

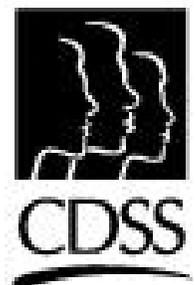
California Child and Family Services Review Statewide Assessment



HIGHLIGHTS July 2002



**California Department
of Social Services**



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HIGHLIGHTS

The Social Security Act Amendments of 1994 authorized the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to review all state child and family service programs. The goal is to ensure each state's substantial conformity with state plan requirements under Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is a departure from prior federal evaluations of states. The changes include a focus on outcomes for children and families, the use of multiple quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate outcomes and performance and joint federal and state review teams. The reviews cover child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support and independent living.

The review is comprised of a statewide self-assessment and an onsite case review. California's Statewide Assessment is due to ACF on July 18, 2002. California's onsite portion of the CFSR will be conducted the week of September 15, 2002, in Los Angeles, San Mateo and Stanislaus Counties. During the onsite case review, case files are read and case participants are interviewed to assess the current status of children and their families as well as to assess the performance of system functions.

The Statewide Assessment:

The Statewide Assessment, a series of narrative-style questions and answers, examines the effectiveness of California's child welfare services and foster care programs. The State, in collaboration with its partners, assesses the effectiveness of the State's performance on seven systemic factors that evaluate the capacity to deliver services to children and families and seven outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency and child and family well-being.

The Statewide Assessment incorporates the State's narrative analysis of data profiles for three years, including statewide aggregate data indicators that are used to determine substantial conformity with National Standards. The Statewide Assessment provides an opportunity to examine data relating to child welfare services programs and to consider the data in light of program goals and outcomes for children and families.

Development of California's Statewide Assessment:

It was necessary for California to dedicate 18 months of work involving approximately 100 people on various committees to complete the Statewide Assessment. California's Statewide Assessment task force included seven Systemic Factor Teams, a Data Team, four Outcomes Teams and a Site Selection Proposal Team. The work of these teams involved representatives from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS); the County Welfare Directors Association and individual counties; the Chief Probation Officers of California; the California Health and Human Services Agency; the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children and the Courts and the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley. This labor-intensive process also involved focus groups, written surveys and structured in-person and phone interviews. The interviews were conducted with key stakeholder groups such as birth parents, county social workers, juvenile court judges, tribal members and service providers.

Statewide Assessment Findings:

To date, no state has satisfied every component of the review. California is no exception. Based on the data collected for the Statewide Assessment, California will be found in non-conformance on the six indicators used to determine the extent to which states are meeting National Standards. However, these indicators represent only two of the 14 elements that are the focus of the review. Additionally, the outcome data analyzed in the 2002 Statewide Assessment is actually from Federal Fiscal Years 1998 to 2000.

Evaluating California's performance solely by comparison to the National Standards presents a picture that is both incomplete and inaccurate. California has achieved an impressive array of accomplishments in the field of child welfare services. The California Adoptions Initiative won the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001 Adoption Excellence Award by achieving a 140% increase in the annual rate of adoption for foster children who could not safely return to their birth parents. To date, the State has captured over \$17.6 million in federal Adoption Incentive Funds. Furthermore, implementation of the successful Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program has allowed thousands of children to exit foster care to the home of relatives. Major system enhancements have been implemented through best practice innovations such as wraparound, Family to Family Initiative, Permanency Planning Mediation, Structured Applicant Family Evaluation (SAFE) and family group decision-making, to highlight just a few. As a result, children today are better supported in their birth families or extended families. Fewer children are in foster care, and those who do come into care are exited to permanency in higher numbers. Yet, California acknowledges that there is still much more to be done. The following are some key findings identified in the Statewide Assessment:

California's statewide information system provides the State with a broad range of data benefits and presents challenges for ongoing improvements.

Although less than five years old, the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) has become a valuable database of all children and families receiving child welfare services in California. The system tracks locations, demographic information and case plan goals for children and families receiving child welfare services. The system provides the State and counties with comprehensive and immediately accessible case information for effective decision-making. While conducting the Statewide Assessment, CDSS identified a number of system and data anomalies. These anomalies included data reporting, data quality and limitations of the current database structure. Future system enhancements are anticipated such as (1) updating the system to ensure consistency with changes in laws and regulations and (2) reviewing and modifying data recording, data extracting and reporting processes.

California has an extensive infrastructure to support quality child welfare services to children and families.

The foundation of California's child welfare services system is a statutory and regulatory framework implemented by county-administered local programs, a broad array of community-based services and well-trained staff. The quality of services to children and families is ensured through a regular cycle of evaluation of individual county operations, a multilevel system of licensing/approval, monitoring and training for out-of-home care providers, university-based training for county child welfare staff, case plans and court reviews. Additional efforts have recently begun to further ensure compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act. California's quality assurance system is being revamped with implementation of Assembly Bill 636 (Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001). This law mandates a new system to be modeled after the federal CFSR that will shift the focus of State reviews from evaluating procedural compliance to assessing the impact of services on outcomes.

