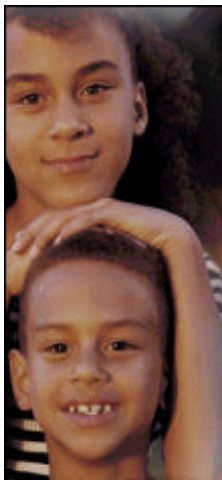


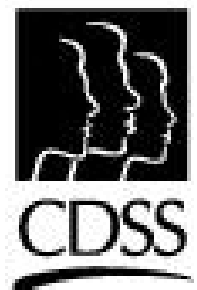
California Child and Family Services Review Statewide Assessment



July 18, 2002



**California Department
of Social Services**



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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



July 18, 2002

Dear Friends:

As Director of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), I am pleased to submit California's Statewide Assessment as part of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). This Statewide Assessment lays the foundation for a comprehensive new process for evaluating California's performance and systematically building program change. Developing a statewide self-assessment was not an easy task. The self-examination of a system as large and complex as the child welfare system in California took time and commitment at all levels.

I would like to acknowledge all the hard work that went into preparing the Statewide Assessment. California dedicated 18 months of work involving 100 people on various committees. The key participants included the County Welfare Directors Association; Chief Probation Officers of California; the University of California at Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research; and the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. This process also involved focus groups, written surveys and structured in-person and phone interviews that were conducted with key stakeholder groups such as birth parents, juvenile court judges, tribal members and others. I would like to thank these contributors for their input and the time they invested.

I would also like to thank Los Angeles, Stanislaus and San Mateo Counties for their participation in the onsite case review. This will be a labor-intensive process for each of these counties. I sincerely appreciate the effort that is being put forth to prepare for the review and to welcome the review teams.

California will continue to work diligently to build upon the program and systemic changes already underway. It is fortunate the timing of the CFSR coincides with the work already in progress by the CDSS Child Welfare Services (CWS) Stakeholders Group in redesigning a new child welfare services system. CDSS is working to use the information surfacing from the review to support the work in progress by the CWS Stakeholders Group.

The CFSR is a departure from prior federal evaluations of states. California has concerns about the many challenges and limitations of this new review process. However, California joins our federal partners and other states in working toward improving outcomes for the children and families we serve.

Sincerely,

RITA SAENZ
Director

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Statewide Assessment Instrument

Section I: General Information

Name of State Agency	
California Department of Social Services	
Period Under Review	
Federal Fiscal Year for Onsite Review Sample: <u>2001</u> Period of AFCARS Data: <u>FFY 2000</u> Period of NCANDS Data: <u>CY 2000</u>	
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SECTION II: Systemic Factors

OVERVIEW:

California's state-supervised child welfare system is administered at the local level by 58 counties, each governed by a county board of supervisors. While there are challenges inherent in the complexity of this type of system, its central strength lies in the flexibility afforded each county to determine how best to meet the needs of its own children and families. As the most populous state in the country, California's rich culture and ethnic diversity includes 224 languages and 109 federally recognized Indian tribes. The State's counties differ widely by population; economic base; mix of urban, rural and suburban settings; and topographies that span desert, forest, mountain, coastal and inland valley formations. Within a single statutory and regulatory framework, these counties are charged with providing the full array of services necessary to meet the needs of at-risk children and families.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is the agency authorized by statute to promulgate regulations, policies and procedures necessary to implement the State's child welfare system and to ensure safety, permanency and well-being for California's children. Furthermore, the CDSS is responsible for developing the State's Child and Family Services Plan. These efforts are all achieved within a framework of extensive collaboration with all child welfare stakeholders. The principal partners with the CDSS in these efforts are California's counties and their associations, the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) and the Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC). Due to its complexity and this high degree of collaboration, California's child welfare system is ever changing as it seeks to improve its ability to meet the needs of the State's children and families. As a result, a number of significant changes have occurred that will not be fully captured in this review:

- It was not until December 31, 1997, that California's statewide, automated child welfare information system became fully operational in all of California's 58 counties. This system has provided a broad range of challenges and benefits. It continues to undergo improvements to keep abreast of the changing child welfare system. Because of its relatively recent implementation, the accuracy of information derived from this system is still continuing to improve.
- Significant changes occurred in California's child welfare law in 1998, which mandated comprehensive assessments of relatives seeking placement of a child and concurrent planning for all children, with a case plan goal of reunification. However, because of the process necessary to promulgate implementing regulations, outcomes resulting from these changes are unlikely to be evident within the scope of this review.
- Passage of California 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 (CWS) and to make recommendations for improvement. In 1999, California implemented an annual funding increase for CWS that totaled \$342.7 million over three years. This figure represents a 22.3% cumulative increase, over the three-year period of 1999 through 2001. While the infusion of additional funding is helpful, it does not resolve the issue of caseload standards.
- With the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 636, (Steinberg, Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001), development and implementation of a new county compliance review process will be completed by January 2005. This new system is to be modeled after the federal Child and Family Services Review and utilizes a peer review process.

- Recognizing that incremental legislative changes are not enough, the CDSS assembled the California Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group with the goal of improving the State's child welfare system. This group was charged by Governor Davis and the State Legislature to "think outside the box" to develop a comprehensive approach for the 21st century as they review the current system for improvements and re-design. The operational mission is to create and sustain a flexible infrastructure comprising public and private partnerships that provide a comprehensive system of support for families and communities to ensure the well-being of every child.

Over time, these changes will permeate California's child welfare system, impacting service delivery and improving outcomes for the children and families it serves. This impact will be more fully realized in subsequent federal Child and Family Services Reviews.

- 1. Discuss how effectively the State is able to meet the State Plan requirement that it operates a Statewide information system that can determine the status, demographics, location and goals for all children in foster care in the State. In responding, consider the accessibility of this information to State managers and local staff and the usefulness of the information in carrying out the agency's responsibilities.**

SUMMARY

- ***CWS/CMS provides the status, demographics, location and goals for all children in foster care.***
- ***CWS/CMS is a valuable tool for caseworkers and State and county administrators.***
- ***Additional improvements and training are needed to ensure timely, quality data and maximum utility.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

The State of California maintains the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) as its federal Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). CWS/CMS was developed pursuant to State (Chapter 1294, Statutes of 1989, Senate Bill 370) and federal (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993) law to automate many of the tasks county child welfare staff had to perform routinely and often manually. The CWS/CMS contains a database of all children and families receiving child welfare services in California and tracks locations, demographic information and case plan goals for these children and families. Child welfare staff can create, read, retrieve and/or update information in this database. The system makes calculations, stores data, prints reports and documents and performs all other processing functions.

On December 31, 1997, CWS/CMS became fully operational in all of California's 58 counties and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Adoption Program district offices. The system is operated from 294 sites throughout the State and has 16,064 baseline users.¹ These users include:

- County caseworkers.²
- State and county adoptions workers.
- Social work supervisors.
- Clerical and support staff.
- Title IV-E eligibility workers.
- State and county administrative management, policy development and research staff.

¹ From IBM and CDSS contract for CWS/CMS

² County probation officers do not have direct access to CWS/CMS. Probation data is input centrally at the CDSS.

The California CWS/CMS application is currently the largest statewide child welfare case management system in the United States. A total of 858,273 cases and 2,831,648 referrals have been recorded in the system since it first became operational in 1996. Currently, 138,657 active cases and 38,733 active referrals are in the system.³ The system is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and an approximate average of 277,228 transactions occur daily.⁴

The California CWS/CMS application and technical platforms are designed to protect the integrity and confidentiality of the data. Over 3,000 business rules are contained in the application to bring it into conformance with State and federal laws and regulations governing child welfare. System integrity is further maintained through an ongoing process of change control management.

The goals of the original State-enabling legislation (Senate Bill 370, Statutes of 1989) relative to the establishment of a statewide information system have been met. These goals include:

- Providing child welfare staff with immediate access to child, family and case-specific information needed to make good and timely case decisions.
- Providing child welfare staff with current and accurate information to effectively and efficiently manage caseloads and to take appropriate and timely case management actions.
- Providing State and county administrators with the information needed to monitor and evaluate the achievement of program goals and to administer programs.
- Providing State and county child welfare agencies with a common database and definition of information from which to evaluate child welfare services.
- Consolidating the collection and reporting of information for child welfare programs pursuant to State and federal requirements.

Subsequent federal legislation (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993) added additional requirements, which have been largely met. Of 87 required SACWIS elements, the State of California has incorporated 73 (60 fully implemented and 13 partially implemented) in its CWS/CMS system. Eleven optional elements have not been implemented.

The SACWIS requirements that have not been fully met are primarily related to interfaces with other systems. These areas include: Titles IV-A, IV-D, IV-E and XIX data systems; improvements in adoption services and case plan documentation and financial management for payments of foster care and adoption assistance. Efforts to improve and/or implement these areas are currently in various stages of development. Completion dates are dependent upon funding availability and the State and federal approval process.

³ From CWS/CMS Project Statistics, May 14, 2002

⁴ From CWS/CMS Project Statistics, May 14, 2002

PRACTICE:

A primary goal of the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) is to support caseworkers in their efforts to provide services to children. The application is designed to improve the productivity of caseworkers and to provide them access to accurate and timely information, as required by State and federal laws and regulations. Some of the many ways in which the system improves the State's child welfare program operations/processes and ensures a quality program include:

- Children/families are tracked across all referrals and service components.
- The system allows for non-duplication of individuals, referrals and cases.
- Case workers' access to information is improved.
- On-line access to chronological histories for individuals and cases is provided.
- Electronic reminders are generated.
- Supervisors are notified of overdue actions.
- Children are matched to available, appropriate placements.

CWS/CMS is capable of tracking the location, demographics and permanency goals for all children in foster care and their families. The system, although still relatively early in its implementation, is used at every level impacting the child welfare system. The CWS/CMS application provides critical information for timely child welfare intervention and case management. County and statewide data is available to child welfare administrators to support program management, budgeting and quality assurance activities.

Case Management:

The "Referral" management function, which is the primary intake portion of CWS/CMS, has extensive information on alleged victims, caretakers, family members, siblings, collateral contacts and perpetrators. The referral function includes functionality for processing referrals, conducting investigations and assessing the need for services. It allows recording information related to the child's medical and educational histories, allegations, investigations, placements or residences and any petitions filed on behalf of the child. In addition to the petitions, Detention hearing reports, court findings, orders and results can be tracked within a referral.

The "Search" function is a valuable user tool. Through this function, a caseworker can search throughout the State for history of child abuse involving a specific adult perpetrator or child. This ability provides child welfare staff with information that has proven valuable, in numerous situations, in assessing maltreatment risk.

The "Case" management function in CWS/CMS includes tools for developing service plans, determining whether the agency can provide services, authorizing the providing of services and helping caseworkers manage the delivery of services. This function contains all court reports, court orders and case plans.

Program Management:

As a byproduct of being a primary tool for caseworkers, CWS/CMS provides the data for both county and State administration and supervision of California's child welfare system. Current uses include the following:

- Inform policy and program decisions: CWS/CMS is the primary source of data for analysis of the child welfare program and the population it serves. This data includes ethnicity, location, age, sex, maltreatment type and frequency, case plan goals, etc. Based upon data from this system, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) routinely publishes statistics related to the child welfare and foster care caseload. Additionally, this system is the source of California's reporting of adoption and foster care data to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
- Evaluate program performance: CWS/CMS enables timely child welfare data to be made available to a wide variety of stakeholders. The University of California, Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), under contract with the CDSS, maintains a longitudinal database at both State and county levels of children in foster care, using CWS/CMS data. Based on this data, key child welfare performance indicators are routinely published on a public website.
- Make budgetary projections: CWS/CMS provides current and historical caseload information essential to accurately project future caseload growth and needed resources. This caseload information provides the basis for State allocation of child welfare funds.
- Improve service delivery: CWS/CMS is being used to correlate risk factors with the recurrence of child maltreatment. This information enables agencies to target limited resources to those families most in need.
- Conduct quality assurance reviews: By incorporating "online review" of child welfare cases as part of county compliance reviews, the CDSS is able to more quickly and efficiently ensure compliance with federal and State program requirements.

Because California's child welfare system is State supervised and county administered, data is accessible on a statewide basis for State administrators, while each county has exclusive access to its own data. Data from CWS/CMS is available through a variety of means. Frequently used, automated program management reports are available through the application. Only a limited number of specified users are granted access to run ad hoc queries directly against the database at either the State or county level.

Automated program management report functionality is available to serve many purposes, from case listings for individual workers, units and agencies to statewide statistical reports. These reports summarize child welfare data into formats that assist county child welfare administrators and State policymakers in making more informed decisions concerning their respective programs. The reports are periodically updated and distributed to State and county child welfare policymakers.

Though program management reports are comprehensive and wide-ranging, they do not meet all CWS/CMS information needs. To this end, 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. In addition to

SAS, CWS/CMS users can use Business Objects software, a more “user-friendly” database querying system. Though not “live” data like SAS, Business Objects allows users to more quickly produce ad hoc CWS/CMS reports to meet local county needs.

Ongoing Improvement:

Training is an essential component to help staff utilize CWS/CMS to its capacity. Formal training, using a uniform CWS/CMS curriculum, is provided at the local level and statewide. In addition, staff members can learn independently by using the computer-based training module available on their computer desktops and can easily access the CWS/CMS web-based training. Currently, the State is working with California universities and colleges to include CWS/CMS training as part of the curriculum for social work students.

The funding incentives for full utilization provided in State Fiscal Year 2000/01 have led to more proficient users and increased data quality. With the availability of system enhancements such as Business Objects, database querying methods have become more user-friendly, and using data from the system for program management purposes has become more common. As a result, the commitment to data quality and integrity has re-emerged as a primary interest for CWS/CMS users, child welfare administrators and stakeholders. As CWS/CMS data is used more frequently at all levels, from individual units to federal reporting, the need for consistent, timely and accurate data is motivating counties to improve how and when data is updated. Through the federal Child and Family Services Review process, some issues have surfaced related to data quality. Specifically, the process has identified the need to reinforce consistency of definitions and common data entry practices among counties and to make the system changes necessary to better capture data related to specific outcomes. To reinforce consistency and to facilitate additional improvements at the local level, CWS/CMS “Tune-Up” has been developed. It is a process designed to improve the amount and accuracy of information going into CWS/CMS.

The Tune-Up assists counties in identifying application and business practices to expand or to improve upon. Assistance is also available through the State to help counties create action plans to implement these improvements. Once a county decides to participate, CWS/CMS staff runs a series of county-specific reports from the CWS/CMS database. These reports identify amount of application use and, in some reports, determine the timeliness and/or quality of data input. The reports cover a broad range of application areas, including caseworker contacts, case plan, referrals and court and supervisor approvals.

County staff analyzes the Tune-Up reports with the assistance of State staff. The county identifies potential barriers to increased and/or improved system utilization and determines how to remove them. Resulting solutions may require local business practice changes, focused training efforts or application or system changes. The county develops an action plan, which includes barrier identification, a plan for removal or reduction of barriers, the time required and the intended outcomes. The county can request State assistance or facilitation at any point in the Tune-Up process, including monitoring action-plan progress.

DATA DISCUSSION:

The assessment of CWS/CMS strengths, gaps, needs and usefulness is based on a review of system implementation to date, discussion with the CWS/CMS Oversight Committee, and input by users obtained through interviews and focus groups participating in the CWS/CMS strategic planning process. Continuous feedback is also obtained through monthly regional meetings among State, county and contractor staff. Input is received from State and county caseworkers, administrators, supervisors, program managers, support staff and researchers. Strengths identified include:

- Immediate and easier access to case history, previous referrals and information from other counties.
- Capacity for information storage.
- Standard documentation formats.
- Navigation and training tools.
- Search, case tracking and monitoring capability.
- Ability to generate caseload statistics, demographic data, compliance and outcome data via management and ad hoc data reports.
- System availability and reliability.
- Reduction in the time and effort required to document cases and services, make referrals, etc., compared to the previous paper-based documentation systems.

Areas identified as needing continuing improvements include:

- Software and hardware upgrades to improve access from the field and to streamline data input to give staff more time to work with children and families.
- Making the system faster, more intuitive, and consistent with changing program requirements.
- Training availability and accessibility.
- Complexity and timeliness of federal and State approval processes necessary to keep the system current with legislative and regulatory program changes and technology advances.

The conclusions described above are based on data related to the number of users, transactions, input from 280 users obtained through interviews and focus groups and observations of data quality improvements in reports such as the Adoptions and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The overall view of the system suggests that it is meeting the primary goal of providing a statewide, critically important case management tool to enable caseworkers to meet the safety and service needs of children. The number and frequency of citations from users identifying positive aspects of the system significantly exceed the number of areas needing improvement. Additionally, the data clearly identifies room for continuous improvement in the CWS/CMS application.

Over the last two years, system usage data indicates a significant increase in system users and transactions. Commensurate with these increases is more timely completion of the data in thousands of CWS/CMS records. The AFCARS reports are one example of significant improvement. In March 1998, 33 of the 103 AFCARS foster care and

adoptions data elements exceeded the federal error tolerance rate. In November 2001, errors exceeded tolerance levels in only 3 of 103 elements. One of those errors was the result of the unavailability of a statewide child support data system. The CWS/CMS is not able to resolve this issue independently.

In conducting this Statewide Assessment for the federal Child and Family Services Review, a number of issues have come to light regarding AFCARS and National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) reporting, data quality and limitations of the current database. Because California AFCARS and NCANDS reporting rely on a third party vendor to map, extract and format the data for submission and because federal approval is required for each change, the CDSS is limited in its ability to quickly make changes in this process. Expediting the federal approval process would help remedy this situation.

In a detailed review of the Data Profile for the Statewide Assessment, problems in the data definitions for extracting AFCARS data were identified that will require closer examination and adjustment to ensure that federal reporting is closely aligned with program practice. Data quality issues have also come to light. Older data is less accurate due to the initial phased-in implementation of CWS/CMS. The process of converting data from the legacy Foster Care Information System resulted in duplication of case records. The duplicate records have since been removed. Delays in system changes and training following new releases have also contributed to data problems. Other issues are related to diverging practice and data definitions among the 58 counties using the system and the complexity of the application itself. Other data problems are the result of limitations in the existing database structure. It is evident that as part of the State's Program Improvement Plan additional elements will need to be added to code tables to capture data more accurately for the statewide data indicators used in the federal Child and Family Services Review process.

FINDINGS:

Although less than five years old, California's statewide information system has become a valuable tool for caseworkers and other staff to use in working with children and families to achieve desired outcomes at the individual, county and State levels. Through the statewide system, staff across the State have real-time access to comprehensive case data, including the status, demographics, location and case goals for all children in foster care. Moreover, CWS/CMS tracks information about individual children who have been the subject of child maltreatment reports, the disposition of those reports and any follow-up services provided. It has also improved access to critical information for caseworkers to meet best practice standards 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

As discussed above, CWS/CMS makes current and past child welfare program data accessible to policymakers, administrators, supervisors and line staff. This capability enhances the ability of State and local child welfare programs to provide oversight supervision, allocate resources, manage caseloads, analyze program effectiveness and plan program changes.

Since implementation, the State and counties have conducted various planning discussions, reviews and studies to ascertain from stakeholders what works effectively in

CWS/CMS and what can be improved. This useful information has resulted in the State doing the following:

- Designing changes to the CWS/CMS application to improve its user-friendliness.
- Making additions to CWS/CMS to increase compliance with federal and State requirements, such as SACWIS and AFCARS.
- Expanding training opportunities and mediums.

To enhance the system's usability and data quality, additional future improvements to the system are needed and may include the following:

- Increasing the system's flexibility to achieve timely consistency with changes in legislation and social work practice.
- Assessing if additional software, portable devices or distributed applications with two-way interfaces can be developed to assist caseworkers when recording contacts, services, and visits in the field.
- Reviewing and modifying mapping and data definitions to improve accuracy of AFCARS and NCANDS reporting.

Ongoing efforts to improve the overall efficacy of CWS/CMS will ensure that this system continues to be a critical tool used to enhance social work practice, provide timely and accurate program management data and performance measures and ensure compliance with federal reporting requirements.

<p>1. <i>How effectively is the State able to meet the requirement that each child in foster care under the State's placement and care responsibility have a written case plan with all the required elements?</i></p>

SUMMARY

- *The ongoing development and documentation of a child welfare services case plan is firmly imbedded in State statutes, regulations and practice.*
- *Additional training and incentives would promote use of the automated case plan documentation tool.*
- *Such tools further the State's and the counties' ability to monitor timely case plan development and compliance with State and federal mandates.*

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

The State of California places significant emphasis on the case plan as the “foundation and central unifying tool in child welfare services” (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 16501.1). Statutory and regulatory requirements for a written case plan have been in force in California since 1982. Since that time, the case plan requirements have been updated regularly and now not only include but also exceed federal mandates. These requirements exceed the federal requirements and direct that the approved written case plan be completed within 30 days of the child's removal from the parent and updated as needed, but no less frequently than once every six months. The written case plan is required for all open cases, whether voluntary or court-ordered, in-home or out-of-home. When Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over the dependent child or ward, statutes require that the written case plan be part of the court report and submitted as evidence into the record initially and at all six-month reviews (WIC 358.1, 706.5, 727.3, 366.1 and 366.3). Compliance with court requirements ensures the timeliness and thoroughness of the case plan.

The federally required elements of the case plan are mandated in provisions of State law and regulations (WIC 16501.1 and Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP), Division 31-205). These provisions emphasize that “the child's health and safety shall be the paramount concern” and require that the plan be based on the child and family's assessment. Specific requirements include:

- Specific goals and appropriate planned services to meet those goals.
- A description of services offered and provided to prevent removal of the child.
- A description of the planned frequency of child-parent contacts.
- Provisions for the development and maintenance of sibling relationships.
- A schedule of caseworker contacts with the child, parents and the child's caregivers.
- A description of the parental participation in the development of the case plan.
- The selection of a safe and appropriate placement that is least restrictive, most familylike, in close proximity to the parental home whenever possible and best suited to meet the child's special needs and best interests.

- A summary of the health and educational records, status and needs of the child.
- When the goal is reunification, a description of the services provided concurrently to achieve legal permanency if reunification fails.
- For youth age 16 or older, a description of services needed to assist the youth to make the transition from foster care to independent living (WIC 366.3).

Additionally, the parents must have an opportunity to review, sign and receive a copy of the plan and have the option to participate in adoption planning, if they so choose. The overriding priority in all case planning is child safety. The California Legislature made this a clear priority in 1996 when it added WIC 300.2 to dependency law. To reiterate, the purpose of this law is to “provide maximum safety and protection to children.”

PRACTICE:

Uniform Automated Case Plan Documentation:

In the past, each of the 58 California county child welfare agencies designed and developed its own format for a written case plan. The initial implementation of CWS/CMS contained an automated case plan, but due to its difficulties this documentation functionality was not used consistently. To facilitate consistent compliance with case planning requirements, in mid-summer 2000 a vastly improved version of the automated case plan functionality in the CWS/CMS application was released to all county child welfare departments. Through budgetary incentives, counties were encouraged to fully utilize this automated feature. Counties are now in the second year of full utilization of the CWS/CMS. While the conversion of 58 counties' case plan tools to the uniform automated version was laborious, that conversion has been largely completed.

Use of a uniform tool ensures that all required case plan elements are completed and promotes continuity of service delivery when a case is transferred from one county to another. Design of this automated case plan promotes documentation of each individual service offered or provided to parents and the parents' level of progress in availing themselves of the services. One criticism of the automated plan is that the hard copy printout consists of multiple pages and is difficult for the family to understand.

Probation officers do not currently have access to CWS/CMS⁵ and, therefore, continue to use non-automated, individual, county-generated versions of case plans. Changes were made to delinquency law in 1999 to ensure that the case plan and court report contained all the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) required elements (WIC 706.5 and 706.6). The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) provided initial training to county probation officers to ensure compliance with case plan requirements. In 2000, the CDSS contracted with the University of California, Davis, to provide extensive training workshops for county probation departments.

⁵ Given the relatively low proportion of probation placements, limited probation data is input centrally from the CDSS. This data does not currently include case plan data.

Current Trends:

While case plan development for children in the child welfare system has been a requirement in California since 1982, efforts continue to further support and improve this important tool. Some current trends illustrate this.

Support of Case Planning: Numerous processes and regulations are in place to ensure State and federal requirements for the case plan are met:

- First-line supervisor must review and approve each completed case plan within 30 days of the child's removal.
- Automated tracking system enables supervisors to monitor the timely completion of the initial case plan and subsequent updates.
- Automated management reports allow the county supervisor and office manager to closely monitor each worker's progress in case plan completion and documentation.
- The initial case plan is incorporated into the Dispositional court report and reviewed and considered by all parties such as the child's attorney, the mother's and father's attorneys and any court-appointed child advocate (WIC 358 and 358.1).
- The reasonableness and efficacy of the recommended services are reviewed and modified as needed, and the court may make any and all reasonable orders including enjoining service providers to coordinate and collaborate in service delivery (WIC 362).

Family-Centered, Strength-Based Case Planning: In recent years, the State has placed an increasing emphasis on training and technical assistance to facilitate development of more family-centered, strength-based assessments and case planning activities. This emphasis on family strengths has resulted in a variety of recent statutory changes to the case plan to enhance those practices. These changes include provisions that:

- Support and strengthen sibling relationships through placement together, visitation plans, post-adoption contact and ongoing information sharing.
- Allow proactive adoption planning and post-adoption contact agreements.
- Prioritize placements with relatives and unrelated extended family members by ensuring early identification, search and assessment of kin placement options.
- Allow grandparent visitation orders.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Case planning is a fundamental child welfare practice in California. Implementation of the revised automated case plan functionality was intended to assist workers' further compliance in this area. Once it is used consistently, the automated plan tool will assist in future monitoring to ensure compliance with State and federal requirements. While there is no current, single, statewide source to measure compliance with this requirement, available indicators from various sources demonstrate that having a written case plan in place is expected, implemented and routine in child welfare cases.

Automated Case Plan Utilization:

While some child welfare staff continue manual case plan documentation, more are using the automated functionality. Data from the CWS/CMS system shows that as of December 2001, 64% of cases open between July 1 and September 30, 2001, and opened more than 60 days, had an automated case plan on the system. It is anticipated that the availability of automated supervisory tracking and monitoring will provide incentives for increased use of the automated case planning functionality in CWS/CMS. As a result, the percentage of cases with completed case plans recorded in CWS/CMS will likely increase.

Juvenile Court Bench Officer Survey:

In November 2001, the Center for Families, Children & the Courts, an agency of the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts completed a structured telephone interview with 12 juvenile court bench officers from 12 representative counties. Eleven of the 12 respondents stated that the court reports have the case plan “always” or “most of the time.” Ten of the 12 respondents said the case plan “always” or “most of the time” gives the information needed by the bench officer.

Internal County Monitoring:

Several of the larger counties maintain an internal quality assurance process that reviews case records for, among other elements, the completion of the case plan. Two of these counties report the following:

- San Bernardino: A review of open foster care placement cases as of November 2001 showed that of 4,354 cases, 3,960 had an approved automated case plan or case plan update completed, for a 91% completion rate.
- Los Angeles County: In reviews of open cases that included both in-home and out-of-home cases, Los Angeles County reported that virtually all cases contained case plans. Although not all the case plans had all the elements required by State law and regulations, the county is making improvements in this area:
 - In 2000: 4,109 cases were reviewed; 3,059 had completed case plans, for 75% compliance.
 - In 2001: 1,769 cases were reviewed; 1,457 had completed case plans, for 82% compliance.

Case reviews conducted by the CDSS indicate that virtually all cases have case plans. However, improvement can continue to be made in ensuring that all State-required elements are documented in the plan. The automated case plan functionality shows promise in helping ensuring this goal is met.

FINDINGS:

The completion and updating of case plans is an area of strength for California. It is clearly required in State statutes and regulations and, in practice, the case plan is the

cornerstone of the service delivery system. The contents of the case plan are dynamic and evolving, highly responsive to emerging best practices. This is evidenced by the fact that the statute on case plan elements, WIC 16501.1, has been enhanced every year from 1991 through 2001. These changes ensure that this core plan is the “foundation and central unifying tool in child welfare services” (WIC 16501.1). Additionally, the regulations governing child welfare services exceed those required by federal law and place a high premium on completing and updating the case plan. Data from CWS/CMS indicates a 64% completion rate for use of the automated case plan tool. However, survey data from juvenile court bench officers and individual county data suggests that actual compliance with the case plan requirement is much higher because caseworkers continue to create non-automated case plans. This indicates that California would benefit from additional training and/or incentives to promote use of the automated case plan functionality.

Overall, the relatively recent automation of a uniform case plan tool is continuing to strengthen statewide compliance with State and federal requirements. Automated monitoring and tracking tools available at the supervisor's level will further enhance compliance over time. The court system has been an active partner in ensuring the case plan is relevant and reasonable for each family. The written case plan is fully institutionalized in California's child welfare services practice. With the transition to automated case plan documentation, the consistent documenting and quality assurance monitoring of case planning will be available more readily at a statewide level.

2. *How effectively is the State able to meet the case review requirement that parents of children in foster care participate in developing the child's case plan? In responding, consider their participation in activities such as identifying strengths and needs, determining goals, requesting specific services and evaluating progress related to their children.*

SUMMARY

- ***Parental participation in the development of the case plan is mandated. As demonstrated by survey results, family-focused practices that rely on family participation are increasingly the norm.***
- ***Systemic issues present challenges to this practice in the form of high caseworker caseloads, early entrance into an adversarial court system and funding issues.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

Involvement and engagement of the child's parent(s) is crucial to California's case planning system. Statute requires that “whenever possible” the parents shall participate in case plan development (WIC 16501.1). As indicated above, the case plan is developed within 30 days of the child's removal and updated at least every six months. Statutes and regulations require that the caseworker explain the purpose and content of the case plan to the parent or the child's legal guardian, provide a copy of the plan and

request that the parent sign the plan as an indication of willingness to participate in the offered services.

Critical to engaging the foster child's family in the case plan is a clear determination of who should be so engaged. California statutes offer reunification services to the child's mother, statutorily presumed father and/or any legal guardians. Therefore, early paternity determinations are crucial to ensure optimal opportunity for reunification, effective concurrent planning and the ability to identify potential paternal relatives as placement resources. WIC 316.2 requires the court to begin the paternity determination process at the Detention hearing. A search for absent parents must be conducted, using due diligence, for a period of six months (WIC 361.5). A previously non-custodial parent, once located, may become the immediate and permanent custodian of the child (WIC 361.2). Additionally, determining the applicability of the Indian Child Welfare Act is significant in the initial part of the case planning process.

Once identified, engaging the parents is key. However, parents, sometimes at the advice of their attorneys, are reluctant to engage in case planning with the worker or to sign the initial case plan before the court makes findings on the original allegations and orders the parents to comply with those services. For court-ordered cases, the parent can refuse to sign the initial case plan. The parent's reason for not signing must be documented in the case record.

The provision of reunification services, however, is not contingent upon the parent's formal acceptance of the case plan. Statutes require that the child welfare agency be ordered to provide "services as soon as possible to reunify the child and his or her family if appropriate" at the initial Detention hearing if the child is not returned to the parent/guardian at that hearing (WIC 319). Since most parents want to have contact with their child who is temporarily detained, the initial engagement and offering of services can be built around the terms and conditions for safe visitation with the child. It is often at this point that efforts, such as family decision-making models and/or alternative dispute resolution methods, can be most successfully used to engage reluctant parents in the process.

Once the parents are ordered to participate in the case plan at the Dispositional hearing, the intensity of the efforts to engage, track and monitor parental progress toward the safe return of their child is increased. Concurrent planning is required by statute as part of the case planning process. Extensive staff training further reinforces this requirement. Parents are involved in the concurrent planning process and receive a copy of the case plan that describes the permanency plan for the child, should reunification fail. Additionally, parents have a number of choices they may make at any stage of the court process. Such choices include waiving their rights to reunification services, agreeing to the selection of a legal guardian to be appointed for their child and voluntarily relinquishing their child for adoption and/or participating in adoption planning.

Ultimately, though not optimally, parents may engage in the development of the case plan through the court process. It is in court, at the Dispositional hearing, that the case plan is considered by all parties, including the child's and parents' attorneys, any court-appointed child advocate, the child welfare agency and any relevant tribal organizations. The reasonableness and efficacy of the recommended services are reviewed and modified as needed, and the court may make any and all reasonable orders including enjoining service providers to coordinate and collaborate in service delivery.

PRACTICE:

It is evident from the above that the skilled caseworker must be competent in a variety of complex legal matters as well as skilled in assessment, engagement and prognosis. Staff training in concurrent planning has been extensive in the last three years. Efforts to locate and engage absent parents have increased. The Judicial Council has provided leadership by establishing court rules and forms for paternity determinations used in juvenile court and training for workers on interviewing the mother and other relatives for paternity-related information.

Searching for and assessing parents and relatives and determining paternity and any Native American heritage must happen very early in the concurrent planning process. Thus, the front end of the system gets overloaded with these tasks at the same time crucial court processes are being initiated. Many counties have developed specialized staff, like Relative Search Units or trained paternity interviewers at court, to perform some of these tasks and relieve the overburdened intake worker.

California has embraced an agency philosophy that a strength-based approach to families is the most effective method of engaging parents in case planning (i.e., identifying strengths and needs, determining goals and requesting services). Counties are exercising a variety of options to bring family-centered models and concurrent resources to their communities. Practices such as family decision-making models,⁶ wraparound services and dependency or permanency planning mediation are being used with increased frequency throughout California. For additional information on family-centered, strength-based case planning practices, please refer to Item 1 of this Part or Section II, Part B, Item 1.

There are continuing challenges, however, to implementing strength-based models that allow parents a higher degree of participation. Serious problems, such as lack of transportation, chronic drug abuse, incarceration and the adversarial court system, remain significant challenges to parental engagement. High caseloads, staff turnover and limited community resources remain ongoing barriers to more effective parental engagement.

There are additional challenges to engaging parents of children in the probation system. However, since the passage of AB 575 in 1999, county probation departments have received extensive training and technical assistance from the CDSS and JRTA through the Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) on the ASFA requirements for case planning and a greater emphasis on family involvement. This training is discussed in more detail in Section II, Part B, Item 1.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Surveys conducted as part of this Statewide Assessment revealed that parental participation in the case planning process is a consistent and widespread practice in California. Below are summaries of the results of various surveys.

⁶ Such models include Family Conferencing, Family Unity and Family Decision-Making. These models are all case planning practices that increase parental and extended family participation and control in developing the child's case plan.

Statewide Surveys:

County Departments Survey: In August 2001, the County Welfare Directors Association sent a survey to all 58 county child welfare services agencies asking about local initiatives/efforts in engaging parent participation in the case plan. Eighty-four percent (84%) responded, including all the large counties.

The data includes the following responses:

- 100% reported that a face-to-face meeting between the caseworker and the parent is the primary method of engagement. Many report these meetings are supplemented by the inclusion of substance abuse and/or mental health specialists or support persons identified by the family. In addition, input from older children is critical to effective case planning.
- 80% reported utilizing versions of the Family Conferencing/Family Decision-making programs for appropriate cases.
- 69% reported having a Wraparound or Children's System of Care in place.
- 10% reported they are involved in the Family to Family Initiative.
- Other processes cited by counties are case staffing, Multi-disciplinary Teams (MDTs) and Pre-Dispositional Mediation.
- 82% reported they plan to implement the following new or expanded programs, within the next 12 months, to increase parental involvement:
 - Family Decision-making.
 - Wraparound Services.
 - Family to Family Initiative or other community-based foster care program.
 - Dependency Mediation program.
 - Dependency Drug Courts for substance-abusing parents.
- 82% reported they have incorporated specific family-centered, strength-based ongoing staff training that focuses on case planning including Structured Decision Making, Wraparound and Family Conferencing.
- 96% reported they have an effective absent-parent search process. Twenty-one of the larger counties have dedicated specially trained staff for searches, using a variety of databases and the Internet and collaborating with child support agencies.
- 59% reported they have a specialized process for engaging incarcerated parents in addition to required phone and mail contacts that includes parenting workbooks, parental "homework" curriculum and specialized assessment and visitation staff.

In spite of progress in the area of engaging parents, 96% of counties described the barriers that exist that prevent or limit parental involvement. (Multiple responses were permitted.)

- 41% cited parental substance abuse.
- 33% cited parental poverty or homelessness.
- 31% cited parental mental illness or developmental delays.
- 27% cited parental denial or hostility.
- 22% cited lack of bilingual or culturally-competent services.

- 22% cited the adversarial court process and attorneys advising parents against participation.
- 22% cited lack of adequate transportation to access services.
- 20% cited parental incarceration at distant facilities.

