

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 County¹
- 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).

¹ 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
Safety Outcome 1: 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
Safety Outcome 2: 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
Permanency Outcome 1: 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
Permanency Outcome 2: 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
Well-Being Outcome 1: 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
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	NO	88.0		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	88
Well-Being Outcome 3: 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

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	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
Case Review System	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
Quality Assurance System	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
Training	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

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
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
Service Array	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
Agency Responsiveness to the Community	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
Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, And Retention	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			

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
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).

Final Report
California Child and Family Services Review
July 2008

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

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 the 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 County¹
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, 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

All 65 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 65 cases reviewed are presented in the table on page 4.

The first section of the report (Section A: Outcomes) presents the CFSR findings relevant to California's performance in achieving specified outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting the data for the case review findings and national indicators (when relevant). The table is followed by a discussion of California's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR review in FY 2002, the State's status relevant to the current review, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Differences in findings across the sites included in the Onsite Review are described when noteworthy. Variations in outcome and item ratings as a function of type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services) also are identified when appropriate. The second section of the report

¹ 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.

(Section B: Systemic Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

It is important to note 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, in the case reviews and assessments of the systemic factors for California, the CFSR process considers probation department placement officers as equivalent to child welfare agency caseworkers.

Key California Case Characteristics

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases N=39*	In-Home Cases N=26
When case was opened/child entered foster care		
Case was opened prior to the period under review	32 (82%)	12 (46%)
Case was opened during the period under review	7 (18%)	14 (54%)
When child entered foster care		NA
Child entered foster care during the period under review (four children entered foster care after case opening)	11 (%)	
Child entered foster care prior to the period under review	28 (%)	
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	19 (49%)	**
At least 10 but younger than 13	6 (15%)	**
At least 13 but younger than 16	8 (21%)	**
16 and older	6 (15%)	**
Race/Ethnicity		
African American (Non-Hispanic)	7 (18%)	**
White (Non-Hispanic)	4 (10%)	**
Hispanic (of all races)	26 (67%)	**
American Indian or Alaska Native (Non-Hispanic)	1 (3%)	**
Two or more races (Non-Hispanic)	1 (3%)	**
Primary reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	14 (36%)	4 (15%)
Physical abuse	4 (10%)	7 (27%)
Sexual abuse	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Medical neglect	1 (2.5%)	0
Abandonment	2 (5%)	0
Mental/physical health of parent	1 (2.5%)	0
Mental/physical health of child	1 (2.5%)	0
Substance abuse by parent	9 (23%)	4 (15%)
Child's behavior/child in juvenile justice system	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Domestic violence in child's home	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Emotional maltreatment	0	3 (11%)
Other (substantial risk)	2 (5%)	3 (11%)

*The CFSR usually includes 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. However, during the Onsite Review, it was discovered that for one of the foster care cases, the child had not been in an out-of-home placement during the period under review. Therefore, the classification of the case was changed to an in-home services case.

**Information on these characteristics for in-home services cases is not provided because all children in the family are considered in these cases.

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes Section of the CSFR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement (ANI) is assigned to each of the 23 indicators (items) reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The item ratings are used to determine the performance of a State on the seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for these outcomes are Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Achieved. For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, the national standards for each data indicator must be met as well as the case review requirements. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a program improvement plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern identified for that outcome.

ACF has established a very high standard 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 considered acceptable. The standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being. This is consistent with the goal of the CFSR to promote continuous improvement in performance on these outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain either the 95-percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review or the national standards for the six data indicators by 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 take time 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 to determine 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 the following: (1) how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the ANIs and (2) 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 the 90-percent (for items) levels established for the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of performance by once more applying the high standards and a consistent, comprehensive, case-review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued PIPs addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, although prior PIP goals may have been achieved. The purpose is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the completion of a PIP.

In the following sections, information is provided pertaining to how the State performed on each outcome in the first round of the CFSR. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round, the key concerns observed at that time are identified as well as the strategies implemented in the PIP to address those concerns. This discussion also focuses on whether the key concerns that emerged in the first CFSR continued to be present in the second review, or whether those concerns were addressed but other concerns emerged.

Because many changes were made in the 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 data indicators or percentages regarding Strength and ANI ratings. Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews include, but are not limited to, 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 enhance consistency and ensure an assessment of critical areas such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents in planning for their children

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	9	11	9	29	80.6
Partially Achieved	0	1	2	3	8.3
Not Achieved or Addressed	0	2	2	4	11.1
Total Applicable Cases	9	14	13	36	
Not Applicable Cases	8	17	4	29	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards					
	National Standard (%)		State's Percentage		Meets Standard?
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6 or higher		92.6		NO
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68 or higher		99.49		NO

Status of Safety Outcome 1

California is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 for the following reasons:

- California did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant for Safety Outcome 1—absence of maltreatment recurrence and absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.
- 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.

Performance on the case reviews 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.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 in its first CFSR conducted in Federal FY 2002 and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. The key concerns of the 2002 CFSR were that the State did not meet the national standards for the two measures pertaining to maltreatment recurrence and maltreatment of children in foster care. However, in the 2002 review, timeliness of investigations (item 1) was rated as a Strength in 96 percent of the applicable cases.

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 (which are provided to 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

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The key concerns identified in California's 2002 CFSR also were identified in the 2008 CFSR. That is, in both review periods, the State did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to maltreatment recurrence and maltreatment of children in foster care. However, unlike the first CFSR, in the 2008 CFSR, the State's performance on item 1 (Timeliness of investigations) was rated as an ANI.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 36 (55 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency policy requirements.

California policy with regard to initiating investigations was provided by the State and includes the following information: The caseworker shall respond to a referral (received by the Hotline) by completing an emergency response assessment to document whether an in-person investigation is appropriate. If an in-person investigation is appropriate, either an immediate in-person investigation will be conducted when a child is alleged to be at immediate risk (the term “immediate” is not defined by the State) or an in-person investigation will be initiated within 10 calendar days from the date the referral is received.

The State’s policy submission form also reports that, “The decision criteria for whether or not an in-person investigation is necessary must include, but not be limited to, consideration of the following factors:

- Ability to locate the child
- Existence of an open case and whether the problem described in the allegation is being adequately addressed
- The allegation meets one or more of the definitions of child abuse, exploitation, or neglect
- The allegation includes specific acts and/or behavioral indicators which are suggestive of abuse or neglect”

The policy statement notes that counties may establish their own policies with regard to initiating an investigation of child maltreatment reports, but that they must meet the minimum criteria established in State policy.

For purposes of the CFSR, cases were reviewed for timeliness of initiating a response based on the following priorities:

- Immediate response – a response that is initiated with face-to-face contact with all children alleged to have been abused, neglected, or exploited and at least one adult who has information regarding the allegations within 24 hours of receipt of the referral from the Hotline
- 10-day response – a response that is initiated with face-to-face contact with all children alleged to have been abused, neglected, or exploited and at least one adult who has information regarding the allegations within 10 days of receipt of the referral from the Hotline

Although some counties included in the onsite CFSR had more stringent timeframes than the State for responding to maltreatment reports, the case ratings were based on State policy and not on county policy.

The results of the assessment of item 1 are presented in the table below.

Item 1	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	12	10	31	86
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	3	5	14
Total Applicable Cases	9	14	13	36	
Not applicable	8	17	4	29	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 86 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 77 percent of Santa Clara County Cases.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy or law. It was rated as an ANI when the investigation was not initiated within the required timeframes. In three of the five cases rated as an ANI, the report had been assigned as an immediate response (the investigation must be initiated within 24 hours). In two of the five cases rated as an ANI, the report had been assigned as a 10-day response.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 86 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in California’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, timeliness of response to maltreatment reports is facilitated by use of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool or the Comprehensive Assessment Tool (CAT) in all 58 counties. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, “the use of these tools promotes a uniform practice of assessment which allows agencies to improve response timeliness.” The Statewide Assessment reports that the differential response approach, piloted in 11 counties, also is intended to improve timeliness of response to maltreatment reports by reducing the number of reports that require an investigative response.

Data provided in the Statewide Assessment indicate that performance on the measure of timeliness of investigation has improved from the second quarter of 2003 to the second quarter of 2006. The 2006 second quarter data indicate that the investigation was initiated in a timely manner in 95.8 percent of the reports in the second quarter that required an immediate response (a 1.4 percent improvement over the quarter ending March 31, 2003) and in 92.3 percent of the reports in the second quarter that required a 10-day response (a 4.1 percent improvement over the quarter ending March 31, 2003). The Statewide Assessment, however, did not note whether these changes reflect a positive trend over time.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following challenges to initiating investigations in a timely manner:

- High rate of turnover in the caseworker positions, which increases the caseloads of the remaining caseworkers and therefore affects their ability to respond to referrals in a timely manner
- Logistics involved in arranging an investigation when referrals are responded to jointly with law enforcement
- Difficulty locating families in geographically large counties and the extensive travel required in some counties
- Traffic congestion in urban areas

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that investigations of child maltreatment reports are initiated in a timely manner and in accordance with State and local policy. Fresno County stakeholders, however, noted that because there is only one telephone number listed for the agency and the Hotline, many of the calls that come into the Hotline are not abuse or neglect calls. These stakeholders suggested that this situation results in more calls coming in than can be effectively handled by the Hotline workers, causing delays in responding to the calls.

Stakeholders in Los Angeles and Santa Clara Counties praised the collaborative efforts of law enforcement and the local Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) offices and indicated that this collaboration has improved both the timeliness and effectiveness of responding to maltreatment reports.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 24 (37 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine if there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

Item 2	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	7	7	20	83
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	3	4	17
Total Applicable Cases	6	8	10	24	
Not applicable	11	23	7	41	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was no indication of two or more substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an ANI in four cases because at least two substantiated maltreatment reports occurred within a 6-month period. In two of the four cases, there were three substantiated reports during the period under review. Of the four cases rated as an ANI for this item, three were in Santa Clara County.

In addition to the four cases involving a recurrence of substantiated maltreatment within a 6-month period shown in the table, there was one case in Santa Clara in which there was a recurrence of substantiated maltreatment within a 7-month period. Also, there were many cases in all sites in which there were multiple reports on the family during the life of the case regardless of disposition. “Life of the case” refers to time span from the first time that an allegation of abuse or neglect was reported on any child in the family to the time of the onsite review. In 20 cases, there were at least 6 child maltreatment reports during the life of the case, and in 13 of these cases, there were 10 or more reports during the life of the case. However, information about the types of allegations involved in these reports was not collected during the onsite CFSR unless the report occurred during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 2 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 83 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In addition, the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to the recurrence of maltreatment. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR because of the State’s performance on the data indicator.

Statewide Assessment Information

Although the State’s percentage of children who did not experience maltreatment recurrence within a 6-month period does not meet the national standard, the Statewide Assessment notes that performance on this measure has improved over time: 91.6 percent in FY 2005 and 92.6 percent in FY 2006. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the rate of recurrence of substantiated physical and sexual abuse has declined in recent years, while the rate of recurrence of neglect has remained about the same. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the decline in maltreatment recurrence was greater in the 11 counties piloting the differential response approach than it was in the remaining 47 counties.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Fresno County stakeholders expressed differing opinions regarding the extent of maltreatment recurrence and agency efforts to address this issue. Some stakeholders indicated that maltreatment recurrence was rare because the Team Decision-Making (TDM) meetings helped to address the key issues in the family. Other stakeholders, however, expressed the opinion that maltreatment recurrence was a frequent problem. They noted that by the time a child is removed from the home, there often have been multiple referrals on the family, although not all of the referrals would have been substantiated. A number of stakeholders in Los Angeles are pleased that the county implemented SDM, as they believe it to be an effective safety and risk assessment tool. Stakeholders in all three counties expressed concern that substance abuse and domestic violence make it difficult to ensure that repeat maltreatment does not occur.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	14	25	11	50	76.9
Partially Achieved	1	3	2	6	9.2
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	3	4	9	13.8
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Status of Safety Outcome 2

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.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

California did not achieve substantial conformity for 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) was less than the 90 percent needed for the State to be found in substantial conformity on 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 target goals for this outcome.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

In comparison to the 2002 review, in the 2008 CFSR, both items 3 and 4 are rated as ANIs. The following concerns were identified:

- No services were provided, and the children remained at risk in the home.
- 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.
- There was a general lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the child’s home during the period under review.

The key findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 39 (60 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent placement of children in foster care while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 3	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	14	10	31	79
Area Needing Improvement	1	4	3	8	21
Total Applicable Cases	8	18	13	39	
Not applicable	9	13	4	26	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied slightly across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 87.5 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 77 percent of Santa Clara County cases and 78 percent of Los Angeles County cases.

Item 3 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Services were provided to the parents and children to prevent removal (21 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home because the removal was necessary to ensure the child’s safety (six cases).
- Services were provided after the reunification of the child to support the reunification and prevent re-entry (four cases).

Case review information indicates that a range of services was offered or provided to families. This included (but was not limited to) the following: assistance with transportation, counseling (individual and family), education-related services for children, bilingual services, concrete services such as housing supplies or funds for utilities, parenting classes, mental health services, housing assistance, outpatient and inpatient drug treatment services, family preservation services, individual therapy, domestic violence victim therapy, and domestic violence perpetrator/anger management services.

Item 3 was rated as an ANI in 8 of the 39 applicable cases. Reviewers determined the following:

- No services were provided, and the children remained at risk in the home (three 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 (three cases).
- The child was removed without efforts to provide services to prevent entry and the removal was not necessary to ensure the safety of the child (one case).
- The child was reunified without provision of services to prevent re-entry (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 3 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 79 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all 58 counties in California are implementing a Standardized Safety Assessment System to determine appropriate services and support that address the needs of children and families. The Statewide Assessment notes that the child welfare agency collaborates with community providers to meet family service needs and to maintain children safely in their homes. The Statewide Assessment identified the following services that support families and permit children to remain safely in their homes.

- Wraparound services, which are being used in 35 counties to support families when children are placed back in the home (usually from group home placements) by providing individualized services for the child and family to help transition and stabilize the placement
- Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)
- The community-based and culturally sensitive services provided under the Family-to-Family program model
- The Linkages initiative, which currently is being implemented in 33 counties in California and provides for coordinated, comprehensive, individualized services to families to support them in achieving the linked goals of self-sufficiency and safety for their children when being served by child welfare and by the State's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (called CalWORKS)

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the effectiveness of the child welfare agency in preventing entry into foster care by maintaining children safely in their own homes. Some stakeholders suggested that practices such as TDM and family conferencing are helpful in preventing removal by identifying concerns and service needs. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that having staff from the Department of Mental Health collocated in the child welfare agency has meant that these staff can assist at the TDMs to avoid unnecessary removals. However, Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that there is a scarcity of family preservation services in the county because of insufficient funds, and this has resulted in long waiting lists for these services. Santa Clara County stakeholders suggested that there is sufficient access to services to prevent placement and that the CAT tool is used to determine how to respond to referrals. However, stakeholders in this county also noted that simply referring parents for services is considered reasonable efforts to prevent removal.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for all 65 cases. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 4	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	14	26	11	51	78
Area Needing Improvement	3	5	6	14	22
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item differed across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 84 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 82 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 65 percent of Santa Clara County cases. There was no substantive difference in performance on this item as a function of type of case: Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of foster care cases and 73 percent of in-home services cases.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through (1) conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children’s home or in the children’s foster home and (2) addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment. Item 4 was rated as an ANI in 14 cases when reviewers determined 1 or more of the following:

- There was a lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the foster home during the period under review (two cases).
- There was a lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the child’s home during the period under review (10 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to engage the child or family in necessary services to address risk issues (two cases). In one case, the case was closed in 6 months without the parent ever having engaged in services.

Rating Determination

Item 4 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 78 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California’s Standardized Safety Assessment System requires that risk assessments are completed on all substantiated and inconclusive in-person responses within 30 days of first face-to-face contact. In addition, a family’s strengths and needs (including those of the caregiver) are assessed on all open cases within 30 days of first face-to-face contact and at each 6-month review. The Statewide Assessment also reports that caseworkers are expected to consult with community-based service providers to review case plan goals and to determine if the services being provided remain appropriate. For children in foster care,

caseworkers are required to provide support to foster parents to enhance the quality of the placement. This includes contact with foster parents and the children in their care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that some of the child welfare agencies have a checklist or a SDM tool to assess for risk and safety. However, a few stakeholders indicated that risk reassessment is not being done consistently using the SDM tool on an ongoing basis.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations					
Number of cases reviewed by site according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	4	7	5	16	41.0
Partially Achieved	4	12	3	19	48.7
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	0	2	4	10.3
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards					
	National Standard (Scaled Score)		State's Composite Score		Meets Standard (Yes/No)
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +		120.1		NO
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +		94.6		NO
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +		106.2		NO
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +		92.2		NO

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

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.

- The State Data Profile indicates that California did not meet the national standards for any of the four data composites.

California's performance on the individual measures included in each composite is presented in the discussion of the items related to the measure.

Although California's case-related performance on this outcome was low in 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.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2002 CFSR. All items included in this outcome were rated as ANIs. This includes item 5 (Foster care re-entry), item 6 (Stability of foster care placement), item 7 (Permanency goal for child), item 8 (Reunification and guardianship), item 9 (Adoption), and item 10 (Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement).

The following key concerns were identified in California's 2002 CFSR:

- 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 termination of parental rights (TPR) petitions unless the agency had an identified 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 other planned permanent living arrangement (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 on TPR
- Identified and addressed unmet placement resource needs through Assembly Bill 636 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, 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 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 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 data indicator measures of foster care re-entry and placement stability were not achieved.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

During the 2008 review, item 5 was rated as a Strength, but all other items included in the outcome were rated as ANIs. Many of the concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR continued to be concerns in the 2008 CFSR. One key concern identified in the 2008 CFSR was that the State did not meet the national standards for any of the data composites pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification, timeliness of adoption, achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended periods of time, and placement stability.

