ANI), particularly children in the in-home services cases. To address these concerns, California implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Issued an ACIN that instructs counties to document how identified mental health needs are addressed and emphasizes the importance of assessing the needs of all children in the in-home services cases
- Provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on assessing the mental health needs of children in the in-home services cases
- Worked with the State Department of Mental Health, the County Welfare Directors Association, the County Probation Officers Association, and the County Mental Health Directors Association to improve and expand access to mental health services

California met its PIP target goals for this outcome.

## **II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

### **Statewide Information System**

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating a Statewide Information System that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care.

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The State's automated system, which is called the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), identifies the legal status, demographics, location, and goals for all children in foster care, including those under the purview of the county probation departments. However, stakeholders noted that probation departments lack direct access to the CWS/CMS, which can cause delays in entering critical information and in obtaining information for probation to carry out its functions. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR.

### **Case Review System**

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine the development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), the implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established in ASFA (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The 2008 CFSR identified the following concerns with regard to this systemic factor:

- Lack of parent involvement in the development of case plans
- Delays in some areas of the State in holding 6-month review hearings and 12-month permanency hearings due to the granting of continuances because of inadequate notification of Tribes, late caseworker reports, and lack of sufficient and timely services for parents
- Lack of documentation of compelling reasons provided in the file when the agency does not file for TPR within the timeframes established by ASFA
- Reluctance on the part of the agency and the court to terminate parental rights when an adoptive family has not yet been identified or when a child is perceived as "unadoptable"

- Delays in TPR because of complex notification requirements, lack of “reasonable efforts” to provide services to parents, and the need for “adoptability” assessments
- Lack of appropriate information provided to foster/adoptive/relative caregivers, which hampers their ability to provide meaningful input at court hearings

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California also was not in substantial conformity with this factor during its 2002 CFSR and therefore was required to address the factor in its PIP. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR:

- Lack of involvement of parents in the development of case plans
- Lack of consistency in documenting reasons for not filing for TPR when children were in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months
- Reluctance to file for TPR by the child welfare agency, and a reluctance to grant TPR by the court, unless an adoptive home had been identified for the child and the home had demonstrated a readiness to adopt

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Developed requirements and competencies for child welfare workers and supervisors with the goal of strengthening case practices, and provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on good case planning practices, including involvement of all family members in case planning
- Issued ACIN I-64-03 and ACL 05-07 clarifying that case plans require family engagement and emphasizing the importance of documentation of child and family involvement in the case planning process.
- Worked with CYC to ensure that youth voice and involvement were integrated into the case planning process
- Expanded the time allotted to develop an appropriate case plan from 30 to 60 days to allow more time for caseworkers to engage parents
- Developed and implemented an educational program through the CDSS contract with the Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) program to provide training to all judges on current law regarding TPR and concurrent planning; ensured that training focused on judges understanding the importance of granting TPR even if there is no current adoptive home for the child
- Used the State’s own self-assessment and planning processes to identify and address unmet placement resource needs, including foster and adoptive parents for special needs and older children

California achieved its PIP goals for this systemic factor.

### **Quality Assurance System**

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of the QA System is based on whether the State has developed standards to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care (item 30) and whether the State is operating a statewide QA System that evaluates the quality and effectiveness of services and measures program strengths and ANIs (item 31).

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of the QA System. The State is implementing quality standards and a QA process that evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures. Stakeholders suggested that the QA process can be strengthened to better understand the underlying issues impacting changes in performance, use the data to drive systemic reforms, and ascertain whether practice changes are occurring as expected.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

During the 2002 CFSR, California was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor and was required to address the factor in its PIP. A key concern of the 2002 CFSR was that, although the State had a QA system in place, the primary QA activity assessed compliance with only six factors and did not assess the effectiveness and quality of services delivered. To address this concern in its PIP, the State developed and implemented Assembly Bill 636: Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability process.