Statewide Birth Parent Telephone Survey: As part of the Statewide Assessment, a statewide survey of birth parents was conducted in January 2002. The purpose of this survey was to interview birth parents on their experiences and perceptions of the foster care system in California. Parents with telephone numbers were selected randomly from across the state. There were 96 respondents. Relevant results include the following:

- 81% of the respondents said they did not have a problem completing the services they were required to attend. However, 35% reported at least one type of problem or barrier to services. The barriers were identified as follows:
 - Transportation, interference with work and services not meeting needs were each identified by 15% of respondents.
 - Child care and the times that services were offered were each identified by 12% of respondents.
 - Long waiting list was identified by 10% of respondents.
- 57% of respondents said their caseworker did not adequately explain to them all the possible services they could have received.
- 50%–58% of respondents said of each category:
 - They were comfortable asking their caseworker for help.
 - They could call, and their caseworker would listen.
 - They rated their caseworker overall as “good” or “excellent.”

Bench Officer Surveys: When the 12 juvenile court bench officers were asked what they knew about the level of parental participation in the case plan:

- 75% reported the caseworker meets with the parents “most of the time” or “always.”
- 83% reported that family group conferencing occurred at least “sometimes.”
- 66% reported that mediation occurred at least “sometimes.”

CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Committee: This group of tribal representatives indicated that case plans are not developed in a way that promotes success. Sometimes court-ordered case plans are not realistic. Native American families need individualized, culturally appropriate and realistic case plans. The following was provided to describe the problem: One Native American mother lived 80 miles away from a court-ordered treatment site, and she had no car. She had to rely on a neighbor to take her, and the neighbor would have to wait eight hours for her to complete the schedule for the day. The county gave her a gas voucher to give to the neighbor to pay for gas. This was not a reasonable way to expect the mother to get to the services.

Tribal Survey: In many respects, a survey conducted among tribal representatives as part of the Statewide Assessment was consistent with other data gathered. Echoing the CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Committee, respondents reported the need for more tribal involvement in the case planning process.

Individual County Surveys:

- San Bernardino County Parent Survey: In March 2001, San Bernardino County conducted mail surveys of Family Maintenance (FM) and Family Reunification (FR) parents who had been receiving services for at least six months. The response rate from FM parents was 37% (48 surveys). The response rate from FR parents was 33% (48 surveys). Findings were as follows:

Question	FM	FR
Are you comfortable asking your caseworker for help?	81% yes	49% yes
How helpful was your caseworker overall?	79% excellent or good	46% excellent or good
Overall, how satisfied are you with your caseworker?	81% excellent or good	48% excellent or good

Table 1: San Bernardino Parent Survey, March 2001

- Yolo County Survey: Yolo County reported conducting a survey of Emergency Response (ER), FM and FR parents in 1997 and found “overall surveys supported customer satisfaction.”

FINDINGS:

Despite significant barriers to engaging parents in the case planning process, this data indicates general success. Given the adversarial nature of California’s child welfare system, a 50%–60% approval rating of parents’ experience with caseworkers is positive. Furthermore, 81% of parents surveyed indicated that they did not have a problem completing services they were required to attend. These findings would suggest that case plans are generally appropriate and include accessible services. Additionally, information from counties indicates they are engaging in service delivery strategies that promote family strengths and self-determination, and this trend appears to be on the rise.

From statutes to courts to agency practice, engagement of the parent and the legal guardian in the case planning process is an area of strength for California. Through a wide variety of requirements, programs and practices, opportunities are made available for parents to participate in identifying strengths and needs, determining goals, requesting needed services and evaluating their progress. Furthermore, the court system has many safeguards to ensure that absent parents are searched for and located; that the child's legal parents are identified through a paternity determination; that the child's relatives are identified, located and assessed for placement; and that incarcerated parents, where appropriate, receive services to learn parenting skills.

Statutes, regulations and practices all support the face-to-face development of the case plan goals between the worker and parent/guardian, and this process is often supplemented by case staffings, MDT support persons and mediators. Every parent is provided a court-appointed attorney who advocates for their clients' due process rights to reasonable services that are required based on proven allegations. While sometimes the adversarial nature of the court process impedes the caseworker/parent case

planning process, it provides balance in ensuring the parent's needs for services are met while protecting due process. It is further testimony to the strength of the case planning/case management process that more often than not, parents have a positive experience with their caseworker and engaging in services.

Over the last five years, California has embraced a family-centered, strength-based child welfare system and is incorporating that system in its staff and provider training. Counties are eagerly adopting a wide variety of parental engagement models. There is a systemwide acceptance of the efficacy and value of a family-based service model.

3. *Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effectively the State is meeting the requirement that the status of each child in foster care be reviewed periodically, i.e., at least every six months, by a court or by administrative review.*

SUMMARY

- ***Clear statutory and regulatory requirements exist for review of each child's case at least every six months by a court or administrative review panel.***
- ***High court and agency caseloads sometimes result in conditions that necessitate continuances that, however justifiable, can delay permanency for children.***
- ***Additional training is being implemented to ensure timely hearings.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California has both revised its state laws, regulations and court rules and developed on-going training programs to help all stakeholders comply with the federal requirement for timely and complete case reviews.

In dependency cases, the Dispositional hearing determines whether the child should be declared a dependent of the court and serves as the first periodic case review. At this hearing, the court reviews evidence about the child's safety and then makes determinations on all required ASFA elements (WIC 360). The court must hold subsequent periodic status review hearings no less frequently than every six months from the date of the original Dispositional hearing. The required ASFA determinations are reviewed at each subsequent six-month review hearing for the life of the foster care case (WIC 366, 366.21, 366.3, 11400 and 11404). In delinquency cases, the date the child entered foster care triggers the first periodic case plan review, which continues every six months until the termination of the case (WIC 727.3).

In dependency cases, for each review prior to the 12-month Permanency Review hearing and for subsequent reviews, at least annually, the court must conduct a status review hearing of the permanent plan. Subsequent to the Permanency Review, statutes permit administrative hearings to be conducted for the six-month status reviews between the annual court hearings. Only six counties in California utilize this option: Kern, Monterey, Sacramento, Santa Cruz, Shasta and Stanislaus. However, if the permanent

plan is adoption or legal guardianship, only the court can conduct the subsequent Permanency Reviews (WIC 366.3). In delinquency cases, status review hearings may be heard by administrative panels; however, none of the counties in California currently hold administrative review hearings in delinquency cases (WIC 727.3).

The statutory timeframes for periodic status reviews (WIC 352) also require that continuances not be granted when they are contrary to the child's interest, but only be given upon a showing of good cause. The statute emphasizes the child's need for prompt resolution of his or her custody status, the need to provide children with stable environments and the need to reduce the damage to a child due to prolonged temporary placements. California Rule of Court 1422(a) reiterates the language of the statute.

PRACTICE:

Although clear statutory timeframes exist for dependency cases, at times, California's commitment to due process for parents in the child welfare system presents a challenge to meeting these timeframes. Though occasionally necessary to ensure the constitutional rights of the parties, court continuances are the principal barrier to meeting the timeframes. Recently, the appellate courts have severely chastised the juvenile courts when cases extend beyond the statutory scheme. The appellate court confirmed that "[c]ontinuances should be difficult to obtain." The court recognized the high judicial caseloads and inadequate resources, but stated:

[w]e are mindful that juvenile court judges are overworked and doing their best to juggle ever-increasing caseloads while suffering grossly inadequate resources. However, while each division of the court is vitally important to the litigants and to society, there is no division of greater importance than the juvenile court, which deals with the sensitive parent child relationship and the potential of horrendous damage to children." (*In re Jeff M.* (1997) 56Cal.App.4th 1238, 66 Cal.Rptr.2d 343)

In order to address the issue of continuances more successfully, California provides judicial officers and court clerks with specialized training on dependency and delinquency cases. Several State agencies and associations provide such training, including the Judicial Council's Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) and Center for Families, Children & the Courts. CJER holds annual institutes and produces judicial bench guides on each juvenile court hearing that discusses the strict statutory timelines in juvenile law.

Since 1994, under the auspices of the CDSS and through a contract with the California Judicial Council, the Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) project has been a critical statewide effort to improve juvenile court performance and compliance with Title IV-E. The JRTA project visits each county every year to assess compliance with Title IV-E, to recommend any necessary changes and to provide technical assistance in implementing those changes. Additional information on this project is in Section II, Part C, Item 1.

DATA DISCUSSION:***Timely Case Reviews:***

JRTA: Based on on-site visits to the juvenile courts of all 58 counties, from 1998 to 2000, a review of court cases read for the timeliness of the last periodic case review, determined that statewide, 427 of 651 hearings (65.6%) had been held timely. Because of the difficulties and logistics involved in reading court cases, a statistically valid sample was not used in each county. Therefore, the results merely provide a snapshot to inform county court systems of areas needing additional study.

Juvenile Court Bench Officer Survey: Phone interviews of 12 juvenile court bench officers, conducted by Judicial Council in November 2001, yielded the following responses to the question: Are status review hearings timely, i.e., every six months? Five bench officers responded "Always," six bench officers responded "Most of the time," and one bench officer responded "Sometimes."

Though four bench officers had no recommendations because the law was clear or there was no problem, others made the following recommendations for changes in law or procedures:

- Fixed statutory or rule guidelines setting maximum period of continuances and allowing sanctions for non-compliance.
- More training for attorneys on the way they handle dependency cases and adequate judicial reforms for juvenile court.
- A mandate to force delivery of services and for making sure the formal case plan is fully reviewed by lawyers and parents before it is signed.
- Sanctions applied to counties that are not in compliance with the timeframes.
- Enactment of procedures that are consistent with what is required by law.
- A "readiness calendar" before the six-month deadline.
- "Full support of progress reports 60 to 90 days after the Dispositional hearing."

Continuances:

The California Court Improvement Project Report (April 1997): This report, published by the National Center for State Courts, provided the Judicial Council of California with an analysis of California's dependency system and timeliness of hearings based on a two-year assessment. The assessment included public hearings, focus group meetings and roundtable discussions with members of the Judicial Council, judicial officers and administrators and subcommittee members.

The project included a study of continuances in juvenile dependency cases in three California counties: Los Angeles, Santa Clara and Contra Costa. The objective of the project was to develop a statewide strategy for reducing court continuances in an overburdened court system and to highlight how local court systems could improve. The two sources of data for this study were court data on continuances and information from interviews. The interview phase of the study provided insight into problems creating

delay and ways to reduce delay that statistics often cannot reveal. The interviews yielded three recurring themes:

- More efficient calendar management techniques would ease problems.
- Attorneys are often not prepared to proceed at a scheduled hearing.
- Heavy caseloads hamper the ability of caseworkers to prepare accurate and complete reports in advance of court hearings.

Specific county data based on individual cases is shown below:

Counties:	Santa Clara	Contra Costa	Los Angeles
<u>TOTAL CASES REVIEWED</u>	408	106	5,663
Continued	82%	97%	83%
Denied	18%	3%	17%
Reasons for Continuance:			
Problems with caseworkers' report	18%	29%	32%
Person not present	13%	18%	16%
Noticing issues	7%	NA	22%
Set for trial date	1%	23%	19%
Attorney not prepared	3%	11%	4%
Reason not determined			28%

Table 2: The California Court Improvement Project Report, April 1997

According to this data, the most prevalent reason for continuances in these three counties was related to the caseworker's report, which is consistent with the results of the interview portion of the study. The most significant discrepancy with the interview data is that court data indicated that attorney preparation was less often the reason for the delay than the interview data indicated.

This continuance study has provided valuable information. First, it has provided local dependency court personnel with statistical data regarding continuances in their courtrooms. It has broken down that information into measurable outcomes that determine how many continuances are granted and denied, why continuances are made and whether judicial officers are making the appropriate legal findings necessary to grant continuances.

Juvenile Court Bench Officer Survey: Because continuances are often cited as the reason why review hearings are delayed, in the November 2001 survey, 12 bench officers estimated the percentage of all cases that are continued as follows: four bench officers reported less than 10%, six bench officers reported 11%–25% and two bench officers reported 26%–50%.

When ranking the frequency of various reasons for continuances, bench officers most frequently ranked "the matter was set for trial" as the highest and "the caseworker's report was late" as the lowest. Attorney issues and settlement issues were always marked as medium to low in frequency.

Finally, the bench officers were asked what measures they had in place in their courtroom to reduce the number of continuances. Their responses included:

- Bench officer being vigilant.
- Monitoring of and sanctions for late reports.
- Regular meetings among agencies to promote interagency cooperation and to address issues.
- Effective calendar management.
- Policy to ensure caseworkers are present.
- Well-trained and knowledgeable attorneys representing all parties.
- Drug Court, which is helping reduce the number of continuances by boosting reunification efforts.
- Tracking the number of continuances.
- Treating all reviews as “contested” hearings. If parents fail to attend court without good cause, then the case is closed, as the no-show parents forfeit their right to contest.

FINDINGS:

The State’s statutes and regulations clearly require a process for case review that occurs no less frequently than once every six months. California’s child welfare departments and the juvenile court system are both committed to timely case plan reviews, as evidenced by the efforts of the JRTA project. Legitimate and compelling reasons occur on a regular basis that result in continuances being granted. However legitimate the delays may be, California courts are guided by the overriding principle that children are entitled to a swift and certain permanency decision. Any delay must consider the impact that delay has on the child’s need for a “prompt resolution” and the damage to the child of prolonged temporary care (WIC 352). To this end, it is clear there are specific areas that can be addressed to improve the timeliness of case reviews. The automated case plan documentation tool currently being implemented will continue to improve timeliness of case plan updates and court reports.

Extensive training, on-site case reviews and technical assistance by JRTA is continuing to focus attention on the need to ensure timely hearings. The recent survey of bench officers demonstrates their clear understanding of the central role of the bench officer to ensure strong, effective measures are in place, balancing due process within statutory timeframes.

- 4. Citing any data available to the State, discuss how the State meets the requirements that Permanency hearings for children in foster care occur within prescribed timeframes. Discuss the effectiveness of these hearings in promoting the timely and appropriate achievement of permanency goals for children.**

SUMMARY

- **Clear statutory and regulatory requirements exist for Permanency hearings to occur within the prescribed timeframes. Recent law changes underscore the need for timely permanency.**

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California statutes mandate that a Permanency hearing be held within 12 months after the date the child entered foster care or immediately, at the Dispositional hearing, if reunification services are not ordered (WIC 366.21(f) and 361.5(f)). At this Permanency hearing, the court must hear all the evidence and determine whether the child can be immediately returned home or, if the parent is demonstrating substantive progress in meeting the treatment goals of the case plan, whether additional time-limited reunification services should be ordered. If reasonable services were offered and neither of the two above options are safe for the child, then the court must determine the permanent plan for the child. If the plan is adoption or guardianship, then the court will set an implementation hearing under WIC 366.26. If a compelling reason documents why the termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interest, the court will immediately implement the alternate permanent placement order (WIC 366.21(g)).

As of July 1, 2000, California has completed its review of all children who were in foster care for 15 out of the most recent 22 months. This effort coincided with the implementation of many other efforts to ensure permanency for greater numbers of California's foster children. Expediting permanency for children in foster care has been a priority for California for a number of years. The commitment to early permanency for very young children was reflected in statutory changes made in 1996 to limit the period of reunification services to six months for children under the age of three years (WIC 361.5). Later changes allow parents who clearly cannot or do not want to reunify to opt out of the adversarial court process by engaging in adoptive planning, signing a voluntary relinquishment or agreeing to the selection and appointment of a legal guardian at the Dispositional hearing. Implementation of concurrent planning, enhanced efforts for kinship care and California's own Adoptions Initiative, with additional adoption funding, are examples of significant efforts to move children out of foster care toward adoption and guardianship.

PRACTICE:

Various programs and practices in California have continued to move more foster children more quickly to permanency. The most significant is California's statutory mandate for concurrent planning. All case plans for foster children who are being

reunified must have a concurrent plan for permanency. As counties work to fully implement concurrent planning, they have developed a variety of system reforms to ensure that permanency planning begins at the point of removal. Some of these reforms include:

- Out-stationing adoption workers in offices and units of workers who are providing reunification services.
- Pre-Dispositional concurrent planning case staffings with adoption workers.
- Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents who will accept the risk of foster placements.
- Increased permanency mediation for birth families.
- The option of post-adoptive contact agreements.
- Improved and earlier search efforts for relative placements who will commit to be permanent homes, should reunification fail.

The JRTA project, as described in Item 3 of this Part, under contract with the CDSS, is a critical statewide effort to improve juvenile court timeliness of case review hearings, including the Permanency hearing. Through this project, JRTA provides technical assistance and education to juvenile court bench officers and reviews individual cases in each county to assess timeliness of review hearings.

DATA DISCUSSION:

JRTA:

The Judicial Council's JRTA performed on-site reviews in 58 counties' juvenile courts, reading court cases to determine if the Permanency hearings were held in a timely manner. Based on a limited, non-statistically valid sample of 615 cases, 75.9% of the cases had a Permanency hearing held within the required ASFA timelines.

Juvenile Court Bench Officer Survey:

In the November 2001 phone survey of 12 bench officers by the Judicial Council, 83% of the bench officers reported that 12-month Permanency hearings are "always" or "most of the time" held in a timely manner from the date of entry into foster care.

When asked if caseworkers and probation officers address concurrent planning in reunification court reports, 83% responded "always" or "most of the time."

When asked what additional laws or procedures need to be in place to improve timely 12-month Permanency hearings, 33% reported no recommendations, as they have no problems in this area. Other responses included the following:

- More training for mediators on permanency planning.
- Enforce 10-day rule for court reports. (Most reports are given to the parties right before the hearing, and this procedure does not allow enough time for the reports to be reviewed by the parties' lawyer.)
- Enforce strict standards for continuing services at the Permanency hearing.

FINDINGS:

California has a clear commitment to achieving timely and appropriate permanency for foster children. Through a series of statutory changes and extensive training of child welfare and probation staff and juvenile court bench officers, the State has made permanency for all foster children its guiding principle.

In 1998, California modified statutes to conform to ASFA and to ensure that the Permanency hearing is held within 12 months of the date the child entered foster care. Previously, this hearing was held at 18 months from removal. This statutory modification blends into a series of changes California had already made to expedite permanency for very young children, to integrate concurrent planning into its practice, to streamline the adoption process and to encourage relatives to either adopt or become legal guardians.

As demonstrated by the data, California continues to make permanency for children in foster care a priority. The Permanency hearings work in concert with other program requirements to ensure that children in foster care have the maximum opportunity to achieve permanency. In the vast majority of cases, juvenile court bench officers are aware of requirements and are holding timely Permanency hearings. Through the JRTA project, training and technical assistance are provided to continue these improvements.

5. Citing any data available to the State, discuss how the State meets the requirement to provide foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers of children in foster care with notice of and an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child in their care.

SUMMARY

- ***Clear statutory and regulatory requirements exist requiring that caregivers be provided notice of their opportunity to be heard at a court hearing or administrative review regarding a child in their care. However, many caregivers do not participate in the court or review process.***
- ***Recent efforts by the Center for Families, Children & the Courts have focused on training caregivers to improve effective participation in the review process.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

Since 1982, statutes have required the child's caregiver to be notified of all six-month case review hearings (WIC 366.21(b) and 16503). Current statutes require that the "notice of the hearing shall be mailed by the social worker to the foster parents, relative caregivers, community care facility or the foster family agency having physical custody of the child." (WIC 366.21(b) and 727.4).⁷ Similar notice is required for any administrative review convened in lieu of a court hearing.

This notice to the child's caregiver is in addition to the notice provided to the child's parents or legal guardian, the counsels of record and the child over the age of 10 years. 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 (WIC 366.21(b) and 727.4).

In addition to the written notice, the caseworker and probation officer must, at least 10 calendar days prior to the hearing, "provide a summary of recommendations for disposition" to the child's attorney, any court-appointed child advocate, foster parents, relative caregivers or pre-adoptive parents (WIC 366.21(c)).

Although California law does not grant standing to the child's caregiver, the caregiver may submit a written report to the court. The law states that prior to the hearing, the community care facility or foster family agency is required to file a report with the court about its care of the child and the "facility's or agency's recommendation for disposition." The court is required to consider these reports and recommendations prior to a Dispositional decision (WIC 366.21(d)).

PRACTICE:

To ensure a meaningful implementation of the "notice and opportunity to be heard" provisions for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers under the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, the Judicial Council of California, Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) implemented the Caregivers and the Courts Program. Its purpose is to ensure that information from caregivers about dependent children's needs is available to judicial officers for the court decision-making process.

Federal and California state law give foster parents (including pre-adoptive parents) and relatives caring for children the right to be heard in court, subject to certain restrictions. In order to participate effectively in the court process, caregivers need to understand the different legal issues judges face at court hearings, how to assess whether information is appropriate for the court process and how best to present the information to the court. To facilitate effective participation of caregivers in the juvenile court process, the CFCC has a number of efforts in place:

⁷ Since pre-adoptive parents are also foster parents or kin caregivers, they are automatically included in the noticing requirements.

- An educational booklet, *Juvenile Dependency Court: A Primer for California Foster Parents and Relative Caregivers* with information regarding the dependency court process, the law relating to caregiver participation in court hearings, information the court may consider helpful, how to decide whether written reports or court attendance is more appropriate, tips for caregivers who are called to testify in court, de facto parent status and local court culture.
- Training for conferences and caregiver groups regarding participation in the dependency court process. Training focuses on general legal concepts and the practical aspects of caregiver participation in court.
- Training for judicial officers, court personnel, attorneys, caseworkers, foster parent trainers, Court Appointed Special Advocate staff and other key system participants on how to utilize caregivers as information resources for the court process. This training focuses on implementation of federal and State mandates.

Additionally, the Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee is recommending that the Judicial Council of California approve a proposed Caregiver Information Form (JV-290) for optional use by caregivers who wish to submit information to the juvenile court. The proposed form is intended to provide caregivers with a structured format in which to present the information.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Caregiver Training Research Study:

The Judicial Council's CFCC collaborated with the National Center for Youth Law to train foster parents and kinship caregivers in four California counties. The project, supported by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, studied the effects of providing caregivers with training in dependency court process and procedure. The research study addressed three research questions:

- How training in the dependency court process affects caregivers' knowledge and attitudes about participating in court and the likelihood they will choose to participate.
- What factors determine how caregiver information is used in judicial decision making.
- What can be learned from case studies about the possible effects of caregiver participation on children's well-being.

Initial indications are that caregivers can and do learn information about the court and the court process as a result of the three-hour training. The training appears to increase participation in court. The study recommended that a multi-disciplinary panel, consisting of judicial officers, attorneys, caseworkers, caregivers and researchers be convened to review the issues raised by the study and to recommend next steps.

County Survey:

In a survey of the 58 county child welfare agencies, counties were asked how they ensure that the child's caregiver is noticed of the hearing and gets the opportunity to be heard. Forty-nine counties responded with the following:

- 65% reported they offered ongoing training to make the foster parent aware of how to participate.
- 65% reported that the caregivers' input was gathered in the home during the caseworker interview and specified as such in the caseworker's report. If the foster parent writes a separate report, the caseworker will attach it to the court report and file both with the court.
- 14% reported that they have developed a special form that is sent to each child's caregiver before each six-month review hearing, which the caregiver completes and returns to the caseworker for filing in court. Use of a standardized form makes the process less intimidating for caregivers and helps them focus on what information about the child the court needs. These forms ask about the child's health, behaviors, development, educational status, adjustment to placement, activities and interests, response to parental visitation and overall well-being.

Juvenile Court Bench Officers Survey:

A November 2001 phone survey of 12 juvenile court bench officers asked about the level of participation at court by the child's caregivers. It found that caregivers were noticed to appear in court "most of the time" or "always" and "sometimes" did so. It also found that caregivers "sometimes" provided written reports or oral information.

The bench officers commented that the caregivers, generally depend on the caseworker to include their input in the court report. However, the court sometimes receives separate written reports from the foster homes and group homes and always from probation departments.

Foster Parent Focus Groups:

A series of focus groups was held with county foster parents and caregivers. Foster parents reported routinely being notified of court hearings but rarely going to court. One said, "I would only go to court if a child was going up for adoption and I wanted to adopt." Others commented the drive to court was long and meant getting childcare. When asked if the caseworker explained to them how to give information in writing to court, one focus group reported that the worker calls to ask how the child is doing. Others reported they have written something to be taken to court or have recorded interviews for court.

A second focus group of foster family agency foster parents was less sure about participation. One said "I am told about court but not encouraged to attend." Several said they have never sent anything to court in writing and don't always hear back from the worker what happened in court.

Responses from a focus group of relative caregivers in Los Angeles included the comments that their workers often tell them they do not need to appear, and they do not always know about hearings. Some get copies of the court orders after the hearings. Only one relative of the eight had actually attended a court hearing and had submitted written reports.

FINDINGS:

California clearly meets the requirement for a process to provide notice to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers of juvenile court hearings of a child in their care and of their opportunity to be heard. For over two decades, statutes have required that notice of case review hearings be provided to foster parents, as well as a copy of the agency's recommendations and advisement of the opportunity to attend or submit a written report. The child's caregivers are routinely provided written notice of the hearings but do not generally attend these hearings. The court is an adversarial environment, and, as the foster parent is not given standing, caregivers who were interviewed generally felt it was more effective to provide input to the juvenile court through the caseworker.

In addition to noticing the caregivers, the State has engaged in significant efforts to further reach out to relatives and foster parents and to assist them in understanding their role in court will likely improve the frequency and quality of caregivers' participation in the court process. Training for caseworkers and attorneys will enable them to make the best use of caregivers' information. Additionally, the creation of a standardized form by Judicial Council for use by foster parents and relative caregivers is an important improvement in formalizing a process to ensure the caregivers have an easy and clearly understood mechanism for input.

- 1. Discuss how the State has complied with the requirement at Section 471(a)(22) of the Social Security Act to develop and implement standards to ensure that children in foster care placements are provided quality services that protect their health and safety, and any effects of implementing the standards to date.**

SUMMARY

- ***A broad range of activities provide a system of checks and balances designed to ensure that children in care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety.***
- ***County compliance review results have demonstrated improvement in the quality of services provided to children in care over the last several years.***
- ***Major revisions to the State's quality assurance system are beginning, with the goal of improving desired outcomes for children.***

OVERVIEW:

In California, efforts are made at many levels to ensure that agencies in all jurisdictions of the State provide children in foster care with quality services that protect their health and safety. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is mandated by State statutes with the responsibility to supervise public and private agencies that provide child welfare services. These agencies include child welfare agencies in 58 counties, private agencies and county juvenile probation departments that provide child welfare services.

The mechanisms for ensuring the quality of services are many and varied. They begin by establishing standards in State law and regulations, then ensuring that those standards are maintained through compliance reviews; implementation of licensing and approval standards for placement resources; and complaint investigation and grievance processes. In some areas, such as promulgating regulations and monitoring compliance with those regulations, the State has ultimate responsibility. The courts provide another layer of review. In other areas, such as licensing of foster homes or approval of adoptive homes or kin caregivers, the responsibility is shared with counties and, in some cases, private agencies. In addition, activities are performed internally at the county level to ensure the provision of quality services to foster children.

PRACTICE:

Compliance Activities:

Division 31 Compliance Reviews: Division 31 of the Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures primarily sets forth the requirements for the services provided to children in foster care. The CDSS conducts individual county reviews to ensure compliance with Division 31 regulations in four program areas: Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanency Placement. These reviews are conducted every three years in all 58 counties, based on an examination of a statistically valid sample of cases and focusing on specific core issues. The cases

reviewed are under the jurisdiction of both the county child welfare agencies and the county probation departments.

Review elements are slightly different for child welfare and probation cases. The elements evaluated for child welfare cases are: initial and monthly contacts with the child and family; medical, dental, health and educational information concerning the child; and, a targeted review question focusing on transitional independent living plans.

The review questions evaluated for Probation Departments are: case plans; monthly contacts with the child and family; medical, dental, health and educational information concerning the child; a targeted review question focusing on transitional independent living plans; and, a targeted review question focusing on children placed out-of-state under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.

Each Division 31 Compliance Review results in a report detailing the county's level of compliance for the areas reviewed. These reports are used to document counties' performance in maintaining the minimum compliance levels. If a county falls below the minimum compliance level of 90%, the county is required to develop a corrective action plan (CAP) for approval by the CDSS. Counties under a CAP must provide the CDSS with quarterly progress reports that are tested for validity by the CDSS before approval. Currently, 80% of counties reviewed in the past three years have been required to develop CAPs for one or more of the review areas.

Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA): The Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, is an agency of the Judiciary Branch that is responsible for improving the administration of justice in California. The Judicial Council provides guidelines to the courts, makes annual recommendations to the Governor and Legislature and adopts and revises California Rules of Court in the areas of court administration, practice and procedure. The Council also sets the direction and provides leadership for improving quality and advancing consistent, independent, impartial and accessible administration of justice. As related to quality assurance within the scope of child welfare, the Council is involved with many projects concerning family, juvenile, child support, custody, visitation and domestic violence law and procedure. All these projects have the overall goal of ensuring and maintaining fair and impartial juvenile hearings.

The JRTA project, through a contract between the CDSS and the Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts, was created to educate and assist county juvenile courts to improve compliance with Title IV-E requirements. These requirements help ensure that children are not removed from their homes unnecessarily, and that if children are removed, that reasonable efforts are made to reunify them with their families, and that if children cannot be returned to their families, that they receive legally permanent homes.

The JRTA project staff visits each county every year to assess compliance with Title IV-E, to recommend any necessary changes and to provide technical assistance in implementing those changes. Additional discussion of this project is in Section II, Part B, Item 3.

Implementation of Licensing and Approval Standards:

Licensing and Approval: California's Health and Safety Code, Welfare and Institutions Code and Title 22 regulations specify levels and standards of care for children in various placement settings. The CDSS, through its Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) is responsible for ensuring the health and safety of children residing in licensed facilities throughout the State. Such facilities include foster family homes, foster family agencies (FFAs), small family homes, adoption agencies and group homes. However, other agencies are responsible for ensuring licensing and approval standards as well. In 42 counties, the responsibility for ensuring these standards for foster family homes is delegated to the county child welfare agencies. Twenty-eight counties and six State district offices maintain standards for adoptive homes. All county child welfare agencies are responsible for enforcing standards for relative caregivers and non-related extended family members.

The licensing and approval compliance system includes monitoring activities; applying consequences for non-compliance; providing efficient due process; maintaining established state/county/private agency roles and standards; making criminal record checks for licensees, employees, certified administrators, adult non-client residents and volunteers and providing technical assistance.

A review of compliance with all established standards is conducted as part of the annual license review process. In addition, any complaints of licensing violations are investigated by State or county licensing staff within 10 days. Formal actions in response to licensing violations may include a plan of correction, monitoring, fiscal sanctions, placing the facility on probation, and in some cases, revocation of a license.

Additionally, the CDSS requires an Administrator Certification Program for private agency administrators that requires completing an initial training program, passing an examination and a criminal record clearance and continuing education.

Audits: To supplement the licensing review process, the CDSS has established the following measures that provide additional controls to ensure that group home providers and foster family agencies also adhere to State and federal program and funding requirements:

- Group home program audits are routinely conducted on a scheduled basis to ensure that services are being provided commensurate with the payment level. An audit may result in a reduced payment level, an overpayment being assessed and/or the submission of corrective action by the provider.
- Financial audits of group homes and FFAs are required annually to ensure that effective controls and accountability systems have been established by providers. These audits are performed by independent auditors, who are directed by government auditing standards and must be certified public accountants or State-licensed public accountants, and submitted to the State for review and follow-up.

Complaint Investigation and Grievance Procedures:

Foster Care Ombudsman: In California, all children in foster care may receive assistance through the Foster Care Ombudsman Program. Under this program, a statewide toll-free telephone number is available to individuals for making a complaint or requesting information. The program conducts objective investigations and attempts to resolve complaints made by, or on behalf of, children or youth placed in foster care related to their care, placement or services. The Ombudsman's Office disseminates information on the rights of children and youth in foster care and the services provided by the Office and compiles all data collected on a yearly basis.

Grievance Procedures: The CDSS has established grievance procedures in regulations by which individuals can review the actions taken by child welfare and adoption agencies concerning the placement or removal of a child from a foster home or adoptive home or other related actions. Grievance procedures are administered at the local level. Each county must develop, maintain and implement a written administrative review plan. The CDSS does not maintain a database for retrieval of information regarding grievances.

Complaint Investigation: The CDSS directly receives concerns and complaints from the general public, as well as consumers of child welfare services. The CDSS investigates these concerns and complaints and makes recommendations, as appropriate. The CDSS also determines whether the county child welfare agencies have abided by Division 31 regulation requirements and State law. The number of such written inquiries received by the CDSS averages eighty per month. Additionally, the public may call and speak directly to a CDSS analyst during business hours.

State Fair Hearings: The CDSS provides a means of adjudicating welfare and social services disputes on behalf of the Director of the CDSS. To adjudicate disputes, an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) will conduct quasi-judicial administrative hearings, evaluate evidence, issue subpoenas if necessary, make evidentiary findings, research the applicable law and prepare decisions. ALJs may issue final decisions on behalf of the Director or submit proposed decisions for the Director's consideration. The Director may adopt the proposed decision, issue a Director's Alternate Decision or order a further hearing. Released decisions are binding unless overturned by judicial review. Hearing parties may request a rehearing if dissatisfied with a released decision.

Local Efforts:

A survey of California's county child welfare agencies conducted in August 2001 revealed that of the 42 counties that responded, approximately 90% had a county quality assurance system in place that resembled the State's Division 31 compliance review system. In approximately 50% of the counties, specific areas of practice are reviewed in addition to the State's requirements and in 50% of the counties, outcome data is collected.

Current Trends:

Since 1997, California has enacted a number of laws that modified the State's child welfare program. These laws are designed to improve the quality of services provided to foster children and are outlined below.

Assembly Bill (AB) 1544 (Assembly Human Services Committee), Chapter 793, Statutes of 1997, contained provisions in part to:

- Increase the likelihood of placement of a child with a kin caregiver who can provide a safe, permanent home.
- Expedite permanency for foster children by mandating concurrent planning.
- Create an additional adoption option for relative caregivers.

AB 2773 (Assembly Human Services Committee), Chapter 1056, Statutes of 1998, and AB 575 (Arner), Chapter 997, Statutes of 1999, conformed California statutes with the federal Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997.

Senate Bill 933 (Thompson), Chapter 311, Statutes of 1998, enacted major child welfare services system reforms, including provisions to:

- Require that out-of-state facilities in which California children are placed be certified as meeting California's standards and that ongoing monitoring be conducted.
- Develop and implement county pilots to use best practices guidelines for family-centered assessments of families and children receiving child welfare services.
- Expand group home and foster family agency audit functions to ensure quality services.

AB 899 (Liu), Chapter 683, Statutes of 2001, specifies the rights of children in foster care and requires caseworkers and foster care facilities to provide information regarding those rights.

AB 1695 (Assembly Human Services Committee), Chapter 653, Statutes of 2001, conforms State law with recent amendments to federal regulations relating to the placement of foster children in licensed or approved homes of non-relatives and relatives.

AB 636 (Steinberg), Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001, mandates the development and implementation of an outcomes-based county compliance review process by January 2005 that is modeled after the federal Child and Family Services Review.

Recognizing that incremental legislative changes are not enough, the CDSS assembled the California Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group with the goal of improving the State's child welfare system. This group was charged by Governor Davis and the Legislature to "think outside the box" to develop a comprehensive approach for the 21st century as they review the current system for improvements and re-design. The operational mission is to create and sustain a flexible infrastructure comprising public and private partnerships that provide a comprehensive system of support for families and communities to ensure the well-being of every child. Strategies emerging from this group related to services to foster children are focusing on shifting the role of the foster

family from that of a placement facility to that of being an active agent in a therapeutic and emotionally nurturing role with the child, as well as being a resource for permanency should reunification fail.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Founded on the assumption that good processes lead to good outcomes, for over 15 years, the CDSS has operated a quality assurance system focusing on compliance with the regulations governing the child welfare process (Division 31). These reviews, essentially “process oriented,” do not focus on outcomes, but rather on a critical number of required activities that are linked to the federal outcome measures. The State also has a variety of sources of data that inform decision makers and local program managers regarding the quality of services provided to children and families.

State Fiscal Year	Initial Contact Timely	Monthly Contact	Health Education Info. Given to Provider	Medical Exam Timely	Dental Exam Timely	Independent Living Program
FY 94/95	53%	29%	6%	6%	6%	19%
FY 01/02	90%	90%	10%	100%	80%	0%

Table 3: Child Welfare Services Division 31 Compliance Reviews (Percentage of Counties in Compliance)⁸

A comparison of the levels of compliance achieved by counties between State fiscal years 1994/95 and 2000/01, as determined by the State's Division 31 compliance reviews, shows increased levels of compliance in five of the six areas reviewed. The exception is completion of Independent Living Plans in a timely manner, as required by regulations.

Out-of-State Placements:

Out-of-state group home placements decreased from 778 in March 1998 to 165 in June 2002 as a result of CDSS efforts to ensure quality services to children placed out-of-state. A number of out-of-state group home providers chose to discontinue serving California children rather than meet California's rigorous regulatory standards. Several other facilities failed to meet our standards.