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 were 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 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.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 11 (28 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for assessment if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into

foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 5	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	5	4	11	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	5	4	11	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	14	6	28	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

The State’s performance for the 12-month CFSR target period (which ended March 31, 2007) on the individual measure of foster care re-entry (measure C1.4) included in Composite 1 (Timeliness and permanency of reunification) is as follows: 14.1 percent of the children exiting foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the CFSR target period re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is better than the national median for this measure of 15.0 percent but greater than the 25th percentile for this measure of 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance. This suggests that although no children in the applicable cases reviewed onsite experienced a re-entry within less than 12 months, foster care re-entry continues to be of some concern for the State.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 11 cases in which the child’s entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode.

Rating Determination

Item 5 is assigned an overall rating of Strength. Reviewers determined that in 100 percent of the applicable cases the child had not re-entered foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, under current California law, counties make the recommendation to the court for the child to return home. When the court orders return home, agency supervision is provided for a period of time to ensure that the child is stabilized at home with supportive family services. The Statewide Assessment notes that decisions on case closure address whether the improvements necessary to ensure the ongoing safety of children have been made. Prior to case closure, caseworkers increase the number of contacts with parents, children, and service providers to determine the likelihood of successful reunification. In addition, caseworkers are required to complete the Standardized Safety Assessment prior to children returning home. This assessment is used to both inform the reunification decision and identify the issues that require services and support during the reunification process.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following information:

- Children who were in group home placements prior to reunification had the highest percentage of re-entries.
- Children in kinship care or guardianship placements prior to reunification had the lowest percentage of re-entries.
- Children under age 1 and between the ages of 11 and 15 had the highest re-entry rate.
- Children between the ages of 16 and 17 had the lowest re-entry rate.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Los Angeles County stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR noted that probation has a lower re-entry rate than the county agency and attributed this to probation’s efforts in engaging families in case planning and providing wraparound services. Fresno County stakeholders reported that the county has a low re-entry rate because they are careful in making reunification decisions and use a TDM to make the decision and develop a safety plan when the case is dismissed. They noted that this results in a lower rate of reunifications within a 12-month period as well as a lower rate of re-entry. Fresno County stakeholders also noted that after a child returns home, the county keeps the case open as a family maintenance case and tapers off the child welfare agency involvement.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 39 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child’s service needs. Reviewers also assessed the stability of the child’s current placement setting. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 6	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	17	8	30	77
Area Needing Improvement	5	2	2	9	23
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Performance on this item varied across counties. The item was rated as a Strength in 89 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 80 percent of Santa Clara County cases, compared with 50 percent of Fresno County cases.

California's performance for the CFSR 12-month target period on the individual measures included in Composite 4: Placement stability is presented below.

- 80.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage indicates that California's performance on the measure is lower than the median performance for all States of 83.3 percent.
- 60.2 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage indicates that California's performance is about equal to the median performance for all States of 59.9 percent.
- 34.0 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage indicates that California's performance is about equal to the median performance for all States of 33.9 percent.

These data indicate that California performed at the level of the national median on two of the three measures of placement stability and below the national median on one measure. California did not reach the 75th percentile in performance on any of the measures of placement stability. These data suggest that achieving placement stability is a challenge for the State.

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child did not experience a placement change during the period under review and either the current placement was stable or the child was discharged from foster care during the period under review (23 cases).
- The placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest and were intended to further achievement of the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (seven cases). For example, the child moved from a foster family home to a pre-adoptive home with a relative.

Item 6 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to further attain the child's permanency goal (nine cases).
- The child's current placement setting (at the time of the onsite CFSR) was not stable (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 77 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interest of the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency must notify the court, attorneys for the child, parents or legal guardians, and caregivers before any placement change. In circumstances where a child is moving to a more restrictive setting, a hearing must be held

to determine the necessity of the move. Unless the child is in immediate danger, the placement agreement requires that a notice be given to the foster parent or agency 7 days prior to removal of a child from a placement setting.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that prior to placement in foster care, the caseworker or probation placement officer makes an assessment of the child’s placement needs and identifies the most suitable placement. The Statewide Assessment identifies TDM and FGDM as practices that are instrumental in preserving placements that may be in jeopardy. The Statewide Assessment also identifies the Multi-Disciplinary Assessments (MAT) of children at entry into foster care as promoting placement stability by providing comprehensive information regarding the child’s behaviors and/or needs that may affect decisions about placement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that placement stability is a concern in the State. Several stakeholders suggested that one reason for this is that foster parents and even group homes are not provided with sufficient information on the child to determine whether they are adequately prepared to provide for the child. As one stakeholder noted, there is a lack of full disclosure of information on the child. This results in placement disruptions because often a child is placed in a home where the care providers are not able to meet the child’s needs. Another reason noted for placement disruptions was the lack of sufficient placement resources.

Stakeholders in Fresno County indicated that the TDMs that are required to be held whenever there is a placement change have been very effective in preparing the new placement providers because the new foster parents can get information from the prior foster parents about the child’s needs.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 39 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	12	6	23	59
Area Needing Improvement	5	7	4	16	41
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Performance on this item varied slightly across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 63 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 60 percent of Santa Clara County cases, compared with 50 percent of Fresno County cases.

California's performance on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 3 (Achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods) for the CFSR target 12-month period, which ended March 31, 2007, is as follows:

- 16.7 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the target period were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the target period. This percentage indicates that California performed below the median performance for all States of 25.0 percent (measure C3.1).
- 97.8 percent of the children exiting foster care during the target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage indicates that California's performance is better than the median performance for all States of 96.8 percent and very close to the 75th percentile performance for all States of 98.0 percent (measure C3.2).
- 51.1 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation, or who turned age 18 while in foster care, had been in foster care for 3 years or longer. This percentage indicates that California performed below the median performance of all States of 47.8 percent. For this measure, lower scores indicate more positive performance (measure C3.3).

California's performance on measures C3.1 and C3.3 suggests that the State experiences challenges in achieving permanency for children who are in foster care for long periods of time.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. The case was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's current permanency goal was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (five cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (six cases).
- Not all options were thoroughly considered before establishing a permanency goal of OPPLA (seven cases). In one case, the child was 5 years old and case reviewers reported that the agency caseworker could not explain why permanency was not being sought for the child.

Case review findings pertaining to the case goals were as follows:

- 11 children had a goal of adoption only.
- 10 children had a goal of reunification with parents or other relatives only.
- 9 children had a goal of OPPLA only. (OPPLA is a living arrangement other than adoption, reunification, living with other relatives, or guardianship that involves the child remaining in State custody until reaching the age of majority.)
- 4 children had a goal of guardianship only.
- 2 children had concurrent goals of guardianship and reunification with parents.

- 2 children had concurrent goals of reunification with parents and OPPLA.
- 1 child had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification.

These data indicate that only 13 percent of all foster care cases had concurrent goals reported in the case file, and only 33 percent (five cases) of the children with a goal of reunification had a concurrent goal reported in the case file.

Case review findings pertaining to TPR were as follows:

- At the time of the onsite CFSR, 25 (64 percent) of the 39 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- TPR had been filed in a timely manner in 9 (36 percent) of the 25 cases.
- A compelling reason for not filing for TPR was noted in 10 (62.5 percent) of the 16 cases in which TPR had not been filed in a timely manner, despite the 15-month criterion being met. In 6 (37.5 percent) of these 16 cases, no compelling reason was in the case file. Three of these cases were in Santa Clara County.

Rating Determination

Item 7 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 59 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. A key concern identified pertained to establishing a goal of OPPLA without full consideration of other permanency options, particularly when children were very young (i.e., under the age of 10). This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, unless the court finds that certain specified exceptional circumstances exist, reunification is the initial permanency goal for all children removed from their homes. California requires that children who are 3 years of age and older receive no more than 12 months of reunification services, and children who are younger than 3 years of age receive no more than 6 months of reunification services. For all children, reunification may be extended to a maximum of 18 months if the court has determined there is a substantial likelihood that reunification will be successful within 6 months after the first 12-month permanency hearing.

If family reunification is not ordered because exceptional circumstances exist or because efforts have failed, then the court establishes one of the other permanency options as the primary case plan goal.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that with the implementation of concurrent planning over the past decade, any case with a primary case plan goal of family reunification must specify a permanency alternative (e.g., adoption or guardianship) and the services

necessary to achieve it if reunification is unsuccessful. The Statewide Assessment reports that County System Improvement Plans indicate that counties are continuing to implement practices and system changes that support concurrent planning.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that although the expectation is that agency caseworkers will engage in concurrent planning, this approach is not implemented on a consistent basis. (Note: This is consistent with the finding that only 5 (33 percent) of the 15 children with a goal of reunification had concurrent permanency goals identified in the case file.) Stakeholders often referred to the concurrent goal as the “secondary” goal. As one stakeholder suggested, the secondary goal usually is a “place holder,” and is only discussed if the parent is not doing well in meeting case plan requirements. However, other stakeholders noted that there are many caseworkers who actively pursue concurrent goals, particularly when the concurrent goal is adoption, and will make concerted efforts to ensure that a home study on a potential adoptive caregiver family has been completed even if parents are working on their reunification plan.

Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 19 (49 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 8	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	5	4	11	58
Area Needing Improvement	0	7	1	8	42
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	12	5	19	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	7	5	20	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

California’s performance for the 12-month CFSR target period (which ended on March 31, 2007) on three of the four individual measures included in Permanency Composite 1 (Timeliness and permanency of reunification) is presented below.

- 70.5 percent of the reunifications that occurred in the target period took place in 8 days or more but less than 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care. This percentage is about equal to the national median of 69.9 percent.

- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 6.2 months. This suggests that California's performance on this measure is about equal to the median performance for all States of 6.5 months. For this measure, a lower number of months in foster care means a higher level of performance.
- 38.0 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage indicates that California performed below the median performance for all States of 39.4 percent.

These data suggest that California performed at only about the median level for all measures of timeliness of reunification. The data also suggest that achieving reunifications for children in a timely manner is a challenge for the State whether the analysis focuses on children exiting foster care or on an entry cohort.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The case goal was guardianship and the child was residing with the guardian, but the case was not closed and/or guardianship was not finalized because the relative caregivers were concerned about losing foster care payments to care for the child and to access services for the child (five cases).
- The agency had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner (three cases).

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 58 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, child welfare caseworkers develop service plans for reunification based on an assessment of needs. Services are identified to address safety concerns and achieve reunification in a timely way. The Statewide Assessment reports that caseworkers have frequent contact with families, foster parents, and service providers to evaluate progress towards meeting reunification goals. The court also reviews progress every 6 months and may order reunification with parents when safety concerns have been adequately addressed.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the Child and Family Policy Institute of California's Executive Summary of an analysis of county system improvement plans reports that the nine counties that focused on reducing the length of time to reunification improved

a median of 16 percent on the State measure related to timeliness of reunification and 11 percent on the Federal measure. The Statewide Assessment reports that these nine counties comprise more than half of the State’s foster care population.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR generally did not comment on the effectiveness of the agency in achieving permanency for children in a timely manner through reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives. However, stakeholders did comment that in many cases, relatives who are granted guardianship or who want to become guardians, do not want their cases closed in the child welfare system. Stakeholders said that these caregivers want the support of the agency caseworker and they want access to resources and services for the children that would be too expensive for them to afford on their own.

Item 9: Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 12 (31 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to finalize adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below.

Item 9	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	2	2	6	50
Area Needing Improvement	1	4	1	6	50
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	6	3	12	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	13	7	27	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

California’s performance on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 2 (Timeliness of adoptions) for the 12-month CFSR target period (which ended March 31, 2007) is presented below:

- 32.6 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percentage indicates that California’s performance is better than the median performance of all States of 26.8 percent but lower than the 75th percentile performance of all States of 36.6 percent.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 29.7 months. This length of stay indicates that California performed below the 25th percentile performance for all States of 27.3 months, but better than the median performance for all States of 32.4 months. For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.

- 14.0 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the target period. This percentage indicates that California performed below the median performance of all States of 22.7 percent.
- 5.6 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the CFSR 12-month target period became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within 6 months. This percentage indicates that California performed below the median performance for all States of 8.8 percent.
- 53.5 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is about equal to the 75th percentile for this measure of 53.7 percent.

These data suggest a variable picture of effectiveness in achieving adoptions in a timely manner. For children exiting foster care to adoption, the data suggest that California is performing above the median and fairly close to the 75th percentile. In addition, California appears to be effective in finalizing adoptions in a timely manner once children have become legally free for adoption. However, the State appears to be less effective in terminating parental rights and achieving adoptions for children who have been in foster care for 17 months or longer and who did not exit foster care to other types of permanency during the target year.

For the case reviews, item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an ANI in six cases due to one or more of the following concerns:

- Delays in terminating parental rights (three cases)
- Delays in completing home studies (one case)
- Lack of effort to recruit an adoptive home for the children (two cases)
- Lack of proper notification of a Tribe in accordance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (one case)
- Delays in finalizing the adoption (one case)

Of the six children in these cases, five had been in foster care for 4 years or longer at the time of the onsite CFSR. The other child had been in foster care for 27 months at the time of the onsite review.

Additional case review findings relevant to this item were the following:

- Of the 12 cases with a case goal of adoption, the adoption was finalized in 3 cases (25 percent) at the time of the onsite CFSR. Of those 3 adoptions, one was finalized within 24 months. The remaining two adoptions were finalized in 27 and 38 months, respectively.
- Of the nine children who did not have a finalized adoption, six were placed in a pre-adoptive home at the time of the onsite CFSR. The remaining three of the nine children who did not have a finalized adoption were not placed in pre-adoptive homes.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Case reviewers determined that in 50 percent of the cases, the agency had made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, beginning State FY 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007), California increased funding for adoptions by 15 percent. Additionally, \$4 million in State General Funds was made available for a 3-year pilot in four counties (Alameda, Kern, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) and a CDSS Adoptions District Office to increase the successful adoptions of older foster youth.

The Statewide Assessment reports that when the child's permanency goal is adoption the current caregiver is to be considered first. If the current caregiver is not an option, caseworkers seek family members who are willing and able to adopt. If relatives are not available, recruitment efforts are expanded to look at other potential adoptive families and include contact with private adoption agencies and other jurisdictions.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the majority of children who are adopted are adopted by either their foster parents or relative caregivers. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that foster parents and relative caregivers who want to adopt must complete an adoption home study and that this process is lengthy and may delay completion of an adoption. It was reported in the Statewide Assessment that relatives who have foster children placed with them often are slow to complete the necessary tasks required for both the home study and the finalization process for a variety of reasons, including a lack of a sense of urgency on their part. The Statewide Assessment postulates that early engagement and discussion with relative caregivers may reduce these barriers to completing the adoption process.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that, when TPR has occurred and adoption is the goal, court hearings are regularly held to evaluate progress toward identifying an adoptive family and legally finalizing the adoption after the family is identified. In addition, the Judicial Council has provided training to the majority of courts in the State on the TPR and concurrent planning.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that the child welfare agency has been informed by Tribal representatives of the agency's ICWA Workgroup that in many California Tribes, adoptions are contrary to Tribal custom and law. According to the Statewide Assessment, the ICWA Workgroup representatives have reported that adoption, with TPR, for some Tribes can mean termination of membership rights of the child.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Various stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFPSR identified a number of barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner. The most frequently mentioned barrier was noted only in Los Angeles County. In this county, several stakeholders reported that a consistent barrier to timely adoptions is the lack of notification or defective notification of parents with regard to TPR hearings. This results in multiple continuances and can extend an adoption process for several months. Stakeholders indicated that the law is confusing regarding the notification process and that caseworkers are expected to be lawyers and interpret the law correctly. They also indicated that because of the turnover in the caseworker positions, there are constantly new caseworkers who do not know how to notify properly. Several stakeholders suggested that lawyers, instead of caseworkers, should be responsible for the notification process. Other barriers to timely adoptions noted by State- and local-level stakeholders were the following:

- It can depend on the perceived adoptability of the child.
- A lack of time for caseworkers to find adoptive homes because of high caseloads; one stakeholder noted that usually if the current caregiver is not interested in adoption, then it is unlikely that the adoption will occur in a timely manner.
- Even when there is a concurrent plan of adoption, little effort is made toward achieving that plan until reunification efforts fail.
- Home studies take a long time to complete.
- Relatives are slow to complete paperwork for adoption because they have to do the entire licensing process over again.
- Foster parents and relative caregivers do not want to adopt because they would lose access to services for the children and they may not be able to afford these services if they adopted the child.
- There is a disincentive to adopt older children because college funds are not available for children who are adopted if adopted before age 16.

Item 10. Permanency goal of OPPLA

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 11 (28 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to OPPLA. The results are presented in the table below.

Item 10	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	2	0	5	45
Area Needing Improvement	2	1	3	6	55
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	3	3	11	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	5	16	7	28	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in five cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement for the child and to provide the necessary service to prepare the child for independent living. Item 10 was rated as an ANI in six cases when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was not in a stable permanent placement and concerted efforts had not been made to find a permanent placement for the child (three cases).
- The child was in a stable foster family or relative home placement, but the caregiver had not made a formal agreement to provide care for the child until the child reached the age of majority (three cases).

Additional key findings of the case reviews were the following:

- In three cases, the child was younger than 6 years old when the goal of OPPLA was established.
- In six cases, the child was older than 6 but younger than 13 when the goal of OPPLA was established.
- Only two of the children were adolescents (age 13 and age 16) at the time the goal of OPPLA was established.

These findings raised concerns among reviewers regarding establishing the goal of OPPLA. For all of but one of these cases, it was not clear why the goal of OPPLA was established at such a young age. In the one case, the child had severe and extensive developmental disabilities including autism, and reviewers determined that the care facility in which the child was placed was effective in meeting the child's needs and would be a permanent placement until there was a transition to an adult facility.

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 45 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. The item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, during all permanency and post-permanency review hearings, held at 12 and 18 months respectively after the dispositional hearing, all permanency options are to be considered. For children in long-term foster care, permanency options are to be reconsidered at each status review hearing.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the availability of independent living (IL) services. Some stakeholders indicated that IL services are offered to all youth and in some counties to youth as young as age 14 or 15. However, stakeholders in Santa Clara and Los Angeles Counties expressed concern about the availability of IL services for eligible youth and some stakeholders noted that the IL services are either offered too late or youth are not given information about what services are available for them.