California met its PIP target goals for this systemic factor.

### **Training**

The systemic factor of Training incorporates an assessment of the State's initial caseworker training program (item 32), ongoing training for child welfare agency staff (item 33), and training for foster and adoptive parents (item 34).

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The 2008 CFSR identified the following concerns with regard to this factor:

- The initial and ongoing training of child welfare workers and supervisors will not be required until the State's regulations become effective July 1, 2008, and therefore was not in place during the onsite CFSR.
- Training for probation officers does not adequately prepare them for carrying out the same functions as child welfare workers.
- Neither the pre-service training nor the ongoing training adequately prepares caregivers for parenting the children placed in their homes or for working within the system.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

The State was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and therefore was required to address the factor in its PIP. The following key concerns relevant to this systemic factor were identified in the 2002 CFSR:

- There was no statewide requirement for initial and ongoing training for all staff that supports the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

- There was no uniform statewide training required for all caregivers. Because training requirements for caregivers varied across the State, when foster parents who were trained in one county moved to another county, the training they received did not always meet the requirements of the new county.

To address these concerns, the agency implemented the following key strategies as part of its PIP:

- Developed and implemented a common core curriculum for initial training of staff and supervisors
- Established requirements for ongoing, consistent statewide staff training
- Developed and implemented standard training requirements for caregivers

California met its PIP target goals for this systemic factor.

### **Service Array**

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses three questions: (1) Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

### **Key Findings in the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The key concerns identified in the 2008 CFSR are the following:

- There is a shortage of necessary services, including therapeutic foster care, substance abuse treatment services for children, foster families and supports for foster and adoptive families, quality mental services, caseworkers, and transportation resources.
- There is extensive variation in service availability and accessibility, including core independent living services, public health nurses, mental health services (particularly when placing children across county lines), drug courts, Family-to-Family services, wraparound services, Team Decision-Making, and differential response.
- Programs designed to individualize service delivery, such as wraparound services, differential response, and Team Decision-Making, are not implemented statewide and often are not implemented for all children in the system.
- The unique needs of Native American children and families are not being adequately addressed.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

The State also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2002 CFSR and therefore was required to address this factor in its PIP. The following key concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR:

- There were significant gaps in services across the State, including core services.
- There was no unified approach to implementing promising practices on a statewide basis.
- There were long waiting lists to access services, including core services.

- There was a lack of individualized services for youth and Native American children.
- Many case plans lacked an individualized approach to serving children and families.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Implemented a framework for a differential response system
- Used the Assembly Bill 636: Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability system to identify and address service gaps and systemic barriers
- Convened a State Interagency Team (SIT) to help ensure that children and families in the California child welfare services system receive the appropriate priority for services across systems
- Created a clearinghouse to disseminate information to counties and provide technical assistance to help implement promising and evidence-based practices

California met its PIP target goals for this systemic factor.

### **Agency Responsiveness to the Community**

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the CFSP (item 38) and in developing annual updates of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP (item 39), and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

#### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is in substantial conformity with the factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The 2008 CFSR determined that the State engages in ongoing consultation with key stakeholders to obtain their input regarding the goals and objectives of the CFSP and in preparing its annual reports. However, item 40 was rated as an ANI because of concerns regarding the lack of coordination of services between the child welfare agencies and the agencies providing education, mental health, and housing services for children and families. Local-level stakeholders suggested that the lack of coordination among these agencies at the State level increases the difficulty of coordination at the local levels. This area also was a concern in the State's 2002 CFSR.

#### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR. However, item 40 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR, and the same concerns as noted above were identified at that time.

## **Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention**

The assessment of this systemic factor focuses on the State's standards for foster homes and child care institutions (items 41 and 42), the State's compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background checks for foster and adoptive parents (item 43), the State's efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of foster children (item 44), and the State's activities with regard to using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanent placements for waiting children (item 45).