Audits:

To ensure that the services are actually being provided to children in placement, the CDSS conducted 60 provisional rate audits between June 1999 and August 2000. In 70% of these audits, providers maintained the appropriate rate classification level initially

⁸ FY 01/02 represents the 10 counties that have been reviewed and whose Oversight Reports have been forwarded to the county.

established, while 30 percent of the audits resulted in a rate reduction of from one to two levels. California has a group home Rate Classification Level (RCL) system that ranges from RCL 1 to RCL 14 (the highest level). The RCL for each program is determined by the program description of services to be provided and the education and experience of the staff providing the services.

Complaints:

During its first year of operation, the Foster Care Ombudsman received 1,296 contacts, 550 complaints (396 have subsequently been closed and 154 are considered to be active cases), 187 referrals and 559 requests for information. Of the complaints, 26% were from current or former foster youth, 19% from foster parents and 31% from relatives. The most common complaints concerned placement decisions (201 complaints), placement agencies (155 complaints) and foster youth rights (69 complaints).

Surveys, Focus Groups and Interviews:

A variety of focus groups, surveys and interviews were conducted from August through November 2001 involving caseworkers, foster parents, foster youth, tribal representatives, private agency staff and adoptive parents. For the most part, the participants were aware of the majority of quality assurance programs in place in California. Licensing of foster homes was the quality assurance activity with which respondents were most familiar, and it ranked high as one of the most effective. Among the advocates interviewed, two were essentially unfamiliar with the county compliance system; another one felt it has improved, but that the current system is still inadequate to identify significant problem areas. Other comments focused on the need to assess more than the physical environment in the foster care licensing process. Another response focused on the need for a more coordinated approach to training foster parents as a means of ensuring quality in this area.

Most respondents were unfamiliar with the audit functions performed by the CDSS. A recent survey found that 60% of 42 counties that responded to the survey do not inform parents and other stakeholders about their quality assurance process in any formal way.

FINDINGS:

The range of activities designed to ensure services are in place to protect the health and safety of children in foster care provides a valuable system of checks and balances for quality assurance. These activities have resulted in improved system functioning, increased accessibility to stakeholders and clients and a shift in focus toward improving outcomes for children through more effective services.

In the future, the CDSS, under the requirements of AB 636, will be making major revisions to the compliance review process. The purpose of these revisions is to integrate process indicators, like those currently used, with a clearer emphasis on outcomes. This legislation directs the CDSS to establish a California Child and Family

Services Review System, consistent with the federal model, to review all county child welfare systems. These reviews will cover child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support and independent living. The performance indicators must be consistent with the federal Child and Family Services Review measures for safety, permanency and well-being outcomes and systemic factors. In addition, the CDSS must identify and promote the replication of best practices to achieve the desirable outcomes for children and families.

2. Discuss the effectiveness of the agency's quality assurance system in helping to ensure safety, permanency and well-being for children served by the agency and their families in all jurisdictions of the State. In responding, discuss the jurisdictions in the State covered by the quality assurance procedures, the capacity of the system to evaluate the adequacy and quality of the State's child and family services system and its capacity to produce information leading to program improvements.

SUMMARY

- ***To help ensure safety, permanency and well-being for children served by the State's child welfare system, a quality assurance system is in place that combines both compliance-focused and performance-focused activities.***
- ***The primary quality assurance activities are available in every jurisdiction, and the majority are available statewide.***
- ***In shifting toward a stronger focus on desired outcomes, the State's challenge is to define measurable performance indicators that can be derived from the current statewide information system.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

In part, because California operates under a state-supervised, county-administered system, efforts to ensure safety, permanency and well-being for children served by the State's child welfare system occur at many levels and in all jurisdictions, i.e., counties, County agencies (child welfare and probation), private agencies, the courts and the State all contribute to ensuring effective services.

California has a comprehensive statutory framework for ensuring safety, permanency and well-being. Recent legislation has served to strengthen this framework further. As with State statutes, regulations governing various aspects of the State's child welfare program are in effect in all counties of the State. As described above, the focus of past and recent quality assurance systems has largely been on *process* indicators, based on the concept that good practices or services lead to good outcomes. However, in recent years, California has begun a shift toward a focus on performance and achieving positive outcomes for children.

The shift in emphasis to performance and outcomes can be seen in several quality assurance activities currently in place and others that are in pilot stages. All are directed at ensuring improvement in safety, permanency and well-being for children. Efforts

designed to ensure compliance with existing requirements or to assess problem areas are one means of achieving program improvement. Other efforts are focused on using the State's information system resources to evaluate performance. Both these efforts have led to pilot projects or system changes that have improved the State's overall child welfare program functioning.

PRACTICE:

The CDSS has a number of programs in place to measure the quality of the child welfare services provided to children and families by public and private agencies. These services can be broken down into two primary areas: those focused on compliance and those focused on performance.

Compliance-Focused Activities:

Division 31 County Compliance Reviews: As discussed in Item 1 of this Part, these reviews focus on the four program areas: Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanency Placement. The reviews are conducted, on a rotating basis, every three years in all 58 counties, based on an examination of a predetermined number of cases and focusing on a limited number of core issues. These compliance reviews examine cases that are under the jurisdiction of both the county child welfare agencies and the county probation departments. Any county found out of compliance in any area reviewed is required to develop a corrective action plan. This plan is monitored by the CDSS through quarterly progress reports submitted by the county.

The Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) Project: This Judicial Council project, described in Item 1 of this Part, was created to educate and assist county juvenile courts to improve compliance with Title IV-E requirements.

The State Child Death Review Council: This council was established in 1992 under the auspices of the California Department of Justice. Its goal is to reduce child deaths associated with child abuse and neglect. The Council supports Local Child Death Review Teams through training and the development of State and county data- and information-sharing systems.

The Council is composed of representatives from relevant State agencies and various statewide associations. Several members of the Council are also members of Local Child Death Review Teams. The Council is responsible for overseeing the statewide coordination and integration of State and local efforts to address fatal child abuse and neglect. The Council is also committed to developing strategies and funding sources to support data collection and training in the hope of preventing future child deaths.

Fifty-six of 58 counties in California have Local Child Death Review Teams that review child fatalities that occur in their local communities. Additionally, the Teams also review the history of the case and related cases. If the review finds the county has systemic factors that may have been related to the child's death, recommendations for changes are made to prevent future child deaths.

Licensing, Approval and Auditing: The CDSS, as described in Item 1 of this Part, maintains standards across the range of out-of-home placement options for children in foster care to ensure their health and safety.

The Civil Rights Bureau: The CDSS, through its Civil Rights Bureau, administers programs based on State and federal laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Program. These programs are designed to ensure equal access and nondiscrimination for all recipients of services provided by child welfare agencies. The activities of this bureau include discrimination complaint investigations, technical assistance, training and county compliance monitoring. Additionally, the Civil Rights Bureau also requires county offices to provide the CDSS with an annual Civil Rights Plan detailing the counties' civil rights programs and the methods by which the counties ensure equal access and nondiscrimination to all recipients of services.

Performance-Focused Activities:

Performance-focused activities require data that is accessible for review. The availability of performance data is also necessary for the public accountability and stakeholder participation that are key components of quality assurance in the public child welfare arena. The following are examples of the ways in which performance data is connected to program improvement in the areas of safety and permanency:

Structured Decision Making (SDM): This project adds structure to key child welfare assessments and associated decision points in order to improve the consistency (reliability) and accuracy (validity) of both the assessments and the resulting decisions. Through more consistent and accurate assessments and decisions, SDM is able to increase the proportion of scarce treatment resources allocated to the children at greatest risk of future maltreatment. By doing this, SDM strives to achieve its ultimate goals—the reduction of maltreatment recurrence, child injury, foster care placement and re-referral/re-investigation.

In addition to the use of specific assessment tools and service guidelines to guide practice, SDM has a number of feedback mechanisms that ensure the continuation of high-quality work. These mechanisms include such components as process evaluation, management reports, workload study, performance/outcome indicators, etc.

Preliminary California data and data from other states indicate that SDM assessment and decision making is consistent (reliable) and accurate (valid) and that use of SDM reduces maltreatment recurrence and other negative outcomes that it seeks to prevent.

The most compelling quality assurance aspect of SDM, however, cannot be found in any single element listed above, but rather in the integration of all the elements working toward a single purpose. Every aspect of the model, from the standardized assessment tools to use of performance and outcome indicators is designed to ensure high-quality work and high-quality work products in child maltreatment prevention through collection, analysis and feedback of data on program operations and reinforcement of policies and procedures by supervisory staff.

Foster Care Performance Indicators, Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley: For several years, the CDSS, through a contract with University of California, Berkeley, has tracked State administrative data regarding children in foster care. Prior to 1998, when the primary source of data became the State's SACWIS system, the CDSS maintained the Foster Care Information System. Longitudinal data from both sources is published routinely on a public website and available at the individual county level. Most recently, data regarding child abuse referrals and dispositions is on this website as well. The data made available through this contract has been instrumental in informing the child welfare community and developing significant program improvements.

For example, the sharp rise in the proportion of children placed with kin juxtaposed to the relatively low proportion of children exiting the system from kin placements led to major program improvements (e.g., kinship adoption and Kin-GAP) (See Section II, Part E, Item 3 and Section IV, Part B, Item 2.) Working with key stakeholders in the kinship care community, the CDSS implemented significant program changes to improve safety, permanency and well-being for children placed with relatives. The resulting changes in laws, policies and funding have increased the options for children placed with relatives to exit the child welfare system to safe, permanent homes with relatives.

California Adoptions Initiative: This effort augmented funding of county adoption programs to achieve individual county performance targets for increases in the annual number of foster children adopted. The goal was to double the annual number of adoptive placements statewide. With the help of significant law, practice and policy changes, this goal was more than achieved. These efforts led to California receiving over \$17.6 million in federal Adoption Incentive Funds and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001 Adoption Excellence Award.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Division 31 Compliance Reviews:

Please refer to the data in Item 1 of this Part regarding the overall improvement in compliance to program requirements by county child welfare programs over the last several years. This improvement is seen most dramatically in the areas of the review related to child well-being. County performance in providing timely medical and dental exams improved from 6% each in 1994/95 to 94% and 65%, respectively.

Foster Care Performance Indicators:⁹

The dramatic reduction in the proportion and number of foster children placed with kin caregivers demonstrates one of the improved outcomes that has resulted from California's focus on performance indicators:

⁹ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

- On January 1, 2000, 46,579 children resided with kin caregivers, representing 44% of the foster care population.
- On July 1, 2001, 36,503 children resided with kin caregivers, representing 36% of the foster care population.

California Adoptions Initiative:

Over the five years of the Adoptions Initiative, the annual number of completed adoptions increased by 111% (Table 4). This data demonstrates improved outcomes for children resulting from fiscal incentives and performance targets.

State Fiscal Year	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Completed Adoptions	3,384	4,065	5,211	5,854	7,125

Table 4: Completed Adoptions¹⁰

Child Deaths:

The Child Death Review Council provides a Reconciliation Audit that combines all sources of data related to child deaths. This audit report is used to better identify all child deaths caused by child abuse and neglect. Additionally, this information is also used to examine any trends and potential solutions within this area.

The State Child Death Review Council receives information from three different sources: The Department of Justice homicide files, the Vital Statistics death records and the Child Abuse Central Index. The most recent report published by the State Child Death Review Council, dated September 2000, shows the following for the years 1996 to 1998:

	Department of Justice Files			Vital Statistics Death Records			Child Abuse Central Index		
	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
Child Abuse and Neglect Homicides	143	110	96	63	33	20	52	47	24

Table 5: State Child Death Review Council Report Data, September 2000

Child Death Review data indicates that the number of child deaths as a result of abuse or neglect has decreased over the three-year period (1996–1998). At this point, the Council is still analyzing the reasons for the changes represented by this data.

Civil Rights:

As part of its oversight authority, the Civil Rights Bureau conducts compliance review studies of public contact caseload and facility accessibility reviews. These review studies are conducted on-site. Frequency varies by county.

¹⁰ Source: California Department of Social Services, compiled from aggregate figures submitted by counties on the 56A Form, Quarterly Adoption Statistics

In addition to these studies, the Civil Rights Bureau investigates allegations of discrimination. In its Discrimination Complaints Quarterly Report covering the period from January 1, 2001, to March 31, 2001, the Civil Rights Bureau received 15 complaints involving county child welfare agencies. The investigation of these 15 complaints resulted in the following: Five were investigated, but no discrimination could be substantiated. One is still pending, an investigation by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights investigation. The remaining complaints were withdrawn, not related to discrimination or dropped by the complainant.

Local Efforts:

In a survey of counties, with 49 of 58 (84%) responding, 23% of the 49 counties report that they conduct client satisfaction surveys with parents or have a similar client feedback process. Another 10% indicate they plan to implement client satisfaction surveys in the near future.

FINDINGS:

The State's quality assurance system is made up of both compliance-focused activities (Division 31 Compliance Reviews, the JRTA project, Child Death Review Council, licensing, approval and auditing processes and the CDSS Civil Rights Bureau) and performance-focused activities (Structured Decision Making, Foster Care Performance Indicators and California's Adoptions Initiative). This combination of quality assurance activities is critical to helping ensure safety, permanency and well-being for children served by the State's child welfare system.

The principal quality assurance activity, the Division 31 Compliance Reviews, occurs regularly in all jurisdictions of the State. These reviews are complemented by these other quality assurance activities to provide a system that evaluates both the quality and effect of the services provided. Analysis of performance indicators and outcomes provides the State with the ability to identify the strengths and needs of the service delivery system. Such analysis has led to program improvements such as Kin-GAP, kin adoption, concurrent planning, etc. The ongoing contract with U.C. Berkeley and the comprehensive CWS/CMS ensures continued access to child welfare data to assess overall program performance.

Over the past several years, California has been steadily moving further toward a performance and outcome-focused quality assurance system in all jurisdictions of the State. However, many of the quality assurance activities continue to emphasize *processes* rather than *outcomes*. As noted earlier, the review process currently in place seeks to ensure that specific services are provided in a manner that is consistent with requirements rather than to assess the effectiveness of those services. Recognizing this, the Governor and the Legislature enacted Assembly Bill 636 (Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001), which will better integrate the process and outcome focuses within the State's primary quality assurance activity—the Division 31 county compliance reviews. Furthermore, through this change, the county compliance reviews will become more consistent with the federal Child and Family Services Review. The primary challenges to making this shift are defining measurable outcomes that can be captured in the

current statewide information system and ensuring the quality of the data produced by the system.

While some improvements are still needed to more accurately capture such data, (described in Section II, Part A) much progress has been made. Since the overall quality and reliability of the data produced by this system has been steadily increasing in recent years, shifting to an outcome-based system is now timely for California.

1. ***Citing any data available to the State on the numbers and timeframes of staff trained, discuss the effectiveness of the State's initial and ongoing training for all child welfare staff employed by the agency that includes the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions.***

SUMMARY

- ***State statutes require implementation of a coordinated, statewide training program of specified topics. Individual counties and the Regional Training Academies provide this training.***
- ***California continues to increase its capacity to train child welfare staff. Regional Training Academies have provided over 34,419 worker days of initial and ongoing training in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2000/01 (a 24% increase over SFY 1998/99).***
- ***Improved county performance on the Division 31 county compliance reviews (Section II, Part C) demonstrates the effectiveness of the State's training system.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California's state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system presents unique challenges and opportunities for developing and delivering professional training to the varied professional and paraprofessional child welfare staff throughout the State. Such training and professional development opportunities occur at many levels: State, regional, county and individual agency. Training and development programs are provided by government agencies, educational institutions, professional associations and private foundations, consistent with the goals and objectives of the State's Title IV-B and IV-E plans.

The Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16200 et seq., (Chapter 1310, Statutes of 1987) requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide practice-relevant training for social workers, agencies under contract with county welfare departments, mandated child abuse reporters and all members of the child welfare delivery system.

State statutes require implementation of a coordinated, statewide training program specifically designed to meet the needs of county child welfare workers assigned to emergency response, family maintenance, family reunification, permanent placement and adoption responsibilities. This training is to include all of the following: (1) Crisis intervention. (2) Investigative techniques. (3) Rules of evidence. (4) Indicators of abuse and neglect. (5) Assessment criteria, including the application of guidelines for assessment of relatives for placement. (6) Intervention strategies. (7) Legal requirements of child protection, including requirements of child abuse reporting laws. (8) Case management. (9) Use of community resources. (10) Information regarding the dynamics and effects of domestic violence upon families and children. (11) Post-traumatic stress disorder and the causes, symptoms, and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in children.

The CDSS funds a significant portion of the training for county staff through contracts with California universities. The CDSS also provides direct training to county child welfare staff on changes in State regulations and statutes, implementation of new programs and transfer of best practices. California's universities and colleges also play a significant role in the training and preparation of child welfare professionals. Many social work educational institutions prepare graduate social work students specifically to work in public child welfare agencies. Additionally, they provide induction training to newly hired county child welfare staff. Many counties also provide their own induction training for new social workers and ongoing professional training for seasoned staff.

The California Social Work Education Center:

The California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), the nation's largest state coalition of social work educators and practitioners, is a consortium of the State's 15 accredited social work graduate schools, the 58 California county departments of social services and mental health, the California Department of Social Services and the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. One of CalSWEC's principal aims is to recruit and train a diverse group of social workers for careers in public human service, with special emphasis on child welfare. This body, through contracts with the CDSS, plays several key roles in the training of the State's public child welfare professionals.

Title IV-E Master of Social Work (MSW) Program: CalSWEC administers the MSW Public Child Welfare (Title IV-E) Stipend Program. This program is offered by the 15 accredited social work graduate schools in the consortium. The Title IV-E MSW Program provides two years of financial support, using university and federal funds through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, to full-time graduate social work students preparing for public child welfare careers. Since Fall 2000, the amount of support has been \$18,500 per student per year. Financial assistance is also available to part-time graduate social work students. To be considered for a stipend, students must be admitted to an accredited California graduate school of social work. Students receiving the Title IV-E stipend also complete at least one of their field placements in a public child welfare setting. After receiving their degrees, students are required to complete one year of service in a public child welfare agency, at full salary for each year of financial aid received.

The Regional Training Academies: The CDSS funds five regional training academies to provide training and continuing professional education to county child welfare staff. These academies are university/county/State partnerships charged with meeting the training needs of all counties in their regions. Included is hands-on training on the statewide computer system, Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). Developing and delivering training for child welfare workers regionally allows for each academy to tailor curricula to meet its particular county's needs. CalSWEC provides coordination for the academies. Four of the five training academies are funded through Title IV-E training funds, leveraged with matching funds from the CDSS and from the universities where their operations are located. The Inter-University Consortium in Los Angeles also utilizes federal Title IV-E funds but contracts directly with the County of Los Angeles.

Training Academy or Program	Counties Served	Principal University Partner	Number of Worker-Training Days		
			SFY 98/99	SFY 99/00	SFY 00/01
Bay Area Academy	12	California State University (CSU), San Francisco	1,123	2,451	3,232
Central Academy	11	CSU, Fresno	1,200	2,061	2,802
Northern Academy	33	University of California (UC), Davis	1,085	1,389	1,144
Southern Academy	5	CSU, San Diego	4,830	7,115	8,661
Inter-University Consortium (Los Angeles)	1	UCLA; CSU, Long Beach; CSU, Los Angeles; University of Southern California	19,472	14,717	15,009
The Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice*	58	UC Davis	0	1,871	3,571
Total	N/A		27,710	29,604	34,419
			24% increase over three years		

* See paragraph below regarding this training program

Table 6: Training Academies and Centers

The Regional Academy Coordination Project: CalSWEC initiated the Regional Training Academy Coordination Project in 1997, through a contract with the CDSS. The purpose of the project is to provide assistance to the academies in curriculum development, trainer development and the implementation and evaluation of training designated by the CDSS. Most recently, CalSWEC developed nine Coordination Teams as the primary vehicles for coordinating training efforts, conducting research and developing curricula.

Standardized Core Curriculum Project: This project is the result of a multi-year, statewide collaborative effort, including the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), CalSWEC, the five Regional Training Academies, and the CDSS. It is aimed at ensuring that each new child welfare worker in California is provided with a comprehensive, competency-based training before he or she assumes an independent caseload. Assembly Bill 2779, (Arner), Chapter 329, Statutes of 1998, appropriated general fund dollars to develop a standardized training curriculum for child welfare workers. This project is currently in the evaluation phase.

The Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice: This resource center at U.C. Davis, while not a regional training academy, plays a key role in implementing best practices in California. In partnership with the CDSS, it brings together subject-matter experts for training and consultation to support agencies incorporating new best-practice models. An advisory committee of organizations and professionals involved in family-focused practice, policy and research guides the center's work. Training activities are coordinated with other statewide child welfare training efforts.

CDSS Training:

The CDSS provides training to county child welfare staff in a wide variety of areas. In general, training provided by the CDSS is for the purpose of implementing new laws or regulations, transferring best practices or assisting individual counties in improving or correcting performance. The following are examples of the variety of training offered to county staff in recent years:

Foster Family Home Licensing: The CDSS contracts with 42 counties to perform foster family home licensing. Licensing staff in those counties are provided 24 hours of the State staff's academy. Additional specialized training for county licensing staff is also provided throughout the year by the CDSS Regional County Liaisons in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the State and counties.

Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) Training and Technical Assistance: The KSSP currently provides State funds to 11 eligible counties that have a minimum of 40% of their foster children placed in relative care. The training and technical assistance provided to KSSP site personnel consist of case management for the caregiver and family, facilitation of support groups, tutoring services and after-school clubs, emancipation services programs, development of respite and recreational programs and ongoing community outreach and recruitment.

Kin Assessment Training: In FY 1999/00, the Foster Care Policy Bureau provided training to 60 county administrators and program directors and 235 county trainers, CalSWEC staff, child welfare supervisors and caseworkers. The purpose of this training was to provide guidance to counties in the mandates of recently enacted legislation regarding standards for relative search and assessment. The goal of this training was to ensure that administrators were knowledgeable regarding the requirements for the search, assessment and approval of relative homes.

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) Program: The Kin-GAP Program was established in California statute in 1999 and is administered at the county level with the State providing policy oversight and training of county program personnel. The CDSS presented 21 training workshops statewide on the implementation of the Kin-GAP Program. Counties sent representatives to this training who would be responsible to train their home county and community-based staff directly responsible for training foster parents and relative caregivers.

Concurrent Planning Training: Upon enactment of the legislation mandating concurrent planning, the CDSS, in collaboration with the National Resource Center for Permanency Planning, provided six regional planning forums to assist counties with implementation. Over the subsequent three years, the CDSS trained county child welfare staff on concurrent planning at many conferences and in individual counties.

Adoption Program Training: Over recent years, the CDSS has provided various training to county adoption and child welfare staff. Some of the topics included adoption regulation changes, family assessment, adoption relinquishment, kin adoption, permanency planning mediation and the Adoption Assistance Program. In addition to direct training, the CDSS has made stipends available to county child welfare agency staff to attend non-State sponsored training.

Individual County Training:

Counties are required to submit training plans annually to the CDSS. Individual counties provide training to child welfare and adoption staff as well. Some counties provide as much as six to eight weeks of training before a worker actually receives a case. Individualized training is available in the form of mentoring, case staffing and supervision.

FINDINGS:

Even among the diversity of a county-administered, State-supervised child welfare system, California provides a comprehensive training program to its public agency child welfare staff. This training program supports the goals and objectives of the State's Child and Family Services Plan and ensures that all county child welfare staff have the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions. The efforts of the CalSWEC consortium ensure a level of consistency in child welfare practice and philosophy across the State. In many cases, training begins before a prospective worker enters the agency's doors, though the State's Title IV-E MSW Program described in this Item. A comprehensive induction training is provided to new workers and enhanced over time by the availability of more advanced ongoing professional education for seasoned staff. The 24% increase in the number of worker training days provided by the academies over the last three years demonstrates the State's increasing capacity to maintain a competent workforce. The effectiveness of the State's training system is further demonstrated by the overall improved performance of the counties in the Division 31 compliance reviews cited in Section II, Part C, Item 1.

The regional training academies provide the ability for child welfare training to be generally uniform, yet tailored to meet individual county or regional needs and practices. Individual counties also provide training to ensure that workers have the skills to perform the critical child welfare functions. Moreover, training provided by the CDSS further ensures that county child welfare staff is informed about changing laws, regulations and best practices.

- 2. Citing any data available to the State, discuss the effectiveness of the State's training of current and prospective foster and adoptive families and the staff of State-licensed or approved childcare institutions that care for children in the State's care or responsibility that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties.***

SUMMARY

- California law requires minimum hours of both pre-service and in-service training for licensed foster parents. Regulations specify information to be provided to prospective adoptive parents, which is often provided through training. Law requires that training be made available to kin caregivers.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

Over the last decade, California has reinforced its commitment to improving the ability of all types of caregivers in the State's foster care system to meet the needs of the children in their care. Changes in law and regulations regarding the training of caregivers demonstrate this fact. Like other aspects of California's child welfare system, training of providers is State-supervised and county-administered. Additionally, private licensed adoption and foster family agencies provide training to caregivers, under their agency umbrella, within the State's statutory and regulatory framework.

Beginning in 1995, California statute provided funding for the CDSS to develop and implement an enhanced statewide basic foster parent training program. To this end, the CDSS selected and adapted the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE (Parent Resource for Information Development Education curriculum developed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services) as a recommended curriculum for county use. The curriculum consists of nine training sessions that focus on development of four core competencies from which foster and adoptive parents will:

- Understand the factors that contribute to neglect, emotional maltreatment, physical abuse and sexual abuse.
- Know the conditions and experiences that may cause developmental delays and affect attachment.
- Understand the concept of permanency for children and why children in family foster care are at risk for not being connected to lifetime relationships.
- Know the roles, rights and responsibilities of foster parents and adoptive parents.

Through achievement of these competencies, adoptive and foster parents will, in essence, become more proficient caregivers who are able to apply the techniques learned during the comprehensive training model.

General Foster Parent Training:

Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 903.7 established the Foster Children and Parent Training Fund in the State Treasury and provides that available funds shall be allocated for support of foster parent training programs conducted in community colleges. In addition, it requires the CDSS to facilitate county child welfare agencies' participation in the foster parent training program.

Pre-service and in-service training for foster parents is provided through a curriculum tailored to meet the needs of each community. Some counties provide parts of this training directly to foster and adoptive parents, and other counties contract with other organizations (agency or educational institution) for this purpose. A minimum of 12 hours of pre-service training is required for placement of a child in a foster home. A minimum of eight hours in-service training is required each year that a foster child resides in the home. Foster parent training (particularly in-service training) may be attained through a variety of sources, including community colleges, counties, hospitals, foster parent associations, the California State Foster Parent Association's Conference, adult schools and certified foster parent instructors.

Because there are children in care whose needs exceed the abilities of the typical foster parent, the Specialized Care system was developed. This system is mandated by WIC 11461.e (1)–(3) and Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) 11-400.3 to meet the needs of children who require additional care and supervision because of a health and/or behavior problem. The number of training hours required for specialized care is determined at the individual county level and is included in the county plans. This system allows a county to supplement the basic foster family home payment rate to provide for more intensive care.

Adoptive Parent Training:

In California, the vast majority of foster children who are adopted are adopted by the families with whom they were placed in foster care. This practice is often beneficial to children and critical to the implementation of concurrent planning. To facilitate this practice, in many counties, foster and adoptive parents are trained through the same process. Therefore, it is increasingly rare that adoptive parent training is differentiated from that of foster parents. State regulations specify the information that must be provided to adoptive parents prior to their approval for adoption. This information is often provided in a training group format, but may be provided individually as well.

County Training for Foster Parents:

Most counties provide or contract with other organizations to provide training for foster and adoptive parents. While several counties use the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE curriculum described above in this Item, it is not required. Many counties use parts of this curriculum or adjust it to meet local needs and procedures. Others use a completely different curriculum. For example, Los Angeles County training for foster parents is comprised of a five-part program with the following components:

- Pre-service Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP).
- Specialized Care (two parts).
- Enhanced Foster Parent Training.
- Recruitment and Retention Plan.

Under MAPP, potential foster/adoptive parents attend 12 three-hour sessions covering a range of topics presented by social workers, foster parents and a trained community college instructor. All licensed caregivers are required to participate in 36 hours of pre-service training prior to placement authorization, and nine hours of annual renewal is additionally required. Specialized Care providers are required to complete 16 hours of certification training and 12 hours of renewal training annually.

Kinship Relative Care Provider Training:

AB 2307 (Chapter 745, Statutes of 2000) required the California Community Colleges to make training available to kin caregivers. The CDSS is in the process of coordinating this training with the community colleges. In addition, starting November 2001, the CDSS began piloting the Child Welfare League of America Kinship Care model. This

unique model combines instruction with a support-service orientation, something that has been requested by kin caregivers. Some counties are already offering training to kin caregivers through local community colleges.

The Family to Family Initiative:

The Family to Family Initiative is a unique effort in the State. With funding and technical assistance from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and, in some counties, funding from the Stuart Foundation, staff and providers receive enhanced training:

- To encourage partnership between staff and foster parents.
- To promote placement of children in their local communities.
- To prevent placement moves.
- To train foster parents to mentor birth parents whenever possible.

The Family to Family Initiative is currently being implemented in eight California counties (Los Angeles, Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo, Stanislaus, San Luis Obispo, Contra Costa and Santa Barbara).

Group Homes, Foster Family Agencies and Small Family Home Providers:

While there have been statutory requirements for group home staff training for many years, effective July 1, 1999, new line staff must receive 40 hours of training in the first year and 20 hours annually thereafter. Since the CDSS directly licenses group homes, foster family agencies and small family home providers, it provides training and technical assistance to these providers through the Technical Support Program (TSP). However, the TSP does not directly train foster families. The focus of these services is to provide facility staff with information to assist them in maintaining compliance with licensing regulations and improving the quality of care delivered to children in care. Participation in TSP services by facilities and their staff is voluntary, and there is no charge to participate.

Group Home Administrator Certification:

California law requires that group home administrators complete a 40-hour certification program in addition to other licensing requirements. The training must provide core knowledge in each of the following areas:

- Laws, regulations, policies and procedural standards that impact the operations of the type of facility for which the applicant will be an administrator.
- Business operations.
- Management and supervision of staff.
- Psychosocial and educational needs of the facility residents.
- Community and support services.
- Physical needs for facility residents.

- Administration, storage, misuse and interaction of medication used by facility residents.
- Resident admission, retention and assessment procedures.
- Nonviolent emergency intervention and reporting requirements.

CDSS Training and Technical Assistance:

The CDSS offers or sponsors training and technical assistance to professionals in the child welfare arena. Providers are among those who benefit from such services, particularly group homes, foster family agencies and small family homes. Some of the offered training includes the following:

- Peer Review training.
- Training and technical assistance to improve multi-disciplinary approaches to child abuse prevention, intervention and treatment.
- Mandated Reporter training to professional and paraprofessional mandated reporters who work with children between the ages of birth and five years.
- Independent Living Program training for foster parents.
- Presentations at conferences regarding statutory changes, implementation of new programs and identified best practices.

DATA DISCUSSION:***County Sponsored Training for Foster Parents:***

Data on foster parent training is not available for most counties. However, during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2000/01, Los Angeles County reported that:

- 1,249 caregivers participated in MAPP.
- 1,820 foster caregivers participated in the annual Enhanced Training component.
- 971 caregivers participated in Specialized Care, part 1.
- 331 caregivers participated in Specialized Care, part 2.
- 4,680 hours of classes were offered to foster parents and kin caregivers by the community colleges to enhance their skills and ability to care for children.

CDSS Training and Technical Assistance:

During SFY 2000-01, Technical Support Program staff provided training to approximately the following numbers of staff or facilities:

	Foster Family Agencies	Group Homes	Small Family Homes	Group Home Administrators	Total
Total Staff Trained	1,083	1,548	63	1,444	4,138

Table 7: CDSS Training

FINDINGS:

California's State-supervised, county-administered child welfare training system presents unique challenges for delivering educational training to various prospective professional and paraprofessional foster and adoptive caregivers and providers throughout the State. The statutory and regulatory requirements provide a consistent statewide framework that individual counties and private agencies may build upon. Standardized curriculum is available, and counties and private agencies may modify or augment this curriculum as necessary to meet local needs; or, they may use another curriculum entirely.

As demonstrated by the number of providers trained, California and its individual counties are committed to developing caregivers and providers who are competent to meet the needs of all the children in their care.

- 1. Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the Title IV-B State Plan requirement to provide services designed to help children safely and appropriately return to families from which they have been removed.**

SUMMARY

- **California law and regulations place a high priority on services to reunify children and families. In general, services are effective and available as demonstrated by the following:**
 - **In Federal Fiscal Year 2000, 73% of children exiting care returned safely to their parents or to permanency with extended family members.**
 - **81% of parents surveyed reported that they did not have a problem completing services.**
- **Data suggests that more services are needed that increase overall family functioning and stability over time (e.g., in-home services, housing assistance and job training/assistance) and that engage family strengths (e.g., family conferencing and wraparound services).**

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California's goal is to ensure that every child has a safe, stable permanent home as quickly as possible. To that end, State statutes and regulations conform to the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997. State law now mandates concurrent planning, with family reunification as the preferred permanency goal. Out-of-home placement is considered a service provided to children and families in support of a reunification goal or alternative permanency if reunification is unsuccessful.

Current statutes and regulations require juvenile courts to order that child welfare services be provided to children removed from the custody of their parents or guardians, and to their parents or guardians, except under narrowly specified circumstances. Specific time limits, which are shorter for children under three years of age, are placed on the duration of those services. If reunification has not been achieved within the specified timeframes, alternative permanent plans must be pursued.

The fundamental framework for services to return children to their families is established in State law and regulations and applies both to children removed from home due to maltreatment (dependents) and to children removed due to having committed a criminal offense (wards). Based on an assessment of the child and family, social workers provide case management services to dependent cases and probation officers provide these services to probation cases. The proportion of dependents to wards receiving these services is approximately 20 to 1. Therefore, to simplify the discussion about these services, the term "social worker" will be used exclusively. Federal, State and county governments fund these services. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is the agency mandated by State law to supervise these services administered by counties. The CDSS is also responsible to promulgate regulations to ensure safety,

permanency and well-being of children removed from their parents. Regular county reviews are made, as described under Section II, Part C, Item 1, to ensure compliance with the regulations.

The assessment, case planning and case management services provided by county agencies are critical to successful family reunification. For every child receiving family reunification services, State regulations require a county social worker to develop a case plan that must include objectives to be achieved, specific services to be provided and case management activities to be performed. Further, State regulations require the county social worker to complete and document a thorough assessment of the child, a fundamental element of the case plan. The assessment must include:

- Relevant social, cultural and physical factors.
- The apparent presenting problems and causes.
- Family strengths.
- Prior social services offered or provided to the family and their results.
- The identity of relatives and others who could provide legal permanency, if family reunification is not achieved.
- The child's medical needs, if known.
- A placement needs assessment and recommendation.
- The type, frequency and appropriateness of parents' and grandparents' visits.
- The social worker's visit and contact schedules.
- The child's health and education information.
- A medical and dental care plan.

California's child welfare system is State-supervised and county-administered. Specific services are established, coordinated and delivered at the local level. This localization of services, in combination with individualized assessments and service plans provides the flexibility to more effectively meet the needs of children and families. To ensure ongoing monitoring and enhancement of service provision, California enacted the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act of 2001 (Assembly Bill 636, Steinberg, Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001), to further ensure that services are delivered in a way that will improve outcomes for children and families.

PRACTICE:

Counties provide family reunification services after it has been determined that a child cannot be safely maintained in the home. Counties may make exceptions to the provision of family reunification services only under limited circumstances that must be approved by the courts.

Within State statutes, regulations and guidelines, counties may establish family reunification practices that address local needs and can be provided with available resources. Section II, Part E, Item 2 provides detailed information from a wide variety of providers and consumers on county family reunification practices.

In 2001, the CDSS conducted a mail survey asking California's county child welfare agencies and juvenile probation departments to identify, in part, the services provided to help children return safely and appropriately to their families and to state whether the services are immediately available or if there is a waiting list. The CDSS received 45 responses from county child welfare services agencies and 37 responses from juvenile probation departments, for a total of 82 agency responses to identical questions. The following is a summary of the services provided by counties:

- Most counties arrange or provide legal representation for children and parents, although this data suggests that greater focus is placed on the parents of dependents than on the parents of wards during family reunification.
- Nearly all respondents arrange or provide transportation for children to access planned services.
- Most report that medical services, consistent with California Health and Disability Prevention Program guidelines, are available to children countywide, with a small number reporting a waiting list. Medical and dental care is available for all children, but nearly one in ten respondents reported a local waiting list for dental care. This data is consistent with questionnaire responses from public health nurses, who reported a lack of dental care providers in rural parts of the State.
- Medication management services, including those provided by public health nurses, are provided or arranged by most responding counties.
- Most respondents arrange for visitation between children and their parents, siblings and grandparents. (Family visitation arrangements occur at equal rates for dependents and wards.)
- Most responding county agencies provide crisis intervention and refer children and families to community resources, as appropriate.
- Reflecting its relative importance, nearly every respondent reported countywide substance abuse testing for minors and parents, with no waiting lists.
- Drug treatment services are widely available, but waiting lists were reported in some areas.
- Most counties have countywide access to behavior management services or impulse control intervention, with no reported waiting lists.
- Nearly all respondents have countywide counseling for children and for parents, and few reported waiting lists.
- Parenting training is available for the parents of most children receiving family reunification services. Parent training classes for minor parents are available in most counties, particularly the larger counties. However, nearly one in 10 respondents reported a waiting list for those classes.
- Similarly, employment and job training for parents are widely available, according to child welfare services agencies.
- Mentoring programs for parents and guardians are generally unavailable.