Stakeholders also conveyed different opinions about whether the IL services adequately meet the needs of this population of youth with many stakeholders expressing the opinion that there are not enough services for all eligible youth. Stakeholders also expressed confusion about the eligibility criteria for the IL services, including post-secondary educational assistance.

Several stakeholders reported that the IL program is not responsive to the needs of youth with disabilities, especially with regard to transitional housing rules (e.g., need to obtain employment within a set amount of time). Many stakeholders indicated that youth are often not informed of the independent living services available to them. Stakeholders suggested that caregivers are not expected to receive training and therefore do not receive training on how to help youth learn IL skills.

Fresno County stakeholders praised the IL services in that county, but noted that youth have very little contact with their caseworkers and that caseworkers are not involved in assessing the needs of the older youth

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children					
Number of cases reviewed by site according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	9	15	7	31	79.5
Partially Achieved	1	4	2	7	17.9
Not Achieved	0	0	1	1	2.6
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	0	0	

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

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.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

California was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. In the 2002 CFSR, five of the six items assessed for this outcome were rated as a Strength. Only item 14 (Preserving connections for children in foster care) was rated as an ANI at that time, with the key concern being a lack of consistency with regard to concerted efforts to maintain children's connections with extended family and friends.

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
- Integrated Tribal perspectives into core training curriculum for staff and supervisors
- Conducted focused ICWA training and assessed ICWA compliance through the Assembly Bill 636 quality assurance 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

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

In contrast to the 2002 CFSR, item 14 is rated as a Strength in the 2008 CFSR, with 92 percent of the cases rated as a Strength. Item 11 also is rated as a Strength in the 2008 CFSR. However, unlike the 2002 CFSR, in the 2008 CFSR, items 12, 13, 15, and 16 are rated as ANIs.

The key concerns identified in the 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.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 27 (69 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child’s most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 11	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	13	7	26	96
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	4
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	13	8	27	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	6	2	12	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed in the same community or county as the parents or that the child's placement was not in the same community or county, but was in close proximity to the parents. The item also was rated as a Strength if the child was placed out of his or her community or county, but the placement was determined to be necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the child's permanency goal. In one case, item 11 was rated as an ANI because the child's placement was not in proximity to his parents or siblings. This placement was initially an emergency placement due to licensing problems in the prior foster home and later became a long-term placement, although it was far away from parents and other family members.

Rating Determination

Item 11 is assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 96 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives, or that were necessary to meet special needs. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California Welfare and Institutions Code states that a child must be placed in a safe and appropriate placement that is least restrictive, most family-like, in close proximity to the parental home whenever possible and best suited to the child's needs. The Statewide Assessment notes that California law states that if the child needs to be placed out of the county in which the parents reside, the specific reason for such a placement must be documented in the case plan as well as the resources that were lacking that led to the out-of-county placement.

The Statewide Assessment notes that, in general, the agency is effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents or families of origin. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that stakeholders identified the following challenges:

- The proximity of placement is problematic in communities with a shortage of approved foster homes.
- In some cases, the most appropriate kin placement is not located close to the child's parents and community, thereby requiring the placement of children outside of their community.
- Children with special needs often require placement in treatment facilities that are not near the communities from which they were removed.

Stakeholder interview information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the agency makes concerted efforts to place children in close proximity to their parents and family. Fresno stakeholders noted that the Family-to-Family initiative has been particularly effective in promoting placements in the children's communities.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 28 (72 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not have a sibling in foster care at any time during the period under review. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 12	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	14	4	25	89
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	1	3	11
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	16	5	28	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	3	5	11	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Performance on this item varied somewhat across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 87.5 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 80 percent of Santa Clara County cases.

Item 12 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed with all siblings, or if siblings were separated, that the separation was due to the special needs of one of the siblings or to the fact that placement with siblings was not in the child's best interest. Item 12 was rated as an ANI in three cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together. In two of those cases, the reason for separation of siblings was attributed to the size of the sibling group (four children in one case and three children in the other case). In the third case, the two siblings indicated that they did not want to be placed together and reviewers determined that the agency had not attempted to address the reason why the children did not want to be together.

Rating Determination

Item 12 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 89 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever possible and appropriate. This is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California statute requires that in any case in which a caseworker places a minor into custody the social worker shall, to the extent that it is practical and appropriate, place the minor together with any sibling(s) or half-sibling(s) who also are detained. If siblings are not placed together, the caseworker must explain to the court why the siblings are not placed together and what efforts he or she is making to place the siblings together or why those efforts are not appropriate. The Statewide Assessment notes that California's common core curriculum for all newly hired social workers includes training on placing siblings together whenever possible and that maintaining sibling relationships is a high priority for caseworkers when seeking placements for children.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following data: In 2007, 47.2 percent of all children with siblings were placed with all their siblings and 68.9 percent were placed with all or some of their siblings. The Statewide Assessment also reports the following challenges with regard to placing siblings together:

- When a sibling of a child who is already in foster care is removed, there may not be room in the foster home for the second (or third) sibling. Thus, placement stability must be weighed against placing siblings together.
- Locating foster homes that are able and willing to care for large sibling groups, especially when some of the children have significant emotional, behavioral, and/or developmental concerns is often challenging.
- Licensing requirements may limit the number of siblings placed in one home.
- When siblings have different fathers, some relatives are reluctant to accept children for placement who are not related to them by blood.
- Children with specialized needs often require placement in treatment facilities and may be temporarily separated from their siblings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders from Los Angeles and Santa Clara Counties who commented on this item expressed the opinion that efforts are made to place siblings together. However, stakeholders in Los Angeles County also noted that the lack of foster homes that will accommodate large sibling groups often is a barrier to achieving this goal.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 13 was applicable for 29 (74 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item if the child had no siblings in foster care and if one of the following conditions was met with regard to the parents: (1) TPR was established prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the child's life (or parents were deceased), or (2) visitation

with a parent was considered to not be in the best interests of the child. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families.

The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 13	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	12	6	21	72
Area Needing Improvement	1	4	3	8	28
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	16	9	29	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	3	1	10	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Performance on this item did not differ substantively across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of Fresno and Los Angeles County cases and 67 percent of Santa Clara County cases.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that (1) the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children or (2) the agency made concerted efforts to promote frequent visitation even when the current visitation frequency did not meet the child’s needs.

Item 13 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother (four cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings (four cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the father (four cases).

Specific information about visitation frequency is provided in the table below. As shown in the table, during the period under review, 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.

Visitation Frequency (During the period under review)	Mother and Child	Father and Child	Siblings in Foster Care
At least once a week	14 (54%)	6 (40%)	9 (45%)
Less than once a week, but at least twice a month	1 (4%)	2 (13%)	2 (10%)
Less than twice a month, but at least once a month	1 (4%)	0	3 (15%)
Less than once a month	5 (19%)	3 (20%)	2 (10%)
Never	5 (19%)	4 (27%)	4 (20%)
Total applicable cases	26	15	20

Rating Determination

Item 13 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 72 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child and family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California Welfare and Institutions Code and Manual of Policies and Procedures require that caseworkers and probation placement officers arrange visits between children and their parents, guardians, and grandparents according to minimum specified schedules set forth in the child's case plan. The Statewide Assessment also reports that California's common core curriculum for all newly hired caseworkers and probation placement officers includes training on visitation between parents and children and between siblings.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, for the second round of the CFSR, the CDSS added questions to its survey to address this area. Interviews were conducted from February to July 2007 of a sample of parents. The Statewide Assessment reports that baseline data indicate that 65 percent of foster children had contact with their parents in the prior 2 weeks and 46 percent of foster children had contact with siblings in other foster care placements in the prior 2 weeks.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that efforts are made to ensure sibling visitation. Other State- and local-level stakeholders, however, indicated that sibling visitation is not taking place on a routine basis and that some children in foster care have not seen their siblings in years. One barrier to sibling visitation was noted to be the high cost of transportation.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for 38 (99 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. One case was rated as Not Applicable because the child was placed in a pre-adoptive home with his siblings immediately after birth and therefore there were no other connections to maintain. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child’s connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, extended family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. This item is not rated on the basis of visits or contacts with parents or siblings in foster care. The results of the assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 14	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	10	16	9	35	92
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	1	3	8
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	18	10	38	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	1	0	1	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

All three sites exhibited high performance on this item.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members, religious or cultural heritage, schools, neighborhoods, and friends. Item 14 was rated as an ANI in two cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to extended family. The item was rated as an ANI in one case when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connection to his school.

Rating Determination

Item 14 is rated as a Strength. In 92 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections with extended family, culture, religion, community, and school. This exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when children require out-of-home placement, caseworkers are expected to make concerted efforts to place them with relatives in their home community and in a placement that permits them to continue in their current schools, when possible and appropriate. Contacts with families and friends and continued connections to their cultural, religious, and other community-based activities are strongly encouraged. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that caseworkers are expected to develop case plans that preserve cultural, educational, social, and other community connections. The Statewide Assessment also reports that when a child is identified as an Indian child, the agency involved notifies the appropriate Tribe and requests its involvement at the earliest possible point.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the Family-to-Family initiative focuses on placement of children in their communities and/or with relatives, and encourages mentoring relationships between parents and resource families.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that Native American Tribes are not routinely being notified of Native American children in county foster care systems. Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the agency makes concerted efforts to keep children connected to significant people in their lives and to their schools and communities. Los Angeles County stakeholders noted that the judges ask caseworkers at each hearing to justify why a child was not able to remain in their school of origin at the time of placement.

Item 15. Relative placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 34 (87 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if relative placement was not an option during the period under review because (1) the child was in an adoptive placement at the start of the time period or (2) the child entered foster care needing specialized services that could not be provided in a relative placement. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 15	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	13	6	26	76
Area Needing Improvement	1	4	3	8	24
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	17	9	34	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	2	1	5	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Performance on this measure varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 87.5 percent of Fresno County cases, compared with 76 percent of Los Angeles County cases and 67 percent of Santa Clara County cases.

Item 15 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed with relatives (16 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives but the agency made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (10 cases).

Item 15 was rated as an ANI in 8 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency had not made efforts to search for maternal relatives (five cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to search for paternal relatives (seven cases).

Rating Determination

Item 15 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 76 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, placement options are considered in the following order of priority: noncustodial parent, relatives, Tribal members (if applicable), foster family, and group home. When the child cannot return home, the court is required to determine if there is a relative who is able and willing to care for the child. Caseworkers are required to search for relatives and approve relative home placements. California’s law provides for emergency placement with relatives to avoid placement with non-related caregivers. Additionally, the Relative and Foster Care Emergency Fund is available to provide for one-time assistance to purchase items such as smoke detectors or beds to meet approval or placement requirements. Such assistance can remove barriers to placements with relatives. The Statewide Assessment reports that the greatest numbers of children placed in out-of-home care are placed with relatives.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the use of Family-to-Family, FGDM, and TDM, as well as other family engagement strategies, contributes to identifying relatives who may serve as placement resources when appropriate.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the agency generally makes concerted efforts to place children with relatives. A few stakeholders said that in accordance with State regulation, relative placement has a higher priority than adoption.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 27 (69 percent) of the 39 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if (1) parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child or (2) a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child’s best interest throughout the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below:

Item 16	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	10	5	17	63
Area Needing Improvement	2	4	4	10	37
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	14	9	27	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	5	1	12	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children. Item 16 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the father (five cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the mother (six cases).

Specific findings pertaining to this item were as follows:

Effort Made	With Mother	With Father
• Encouraging the parent’s participation in school or after school activities and attendance at medical appointments and special events	11	6
• Providing transportation so that parents can participate in these events	8	3
• Providing opportunities for family therapeutic situations	12	6
• Encouraging foster parents to mentor biological parents and serve as parenting role models for them	7	10
• Encourage and facilitate contact with incarcerated parents (when appropriate) or with parents living far away from the child	2	3

Rating Determination

Item 16 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 63 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, some counties in California are using Parent Child Interactive Therapy as a model of helping to train parents on positive interaction with their children. When families are engaged in this treatment, parents and children are together an hour a week for 20 weeks.

Stakeholder Interview

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well-Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the site according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	10	19	9	38	58.5
Partially Achieved	3	10	6	19	29.2
Not Achieved or Addressed	4	2	2	8	12.3
Total Applicable Cases	17	31	17	65	
Not Applicable Cases	0	0	0	0	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

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.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

California also did not achieve substantial conformity for this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. Although at that time, case reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children (item 19) was a Strength, the following concerns were identified with regard to the other items included in this outcome:

- The service needs of children and families were not consistently met (item 17).
- Parents and children (when appropriate) were not consistently engaged in case planning (item 18).
- 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).

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 a 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

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

All four items included in this outcome were rated as an ANI in the 2008 CFSR. The key findings of the 2008 case reviews are somewhat similar to those found in 2002 and include the following:

- In 92 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had assessed and met the needs of the children. However, the agency is inconsistent with regard to assessing and meeting the services needs of the mothers, fathers, and foster parents.
- The agency is inconsistent with regard to involving mothers, children (when appropriate), and particularly, fathers in developing the case plan.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children is inconsistent across cases.
- There is a lack of sufficient caseworker visits with mothers and, particularly, fathers, and when visits do occur, they are of questionable quality.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 17 was applicable for all 65 cases (100 percent). In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. This item excludes the assessment of children’s (but not parents’) needs pertaining to educational, physical health, and mental health needs. These are addressed in later items. The case review results are the following:

Item 17	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	11	20	10	41	63
Area Needing Improvement	6	11	7	24	37
Not applicable	0	0	0	0	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

There was no meaningful variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 65 percent of Fresno and Los Angeles County cases compared with 59 percent of Santa Clara County cases. There also was no meaningful difference in performance as a function of type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 64 percent of foster care cases and 61 percent of in-home services cases.

Item 17 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents (relevant to only the foster care cases) had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met. Item 17 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that there was either inadequate assessment of needs or inadequate services to meet identified needs.

Specific case review findings for item 17 are shown in the table below. The data in the table suggest that the agency was considerably less effective in assessing and meeting service needs of the fathers than it was in assessing and meeting the needs of the children, mothers, and foster parents. The data also indicate that the agency was most effective in assessing and meeting the needs of the children.

Item 17: Needs Assessment and Services Provided	Yes	No	Total Applicable
Child's needs assessed and met	60 (92%)	5 (8%)	65
Mother's needs assessed and met	39 (80%)	10 (20%)	49
Father's needs assessed and met	23 (62%)	14 (38%)	37
Foster parents' needs assessed and met	27 (82%)	6 (18%)	33

Rating Determination

Item 17 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 63 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children, parents, and, when applicable, foster parents. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Manual of Policies and Procedures specifies that an assessment must be completed for each child who receives child welfare services. The factors that must be considered in the assessment include relevant social, cultural and physical factors relating to the child, the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) or person(s) serving in that role, and other significant persons who reside in the home; apparent problems and causes; and whether the child may remain safely in the home.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that the shortage of qualified service providers presents a challenge for caseworkers and probation placement officers when identifying needed resources. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that the provision of specific services, particularly psychotherapy and counseling for children, can be disrupted by placement changes.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the child welfare agency is effective in assessing the needs of children and that there are a range of services available for children. However, stakeholders in Santa Clara and Los Angeles County expressed concern about the availability of IL services for eligible youth, and some stakeholders noted that the IL services are either offered too late or youth are not given information about what services are available for them. Fresno County stakeholders praised the IL services in that county, but noted that youth have very little contact with their caseworkers and that caseworkers are not involved in assessing the needs of the older youth.

Fresno County stakeholders also praised the agency in that county for its efforts to assess and meet the needs of foster parents. However, State-level stakeholders and stakeholders in Santa Clara and Los Angeles County expressed concern about the lack of support and communication between county caseworkers and the foster parents.

Most stakeholders did not comment on agency efforts to assess or meet the needs of parents. However, a few stakeholders in Los Angeles County indicated that meeting the needs of parents in probation cases is difficult because probation can only refer for services and does not have funds to pay for services for parents. They noted that often when probation parents are referred for parenting classes that are offered by child welfare, the classes are full and the parents have to wait long periods of time to access the classes.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 58 (89 percent) of the 65 cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were not involved with the child in any way and the child was too young or had cognitive delays or other conditions that were barriers to participation in case planning. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (if age appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child’s best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

Item 18	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	17	7	32	55
Area Needing Improvement	8	9	9	26	45
Total Applicable Cases	16	26	16	58	
Not Applicable Cases	1	5	1	7	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 65 percent of Los Angeles County cases compared with 50 percent of Fresno County cases and 44 percent of Santa Clara County cases. However, performance did not differ as a function of type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 55 percent of foster care cases and 56 percent of in-home services cases.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process or that the agency had made concerted efforts to involve them in the case planning process. The item was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to involve the mother, father, and/or child (when age appropriate) in the case planning process.

Key findings with regard to this item are presented in the table below. The data indicate that for the cases reviewed, fathers were less likely to be involved in case planning than either mothers or age-appropriate children. In addition, children were slightly less likely to be involved in case planning than mothers. However, although the mothers were more likely than the fathers or the children to be involved in case planning, about one-fourth of the mothers were not involved in case planning.

Item 18: Involvement in Case Planning	Evaluation Results		Applicable Cases
	Yes	No	
Mother involved in case planning?	37 (76%)	12 (24%)	49
Father involved in case planning?	23 (58%)	17 (43%)	40
Child (if age appropriate) involved in case planning?	31 (70%)	13 (30%)	44

Rating Determination

Item 18 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 55 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, in both Family Maintenance and Family Reunification cases, caseworkers or probation placement officers are required to complete initial case plans within 30 to 60 days, update them every 6 months, and engage children and parents in the case planning process through activities such as FGDM, TDM, and family conferencing. The Statewide Assessment notes that core training for caseworkers and probation placement officers incorporates effective practices for involving the child and family in the development of the case plan.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed differing opinions depending on their location. Fresno County stakeholders reported that the child welfare agency makes concerted efforts to engage parents and children in case planning on a routine basis and that TDMs help facilitate the engagement of families. However, stakeholders from this county also noted that probation placement officers are less likely than agency caseworkers to engage the youth and parents in case planning.