Case planning and review are fundamental to California's child welfare system, but their effectiveness and timeliness have been hampered by high caseworker and court caseloads.

California has clear regulatory requirements for face-to-face contact between children and caseworkers, caseworkers and parents and caseworkers and care providers. This contact is critical to case planning development, court report development and decision-making. However, focus group data suggests caseload reductions would further improve both the quality and the frequency of these contacts and, thus, improve outcomes. Efforts are already underway in California to expand resources and opportunity for caseworkers to create and sustain supportive relationships with children, families and service providers. Passage of Senate Bill (SB) 2030 (Chapter 785, Statutes of 1998) required the CDSS to undertake an evaluation of the workload and budgeting methodologies for child welfare services. The current methodology was developed 15 years ago. Since that time, the demands placed on social workers have changed substantially. In addition, extensive changes in child welfare service delivery have necessitated a re-evaluation of that methodology. The CDSS is working with key stakeholders to make recommendations for improvement. In 1999, California implemented an annual funding increase for child welfare services that totaled \$342.7 million over three years. This dollar figure represents a 22.3% cumulative increase over the three years. However, the additional funding has not resolved the issue of caseload standards and its impact on outcomes for children and families. The Human Resources subcommittee of the California Child

Welfare Services Stakeholders group has the task of integrating the SB 2030 workload study recommendations into a redesigned child welfare services system. Since 1994, the CDSS has been involved in a statewide effort to support and improve juvenile court performance and compliance. This effort is being accomplished through the Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) project under a contract with the Judicial Council of California.

California is making progress to reduce the rate at which children enter foster care and the rate of recurrence of maltreatment, but more work needs to be done.

The rate of recurrence of maltreatment and the rate at which children enter foster care have decreased slightly over the three-year period from Calendar Year 1998 to 2000. This combination indicates improving performance in maintaining children safely at home. However, California's performance at 10.9% does not meet the National Standard of 6.1% for recurrence of child maltreatment. Recurrence of maltreatment is the rate at which children re-enter foster care within six months following a return home. Taking into account CWS/CMS data issues identified through the Statewide Assessment, California's rate of recurrence may be closer to 7.3%.

Children most at risk are those in families with multiple and chronic problems. These are the families that will require sustained and intensive intervention efforts to maintain children safely at home. Counties are making progress in this area by improving the effectiveness of initial risk assessments at first contact, expanding the availability of intensive services, creating partnerships across disciplines and agencies, lowering worker caseloads to make more in-depth assessments of at-risk families and providing intensive in-home services and follow-up when a child is returned home.

California's system is structured to protect children against abuse and neglect while in foster care. Additional efforts are already underway to improve this area, including better data collection.

A child's personal rights, including those relating to maltreatment, are clearly defined in California's statutes and regulations. Regulatory enforcement is ensured through the CDSS oversight of county child welfare agencies. California has already initiated efforts to reduce the frequency of abuse and neglect in out-of-home care. The CDSS is developing foster/adoptive family assessment protocols that will examine the capacity of potential caregivers to appropriately parent the children in their care. It is anticipated that the new home study protocols will result in reductions in actual and reported instances of abuse and neglect in foster care because prospective foster

parents will be more thoroughly oriented, screened and trained.

California is unable to conclude whether the State's rate of child maltreatment by foster care providers conforms to the National Standard of 0.57%. No State data source is currently configured to capture the data. Based on data that includes only one third of children in out-of-home care, specifically those children placed in foster family agency certified homes or in non-relative foster family homes, the State's rate of maltreatment by providers is 1.06%. Changes are underway to make the data available in the future.

California successfully reunifies children with their parents or other relatives, but doing so takes longer than is desirable.

California is committed to improving the way in which the child welfare system is able to facilitate children exiting the system into the care of their parents or other relatives. California does not count exiting to a relative, other than a birth parent, as reunification. However, over 73% of children who exit the child welfare system exit within 12 months to their parents or other relatives. The National Standard for reunification within 12 months is 76.2%. California's statewide performance on this measure is 53.7% (excluding reunification with relatives). Although children may take longer to exit to reunification, the data suggests that children returning to their parents or to relatives are less likely to re-enter care. California has implemented many innovative programs to improve timely reunification, including options that exit children into the care of relatives. Those programs include wraparound services, family conferencing, Family to Family Initiative and Kinship Support Services Programs. Child welfare stakeholders identified several obstacles and potential barriers to timely reunification. These issues include inadequate availability of substance abuse programs, difficulties obtaining services that are conveniently located and families' increasing use of substances that are more addictive and make rehabilitation much more difficult.