In addition, the CDSS provides statewide training to county child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers about the services required and their responsibilities in providing and documenting family reunification services.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Although there is no centralized means of determining the effectiveness of the services provided by counties to help children return to their families, there are some overall indicators. In addition, the CDSS conducted a number of surveys, focus groups and interviews regarding the appropriateness, use and effectiveness of these services.

Statewide Assessment Survey, Interviews and Focus Groups:

In 2001, the CDSS conducted surveys and focus groups for the Statewide Assessment. With an amazing degree of consistency among the almost 450 stakeholders who responded to the survey, the following services were identified as key to reunifying children with their families:

- Substance abuse treatment.
- Parent education.
- Parent-child visitation.
- Individual or family counseling.

Respondents also indicated a number of services that should have been provided in cases that had been unsuccessful. These include (not in priority order):

- Intensive in-home services.
- Wraparound services.
- Family conferencing.
- Housing assistance.
- Job training and assistance.
- Substance abuse treatment.

Caseworkers specifically recommended more birth parent involvement in case planning and family conferencing, with more emphasis on case staffing, increased consistency among county staff in working with service providers and better coordination of services.

Focus Groups and Interviews:

Several focus groups were held in Fall 2001 as part of the Statewide Assessment. These groups included foster parents, relative caregivers, foster youth, public agency caseworkers and supervisors and private agency administrators. Interviews were held with representatives from large Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) organizations. The results contained themes very similar to the survey results reported above. Respondents believed that substance abuse treatment, parent/child visitation and parent education classes were the most effective services to help reunify children and families.

Private agency administrators specifically addressed the need for additional funding to provide services to parents and for better follow-up with a family when a child is returned

home. "Funding through Title IV-E focuses on the child in placement. There is not enough funding for services with parents. Parents are not getting treatment. There are not enough supportive services. Children are returned, but there were not enough services to repair the parent."¹¹

The CASA interviews also emphasized the importance of tailoring services to the individual family needs, increasing parent/child visitation and helping parents build social supports. The interviews also acknowledged high caseloads as a barrier to caseworkers providing more effective services. Due to the trauma that children typically experience as a result of abuse and the process of being placed in foster care, CASA respondents also emphasized the need for counseling and trauma treatment for children.

Birth Parent Telephone Survey:

As part of the Statewide Assessment, a statewide survey of birth parents was conducted in January 2002. The purpose behind this survey was to interview birth parents on their experiences and perceptions of the foster care system in California. Parents with telephone numbers were selected randomly from across the State. The 96 respondents included a combination of family maintenance and family reunification cases. Relevant results included the following:

- 81% of the respondents said they did not have a problem completing the services they were required to attend. However, 35% reported at least one type of problem or barrier to services. The barriers were identified as follows:
 - Transportation, interference with work and services not meeting needs were each identified by 15% of respondents.
 - Child care and the times that services were offered were each identified by 12% of respondents.
 - Long waiting list was identified by 10% of respondents.
- 57% of the respondents said their social worker did not adequately explain to them all the possible services they could have received.
- Respondents reported the following about the services they received or did not receive and would have liked:

Services to Parents	% Received	Most Helpful	Would Have Liked
Parenting Classes	59%	36%	
Counseling for Self	50%	22%	
Arranged Visitation with Their Children	41%	21%	
Anger Management	36%		
Transportation Assistance	32%		
Counseling for Child		22%	13%
Help with Child's Behavior		16%	
Immigration Assistance			10%
Childcare Help			10%
Substance Abuse Treatment	25%		1%

Table 8: Birth Parent Telephone Survey

¹¹ Comments from a focus group of private child welfare agency administrators conducted by the CDSS in Los Angeles in October 2001

Among child welfare professionals and caregivers, substance abuse treatment was rated high as a needed service. However, only 1% of parents indicated that this was a service they would have liked. This appears to be the most significant area of discrepancy among all categories of respondents.

Reunification Rates:

Juvenile Court Bench Officers Survey: California aggressively provides services to reunite children and their families. Even though State statute provides 14 conditions under which the court may opt not to order family reunification services due to the parent's egregious actions (WIC 361.5 (b)), data indicates this occurs relatively infrequently. A survey of 12 juvenile court bench officers asked what percentage of all foster care cases had no reunification services ordered under these conditions. Five bench officers reported these conditions occur in less than 5% of all cases; five bench officers reported 6% to 15% of cases; and two bench officers reported 16% to 25% of cases.

Statewide Aggregate Data Profile:¹² According to the First-time Entry Cohort Permanency Profile, of children who exited foster care after having entered care in the first six months of the FFY 2000, 88.2% exited foster care to return home.

According to the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile:

- The median number of months to discharge for those children who reunified for FFY 2000 was nine months.
- Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of exiting foster care, 53.7% were reunified within 12 months from the time of the latest removal.

These results take on more significance when viewed in conjunction with the rate of re-entry¹³ into foster care after being reunified. Of all children who entered care during the year, 9.3% re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode. While this indicator is slightly over the National Standard of 8.6%, this relatively low rate suggests that reunification services are generally effective.

Unfortunately, viewing re-entry within a window of 12 months does not tell the whole story. Although the rate for re-entry occurring in under 12 months is relatively low according to the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile in Section III, longitudinal data from the California Children's Services Archive¹⁴ indicates that a number of children, about 10%, re-enter care after 12 months. This suggests that although the immediate problems that led to the child's removal have been addressed, perhaps the overall

¹² Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

¹³ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports> This rate may be somewhat inflated due to data quality issues. A number of children with open placement episodes are identified as being on a "trial home visit" for over two months, the length of time permitted by statute. This suggests that these children have, in fact, exited to reunification but that this activity has not been documented on CWS/CMS.

¹⁴ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

functioning of the family has not substantially changed, or the change is not sustained long-term.

California Children's Services Archive: Based on data from the California Children's Services Archive, the success of the State's overall reunification program and practices is reflected in a reunification rate¹⁵ of 49.6% for kin and 52.7% for non-kin after 30 months. For children who entered foster care between the ages of 1–5 years, these rates increase to 54.1% for kin and 55.3% for non-kin.

California, unlike some states, does not consider exiting to a relative, other than a birth parent, as reunification. If exiting to the home of a relative, i.e., via guardianship or adoption, was considered reunification, the State's reunification rate would be substantially higher. For example, in 2000, 48,066 children exited from child welfare supervised foster care; of those, 27,258 (57%) reunified and 7,888 (16%) exited through guardianship or adoption with relatives. Thus, 73% of children exiting foster care in 2000 returned to parents or other family members.

FINDINGS:

There is a clear mandate in California's laws and regulations to provide children every opportunity to return to their families. Based on an assessment of the strengths and needs of the children and families, individual case plans are developed and then implemented through the broad array of available local services. Through this process, the majority of children who exit care (73%) exit to a safe home environment either by returning to their parents or by exiting the system permanently to other family members through adoption or guardianship. The State's efficacy in helping children safely and appropriately return to the families from which they have been removed is clearly substantial.

Survey data indicates that, in general, the services that are most frequently provided are those that parents find most helpful. Moreover, a high percentage of parents (81%) indicated that they did not have a problem completing the services they were required to attend. Among child welfare stakeholders, there appears to be a high level of consensus regarding those services that are currently most effective and those services that need to be more available to achieve better outcomes.

The overall data suggests that California is effective in resolving the more immediate conditions that led to a child's removal from home. However, longitudinal data suggests that additional strategies are needed to help increase overall family functioning in the long run. This finding is consistent among information collected from a broad range of child welfare stakeholders. These stakeholders indicated there is a need for more services that fall into two categories: those that increase family stability over time (in-home services, job training/assistance and housing assistance) and those that engage family strengths and identify individual needs (family conferencing and wraparound services). Since just over half of parents surveyed felt that social workers did not adequately explain all available services, more individualized service planning can further improve a worker's effectiveness in educating parents about available services.

¹⁵ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

Based on the information presented in Section II, Part B, Item 2, a number of counties surveyed indicated they are preparing to initiate or augment many of these needed services in the near future. Such services are expected to more effectively meet the individual needs of families with children in care. Therefore, it is anticipated that California's overall ability to return children safely and appropriately to their families will continue to be an even greater strength in the future.

2. Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the Title IV-B State Plan requirement to provide preplacement preventive services designed to help children at risk of foster care placement remain safely with their families.

SUMMARY

- ***California has an extensive array of services designed to strengthen family functioning and the ability of local communities to support at-risk families.***
- ***Stakeholders identified intensive in-home services, parent education and skill development and family resource centers as key services to prevent out-of-home placement.***
- ***Better coordination and increased availability of these services are necessary to achieve improved results.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California's child welfare system is based on the belief that children can best be protected, grow and thrive when both the families and the communities in which they live are strengthened and joined in partnership with California's county child welfare agencies and the caregivers who work with them. California has a vast framework in place to promote child safety and well-being. This framework includes activities that fall into three general categories across the public/private continuum:

- Primary prevention through public education and outreach.
- Early intervention with at-risk families and families who have been the subject of a substantiated report of child maltreatment.
- Program development and implementation, training and technical assistance.

PRACTICE:

The focus of services has expanded from "treating" children and families who have already entered the child welfare system to the more global approach of enhancing the community's ability to provide assistance and support. Currently, the focus is on strengthening prevention. The location for delivery of services has evolved from family members visiting professionals to the helping professions reaching out to families, visiting their homes and providing services in their communities.

Primary Prevention Activities:

The CDSS is involved in statewide efforts of public education and outreach. Examples of these activities include the following:

The Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP): The OCAP is the principal CDSS entity to work directly on statewide primary prevention efforts. Public education campaigns designed to prevent child abuse and neglect are developed and implemented through this office. For example, the “Never Shake A Baby” campaign in recent years provided widespread public education and outreach designed to prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome, a significant contributor to infant child abuse that results in injury and death. Current efforts are focusing on the effects of family violence on children.

California’s Children and Families First Initiative: This initiative uses tobacco tax revenues to fund early childhood development programs. One such program, “It’s All About the Kids,” provides a gift box to every new parent, available in Spanish and English. The box contains five videos on topics such as health and nutrition, child safety, early literacy, etc. Also included are a parents’ guide, a board book for the child and a series of 13 brochures about immunizations, health, nutrition, tobacco use, Shaken Baby Syndrome, quality child care, dental health, etc.

California Alliance for Prevention: This alliance was formed through the CDSS with the Governor’s Office of Service and Volunteerism and the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Sacramento. This statewide initiative employs AmeriCorps members to augment child abuse and neglect prevention efforts in local communities.

Education and Outreach Child Abuse Prevention Campaign: Through multi-year grants, the CDSS is funding promising strategies to change social attitudes and behaviors regarding child abuse. The goals of this campaign are twofold:

- To increase the rate at which troubled families self-refer for services prior to the need for more intense and expensive formal interventions.
- To motivate individuals, families and communities to support local child abuse prevention efforts.

Services to At-Risk Families:

The CDSS and California counties work diligently to prevent removal of children from their homes. Through three-year grants of State and federal funds, a variety of family preservation and support programs in public and private agencies assist families in keeping children safely in their own homes. To coordinate these activities, counties are required to submit annual plans to address how prevention/family support activities are coordinated at the local level during each three-year grant period. Specifically, these plans address:

- How the county will integrate services funded by Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (CAPIT) State funds and Community Based Family Resource and Support (CBFRS) federal funds with other prevention services.

- The county's assessment of unmet needs and services and the ways of meeting those needs.

Through this annual process, the counties have identified over 400 programs and services designed to support, strengthen and nurture children and families that are at risk of entering the child welfare system. The service needs within the individual counties are as varied as the counties themselves and include services to address the challenges faced by a wide range of families and children. Examples of county activities include the following:

- San Bernardino County offers expanded bilingual counseling services on public school grounds, which increase the chances for services to parents of young children where special needs children can be identified.
- Los Angeles County allocates 70% of its funding to support prevention case management through in-home outreach. Services focus on parent education, housing assistance, child care and legal aid. Additionally, intervention services include anger management, domestic violence groups, after-school programs, tutoring, transportation and substance abuse treatment.
- Riverside County, through the University of California, Riverside, the United Way and the Department of Community Action is assessing unmet needs. Four new family resource centers are being established throughout the county to better serve the local communities.
- San Diego County conducts community focus groups in all geographic areas of the county to assess local needs. These focus groups are conducted in cooperation with community service providers, citizen advisory boards, child abuse coordinating councils and parents.
- Orange County's "Families and Communities Together" is a collaborative effort focusing on underserved groups (i.e., high risk families with children from birth to five years of age; at-risk adolescents aged 12 to 21; and low income, homeless and unemployed families).
- Imperial County has engaged in an expansion of parent support groups, an increase in seminars and an expansion of mandated reporter training.
- San Francisco County is collaborating with the Asian Pacific Island Family Resource Network and the Asian Perinatal Program to expand outreach to underserved populations. This effort seeks to ensure that both information and services are available for children and families.

While this broad array of services and efforts is quite varied, the common focus is on supporting at-risk families and providing services to improve family functioning, particularly parenting, so that children can remain safely in their homes and out-of-home placement is prevented.

Program Development, Training and Technical Assistance:

The CDSS, in partnership with child welfare stakeholders, counties, public health providers, private foundations and advocacy groups has focused on several key strategies to prevent child maltreatment in at-risk families: home visiting, family resource centers, integrated services, public-private partnerships and capacity building. These

strategies have driven significant demonstration projects in recent years that have yielded positive results by using paraprofessionals to provide intensive, long-term home visiting services targeting at-risk families and newborns. Two recently completed projects—Healthy Families San Diego (HFSD), and California Safe and Healthy Families (CalSAHF)—indicated that families receiving an expanded service array compared somewhat favorably to the control group participants. Please refer to Data Discussion in this Item for description of preliminary findings.

Answers Benefiting Children (ABC): The ABC Program evaluation is currently being conducted jointly by the San Diego State University Foundation, Social Policy Institute and LPC Consulting Associates in seventeen counties.¹⁶ The ABC Program, built upon the preliminary findings of both the HFSD and CalSAHF models, includes a home-visiting component as a core service in the array of services provided at local family resource centers. The two-year evaluation period examines program components related to home visiting, the level of resident males and father involvement in homes receiving services, changes in service delivery methodology and program performance. Technical assistance is also provided to each site. Although the State, federal and foundation funds that are currently matched by counties will end in June 2002, the requirements for program sustainability built into the process will allow many of the sites to continue these services.

Small County Initiative (SCI): The Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) has contracted with the University of California, Los Angeles to conduct an evaluation of the SCI as part of a broader evaluation throughout California. With limited revenue, personnel and supportive services, it is difficult for some small counties to compete for funding and to participate in service initiatives. Several small counties requested OCAP to develop an initiative specifically targeted toward them. Based on a competitive process, 12 counties with populations less than 60,000 (Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Glenn, Inyo, Modoc, Plumas, Siskiyou, Tehama, Trinity and Tuolumne) were selected to participate in the SCI. The purpose of this initiative is to:

- Support and strengthen counties' child abuse prevention systems, including promoting positive systemic changes, where needed.
- Facilitate the development of child abuse prevention systems in areas that do not currently have them.
- Increase the participation of Child Abuse Prevention Councils, local community members and parents as partners in the development, implementation and decision-making processes in child abuse prevention systems.
- Strengthen families.

An evaluation report is expected by July 2002.

Structured Decision Making (SDM): The SDM project is designed to add structure to case assessment and decision making in order to improve the consistency and accuracy of child welfare case decisions. Better assessment and decision making are used to identify the highest risk children and to provide them with more services. Working through these mechanisms, the ultimate goals of SDM are to reduce maltreatment

¹⁶El Dorado, Kern, Lake, Merced, Napa, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Yolo, and Yuba

recurrence, child injury, placement in foster care and re-referral/re-investigation. SDM focuses on specific case assessment and decision-making processes. These assessment/decision processes and the corresponding SDM assessment tools are as follows:

- The decision about how quickly a case should be investigated once it is decided that an in-person investigation will take place (Response Priority Assessment).
- The decision whether children reported as maltreated may safely remain in their homes or must be placed in foster care pending completion of an investigation of maltreatment allegations (Safety Assessment).
- The assessment and reassessment of the likelihood that a reported child will be maltreated in the future (Risk Assessment).
- The assessment and reassessment of the strengths and needs of families and their children (Family and Child Strengths and Needs Assessment).
- The appropriateness of returning children home from foster care placements (Reunification Assessment).

The Prevention Advisory Council (PAC): The PAC, established at the State level, is comprised of members with extensive experience in providing and administering prevention programs. This body provides guidance to the CDSS as it develops policy, practices and procedures designed to protect children and to strengthen both families and communities. Major objectives of the PAC include:

- Improve the quality and quantity of family resource and support services.
- Integrate family support services into existing systems for long-term funding sustainability.
- Maximize statewide network linkages to facilitate collaboration and to reduce duplicate family support services.
- Identify unmet needs within neighborhoods throughout the State.

Training: To train program administrators and service providers throughout the State, the CDSS continues to sponsor important conferences related to family and child well-being. The “Within Our Reach” annual conference was developed to bring together over 1,000 researchers and service providers from across the nation to share information on effective strategies for family support home visiting. The annual “Family Strengths Conference” creates a forum that blends the best of research, practice and policy to promote effective family-centered services that support and promote the strengthening of families.

Technical Assistance: To better respond to the individual differences and needs of counties, the CDSS has taken a regional approach to address each county’s issues. The 58 counties are divided into seven regions, with each assigned an OCAP consultant. The consultant is familiar with the programs, services, strengths, challenges, technical assistance needs and training desires in the area. Through regional training and consultation, the CDSS is able to strengthen its partnership with the counties and to build a viable network of services to strengthen families.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Given that more than 400 different programs related to prevention of child maltreatment exist in 58 counties, it is impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of each of them. However, by focusing on some examples of services that appear to be effective, some common themes emerge.

Healthy Families San Diego Clinical Trial:

This randomized clinical trial was conducted to determine whether this model of home visiting, and/or each of the individual components of the model, would provide sufficient children and family benefits and cost savings to encourage replication. The study evaluated critical areas of family and child functioning in 488 low-income/public assistance families (247 families receiving services and 241 control subjects). This evaluation effort produced three years of data. The preliminary results at two years were promising in specific domains. After two years the results indicated:

- A significantly lower percentage of mothers, compared to control group mothers, reported use of any psychological aggression in dealing with parent-child conflict (e.g., demeaning, angry verbalization).
- Reduced maternal depressive symptoms were observed.
- The intervention families reported significantly more “well-child visits.”
- The intervention families indicated a significantly higher proportion with well-child-visit compliance than the control group.

The findings of the third (final) year have proved more modest and, in many areas, unclear. It is uncertain if such findings demonstrate the difficulties in creating sustainable, improved functioning in at-risk families or if other factors are at work here. The CDSS plans further analysis to clarify the findings.

Child Welfare Stakeholder Survey:

In a survey of child welfare professionals (public and private agencies) and other stakeholders conducted as part of the Statewide Assessment, 22% of respondents reported that intensive in-home services were most effective in preventing out-of-home placement. Parent education activities were identified by 15% of respondents as the most effective preplacement activity.

Focus Groups:

As part of the Statewide Assessment, the CDSS and the counties conducted a number of focus groups. Across groups of tribal representatives, foster parents and foster family agency representatives key commonalities were found in the kinds of services that were identified as needed or effective. Intensive in-home services, parent education and skill development and family resource centers were commonly identified as critical to preventing out-of-home placement for children. Additionally, foster youth advocated the

non-categorizing of foster care funds and the use of such funds to support biological families instead of foster care parents.

Structured Decision Making (SDM):

Through more consistent and accurate case assessment and decision making, SDM strives to provide children and families at highest risk of future maltreatment with the most service. This approach is intended to reduce rates of maltreatment recurrence, child injury, foster care placements and re-referral/re-investigation of families. The chart below suggests that SDM is effective in reducing maltreatment recurrence rates. It shows that Orange County, which uses SDM, reduced its maltreatment recurrence rate more quickly after implementing SDM than it had been doing before SDM implementation. Meanwhile, recurrence rates in a pair of adjacent non-SDM counties (Riverside and San Diego) fell less quickly over the period after SDM implementation in Orange County. The chart projects that Orange County will soon reach the federal National Standard of 6.1%.

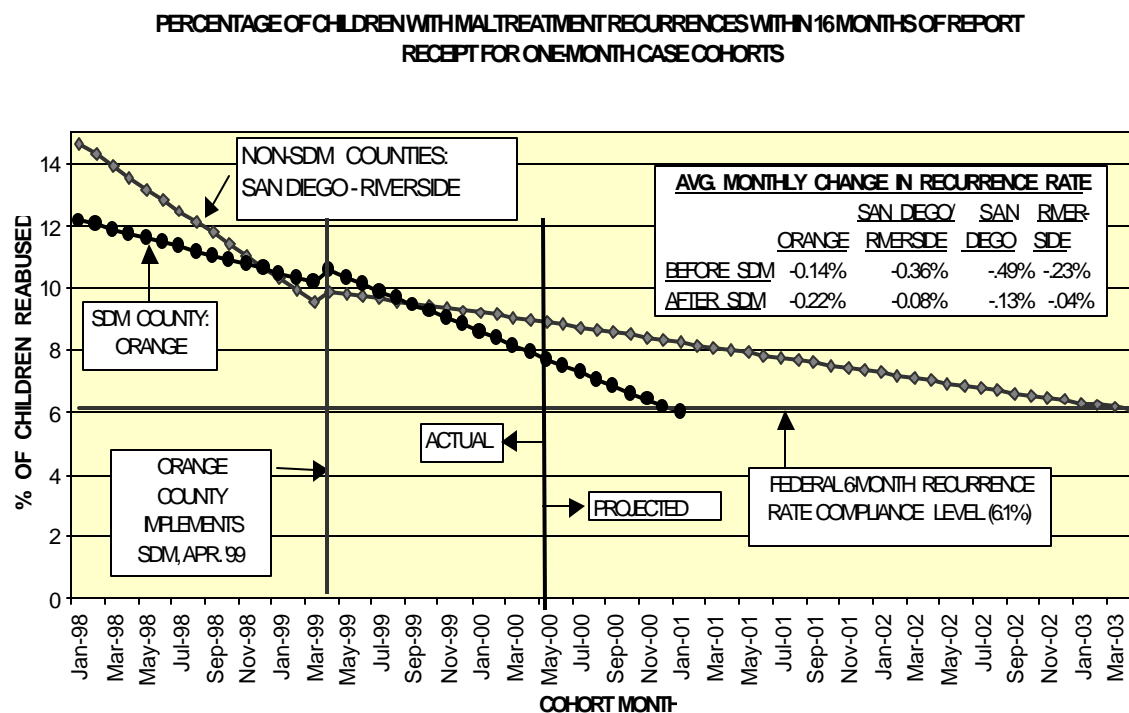


Figure 1: Percentage of Children with Maltreatment Recurrences Within 16 Months of Report Receipt of One-Month Cohorts

Statewide Aggregate Data Profile:¹⁷

Based on the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile element, the percentage of children with a substantiated child abuse or neglect referral who enter foster care has declined over

¹⁷ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

the past three years, from 33.1% in FFY 1998 to 29.2% in FFY 2000. This data indicates some modest improvement in preventing out-of-home placement for children due to abuse and neglect without increasing the rate of recurrence of maltreatment. Moreover, this reduction in children entering foster care has occurred in the face of increasing numbers of children who have been the subject of child abuse/neglect referrals.

However, the incidence of recurrence of maltreatment, as demonstrated in the Data Profile, has raised concern. In trying to understand the reasons for this rate, the CDSS made a closer examination of a random sample of over 250 child cases in this population. Based on this examination, about 30% of the children identified in this population did not, in fact, experience a repeat incidence of maltreatment. The second report of maltreatment in these cases was, upon examination, an additional, subsequent report of the original maltreatment incident. This suggests that efforts to prevent further abuse are significantly better than indicated in the Data Profile.

The data indicates, overall, that California is making improvements in reducing the need for removal of a child for reasons of maltreatment, without creating an excessive or increased level of recurrence of maltreatment. This finding, combined with the data related to re-entry and reunification rates discussed above, suggests that the children most at risk are those in families with multiple and chronic problems who will require sustained and intensive intervention efforts in order to parent safely over the long run. Structured Decision Making shows promise as a tool to help workers target relatively scarce intensive services to those families who most need them and, thus, to enable children to remain safely with their families.

Because the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to prevent child maltreatment and out-of-home placement statewide depends on data reported on CWS/CMS, consistency in the way that data is recorded needs to be improved.

FINDINGS:

Across California, an extensive array of statewide and local efforts is deployed to prevent child maltreatment and resulting out-of-home placement. Through a multilevel array of prevention activities and local services, these efforts aim to strengthen both family functioning and the ability of local communities to support at-risk families, enabling children to remain safely in their homes. To further develop this array of service, using various methods such as training, initiatives, grants and projects, the CDSS has been testing the most effective intervention methodologies.

With State support, local efforts to assess family strengths and needs and to build on those strengths by providing integrated, intensive in-home and local services (e.g., family resource centers) appear to be yielding some initial positive results. These local efforts have required collaboration among the State, the counties, public child welfare agencies, private agencies, educational and healthcare institutions and advocacy groups. The Statewide Aggregate Data Profile demonstrates and practitioners and stakeholders in the child welfare field agree that such strategies are among the most successful as well.

While there has been some improvement in keeping children safely in their own homes, the biggest challenge seems to be to create long-term, sustainable change in multi-problem, at-risk families. Given the vast array of services available throughout the State, it is unclear if these services are focused and coordinated in such a way to optimally achieve the desired outcomes for children and families, particularly in times of increasing budget constraints. Moreover, capitated federal Title IV-B funding of services and the inflexibility of Title IV-E categorical funding of foster care placements creates disincentives and challenges for increasing preplacement preventive services.

It is in such a context that the efforts of the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group, convened by the CDSS, is working. In part, the group's goal is to identify comprehensive and systemic strategies to continue to reduce the proportion of children who experience repeat maltreatment or removal from their homes. Additional information about the work of this group can be found in Section II, Part F, Item 1.

3. Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the Title IV-B State Plan requirement to provide services designed to help children be placed for adoption, with a legal guardian or, if adoption or legal guardianship are determined not to be appropriate for a child, in some other planned, permanent living arrangement.

SUMMARY

- **California has increased its capacity to move children from foster care to permanency through adoption and guardianship.**
- **Over the five-year period ending June 2001, children exiting to permanency of guardianship and adoption increased by 153%.**
- **California can improve timeliness in achieving permanency for children in care by fully implementing concurrent planning.**

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

Over the last eight years, beginning prior to the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), California has made a number of changes in child welfare law, regulations and practices to expedite permanency for children in foster care. These changes have focused particularly in the areas of adoption and relative guardianship because they provide the greatest degree of permanency when reunification cannot occur. Many of these changes resulted from two key efforts: the California Adoptions Initiative and implementation of the Kinship Care program. Both began in 1996, were developed in collaboration with child welfare stakeholders and enjoyed widespread support across the child welfare and legislative arenas. Together, these efforts made significant changes to allow more children to exit the foster care system to safe, permanent homes. Legislative changes over the past several years include the following:

- Mandating adoption reassessment every six months when a child is in long-term foster care.

- Allowing shorter reunification timeframes for children who enter foster care at under three years of age.
- Allowing the cases of siblings who become dependents at different times more opportunity for synchronized timeframes, thus facilitating more opportunities for reunification or permanent placement together.
- Creating additional options for the court to forego reunification services in circumstances of egregious, chronic or unremediated maltreatment.
- Increasing funding for county adoption agencies.
- Allowing parents the option to forego services to reunify.
- Requiring counties to advise parents about the option of adoption planning.
- In family reunification cases, mandating concurrent planning for alternate permanency should reunification fail.
- Allowing legally binding post-adoption contact agreements to enable adopted foster children to maintain contact with birth relatives after adoption.
- Requiring expedited paternity determinations.
- Requiring expedited and improved processes for identification, search and assessment of relatives as safe, stable placement options.
- Establishing adoption options tailored for kin caregivers.
- Establishing funding for the Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP).
- Establishing the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program to remove financial disincentives for relatives to become guardians.
- Specifying any federal Adoption Incentive funds received by California to support post-adoption services.

The CDSS has as one of its goals safe, permanent homes for vulnerable children. To better achieve this goal, it recently completed a structural realignment of the Children and Family Services Division to reflect more accurately California's long-term commitment to permanency for children in foster care. The former Foster Care Branch of this Division, which focused on placement policies and funding is being transformed into the Child and Youth Permanency Branch to better reflect the priority of permanency for children. This branch will focus on efforts to better support the range of permanency options from family reunification to legal permanency through adoption and guardianship. This branch also oversees services to cultivate independent living skills for youth who will not reunify and for whom adoptive families have not been found. This recent realignment more accurately reflects and better supports the goals of the CDSS to realize safety, permanency and well-being for California's at-risk children.

Adoption Services:

Public adoption services, funded by State and federal sources, are provided to children in foster care through 27 licensed county adoption agencies and six State Adoptions District Offices. These district offices serve counties that do not have their own adoption agencies. Public adoption agencies are responsible for assessing children and prospective families for adoption, selecting adoptive homes, taking relinquishments and making recommendations to the court regarding the completion of adoptions. These agencies work in tandem with other child welfare services and/or private adoption

agencies to implement concurrent planning and to place children in permanent adoptive homes when reunification is unsuccessful.

Welfare and Institutions Code Sections 366.26 and 727.3 (f) grant the juvenile court the responsibility for determining whether adoption, legal guardianship or another permanent planned living arrangement is appropriate for the child. Permanent living options typically include placing the child with an adoptive family, an appropriate and willing relative or a legal guardian.

California's Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) is available to families that adopt eligible children. At least 97% of families adopting foster children receive some level of AAP benefits at the time the adoption is finalized, and the remainder have it available if the need arises. The level of payment may vary by county.

To date, California has earned over \$17.6 million in Federal Adoptions Incentive funds. These funds were passed in their entirety to the counties that contributed to earning the incentives in proportion to their share of finalized adoptions. Counties have wide latitude to determine the types of post-adoption services to offer to local adoptive families. These services include parent training, counseling and any other service the county identifies as necessary to support the adoption.

Kinship Care Services:

In 1997, California established the Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) as a grants-in-aid program that allows eligible counties to establish community-based support programs. Counties are reluctant to terminate dependency for a child placed with a kin caregiver if there are no support services such as those offered through the KSSP program. The demand for these services exceeds availability. Child advocates continue to push for legislation to lower the eligibility threshold for counties that is established in statute for KSSP funding.

The Kinship Adoption Program allows children to exit the foster care system through adoption by relatives. This program recognizes the benefits of family continuity by allowing for legally binding post-adoption contact among the child and other birth relatives. Additionally, it allows adoption orders to include the child's birth name. Relatives who adopt children in foster care may receive AAP. For all these reasons, the number of kinship adoptions has consistently increased.

In January 2000, California established Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program (Kin-GAP) as a permanency option for children in long-term foster care placements with relative caregivers. This program allows the child and relative caregiver to exit the child welfare system by providing the relative with an assistance payment that is equal to the child's foster care rate and continuing Medi-Cal coverage for the child. Kin-GAP is administered at the county level with the State providing policy oversight and training of county program personnel. As of June 30, 2001, 7,038 youth have exited the dependency system to Kin-GAP.

PRACTICE:

To expedite permanency for children who are unable to reunify with their families, California mandated implementation of concurrent planning in 1998. Concurrent planning, as set forth in statute, requires that the case plans of all children receiving reunification services include those services necessary to achieve a permanent home should reunification fail. Concurrent planning is defined as the process of immediate, simultaneous and continuous assessment and case plan development that provides a continuum of options to achieve early, family-based permanency for every child removed from his or her family. Successful implementation of concurrent planning requires broad system change and collaboration among many players in the child welfare community including the county child welfare agency, the court, caregivers, community-based service agencies, etc.

A fundamental component of concurrent planning is the recruitment, training and early placement of children with families that are willing both to assist in reunification and to provide the child with a permanent home should reunification fail. Based on an evaluation of several county adoption agencies' performance in recent years, the delayed identification and assessment of the prospective adoptive family was the single most common factor that delayed adoption for children in foster care.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Data from the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile for FFYs 1998, 1999 and 2000, in Figure 2 below, indicates significant increases in children exiting from foster care. These increases are primarily the result of efforts to increase both adoptions and kin guardianships.

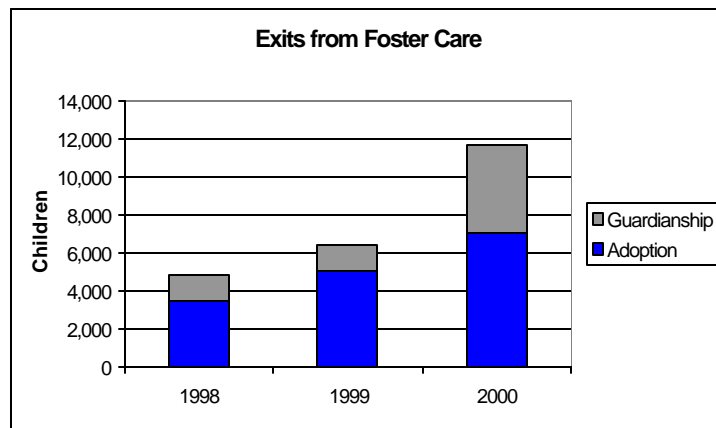


Figure 2: Exits from Foster Care

State data for a five-year period, Figure 3, shows a 153% increase in the number of children exiting to permanency each year through adoption and guardianship.¹⁸ This increase is largely due to the Adoptions Initiative and the Kin-GAP program. Both

¹⁸ Adoption statistics are based on public adoption agency reporting on the Agency Adoption Program Quarterly Statistical Report (AD 56A). Guardianship statistics are based on CWS/CMS data compiled by U.C. Berkeley.

programs allowed children who would otherwise grow up in foster care, to exit to permanent homes.

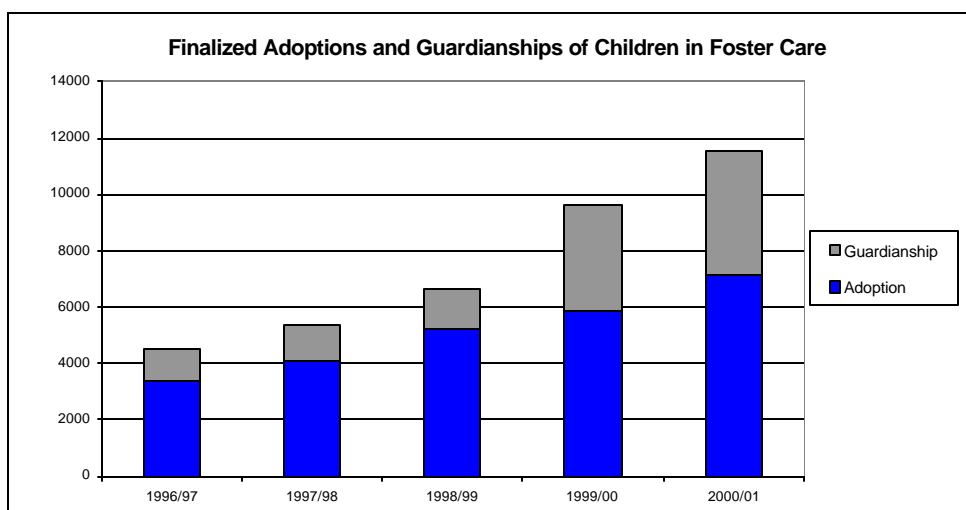


Figure 3: Finalized Adoptions and Guardianships of Children in Foster Care

The Statewide Aggregate Data Profile indicates that although exits to adoption and guardianship increased, the median number of months to achieve these exits has also increased over the three-year period. This increase in the median number of months to exit, while negative on the surface, is the result of children exiting who have been in care for long periods of time and who likely would have remained in foster care if not for these efforts. Thus, the increase in the median length of time to exit is testimony to California's success in achieving permanency for children who have been in foster care the longest.