Fresno County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the county’s effectiveness in this area may be due to recently established caseload caps for the caseworkers that give the caseworkers more time to engage families. However, Fresno County stakeholders also

said that the agency had only 30 days to develop a case plan, suggesting that the county has not opted to adopt the new State guideline of 60 days.

In comparison to Fresno County, Santa Clara County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the involvement of parents and children in case planning varies across caseworkers and depends on the specifics of a case. They noted that a TDM often is effective in engaging families. They also noted, however, that when the court releases the agency from pursuing reunification, the agency is no longer obligated to engage the parents in further case planning.

Los Angeles County stakeholders were in general agreement that parents and children are not engaged in case planning. These stakeholders said that parents are given the case plan to sign and if they do not agree with the plan, they do not sign it. Some stakeholders noted that plans are not changed even if parents do not agree with it. Los Angeles County stakeholders attributed the lack of engagement of youth and parents to the lack of time. They noted that some caseworkers in Emergency Response do not have time to talk with the family prior to developing the plan, but that once the plan is completed, they may have discussions with the family. Caseworkers in Los Angeles County also noted that FGDM and family conferencing would help to engage families, but that the use of these approaches is extremely rare. They noted that TDMs are occurring more often in the county, but that these are not seen as formal meetings for developing the case plan.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 19 was applicable for all 65 (100 percent) foster care cases. In conducting the assessment of this item, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child’s safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 19	Fresno County	Los Angeles County	Santa Clara County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	12	29	13	54	83
Area Needing Improvement	5	2	4	11	17
Not applicable	0	0	0	0	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of Los Angeles County cases, compared with 76 percent of Santa Clara County cases and 71 percent of Fresno County cases. However, performance on the item did not differ as a function of the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of foster care cases, compared with 85 percent of in-home services cases.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals. Item 19 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (three cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits did occur, they were substantive (four cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (three cases).
- There were extended periods of time in which there were no visits to the child at all (one case).

Specific information from the case reviews is presented in the table below.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Child During the Period Under Review	Number and Percent of Cases
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	5 (8%)
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	10 (15%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	43 (66%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	6 (9%)
There were no visits during the period under review	1 (2%)
Total cases	65

Rating Determination

Item 19 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 83 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports the following information regarding visits with children:

- For in-home cases, the caseworker is required to visit each child with an approved case plan who remains in the home at least once a calendar month. However, this can be reduced to once every 2 months if certain criteria have been met and supervisory approval obtained and documented.
- For each child with an approved case plan who is placed in out-of-home care with a relative, foster family home, foster family agency (FFA), or a legal guardian, the caseworker or probation placement officer must visit the child at least once each calendar month. The caseworker or probation placement officer shall be permitted to have less frequent visits, up to a minimum of once every 3 calendar months, only if certain criteria are met and written supervisory approval has been obtained. A portion of each visit is to be spent with the child alone and outside of the presence of a caregiver.
- Consistent with new Federal requirements, California currently is developing a plan using funds under title IV-B to increase caseworker visits with children in foster care to monthly. This plan will be submitted to the Federal government by June 2008.

The Statewide Assessment notes that of all children who required a monthly caseworker visit, the percentage who received a monthly visit increased by 6.6 percentage points from September 2003 (86.4 percent) to September 2005 (92.1 percent).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed differing opinions depending on their location. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that, in that county, children are seen at least once a month by their caseworkers even if it means that the caseworker has to work on the weekend. They noted that monthly visitation is a mandate of the county office and that the frequency of visits is carefully monitored by supervisors. Los Angeles County stakeholders were less positive about the frequency and quality of visits with children by probation placement officers because of the extremely large caseloads carried by these staff (70 to 80 cases). Santa Clara County stakeholders had mixed opinions with regard to this item. A few stakeholders indicated that children are seen at least once a month by their caseworkers. However, other stakeholders questioned whether caseworker visits with older youth were occurring with any frequency.

Fresno County stakeholders reported that the frequency of caseworker contact with the child depended on the type of caseworker. They noted that Emergency Response and Family Reunification caseworkers generally see the children in their caseloads on at least a monthly basis. However, long-term foster care (LTFC) caseworkers tend to see the children in their caseloads only once or twice every 6 months. Stakeholders estimated that only 20 to 30 percent of the children who are in LTFC are seen monthly.

Item 20: Worker visits with parents

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 49 (75 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. All cases that were not applicable were foster care cases. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well-being. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 20	Fresno	Los Angeles	Santa Clara	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	13	9	28	57
Area Needing Improvement	5	10	6	21	43
Total Applicable Cases	11	23	15	49	
Not Applicable Cases	6	8	2	16	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

There was no meaningful variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 55 percent of Fresno County cases, 57 percent of Los Angeles County cases, and 60 percent of Santa Clara County cases. However, performance varied as a function of type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 48 percent of the applicable foster care cases and 65 percent of the in-home services cases.

Item 20 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children and that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. Item 20 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency or quality (four cases).
- Visits with the mother were of sufficient frequency, but not quality (three cases).
- Visits with the mother were of sufficient quality, but not frequency (two cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency or quality (five cases).
- Visits with father were of sufficient quality, but not frequency (two cases).
- There were no visits with father (11 cases).
- There were no visits with mother (four cases).

Additional information from the case reviews is provided below. These data indicate that caseworkers were more likely to visit mothers at least once a month (73 percent of applicable cases) than they were to visit fathers at least once a month (45 percent of applicable cases).

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Parents	Mother	Father
Visits occurred at least weekly	6 (12.5%)	1 (3%)
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	6 (12.5%)	2 (6%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	23 (48%)	13 (37%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	9 (19%)	8 (23%)
There were no visits during the period under review	4 (8%)	11 (31%)
Total Applicable Cases	48	35

Rating Determination

Item 20 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 57 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for foster care and in-home cases, the standard frequency for face-to-face visits between caseworkers and parents is monthly, unless the parents’ needs require more frequent visitation. The Statewide Assessment indicates that less visitation may occur if certain criteria are met and written supervisory approval has been obtained. The case plan must contain documentation justifying less frequent visits.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following information: “Data on caseworker visits with parents from the CWS/CMS [Child Welfare Services/Case Management System] in Family Maintenance and Family Reunification cases indicate an 11 percentage point increase between March 2002 and December 2006.”

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Fresno	Los Angeles	Santa Clara	Total Number	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	11	20	13	44	88.0
Partially Achieved	1	1	1	3	6.0
Not Achieved	1	1	1	3	6.0
Total Applicable Cases	13	22	15	50	
Not Applicable Cases	4	9	2	15	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 2

California is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. Reviewers determined that the outcome was substantially achieved in 88 percent of the cases. This 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. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 91 percent of the foster care cases and 82 percent of the in-home services cases.

Key Concerns of the 2002 CFSR

California did not achieve 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 are assessed and to document how the identified educational needs are addressed in the case plan
- Developed protocols for counties and local school districts to improve educational services to children with identified needs

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

A key finding of the 2008 CFSR is that for some of the children in the cases reviewed, educational needs were either not assessed, or identified educational needs were not addressed.

Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 50 (77 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if any of the following applied: (1) children were not of school age, or (2) children in in-home cases did not have service needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether concerted efforts were made to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below:

Item 21	Fresno	Los Angeles	Santa Clara	Total Number	Percent
Strength	11	20	13	44	88
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	2	6	12
Total Applicable Cases	13	22	15	50	
Not applicable	4	9	2	15	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and concerted efforts were made to provide services, if necessary. Item 21 was rated as an ANI in three foster care cases and three in-home services cases when case reviewers determined the following:

- There was a lack of assessment of educational needs despite information that an educational assessment was warranted (two in-home services cases).
- The child had educational needs that were not being met (two foster care cases and one in-home services case).
- The child did not go to school for 11 days because the agency did not ensure that transportation was available to take the child to school when his placement was changed (one foster care case).

Rating Determination

Item 21 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 88 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for this item to be rated as a Strength. A 95 percent standard is set for this item because it is the only item assessed for the outcome.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State child welfare agency is responsible only for meeting the educational needs of dependent children (i.e., children in the foster care cases). The Statewide Assessment does not address the issue of educational needs for children in the in-home services cases, noting that in those cases, parents are responsible for meeting educational needs.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following data as relevant to this item:

- Only 0.28 percent of the 3,238 foster youth served during school year 2004-2005 were expelled from school, which was significantly below the 0.34 percent statewide expulsion rate for all students. This 0.28 percent figure for foster youth was a 0.14 percent improvement over the previous school year.
- Between school years 2002-2003 and 2004-2005, the average number of days to transfer school records for foster children was reduced from 5 days to 2.9 days.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions depending on their location. Most State-level stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency is not effective in assessing and addressing children's educational needs, due primarily to a lack of collaboration between the school systems and the child welfare agencies. These stakeholders reported that there is a lack of data on educational outcomes, inadequate educational tracking of children who move from school to school when placements change, and insufficient information about educational services that are available for children. A few State-level stakeholders suggested that no one is monitoring the educational progress of older youth in foster care and, if foster parents are not encouraging the children to stay in school and perform well, the children tend to lose interest in school.

Los Angeles County stakeholders also expressed concerns about the agency's effectiveness in assessing and addressing children's educational needs. Although several stakeholders noted that the county child welfare agency has educational consultants that are helpful in meeting children's educational needs, other stakeholders indicated that these consultants often are called in only when there is a crisis (e.g., the child is expelled or the child needs an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and the school is not doing it) and that there is little ongoing assessment and planning with regard to educational issues. Stakeholders also noted that caseworkers are not effective in maintaining information in the children's educational passports, due primarily to their excessive caseloads. A few stakeholders reported that although there are some problems in the relationship between the schools and the county child welfare agency, there is an Education Coordinating Council in that county that is an advisory oversight body that can bring people to the table when there are

problems. Los Angeles County stakeholders also noted that foster parents in the county are not given the support that they need from the county child agency to advocate successfully with the educational system.

Although only a few Santa Clara County stakeholders commented on this item, the general opinion of these stakeholders was that educational issues are not being adequately addressed, and there is little or no advocacy for educational services for children in foster care by the agency, including the foster parents.

In contrast to Los Angeles County and Santa Clara County, Fresno County stakeholders were in agreement that the agency makes concerted efforts to ensure that the educational needs of children are assessed and addressed. Stakeholders noted that there is a good partnership and collaboration between the county schools and the county child welfare agency, that educational liaisons are very effective in ensuring that children’s needs are assessed and met, that tutoring is available for children who need it, and that the agency calls a special meeting (similar to a TDM) to address educational issues when a child in foster care has a 2.0 or lower grade point average. However, Fresno County stakeholders also noted that caseworkers have difficulty keeping the educational passport up to date because of their time constraints.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Fresno	Los Angeles	Santa Clara	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	15	21	11	47	81.0
Partially Achieved	0	2	3	5	8.6
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	3	2	6	10.3
Total Applicable Cases	16	26	16	58	
Not Applicable	1	5	1	7	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

California is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 81 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, 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 and 74 percent of in-home services cases.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

California did not achieve substantial conformity for this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. The key finding was that although the State was highly effective in meeting children’s physical health needs (item 22 was rated as a Strength), it 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. A key concern identified by stakeholders was that mental health services are not always available or of sufficient quality to meet children’s mental health service needs.

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, County Welfare Directors Association, County Probation Officers Association, and County Mental Health Directors Association to improve and expand access to mental health services

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings of the 2008 CFSR are similar to those for the 2002 CFSR. That is, the agency was found to be generally effective in meeting children’s physical health needs (item 22 is rated as a Strength), but less effective in meeting children’s mental health needs (item 23 is rated as an ANI).

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

Item 22: Physical health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 45 (69 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical

health needs (including dental needs) had been appropriately assessed, and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 22	Fresno	Los Angeles	Santa Clara	Total Number	Percent
Strength	11	20	11	42	93
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	2	3	7
Total Applicable Cases	11	21	13	45	
Not Applicable Cases	6	10	4	20	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied somewhat across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Fresno County cases, 95 percent of Los Angeles County cases, and 85 percent of Santa Clara County cases. There was no meaningful variation in performance on the item as a function of type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of the 39 applicable foster care cases and 100 percent of the 6 applicable in-home services cases.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's health needs (medical and dental) were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Item 22 was rated as anANI in three foster care cases when reviewers determined that the child's dental health-care needs had not been adequately addressed.

Rating Determination

Item 22 is assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 93 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, each child in placement is required to receive a medical and dental examination, preferably prior to, but not later than, 30 calendar days after placement. The assessment shall be performed by, or under the supervision of, a licensed physician. The Statewide Assessment notes that California State policy does not address this item as it pertains to in-home services cases. It was noted that, for in-home services families, caseworkers educate and assist families with programs that provide medical and dental care.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following data: Preliminary data on this measure indicate that at least 85 percent of foster children have received medical exams in accordance with the Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program guidelines; over 55 percent have received dental exams as recommended by the CHDP.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that public health nurses are placed in county child welfare agencies to monitor medical and dental visits, psychotropic medications, and the input of data into the child's health passport. They also accompany caseworkers investigating child abuse and neglect to assess the physical condition of children. In addition, they help caseworkers monitor chronic medical conditions that foster children may have and work with families with in-home service cases and children placed in out-of-home care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the agency makes concerted efforts to assess and meet children's physical health needs. Stakeholders noted that this is facilitated by the use of public health nurses who are housed in the child welfare agency and serve as consultants to caseworkers on physical health issues and concerns. However, stakeholders also expressed the opinion that dental services for children in foster care are not adequate. Many dentists do not take MediCal, and MediCal will not pay for orthodontics or severe dental conditions, including Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMJ).

Many stakeholders voiced concern about whether foster parents and relative caregivers were being given adequate support to meet the physical health needs of children in their care. They noted that the health and education passport is not routinely provided to foster parents, and, when it is provided, it does not always have the most up-to-date health and treatment information. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that foster parents and relative caregivers are not able to access the medical equipment or the home nursing services that they need for children in their care. Some stakeholders said that foster parents often have to pay for home nursing services themselves when they are caring for a medically fragile child.

Item 23: Mental health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 49 (75 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs or if there were no mental health concerns. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 23	Fresno	Los Angeles	Santa Clara	Total Number	Percent
Strength	13	17	10	40	82
Area Needing Improvement	1	4	4	9	18
Total Applicable Cases	14	21	14	49	
Not Applicable Cases	3	10	3	16	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

There was variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 93 percent of Fresno County cases, 81 percent of Los Angeles County cases, and 71 percent of Santa Clara County cases. Performance on this item also varied as a function of the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of the 33 applicable foster care cases and 69 percent of the 16 applicable in-home services cases.

Item 23 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children’s mental health needs were appropriately assessed, and the identified mental health needs were addressed. Item 23 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- Mental health needs were not assessed nor addressed (three in-home cases and two foster care cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed, but services were not provided to address identified needs (two in-home cases and two foster care cases).

Rating Determination

Item 23 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, a CHDP health examination is required for all foster children and includes a socioemotional developmental screening that can result in a referral for further mental health assessment. The Children’s Systems of Care, utilized in all counties, is the formal interagency structure used by child welfare to address mental health treatment planning and placement options. The CDSS provides cross-training for providers and county mental health and child welfare staff, which contributes to building relationships that result in effective collaboration.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the final CDSS statewide survey of parents and foster parents indicated that 60 percent of the children have had a mental health screening and, of those who needed services, 65 percent received them.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that although mental health assessments are accessible for the most part, there are insufficient mental health services to meet the needs of the children. State-level stakeholders attributed this to the poor collaboration between mental health and child welfare agencies. However, Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that in that county, as a result of the Katie A. lawsuit, there has been improved collaboration between mental health and child welfare, and the Department of Mental Health now has staff colocated in the county child welfare agencies.

Many stakeholders expressed concern that the lack of mental health services is being addressed by putting children on psychotropic medications. Stakeholders indicated that many children in foster care are on psychotropic medications, with some taking several dosages and several different medications. Stakeholders noted that group care facilities receive additional money if a child is on medications, and some expressed concern that this was resulting in children being pushed to take medications. Stakeholders noted that routine mental health concerns are being addressed with psychotropic medications as if that was the only option and that behavioral therapy approaches are not being adequately considered. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that MediCal, for example, will only pay for two counseling sessions, so children are not getting the counseling services that they need.

Several stakeholders also expressed concern that the mental health providers who serve children in foster care usually are interns and do not understand the mental health issues related to foster children. Stakeholders also noted that some foster parents believe that mental health services for children in foster care are only available in the county where the child is in foster care. For example, if the child is in foster care through the Los Angeles County agency, but the foster family lives in San Bernardino County, the foster family believes the child must be taken to Los Angeles for services.

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

This section of the CFSR Final Report provides information regarding California’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors examined during the CFSR. Information on the items included under each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders conducted during the onsite CFSR. A score for substantial conformity is established for each systemic factor. Scores of 3 and 4 represent substantial conformity. Scores of 1 or 2 mean that a State is not in substantial conformity with the requirements of the systemic factor. Specifically, a score of 1 is given when none of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) or program requirements are in place. A score of 2 indicates that some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement. A systemic factor is rated a 3 when all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and no more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement. A rating of 4 is given when all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement.

Information is provided regarding the State’s performance on each systemic factor for the State’s first CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State’s PIP, the key concerns addressed in the PIP and the strategies for assessing those concerns are noted, as well as any changes in ratings that occurred as a result of the State’s second CFSR.

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
Rating	1	2	3X	4

Status of Statewide Information System

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System because the single item assessed for this systemic factor was rated as a Strength. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, was not required to address the factor in its PIP. Findings for the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because CWS/CMS, the State’s automated system, 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, probation departments lack direct access to the CWS/CMS, which can cause delays in entering critical information and in obtaining information for probation to carryout its functions.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California’s CWS/CMS is its Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). CWS/CMS contains data on all children and families receiving child welfare services in California (including children under the purview of the county probation departments) and tracks the legal status, location, demographic information, and case-plan goals for these children and families. The Statewide Assessment reports that using this system, “child welfare staff can create, read, retrieve, and update information in the database,” and that “the system makes calculations, stores data, prints reports and documents, and performs a full range of processing and case management functions.” The Statewide Assessment also reports that data from the CWS/CMS are used to inform policy and program decisions, evaluate program performance, make budgetary projections, improve service delivery, and conduct quality assurance reviews. CDSS also addresses the issue of data quality through ACINs and ACLs intended to focus county attention on particular data quality concerns.