The number of children re-entering foster care suggests that better resources for after-foster care are needed.

A number of factors affect the rate of re-entry to foster care. California will continue to focus its efforts on identifying areas of improvement. The State will continue to review the court and child welfare agencies' compliance with timelines that may result in sending children home before sufficient services have been provided or before sufficient follow-up services are in place to ensure the family

is safe. The data suggests the availability of resources may be insufficient to help families maintain functioning when children return home. Another area for review is high caseworker caseloads that may impact the ability of child welfare agencies to provide sufficient post-reunification services to families. California, at 9.3%, did not meet the National Standard of 8.6% for foster care re-entries within 12 months of a prior foster care episode. Further examination of cases that re-enter foster care will provide additional clarity.

California has excelled in achieving permanency for children and will continue efforts already underway to accomplish permanency in a more timely manner.

Over the five-year period from 1995 to 2001, the likelihood of adoption for children in foster care who cannot return home improved by 108%. This improvement is in large part due to the California Adoption Initiative. This initiative increased funding allocations and made statutory, regulatory, policy and practice reforms that focused on achieving legal permanency for children in foster care. In the final year of the initiative, the Governor authorized an additional \$22 million specifically to expedite finalization of adoption cases underway. Another key effort, the Kin-GAP program, created a permanency option for children in foster care placements with relatives. Within 18 months of the program's implementation, over 7,000 children who could not return to birth parents were able to gain legally recognized and stable homes within their extended families.

California's efforts over the last several years to provide permanence to children, irrespective of how long a child has been in foster care, have had an unanticipated impact on California's performance on this data indicator. California, at 23.5%, did not meet the National Standard of 32% for adoption within 24 months of the latest removal. While California recognizes that timeliness is of value, it should be weighted along with the best interests and needs of children, particularly for those children who require more sustained efforts to improve the likelihood of successful permanency. California's data shows that 87% of children who exited foster care, exited to a legally permanent situation (reunification, adoption or guardianship). In spite of this success, additional efforts are needed to more effectively meet the needs of the 13% of children who are not leaving foster care to permanent homes.

California continues to improve its efforts to promote stability for children in foster care.

California places a priority on preventing unnecessary moves once a child comes into care. A placement is arranged based on the child's specific needs and the most suitable placement. A court hearing must be held to determine the necessity for the move. Placement stability is affected by a number of factors, including type of placement, recruitment of caregivers, assessment and training of foster parents and multidisciplinary efforts. California, at 82.9%, did not meet the National Standard of 86.7% for stability in foster care. The findings suggest that the best chances for minimizing placement moves include providing more effective initial assessments and thoughtful placement selection. In addition, the data indicates that children experience increased stability when placed with relatives. Another aspect of stability is placement with a sibling. California's laws and regulations promote opportunities for siblings to be placed together. The likelihood of siblings being placed together is greater when placement is with relatives. Additionally, to increase accuracy for determining California's performance, changes are needed in the way this data is computed.

System changes in recent years demonstrate that better education, health and mental health services are provided to children in foster care, but more is needed.

California's statutes and regulations have clear mandates to ensure that the education, health and mental health needs of children in out-of-home placements are met. California's efforts to improve these services to children and youth in out-of-home care are underway at both the State and county levels. The education, health and mental health needs of children in out-of-home care are reported at periodic court reviews. The status of educational conditions, grade level and school attendance are included within or attached to the court report. The Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program, California's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) program, requires a defined frequency of health examinations. Data indicates that the great majority of children receive a mandatory health examination as they enter out-of-home care. However, the number of children receiving timely dental examinations is less satisfactory. Adequately trained child welfare services staff is essential to identification and recognition of children's education, health and mental health issues. The availability of community-based multidisciplinary resources is a critical area requiring more extensive effort.

Conclusion:

Significant changes occurred in California's child welfare law starting in 1997 and continuing through 2001. Over time, these changes will permeate California's child welfare system, impacting service delivery and improving outcomes for children and families served. Because of the process necessary to promulgate implementing regulations, benefits from these legislative changes will be more fully realized in subsequent federal reviews.

The CFSR has provided a process to review California's child welfare services delivery system and to identify its strengths, needs and gaps in resources. The CFSR has also stirred a renewed focus on the importance of data collection and analysis and its application to State and county policies, programs and practice. California joins the federal government in its commitment to improving program outcomes for the children and families served. Despite some limitations of this review process, the review offers the opportunity to examine the State's performance and systematically build program change. In addition, it is fortuitous that the timing of the review coincides with the work already in progress by the CDSS Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group in redesigning a new child welfare services system. The CDSS is working closely with its federal and county partners to use the information surfacing from the review to support the work in progress by the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group.