FINDINGS:

On the surface, it appears from the Statewide Aggregate Data Indicator on adoption, that California is not performing adequately in the area of permanency. However, closer examination reveals significant efforts to the contrary. California has, in fact, exhibited a clear, demonstrable commitment to permanency over the last several years as evidenced by the dramatic increase in children exiting foster care to adoptive families and kin guardianships. Without these efforts, the median length of time to exit for this indicator would have been shorter, because children who have been in foster care the longest would simply have remained there until they aged out or ran away. By remaining in foster care, these children would not have been included in the statistic regarding the median number of months to exit, since they would not have exited. Due to California's commitment to permanency and to older children, the State may never reach the National Standard, as it often takes more time to identify homes for older children. However, full implementation of concurrent planning is likely to shorten these timeframes.

4. Describe the extent to which all the services in the preceding items 1-3 are accessible to families and children on a statewide basis.

SUMMARY

- *The required services are available in each county, although they are not necessarily delivered in the same way.*
- *Each local community faces unique challenges and tailors services to meet local needs.*

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

In conformity with the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997, California's statutes and regulations require that reunification, prevention and permanency activities are delivered statewide. Within this framework, each county has the flexibility and responsibility to deliver services in a way that most effectively meets local community needs. Effective development and delivery of these services require active communication with, and participation of, interested local stakeholders that make up the diverse ethnic, religious, urban and rural communities throughout California.

To ensure services are available statewide, the CDSS augments the basic statutory, regulatory and funding framework provided to all counties. Special programs, like the Small County Initiative, help ensure availability of necessary services in rural communities that may lack the necessary infrastructure or service delivery systems. Additionally, the CDSS provides direct services, specifically foster family home licensing and adoption, in counties that have for various reasons chosen not to provide such services themselves.

The size of the State and the diversity of California's communities present additional challenges. California has devoted considerable financial resources to ensure that children in foster care across the State have their medical needs addressed. Through the efforts of public health nurses, the California Health and Welfare Agency, universities and current and former foster youth, a report entitled *Code Blue: Health Services for Children in Foster Care (1998)* was issued. This report spurred legislative action and a Governor's Budget item that located public health nurses in all county child welfare agencies. The public health nurses are available to administer the medical portion of the respective case plans. This program has benefited greatly in ensuring that each foster child's medical records, inoculations and health passports are handled properly. The CDSS, through its Children and Family Services Division has devoted full-time staff as liaisons to the State Departments of Health, Mental Health and Education to ensure that issues critical to effective statewide service delivery for children in foster care are addressed in internal policy discussions.

Additional State resources are available to augment and support local efforts in other ways as well. For example, the Kinship Support Services Program has been established to allow counties that have a high proportion of children placed with kin to establish

community-based support programs. These programs assist caregivers of children involved in a planned permanent living arrangement. Similarly, California's Adoption Assistance Program assists children with special needs and their adoptive families.

In addition to county jurisdictions, California has 109 federally recognized Native American tribes and 44 tribes that are not currently federally recognized. The CDSS is committed to ensuring that services are provided to Native American communities in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Tribal representatives have indicated on surveys that more culturally appropriate services specifically suited to Native American communities are needed. In an effort to address this issue, the CDSS continues to work toward developing positive relationships with these tribes by working on a government-to-government relationship and through the development of a CDSS tribal liaison position. Additionally, the CDSS has required that the State's Child Welfare Services Training Academies' curriculum include training for county social workers and probation officers regarding their responsibility to deliver services to Native American families and children in accordance with the ICWA. Moreover, to improve service delivery among Native American communities, the CDSS meets quarterly with its Tribal Government Advisory Committee of statewide tribal representatives to identify and develop solutions for these issues.

FINDINGS:

California operates under a State-supervised, county-administered system. As such, State supervision ensures a strong statewide statutory and regulatory framework, while county administration means that each county has the flexibility to determine the kinds of child welfare services necessary to best meet the needs of its communities. Such flexibility allows for counties to meet the unique needs of the children and families served by each agency. This means that the required services are not delivered in the same way in each county.

California's population, geographical size and cultural and ethnic diversity form its greatest challenges, as well as its greatest strengths. Each county faces unique challenges. Many issues, beyond funding, impact the ability of county agencies to serve children and families. In some geographic areas, transportation to available providers for medical, dental and rehabilitation services for parents and their children is a significant barrier. In other communities, limited access to low income/affordable housing creates barriers to successful prevention or reunification efforts. The CDSS will continue to work with the broad spectrum of child welfare stakeholders, both public and private, to further improve the statewide child welfare service delivery system.

1. ***Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the requirement to consult and coordinate with external community stakeholders in the development of the State's Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). In responding, discuss how the concerns of stakeholders are addressed in the agency's planning and operations and their involvement in evaluating and reporting progress on the agency's goals.***

SUMMARY

- ***The required services are available in each county, although not necessarily delivered in the same way.***
- ***At both the State and county levels, multiple opportunities exist for external community stakeholders to be engaged in defining the needs of children and families at-risk.***
- ***Such collaboration is key to the development of the State's Child and Family Services Plan.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

With California's State-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, 58 counties, 109 federally recognized tribal organizations and an increasingly rich ethnic/cultural diversity, collaboration in the development of the Child and Family Services Plan is not optional, it is essential. This collaboration extends to all areas of the child welfare services continuum—from the joint primary prevention efforts with community-based organizations and government to public/private partnerships in adoptions. While the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is responsible for the mechanics of writing the State's Child and Family Services Plan, the work of these extensive collaborations forms the foundation of the plan itself. Key partners with the CDSS in the child welfare arena include:

- County child welfare agencies, primarily represented by the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) Children's Committee.
- Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC).
- Advocacy groups and foundations (California Children's Lobby, the Youth Law Center, Stuart Foundation, Casey Foundation, etc.).
- Provider associations (the Alliance for Children and Families, California Association of Adoption Agencies, etc.).
- Colleges and universities (Community College Foundation, Regional Training Academies, California Social Work Education Consortium, etc.).
- The judicial system (Judicial Council of California).
- Foster, adoptive and kinship care family associations.
- Labor and professional associations (Service Employees International Union, National Association of Social Workers, etc.).
- Foster youth (California Youth Connection).
- Tribal organizations.

Over time, these collaborations have become more institutionalized, with some being required by legislation, others by funding mechanisms and still others essential to the work. While each may deal with a different aspect of the overall child welfare system, each partnership has common features: discussions on program implementation, two-way communication about concerns and issues, cooperative planning, prioritizing and problem-solving. Major program changes or issues that arise are addressed through the various modes of communication with partnering agencies. The following are examples of such collaboration:

- Operational Implementation Task Force (functions through monthly meetings of representatives from the CWDA Children's Committee and the CDSS to share concerns, policy issues and planning efforts).
- Adoption Policy Advisory Council (established in statute for the duration of the California Adoptions Initiative, ending June 2001, and comprised of stakeholders from across the adoption arena).
- The CDSS and the CWDA Adoptions Subcommittee (meets quarterly).
- The CDSS and California Association of Adoption Agencies (meets quarterly).
- The CDSS and public adoption agencies (meets quarterly in five regions).
- The CDSS and the CWDA Regional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Foster Care (AFDC-FC) subcommittee on compliance to Title IV-E eligibility (meets quarterly).
- The CDSS and the CWDA Licensing Subcommittee on foster parenting issues (meets quarterly).
- Kinship Care Steering Committee (involves representatives from the CDSS, CWDA, kinship support and advocacy groups, California Children's Lobby and kinship service providers).
- The CDSS and the California Youth Connection.
- The Prevention Advisory Council (PAC) (provides guidance to the CDSS as it develops policy, practices and procedures designed to protect children and strengthen both families and communities.)
- Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group (engages an appointed group of key child welfare stakeholders in a three-year process to examine the current child welfare system and to make recommendations for its improvement).

Local Efforts:

Just as the CDSS initiates collaborations among stakeholders at various levels, counties actively collaborate at the local level with providers and community-based service agencies. To achieve this collaboration, counties have formed local advisory boards, coordinating policy councils, and interagency collaboratives. They have conducted community forums and surveys to obtain valuable input on how to ensure that children and families are better served. Almost all counties hold regular meetings with public agencies (mental health, public health, etc.), educational institutions, foster parent associations, child abuse councils, probation departments, the courts, private groups, youth groups, law enforcement, the business community and commissions. Examples of county-level coordination include the following:

Los Angeles County: Los Angeles County expanded its commitment to the service integration strategy by creating the Service Integration Branch (SIB) within the county Chief Administrative Office (CAO). The purpose of the SIB is to support and coordinate collaborative policy development initiatives, to assist county departments' integration of service delivery systems and to help provide children and families with needed information. The SIB convened a two-day Service Integration Forum to begin establishing long-range, system-wide service integration goals and to set measurable outcomes and performance measures for the SIB. Forum participants included representatives from collaboratives, county departments, public agencies and community organizations. From this forum, an action plan was developed that focuses on six areas: access to services, customer service and satisfaction, multi-agency service delivery, data sharing, funding for services and pursuing long-term success.

To help guide development of the Los Angeles County Children and Family Services Strategic Plan, over fifty focus groups were conducted with both internal and external stakeholders. Participants included managers, supervisors, caseworkers and support services staff. Interviews were held with representatives from the Board of Supervisors, the Commission for Children and Families, the courts, labor unions, children and family focus groups, youth groups and community groups.

Monterey County: The Monterey County Board of Supervisors conducted an extensive performance audit of its family and children services program and its relationship with the foster parent community. This audit resulted in major policy and practice reform. One of several practices was the implementation and success of the Family Ties Program that provides services to assist relative caregivers in protecting and promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of children in kinship families. This program resulted from stakeholders who met to discuss needs and proposed program design before the submittal of the grant application for Kinship Support Services Programs funding. The initial group of stakeholders included Children's Mental Health, Public Health, three school districts, Probation Department, Family Service Agency, relative caregivers, Department of Social Services, Hartnell College, Area Agency on Aging, Legal Aid and Legal Services for Seniors.

Shasta County: The Shasta County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) coordinates with the Shasta County Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council (CAPCC) to conduct community needs assessments, surveys and focus groups about agency responsiveness to community needs. In Fall 1994, the DPSS contracted with the CAPCC to conduct a community-wide assessment to test public attitudes on how to improve or implement changes that would achieve the improved well-being for vulnerable children and their families. As a result of the study, several recommendations were made for improving the health and welfare of children and families in Shasta County. A recent study examined what services are needed for improvement, guided by information from caseworkers and parents who are involved with child protective services.

Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group:

Child Welfare Services (CWS) Stakeholders Group: California's child welfare system is currently operating with an infrastructure based on a 20-year-old model. Realizing that some of these elements no longer work effectively, incremental changes have been

made over the years to improve the system. However, this patchwork of legislation and new rules and regulations has created inefficiencies and inconsistencies. In 2000, the Legislature passed legislation that established the CWS Stakeholders Group to redesign this system.

For this effort, the Director of the CDSS appointed a group of key child welfare stakeholders to join in a three-year process to examine the current child welfare system and to make recommendations for its improvement. Members of the Stakeholders Group represent birth parents; kin caregivers; foster parents; advocates; Indian tribes; public and private service providers; federal, State, and county child welfare administrators; consumers of child welfare services; representatives from the State's departments of Health Services, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug, Developmental Services, Education and Finance; the courts and the legal community; the California State Legislature; research institutions involved in child welfare and private foundations.

The Stakeholders Group approached this huge task by forming four subcommittees:

- The Human Resources Subcommittee looks at recruitment, training and retention of caseworkers, as well as manageable workloads for all workers in the CWS system and the courts.
- The Rules and Regulations Subcommittee reviews the current rules and regulations of the child welfare system and is aligning them with the goals developed by the Group.
- The Flexible Funding Subcommittee reviews various child welfare funding streams and makes recommendations on how counties can increase funding for CWS.
- The CWS and the Courts Subcommittee looks at the relationship and communication among caseworkers and court personnel.

In the second year of the process, the Group has embarked on the task of developing a proposal to redesign the child welfare system. The detailed concept will be made public this spring/summer.

FINDINGS:

At both the State and county levels, multiple opportunities are available for all stakeholders (tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court and other public and private child and family-serving agencies) to be engaged in defining the needs of children and families at risk and planning the services necessary to meet those needs. The major concerns of these stakeholders is fundamental to the development of the State's Child and Family Services Plan and the county delivery of those services. The two-way communication between the CDSS, which is ultimately responsible for producing the Child and Family Services Plan, and the extensive network of critical stakeholders of the child welfare system, is integral to this plan's development.

County social service agencies are directly involved with a myriad of stakeholders and use a wide variety of means to engage them. Such collaborative activities at the local level are funneled into the development of the Child and Family Services Plan through the regular, ongoing meetings among the CDSS and counties, provider associations,

advocates, etc. Focus groups, meetings, training sessions, case staffings, newsletters, conferences, advisory boards, client surveys, community forums and town hall meetings are methods used across the 58 counties to involve the community in the child welfare system. In a state as large and diverse as California, engaging and listening to child welfare stakeholders is an ever-present, multi-level task. Programs, policies, regulations, practice and evaluation all require the contributions of practitioners, children, parents, caregivers, tribes, advocates, legislators, researchers and other allied professions.

This broad array of stakeholders to the State's child welfare system could not adequately be engaged in a single workgroup to develop the Child and Family Services Plan. To do so would truncate the necessary input and reduce the depth and breadth of the planning effort. In June 2001, in an effort to more overtly address the planning process with the child welfare community, the Child and Family Services Plan Update was distributed to both the Stakeholders Group and the Child and Family Services Review Steering Committee. Given the roles of these two groups in reviewing the overall child welfare system, they will now have an opportunity to provide additional input during development of the 2002 annual report.

2. Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State Plan requirement to coordinate its services with the services and benefits of other public and private agencies serving the same general population of children and families.

SUMMARY

- ***The CDSS and local county child welfare agencies work extensively with other public and private service providers to coordinate services to children and families at-risk.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

The CDSS is committed to coordinating its services with those of other public and private agencies to better meet the needs of children and families. In an effort to deliver the appropriate services to families in the most beneficial manner, the CDSS participates in a number of committees, workgroups, forums, task forces and special projects. Representation includes, but is not limited to, educational/research institutions and agencies related to drug and alcohol, health, mental health, education, domestic violence, and juvenile courts, representing various counties.

PRACTICE:

The CDSS is involved in a broad array of efforts to coordinate services among public and private organizations. Below are examples of some of these efforts:

Supportive and Therapeutic Options Program (STOP):

The collaborative planning and integration of service delivery of the STOP program works to prevent children from entering or re-entering foster care and/or to promote successful transitions when children return home. Examples of coordination of services within this program include the following:

- Ongoing coordination with California Department of Mental Health to plan and deliver aftercare services and placement prevention services and to maximize STOP funds.
- Participation with education/schools, residential care providers, health services and local community-based agencies to plan and deliver integrated mental, social, health, educational, recreational and vocational services.
- Continuity of care for children transitioning home by providing aftercare services, ideally delivered by the facility from which the child is exiting.
- Agreements between counties and service providers that clearly identify program and fiscal responsibilities.

State Child Death Review Council:

This council, established in 1992 under the auspices of the California Department of Justice, is composed of representatives from relevant State agencies and various statewide associations. The Council is responsible for overseeing the statewide coordination and integration of State and local efforts to address fatal child abuse and neglect. The Council supports Local Child Death Review Teams in 56 counties, through training, and is developing strategies to use the collected data to prevent future child deaths.

Wraparound Project:

The State's Wraparound Project is designed to address the needs of high risk wards, dependents and emotionally disturbed minors (who meet the criteria of Education Code 26.5) who, without the wraparound intervention, would otherwise be placed in high-level group home care. As an alternative to placement, these probation wards, dependents and mental health clients can be "placed in their home" and maintained in the community using State and county foster care dollars.

Wraparound requires the referring agency (e.g., child welfare, probation, mental health, etc.) to coordinate and collaborate with formal and informal services, support systems in the community and friends or family members. Children are referred to the Wraparound Program via the county review process for children being considered for placement. The wraparound process, using a multi-disciplinary team, produces a child and family team plan created with the family, the referring agency and service providers to address the safety needs of the community and the individual needs of the family and the ward.

Answers Benefiting Children (ABC):

A joint initiative between the CDSS and the Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP) produced this pilot program of integrated services within targeted populations. The ABC program provides home visits targeting at-risk families with children from birth to three months of age. Each grantee county is required to collaborate with non-profit organizations and other local stakeholders. The collaboration includes an assessment of all the existing resources available for services to children and families and the development and implementation of an integrated delivery approach that best serves the clients of the targeted population. Additional information on this project is available in Section II, Part E, Item 2.

Child Welfare and CalWORKs:

Due to the significant overlap in clients in the CalWORKs (welfare reform) program and the child welfare system, a number of efforts are focused on coordinating services to these clients. These efforts include:

Joint CalWORKs Committee: The Joint CalWORKs Committee is comprised of county representatives from the California Mental Health Directors Association, the County Alcohol and Drug Program Administrators Association of California and CWDA; and representatives from the State Department of Mental Health and the State Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. The committee's purpose is to work jointly on issues affecting CalWORKs families who receive child welfare services and who may have mental health, alcohol or other drug and domestic abuse barriers to employment.

Interface Committee for Child Welfare Services /CalWORKs: This committee, comprised of the CDSS and county representatives, identifies, prioritizes and develops recommendations on emerging interface issues, identifies best practice models and explores the use of technology to enhance collaboration and to improve services to families.

CalWORKs/Child Welfare Services Partnership Project: This four-year project, supported by the Stuart Foundation and launched in partnership with the CDSS, includes 60 child welfare and public assistance administrators. The project seeks to identify and increase practices that maximize coordination of child welfare and public assistance programs in California. The project is based at the California Center for Research on Women and Families at the Public Health Institute in Berkeley, California.

FINDINGS:

Many of the children and families served by the CWS system are also likely to be engaged in other public service systems. The CDSS and county agencies actively work with other service providers (e.g., substance abuse and mental health agencies, education and research institutions, the courts, probation departments, and tribes) to reduce redundancies and to fill gaps in services to children and families.

The CDSS recognizes the value of and promotes the coordination of services and benefits to children and families. As demonstrated above, an extensive number of

efforts are underway at both State and county levels to ensure needed services are delivered in a coordinated, cost-effective manner.

- 3. Does the agency have any agreements in place with other public or private agencies or contractors, such as juvenile justice or managed care agencies, to perform Title IV-E or IV-B functions? If so, how are services provided under the agreements or contracts monitored for compliance with State Plan requirements or other program requirements and accurate eligibility determinations made, where applicable?**

SUMMARY

- ***To more effectively meet the needs of the children and families served, the CDSS and local county child welfare agencies sometimes make contracts or agreements with public or private agencies to perform Title IV-B and Title IV-E functions.***
- ***To ensure compliance with State and federal requirements, these contracts are usually competitively procured and routinely include reviews, deliverables, outcome measures and reporting requirements.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

Although State regulations prohibit counties from routinely contracting for basic case management services, many other services to children and families are delivered as a result of contracts or agreements. Since California is a State-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, county child welfare agencies, as well as the CDSS, enter into many different agreements or contracts to most effectively accomplish all the necessary functions.

Specific contracting processes may differ, but they are typically competitive processes. County contracts or agreements are usually approved through individual agencies and the county boards of supervisors. Contracts or agreements to which the CDSS is a party undergo a rigorous, prescribed approval process that includes legal review and oversight by the California Department of General Services.

Each contract or agreement is monitored through a different mechanism, depending on the nature of the services provided and the parties involved. Contracts generally contain provisions for annual audits. Methods of oversight fall into three categories:

- Agreements or contracts for general services to foster children that are monitored through the review process for county compliance to child welfare program regulations.
- Agreements or contracts that are monitored by providing specific, deliverable services or products prior to payment.

- Agreements or contracts awarded for pilot or demonstration projects that are monitored through an evaluation for performance or outcomes, usually by an educational or research institution.

The following are examples of various contracts and the kind of monitoring used to ensure services are delivered in compliance with contract standards and program requirements.

Compliance with State Child Welfare Regulations:

Services for Developmentally Disabled/Delayed Children: An agreement exists between the California Department of Developmental Services (CDDS) and the CDSS with respect to foster children who are developmentally delayed. The CDDS is responsible for assessment and coordination of services for children with developmental disabilities through a statewide system of 21 locally-based regional centers. The assessment, placement and service delivery for a dual-agency child is a collaborative effort between the local county welfare department and the regional center. Although the regional centers assist in identifying an appropriate placement, the county welfare departments are ultimately responsible for ensuring the placement adequately meets the needs of these dual-agency clients. The CDSS uses AFDC-FC funds to pay the placement rate established by the CDDS; the county child welfare agency is responsible for ensuring that the claim submitted for payment of funds is for allowable costs and for the correct amount.

Probation and Child Welfare: Federal and State statutes require that a written agreement be in effect between a county probation and county child welfare agency in order to claim federal Title IV-E funds for foster children supervised by a probation department. The CDSS issued All County Letters (State policy letters) in November 1999 and March 2000, that addressed the counties' responsibility to:

- Maintain these written agreements.
- Ensure proper supervision and provision of services for all AFDC-FC funded foster care placements.
- Modify their existing agreements, as needed, to incorporate recent changes in federal and State law.

By December 2000, the CDSS received updated agreements from all 58 counties in California.

Youth Pilot Program: This program provides comprehensive, integrated services from multiple agencies to at-risk youth and their families using blended categorical funding to meet a wide range of needs. An agreement exists between the California Health and Human Services Agency and the six participating counties. This agreement waives specific requirements to enable these counties to implement the Youth Pilot Program, e.g., the prohibition against contracting case management services. The agreement permits these counties to secure specific case management activities through contract with a consortium of private providers. The counties perform a collaborative oversight function with the providers. The Youth Pilot Program is administered by the CDSS.

Providing Deliverable Services or Products:

Foster Care Performance Indicators, Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley: Since 1993, the CDSS has contracted with the University of California, Berkeley, to track data regarding children in foster care. Prior to 1998, data was collected from the department's Foster Care Information System. Since 1998, this data has been generated by the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (the State's SACWIS system). This data is published routinely on a public website and is available at the individual county level. Most recently, data regarding child abuse referrals and dispositions also became available on this website as well. The data, made available through this contract, has been instrumental in informing the child welfare community and in developing significant program improvements.

Quality Assurance in Case Reviews: The CDSS entered into a contract in 1995 with the Judicial Council of California to implement the Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) project. The goal of the JRTA project is to improve compliance with Title IV-E requirements. To accomplish this goal, the JRTA team provides individual county reviews of both dependency and delinquency cases for Title IV-E compliance and provides technical assistance to the county's presiding juvenile judge(s) and probation and social services staff.

Structured Decision Making (SDM): The Children's Research Center (CRC) of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency is under contract to work with the CDSS and a number of counties to develop a structured process for making key child welfare assessments and associated decisions. The purpose of the contract is to improve the consistency (reliability) and accuracy (validity) of both the assessments and the resulting decisions when children come to the attention of the child welfare system. Through more consistent and accurate assessments and decisions, SDM is able to increase the proportion of scarce treatment resources allocated to the children at greatest risk of future maltreatment. The CRC provides development of the SDM model and associated tools necessary for implementation. It also provides program management reports about the performance of the program and ongoing technical assistance to counties.

Permanency Planning Mediation: The CDSS has contracted with the private, non-profit agency, Consortium for Children (CFC) to provide permanency mediation services to parents of court-dependent children referred by a county child welfare agency or juvenile court. The process seeks to engage parents who are contesting an adoption plan after failing reunification in proactive adoption planning through mediation for post-adoption contact. The goal is to expedite permanency and to reduce emotional and fiscal costs of court termination of parental rights. Under this contract, the CFC has agreed to provide a minimum number of mediations, along with other deliverables.

Child Welfare Staff Training: The CDSS funds five regional training academies to provide induction training and continuing professional education to county child welfare staff. These academies are university/county/State partnerships charged with meeting the training needs of all counties in their region. This regional approach allows each academy to tailor curricula to meet its particular counties' needs. The California Social Work Education Consortium provides overall coordination for the academies. Four of the five training academies are funded through Title IV-E training funds, matched with funds from the CDSS and from the universities where their operations are located. The

Inter-University Consortium in Los Angeles also utilizes federal Title IV-E funds but contracts directly with the County of Los Angeles. In State Fiscal Year 2000/01, the academies had over 34,000 registrants.

Evaluation of Performance or Outcomes:

Educational and research institutions play a major role in the monitoring and evaluation of various aspects of the State's child welfare program. Agreements and contracts for various services frequently include an evaluation component, particularly in pilot and demonstration projects.

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)/Parents Anonymous: Parents Anonymous is contracted to conduct Parent Leadership Training in multiple locations throughout California. The goal of the training is to create mechanisms by which community-based public and private agencies can integrate parent leadership strategies into service delivery and to construct opportunities for meaningful parent involvement. UCLA conducted pre-training and post-training surveys to measure the effectiveness of the training for all participants.

Answers Benefiting Children (ABC): The ABC program is currently being conducted jointly by the San Diego State University Foundation, Social Policy Institute and LPC Consulting Associates in 45 program sites in 17 counties.¹⁹ The ABC initiative features a home-visiting component as the core service in an array of services provided at local family resource centers. The two-year evaluation period provided in this program examines program components related to home visiting, the level of resident males and father involvement in homes receiving services and changes in service delivery methodology and program performance. Technical assistance is also provided to each site. Although the State, federal and foundation funds that are currently matched by counties will end in June 2002, the requirements for program sustainability built into the process will ensure that many of the sites continue these services.

Small County Initiative (SCI): The CDSS has contracted with UCLA to conduct an evaluation of this program. With limited revenue, personnel and supportive services, it is difficult for some small counties to compete for funding and to participate in service initiatives. Twelve counties with populations less than 60,000 were selected in the SCI. The purpose of the SCI is to:

- Support and strengthen counties' child abuse prevention systems, including promoting positive systemic changes where needed.
- Facilitate the development of child abuse prevention systems in areas that do not currently have them.
- Increase the participation of Child Abuse Prevention Councils, local community members and parents as partners in the development, implementation and decision making processes in child abuse prevention systems.
- Strengthen families.

¹⁹ Alameda, El Dorado, Kern, Lake, Merced, Napa, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Yolo, and Yuba

FINDINGS:

The CDSS has a history of agreements with other public and private agencies for Title IV-E and IV-B functions. Counties, responsible for the local administration of service delivery, also contract with various entities to meet individual county needs. Many of these agreements are competitively procured and are based on local needs assessments and service priorities. These agreements and contracts include routine reviews, deliverables, outcome measures, reporting requirements and, in some cases, research evaluations. The State-supervised, county-administered nature of California's child welfare program makes contracting for Title IV-B and IV-E functions more complex. However, this complexity also provides a built-in system of checks and balances to ensure services are delivered in a manner consistent with federal and State requirements.

- 4. Citing any data available, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting State Plan requirements for determining whether children are American Indian and ensuring compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act.***

SUMMARY

- ***The State's laws and regulations require compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).***
- ***In recent years, CDSS has worked proactively to better address tribal concerns by:***
 - ***Including ICWA in social worker training curricula.***
 - ***Establishing the CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Council.***
 - ***Establishing State-level staff positions focused on ICWA, including a Tribal Government Liaison.***
 - ***Providing financial support to an annual ICWA conference.***
- ***Based on surveys and focus groups with tribal members and representatives, areas needing improvement are:***
 - ***More culturally appropriate services based on individualized and realistic case plans.***
 - ***Better collaboration and communication among tribal organizations and county child welfare agencies.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California's statutes and regulations are consistent with federal law regarding compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). The CDSS has had regulations in place to implement the ICWA for many years, as well as State laws governing child custody proceedings for Native American children. County social services agencies and probation departments are required to comply with these laws and regulations when a child is identified as having Native American heritage. The CDSS regulations summarize key provisions of the ICWA and provide procedures for compliance. The

State's automated child welfare information system is structured to easily collect the necessary information and to produce the forms necessary to expedite contact with the appropriate tribe.

In 1995, California enacted Assembly Bill (AB) 1525, which provided the CDSS with broad authority to enter into agreements between the State and federally recognized Indian tribes. The agreements are to permit the tribes to provide child welfare services to their member children and to be reimbursed for these services. Although the agreements are between the State and the tribes, county involvement is critical to ensure a smooth transition of cases from the county to the respective tribe. Negotiations have involved county and tribal law enforcement, county administrators, tribal councils and the State. The CDSS has provided training and technical assistance to tribal organizations to ensure their child welfare services are in compliance with existing State and federal laws and regulations.

California has 109 federally recognized tribes and 44 tribes that are not currently federally recognized. The CDSS is committed to ensuring that services are provided to Native American communities in a manner consistent with the requirements of the ICWA. To that end, the CDSS continues to work towards developing positive relationships with these tribes by working on a government-to-government relationship and through the development of a CDSS Tribal Liaison position. The Liaison assists the CDSS in resolving State/tribal issues and assisting in the development of strategies for successful implementation of child welfare programs and compliance with ICWA. The Liaison also acts as a resource for tribal officials. Since California is a mandatory Public Law 280 state, this federal law imposes a complex relationship with our tribes. As such, issues surrounding tribal sovereignty and liability play a significant role in the relationship.

The two primary areas in which the CDSS interacts with tribal governments are in ICWA and Tribal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Because both areas are complex, the CDSS initiated a Tribal Government Advisory Committee to meet and resolve outstanding issues in these areas. On March 2, 2001, the CDSS held its first meeting of the Tribal Government Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee consists of eight tribal representatives, selected by their regions, including two urban Indian representatives and the CDSS staff from programs that affect tribal social services. The meetings are held bi-monthly. The purpose of these meetings is to jointly develop regulations, policies and practices to more effectively meet the needs of tribal communities.

The CDSS is committed to promoting the understanding and application of ICWA policies across the State's child welfare system. To this end, the CDSS was recently successful in securing approval to recruit and hire two staff members who would be dedicated to ICWA. This additional staff will enable the CDSS to provide training and technical assistance to Indian tribes, child welfare agencies and the CDSS staff regarding the history and intent of ICWA, ICWA policies and procedures and strategies for building relationships among tribes and county/State staff that best promote conformance with ICWA.

PRACTICE:

The CDSS has supported and strengthened the intent of ICWA in its statutes and regulations. It seeks to do so as well in child welfare practice throughout the State. A number of efforts have been developed to achieve this:

- The CDSS co-sponsors the California Indian Child Welfare Act annual conference. The purpose of the conference has been to educate and expose service providers, judges, adoption attorneys, tribal leaders and social service agency personnel to the provisions of the ICWA.
- The CDSS continues to negotiate a State/tribal agreement with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California to provide child welfare services to their member children and to be reimbursed for these services through Title IV-E funds.
- The CDSS staff attends and participates in several county ICWA Roundtables. Such events are held in Butte County, Sonoma County, Sacramento County and Lake County. The roundtables consist of juvenile court judges, local tribes, county social services, probation and anyone else who may impact a Native American child in child welfare services. The purpose of these roundtables is to educate all involved on the requirements of ICWA.
- The caseworker training curriculum of the regional training academies includes activities necessary to promote compliance with ICWA.
- The CDSS encourages counties to establish ICWA units at the county level. A model unit is in San Diego County, where staff is familiar with application of the ICWA and works at all levels to administer and operate by the philosophy and principles of the ICWA. The San Diego county staff works with tribes as resource partners in providing services to children and families and continues to address any barriers to tribal intervention in cases that involve Native American children.

DATA DISCUSSION:

California is home to 109 federally recognized tribes and approximately 44 non-recognized tribes. Of these 44 non-recognized tribes, 40 tribes have applied to the federal government for recognition. California has approximately 333,346 Native Americans living in both urban and rural communities.

As of January 1, 2001, approximately 1,500 Native American children were in foster care in California. These children are from California tribes as well as from tribes from other states. Native American children living with their relatives comprise over 38% of Native American children in out-of-home care. Over 6% of the children live with legal guardians, over 20% live in foster family homes, almost 8% live in group home care, 19% are placed with foster family agencies and 2% of Native American children are in shelter care.

Tribal Survey:

In a survey conducted with individuals from various tribes, respondents reported the following:

- Additional collaboration with tribes is needed to improve implementation of ICWA and integration of the State's child welfare services with that of the tribes.
- Sometimes respondents believe that tribes are heard better at the county level than they are at the State level; others believe that the opposite is true.
- Recognition that the State and counties have established additional forums for communication through the creation of the CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Committee and local county roundtables.
- Forums should be established in every county to promote communication among child welfare programs and tribal organizations.
- More culturally appropriate services and providers are needed.
- Increased efforts need to be made to tailor case plans to meet the specific needs of Native American families.

CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Committee:

Members of this committee identified the following problem areas:

- Active recruitment of Native American foster homes that are paid rates equal to those of non-Native American foster homes. This will reduce the practice of routinely placing Native American children in non-Native American homes. Placement preferences need to be followed.
- All counties need to notice the appropriate tribes in a timely manner, by mail, when a child comes into care. In some jurisdictions, this notification is not taking place.
- Some country clinics/service providers are not culturally appropriate. When appropriate tribal services are available, county caseworkers sometimes believe they are not qualified or competent to provide care.
- Judges sometimes ignore mandatory stays for tribal intervention and fail to recognize ICWA issues.
- Sometimes court-ordered case plans are not realistic. Native American families need individualized, culturally appropriate and realistic case plans.
- Competing requirements of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 and ICWA sometimes result in the promotion of adoption of Native American children by non-Native American families.

According to foster care data, Native American children make up a relatively small proportion (1%) of the State's foster care caseload. However, these children have unique needs and are subject to laws that require additional collaboration with tribal organizations. According to input collected from tribal representatives, improvements have begun with the enactment of recent changes. Nevertheless progress is uneven, much communication between tribes and State and local governments is inconsistent and additional efforts are needed to ensure consistent implementation of ICWA to meet the needs of Native American children throughout the State.

FINDINGS:

Developing an effective system to comply with ICWA is a high priority for the CDSS. The CDSS has taken a proactive position to address tribal concerns by establishing regulations and State statutes to implement ICWA, including ICWA as part of the curriculum for the social work training academies, meeting frequently with tribes, establishing a Tribal Government Liaison and the CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Committee, creating two ICWA staff positions, supporting the annual ICWA conference and establishing a statewide plan to train and educate tribal workers and county staff. Social service agencies in several counties have established roundtables and ICWA units to work with the local tribes. These efforts can serve as models to other counties.

Input from tribes during the Statewide Assessment has helped to identify specific areas for additional improvement. The key findings include:

- More culturally appropriate services based on individualized and realistic case plans.
- Better collaboration and communication among tribal organizations and county child welfare agencies.

Recent efforts on the part of the CDSS and counties will provide a solid base from which to continue to improve compliance with ICWA and the State's ability to meet the needs of Native American children at risk.

1. ***Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the requirements to establish and maintain standards for foster family homes, adoptive homes and childcare institutions in which children served by the agency are placed.***

SUMMARY

- ***California has a program in place to ensure that licensing and approval standards for all placement types are rigorously and effectively established, maintained and enforced consistent with recommended national standards.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

The continuum of placement resources for children in out-of-home care in California is structured to safely meet children's needs in the least restrictive, most family-like setting possible. To this end, California law (enacted in 1980) requires preferential placement with relatives. Since that time, the number of foster children placed with relatives has grown from 7% (1984) to a high of 48% (1998), to the current level of 46% of the total foster care population. This significant growth has resulted in legislative and regulatory changes designed to improve service delivery to both the children and their kin caregivers. Approved relative caregivers and non-related extended family member caregivers, while not required to obtain a foster family home license, are required to meet the identical standards used to license non-relative families.

California's licensing standards were originally established in 1977 and have been routinely updated since that time. These standards, set forth in State statutes, regulations and policies (Health and Safety Code; Welfare and Institutions Code; California Code of Regulations, Title 22; and Divisions 31 and 45 of the Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures) specifically address the areas of safety, admissions policies, sanitation and civil rights for foster family homes, as referenced in the Final Rule for the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). The regulations and policies are updated annually to reflect changes in law or programmatic needs. Following are the key licensing and approval requirements for all foster homes, including those for kin caregivers:

- **Criminal records check:** All appropriate persons in the home obtain a criminal record clearance.
- **Caregiver qualifications:** The caregiver possess qualities that include having the ability to provide appropriate care and supervision, possessing knowledge of applicable laws and regulations, maintaining financial records, etc.
- **Physical environment:** The home is clean, safe, sanitary and in good repair.
- **Personal rights:** The caregiver ensures that each child is accorded personal rights.

The standards apply to the following placement types in which children served by the agency may be placed:

- Foster family home: A home licensed by the State or county to care for children from any placing agent.
- Kin caregiver: A relative or unrelated extended family member approved by the county child welfare agency to care for a specific child or sibling group.
- Adoptive home: A home approved by the CDSS or a licensed county or private adoption agency for adoptive placement through the approving agency.
- Foster family agency (FFA) certified family homes: A home certified by an FFA under its license for placement of a child through the certifying agency. (FFA are private, nonprofit corporations that recruit, certify, train and provide professional support to the homes accepted into their network. These certified homes essentially provide care for children who require intensive services that would otherwise be available only in childcare institutions.)
- Childcare 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 non-profit 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 CDSS, the county child welfare agencies and the courts all bear responsibility for enforcement of these standards. The CDSS performs the licensing function for foster family homes in 16 counties and for FFAs, childcare institutions and public and private adoption agencies in all 58 counties. In 42 counties, foster family home licensing is contracted out to the county child welfare agency. FFAs certify foster homes under their licenses. Both public and private adoption agencies may approve adoptive homes under their licenses. Licensing, approval or certification requirements are consistent for each placement type, regardless of the jurisdiction. Licensing and approval standards are the same across all of these placement types.