The following specific features of the system were identified in the Statewide Assessment:

- CWS/CMS contains ad hoc reporting capabilities that allow State and county users to create and generate customized reports.
- The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software allows reports to be generated from the CWS/CMS database using real time information.
- CWS/CMS users can use Business Objects software, which does not use “live” data like SAS, but allows users to quickly produce ad hoc CWS/CMS reports to meet local needs.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that CWS/CMS is effective in tracking the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for all children in foster care. They also noted that the local child welfare agencies encourage caseworkers to enter data in a timely manner. Stakeholders reported that a large number of reports (as many as 50) are generated that provide useful information for both agency managers and caseworker supervisors. Several stakeholders said that

many reports are developed through a contract with the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), and are made available on the Internet.

State-level stakeholders indicated that the UC Berkeley reports using CWS/CMS data help CDSS monitor the progress of counties in achieving particular outcomes and assist the State in targeting technical assistance efforts to the counties. County-level stakeholders reported that data reports from CWS/CMS are used to monitor the progress of the county and to identify areas of concern.

A number of stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of access to the CWS/CMS system of staff in the county probation departments. Stakeholders said that the probation department has no direct access to SACWIS and, therefore, must rely on staff of the child welfare agency to enter and retrieve information. Although this can result in some delays in data entry as well as delays in making necessary information about a child available to probation, stakeholders agreed that the basic data pertaining to the location, status, demographic information, and case goals of children served by the probation departments are accessible through CWS/CMS.

Various stakeholders also expressed concern regarding the ease of using the system and the fact that two caseworkers cannot access the same case at the same time without information from one of the caseworkers being lost. State-level stakeholders indicated that there are many ongoing and planned improvements to the system to increase its ease of use and effectiveness as a case management tool.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2X	3

Status of Case Review System

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System because each of the items assessed for this systemic factor were rated as an ANI. A key concern was that although some of the necessary systems were in place, they were not functioning as intended.

Key Concerns Identified in 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. In the 2002 review, items 26 (periodic reviews), 27 (permanency hearings), and 29 (noticing of foster parents and providing opportunities for them to be heard) were rated as Strengths, but the following concerns were identified with regard to items 25 and 28:

- There was a lack of involvement of parents in the development of case plans (item 25).
- There was a 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 (item 28).
- County agencies often would not file for TPR, and the courts often would not grant TPR, unless an adoptive home had been identified for the child, and the home had demonstrated a readiness to adopt (item 28).

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

- Requirements and competencies were developed for child welfare caseworkers and supervisors with the goal of strengthening case practice and provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on good case planning practice, including involvement of all family members in case planning.
- ACIN I-64-03 and ACL 05-07 were issued to clarify that case plans require family engagement and emphasize the importance of documentation of child and family involvement in the case planning process.
- The State worked with CYC to ensure that youth voices and involvement are integrated into the case planning process.
- The time allotted to develop an appropriate case plan was expanded from 30 to 60 days to allow more time for caseworkers to engage parents.
- An educational program was developed and implemented through CDSS' contract with the Judicial Review and Technical Assistance program (JRTA) to provide training to all judges on current law regarding TPR and concurrent planning. One focus of the training was to ensure that judges understand the importance of granting TPR even if there is no current adoptive home for the child.
- The State's AB 636 Outcomes and Accountability self-assessment and planning processes was used to identify and address unmet placement resource needs, including foster and adoptive parents for special needs and older children.

California met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

The specific findings of the 2008 review for each item included in this systemic factor are presented below.

Item 25: Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an ANI because there is no statewide process to ensure that age-appropriate children and their parents are involved in case planning. Case reviews found that parents and/or age-appropriate children were involved in case planning in only 55 percent of the applicable cases. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires the development of a written case plan for all open cases, including voluntary or court-ordered placement cases and in-home services cases. One of the required elements of the case plan is a description of the parental participation in the development of the case plan. The Statewide Assessment reports that because this item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR, statutes were enacted that extended the required timeframe for completing the case plan from 30 days to 60 days, at county option. The expanded timeframe was intended to ensure sufficient time to engage parents and children in the development of the plan. The Statewide Assessment also reports that involvement of parents in case planning is facilitated by the implementation in many counties of practices such as TDM, Family Group Conferencing, and FGDM. In addition, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, California legislation (AB 1412) passed in 2005 requires that children age 12 and older have the right to be involved in the development of their case plans.

The Statewide Assessment reports that meeting case plan timelines can be challenging because of caseload sizes, staffing issues, and limitations of community resources. The Statewide Assessment also reports that parents sometimes are reluctant to engage in case planning or to sign the case plan "before the court sustains the allegations in the petition." However, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, procedures and regulations are in place to ensure that front line managers and supervisors monitor timely completion of initial case plans and subsequent updates. This includes automated management reports that allow the county supervisor and office manager to monitor each caseworker's progress in case plan completion, documentation, and updating.

According to the Statewide Assessment, as part of the PIP, California was required to demonstrate improvement in the percentage of children, parents, and caregivers who were involved in case planning. Through a series of surveys, this was measured in three ways:

- The percentage of interviewees who reported that the children, parents, and caregivers were involved in case planning
- The percentage of interviewees who reported that the case plan was discussed with them
- The percentage of interviewees who reported that the case plan was discussed with them and the child

California met the PIP improvement targets for each of these measures.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR noted that timeliness of case plan development varies across counties, with some counties being more effective than others in meeting the State’s timeframes. In addition, most stakeholders agreed that there is little consistent involvement of parents in case planning in most counties and that variation tends to occur both across caseworkers and across counties. Los Angeles County and Fresno County stakeholders reported that case plans usually are completed in a timely manner, but that they do not consistently involve families. Los Angeles County, Santa Clara County, and Fresno County have maintained the 30-day requirement for the completion of case plans, and stakeholders noted that the plans usually are completed in a timely manner.

Stakeholders also reported that reviews and visits conducted by the JRTA project help probation departments strengthen their understanding and practice with regard to improving timeliness in completing case plans and in engaging parents in case plan development.

Stakeholders indicated that when a TDM or Family Group Conferencing meeting is implemented, parents and age-appropriate children tend to be involved in case planning. However, some stakeholders also indicated that these practices are not always implemented on a frequent basis even in the counties in which they are being used. Implementation of TDM is not necessarily a countywide practice. In addition, a few stakeholders cautioned that TDMs may be used more often to address placement issues (such as preventing a placement disruption or facilitating a placement change) than to develop case plans. Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that case plans tend to be “boiler plate,” identifying the same sets of services for all families.

Problems with parent involvement in case planning were attributed to the high workloads carried by caseworkers. Case review information (reported under item 18) indicates that only 76 percent of the mothers, 70 percent of the children, and 58 percent of the fathers were involved in case planning

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as an ANI. Although the State has a statutory framework for conducting periodic reviews at least every 6 months and although the Statewide Assessment did not provide data on the percentage of 6-month periodic reviews held timely, both the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews reported that the 6-month reviews are not always held in a timely manner in many areas of the State. Delays were attributed primarily to continuances being granted when caseworkers did not submit completed reports to the court in a timely manner or to the agency not notifying Tribes in accordance with the provisions of ICWA. Some stakeholders

expressed the opinion that the high caseworker caseloads and the high rate of turnover among caseworkers make it difficult for caseworkers to submit reports to the court in a timely manner. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires that for all dependency cases, the court must hold periodic status review hearings no less frequently than every 6 months from the date of the original dispositional hearing. For delinquency cases, the first periodic review must be held within 6 months of the child's entry into foster care. The Statewide Assessment also reports that California law and Rules of Court mandate that continuances must not be granted if doing so is contrary to the child's best interest (i.e., the continuance would prolong a temporary placement, an unstable placement, and/or an unresolved custody status); continuances should be granted only upon a showing of good cause.

The Statewide Assessment identified the following key challenges to ensuring that reviews or hearings are held at least every 6 months:

- Child welfare caseworkers do not always provide the required reports to the courts and to the parties to the case in a timely manner, so that all parties have sufficient time to review the reports prior to the hearing. This problem was attributed to the very high workloads carried by caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment notes that when reports are not submitted in a timely manner or are not complete, judges may grant continuances to permit completion and/or adequate reviews of the documents.
- The Tribes are not always notified appropriately as specified in ICWA. When a Tribe has not been properly involved, the court may delay the hearing until the Tribe has been appropriately notified.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed differing opinions regarding the timeliness of the 6-month reviews. Several State-level stakeholders suggested that the timeliness of the 6-month hearings varies across counties, with a few counties still struggling to complete reviews in a timely manner. Although several Los Angeles County and Santa Clara County stakeholders said that the 6-month reviews generally are held on time and continuances are not a frequent occurrence, several other Los Angeles County and Santa Clara County stakeholders expressed the opinion that continuances are a barrier to timely hearings. Most Fresno County stakeholders expressed concern about continuances, which they attribute primarily to the excessive caseloads carried by caseworkers and to the high rate of turnover in the caseworker position. However, Fresno County stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the number of continuances has declined considerably in recent years.

All stakeholders agreed that the court schedules the 6-month reviews in a timely manner, but also noted that judges will order a continuance for the following reasons:

- Proper noticing of relevant parties was not done (this included failure to notice caregivers or the Tribe, if it is an ICWA case).
- Caseworkers did not submit reports to the court in a timely manner so that all parties had sufficient time to review the reports prior to the review.

- Services that were identified in the plan had not been arranged for or provided.
- Lawyers requested a continuance because they were not ready.
- Incarcerated parents were not provided transportation to the hearing.

A few stakeholders expressed concern that the 6-month reviews are not focused on moving the case forward with regard to achieving permanency. A few other stakeholders indicated that the reviews focus on whether what is being recommended for the child is appropriate to meet the child’s needs, but not necessarily on permanency.

Some stakeholders, particularly at the local level, noted that there are no continuances for the 6-month reviews in probation cases. A number of State- and local-level stakeholders attributed improvements in holding timely periodic reviews for probation foster care cases to the onsite reviews and technical assistance visits conducted by JRTA.

Item 27: Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State 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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an ANI. Although permanency hearings are scheduled in a timely manner, the CFSR found that they are not being held in a timely manner on a routine basis throughout the State. Delays in permanency hearings were attributed to the court granting continuances because of inadequate noticing, late caseworker reports, and a lack of sufficient and timely services for parents. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires that a permanency hearing must be held no later than 12 months after the date the child entered foster care. At the permanency hearing, the court must determine the permanent plan for the child, which must include a determination of whether the child will be returned to the child’s home, and if so, when. The Statewide Assessment notes that, in accordance with State statute, if a child is younger than 3 years old, the permanency hearing may be held 6 months after the child entered foster care. The Statewide Assessment also notes that State statute also requires that a permanency review hearing be held every 6 months after the initial permanency hearing.

Although the Statewide Assessment does not provide data on the percentage of permanency hearings that are held in a timely manner, the Statewide Assessment reports that in the majority of cases, permanency hearings are held in accordance with the required timelines. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that timing for the permanency hearing can be affected when the adjudication

process is delayed or extended and/or reunification efforts are extended by the court. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the JRTA program helps courts focus on timeliness of court hearings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed quite different opinions as to whether permanency hearings are held in a timely manner. A few State-level, Los Angeles County, and Santa Clara County stakeholders said that permanency hearings are held in a timely manner. However, other State-level stakeholders (including representatives from different counties) and Fresno County stakeholders noted that continuances frequently delay permanency hearings. Several stakeholders said that sometimes permanency hearings are not held until the child has been in foster care for 18 months in order to give parents more time to work on their reunification plan. Stakeholders also reported that judges granted continuances if noticing was insufficient, if the caseworker's report was not received in a timely manner, if services were not offered to parents in a timely manner, or if parents were unable to complete services in a timely manner. Interviews at the State level indicated that the timeliness of permanency hearings was problematic in a few counties in addition to those included in the CFSR.

Stakeholders also had differing opinions with regard to whether permanency hearings facilitate permanency. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the hearings focus on permanency and are not "cookie cutter" hearings. A few other stakeholders indicated that the hearings were not sufficiently focused on facilitating permanency.

Item 28: Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as an ANI. Although State statute provides a process for TPR in accordance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act, this process is not consistently implemented as intended across the State. Case reviews found that TPR had been filed in a timely manner in 36 percent of the applicable 25 cases. In 37.5 percent of the applicable 25 cases, there was no compelling reason for not filing for TPR in the case file. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires that action to terminate parental rights must be initiated at the permanency hearing, which is held 12 months after the child entered foster care, unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. At the 12-month hearing, a date is set for the selection and implementation hearing, at which time TPR occurs or another permanent plan is selected. The Statewide Assessment notes that, effective January 1, 2007, the following specifications pertain to situations in which TPR is considered to not be in the child's best interest: (1) the TPR would interfere with the child's connection to his/her Tribal community and his/her membership rights; and/or (2) the child's Tribe identifies an alternative permanent plan.

The Statewide Assessment reports that exceptions or compelling reasons why TPR is not in the best interest of the child must be included in the caseworkers' or probation placement officers' reports that are submitted at all court hearings. The court makes the final decision as to whether there is a compelling reason why TPR is not in the best interest of the child. Upon the court order to terminate parental rights, an appeal may be filed using the traditional appeal process. In this process, the appellant and the appellant's attorney must file a signed notice of appeal within 60 days of the court order.

The Statewide Assessment reports that a key challenge to pursuing TPR for a child who has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months is that, in some jurisdictions when an adoptive family has not yet been identified, caseworkers may be reluctant to recommend TPR and/or courts may be reluctant to terminate parental rights. This reluctance was attributed to the desire not to create legal orphans should children whose parental rights have been terminated not be adopted. As a result, by the time parental rights are terminated, many children are already living with the family that will adopt them.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that TPR hearings may be delayed because of the noticing process for birth parents that is required for the hearing. This noticing process was reported to be complex and, as a result, continuances often were necessary because of improper noticing. The Statewide Assessment reported that although this situation creates the need for continuances in the TPR process, the continuances ultimately prevent having a judgment or court order overturned.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR provided distinctly divergent opinions both across and within counties. While a few stakeholders said that the agency is filing for TPR in a timely manner and that TPR hearings are held in a timely manner, many stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that, although the State has a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, this process is not always followed.

Many stakeholders reported that, because of a fear of creating legal orphans, agency caseworkers often do not petition for TPR unless a child is placed with an adoptive family, and/or judges often will not grant a TPR unless a child is already with an adoptive family that has made a formal commitment to adopt the child. Los Angeles County stakeholders noted that it is rare that a child's goal will be changed to adoption unless the child has an identified adoptive family, and TPR will not be recommended until there is a county-approved home study completed. Some Fresno County stakeholders noted that it is rare that there will be a TPR if children are not already in an adoptive home. However, other Fresno county stakeholders indicated that lack of an adoptive family was not an impediment to moving toward a TPR in that county.

A few Fresno County stakeholders reported that they monitor whether compelling reasons have been documented. They noted that the court may order a bonding study to be done, to determine if that is an issue.

Various stakeholders reported that TPR hearings often are delayed for several months for one or more of the following reasons:

- The complex noticing requirements for both birth parents and the Tribes that result in insufficient notice being given to both parents and the Tribe
- A lack of “reasonable efforts” to provide services to parents (i.e., services were not provided to the parents or parents were not given the opportunity to complete services)
- The need to have an assessment as to whether the child is “adoptable”
- Challenges from the Tribe or appeals by the parents of a writ to terminate reunification services

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as an ANI. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required by law to provide caregivers with the Caregiver Information Form, which is intended to provide caregivers with a structured format in which to present information to the courts. However, many foster parents do not receive the form, and many of those who do receive the form, do not receive instructions or assistance on how to complete it. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires agencies to notify the child's caregiver of all 6-month case review hearings. The notice of the hearing must be mailed by the caseworker/probation placement officer to the foster parents, relative caregivers, pre-adoptive parents, community care facility, or the FFA that has physical custody of the child. Similar notice is required for any administrative review convened in lieu of a court hearing. This written notice informs the caregiver of the date, time, and place of the hearing; the nature of the hearing; and any change in the custody or status of the child. This notice advises the foster parent, relative caregiver, and pre-adoptive parent that they may attend all hearings or may submit any information deemed relevant to the court in writing.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, effective October 1, 2007, a new rule went into effect that requires the court to ensure that notice is provided to the following parties for all reviews, permanency, 366.26 selection and implementation hearings, and TPR hearings: current caregiver of the child, including foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, relative caregivers, and non-relative extended family members (NREFM). The rule clarifies that these caregivers have a right to be heard in each of these proceedings. The rule also describes the procedures for caseworkers/probation placement officers to provide the summary of recommendations, caregiver form, and instructions to the caregivers, for the caregivers to file the form or a letter with the court, and for the court clerk’s office to distribute the completed caregiver form to the court and all parties to the case. A revised version of the Caregiver Information Form and new instructions for completing and filing the form also went into effect on October 1, 2007.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that the initial Caregiver Information Form was implemented by the Judicial Council of California in 2002 for optional use by caregivers who wish to submit information to the juvenile court. The form is intended to provide caregivers with a structured format in which to present the information; caseworkers are required by law to provide this form to caregivers.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, despite the many statutes, rules, and programmatic efforts, foster parents and relative caregivers sometimes are reluctant to attend court hearings because they do not understand their roles and are intimidated by the process. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that foster parents and relative caregivers often are unable to attend court hearings because of work schedules and the lack of child care resources.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that caregivers are receiving notification of hearings and reviews, that notification usually is done by the child welfare agency caseworker, and that notification is by mail. However, many stakeholders suggested that, although the opportunity to be heard is available to foster parents through the Caregiver Information Form, many foster parents do not receive the form at all, do not receive the form in a timely manner, and/or do not receive instructions on how to complete or submit the form. Stakeholders also said that caseworkers often tell caregivers that they do not need to complete the form or attend the hearing and sometimes actively discourage caregivers from attending. State- and local-level stakeholders indicated that the summary of recommendations by the child welfare agency is not often provided, so they do not know what to comment on.