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. For this factor, items 41, 43, and 45 were rated as Strengths, and items 42 and 44 were rated as ANIs. A key concern identified was that, despite the State's regulations requiring that both licensed and approved foster family homes meet the same standards, the standards are not being applied equally because some local licensing agencies continue to treat training completion as a condition for licensure, while training completion is not treated as a condition for approval. Another concern pertained to a lack of foster homes in the State in general and a specific lack of foster homes that reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the children in foster care. Stakeholders also suggested that there is a lack of State leadership with regard to statewide recruitment efforts.

### **Key Findings of the 2002 CFSR**

California was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, was required to address the factor in its PIP. The 2002 CFSR identified the following key concerns:

- Although CDSS has one common set of licensing/approval standards, there is evidence that, across counties, staff interpretation of the standards is not consistent. As a result, the same standards are not being applied to all foster family homes. In addition, all relative foster family homes have not been assessed and approved against the new standards.
- The State does not have a statewide process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in care.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Instituted a formal process for relative approvals
- Instituted a formal process to train all State and county foster care licensing/approval staff on applying the same licensing/approval standards
- Issued an ACIN to clarify diligent recruitment efforts and adoption assistance policies and provide strategies for improving recruitment
- Used the California-Child and Family Services Review process to identify and address unmet placement resource needs
- Worked with counties to integrate fairness and equity (cultural competence) into all decisions made by the child welfare system, including foster parent recruitment

California met its PIP goals for this systemic factor.

**Table 1. California CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items**

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
<b>Safety Outcome 1:</b> Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	NO	80.6	NO		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	86
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				ANI	83
<b>Safety Outcome 2:</b> Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	NO	76.9			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	79
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	78
<b>Permanency Outcome 1:</b> Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	NO	41.0	NO		
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				Strength	100
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	77
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	59
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	58
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	50
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	45
<b>Permanency Outcome 2:</b> The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	NO	79.5			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	96
Item 12: Placement with siblings				ANI	89
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	72
Item 14: Preserving connections				Strength	92
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	76
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	63

\*95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of the cases must be rated as a Strength.

**Table 2. California CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes and Items**

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	Percent Strength
<b>Well-Being Outcome 1:</b> Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	NO	58.5		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	63
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	55
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	83
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	57
<b>Well-Being Outcome 2:</b> Children receive services to meet their educational needs	NO	88.0		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	88
<b>Well-Being Outcome 3:</b> Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	NO	81.0		
Item 22: Physical health of child			Strength	93
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	82

\*95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for the State to be in substantial conformity with the outcome.

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of the cases reviewed for the item (with the exception of item 21) must be rated as a Strength. Because item 21 is the only item for Well-Being Outcome 2, the requirement of a 95-percent Strength rating applies.

**Table 3: California CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items**

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
<b>Statewide Information System</b>	YES	3	
Item 24: State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care			Strength
<b>Case Review System</b>	NO	2	
Item 25: Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parents that includes the required provisions			ANI
Item 26: Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review			ANI
Item 27: Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the States has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter			ANI
Item 28: Provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of ASFA			ANI
Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child			ANI
<b>Quality Assurance System</b>	YES	3	
Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children			Strength
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable QA system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identified strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluations program improvement measures implemented			Strength
<b>Training</b>	NO	2	
Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services			ANI

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			ANI
Item 34: The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State-licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children			ANI
<b>Service Array</b>	NO	2	
Item 35: The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency			ANI
Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP			ANI
Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency			ANI
<b>Agency Responsiveness to the Community</b>	YES	3	
Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, services providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP			Strength
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP			Strength
Item 40: The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population			ANI
<b>Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, And Retention</b>	NO	2	
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards			Strength
Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds			ANI
Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background			

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children			Strength
Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom adoptive homes are needed			ANI
Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

\*Scores range from 1 to 4. A score of 1 or 2 means that the factor is not in substantial conformity. A score of 3 or 4 means that the factor is in substantial conformity.

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).