A license allows a caregiver to accept children from any placement agency. A home certified by an FFA may accept a child through that licensed FFA. An approval allows an adoptive home to accept a child through the licensed agency granting the approval. An approval allows a kin caregiver to care for a specific relative child or sibling group from any placement agency.

Currently in California, there are approximately 12,000 foster family homes, 13,300 FFA-certified family homes and 1,660 licensed childcare institutions (group homes). Approximately 37,000 foster children are placed with kin caregivers.

At the end of June 2001, California had 3,311 approved homes for adoption. Of these homes, 1,463 intended to adopt a foster child already in their care, and 1,848 were waiting to find a child to adopt. Essentially all foster children who are adopted are placed into approved adoptive homes that are also licensed foster homes or are adopted by their licensed foster parents or approved kin caregivers.

PRACTICE:

Standards are maintained by ensuring compliance with established statutes and regulations. This compliance is achieved by routine monitoring as part of the annual license or certification renewal process for foster homes and the ongoing case management of children placed with kin caregivers. During the annual review and any complaint investigation, the licensing agency documents any identified concerns or issues of non-compliance and assists the home in developing a plan of corrective action. Similarly, kin caregivers are routinely monitored. In addition to regular visits by the county child welfare worker, kin caregivers are reviewed at the time of the child's six-month status review. 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 may make recommendations for corrective action or may recommend removal of the child from the placement.

Public and private adoption agencies, FFAs and childcare institutions are all licensed exclusively by the CDSS. A review of compliance with all established standards is included in the annual license review process conducted by the CDSS. In addition, any complaints of licensing violations are thoroughly investigated by the CDSS. Formal actions in response to licensing violations may include a plan of correction, monitoring by the CDSS, fiscal sanctions, issuance of a probationary license or revocation of the license.

In addition to the licensing review process, additional controls have been established to ensure that group home providers and FFAs also adhere to State and federal program and funding requirements. These additional reviews for group homes and FFAs include the following:

- Program audits: Group home program audits are conducted on a scheduled basis to determine if providers' projected rate classification levels were maintained at the paid rate classification level for the audit period. Group home provisional rate audits are conducted during the first year of a new program operation. Audits either substantiate the rate classification level or find cause to reduce the rate. An audit may trigger the assessment of an overpayment and/or corrective action.
- Financial audits: Group home and FFA financial audits are required and conducted annually to ensure that effective controls and accountability systems have been established by providers. These audits are performed by independent auditors who are directed by government auditing standards and must be certified public accountants or State-licensed public accountants.

DATA DISCUSSION:

As part of the Statewide Assessment, the CDSS conducted a number of focus groups and surveys to collect information about the effectiveness of various aspects of the State's child welfare system. The following is information relevant to licensing and approval activities.

Surveys of Child Welfare Stakeholders:

In recent surveys of over 300 respondents representing public and private child welfare stakeholders, 31% reported they believed that licensing of providers was the most effective activity that the State and counties conduct to ensure quality services to foster children.

Statewide Assessment Focus Groups and Interviews:

In some focus groups that included caregivers, participants characterized licensing standards as rigid and voiced concerns that “such standards are too regimented and scare people away.” In addition, “licensing standards focus on younger children” and do not allow flexibility to accommodate the needs of older youth. The director of the statewide association for Court Appointed Special Advocates expressed concern that training of foster parents is uneven among counties and affects the quality of care in foster homes. The director of a youth advocacy organization stated that the licensing process, “within its mandate...does a pretty good job.” It was further suggested that the regulations could be made more “user-friendly” and that the foster care licensing process needs to focus more on the quality of the home than the specific physical requirements of the facility.

Compliance Activity:

From January 1, 2001, through November 30, 2001, the CDSS took 183 administrative actions against foster family homes and childcare institutions statewide.

Audits:

For data on audits of group homes, please refer to Section II, Part C, Item 1.

FINDINGS:

California has consistently honed its enforcement program in an effort to ensure that licensing and approval standards for all categories of placement types are rigorously and effectively established, maintained and enforced in accordance with recommended national standards. The policies are disseminated and mechanisms are in place to enforce and monitor compliance through licensing authorities, court review and approval processes. In addition, the standards are updated in an effort to improve outcomes for children in out-of-home placement.

Subsequent to the release of the ASFA Final Rule in January 2000, the CDSS and its stakeholder partners embarked on a review of the licensing/approval requirements for many types of placement resources. The purpose of these efforts was to ensure consistent safety standards exist across licensing and approval processes and include identification of barriers to recruitment and retention of foster families and kin caregivers. These efforts included:

- The CDSS and the County Welfare Directors Association established a joint task force to review existing requirements and to ensure that the same standards are required for licensed and approved homes.
- The Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group formed a subcommittee charged with looking at the three primary licensing/approval categories: Title 22 requirements for the licensing/approval of foster family homes, group homes and foster family and adoption agencies.
- The Group Home Reform Workgroup was charged with reviewing the standards and broader issues related to group homes.

Based on these review efforts, the CDSS will develop regulatory, policy and practice changes from the ensuing recommendations with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of the State's system for licensing and approval of placement resources.

2. Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State Plan requirement to ensure that the State's licensure standards are applied equally to all foster and adoptive homes and childcare institutions that serve children in the State's care and custody.

SUMMARY

- **State law and regulations set forth licensing and approval standards that are applied equally across placement types receiving Title IV-B and Title IV-E funding.**

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

As described in Item 1 of this Part, statewide licensing/approval standards for foster family homes, kinship care homes, adoptive homes and childcare institutions originate in State statutes, regulations and policies and are applied consistently in each county and in each category. The CDSS provides a central point of contact for oversight and technical assistance to counties to ensure that uniformity in practice exists.

In order to develop consistent standards across placement types, a significant shift regarding standards for kin caregivers occurred in 1998, with the enactment of Assembly Bill (AB) 1544. Since relatives are not required to be licensed under California law, prior to this legislation the standards for approval of relatives for placement had been inconsistent across the State. In part, AB 1544 increased the standards for kin caregivers to make them more consistent with those of licensed foster homes and approved adoptive homes. This change was coupled with provisions requiring increased efforts to identify and search for appropriate relatives. As a result of this legislation the CDSS, in partnership with key stakeholders, developed a detailed assessment protocol for kin caregivers. To ensure optimal implementation, the CDSS provided statewide training to counties on the protocol and standards.

More recently, AB 1695 (Assembly Human Services Committee), Chapter 653, Statutes of 2001, was enacted to conform State law with recent amendments to federal statutes and regulations relating to the placement of foster children in licensed or approved homes of non-relatives and relatives.

PRACTICE:

In accordance with the intent and spirit of the ASFA Final Rule, all individuals who wish to be licensed or approved must meet the same standards. In order to ensure uniformity in licensing and approval practices, the CDSS issues All County Letters, All County Information Notices and regulations so that counties, providers and State staff are aware of changes in statutes, policies and procedures. These documents are available on the CDSS website. Additionally, the CDSS provides technical assistance and training to ensure standards are maintained.

FINDINGS:

Over the last several years, efforts have been focused on increasing consistency in standards for child placements. Consequently, licensing and approval standards are now consistently applied to all licensed and approved foster family homes and childcare institutions receiving Title IV-E or Title IV-B funds.

3. *Citing any licensure or safety data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State Plan requirements to conduct criminal background clearances on prospective foster and adoptive families, including those being licensed or approved by private agencies in the State. How does the State address safety considerations with respect to the staff of childcare institutions and foster and adoptive families (if the agency has opted not to conduct criminal background clearances on foster care and adoptive families)?*

SUMMARY

- ***California law, consistent with federal requirements, mandates a criminal record review and a California Child Abuse Central Index clearance for all facility types.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

California is committed to ensuring the safety of children in out-of-home placement. To this end, State law and regulations require criminal background checks that exceed the federal requirements. State law requires a review of criminal records for all prospective foster parents, kinship care providers, adoptive parents and childcare institution staff. Moreover, a criminal record check is not limited to the applicants. For instance, foster

and adoptive applications, other adults and, in some cases, children residing in the home of the applicant must also be checked. In addition to conducting a review of criminal records, California law also requires a check of the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) maintained by the California Department of Justice. In addition, in many counties, Department of Motor Vehicle records are reviewed as well.

Typically, fingerprinting occurs at local law enforcement or social services agencies. Two sets of fingerprints are taken and forwarded to the California Department of Justice, one for searching the California Crime Information Intelligence System and one for searching the criminal records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The results of the criminal history background checks are provided to the State or county licensing/placement authority and/or private adoption agency, which issues a notice of clearance or non-clearance. A clearance is required prior to any of the following:

- The issuance of any foster family home or childcare institution license.
- Approval of a kin caregiver and placement of a child.
- Approval of adoptive applicant.
- Childcare institution staff being present in the facility.

California has also provided funding for all 58 county child welfare services agencies to purchase electronic Live Scan equipment to facilitate the criminal records clearance process. This system allows the fingerprints to be submitted electronically, reducing the processing time.

PRACTICE:

California obtains criminal background checks on all types of care providers. In all cases of licensed or approved placements, clearance is obtained prior to licensure/approval and placement of a child. All care providers and facility staff are required to submit two sets of fingerprint cards, a request for check of the California CACI and a signed declaration regarding any prior criminal convictions as a condition of employment, residence or presence in the facility.

Applicants must meet the requirements of separate criminal background checks for foster care and adoptions. Since a majority of adoptive families are also licensed foster care providers, a double screening of the applicants occurs. The criminal background check for adoptive applicants includes a full criminal record report, which contains information on arrests (as well as convictions). This process ensures the safety of children waiting for a permanent home.

DATA DISCUSSION:

According to the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile for the Statewide Assessment, abuse in licensed foster family homes or in homes certified by FFAs is reported at a rate of 1.06%, exceeding the National Standard of .57%. Since the State's automated child welfare information system cannot adequately capture this data currently, this figure does not include children placed with kin caregivers or in childcare institutions or finalized adoptive homes. Based on data from other sources, there are indications that

this rate may be lower when these other placement types are included in the calculation. On the other hand, there may be inconsistent recording of this element from county to county, in which case the data may be under counted for this measure.

There are other problems with this data as well. It is unclear if what these reports represent is actually child maltreatment. For instance, California's licensing regulations do not allow a foster parent to employ corporal punishment (i.e., spank a child). Complaint reports are typically made for such incidents, even though this punishment would not necessarily be considered child abuse. Until the data can be examined further, on a case-by-case basis, it is unclear exactly what the data represents.

FINDINGS:

California statute complies with federal requirements and requires a criminal record review and California CACI clearance for all facility types. A criminal history self-disclosure affidavit is also required of all applicants, adult household members and childcare institution staff (Health & Safety Codes 1521.6, 1525.5; WIC 361.4).

California has an aggressive, long-standing policy regarding criminal background checks for caregivers of all types, including others residing in the home. As pointed out in the above data discussion in this Item, the data collection and analysis needs to be improved, and further examination of the data is required in order to make appropriate comparisons to the National Standard. In addition to criminal background checks, effective assessment and ongoing training of foster and adoptive families are both critical components to ensuring the well-being of children in care.

4. Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State Plan requirement to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families that represent the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed, including the effectiveness of the State's official recruitment plan.

SUMMARY

- ***California has a process in place to recruit potential foster and adoptive parents that reflects the diversity of the State's foster children.***
- ***Recruiting sufficient numbers of families to meet the needs of children in care continues to be a challenge.***
- ***A key strength for California is its ability to identify, search for and assess relatives of children in care as placement resources.***
- ***The State has developed a five-year strategic plan for recruitment of foster and adoptive parents that is currently under review.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

In recent years, over 40,000 children have entered foster care annually in California. The State recognizes that aggressive recruitment strategies alone are not enough to meet the placement needs of these children. Retention of foster and adoptive parents involves, in significant measure, training and ongoing or post-placement support services. Recruitment and retention programs are conducted at many levels. Though formally administered through the counties with CDSS oversight, the State engages in many collaborative activities to further augment and support local efforts. Many recruitment activities occur at the individual county level and many at a regional level, with multiple counties working cooperatively. State/county and public/private partnerships also play a significant role in recruitment efforts.

California's general population is very diverse, and this diversity is reflected in the foster care population. Of approximately 107,000 children in foster care, nearly 32% are Caucasian, 36% are African-American and 28% are Latino. This diversity presents challenges across the State in the area of foster and adoptive parent recruitment. The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 has spurred California to approach the task of recruitment and retention from a broader community outreach perspective.

PRACTICE:***Recruitment Efforts:***

800-KIDS-4-US: The CDSS funds a 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 300 calls are received in the typical business month.

The California State Fair Booth: This is an annual event in which the CDSS participates as a commercial exhibitor during the 18-day run of the California State Fair. The booth, staffed by State and private agencies, contains various exhibits depicting foster and adoptive children and families. Staff responds to inquiries from interested parties and takes names and addresses for follow-up at the local level.

Public Service Announcements: The CDSS developed, in collaboration with local television station KMAX, Channel 31, three 30-second foster care public service announcements (English and Spanish). The public service announcements were disseminated, without cost, to all 58 counties to assist them in their foster family recruitment activities.

Other efforts are being conducted in a number of counties to actively recruit racially and ethnically diverse foster family homes in local communities through faith-based organizations. Bilingual recruiters visit churches where the congregation is predominantly monolingual (e.g., Latino and Southeast Asian) and introduce the idea of becoming a foster or adoptive family. Additionally, advertisements are placed in African-American church newsletters and forums.

Promotional Materials: “Adoptions in California” is a free informational video for prospective adoptive parents developed as part of an information services campaign. Through a series of on-camera interviews with administrators, adoption caseworkers and adoptive parents, this 24-minute video provides an overview of the adoption process in California. The video covers such topics as concurrent planning and home studies and answers some of the most frequently asked questions about adoptions.

Community-Based Foster and Adoptions Recruitment: The focus of the following programs is to enhance outreach to minority communities, to encourage greater diversity among potential foster and adoptive parents and to increase the likelihood that children remain in their local communities:

- The Institute for Black Parenting and the Black Adoption Placement and Research Center are community-based organizations that were “seeded” by the CDSS to develop outreach and service delivery models to increase placement opportunities for all children of color.
- The Latino Family Institute “Kinship Support Project” currently identifies and provides outreach to Latino relative caretakers to inform them of information workshops, support services, parenting classes and bilingual services that focus on the unique experiences of kinship adoptions.
- The Family to Family Initiative currently includes eight California counties (Los Angeles, Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo, Stanislaus, San Luis Obispo, Contra Costa and Santa Barbara) that have begun to implement the Family to Family Initiative, with funding and technical assistance from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and, in some counties, funding from the Stuart Foundation. Staff and providers at these sites receive enhanced training to encourage partnership between staff and foster parents, to promote placement of children in their local communities, to prevent placement moves and to train foster parents to mentor birth parents whenever possible.

Training Efforts:

Training is a critical component of retaining qualified, effective foster parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the State’s foster children. Moreover, it also contributes to recruitment efforts. Foster parents must be given a realistic picture of the children who may be placed with them and the problems they might face. Through training, foster parents can develop the skills necessary to handle difficult behavioral problems and to find resources that will help their foster children. Training efforts across the State are substantial, as evidenced by the following:

- State law requires foster parents to undergo a minimum of 12 hours of core training and eight hours of in-service training annually.
- Eighty-eight of the California Community Colleges currently provide training through the Foster and Kinship Care Education Training program.
- An interagency agreement exists between the CDSS and the Chancellor’s Office of the California Community Colleges to coordinate enhanced training seminars in 11 counties.
- Foster Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (Foster PRIDE), a program for pre-service training, assessment and selection of prospective

foster and adoptive families, is the core curriculum around which counties build their training.

- Specialized programs that provide therapeutic services and training include the Specialized Training for Adoptive Parents, Specialized Care Incentives and Assistance Program and the Options for Recovery Perinatal Program.

Post-placement Support Efforts:

Post-placement supervision and support of foster care placements is required by regulations and generally falls upon the child's caseworker to provide. However, additional support is available through several avenues:

Foster Parent Associations: The CDSS provides funds and technical assistance to California foster parent associations to conduct annual conferences.

Foster Family Agencies: As described in Item 1 of this Part, foster family agencies certify foster homes under their licenses for the purpose of providing homes for children who cannot adequately be served by county-licensed or State-licensed foster homes. As such, these agencies provide a higher level of post-placement support to their foster parents. While the type of support varies by agency, it often includes more frequent caseworker visits, transportation, training, etc.

Post-adoption Services: As significant increases in the annual number of foster child adoptions occurred, the Governor, the Legislature, and adoption stakeholders across the State recognized the need to support these new adoptive families. To that end, AB 2773, (Assembly Committee on Human Services), Chapter 1056, Statutes of 1998, enacted provisions that specify any federal Adoption Incentive funds received by the State are intended to be used for post-adoption services. Therefore, these funds were distributed to counties commensurate with the number of adoptions finalized in each county.

Collaborative Efforts:

County Regional Workshops: A series of county regional workshops was conducted throughout 2001 to strategize best practices to improve recruitment, training and retention of foster and adoptive homes. Participants representing various segments of the county child welfare programs were asked to examine the barriers they encounter, such as a perceived disparity between the foster family home and the foster family certified home payment rates, a lack of support resources, a need for more community outreach services and training needs and the need for improved communication between foster/adoptive families and the county staff. These issues are being compiled into a comprehensive report intended for statewide dissemination.

Statewide Foster Parent Survey: In 1999, a foster parent services evaluation (survey) was developed and conducted by random selection of foster family homes in 10 of California's largest counties. The foster families were asked to answer questions relative to licensing and placement, training, ancillary services and working relationship of the State, counties and foster parents. This data is currently being tabulated. The CDSS, county welfare directors, foster parent associations and community colleges will

use the results in their ongoing efforts to improve foster parent training curricula and recruitment activities. This information will also reveal how and where foster parents may access information and services that will benefit them and their charges.

Annual Reports: Counties are required, beginning State Fiscal Year 2001/02, to submit a year-end report outlining their recruitment, training and retention program data and accomplishments achieved during each fiscal year for all funding sources. This data will be compiled into a comprehensive report for statewide distribution that can be used by the State and counties in planning future activities. The community colleges, counties and foster parent associations will collaborate to complete the report.

DATA DISCUSSION:

The CDSS compiles information on the number of licensed facilities and their capacities. Capacity is stated in terms of the number of beds available in a licensed facility. Information is not compiled by ethnicity of the provider. According to the CDSS records, on December 15, 2001, California had 12,027 licensed foster family homes (FFHs) with a total capacity of 29,920 and 13,349 foster homes certified through foster family agencies (FFAs) (total capacity is not reported). Assuming a capacity of 2.5 children per certified home (same as FFH), FFA-certified homes yield an estimated capacity of 33,372 beds. Total capacity of these two types of facilities is 63,292. Foster care caseload data indicates that on July 1, 2001, 34% of children in care were placed in these facility types, leaving 27,478 beds available. Assuming that 34% of 43,000 children entering foster care in a year will be placed in these same facility types annually, then workers placing the 40 children coming into the system each day (34% of 43,000/365 days a year) appropriate for those placement types will have 27,478 beds available to choose from at any given time.

Placement Type	Children in Placement			% of All Placements	Capacity	% Filled	Available
	CWS	Probation	Total				
FFH	19,353	207	19,560	19%	29,920	65%	10,360
FFA	15,978	276	16,254	16%	33,372	49%	17,118
Total	35,331	483	35,814	34%	63,292	57%	27,478

Table 9: Foster Home Availability^{20 21 22}

While these figures generally indicate recruitment efforts are successful, the apparent availability of foster family homes is misleading. Foster family homes receive a license because they meet the standards established in law and regulations. However, the requirements for licensure do not evaluate the suitability or ability of applicants to effectively parent children or to provide an emotionally healthy environment for children. Rather, an applicant's suitability is considered when making a placement, and not when evaluating a candidate's home for licensure. Since no such placement criteria is

²⁰ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

²¹ On December 15, 2001, based on CDSS Licensed Children's Residential Facilities, www.cclid.ca.gov

²² FFA capacity per certified home is computed at the same rate as FFH capacity per licensed home: 2.5

established for foster family homes in law or regulations, inconsistencies exist between jurisdictions, across placement types and even among individual workers. It is this distinction between the requirements for licensure and any locally established placement criteria that results in many homes being licensed that are assessed as not suitable for placement. Thus, because homes are licensed but not suitable for placement, it appears that the State's foster care system has a greater capacity (i.e., number of available beds) than is, in fact, the case. A number of other factors impact this issue as well:

- California is geographically very large, e.g., homes available in Southern California are not accessible to Northern California counties and vice versa. Effective family reunification necessitates children be placed in a foster home that is accessible to the parents.
- Families sometimes do not want to care for the full number of children for which they are licensed.
- Foster family homes that receive a license may not be willing to care for the kind of children who are available for placement (e.g., children with behavior problems, sexual abuse history, prenatal substance exposure, etc.).
- Foster families choose to adopt a specific child who was placed with them for temporary care and, thus, are no longer available for additional children.
- FFAs, which have the highest level of availability, are intended to be used for those children who need a higher level of care and, therefore, are more costly. These homes are thus not appropriate for children without exceptional needs.
- As concurrent planning is implemented more fully, some families may not be willing to provide the permanency children need when they cannot return to their families.
- Many foster family homes are licensed to foster a specific child (i.e., known to them prior to licensure) and thus, do not choose to make themselves available to provide care for other foster children.

FINDINGS:

California's many and varied recruiting efforts appear to have borne fruit. However, significant challenges remain. Although California has a process in place for ensuring the recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the diversity of California's foster children, recruiting sufficient numbers of families that are able to meet the needs of the children coming into care requires continued efforts. Increased requirements for identification, search and assessment of relatives help meet this challenge and promote the best interests of children. Outreach to minority communities has created additional resources as well. Implementation of concurrent planning creates permanency for foster children. With concurrent planning comes some additional challenges: the increased need for foster parents who are willing to make a permanent commitment should reunification fail and the retention problem of foster parents leaving the system once they have adopted.

To continue to meet these challenges, the CDSS will begin county reviews in 2002 to determine where to concentrate its strategy to recruit, train and retain foster and adoptive families. The purpose of these reviews is to partner with counties in the development of an effective and sustained statewide strategy to identify and improve

delivery of services to children and families in the foster care and adoption communities. The desired outcome is to increase the pool of qualified foster and adoptive family homes into which counties may place a child with a “best match” home.

There is clearly more to be done in this area. The CDSS has developed a five-year Strategic Plan, currently under review. The scope of the plan includes: improved training, an improved marketing strategy, developing a stronger relationship between stakeholders and the State and developing a customer-service-oriented approach to increasing the number of available foster and adoptive family homes in California.

5. *Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State Plan requirement to recruit and use adoptive families for waiting children across State or jurisdictional boundaries. In responding, consider relevant agency policies, timeframes for initiating recruitment activities and specific methods.*

SUMMARY

- ***California has a process in place for effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive and guardianship placements.***
- ***In SFY 2000/01, cross-jurisdictional placements increased 48.5% over the previous fiscal year.***

SYSTEM OVERVIEW:

A goal of California’s recruitment efforts is to ensure use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive placement. Under California law (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 department 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.

California formed the Cross Jurisdictional Task Force to develop strategies to maintain compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act related to cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements. The Task Force developed checklists to assist adoption agencies in completing inter-jurisdictional placements. These checklists were distributed via an All County Information Notice to all licensed public and private adoption agencies. Agencies have also been encouraged to expand their searches for prospective adoptive parents beyond their jurisdictions.

Under Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16100(b), public adoption agencies have the ability to contract with out-of-state public or private adoption agencies to provide adoption services for children who cannot adequately be served by a California adoption agency. In California, a child’s Adoption Assistance Program benefit is based on the foster care payment of either the receiving county or state, if the child is placed outside

of the financially responsible California county. This regulation removes a potential barrier for cross-jurisdictional placements.

PRACTICE:

Efforts at increasing the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for adoptive placements include recruitment strategies such as the California Kids Connection Program website. Statewide, five programs meet monthly to share specific information regarding family and children. A support coordinator is responsible for assisting in matching waiting children with available families identified by the exchange. The website program offers both a secure and a public website. The public website is accessible to any Internet user. Visitors indicate their interest in specific children by sending an email to the placing agency identified for each child. Many public adoption agencies also maintain their own websites featuring children available within their county.

Also, California is in the process of planning a permanency summit to assess California's progress in promoting permanency and to plan strategies for the new challenges in our efforts to find permanency and stability for all California's waiting children. One workgroup will focus on cross-jurisdictional placements and will develop additional recommended action steps.

DATA DISCUSSION:

In State Fiscal Year 2000/01, a total of 2,146 cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements were made by public adoption agencies. This number represents 28% of the total adoptive placements made during this fiscal year. The number of cross-jurisdictional placements increased by 48.5% (1,628) over the previous fiscal year.

FINDINGS:

California has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive and guardianship placements. Although the number of cross-jurisdictional placements has continued to increase over the previous three years, California is committed to further streamlining the adoption process. By continuing to revise State law and regulations and commensurate system changes, the number of cross-jurisdictional placements will continue to increase.

SECTION III: Safety and Permanency Data

PREFACE:

This section contains two versions of the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile: one prepared by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the other prepared for the State by the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley (U.C. Berkeley). The Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) is the source of the data for both the federal and the State versions of the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile. This system is California's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and provides the data reported for both the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The timing of the implementation of CWS/CMS relative to California's Child and Family Services Review has a significant impact on the quality of the data available for the Statewide Assessment.

The CWS/CMS is a result of Senate Bill (SB) 370, Chapter 1294, Statutes of 1989. SB 370 required the development of a statewide computer system to automate the functions of county child welfare offices. The CWS/CMS system automates many of the tasks that county workers had to perform routinely and often manually. The CWS/CMS provides a centralized statewide system that allows State and county child welfare workers to share information on child abuse cases.

After the State's development effort was underway, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 was passed. Under the supporting regulations, additional federal financial participation was made available for the planning, design, development and installation of a SACWIS system that met specified goals. Statewide rollout of CWS/CMS began in January 1997. Initial application development was completed in August 1997. Rollout was completed statewide by June 30, 1998.

Because CWS/CMS is California's SACWIS system, it was developed, in part, to satisfy the requirement to capture the AFCARS data. Conversely, the NCANDS data that is the basis for the Safety Profile is collected and submitted voluntarily by states. In most recent years, California has made substantial progress in improving the completeness and accuracy of the data submitted for both AFCARS and NCANDS.

Due to concerns about the quality of the data used in the federal Data Profile based on original AFCARS and NCANDS data submissions, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) considered resubmitting this data as other states have done. However, due to the costs involved in resubmitting AFCARS and NCANDS data within the review timeframes, the CDSS declined to update its federal reports. As an alternative, at the request of the CDSS, the staff at U.C. Berkeley, under the direction of Barbara Needell, MSW, Ph.D., generated the safety and permanency data for the Data Profile, using the federal data definitions and data recently extracted from CWS/CMS. As a result, both the federal and the U.C. Berkeley versions of the data are presented.

The Child and Family Services Review requires that California's conformity be determined on the data provided by ACF. However, because the Data Profile generated by U.C. Berkeley is a more accurate reflection of the State's child welfare program, the U.C. Berkeley Data Profile is the basis of the answers for the questions in Section IV. This approach not only enables the State to conduct a more accurate analysis of

program trends, but also helps ensure that any eventual program improvement plan is based on the most accurate and current data available.

The U.C. Berkeley Data Profile is more accurate for a number of reasons:

- The data is “fresher.” Data used in the U.C. Berkeley Data Profile is drawn from CWS/CMS as of July 1, 2001. The federal version of the Data Profile uses data submitted to ACF during 1998, 1999, and 2000.
- The data is of better quality. Earlier submissions to AFCARS and NCANDS may contain errors that have since been corrected. Counties have continued to clean and improve the quality of their data, e.g., more thorough data entry and removal of duplicates, etc.
- The data extract used by U.C. Berkeley is reconfigured by them into a longitudinal file and then linked to historical data from the Foster Care Information System, the statewide predecessor to CWS/CMS. Data is unduplicated at the child level. In instances where duplicate records for the same timeframe exist, only one is retained.

Replicating the federal Data Profile enables California to have a more precise understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of the federal Data Profile provided for the Statewide Assessment. Additionally, it has allowed the data indicators for the National Standards to be broken out by individual counties and published on a public website: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/cfsrdata/>.

In preparing the data, U.C. Berkeley has followed federal instructions available on the National Resource Center for Information and Technology in Child Welfare website (Section D—Quick Reference Guide to the Data Elements): [http://www.nrcitcw.org/toolkit/Word%20Version/Data_Guide%20\(03-19-01\).doc](http://www.nrcitcw.org/toolkit/Word%20Version/Data_Guide%20(03-19-01).doc). When possible, U.C. Berkeley also followed the coding methodology currently used for submission of AFCARS and NCANDS data. After consultation with State and county staff, some specific adjustments and changes have been made.

The following provides additional information about key data elements:

Safety Profile:

With the exception of the data element for maltreatment in foster care, U.C. Berkeley has made no specific modifications to federal instructions in producing the Safety Data Profile. The U.C. Berkeley data is quite similar to what is derived by ACF from NCANDS.

Because CWS/CMS does not adequately collect data that meets the federal NCANDS definition for the data element for maltreatment in foster care, federal approval was granted for California to use an alternative data source. This alternative data is described in detail in Section IV, Part A, Item 7.

Point-in-Time Permanency Profile:

In the structure of the CWS/CMS database, a child in out-of-home care is in a placement “episode.” During an episode, a child may have numerous specific “placements.” Data errors may occur when a child is in an episode without a specific placement identified.

Children in Care on First and Last Day of Year:

This category *includes* children with an open-placement episode, including:

- Children in adoptive placement (for whom an adoptive placement agreement was signed).
- Children in a non-foster-care placement (e.g., medical facility).
- Children who left their last specific placement *within six months* due to a trial home visit, running away or other unknown reason.

This category excludes children placed with guardians and children placed as incoming Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) cases. Children were also excluded if they were in an episode and without a specific placement for more than six months.

The federal caseload estimates are considerably higher because prior AFCARS submissions did not exclude those children who were in an episode, but not identified as in a specific placement for more than six months. Also, prior AFCARS submissions included some duplicate records per child.

Admissions:

This category includes children who began a placement episode during the year. This category excludes children placed with guardians and children placed as incoming ICPC cases.

Discharges:

This category includes children who ended placement episodes during the year. Those children who were in an open episode, but not in a specific placement, were automatically discharged at six months.

Number of Placement Settings in Current Placement Episode:

At this time, all out-of-home placement changes are counted. These placement changes include:

- Instances in which the foster parents move or change residence with the child.
- Temporary changes, e.g., respite care for foster parents.

- Return to a placement after being in a different placement (e.g., returning to a foster home after being in a group home).

Recent clarification of the federal instructions requires that this method of counting placements be changed to reflect only those moves in which a child goes to a new caregiver within a placement episode. Therefore, any placement to which a child is returning does not count as an additional placement. Neither the federal version nor the U.C. Berkeley version of the Data Profile incorporates this change.

Number of Removal Episodes:

Episodes that are separated by two days or less are bridged based on the assumption that they are data-entry errors. The federal version of the Data Profile does not bridge such episodes.

Placement Type:

“Group Homes” include children placed in a group home of any size or in “Small Family Homes.”

“Institutions” include children placed in “Non-Foster Care” Placements (e.g., medical facilities or jail) and all placements entered as “County Shelter/Receiving Home.” It appears that “institutions” may also include some children placed in “emergency” or “shelter” foster family homes, depending on how individual cases are coded by workers. These definitions are consistent between the U.C. Berkeley and federal versions of the Data Profile.

California’s definitions for these categories are not currently consistent with those of other states. In the future, these definitions will likely change to be more consistent with other states’ and with the federal instructions that require the category of “Group Homes” to include placement in a facility having a capacity of from 7 to 12 children. The federal instructions also require that facilities having a capacity of more than 12 children be labeled “Institutions” and those with fewer than 7 children be labeled “Foster Family Homes,” even if the facility has multiple caregivers working in shifts.

National Standards:

Items VI and VII on the Safety Profile and Items IX, X, XI and XII on the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile correspond to the six Statewide Aggregate Data Indicators to which the National Standards are applied.

First-Time Entry Cohort Group:

This section of the Data Profile follows children who enter care for the first time during the first six months of the fiscal year. Unlike the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile, no editing has been attempted in this section regarding children in open episodes but not open placements. However, episodes that are separated by two days or less are

bridged based on the assumption that they are data-entry errors. Children are considered discharged if they have an episode that ended at some point during the fiscal year. "Most Recent Placement Type" refers to the last known placement of the child during the fiscal year, regardless of how long the child was in care or whether the child was discharged and re-entered, as per federal instructions. Similarly, "Number of Placements in Current Episode" does not take into account whether children were discharged during the year.

Other data quality issues continue to exist with both the federal and U.C. Berkeley versions of the Data Profile. These problems will be addressed in the review process itself. They will require future changes at both the data-entry and data-processing levels. Due to time and cost constraints associated with making changes to AFCARS and NCANDS, the modifications necessary to improve the federal version of the data cannot be made in time for this review.

For such reasons, data entered or converted in the early stages of the system's implementation is not as complete as that entered later. The data quality has improved as staff adjust to and become more familiar with the system, errors and inconsistencies are detected and addressed, ongoing and specialized training is provided, etc. Because of the State's progress in data reporting, newer data is more accurate than older data. Therefore, it is unwise to place much emphasis on some of the trends over the past three years that the data suggests. Although observed differences may, in fact, reflect true trends, these differences may also be simply an artifact of improved data quality. California believes that data extracted as of July 1, 2001, is more reflective of the current program status than older data. For this reason, any analysis of the data will be based on the U.C. Berkeley version of the Data Profile using data from the most recent time period (Calendar and/or Fiscal Year 2000).

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 Provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

I. CHILD SAFETY PROFILE <i>California</i>	Calendar Year 1998 ^A						Calendar Year 1999						Calendar Year 2000					
	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn.	%	Unique Childn. ²	%
I. Total CA/N Reports Disposed ¹	115,042		413,372				227,561		452,887		357,807		243,312		486,127		381,560	
II. Disposition of CA/N Reports ³																		
Substantiated & Indicated	32,901	28.6	157,683	38.1			73,188	32.2	130,510	28.8	113,877	31.8	72,844	29.9	129,678	26.7	113,406	29.7
Unsubstantiated	65,260	56.7					89,795	39.5	196,517	43.4	152,020	42.5	170,468	70.1	356,449	73.3	268,154	70.3
Other	16,881	14.7	255,689	61.9			64,578	28.4	125,860	27.8	91,910	25.7						
III. Child Cases Opened for Services ⁴			52,742						69,616	53.3	62,433	54.8			69,130	53.3	62,170	54.8
IV. Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Report ⁵			25,339						42,670	32.7	37,361	32.8			41,778	32.2	36,409	32.1
V. Child Fatalities ⁶					26	0.0					33	0.0					30	0.0
STATEWIDE AGGREGATE DATA USED TO DETERMINE SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY																		
VI. Recurrence of Maltreatment ^{7A} [Standard: 6.1% or less]											6,750 of 60,893	11.1					6,494 of 60,886	10.7
VII. Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care ^{8 B} (for Jan-Sept) [Standard: 0.57% or less]					401 of 52,972	.76					512 of 50,632	1.01					472 of 44,556	1.06

FOOTNOTES TO DATA ELEMENTS IN CHILD SAFETY PROFILE

Each maltreatment allegation reported to NCANDS is associated with a disposition or finding that is used to derive the counts provided in this safety profile. The safety profile uses three categories. The various terms that are used in NCANDS reporting have been collapsed into these three groups.