State-level stakeholders reported that appropriate use of the form and effective caregiver input into hearings and reviews varies across counties. It was noted that in some counties, the Caregiver Information Form is not used at all.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Status of Quality Assurance System

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance (QA) System because both items that are assessed for this factor are rated as a Strength. However, a few 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 practices changes are occurring as expected.

Key Concerns Identified in the 2002 CFSR

California was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. A key concern identified in 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—the State’s Outcomes and Accountability process. California met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Specific findings of the 2008 review for each item included in this systemic factor and the reasons for item ratings are presented below.

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 the children

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the State has developed and implemented standards to protect the safety and health of children.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their safety and health. These standards include statewide regulations pertaining to foster care licensing, relative approval, and licensing for residential and group home care, as well as county child welfare agency standards for selecting agencies to provide necessary services to children and their families.

The Statewide Assessment notes that, although in the past service providers contracting with county child welfare agencies have not been focused on outcomes-based approaches to service delivery, some counties are now providing training and funding to these agencies to help them make a shift from process measures to outcome measures. In an effort to facilitate the use of evidence-based practice, the State child welfare agency funded the development and implementation of the California Child Welfare Evidence Based

Clearinghouse in 2004. The “Pathway to Prevention” tool also has been developed to provide findings from research, practice, theory, and policy about what it takes to improve the lives of children and families. It emphasizes acting strategically across disciplines, systems, and jurisdictions to reduce abuse and neglect.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders in the three CFSR county sites expressed the opinion that there has been a greater focus on evidence-based practice and outcome monitoring for both the public agency and contracted services providers.

Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength. The State’s Outcomes and Accountability System framework makes extensive statewide and county-specific outcomes data available quarterly to monitor performance on outcomes. Counties are expected to engage stakeholders, including Tribes, youth, and courts, in conducting periodic self-assessments and developing system improvement plans. The 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. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Assembly Bill 636 mandated the development and implementation of a new Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System in California. As part of this new comprehensive system, the California-Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) places an emphasis on continuous quality improvement. The C-CFSR contains similar features to the Federal CFSR and was designed to be compatible with Federal reporting and reviews.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the C-CFSR is built on a continuously recurring 3-year cycle of self-assessment, planning, implementation, and review using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data come from the CWS/CMS, and the qualitative data come from reviews of individual cases within each county. The CWS/CMS generates multiple, comprehensive reports that are used to monitor program performance and promote continuous improvement. A number of these reports provide information at the level of the individual caseworker.

Key components of the C-CFSR are the following:

- Quarterly county data reports—These reports, which are developed using data from the CWS/CMS, are used by the State and counties to monitor progress and are made available to the general public (on the Internet) by CDSS in partnership with the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research.
- Peer quality case reviews (PQCR) —The PQCR provides an assessment of casework practice at the county level, bringing in expertise from other counties to provide a broader perspective.
- County self-assessments (CSA) —This multidisciplinary needs assessment details the county’s overall best practice, service delivery, and funding streams, and evaluates current needs of the county. The CSA emphasizes increased collaboration with local Tribes, community-based organizations, courts, and the county probation department.
- County system improvement plans (SIP) —The county system improvement planning process, which takes place in partnership with the community, incorporates the data counties are collecting through their data reviews, case reviews, and self-assessments, and translates their understanding of this information into strategic planning for program improvement.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, all 58 counties completed an entire cycle of PQCR, CSA, and SIP by June 2007.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, additional State QA processes include the following:

- The Safe Measures program, which provides State staff and county child welfare managers with an ability to identify specific areas needing improvement and the opportunity to identify specific cases not in compliance for the local agency using recent data from reports that are updated and refreshed twice a week. Forty-nine counties have Safe Measures available on an ongoing basis. For the nine counties that have not subscribed to the service, CDSS has arranged to make it available to them during their PQCR to assist in identifying their focus area and cases to be reviewed.
- The Foster Care Ombudsman Office (FCO), which is an autonomous entity within CDSS, is intended to ensure that current and former foster youth and those who care about them have an objective forum for resolution of complaints and concerns regarding their care, placement, and services. According to the Statewide Assessment, 14 counties have established an “Ombudsman-like” office to address complaints and concerns.

The Statewide Assessment reports that implementation of effective QA activities is challenged by the high workloads and caseloads carried by staff at all levels of the child welfare agency and in all divisions. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that in order to maintain a consistent QA system, additional staff resources are needed at both the State and the county level.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in agreement that the State has multiple QA procedures in place, and the overall QA system at both the State and county levels produces large quantities of quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to identify the strengths and needs of the agency and support and evaluate program improvement efforts. Stakeholders were particularly positive about the quarterly report data published on the UC Berkeley website and about the availability of these data to the general public. Stakeholders noted that the child welfare agency ensures that data are shared with different audiences, and

discussions are held to help people understand what the data mean. There was general agreement among stakeholders that CWS/CMS provides a large number of data reports that are outcome focused and can be used for effective management and continuous quality improvement efforts.

Stakeholders in all three counties indicated that the county child welfare agency has its own smaller QA system that supplements the State's QA system by focusing on particular areas of concern for the county. Los Angeles County stakeholders, for example, noted that the county produces data at the office level and publishes it so that people can see how each office in the county is performing. In addition, supervisors in that county use data to address their QA concerns, such as comparing caseloads across offices. Santa Clara County stakeholders reported that, although there is no separate systematic QA process in the county, they use local QA CAT management reports and unit meetings to promote continuous quality improvement.

Fresno County stakeholders noted that the county has a systematic QA system to address issues to support the county's SIP in addition to those that are assessed as part of the C-CFSR and larger State systems. For example, when the county determined that children in foster care were not experiencing desired educational outcomes, they launched an effort aimed at improving those outcomes that involved caseworkers, independent living program caseworkers, and school districts. In addition, Fresno County stakeholders noted that every caseworker has a copy of the county's Key Result Areas, which is a comprehensive practice guideline that both defines quality casework and is utilized as a tool for the ongoing assessment of social work practice and compliance with Federal, State, and local policies. This assessment also connects with a caseworker's performance rating.

Despite the highly positive perceptions of the State and local QA systems, concerns were expressed by a number of stakeholders regarding the capacity of the State and counties to implement the comprehensive QA system due to low staffing, staff turnover, and high workloads. State-level stakeholders also said that it is necessary to improve the State's capacity to synthesize the large amounts of data available in order to use the data strategically with regard to effective decision-making pertaining to statewide program improvements.

Some stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of involvement of key partners in the SIP process. Stakeholders noted that there is variation across counties with regard to the extent to which Tribes are included in the SIP process, which may be reflected in the inconsistent compliance with ICWA provisions across the State. The extent of involvement of county probation departments in the SIP also was noted to vary across counties. In addition, several stakeholders expressed concern about the fact that the CWS/CMS cannot generate reports that are specific to the population of children who are in foster care but under the purview of the county probation office. Stakeholders said that this makes it difficult to assess differences in outcomes between this population and the population of children in foster care under the purview of the child welfare agency.

State-level stakeholders reported that there is no formalized mechanism for the State Foster Care Ombudsmen to share information about the concerns that surface as a result of the review of complaints. In addition, Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that

there is only one Ombudsperson position for the county, which means that complaints must be redirected and many do not get a response. It was reported that at the time of the onsite interview, the Ombudsperson position was not filled.

IV. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2X	3

Status of Training

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training because all of the items assessed for this systemic factor are rated as an ANI.

Key Concerns From 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 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 State implemented the following key strategies as part of its PIP:

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

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as an ANI. The core curricula developed and implemented statewide for child welfare caseworkers and the training developed for child welfare supervisors will not be required for all new caseworkers and supervisors until July 1, 2008. Therefore, it was not in place statewide at the time of the onsite CFSR. In addition, the core curriculum developed for training probation officers is less comprehensive than the training for child welfare caseworkers and does not adequately prepare them for carrying out their job functions, which are the same as child welfare caseworkers. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, since the 2002 CFSR, initial staff training has become more systematized and standardized, and there has been significant progress in the area of initial training. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, standardized curricula are being delivered throughout the State; the training is systematically evaluated for effectiveness and updated based on evaluation results; and processes are in place to ensure that training reflects best practices, meets the requirements of the CFSP, and promotes the agency's practice principles. As part of the PIP, California adopted the Framework for Training Evaluation on the common core curricula for child welfare workers and supervisors that allows for a systematic approach to training evaluation.

The Statewide Assessment notes that CDSS contracts with the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) to coordinate both pre-service training/education and in-service training. CalSWEC is a partnership between the schools of social work, public human service agencies, and other related professional organizations. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Regional Training Academy Coordination Project coordinates the child welfare training activities of the regional training academies, CDSS, and the counties. Since the last CFSR, the Regional Training Academy Coordination Project and CDSS have cochaired the Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC), which has been the primary vehicle for developing and implementing the new, standardized Common Core Curricula for Child Welfare Workers and Supervisors.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the CDSS, with input from STEC and the counties, amended training regulations, Chapter 14-600 – Training Programs, to require child welfare workers and supervisors to complete a standardized common core training program. The amendments are set for adoption by June 2008. For child welfare workers, the regulations outline highly standardized courses that must be completed in the first year of employment and additional courses that must be completed within 2 years. Child welfare supervisors must complete a standardized curriculum within the first year of hire or promotion. Counties are required to track the completion of the training as part of the regulations, including the number of new child welfare workers and supervisors, and the proportion of these that have completed the requirement.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that these amended regulations also mandate initial training within 1 year of hire for probation placement officers on concurrent planning, visitation requirements, and TPR practices. Probation department supervisors are required to attend training within the first year of hire or promotion on: (1) case planning practices; (2) comprehensive assessments, including screening for educational and mental health needs; and (3) understanding the significance of State and Federal reporting requirements such as the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). This training is tracked by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

During the PIP process, STEC implemented the standardized curricula for child welfare workers and supervisors concurrently with the development of the regulations. Implementation of the curricula began June 2005 and expanded as additional areas of need were identified. Final content was added in June 2007.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS issued ACINs that outlined the training requirements in the PIP and the scope of the new common core training program. CDSS provided additional funding to counties to cover the additional time that staff must be away from the office to attend training.

The Statewide Assessment notes that some counties struggle to provide time for staff to attend the required core training in a timely manner when they are unable to adequately cover caseloads or fill positions. In addition, travel remains a hindrance to staff attendance at training, particularly in rural areas that require at least 1 day of travel to attend training. Some promising models for distance learning have been developed, but at the time of the Statewide Assessment, these models were not available in all regions.

The Statewide Assessment reports that final adoption of the training regulations and implementation of county-based tracking systems across the State that are designed to accurately calculate the completion of training will be completed by June 2008.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the title IV-E Stipend Program, which now includes 18 accredited schools of social work, administers child welfare-specialized, competency-based education to prepare and provide financial aid for students and graduates for careers in public child welfare. Since 2003, 905 individuals have earned M.S.W.s and 32 have earned B.S.W.s after receiving stipends and have entered the public child welfare workforce.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed concern about the child welfare-related training for county probation officers. State stakeholders noted that, although these staff can attend the core training for child welfare workers or supervisors, it is not required for them to attend. State-level and Fresno County stakeholders also noted that probation officers receive a 9-day core training from the University of California at Davis (UC-Davis), which is different than the core training for child welfare agency caseworkers. Fresno County stakeholders reported that probation staff who will be assuming the critical child welfare function of investigating reports of child abuse and neglect related to the youth in foster care under the purview of the probation department

had not received training to prepare them for their job responsibilities. Los Angeles County stakeholders also noted that probation officers are not required to take the child welfare core training and that, although they receive on-the-job training, they are not always able to access more formal training. Los Angeles County stakeholders expressed concern that probation staff is subject to the same mandates as child welfare agency staff, but do not get the same training. Los Angeles County stakeholders also noted that probation supervisors have 40 hours of mandatory training, but this may or may not be related to child welfare. Stakeholders in this county reported that probation officers generally view the training as effective once they receive it.

Stakeholders commenting on this item also provided differing information regarding when staff are expected to complete the core curriculum. Some State- and local-level stakeholders reported that the core training for new hires is completed before they begin carrying a caseload. However, other State-level stakeholders noted that, in small counties, caseworkers carry cases as soon as they are hired and sometimes before starting the core training, although they noted that the county makes a commitment to send the caseworkers to the core training as soon as they can.

Fresno County stakeholders described the core training as a 21-day academy training series that is supplemented by a 6-week county training program. Fresno County stakeholders said that, although the 21-day academy training is supposed to be completed within the first year of being hired, caseworkers in the county do not receive a caseload until they complete at least 4 weeks of the county's 6-week induction program.

Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that new caseworkers complete core training prior to carrying cases, spending 2-3 months (9 week program, broken into modules) in training with the academy and receive on-the-job training either through job shadowing with an experienced caseworker or being mentored by an experienced caseworker. Los Angeles County stakeholders also noted that new supervisors receive training for 15 days that begins after promotion and must be completed within 1 year of the promotion.

Santa Clara County stakeholders reported that caseworkers have 12 weeks of training, including the core training delivered by the training academy, followed by on-the-job mentoring and shadowing arranged by supervisors. Santa Clara County stakeholders reported that some staff are given cases before completing training and some may get cases before training starts. However, Santa Clara County stakeholders also noted that caseworkers in the emergency response units are not assigned cases until training is completed.

Various stakeholders also identified the following concerns with regard to training:

- Small counties have difficulties covering cases while caseworkers attend training.
- There is a lack of caseworker training on in-court presentations.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an ANI. The State regulation requiring ongoing training will not be effective until July 1, 2008 and, therefore, was not in place during the onsite CFSR. In addition, probation staff are not receiving ongoing training specific to child welfare areas that would be effective in supporting them in working effectively with families and preparing more effective case plans. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, CDSS, with input from STEC and the counties, amended training regulations to require child welfare workers and supervisors to complete 40 hours of ongoing training every 2 years. Counties are required to track the completion of the training as part of the regulation package, including the number of staff that completes the requirement. Similar regulations also require ongoing training for probation placement officers and supervisors.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, these regulations are in the same stage of the regulatory process as the regulations for initial training. That is, they will not be in regulation until July 1, 2008. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the \$19.4 million in additional funds available to enable counties to attend the required training also includes funds for the ongoing training requirements. The Statewide Assessment reports that STEC provides a system for identifying statewide ongoing training needs as they arise and develops curricula and training materials to meet those needs.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, although many counties have devised effective tracking systems to determine what training their staffs have attended, it remains a challenge for some. It was noted that counties will be working over State FY 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) to enhance their tracking systems in order to accurately track the proportion of their staff that have completed the 40 hour training requirement when it goes into regulation on July 1, 2008.

The Statewide Assessment notes that two barriers to attending ongoing training are (1) the caseloads of caseworkers and (2) the travel time that is sometimes necessary to attend training.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders at the State and county levels who commented on this item during the onsite CFSR were in agreement that the requirement regarding 40 hours of ongoing training every 2 years will not go into effect until July 1, 2008. Therefore, at the time of the onsite CFSR (February 2008), there was no statewide requirement for ongoing training, which is reflected in the various comments

of stakeholders. Although there were no State-mandated hours for ongoing training, State-level stakeholders noted that there are numerous training opportunities offered by CDSS that caseworkers and supervisors can access, and the quality of this training is high.

Los Angeles County stakeholders indicated that the county has mandatory ongoing training every year, and caseworkers have the option of taking a workday to go to a training of choice. They noted that if the caseworker or supervisor is a licensed caseworker, he/she must have 32 hours every 2 years, but they also noted that not all caseworkers are licensed caseworkers. Most Los Angeles County stakeholders said that training generally meets the needs of the caseworkers, and caseworkers have a \$300 per year benefit to attend desired training outside of the department. Santa Clara County stakeholders also noted that ongoing training is expected, and there are multiple training opportunities and few barriers to accessing training.

In contrast to Los Angeles County and Santa Clara County, Fresno County stakeholders did not identify county-mandated ongoing training but noted that there is mandatory training on particular topics as determined by the agency (e.g., training on the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and ICWA), although no hours are specified. Stakeholders in Fresno County reported that caseworkers generally view the ongoing training as not useful to their needs and suggested that the most useful training for caseworkers is training that is provided to them individually by knowledgeable supervisors.

Stakeholders noted that probation officers are required to take 40 hours of training annually, however, this training is not always specific to child welfare. State-level stakeholders suggested that probation staff are not receiving training in critical areas such as how to work with families and how to prepare an effective case plan. Santa Clara County stakeholders indicated that there is no cross-training with probation officers and child welfare agency caseworkers.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as an ANI. Despite the availability of training for foster parents, many stakeholders indicated that neither the pre-service training nor the ongoing training adequately prepare caregivers for parenting the children placed in their homes or for working within the system. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State requires that all licensed foster parents receive a minimum of 12 hours of pre-service training prior to certification of a foster home for initial placement. This is in addition to the mandated First Aid/CPR training. In addition, a minimum of 8 hours training is required each year that a foster child resides in the home. The Statewide Assessment also

notes that the State provides an orientation and training program for relative caregiver and NREFM caregivers. CDSS contracts with community colleges to provide ongoing training of foster parents, relative/kinship caregivers, and non-related extended family members.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, group home staff and FFA certified families are required to complete training. Line staff at group homes and FFAs, and small family home providers, are required to attend 40 hours of training in their first year of employment and 20 hours annually thereafter. California law requires that group home administrators complete a 40-hour certification program in addition to other licensing requirements.