Disposition Category	Safety Profile Disposition	NCANDS Disposition Codes Included
A	Substantiated or Indicated (Maltreatment Victim)	"Substantiated," "Indicated," and "Alternative Response Disposition Victim"
B	Unsubstantiated	"Unsubstantiated," "Unsubstantiated, Other Than Intentionally False Reporting" and "Unsubstantiated Due to Intentionally False Reporting"
C	Other	"Closed—No Finding," "Alternative Response Disposition—Not a Victim," "Other," and "Unknown or Missing"

Alternative Response was added starting with the 2000 data year. The two categories of Unsubstantiated were added starting with the 2000 data year. In earlier years, there was only the category of Unsubstantiated

1. The data element, "Total CA/N Reports Disposed," is based on the reports received in the State that received a disposition in the reporting period under review. The number shown may include reports received during a previous year that received a disposition in the reporting year. Counts based on "reports," "duplicated counts of children," and "unique counts of children" are provided.
2. The duplicated count of children (report-child pairs) counts a child each time that (s)he was reported. The unique count of children counts a child only once during the reporting period, regardless of how many times the child was reported.
3. For the column labeled "Reports," the data element, "Disposition of CA/N Reports," is based on the highest disposition of any child who was the subject of an investigation in a particular report. For example, if a report investigated two children, and one child is found to be neglected and the other child found not to be maltreated, the report disposition will be substantiated (Group A). The disposition for each child is based on the specific finding related to the maltreatment(s). In other words, of the two children above, one is a victim and is counted under "substantiated" (Group A) and the other is not a victim and is counted under "unsubstantiated" (Group B). In determining the unique counts of children, the highest finding is given priority. If a child is found to be a victim in one report (Group A), but not a victim in a second report (Group B), the unique count of children includes the child only as a victim (Group A). The category of "other" (Group C) includes children whose report may have been "closed without a finding," children for whom the allegation disposition is "unknown," and other dispositions that a State is unable to code as substantiated, indicated, alternative response victim, or unsubstantiated.

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4. The data element, "Child Cases Opened for Services," is based on the number of victims (Group A) during the reporting period under review. "Opened for Services" refers to post-investigative services. The duplicated number counts each time a victim's report is linked to ongoing services; the unique number counts a victim only once regardless of the number of times services are linked to reports of substantiated maltreatment.
5. The data element, "Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Report," is based on the number of victims (Group A) during the reporting period under review. The duplicated number counts each time a victim's report is linked to a foster care removal date. The unique number counts a victim only once, regardless of the number of removals that may be reported.
6. The data element "Child Fatalities" counts the number of children reported to NCANDS as having died as a result of child abuse and/or neglect. Depending upon State practice, this number may count only those children for whom a case record has been opened either prior to or after the death, or may include a number of children whose deaths have been investigated as possibly related to child maltreatment. For example, some states include neglected-related deaths such as those caused by motor vehicle or boating accidents, house fires or access to firearms, under certain circumstances. The percentage is based on a count of unique victims of maltreatment for the reporting period.
7. The data element, "Recurrence of Maltreatment," is defined as follows: Of all children associated with a "substantiated" or "indicated" finding of maltreatment during the first six months of the reporting period, what percentage had another "substantiated" or "indicated" finding of maltreatment within a six-month period. The number of victims during the first six-month period and the number of these victims who were recurrent victims within six months are provided. This data element is used to determine, in part, the State's substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #1.
8. The data element, "Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care," is defined as follows: Of all children who were served in foster care during the reporting period, what percentage were found to be victims of "substantiated" or "indicated" maltreatment. A child is counted as having been maltreated in foster care if the perpetrator of the maltreatment was identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff. Counts of children maltreated in foster care are derived from NCANDS, while counts of children placed in foster care are derived from AFCARS. The observation period for these measures is January–September because this is the reporting period jointly addressed by both NCANDS and AFCARS. For both measures, the number of children found to be maltreated in foster care and the percentage of all children in foster care are provided. This data element is used to determine, in part, the State's substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #2.

ADDITIONAL FOOTNOTES

- A. 1998 data source: SDC.
- B. CA reporting on perpetrator relationship is incomplete. Therefore, California collected their data in the following way: The count for the numerator was based on children in non-relative foster homes and foster family agency homes who had referrals that resulted in substantiated allegations of abuse or neglect during the nine-month period from January 1–September 30. Instances where the child was listed as the victim and the foster parent was listed as the perpetrator were used as the numerator. They also included cases in which the foster parent was listed as the victim and the child was listed as the perpetrator because they feel that this is a common data entry error. This count was divided by the population of children served in non-relative foster homes and family agency homes for the same time period. Due to limitations in the way they currently keep data, this group is narrower than the Federal definition because it excludes children in institutions and children placed with relatives. The State believes that the rate they derived would apply to a little less than 40% of their out-of-home care population. The Children's Bureau's safety data expert recommended approval of this approach, and the Regional Office concurred. Part of the agreement is that, to be consistent, California will use the same approach when they are collecting data for their program improvement plan. In addition, California is agreeing to fix their system so that future reporting can be complete.

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Updated February 28, 2002
 Provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

II. POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE <i>California</i>	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
I. Foster Care Population Flow						
Children in foster care on first day of year	109,819		113,506		117,234	
Admissions during year	52,997		43,587		45,685	
Discharges during year	50,049		39,156		50,112	
Children in care on last day of year	112,767		117,937		112,807	
Net change during year	+2,948		+4,431		-4,427	
II. Placement Types for Children in Care						
Pre-Adoptive Homes	293	0.3	1,738	1.5	3,617	3.2
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	50,876	45.1	49,305	41.8	42,293	37.5
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	42,558	37.7	41,484	35.2	39,357	34.9
Group Homes	10,818	9.6	14,930	12.7	15,635	13.9
Institutions	2,859	2.5	4,962	4.2	2,227	2.0
Supervised Independent Living	0	0	0	0	0	0
Runaway	858	0.8	2,124	1.8	3,362	3.0
Trial Home Visit	3,079	2.7	2,625	2.2	5,256	4.7
Missing Placement Information	0	0	4	0.0	202	0.2
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent year)	1,426	1.3	765	0.6	858	0.8
III. Permanency Goals for Children in Care						
Reunification	16,152	14.3	28,397	24.1	33,918	30.1
Live with Other Relatives	3,948	3.5	8,304	7.0	9,188	8.1
Adoption	2,945	2.6	4,167	3.5	4,483	4.0
Long-Term Foster Care	4,450	3.9	7,988	6.8	8,647	7.7
Emancipation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guardianship	2,567	2.3	5,431	4.6	5,012	4.4
Case Plan Goal Not Established	82,609	73.3	63,650	54.0	51,559	45.7
Missing Goal Information	96	0.1	0	0	0	0

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Updated February 28, 2002
 Provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

II. POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE (continued) <i>California</i>	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Placement						
One	47,260	41.9	39,466	33.5	35,452	31.4
Two	31,064	27.5	31,464	26.7	29,139	25.8
Three	15,734	14.0	19,372	16.4	18,519	16.4
Four	8,020	7.1	10,677	9.1	10,831	9.6
Five	4,167	3.7	6,179	5.2	6,441	5.7
Six or more	6,498	5.8	10,772	9.1	12,391	11.0
Missing placement settings	24	0.0	7	0.0	34	0.0
V. Number of Removal Episodes						
One	84,832	75.2	88,830	75.3	84,640	75.0
Two	18,543	16.4	19,638	16.7	19,353	17.2
Three	5,396	4.8	5,655	4.8	5,474	4.9
Four	2,123	1.9	2,087	1.8	1,855	1.6
Five	898	0.8	881	0.7	791	0.7
Six or more	898	0.8	831	0.7	692	0.6
Missing removal episodes	77	0.1	15	0.0	2	0.0
VI. Number of children in care 17 of the most recent 22 months² (percent based on cases with sufficient information for computation)	32,296	55.5	37,747	60.7	36,866	59.9
	Number of Months		Number of Months		Number of Months	
VII. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care (of children in care on last day of FY)	21.6		25.2		26.6	

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Updated February 28, 2002
 Provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

II. POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE (continued) <i>California</i>	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge
VIII. Length of Time to Achieve Perm. Goal						
Reunification/Relative Placement	23,170	10.0	26,208	9.4	30,355	9.6
Adoption	3,100	30.6	4,812	31.1	7,679	36.7
Guardianship	1,315	20.9	1,264	20.8	3,545	36.6
Other	4,407	26.5	5,934	27.7	7,124	32.9
Missing Discharge Reason	17,234	11.0	379	2.0	738	7.9
Missing Date of Latest Removal or Date Error ³	823	NA	559	NA	671	NA
Statewide Aggregate Data Used in Determining Substantial Conformity	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IX. Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal for home? (4.1) [Standard: 76.2% or more]	12,908	54.9	14,431	54.0	16,441	53.2
X. Of all children who exited care to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home? (5.1) [Standard: 32.0% or more]	1,121	36.1	1,518	31.5	1,388	18.0
XI. Of all children served who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home, what percentage have had no more than two placement settings? (6.1) [Standard: 86.7% or more]	50,426	84.7	36,452	76.9	38,678	77.8
XII. Of all children who entered care during the year, what percentage re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode? (4.2) [Standard: 8.6% or less]	7,342	13.9 (78% new entry)	4,432	10.2 (81% new entry)	4,877	10.7 (80% new entry)

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Updated February 28, 2002
 Provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

III. PERMANENCY PROFILE FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP <i>California</i>	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
I. Number of children entering care for the first time in cohort group (% = 1 st time entry of all entering within first 6 months)	22,677	76.9	17,285	80.9	18,559	80.9
II. Most Recent Placement Types						
Pre-Adoptive Homes	31	0.1	74	0.4	92	0.5
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	7,439	32.8	5,225	30.2	5,404	29.1
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	8,222	36.3	6,059	35.1	6,614	35.6
Group Homes	2,900	12.8	2,179	12.6	2,324	12.5
Institutions	2,337	10.3	2,471	14.3	1,886	10.2
Supervised Independent Living	0	0	0	0	0	0
Runaway	471	2.1	405	2.3	481	2.6
Trial Home Visit	1,018	4.5	766	4.4	1,653	8.9
Missing Placement Information	0	0	2	0.0	10	0.1
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent yr.)	259	1.1	104	0.6	95	0.5
III. Most Recent Permanency Goal						
Reunification	6,357	28.0	6,493	37.6	6,814	36.7
Live with Other Relatives	125	0.6	130	0.8	127	0.7
Adoption	333	1.5	278	1.6	330	1.8
Long-Term Foster Care	191	0.8	96	0.6	132	0.7
Emancipation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guardianship	196	0.9	143	0.8	100	0.5
Case Plan Goal Not Established	15,475	68.2	10,145	58.7	11,056	59.6
Missing Goal Information	0	0	0	0	0	0

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, Updated February 28, 2002
 Provided by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

III. PERMANENCY PROFILE FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP (Continued) California	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode						
One	12,548	55.3	8,249	47.7	9,212	49.6
Two	6,191	27.3	4,759	27.5	5,029	27.1
Three	2,437	10.7	2,478	14.3	2,367	12.8
Four	934	4.1	949	5.5	1,061	5.7
Five	314	1.4	478	2.8	493	2.7
Six or more	249	1.1	370	2.1	395	2.1
Missing placement settings	4	0.0	2	0.0	2	0.0
V. Reason for Discharge						
Reunification/Relative Placement	6,286	68.4	5,691	91.5	6,708	90.7
Adoption	52	0.6	31	0.5	39	0.5
Guardianship	121	1.3	60	1.0	72	1.0
Other	364	4.0	315	5.1	415	5.6
Unknown (missing discharge reason or N/A)	2,373	25.8	124	2.0	160	2.2
	Number of Months		Number of Months		Number of Months	
VI. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care	15.8 ⁴		16.1 ⁵		Not Yet Reached ⁶	

FOOTNOTES TO DATA ELEMENTS IN THE PERMANENCY PROFILE

¹The FY98, FY99, and FY 00 counts of children in care at the start of the year exclude 2,148, 1,070, and 1,166 children, respectively. They were excluded to avoid counting them twice. That is, although they were actually in care on the first day, they also qualify as new entries because they left and re-entered again at some point during the same reporting period. To avoid counting them as both "in care on the first day" and "entries," the Children's Bureau selects only the most recent record. That means they get counted as "entries," not "in care on the first day."

²We designated the indicator, *17 of the most recent 22 months*, rather than the statutory time frame for initiating termination of parental rights proceedings at *15 of the most 22 months*, since the AFCARS system cannot determine the *date the child is considered to have entered foster care* as defined in the regulations. We used the outside date for determining the *date the child is considered to have entered foster care*, which is 60 days from the actual removal date.

³Dates necessary for calculation of length of time in care in these records are chronologically incorrect. N/A = Not Applicable

⁴ This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay was 15.8 months in FY98. This includes 289 children who entered and exited on the same day (who had a zero length of stay). If these children were excluded, the median length of stay would have been 16.1 months.

⁵ This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay was 16.1 months for FY99. This includes 224 children who entered and exited on the same day (who had a zero length of stay). If these children were excluded, the median length of stay would be 16.4 months.

⁶ This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay is "not yet reached" for FY00. This means that the median length of stay was not able to be calculated because fewer than half of the entry cohort has left care. This included 239 children who entered and exited on the same day (they had a zero length of stay). If these children were excluded, the median length of stay would still be "not yet reached."

Safety Data Profile--Compiled by Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley

	Calendar Year 1998						Calendar Year 1999						Calendar Year 2000					
I. Child Safety Profile	Reports	%	Duplic. Chn.	%	Uniq. Chn.	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Chn.	%	Uniq. Chn.	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Chn.	%	Uniq. Chn.	%
I. Total CA/N Reports Disposed	233,685		451,681		353,192		231,010		458,593		359,611		247,912		493,835		385,286	
II. Disposition of CA/N Reports																		
Substantiated and Indicated	73,694	31.5%	128,183	28.4%	110,831	31.4%	74,213	32.1%	132,148	28.8%	114,654	31.9%	74,015	29.9%	131,450	26.6%	114,409	29.7%
Unsubstantiated	156,010	66.8%	314,033	69.5%	235,843	66.8%	156,797	67.9%	326,445	71.2%	244,957	68.1%	173,897	70.1%	362,385	73.4%	270,877	70.3%
Other	3,981	1.7%	9,465	2.1%	6,518	1.8%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%
(Closed without Finding)																		
III. Child Cases Opened for Services					57,562	51.9%					62,734	54.7%					61,663	53.9%
IV. Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Report					34,649	31.3%					34,248	29.9%					33,376	29.2%
V. Child Fatalities					22	0.0%					21	0.0%					25	0.0%
STATEWIDE AGGREGATE DATA USED TO DETERMINE SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY																		
VI. Recurrence of maltreatment--(6.1%) Of all children who were victims of child abuse and/or neglect during the first six months of the review period, what percent had another report within six months.					6,730 of 57,215	11.8%					6,897 of 60,908	11.3%					6,640 of 60,915	10.9%
VII. Abuse in foster care (0.57%) Of all children in foster care in the State, the percentage of children who were subject of maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff					401 of 52,972	0.76%					512 of 50,632	1.01%					472 of 44,556	1.06%

Note: Abuse in foster care is calculated only for children in non-relative foster or foster family agency homes.

Permanency Data Profile--Compiled by Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley

II. POINT IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children
I. Foster Care Population Flow						
First day of the year	103,729		108,407		107,619	
Admissions during year	51,063		44,308		43,746	
Discharges during year	45,752		46,068		54,348	
Children in care on last day of year	108,417		107,661		97,876	
Net change during year (% - net change / served)	4,688	3.0	-746	-0.5	-9,743	-6.4
II. Placement Types for Children in Care						
Pre-adoptive Homes	1,587	1.5	3,096	2.9	3,536	3.6
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	47,997	44.3	46,483	43.2	39,527	40.4
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	39,919	36.8	38,438	35.7	35,766	36.5
Group Homes	11,375	10.5	11,548	10.7	11,520	11.8
Institutions	2,382	2.2	4,180	3.9	1,611	1.7
Supervised Independent Living	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Runaway	454	0.4	615	0.6	875	0.9
Trial Home Visit	2,210	2.0	1,252	1.2	2,586	2.6
Other	2,128	2.0	1,572	1.5	1,913	2.0
Missing Placement Information	365	0.3	477	0.4	542	0.6
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent year)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
III. Permanency Goals for Children in Care						
Reunification	20,027	18.5	26,527	24.6	27,490	28.1
Living with other relatives	3,900	3.6	8,433	7.8	9,472	9.7
Adoption	3,226	3.0	5,300	4.9	6,629	6.8
Long-term foster care	4,334	4.0	8,397	7.8	9,647	9.9
Emancipation	36	0.0	44	0.0	33	0.0
Guardianship	2,287	2.1	5,593	5.2	5,558	5.7
Case plan goal not established	2,028	1.9	4,263	4.0	5,202	5.3
Missing goal information	72,579	66.9	49,104	45.6	33,845	34.6

Permanency Data Profile--Compiled by Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley

II. POINT IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE (Continued)	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode						
One	37,404	34.5	33,818	31.4	28,822	29.5
Two	32,664	30.1	31,370	29.1	27,526	28.1
Three	16,524	15.2	17,346	16.1	15,575	15.9
Four	8,785	8.1	9,729	9.0	9,486	9.7
Five	4,862	4.5	5,580	5.2	5,516	5.6
Six or more	8,178	7.5	9,818	9.1	10,951	11.2
Missing placement settings	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
V. Number of Removal Episodes						
One	83,423	77.0	83,539	77.6	75,422	77.1
Two	18,901	17.4	18,464	17.2	17,313	17.7
Three	4,374	4.0	4,277	4.0	3,988	4.1
Four	1,133	1.1	972	0.9	877	0.9
Five	337	0.3	251	0.2	188	0.2
Six or more	249	0.2	158	0.2	88	0.1
Missing removal episodes	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
VI. Number of children in care 17 of the most recent 22 months (Percent is based on cases with required computation information)	33,829	69.0	34,996	71.0	31,885	65.0
VII. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care (of children in care on last day of FY)	Number of Months		Number of Months		Number of Months	
	23		26		27	
VIII. Length of Time to Achieve Perm. Goal	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge
Reunification / Relative placement	28,987	7	28,024	9	29,862	9
Adoption	3,433	36	5,035	33	7,000	38
Guardianship	1,372	21	1,293	21	4,625	41
Other	6,513	22	6,826	28	7,207	35
Missing discharge reason	4,410	12	4,179	14	4,976	16
Missing date of latest removal or date error	1,037	0	711	0	714	0

Permanency Data Profile--Compiled by Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley

Statewide Aggregate Data Used in Determining Substantial Conformity

II. POINT IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE (Continued)	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children
IX. Reunification-- (76.2%) Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from the home?						
	17,673	61.0	15,309	54.6	16,028	53.7
X. Adoption-- (32.0%) Of all children who exited care in a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from the home?						
	807	23.5	1,298	25.8	1,149	16.4
XI. Placement Stability-- (86.7%) Of all children served who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home, what percentage have had no more than two placement settings?						
	45,605	80.6	38,815	80.0	39,579	82.9
XII. Foster Care Re-entry-- (8.6%) Of all children who entered care during the year, what percentage re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode?						
	5,801	11.4	3,780	8.5	4,056	9.3

Permanency Data Profile--Compiled by Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley						
III. FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children
I. Number of children entering care for the first time in the cohort group (%=1st time entry of all entering within first 6 months)	21,535	78.3	17,813	80.5	18,065	80.4
II. Most Recent Placement Type						
Pre-adoptive Homes	57	0.3	47	0.3	40	0.2
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	6,726	31.2	5,189	29.1	5,291	29.3
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	7,488	34.8	6,357	35.7	6,718	37.2
Group Homes	2,687	12.5	2,081	11.7	2,050	11.4
Institutions	1,905	8.9	2,062	11.6	1,449	8.0
Supervised Independent Living	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Runaway	120	0.6	257	1.4	320	1.8
Trial Home Visit	380	1.8	277	1.6	709	3.9
Other	1,174	5.5	689	3.9	841	4.7
Missing Placement Information	998	4.6	854	4.8	647	3.6
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent year)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
III. Most Recent Permanency Goal						
Reunification	7,658	35.6	7,433	41.7	7,236	40.1
Living with other relatives	129	0.6	129	0.7	124	0.7
Adoption	373	1.7	397	2.2	459	2.5
Long-term foster care	156	0.7	129	0.7	131	0.7
Emancipation	4	0.0	10	0.1	3	0.0
Guardianship	180	0.8	135	0.8	155	0.9
Case plan goal not established	1,696	7.9	2,284	12.8	2,773	15.4
Missing goal information	11,312	52.6	7,296	41.0	7,184	39.8

Permanency Data Profile--Compiled by Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley

III. FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP (Continued)	Federal FY 1998		Federal FY 1999		Federal FY 2000	
	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children	# of children	% of children
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode						
One	12,787	59.4	9,772	54.9	10,154	56.2
Two	5,538	25.7	4,849	27.2	4,801	26.6
Three	2,079	9.7	2,049	11.5	1,872	10.4
Four	760	3.5	695	3.9	743	4.1
Five	220	1.0	303	1.7	315	1.7
Six or more	151	0.7	145	0.8	180	1.0
Missing placement settings	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
V. Reason for Discharge						
Reunification / Relative placement	6,836	79.1	6,009	85.7	6,529	88.2
Adoption	50	0.6	42	0.6	33	0.5
Guardianship	120	1.4	58	0.8	66	0.9
Other	574	6.6	398	5.7	397	5.4
Unknown (missing discharge reason)	1,063	12.3	507	7.2	377	5.1
VI. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care	15		14		-	

SECTION IV: Narrative Assessment of Child and Family Outcomes

OUTCOMES:

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

- 1. Trends in Safety Data. Have there been notable changes in the individual data elements in the Safety Profile in Section III over the past three years in the State? Identify and discuss factors that have affected the changes noted and the effects on the safety of children in the State.**

SUMMARY

- *The number of substantiated reports of child maltreatment has remained constant in spite of increased reporting.*
- *The rate of children entering foster care as a result of maltreatment has decreased slightly over the three years of the review data.*

Any trends identified in the federal Statewide Aggregate Data Profile for 1998 through 2000 must be viewed cautiously due to considerations about data quality resulting from conversion to the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). These considerations are outlined in the preface to the Data Profile. Given those considerations, the Safety Data Profile demonstrates relative stability in the individual safety data elements, particularly between 1999 and 2000, where the data is more reliable than for 1998. The following items may be of significance:

- The number of reports disposed for unique children increased 7% between 1999 and 2000, yet the number of substantiated reports remained relatively constant. This increase may be due to legislation impacting categories of individuals mandated to report child abuse and neglect and increased efforts to train these individuals.
- The rate of children entering care based on child abuse and neglect reports has decreased slightly over the three years.

These trends are discussed in more depth under the individual data elements in Items 2 through 8 of this Section.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Child safety, permanency and well-being are California's primary child welfare priorities. California's goal is to ensure that every child has a safe, stable permanent home as quickly as possible. As such, policies are articulated in the Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Division 31, that set forth regulations for the handling of all suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect, from the emergency

response stage to the closure of a case via family reunification or other permanency options. Each county child welfare agency is required to:

- Respond to all referrals for service that allege that a child is endangered by abuse, neglect or exploitation (MPP 31-101).
- Make every effort to establish an effective system of preplacement preventive services for children through liaison with the courts and with probation, law enforcement and other public and private agencies (MPP 31-005.1.11).
- Recruit competent placement providers and facilities (MPP 31-005.1.12).
- Ensure that caseworkers visit children placed in out-of-home care and monitor the safety of the child (MPP 31-320).

DATA DISCUSSION:

A significant difference exists between the Safety Profiles generated by U.C. Berkeley and by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families in the number of unsubstantiated reports. This difference is principally due to a change in the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) reporting effective for calendar year 2000. The federally generated Data Profile shows 15% of reports in 1998 and 28% of reports in 1999 were categorized as “closed without finding.” In 2000, these cases were more accurately reported as “unsubstantiated.” The U.C. Berkeley-generated Data Profile incorporates this change into all three years. This change more accurately reflects California’s practice and is more consistent with data reported by other states.

Because the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has concerns about the quality of the data used in the federal Data Profile, the most recent time period (2000 calendar and/or fiscal year) has been used for most of the assessment of safety outcomes. While differences in data over the three years may reflect actual trends, they may also be the result of improvement in the accuracy of the data. Thus, the CDSS believes limited emphasis should be placed on some of the trends the data suggests over the past three years. Efforts are underway to resolve these issues so that future data is more reliable.

- 2. Child Maltreatment (Safety Data Elements I & II). *Examine the data on reports of child maltreatment disposed during the year by disposition of the reports. Identify and discuss issues affecting the rate of substantiated vs. unsubstantiated reports and factors that influence decision-making regarding the disposition of incoming reports.***

SUMMARY

- ***The number of substantiated reports of child maltreatment has remained constant in spite of increased reporting. This is most likely the result of increased mandated reporter training.***

- ***Data from county compliance reviews indicates significant improvement in the caseworkers' timeliness in making an initial contact following a report of alleged child maltreatment.***

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Reports of suspected child abuse or neglect in California are received and evaluated by staff of county child welfare agencies. Counties use an Emergency Response (ER) protocol established by the MPP Division 31 regulations that outline the procedures for taking and investigating suspected child abuse reports. Specific timeframes for investigation are assigned to each referral, depending on the apparent level of immediate risk to the child's safety. If it is determined that there is imminent danger to a child, an immediate, in-person response is required. If an in-person investigation is necessary, but not immediately required, it must be made within 10 calendar days. Reports are investigated and disposed into one of three categories:

- "Unfounded" means a report that is determined by a child protective agency investigator to be false, to be inherently improbable, to involve an accidental injury, or to not constitute child abuse or neglect.
- "Substantiated" means a report that is determined by a child protective agency investigator, based upon some credible evidence, to constitute child abuse or neglect.
- "Inconclusive" means a report that upon investigation is determined by a child protective agency investigator not to be *unfounded*, but that the investigation provided insufficient evidence to determine whether child abuse or neglect has occurred. This category includes cases in which there are persisting suspicions but not enough credible evidence to warrant a substantiated determination.

These categories are specified in California Penal Code Section 11165.12. For purposes of this NCANDS reporting and the Safety Data Profile, inconclusive and unfounded reports were categorized into a broader definition of "unsubstantiated."

DATA DISCUSSION:

Table 10 shows the data regarding the total number of child abuse and/or neglect reports disposed of in Calendar Years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Year	Total Reports Disposed	% Substantiated	Number Substantiated	% Unsubstantiated	Closed Without Findings
1998	353,192	31.4%	110,831	66.8%	1.8
1999	359,611	31.9%	114,654	68.1%	0.0
2000	385,286	29.7%	114,409	70.3%	0.0

Table 10: Child Safety Data Profile: Child Abuse and/or Neglect Reports

From 1999 to 2000, the number of reports disposed increased by 25,675, but the number of those reports that were substantiated abuse remained about the same. This fact may be associated with the heightened awareness created by increased efforts in 1999 to train mandated reporters. (This training also occurred in 2000 and 2001.) Specifically, grants were provided to approximately 20 child abuse prevention councils across the State for the purpose of training mandated reporters. This data suggests that the heightened awareness resulting from training may increase reporting.

The incidence of child maltreatment per 1,000 children in the general population is about the same in California (12.0)²³ as it is nationally (11.8).²⁴ This fact, combined with the relatively stable number of substantiated reports, suggest that child maltreatment is reported in California at a rate close to the rate at which it occurs.

California's response to reported maltreatment appears to be improving. County compliance review data for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2001/02 indicates that 90% of the 10 counties that have completed the review process as of June 2002 were in compliance with respect to the timeliness in making initial contacts following a report of child maltreatment. This is a significant improvement over SFY 1994/95, when this same figure was 53%. Please refer to Section II, Part C, Item 1 for additional information.

FINDINGS:

The data seems to indicate that although the number of reports received increased in 2000, the actual number of substantiated reports did not. This fact, in conjunction with the increased training of mandated reporters, suggests that the rate of child abuse has remained constant in the face of increased reporting. It is, therefore, anticipated that this trend may continue in the future, particularly since new categories of mandated reporters, including Court Appointed Special Advocates, have been added, effective 2001. As these new mandated reporters are trained, reporting of ultimately unsubstantiated or inconclusive referrals may continue to increase as newly trained reporters err on the side of caution in reporting child maltreatment.

Overall, the data indicates that the system designed to initially respond to child maltreatment appears to be functioning as intended: mandated reporters are reporting maltreatment and child welfare agencies are responding in a timely way.

²³ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/referrals>

²⁴ Highlight of findings from *Child Maltreatment 1999*, Safety Permanency and Well-Being Child Welfare Outcomes 1999: Annual Report, Appendix B, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- 3. *Cases Opened for Services (Safety Data Element III). Compare the cases opened for services following a report of maltreatment to the rates of substantiated reports received. Discuss the issues affecting opening cases following reports of maltreatment and reasons cases are or are not opened.***

SUMMARY

- ***More services are provided than is indicated by the data because the recording methodology needs to be improved.***
- ***Additional services are needed to stabilize at-risk families, particularly those services that:***
 - ***Improve overall family functioning and stability.***
 - ***Engage family strengths.***

For several reasons, there is some concern about the accuracy of data reported for Safety Data Element III. The methods by which child welfare agencies respond to and investigate reports of child maltreatment in *practice* is distinct from how that practice is captured or recorded in CWS/CMS. This discrepancy led to some inconsistencies in recording case information, particularly early in the system's implementation. Some caseworkers would record the services provided as discrete elements in one section of the application, while others would document the services in the text of the case narrative. Those services documented in the narrative have not been identified for reporting purposes.

Additionally, continuing to provide services after the initial investigation does not necessarily mean a case is opened on CWS/CMS or that a case plan is developed. Furthermore, during a recent review of the NCANDS mapping for the new format, existing mapping discrepancies were discovered that indicated California has been under-reporting in this area. Thus, this data element under-represents the number of cases that receive follow-up services. Changes are currently being made in the mapping and reporting process to increase the future accuracy of this element.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Each year, county social workers investigate nearly half a million reports of child abuse or neglect statewide. About one-third of the reports are substantiated, and approximately half of these substantiated reports are opened for services. The rest of these reports are immediately screened out as inappropriate referrals, closed following an in-person investigation or closed after providing short-term services and referrals.

The level of immediate risk to a child's safety is the key issue in a worker's decision whether to open a case for ongoing services. In California, regulations require that if a worker investigates a report and determines that child welfare services are necessary, a case plan must be completed and initiated within 30 calendar days of either the in-person investigation or the initial removal of the child, or before a Dispositional hearing.

Within these 30 days, services may be provided to the family without establishing a case plan for ongoing services. Such short-term services may include child care, parenting skills training, food and clothing, emergency shelter, housing assistance, substance abuse or mental health services or referral to other community resources that may mitigate the factors that caused the report. Other cases may be closed at investigation for reasons such as the parent refusing services or appropriate referrals to community resources being made and no other follow up being warranted.

In addition to child safety, other factors may affect whether cases are opened for services. If other community resources are available to support and strengthen families, ongoing services from the child welfare agency may be unnecessary. However, the availability of such resources varies from county to county. Other factors impact when cases are opened for ongoing services as well, such as individual county policies, community and media attention, judicial practices, availability of qualified, trained social workers and agency staff turnover rates.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Table 11 shows the data for the total number of child cases opened for services²⁵ with substantiated allegations, and the percentages, in Calendar Years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Year	Substantiated Allegations	Child Cases Opened for Services	% Opened
1998	110,831	57,652	51.9%
1999	114,654	62,734	54.7%
2000	114,409	61,663	53.9%

Table 11: Child Safety Data Profile: Cases Opened for Services

As described above, this data appears to under-represent the services provided families in response to a substantiated report of maltreatment. Due to improvements in both data recording and data reporting processes, this area is likely to demonstrate more accurate data in the future.

FINDINGS:

The percentage of children with substantiated reports of child abuse who receive services may be under-represented in Safety Data Element III. However, as reported, only about half the substantiated cases receive ongoing services following the investigation. If efforts to stabilize families when they first come in contact with the child welfare system are to improve, and thus reduce the need for out-of-home placements, more services must be available. Please refer to Section II, Part E, Items 1 and 2 for more discussion of the types of services needed.

²⁵ This data element is based on the number of children with a substantiated finding of maltreatment during the reporting period under review.

Agencies are increasingly coordinating efforts to meet the multiple needs of children and families through the use of multi-disciplinary teams, collaborative service models and restructured administration. However, these efforts could be significantly enhanced with funding that is more flexible as to its use, e.g., the use of federal Title IV-E funds for services to prevent placement. California's child welfare system is also shifting its emphasis toward outcomes—the effect of services on children and families—instead of monitoring programs based on compliance with procedures and processes.

To improve the quality of the data, caseworkers have been encouraged to utilize the discrete data fields, in addition to text. It is anticipated that future reporting will demonstrate improved recording of services. Furthermore, it is expected that the new format will be utilized for 2001 reporting and will demonstrate an increase in the reporting of cases opened for services.

4. Children Entering Foster Care Based on Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) Report (Safety Data Element IV). Identify and discuss issues affecting the provision of home-based services to protect children from maltreatment and whether or not there is a relationship between this data element and other issues in the State, such as availability of services to protect children, repeat maltreatment or changes in the foster care population.

SUMMARY

- ***A child has a greater chance of entering foster care as a result of substantiated maltreatment in California than in the nation as a whole.***
- ***Stakeholders have identified the need to develop a continuum of services that allows for a more individualized response to child maltreatment to better prevent out-of-home placement.***

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

With child safety, well-being and permanency as the priority, each county child welfare agency is required to make every effort to provide or to facilitate home-based services to eliminate risk factors when families come to the attention of child welfare services. Eliminating or reducing these risk factors is key to preventing children from entering foster care. Home-based services—parent education and support, home visiting, childcare, family group conferencing, substance abuse treatment and wraparound services—are provided to families to help prevent the need for out-of-home placement. When children must enter out-of-home placement, many of these home-based services are also provided to the family to facilitate reunification, particularly as a follow-up to the child's return to the family.

In recent years, California counties, in partnership with local community resources and with support and collaboration from the CDSS and the Legislature, have implemented a significant array of programs designed to deliver home-based services. These programs positively impact the State's ability to maintain children safely in their own homes. The

following are descriptions of several of these programs. (Please refer to Section II, Part E, Items 1 and 2 for additional information.)

- The Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) initiative is a comprehensive array of efforts to implement a coordinated, accessible and culturally responsive continuum of community-based, family-centered services across the State. The efforts often involve multiple agencies crossing multiple disciplines. Family-centered programs emphasize family participation and decision making and are designed to build on existing family strengths and to increase self-sufficiency. Additionally, these programs emphasize the need for local communities to design family support and family preservation services that meet the needs of each individual community. Services include family resource centers, home visiting, family preservation/family reunification, school-based programs, kinship support programs and domestic violence programs.
- Parenting skills training is frequently made available when child maltreatment results from limitations in parenting knowledge and skills. Such classes help parents develop skills in basic child-rearing, age-appropriate discipline and supervision and setting realistic expectations of children's behavior. These services also assist parents in developing nurturing strategies to promote attachment. These classes are often provided by community-based agencies under contract with the local county child welfare agency. In surveys of child welfare stakeholders, services designed to improve parenting were identified among the most effective services provided to prevent out-of-home placement.
- Community-based resources provide families continued support and emergency assistance. Families are often referred to programs such as Head Start, local family resource centers, job training and placement agencies, etc., to ensure that the needs of the family are met. Examples of such programs include:
 - The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS) Program, which provides temporary assistance to needy families so children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.
 - The Healthy Start Program, which provides comprehensive health, dental and vision benefits to uninsured parents of children who meet the program requirements.

Referrals to other local departments/agencies, such as public health, mental health, developmental services and housing are made as well.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Table 12 contains elements of the Safety Data Profile for children entering foster care after a substantiated report of child abuse or neglect, in Calendar Years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Children Entering Foster Care</i>	<i>%</i>
1998	34,649	31.3%
1999	34,248	29.9%
2000	33,376	29.2%

Table 12: Safety Data Profile: Children Entering Foster Care

Although the incidence rate of substantiated child maltreatment per 1,000 children is about the same for California (12.0)²⁶ as it is nationally (11.8),²⁷ in California, a greater proportion of children enter foster care following a substantiated report. In 1999, 20% of victims of child maltreatment entered care nationally. However, in California, as Table 12 indicates, the percentage of children entering foster care after a substantiated report was 29.9%. This figure decreased slightly in 2000 to 29.2%.

A group of child welfare professionals examining this data identified the following as necessary to help reduce the proportion of children entering foster care as a result of a substantiated child abuse report:

- Increased availability of effective, home-based and community-based prevention services, including mental health services.
- Increased availability of adequate, affordable housing for families. (This factor also impacts the number of appropriate foster homes available to children in their local communities.)
- Increased funding that is flexible and has incentives for prevention services (i.e., as opposed to federal Title IV-E funding, which is open-ended and thus creates an incentive to place children in foster care).
- Increased availability of services to meet children's special needs (e.g., mental health, drug dependency, significant medical care and developmental disability).
- Reduced caseloads to allow caseworkers to have more effective and meaningful contact with children and families.

FINDINGS:

The data indicates that the incidence of abuse and neglect is about the same in California as it is nationally. However, a child who is a victim of maltreatment in California has a greater chance of entering foster care than in the United States as a whole. California is committed to making further improvements in this area. To this end, as discussed above, the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Stakeholders Group, established through legislation in 2000, is charged with making recommendations for significant systemic reform. With a fundamental goal of child safety, these reforms will incorporate a comprehensive network of formal and informal services that provide individualized responses to each family's needs. (Please refer to Section II, Part E, Items 1 and 2 for more discussion on the types of services needed.) The redesigned child welfare system will emphasize early intervention, prevention and family support. Having sufficient, effective, home-based services available for children and families will enhance child welfare and improve future outcomes for California's children.