The Statewide Assessment reports that a key focus of the State's PIP with regard to this item was for the State to develop a "standard core curriculum . . . used to train caregivers in all counties." To address this area, a workgroup established a set of 41 standard learning objectives, and the State required the counties to use training curricula that met all 41 of the learning objectives. As a result, both pre-service and in-service training for foster parents is provided through curricula that meet the needs of each county. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that most counties use the Parent Resource for Information Development Education (PRIDE/Adopt Pride) curriculum or the Permanence and Safety – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP) curriculum. Some counties provide training directly to foster and adoptive parents, and other counties contract with other organizations (agencies or educational institutions) for this purpose.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in State FY 2005-2006 (July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006), 31 counties provided training hours above the statutorily required 12 hours of pre-service training to resource families. In addition, 47 counties collaborated with resource family organizations and colleges to improve training and retention advisory meetings, workshops, special events, and training.

According to the Statewide Assessment, compliance with initial and ongoing training requirements by group home and small family home staff is monitored by the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division, which verifies training records as part of the licensing process for providers. Additional points are generated under the group home rate system for a group home program that provides its child care and supervision staff with 40 or more hours of formal ongoing training per staff per year. This training must be identified in a training plan approved by CDSS as part of a group home programs rate application. During a rate audit, CDSS auditors verify that the training hours projected in the training plan were actually provided by the group home.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that licensed caregivers are receiving at least 12 hours of pre-service training prior to licensure and at least 8 hours of training each year. Stakeholders at the State and county levels also noted that Spanish-language training is available, and all of the necessary materials are available in Spanish and English.

However, some State-level stakeholders expressed concerns that training of foster parents does not fulfill the 41 learning objectives established by the State, and the State's focus on the 41 learning objectives does not result in statewide uniformity in training for resource families. Some stakeholders also indicated that although the FFAs are required to provide the required hours of training to the foster parents they certify, there are concerns about the content and quality of this training.

Stakeholders' comments also indicate that many counties provide more than the required number of hours for licensed foster parents. For example, Los Angeles County stakeholders indicated that licensed foster parents must have 33 hours of pre-service training. Although there is no mandatory training for relatives, they have a voluntary 36-hour kinship education preparation and support program. Santa Clara County stakeholders reported that licensed foster parents receive 21 hours of required ongoing training, and Fresno County reported 22 hours of pre-service required training.

However, stakeholders noted that, although the State offers training for caregivers who are relatives or fictive kin (NREFM), there is no mandatory training for approved relative and NREFM caregivers, and some stakeholders noted that training is not made available for relatives approved by the probation department.

Despite the availability of training, many stakeholders indicated that neither the pre-service training nor the ongoing training adequately prepare caregivers for parenting the children placed in their homes or for working within the system. State-level stakeholders noted that foster parents do not get training in the following critical areas:

- How to meet the diverse needs of the children in their homes, particularly if the children are from a different race or ethnicity than the caregiver
- How to advocate for services for children
- What resources are available and how to access them
- How to navigate the court system and the caregiver's role in the court processes
- How to ensure that children's educational needs, particularly with regard to IEPs, are met
- How to deal with trauma
- How to parent older children with behavioral issues
- How to meet the cultural and Tribal-specific needs of Native American children

Some stakeholders also noted that the pre-service training provided to foster parents conveys a partnership between the caregiver and the agency that is incongruent with reality. That is, the training focuses on the partnership between foster parents and the child welfare agency, but in reality, foster parents are not viewed as partners in that they often are not informed about changes in the child's case plan or in the child's status. Some stakeholders recommended that there be joint trainings for foster parents and caseworkers to promote collaboration and true partnership.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2X	3

Status of Service Array

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array because all of the items assessed for this systemic factor were rated as an ANI.

Key Concerns Identified in the 2002 CFSR

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

- Many of the services included in the State’s service array were not accessible to families in all political jurisdictions and, where services were available, there often were long waiting lists.
- Although counties had the flexibility to develop and deliver services to meet unique community needs, there was a lack of individualized services for youth and Native American children.
- Many of the cases reviewed had case plans that were generic and 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 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 target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Findings from the 2008 CFSR for the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an ANI because the State’s service array lacks key services to adequately address the needs of children and families. Services lacking include, but are not limited to, culturally-competent services, therapeutic foster care, inpatient substance abuse treatment services for children, high quality mental health services, resource families, and transportation services. In addition, stakeholders reported that the extensive caseloads carried by caseworkers and supervisors make it difficult for even the basic case management services to be provided in an appropriate manner and in accordance with Federal, State, and county statutes and regulations. The “measure of effectiveness” included in the Statewide Assessment for this item referred to a CFSR PIP target achieved prior to the current CFSR period under review. The Statewide Assessment did not provide updated data or evaluative information. Therefore, the rating for item 35 relies on the case file review results regarding items 3, 17, and 23 (all three rated as an ANI), the onsite stakeholder interviews, and the challenges presented in the State’s Statewide Assessment process. Item 35 was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, CDSS ensures a service array in accordance with Federal regulations that require providing for the safety and protection of children, the preservation of and support to families, and permanency for children. Because California’s child welfare services are State-supervised and county-administered, service array and resource development are achieved statewide through the supervision and support provided by CDSS to the counties and the implementation protocols and best practices by the counties.

The Statewide Assessment notes that State regulations require a county caseworker/probation placement officer to develop a case plan that includes objectives to be achieved, specific services to be provided, and case management activities to be performed. Since the last review, the Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability process is in place in all 58 counties to further ensure that services are delivered in a way that will improve outcomes for children and families. Counties provide services within State statutes, regulations, and guidelines.

The Statewide Assessment describes the following as core services that are to be provided by all counties:

- Emergency Response (ER) services are initial intake services in response to reported allegations of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- Family Maintenance (FM) services are time-limited protective services to prevent or remedy neglect, abuse, or exploitation for the purpose of maintaining children in their own home.
- Family Reunification (FR) services are time-limited services (that are to be specified in the case plan) provided while the child is in out-of-home care that are designed to reunite children with their parents.
- Permanent Placement (PP) services are designed to provide an alternative permanent family structure for children who cannot safely live with their parents and who are not likely to return to their own home.
- Adoption services are used to seek adoptive parents for the child and assess prospective adoptive parents. CDSS provides adoption services in 28 counties, and in the remaining counties, adoption services are provided by licensed county adoption agencies.
- Independent Living Program (ILP) services are designed to assist youth who are 16 years of age and emancipating from care, up to the day prior the youth's 21st birthday, to receive the training and skills needed to become self-sufficient adults.
- Prevention Services are provided by counties based on their needs assessment and include the following: individual, group, and family counseling; parenting education and support; home visiting; respite care; child care; multidisciplinary team services; public awareness and education; community and social services referrals; pre-placement preventive service programs; mental health services; alcohol and other drug services; assistance to address domestic violence; and temporary child care and therapeutic services for families, including crisis nurseries.

According to the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders commenting on the service array were in general agreement that there is an array of various services available to children and families; however, they also noted that resource capacity, including culturally-competent services and qualified therapeutic providers, varies from community to community and is insufficient in many areas. The Statewide Assessment notes that stakeholders who provided input during the State's self-assessment process praised the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program (KinGAP) and the Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) and said that pilot programs implementing participatory case planning strategies such as TDM, FGDM, and wraparound services are very effective where they exist. Stakeholders also recognized CDSS' efforts to strengthen service array through public-private partnerships. The Statewide Assessment also identified the Dependency Drug Courts (DDC) as an effective approach that has positive affects on child welfare case outcomes.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there is an array of services in the State and that many innovative services exist. They also noted that there are many pilot programs currently being implemented in various locations, but that there is no overall State strategy for expanding these statewide.

Despite the general agreement that there is an array of services, several stakeholders identified key service gaps. One service gap noted by stakeholders was the shortage of therapeutic foster care in the State. Stakeholders suggested that this results in unnecessary residential treatment placements. Another service gap pertained to a statewide scarcity of substance abuse treatment services for

children, particularly if residential treatment for substance abuse is needed. Stakeholders also identified a lack of foster families as a concern statewide. This was attributed to the low payment rate for foster care that has not kept up with inflation. It was noted that a cut in the foster care placement rate is anticipated with future budget cuts. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that the lack of foster homes results in too many children being placed in group homes. The over-reliance on group homes as placement resources was noted to occur even for children age 6 to 12 across the State.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns about the availability of high quality mental health services, with many stakeholders questioning the quality of these services particularly at the low-end of the spectrum, such as counseling. Other stakeholders indicated that, although mental health services were part of the general array, the availability of quality services varied across localities. In addition, a few stakeholders reported that there were inadequate postadoption mental health services and that other postadoption services were lacking as well.

Another concern regarding service array on a statewide basis pertained to the workloads carried by caseworkers and supervisors. Stakeholders noted that the size of caseloads makes 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.

Finally, State-level stakeholders noted that transportation is a consistent concern statewide. They noted that the increased cost of gasoline is a barrier to children accessing services, particularly children who need services several times a week.

Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State’s CFSP

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an ANI because there is extensive variations in service accessibility across counties and within counties. This includes, but is not limited to, accessibility to mandated services such as independent living services and public health nurses providing services specifically for foster children. The “measure of effectiveness” included in the State’s Statewide Assessment for this item referred to a CFSR PIP target achieved prior to the current CFSR period under review. The Statewide Assessment did not provide updated data or evaluative information. Therefore, the rating for item 36 relies on the case file review results regarding items 3, 17, and 23 (all three rated as an ANI), the onsite stakeholder interviews, and the challenges presented in the State’s Statewide Assessment process. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, CDSS ensures that all counties provide emergency response, family maintenance, family reunification, permanent placement, adoption, and ILP services to children and families in the child welfare system. The Statewide Assessment also notes that currently, CDSS requires all counties to integrate specific funds for services that are allocated to the

counties. These funds are: State General Fund, Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment; Federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families; and Federal Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention. Counties must develop a single county plan to maximize service delivery and increase effectiveness of these funds.

The Statewide Assessment notes that California's size, which includes many large densely populated urban areas and many large sparsely populated rural areas, makes it difficult for services of every kind and at every level to be equally available to all children and families who need them at a particular time. The Statewide Assessment also notes that transportation is a challenge that impacts counties of all sizes. Parents and children in small counties often have to travel outside of their own counties in order to access services. Many children and parents are unable to access services within their community and must travel a great distance to a service provider within their own county. California also is handicapped by having a poor and very fragmented public transportation system in most areas.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that key services are not available in all jurisdictions of the State. They noted that there are extensive variations in service availability across counties and within counties. Even stakeholders in Los Angeles County reported that service availability varies across the child welfare agency offices within that county. Stakeholders noted that even when services are available, access often is a problem depending on the county or location within a county either because services have waiting lists or because of lack of transportation. This was particularly true in Fresno County. One Fresno County stakeholder noted that it can take an entire day—from early in the morning until 6:00 p.m.—for a parent who lives in a rural area of the county to take a drug test. They noted that many areas of the county have just one bus into Fresno and one bus out.

The following additional concerns were expressed by various stakeholders:

- There is considerable variation in the extent of independent living services across counties, and there is very little oversight on the part of the State with regard to county implementation of ILP in accordance with State guidelines and regulations.
- Although all counties are mandated by statute to have public health nurses in foster care, this mandate is not being consistently met.
- The availability and accessibility of mental health services, as well as their quality, varies considerably across counties. In addition, many stakeholders noted that if a child or family moves across county lines, it is difficult to access mental and physical health services because the provider codes change. Therefore, it is necessary to complete reapplication forms, which is a lengthy process.
- There are many programs that stakeholders believe to be effective that have been implemented only in select counties. This includes the Drug Court, Family to Family, wraparound services, TDM, and differential response. It was noted that the State has not made decisions regarding implementing these efforts statewide.

Despite these concerns, stakeholders at each of the individual counties included in the onsite CFSR expressed praise for many of the services being offered in their counties and many of the innovative programs that have been developed to improve outcomes for children and families.

Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency

____ Strength __X__Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an ANI because programs designed to individualize service delivery, such as wraparound services, differential response, and TDM, are not implemented statewide and often are not implemented for all children in the system. The “measure of effectiveness” included in the State’s Statewide Assessment for this item referred to a CFSR PIP target achieved prior to the current CFSR period under review. The Statewide Assessment did not provide updated data or evaluative information. Therefore, the rating for item 37 relies on the case file review results regarding items 3, 17, and 23 (all three rated as an ANI), the onsite stakeholder interviews, and the challenges presented in the State’s Statewide Assessment process. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when cases are opened for in-home services, or when children are placed in foster care, caseworkers develop case plans in partnership with the families that identify individualized child safety, permanency, and well-being goals and describe the social and other supportive services or resources required to achieve the goals. However, despite this goal, the Statewide Assessment reports that CWS/CMS, which is used by caseworkers to develop case plans, can inhibit individualizing services because its format provides a checklist of prescribed services rather than encouraging workers to develop a unique case plan in concert with the needs of children and families.

The Statewide Assessment notes that there are many participatory case planning strategies, such as FGDM and TDM that have been implemented in various counties and promote the involvement of the family in case planning.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item suggested that the child welfare agency is not consistently effective with regard to its ability to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families. The following key concerns were noted by various stakeholders:

- Although there are many programs designed to individualize service delivery, such as wraparound services, differential response, and TDM, they are not implemented statewide and often are not implemented for all children in the system.
- There are not enough culturally-competent caseworkers or services for non-Hispanic families, and, in particular, the unique needs of Native American children and families are not being adequately addressed.

- It is difficult to meet the service needs of parents whose children remain in their homes because of the scarcity or absence of low cost or no cost services.

Most Santa Clara County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the TDMs and the many services that target special-needs children have enhanced the ability of the county to individualize services for children and families. However, a few stakeholders in Santa Clara County reported that services for parents tend to be somewhat “cookie-cutter.”

Los Angeles County stakeholders indicated that services to probation youth are not individualized, and youth are not involved in determining needed services. Fresno County stakeholders noted that, although many of the service providers are effective in assessing the services needs of individual children and families, the services often are not available to meet those needs, including key services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
Rating	1	2	3X	4

Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community because two of the three items assessed for this factor were rated as a Strength. The State was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, did not address the area in its PIP.

Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service 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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength/ANI because the State engages in ongoing consultation with relevant key stakeholders and is effective in obtaining their input with regard to the agency's overall goals and objectives. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, CDSS develops and implements the title IV-B CFSP according to Federal regulations (45 CFR 1357) requiring broad involvement and consultation with a range of public and private nonprofit agencies and community-based organizations, parents, Tribes, and others. To this end, CDSS participates in a number of committees, workgroups, forums, task forces, and special projects. The Statewide Assessment reports that representation includes, but is not limited to, educational/research institutions and agencies related to drug and alcohol, health, mental health, education, domestic violence, philanthropy, and juvenile courts representing various counties.

The Statewide Assessment describes the following mechanisms for obtaining input from stakeholders with regard to the goals and objectives of the CFSP:

- The ICWA Workgroup—This workgroup was formed in July 2002 and is used by CDSS to obtain consultation from the Tribes. At the time of the preparation of the Statewide Assessment, the workgroup included more than 35 Tribal ICWA workers and/or advocates, 10 county child welfare and probation representatives, and 10 CDSS staff members. The workgroup meets bimonthly to discuss ICWA issues and make recommendations to ensure implementation of the Act. The ICWA Workgroup members participate in many other CDSS workgroups and committees.
- The State Interagency Team (SIT) —This group provides leadership and guidance to facilitate implementation of improved systems that benefit the common population of children, youth, and families served by SIT agencies. The SIT promotes shared responsibility and accountability for the welfare of children, youth, and families through planning, funding, and policy development across State departments and philanthropy.
- The California Mental Health Planning Council (CMHPC) —This council is mandated by Federal and State statute to advocate for children with serious emotional disturbances, and for adults and older adults with serious mental illness; to provide oversight and accountability for the public mental health system; and to advise the administration and the legislature on priority issues and participate in statewide planning. The CMHPC is a multicultural consumer, family, provider, and advocate organization. It provides oversight to the Department of Mental Health regarding accessibility, availability, and accountability of the State's mental

health system. It also advocates for accessible, timely, appropriate, and effective services, which are culturally competent, age and gender appropriate, strengths-based, and recovery-oriented. It also educates the public and the mental health constituency about the current needs for public mental health services and ways to meet those needs.

- County Child Abuse Prevention Councils (CAPC) —These councils advocate at the local level for child abuse prevention. Council membership comprises public and private agencies, prevention stakeholders, and parents. These councils provide a mechanism for CDSS to receive input regarding prevention and training program development, priorities for funding, and consumer feedback.
- The Court Improvement Project (CIP) —This project has entered into an interagency agreement with CDSS to use the CFSP data resources to provide data on safety and permanency outcomes for children specifically to judicial officers to further their involvement in the State’s Outcomes and Accountability project. CIP staff also are coordinating input from CDSS and CWS/CMS designers into the upcoming California Court Case Management System to align data elements, reduce duplication, enhance information sharing, and follow a common schema of performance measurement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSP expressed the opinion that the State engages in ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders and is effective in obtaining their input with regard to the agency’s overall goals and objectives. State-level stakeholders reported that almost all of the legislation affecting CDSS includes a stakeholder consultation requirement. Several stakeholders noted that many key stakeholders are involved on the Blue Ribbon Commission, although they may not be invited to participate directly in CFSP planning. State-level stakeholders also mentioned the ICWA Workgroup and the SIT as resources to CDSS regarding its goals and objectives.

State-level stakeholders noted the development of a new Child Welfare Council that at the time of the onsite CFSP had only met once. It was noted that this council will meet quarterly and focus on how all systems fit together.

A few State-level stakeholders indicated that there was a lack of input from consumers, particularly the biological parents who come into contact with the system, but also foster parents and relative caregivers.

A few stakeholders suggested that greater consultation is needed with probation, particularly in strategic planning. Stakeholders noted that, although there have been recent improvements in this area, it is not happening consistently across counties.

Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because the State consults with a wide range of stakeholders when developing its Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs). This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, California has a statewide Citizens Review Panel (CRP) that includes child advocates, parent leaders, Tribal leaders, foundation officers, county mental health managers, county counsels, foster parents, Tribal members, foster youth, caseworkers, and the Judicial Council. Membership on the panel is geographically diverse with representatives from both metropolitan and rural counties in all parts of California. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, each year the panel reviews and comments on the APSR prior to its submission to Region IX of the Administration for Children and Families. CDSS staff have made presentations on the draft of California's APSR to the statewide CRP each year. The CRP members provide CDSS staff with feedback and information about projects in the State that they believe should be included in the report. The Statewide Assessment reports that in Federal FY 2007, the panel will focus its attention on the State's efforts to standardize the decision-making process at critical stages of a child abuse investigation and on whether this process has an adverse impact on ethnic groups or parents who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that the APSR is developed with broad involvement and consultation with a range of public and private nonprofit agencies, community based organizations, parents, youth, and others, including the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) Children's Committee, the Outcomes and Accountability Data Committee, and the Outcomes and Accountability Policy Committee. The APSR reflects a sample of the collaborative work being done with these various groups.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Almost all stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that stakeholders have substantive input into the development of the APSR through participation on various collaborative groups.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as an ANI. Concerns were identified 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 item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

The following are examples of efforts to coordinate CDSS services with services or benefits of other Federal or federally-assisted programs serving the same population that were provided in the Statewide Assessment:

- Written agreements with the county probation and county child welfare agencies
- A requirement that policies and procedures are in place to refer children under the age of 3 who are involved with a substantiated abuse and neglect case to the Early Start program, which provides a developmental screening and assessment process to determine if the child needs early intervention services
- An agreement between the California Department of Developmental Services (CDDS) and CDSS with respect to foster children who are developmentally delayed
- An effort to combine funding from available sources, including Federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP); the State Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment (CAPIT) Fund; the local Children's Trust Funds; and private donations to meet shared goals and objectives and to provide a continuum of services to children and families
- A coordinated effort between the CIP at the Administrative Office of the Courts and CDSS, including the development of local court self-assessment tools to aid in the improvement process
- The CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project, also known as the Linkages Project, which was launched in November 2000 to develop a coordinated services approach to better serve families and improve outcomes
- California's Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project (CAP) to allow title IV-E funds, which are restricted to pay for board and care costs and child welfare administration, to be used by Alameda County and Los Angeles County for direct services and supports in order to avoid the over reliance on out-of-home care and reunify families more expeditiously
- The CDSS requirement that counties combine their CAPIT, CBCAP and PSSF plans into a single county plan in order to maximize service delivery and increase the effectiveness of available funding

The Statewide Assessment reports that, although counties and their partners collaborate to maximize resources and services, the capacity of communities to meet the needs of children and families falls short of the demand.

Stakeholder interview information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that, although various coordination of services efforts have been implemented, there is room for improvement. Several stakeholders praised the coordination between CDSS and CDDS, but expressed concern regarding coordination of services with mental health and education agencies. They suggested that there are too many service plans for children and families and that this can be confusing for families. It was noted that county offices of education and local school districts are autonomous, which makes it particularly difficult to establish any statewide coordination initiative. Stakeholders also noted that there is no coordination at the State or local levels with agencies addressing housing or homelessness issues, despite the fact that homelessness often is a barrier to reunification.

Several stakeholders said that from the perspective of many counties, the lack of coordination at the State level is a barrier to their ability to coordinate services at the local level. As an example of this, one stakeholder noted that there is a proposal in the Governor’s budget to restrict day treatment for foster children. This stakeholder noted that the State Department of Mental Health developed this proposal without communication with the State child welfare agency.

VII. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
		1	2X	3

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention because two of the five items assessed for this factor were rated as an ANI.

Key Concerns Identified in 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 with regard to this factor:

- 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 foster 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 C-CFSR 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 target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State’s standards for foster family homes and child care institutions are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California’s licensing standards specifically address the areas of safety, admissions policies, sanitation, and civil rights for foster family homes, as referenced in the Final Rule of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). The regulations are updated as needed to reflect changes in law or programmatic needs. The Statewide Assessment reports the following as the key licensing and approval requirements for all foster homes, including those for kin caregivers:

- A criminal record clearance must be obtained for all persons who operate, manage, or provide direct care services in a community care facility as stated in section 1522 of the Health and Safety Code.
- The caregiver qualifications must indicate the ability to provide appropriate care and supervision, knowledge of applicable laws and regulations, and maintenance of financial records.
- The physical environment must be clean, safe, sanitary, and in good repair.
- The caregiver must ensure that each child is accorded personal rights.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS performs the licensing function for foster family homes in 17 counties and for FFAs, child care institutions, and public and private adoption agencies in all 58 counties. In the remaining 41 counties, foster family home licensing is contracted out to the county child welfare agency. FFAs certify homes under their licenses.

According to the Statewide Assessment, standards for all categories of placement types are rigorously and effectively established, maintained, and enforced in accordance with national standards. The State’s Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) monitors child care institutions, FFAs, and foster family homes licensed by CCLD and county licensing agencies, while the Relative

Assessment and Monitoring Unit in the State's Children's Services Operations and Evaluation Branch within the Children and Family Services Divisions (CFSD) monitors approved relative foster family homes. Standards also are enforced by routine monitoring and ongoing case management of children placed with kin caregivers, who are routinely monitored and undergo annual reviews to maintain approval standards by county relative approval units or other review staff. In addition to regular visits by the caseworker/probation placement officer, kin caregivers are reviewed at the child's 6-month status review hearing. If the child's needs are not being met by the caregiver, including any changes in the condition of the home that could jeopardize the child's safety or well-being, the caseworker/probation placement officer may make recommendations for corrective action or may recommend removal of the child from the placement.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the CCLD also conducts annual visits to specified facility categories under the following conditions:

- When a licensee is on probation
- When the terms of an agreement in a facility compliance plan requires an annual evaluation
- When an accusation against a licensee is pending
- When a facility requires an annual visit as a condition of receiving Federal financial participation
- In order to verify that a person who has been ordered out of a facility by the department is no longer at the facility

According to the Statewide Assessment, if these conditions do not exist, then annual visits shall be made to 30 percent of the total licensed facilities (e.g., foster family homes, group homes, and FFA certified homes) using a random sample methodology. Using this methodology, all facilities (including foster family homes) will be visited at least once every 5 years.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, it has been difficult for the State to consistently monitor the quality of group home services due to the number of group homes and the lack of available State staff to monitor them.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State has implemented appropriate standards for licensing and certifying foster family homes, licensing group homes, and approving relative and NREFM (fictive kin) foster family homes. Stakeholders reported that at the time of the onsite CFSR, more emphasis was being given to the quality and cross-county consistency of the approval process for relative and fictive kin caregivers. Stakeholders noted that there is no relicensing process for foster homes, but they are visited at least once every 5 years to determine if licensing regulations are still in place.

Santa Clara County stakeholders reported that, although the State requires a visit by licensing staff to each foster home every 5 years, the county exceeds this requirement. Santa Clara County stakeholders reported that county homes are visited by county licensing staff every 3 years.

However, several State-level stakeholders expressed concern that, although standards are in place, there is a lack of monitoring of foster and group homes to ensure that the standards are being implemented. Stakeholders were particularly concerned about the lack of monitoring of group homes to determine whether standards are being implemented.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as an ANI because, although the State monitors child care institutions to ensure they comply with the State’s standards for such placement types, and although the State has promulgated regulations requiring that licensed and approved foster family homes meet the same standards, the standards for foster family homes are not being applied equally. 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. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, the standards noted under item 41 apply to the following placement types:

- Foster family home—A home licensed by the State or county to care for children from any placing agent.
- Kin caregiver—A relative or NREFM approved by the county child welfare agency to care for a specific child or sibling group.
- FFA certified family homes—A home certified by a FFA under its license for placement of a child through the certifying agency. FFAs are private, nonprofit corporations that recruit, certify, train and provide professional support to the homes accepted into their network. These certified homes provide care for children who require intensive services that would otherwise be available only in child care institutions.
- Child care institutions (referred to in California as “group homes”) —A facility that provides 24-hour care and supervision to both dependents and wards in a specific client group (e.g., children who are seriously emotionally disturbed). Emergency shelters are licensed county group homes or licensed private nonprofit group homes whose sole purpose is to provide a short-term residential program for children who have been removed from their homes or adjudged dependents of the court.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that, although the standards are applied the same to foster care licensed homes and relative caregivers, they are not monitored by the same entities in CDSS. CCLD monitors foster care licensed homes, while the Relative Assessment and Monitoring Unit in the Children’s Services Operations and Evaluation Branch of CFSD monitors approved relative homes.

The Statewide Assessment reports that approved relative caregivers and NREFMs, while not required to be licensed as a foster family home, are required to meet the identical standards as those used to license non-relative families.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review indicated that, although approvals of relative homes and licensing of foster homes have the same standards, there is a difference with regard to expectations for training. It was noted that, although training is made available to approved relative caregivers, there is no requirement for either pre-service training or ongoing training as there is for licensed foster family homes.

Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background 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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength. Although the Statewide Assessment did not provide quantitative data related to this item, according to stakeholders the State complies with the Federal requirements for criminal background checks for all licensed and approved placements, and the State's most recent title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility review supports this finding. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, State law and regulations require criminal background checks that exceed Federal requirements. State regulations require that 15 years must elapse before a person convicted of a misdemeanor assault is eligible for a criminal record exemption, provided he/she submits substantial and convincing evidence of rehabilitation. State law requires a review of criminal records for all prospective foster parents, kinship care providers, adoptive parents, and child care institution staff. Foster and adoptive applicants as well as all adults residing in the home of the applicant must be checked. In addition to conducting a review of criminal records, law also requires a check of the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) maintained by the California Department of Justice (DOJ). If criminal history information is received from either the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) or the DOJ, the Department of Motor Vehicle records are checked to ensure that no conviction is overlooked.

Criminal background checks are conducted on all adults residing in approved/licensed foster and adoptive homes and on all staff of child care facilities. Health and Safety Code, Section 1522, requires that all licensed/certified/approved care providers have a clearance or a criminal record exemption prior to licensure/certification/approval.

A licensing agency must conduct criminal background checks of child care institution staff and foster and adoptive families. Background checks are required by statute and cannot be waived. For initial inquiries, the criminal information dissemination criteria for licensing are set forth in Penal Code Section 11105(m). By contract, the California DOJ sends State and county licensing agencies all subsequent history information as well. This continues until the licensing agency notifies DOJ that they are no longer interested in the individual.

California also has provided funding for all 58 county child welfare services agencies to purchase electronic Live Scan equipment to facilitate the criminal records clearance process.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR agreed that complete criminal background checks are conducted for all caregiver applicants, all adults in the caregiver’s home, and all group home staff. In addition, the review team found no information to the contrary during the Onsite Review.

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 foster and adoptive homes are needed

_____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an ANI. Both the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicate that there is 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. The Statewide Assessment lacked evaluative information to address whether efforts to recruit families that reflect the race/ethnicity of children in foster care are achieving the desired results. Stakeholders also suggested that there is a lack of State leadership with regard to statewide recruitment efforts.

This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, counties are charged with recruiting foster, adoptive, and relative caregiver families to meet the needs of at-risk children. California’s Health and Safety Code provides the authority for the recruitment programs within the 58 counties. California statute provides for the expansion of recruitment activities for minority and sibling placements in compliance with Federal law.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the focus of the following programs is to enhance outreach to ethnic communities, to encourage greater diversity among potential foster and adoptive parents, and to increase the likelihood that children remain in their local communities:

- The Latino Family Institute “Kinship Support Project” actively recruits and provides outreach to Latino relative caregivers. Services are provided to assist adoptive families by providing informational workshops, support services (family preparation, placement process, post-placement issues, and post-legal services), parenting classes, and bilingual services that focus on the unique experiences of kinship adoptions.

- The Community Task Force on Homes for Children (CTFHC) works with KPIX-TV to produce a monthly television segment that features success stories of foster and adoptive families. The CTFHC also works with CBS, Channel 5 to produce service announcements and interviews, which are aired on the station's public affairs program. Targeted television segments are created for prospective foster and adoptive families that are identified by county needs. Also, a website (Bay Area Homes for Kids) is provided to disseminate information on adoption and foster care in English and Spanish. Both the television segments and website list a telephone number and e-mail address for the public to obtain more information on foster and adoptive children.
- The Substance Abuse Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infant Program is administered under the purview of the Recruitment Network Development Unit and provides specialized recruitment, training, and respite care services to counties for foster parents and Federally-eligible relative caregivers who care for infants and children aged newborn to 60 months, who are born substance-exposed and/or HIV positive, and who are court dependent children.
- The Family to Family Initiative focuses on meeting the needs of current foster families by ensuring the availability of community resources. Community partners are actively involved in recruiting and supporting families in their own neighborhoods to increase accessibility to services and supports. Families are trained, supported, and involved in all placement decisions.

The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that the continued operation of the above programs is contingent upon funding and the unknown effects of the expected California budget shortfall. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, due to budget constraints, it is challenging for CDSS to provide adequate funding to support, recruit, and retain foster, adoptive, and relative caregivers.

The Statewide Assessment reports that despite the above programs, recruiting a sufficient number of foster/resource families that are ethnically and culturally matched to the needs of children and youth in foster care is difficult. For example, there is a need for additional Indian resource families in order to better preserve connections of Indian children with Tribes. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the significant numbers of diverse, ethnic, and cultural populations in California make it challenging to recruit culturally and linguistically appropriate resource families.

The Statewide Assessment notes that foster home regulations meant to protect children and promote safety can become barriers to placing large sibling groups together and in meeting the cultural and ethnic needs of the child. There are restrictions on the number of children per bedroom and the total number of children placed in one home, which often limits caregivers from taking all the children in a sibling group. Additionally, a child with a specific religious belief or upbringing residing with a caregiver family may want to practice his/her religion at a place of worship that is only available several miles from the home. Although present CCLD foster care regulations allow a child to practice his/her own particular faith, CCLD does not require caregivers to drive the child to that child's specific desired place of worship other than making some other reasonable accommodation or arrangement. An additional example is some foster home caregivers may not have knowledge or experience in shopping for or cooking to meet the cultural dietary backgrounds or requirements of a child placed in their home.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there is a general lack of foster homes in the State and a more specific lack of foster homes that reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the children in foster care. This was noted to result in placement instability and the inability to keep siblings together. Stakeholders identified the following concerns regarding the recruitment of foster homes:

- A lack of State leadership with regard to recruitment efforts
- An application process that is cumbersome and off-putting to potential foster parents
- A lack of support and respect for foster parents
- A lack of funding for recruitment efforts
- The low payment rate for foster parents
- The lack of Federally-recognized Tribal foster homes

A particular concern expressed by Los Angeles County stakeholders was that some youth are staying in inpatient psychiatric units for 4 to 6 months after they can be discharged. Because DCFS does not have appropriate high-level homes available for them, they are remaining there long after eligibility for discharge. This is consistent with other stakeholders' reports that therapeutic foster family homes are lacking in the State.

Despite these concerns, several stakeholders identified the following strategies to promote recruitment of foster parents in general and the more specific recruitment of foster parents from specific racial and ethnic populations:

- The Family to Family program stresses recruitment in areas where the children tend to be removed, which supports the recruitment of racial and ethnically matched families. However, this program was noted to be in only 25 counties.
- Fairs and community-based events (including speaking at churches) are conducted to recruit minority foster parents (Los Angeles County and Santa Clara County).
- Bilingual Spanish-speaking licensing caseworkers are available (Los Angeles County and Santa Clara County).

Fresno County stakeholders in general noted that in that county, they have been effective in recruiting families that match the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in foster care. This includes recruiting both African American and Hmong families and assisting the Tribes in recruiting Native American families.

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

Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because the State has a process in place of using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements.

This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, California uses cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive and guardianship placements. The Statewide Assessment reports that the number of cross-jurisdictional placements has decreased slightly over the previous 3 years. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, under Family Code, Section 8708(c), a child's adoptive placement cannot be delayed or denied based on the prospective adoptive parent living outside the jurisdiction of the agency or the licensed adoption agency. To meet the intent of the law, California has implemented several policies, such as allowing public adoption agencies to conduct adoption casework activities outside their jurisdiction when it involves children who are court dependents.

The Statewide Assessment reports that California statute designates CDSS as the "appropriate public authority" responsible for the administration of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) and that California participates in ICPC with other States in which it has cases in common. Each county has an ICPC coordinator to help facilitate the process when children require a placement out-of-State.

The Statewide Assessment reports that efforts at increasing the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for adoptive placements include the following:

- California Kids Connection, which is a statewide public Internet site that serves as an online adoption exchange registry and is linked to the national AdoptUsKids website. The website lists children who have an adoption plan and contains a database of California families with approved adoption assessments and who want to adopt. Website visitors indicate their interest in specific children by sending an e-mail to the placing agency identified for each child.
- Assembly Bill 1808 (Chapter 75, Statutes of 2006) established a 3-year project to increase adoption of foster youth, age 9 years and older, in four counties and one CDSS Adoptions District Office.
- 800-KIDS-4-US is a CDSS-maintained toll-free adoption and foster care information telephone service to improve public access to resources, information, and licensed adoption agencies throughout California. During normal business hours, this toll-free number is answered by staff trained to handle inquiries and make referrals to local public or private foster care and adoption agencies. An average of 400 calls are received in the typical business month.

In addition, based on the recommendations of a 2002 Adoptions and Permanency Planning Summit held in California, legislation has been introduced to develop a statewide standardized family resource approval (home study) process.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in State FY 2005-2006 (July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006), a total of 220 cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements were made by public adoption agencies. This number represents 3 percent of the total adoptive placements made during this FY. The number of cross-jurisdictional placements was 3.5 percent in State FY 2004-2005 (July 1, 2004-June 30, 2005).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that although cross-jurisdictional resources exist for placing children in adoptive and other types of permanent homes, there are some barriers to this process. Many stakeholders agreed that cross-county placements frequently occur, but that there are concerns about obtaining MediCAL when placements occur across counties, which can take weeks to months to resolve. This results in a lack of medical and mental health care for the children who are placed in another county.

Most stakeholders suggested that the ICPC process is a barrier because the process is cumbersome and lengthy. Santa Clara County noted that they have a team that works to ensure that ICPC requests are initiated in a timely manner, but that a primary barrier is getting home studies back from other States in a timely manner.