²⁶ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/referrals>

²⁷ Highlight of findings from *Child Maltreatment 1999*, Safety, Permanency and Well-Being Child Welfare Outcomes 1999: Annual Report, Appendix B, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

5. Child Fatalities (Safety Data Element V). *Identify and discuss child protection issues affecting deaths due to maltreatment in the State and how the State is addressing the issues.*

SUMMARY

- ***Local Child Death Review Teams and the California Child Death Review Council are the principal vehicles through which child fatalities are addressed. As such, they:***
 - ***Assist in prosecution of child abuse cases.***
 - ***Protect surviving siblings.***
 - ***Provide data about causes of child abuse deaths.***
- ***A 1999 law is focused on reconciling disparate data systems tracking child deaths to more accurately represent the problem.***

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

In 1997, legislation was passed with the intent of improving coordination and integration of various State and local efforts to address fatalities due to child maltreatment and of creating a body of information from which to develop prevention strategies. The vehicle for these efforts is the California State Child Death Review Council (SCDRC). Members of the SCDRC include the Department of Health Services, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the California Coroner's Association, Consortium to Prevent Child Abuse, California Homicide Investigator's Association and the California Department of Social Services. The SCDRC is entrusted with the responsibility of collecting, analyzing and interpreting State and local data on child deaths and providing training and technical assistance to Child Death Review Teams (CDRTs) at the county level.

County CDRTs have been in existence since 1998. CDRT members are trained on child death investigation protocols designed to identify those deaths associated with abuse or neglect. CDRT members are drawn from local child protective services, law enforcement, health care and criminal justice agencies. Some CDRTs review only cases referred by the coroner, while others review all child deaths. CDRTs are expanding their role to include review of unintentional child deaths that could have been prevented. The goal of the CDRTs is to reduce child abuse and child deaths by sharing information that impacts public policy at the State and local levels and by enhancing the institutional ability to protect children by increasing communication among agencies. The work of the CDRTs focuses on several important areas: investigation, system review, service planning and data collection.

An annual report prepared by the DOJ entitled the "Child Safety Profile" contains the findings of the local teams and data from the DOJ Homicide File, DOJ Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) and Department of Health Vital Statistics Death Records.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Table 13 contains elements from the Safety Data Profile for the number of child fatalities resulting from child abuse or neglect, for Calendar Years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Year	Child Fatalities
1998	22
1999	21
2000	25

Table 13: Safety Data Profile: Child Fatalities

While the Data Profile indicates that the number of child fatalities has increased, this increase continues to be a very small percentage (less than 1%) of the children for whom there were substantiated dispositions of abuse or neglect. This data also represents only those children brought to the attention of the child welfare system and, therefore, likely undercounts the total number of children who died in California as a result of abuse and neglect.

Three major databases in the State collect information on child abuse and neglect-related deaths: DOJ Homicide File, DOJ Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) and Department of Health Vital Statistics Death Records. Due to the various statutory mandates, definitions and purposes for collecting the information, none of these three sources can be considered definitive. For instance, the CACI system should include all child abuse and neglect fatalities. However, it is incomplete for a number of reasons, e.g., deaths are not reported if there are no live siblings. Table 14 below, showing the most recent data available, illustrates the reporting differences among each of the reporting systems.²⁸

Year	Homicide Files	CACI	Vital Statistics	CDSS
1998	96	20	24	22

Table 14: Child Deaths Reported by Various Sources

The discrepancy further illustrates the fact that a significant number of cases were reported to the Homicide Files but were not included in the other reporting systems.

The significance of the data discrepancies among these three systems has caused concern over the impact the under-reporting has had on efforts to improve prevention of child fatalities on a large scale. As a result, in 1998 the Department of Health Services Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control (EPIC) Branch established an annual statewide reconciliation audit. The reconciliation audit links the three available databases, using common data elements.

Data compiled by the EPIC Branch suggests a downward trend in child fatalities related to abuse and neglect for the period 1990 to 1998. The data for 1999 and 2000 is not yet available.

²⁸ Source: 1996–1998 report entitled “Child Deaths in California, Related to Abuse and Neglect” prepared by the State Child Death Review Council and the Office of the Attorney General.

FINDINGS:

The CDRTs have assisted in the prosecution of child abuse cases, protected surviving siblings and provided relevant data about the causes of child abuse deaths. The CDRTs have also helped implement more general prevention programs related to the use of car seat restraints, suicide prevention and the dangers of drowning.

With the information obtained by the CDRTs, the CDSS has worked to support initiatives to deal with issues related to child deaths, e.g., domestic violence, grief and mourning and fetal and infant mortality. As a member of the SCDRC, the CDSS is committed to improving policies, services and resources available to prevent or to address fatal child abuse.

In 1999, the Governor signed into law Senate Bill 525 (Chapter 1012, Statutes of 1999). This law requires law enforcement and child protection agencies to cross-report to one another and county child welfare agencies to create a case record in CWS/CMS for all child deaths suspected of being caused by abuse or neglect. Networks at the local community level need to be further developed to maximize cross-reporting and to ensure increased accuracy of child fatality data. This law also requires a fourth database, CWS/CMS, to be part of the State's child death data system. The EPIC Branch will include this data in its annual reconciliation audit. With these efforts, the CDSS anticipates having a clearer picture in the future of the incidence of child maltreatment-related deaths in California.

6. Recurrence of Maltreatment (Safety Data Element VI). Discuss whether or not the State's recurrence of maltreatment conforms to the National Standard for this indicator, the extent to which the State's rate of recurrence of child maltreatment is due to the same general circumstances or same perpetrator and how the State is addressing repeat maltreatment.

SUMMARY

- ***California does not meet the National Standard for Recurrence of Maltreatment. However, a review of the data indicates that repeat maltreatment has been overreported by about 33%.***
- ***To continue to build on initial progress in this area, California needs to:***
 - ***Improve risk assessment at the first contact with the child and family.***
 - ***Provide appropriate follow-up services based on the assessment.***
 - ***Expand the availability of intensive services.***
 - ***Create partnerships across agencies and disciplines to address complex needs.***
 - ***Improve consistency in data recording.***
 - ***Implement the CWS Stakeholders recommendations.***

The National Standard for this safety data element is 6.1%. At 10.9%, California does not meet the National Standard, according to the Safety Data Profile for 2000. Closer examination reveals significant issues involving the reliability of the data for this measurement, due to inconsistencies in the manner in which this data is recorded in CWS/CMS. In actuality, the rate of recurrence may be closer to 7.3%, as discussed below.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Effective assessment of the likelihood of reabuse is a critical child welfare function. Because reabuse can occur when a child is returned to the family or when in out-of-home placement, assessments must be related to both. In California, no one prescribed risk assessment tool or family assessment tool is used by all counties to evaluate the probability that abuse or neglect will recur. Each county establishes the tools and protocols used during an initial investigation. These protocols include those for conducting family assessments to determine the risk of future abuse and those for making determinations about the necessity of removing a child. Similarly, individual counties are also responsible for determining the capacity and suitability of a potential caregiver prior to placement of a child in that home. The recurrence of abuse related to a child's placement in out-of-home care will be further discussed under Item 7 below.

Part of California's effort to address the problem of repeat maltreatment is an initiative called Structured Decision Making (SDM). The SDM is designed to improve the reliability (consistency) and validity (accuracy) of child and family assessments used in decision making. With more reliable and valid assessments, it is possible to increase the share of treatment resources devoted to children at greatest risk in an attempt to reduce the rates of maltreatment recurrence. The SDM is operating in 13 pilot counties, and initial results appear promising.

As part of the SDM project, the CDSS has developed a research-based instrument for assessing risk of maltreatment recurrence. The instrument classifies cases as being at "low risk" (7.1% recurrence rate within two years of referral), "moderate risk" (14% recurrence rate within two years of referral), "high risk" (31% recurrence rate within two years of referral) and "very high risk" (44% recurrence rate within two years of referral). The risk instrument has a number of items relating to prior maltreatment. Instrument scores are correlated with future maltreatment.

Caseworkers in counties implementing SDM complete the SDM risk assessment tool on each case in which allegations were determined by investigation to be substantiated or inconclusive. This tool is used to assess the child's history of maltreatment as it relates to the likelihood of future maltreatment. The risk assessment is used to decide whether to open a case for ongoing services or to close it after an initial investigation. The SDM data indicates that workers open high risk and very high risk cases at a rate many times that of moderate risk cases.

Caseworkers in SDM counties use a standardized safety assessment and risk assessment to evaluate safety and risk of harm. In counties with strong SDM implementation efforts, the standardized safety and risk assessments are used on more than 80% of investigated referrals found to be substantiated or inconclusive.

Analysis of maltreatment recurrence data from Orange County, which is participating in SDM, suggests that the county is reducing its maltreatment recurrence rate faster than adjacent non-SDM counties and may already have reached compliance with the National Standard of 6.1%. This county's services to higher risk cases has resulted in lower maltreatment recurrence rates compared to cases with similar risk that could not be opened after investigation due to client unwillingness to cooperate.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Because of concern about California's performance on this data indicator, the CDSS reviewed a random sample of 258 individual cases that met the federal definition as having a recurrence of maltreatment for Federal Fiscal Year 2000. This review of individual child cases indicated that approximately two-thirds of the cases had at least one additional occurrence of abuse or neglect. The remaining cases (approximately 33%) had subsequent reports that referred to a previously reported instance of abuse or neglect or to an event that was not abuse or neglect. For example, a neighbor made the initial report of an abuse incident. Then, two days later, a teacher reported the same incident. The teacher's report also was recorded as another substantiated report.

If this 33% was applied to the federal data indicator, it would adjust the statewide rate of recurrence of maltreatment from 10.9% to 7.3%. Although this rate still does not meet the National Standard, it is a more accurate reflection of California's performance.

Year	Substantiated Allegation in first 6 months	Recurrence in next 6 months	%
1998	57,215	6,730	11.8%
1999	60,908	6,897	11.3%
2000	60,915	6,640	10.9%

Table 15: Child Data Profile: Substantiated Allegation in First Six Months

Based on the Safety Data Profile, Table 15 shows the total number of children with substantiated reports of maltreatment during the first six months of the review period who had an additional substantiated report within the next six months. The data shows that although the number of substantiated allegations has increased, the percentage and number of children experiencing repeat maltreatment is decreasing.

FINDINGS:

The findings of this review raise questions about the validity of using "subsequent substantiated reports" as a measure of the recurrence of abuse and neglect. To improve the data, procedures must be in place to eliminate multiple reports of the same incident of child maltreatment. Additional adjustments may also need to be made in the data-mapping and reporting process.

Aside from the data quality issues, whether using an adjusted rate of recurrence or the rate currently in the Safety Data Profile, two conclusions are clear: The rate appears to be declining slightly, and California still needs to improve to meet the National Standard

of 6.1%. Additional progress can be achieved to reduce the recurrence of maltreatment by continuing to:

- Improve the effectiveness of initial risk assessment of a child at the first contact.
- Expand the availability of intensive services that build on family strengths and improve parental skills.
- Create partnerships across disciplines and agencies to address the complex needs of high risk families.
- Provide appropriate follow-up services after the initial investigation and when a child is returned home.
- Improve data quality to more accurately assess the State's progress in this area.

These efforts can be further amplified by implementation of the recommendations from the Human Resources Subcommittee of the CWS Stakeholders Group. Lowering worker caseloads will allow caseworkers time to make more in-depth assessments of at-risk families, provide intensive in-home services and ensure appropriate follow-up when a child is returned home.

7. Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care (Safety Data Element VI). Discuss whether or not the State's incidence of child maltreatment by the foster care provider conforms to the National Standard for this indicator. Discuss the ways in which the State is addressing this issue and whether or not there is a need for additional measures to ensure the safety of children who are in foster care or pre-adoptive placements.

SUMMARY

- **More comprehensive and accurate data is needed to better define the extent of maltreatment in foster care.**
- **Stakeholders indicated:**
 - **More consistent training of foster parents is needed across counties.**
 - **The licensing process needs to focus more on quality of the home rather than the physical requirements of the facility.**
- **Caregiver family assessment protocols are currently being revised to be more comprehensive and consistent.**

ALTERNATE DATA SOURCE:

Sufficient data for this Safety Data Element has not been submitted in the State's NCANDS reporting. Neither CWS/CMS nor any other State data source is currently configured to capture the data necessary for this element, as defined. Since reliable data is unavailable, California requested and received approval for submission of data from an alternate data source. This alternate data, extracted from CWS/CMS, 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. It does not include children placed with relatives or in group homes or institutions. Furthermore, due to questions about the documentation, this rate may contain overcounts and/or undercounts of incidents of maltreatment. Based on the available data with the limitations described above, the rate of maltreatment by providers is 1.06%.

In light of the limitations of the alternate data, any conclusions drawn from this data must be considered tentative and viewed cautiously. Furthermore, the quality of the data is insufficient to suggest a reliable trend in either the absolute numbers of maltreated children or the proportion of children in foster care who are maltreated. Cases included in this sample have not been independently reviewed to assess the validity of the data. Therefore, California is unable to conclude whether the State's rate of child maltreatment by foster care providers, in fact, conforms to the National Standard of 0.57%.

Maltreatment rates must be compared cautiously. In every state, the actual frequencies of child abuse and neglect are higher than the reported frequencies. With other states, California's goal is to ensure that every incident of child maltreatment is promptly reported and thoroughly investigated. Effective efforts to achieve this goal will result in increases in allegation and substantiation frequencies.

Until comparable reporting statutes and investigative protocols are established in every state, state-to-state comparisons cannot be made, and state data cannot be pooled to establish a meaningful National Standard. States with more effective child maltreatment reporting and investigation protocols will continue to compare unfavorably with pooled national data. At the State and county levels, California will continue to establish and enhance primary and secondary maltreatment prevention programs as efforts continue to ensure that maltreatment data is accurate.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

California's licensing and certification statutes and regulations are exhaustive, detailed, directly pertinent to children's welfare and effectively enforced by the CDSS and by county child welfare agencies. Trained investigators, some with law enforcement status, promptly and thoroughly investigate every allegation of abuse or neglect. Where appropriate, the child welfare agency and/or the local police department participate actively. For all group homes and foster family agencies and for some foster family homes, the CDSS has direct licensing enforcement responsibilities. In 42 of California's 58 counties, county child welfare agencies enforce State-promulgated regulations pertinent to county-licensed foster family homes. Statewide uniformity and effectiveness in regulatory enforcement is ensured through the CDSS oversight and ongoing training.

California's child abuse reporting statute defines 33 categories of professionals and others with direct and indirect contact with children as mandated reporters. This statute is frequently expanded by the Legislature. Additional categories of employees and professionals with child contact or care responsibilities are added to the list of mandated reporters. These important changes reduce unreported child abuse and neglect and, over time, will increase both the statewide numbers of child abuse and neglect reports and of substantiated cases.

A recently enacted statute requires county social workers and juvenile probation officers to visit privately with each child in placement. The intent is to ensure that an unmonitored, confidential conversation takes place on a regular basis between the child and the placement worker. Two possible results are an increase in the number of abuse and neglect complaints and an increase in the number of substantiated allegations.

According to a recent survey by the CDSS, less than half of the states have explicitly delineated personal rights for children in out-of-home care. In California, however, children's rights are detailed, specific and directly pertinent to out-of-home care. Placement workers must inform children of their rights and the avenues through which any grievances can be heard. This process affords them an important level of protection against abuse and neglect and an identified means of exercising their right to appropriate treatment. California hopes and expects that by granting and guaranteeing these rights, children will exercise them fully, and the number of reported and unreported instances of abuse and neglect will be reduced.

California has established the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman as an independent resource within the CDSS. This office acts as both a referral and an investigatory agency for all children in out-of-home care. Additionally, the California Youth Crisis Line is available to all children statewide and provides 24-hour counseling service, information and referrals to medical services, shelters, crisis centers, AIDS testing and transportation. Counties also provide crisis line services for children. The broadening availability of these effective means of alerting advocacy, investigatory and regulatory agencies to alleged abuse and neglect may also serve to lower the rates of unreported abuse and neglect in out-of-home care.

Collaboration between the State and counties in child abuse and neglect investigations has repeatedly proven to be effective. Los Angeles County, where the foster family home licensing function is retained by the CDSS, has a designated team of professionals who investigate child abuse and neglect in foster family homes. When appropriate, the county issues corrective action directives to providers and, when necessary, immediately removes at-risk children and stops new placements.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Stakeholder input relevant to this Item is under the data discussion in Section II, Part G, Item 1. Overall, stakeholders indicated that:

- More consistent training of foster parents is needed across counties.
- The licensing process should focus more on quality of the home rather than the physical requirements of the facility.

The data for this element, as defined, is unavailable because CWS/CMS is not currently configured to capture information about perpetrators who would fall into the categories of relative caregivers or group home staff. Changes are underway to make these options available in the future.

In addition to the limited scope of the data with respect to the total out-of-home care population, other concerns exist about the accuracy of the data on CWS/CMS. For instance, is it subject to the same over-reporting (i.e., multiple reports of the same

incident of maltreatment) as discussed for the recurrence of maltreatment in Item 6 above?

In addition to multiple reports of the same incident, overlapping reporting requirements create confusion and may lead to over-reporting. Besides making a child abuse report, maltreatment in foster care would also be reported as a licensing complaint. Such complaints are categorized differently from child abuse and neglect reports. For example, in licensing complaints, physical abuse is categorized with corporal punishment. Corporal punishment in any degree is not permitted by a licensed facility. What may be counted as abuse may, in fact, be an incident of corporal punishment, e.g., a slap on the hand. Similarly, lack of supervision (which, depending on the circumstances, may not constitute child neglect) and neglect are categorized together. Because of these combined categories, it is unclear if the substantiated reports of maltreatment of children in foster care reported on CWS/CMS are truly abuse or neglect.

Because of the limitations of this data, it is unclear how California's performance on this indicator will change in the future as the data is improved, additional placement categories are included and reporting is made more consistent statewide. A key question remains: if the State improves the data, but that data demonstrates poorer performance, will the State incur a fiscal penalty?

FINDINGS:

Examination of the State's performance on this data element requires a two-fold response: one to address the data issues, and another to reduce the level of maltreatment by providers. Efforts on both are currently underway. Stakeholders indicated a belief that more consistent training and changes in the assessment process would improve the quality of foster care. California has already initiated efforts to reduce the frequency of abuse and neglect in out-of-home care. In a continuing multi-year effort, 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 and to provide permanency. Potential caregiver evaluations will be more consistent with those of prospective adoptive parents. Foster parents often adopt children placed with them yet have only been evaluated as a "facility" that provides temporary care. For this reason, evaluating prospective foster parents with the same level of scrutiny as adoptive parents affords children greater protection. 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. Additional information relevant to this topic is in Section IV, Part B, Item 8.

8. Other Safety Issues. Discuss any other issues of concern, not covered above or in the data profiles that affect the safety outcomes for children and families served by the agency.

All issues of concern have been discussed above.

OUTCOMES:

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

- 1. Trends in Permanency Data. Have there been notable changes in the individual data elements in the two Permanency Data Profiles in Section III over the past three years in the State? Identify and discuss any factors affecting the changes noted and the effects of permanency for children in foster care in the State.**

SUMMARY

- ***Over the three-year period of the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile, the foster care population decreased by 9.7% due to:***
 - ***Decreased foster care admissions.***
 - ***104% increase in the number of children exiting to adoption.***
 - ***237% increase in the number of children exiting to guardianship.***
- ***California performs best on permanency data indicators for children under five years of age.***
- ***Data indicates improvements are needed to better address the needs of older children and youth.***

DATA DISCUSSION:

Any trends identified in the federal Statewide Aggregate Data Profile for Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 1998-2000 must be viewed cautiously due to data quality considerations resulting from conversion to the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). Those considerations are outlined in the preface to Section III. Given those considerations, the permanency data in the Data Profile demonstrates four significant trends in California.

- The population of children in the California foster care system has decreased 9.7% between FFY 1998 and FFY 2000, from 108,417 to 97,876. This decline can be attributed to the following factors:
 - Annual admissions to foster care have decreased over this three-year period from 51,063 to 43,746. This decline is consistent with Safety Profile Item 4 of Section IV, Part A, Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Reports, that shows decreased numbers of children entering care as a result of substantiated reports of maltreatment. These declines may be due to better risk assessments being made at the time child maltreatment is initially investigated or intensive in-home services such as those discussed in Section II, Part E, Item 2. This decline in admissions occurred in spite of slight increases in the number of substantiated reports during the same period.

- Discharges from foster care increased in all permanency categories during this three-year period. The number of children reunified increased from 28,987 in FFY 1998 to 29,862 in FFY 2000. The number of children adopted increased from 3,433 to 7,000 over the same period, a 104% increase. This increase is principally due to additional funding and program improvements through the California Adoptions Initiative. Guardianships increased from 1,372 to 4,625 during this period, a 237% increase. This increase may be attributed largely to improvements in kinship care, and most significantly, to implementation of the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program that promotes permanency through relative guardianships.
- The First Time Entry Cohort section of the Data Profile shows a decrease between FFY 1998 and FFY 2000 in the number of children who are entering foster care for the first time. In addition, 36.1% of the children who entered care for the first time in the first six months of FFY 2000 were reunified with their parents within 12 months, an increase from 31.7% in FFY 1998.²⁹
- The Point-In-Time section of the Data Profile shows the proportion of children with two or fewer placement settings declined over the last three FFYs and the proportion of children with six or more placement settings increased. Both trends are likely due to the number of children who have exited care to reunification, guardianship and adoption. Specifically, those children who exit are more likely to have fewer placements before exiting. Those children who remain in care are more likely to have a greater complexity of needs. Thus, they are at higher risk for additional placement changes, increasingly less likely to exit and, over time, form an increasingly higher proportion of the State's overall foster care population.
- When the Statewide Aggregate Data Indicators are stratified by age,³⁰ a different picture emerges. As Table 16 indicates, with the exception of the stability indicator, California's performance on all permanency indicators, is better for children five years of age and younger than for older children.

FFY 2000	Reunification		Adoption		Stability		Re-entry Over Time					
Ages	< 12 months		< 24 months		Two or fewer		Re-entered (in months)				No re-entry	
							12 months or less		More than 12 months			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
All	16,028	53.7	1,149	16.4	39,579	82.9	4,056	9.3	4,618	10.6	35,072	80.2
<1 yr	1,480	100.0	100	99.0	5,183	85.2	188	3.1	1	0.0	5,904	96.9
1-5 yrs	4,788	54.6	916	23.2	10,466	80.9	1,001	8.6	820	7.1	9,810	84.3
6-10 yrs	4,462	51.0	99	4.8	9,336	82.5	917	8.9	1,482	14.3	7,955	76.8
11-15 yrs	3,773	52.3	29	3.9	9,867	81.7	1,349	11.9	1,690	14.9	8,293	73.2
16-17 yrs	1,398	47.5	5	4.2	4,253	88.8	592	13.8	607	14.2	3,086	72.0
Missing	127	17.9	-	0.0	474	86.8	9	17.6	18	35.3	24	47.1

Table 16: Permanency Indicators

²⁹ These figures are derived by dividing the number of children discharged to reunification (Item V of the First-Time Entry Cohort Profile) by the total number of children entering foster care in the first six months of the FFY.

³⁰ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

This data suggests that limited child welfare resources are being targeted appropriately to those children in the system who are most vulnerable. This data is also consistent with a change in California law in 1997 that recognizes the developmental needs of young children differ from those of older children. This statutory change reduced the reunification period to six months for children under age three unless substantial probability for return existed within the next six months.

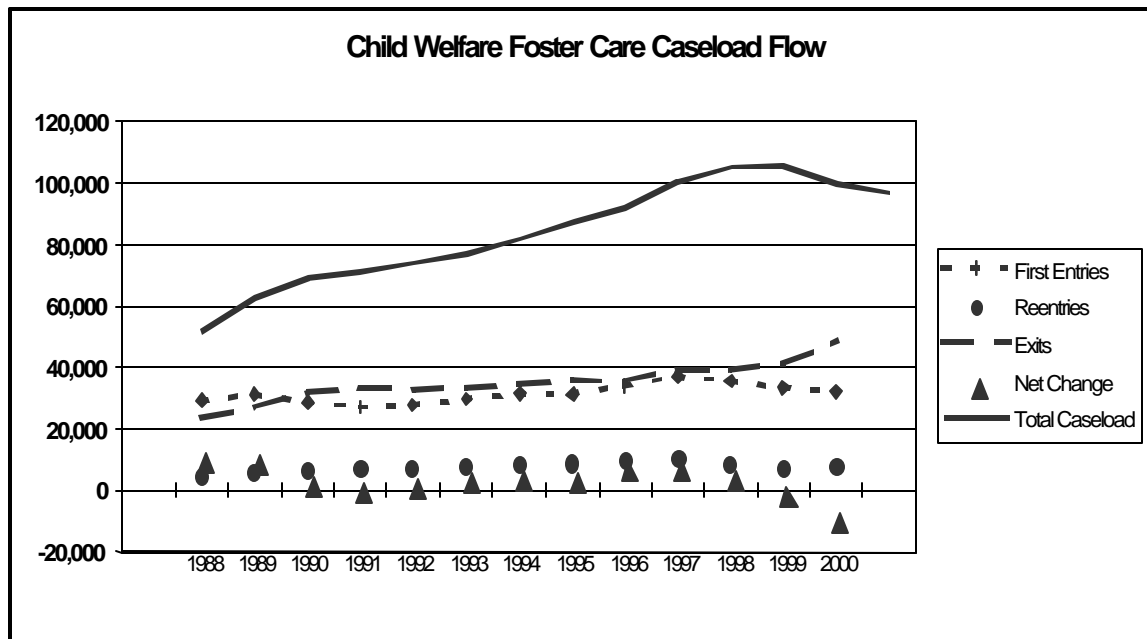


Figure 4: Child Welfare Foster Care Caseload Flow

FINDINGS:

The overall reduction in the foster care caseload is due primarily to increased efforts to address the permanency needs of children who were unable to return home. These efforts are discussed in more detail in Item 2 of this Part.

Data demonstrates that the child welfare system appears to achieve more positive outcomes for the youngest, and therefore most vulnerable, children. However, the data also indicates that improvements are needed to more effectively meet the permanency needs of older children and youth.

2. *Foster Care Population Flow (Point-in-Time Data Element I & Cohort Data Element I).* Identify and discuss any issues raised by the data regarding the composition of the State's foster care population, rates of admission and discharges and changes in this area. Discuss the State's ability to ensure that the children who enter foster care are only those children whose needs for protection and care cannot be met in their own homes.

SUMMARY

- *The California Adoptions Initiative and the Kin-GAP program were successful in increasing opportunities for children to exit out-of-home care to permanency.*
- *Preplacement preventive efforts and risk assessment of substantiated child abuse cases show promise in reducing admissions to foster care.*
- *Augmentation of county child welfare services allocations appears to have a positive impact toward achieving desired outcomes.*

DATA DISCUSSION:

According to the Data Profile, the number of children in foster care at the end of the year decreased by 10,541 from FFY 1998 through FFY 2000, with the largest change occurring during FFY 2000, a 9% drop. This is a significant change in direction for a caseload that has increased substantially over the last decade. As Figure 4³¹ illustrates, while most of this decrease was due to a marked increase in the number of discharges, a decrease in admissions (entries and re-entries) contributed as well.

Discharges:

Longitudinal data from University of California, Berkeley³² indicates a 35% increase in the number of exits from foster care between 1995 and 2000. Clearly, California's commitment to permanency for children in foster care has played a significant role in the overall reduction of the foster care caseload and the sharp increase in the number of discharges from out-of-home care. Figure 4 above demonstrates that the increase in exits has had a negative net effect on the caseload. The principal programs responsible for this change focused on children who were unable to return to their parents and who were at risk of remaining in the foster care system. They include:

Kin Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) Program: The Kin-GAP program, described in the Section II, Part E, Item 3, has played an important part in exiting children into permanent care with relatives. Because of children exiting through the Kin-GAP program, the number of children placed with relatives decreased 24%, from 48,185

³¹ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

³² Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

in 1998 to 36,503 in 2001. As Table 17³³ illustrates, this reduction has also impacted the proportion of children who are in care with relatives under the supervision of the child welfare system.

On July 1	1998	1999	2000	2001
% Children Placed with Relatives	45.8%	43.8%	41.2%	37.7%

Table 17: Children Placed with Relatives

California Adoptions Initiative: This effort combined augmented funding of county adoption programs; statutory, policy and procedural changes; and extensive training and technical assistance to more than achieve the goal of doubling the annual number of adoptive placements statewide, as indicated in Table 18³⁴ below. This process was aided by the establishment of individual county performance targets for increases in the annual number of foster children adopted. These efforts led to California receiving over \$17.6 million in federal Adoption Incentive Funds and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001 Adoption Excellence Award.

State Fiscal Year	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Completed Adoptions	3,384	4,065	5,211	5,854	7,125

Table 18: Completed Adoptions

Los Angeles County was a major contributor to reducing the foster care caseload. Data from the California Children's Services Archive indicates that in Calendar Year 2000, Los Angeles County significantly reduced the number of foster care admissions (both first entries and re-entries) and exited over 17,000 children from out-of-home care.

Other local initiatives have been focused on family reunification efforts. For instance, pilot projects in Los Angeles and San Diego Counties' juvenile courts have yielded some promise. In these projects, specific protocols have been established for children with mental health or substance abuse issues. By adding the support of juvenile courts to county family reunification efforts, children and families have been able to achieve successful results.

Increased interagency collaboration among county agencies such as probation, child welfare services and mental health has also shown positive results for children and families. The CDSS has provided group training to representatives from all these agencies on case planning collaboration, with improved case-specific communication among involved agencies.

Admissions:

Both the Point-in-Time and First Time Entry Cohort Profiles indicate that admissions to foster care declined between 1998 and 1999 and, to a lesser degree, between 1999 and 2000. Determining the reasons for this decline in admissions is more difficult than for

³³ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

³⁴ California Department of Social Services aggregate figures submitted by counties on the 56A Form, Quarterly Adoption Statistics

the discharges because so many factors influence the removal of children from their homes.

Through application of narrowly drafted statutes and regulations, California ensures that only those children whose needs for protection and care cannot be met in their own homes enter foster care. To that end, the Welfare and Institutions Code specifies that the court must determine if reasonable efforts have been made to prevent or eliminate the need for removing a child from his or her home. These efforts, as listed in the statutes, include case management, counseling, emergency shelter care, emergency in-home caretakers, out-of-home respite care, teaching and demonstrating homemakers, parenting training, transportation and any other appropriate California Department of Social Services authorized services. Further, the court must determine that continued placement in the custodial parent's home is contrary to the child's welfare, that it would represent a substantial danger to the child and that there are no reasonable means of protecting the child.

In addition to the overall policy framework, a number of efforts are in place to limit out-of-home placement to those children who require it. Some examples include the following:

- Wraparound services have shown promise in successfully maintaining children at home who otherwise would require placement.
- Family conferencing/family decision making are growing efforts that engage extended family members in providing safety for a child who might otherwise come into care.
- Structured Decision Making (SDM), being implemented in a number of counties, establishes protocols that seek to ensure child safety, reduce recurrence of maltreatment and prevent unnecessary removals.
- Answers Benefiting Children (ABC) provides home visiting as a core service in the array of services provided at local family resource centers.

These efforts are not the only factors impacting the foster care caseload. California's recent augmentation of county child welfare allocations may have provided some relief on high caseworker caseloads by giving counties more flexibility. These funds may have increased worker effectiveness in preventing out-of-home placement and increased family reunification rates. As counties become more familiar with the more recently enacted State mandates and more effective at implementing them, this rate is expected to increase.

FINDINGS:

Over recent years, efforts focused on permanency for children in foster care have had a significant impact on the foster care caseload, resulting in a 9.7% decrease over the three-year period of the review data. These efforts, primarily the California Adoptions Initiative and the Kin-GAP program, have provided increased opportunities for children to exit out-of-home care to permanency. Admissions to foster care have also declined, suggesting that preplacement prevention efforts and the risk assessment of children and families with substantiated reports of child maltreatment show promise. Additionally, augmentation of county child welfare allocations appears to have had a positive impact

toward achieving desired outcomes for children. For additional discussion of issues related to reduction of foster care admissions, please refer to Section IV, Part A, Item 4.

- 3. Placement Types for Children in Foster Care (Point-in-Time Element II & Cohort Data Element II). How well is the State able to ensure that children are placed in the types of placements that are the most family-like and most appropriate for their individual needs, both at the time of initial entry into foster care and throughout their stay in foster care?**

SUMMARY

- *When children must come into foster care, California is successful in placing children in the most family-like setting possible, as demonstrated by the high proportion of relative placements.*

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

California's policy regarding placement, as set forth in the statutes, requires that a child be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting possible. It also requires the selection of the placement environment that is best suited to meet the child's individual needs and best interests. Based on this policy, placement options are considered in the following order of priority: non-custodial parent, relatives, tribal members (if applicable), foster family and, finally, group home. Placing siblings together is a priority unless there is documented evidence that doing so is detrimental to one of the children. Placement of a child is required to have an administrative review to determine the appropriateness of that placement.

DATA DISCUSSION:

The Statewide Aggregate Data Profile clearly demonstrates that California follows these priorities. The Point-in-Time Permanency Profile Data Element II (extracted, in part, in Table 19 below) indicates that the largest percentage of children are placed with relatives and the next largest percentage are in non-relative foster homes and group homes, with institutions being used the least. While the *percentage* of children placed in group homes increased between 1999 and 2000, from 10.7% to 11.8%, the actual *number* has decreased slightly over that period, from 11,548 to 11,520. This increased *proportion* of children in group homes can be attributed to changes in the composition of the foster care population resulting from a substantial number of exits to adoption and relative guardianship. The significantly reduced number of children in care with both relatives and foster families demonstrates this further. Thus, what appears on the surface as a negative trend is actually very positive: more children are exiting to permanency and those who most need placement are remaining.

	1998		1999		2000	
II. Placement Types for Children in Care	n	%	n	%	n	%
Pre-adoptive Homes	1,587	1.5	3,096	2.9	3,536	3.6
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	47,997	44.3	46,483	43.2	39,527	40.4
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	39,919	36.8	38,438	35.7	35,766	36.5
Group Homes	11,375	10.5	11,548	10.7	11,520	11.8
Institutions	2,382	2.2	4,180	3.9	1,611	1.7
(All Others) ³⁵	5,157	4.8	3,916	3.6	5,916	6.0

Table 19: Placement Types for Children in Care

Children supervised by probation (wards) are overrepresented in the group home population. As of July 1, 2001, 68% of wards receiving foster care funding were placed in group homes.³⁶

Careful safeguards are in place to ensure that younger children are not placed in group homes unless such a level of care is clearly necessary. Specifically, children under the age of six are not placed in group homes unless:

- The placement provides comprehensive diagnostic assessment to assist in long-term decision making about the child's future.
- The placement provides special treatment needs to the child while program planning and testing occur to prepare the child for a less restrictive, permanent placement.
- The placement enhances and supports the case plan goal of either family reunification with the parents or kin, or adoption, when no other suitable, less restrictive placement is available.
- The placement is for temporary shelter care and is not for more than 30 days and no other, less restrictive placement is available or, it will keep a sibling group together until a more suitable, less restrictive placement is available.

Pre-adoptive homes are either relative or foster homes in which an adoptive placement agreement has been signed in preparation for completion of the adoption. The adoption then is usually completed within three months. The Data Profile shows that the number of children placed in pre-adoptive homes has doubled over the last two years. This increase is both reflective of the work of the California Adoption Initiative and of data quality improvement as adoption agencies fully implement the adoption functionality of the CWS/CMS.

The First-Time Entry Cohort section of the Data Profile presents a slightly different picture, with the proportion reversed between relatives and foster homes. This contrast to the Point-in-Time section of the Data Profile is most likely due to the fact that children are often placed in a foster home while relatives are identified, searched for and assessed prior to placement.

³⁵ Combines all other categories in this data element

³⁶ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

FINDINGS:

Based on the Statewide Aggregate Data Profile, California is successfully meeting the individual needs of children by placing those who must come into care into the most family-like, least restrictive setting possible. In California, children are placed with relatives at a higher rate than any other placement option and at a higher rate than the national average.³⁷ The next most frequent type of placement is with a non-related foster family. The use of group homes is reserved for a small minority (11%) of children whose needs cannot be met in the home of a relative or foster family. Placements of this nature are intended to be used as a treatment modality to enable children to return to a less restrictive, more family-like setting that will enable them to achieve permanency.

California continues to improve the way in which the child welfare system is able to support children in kinship care and to facilitate children exiting the system into the care of relatives. It has been shown that children have fewer placement disruptions when placed with their relatives. To this end, relative placements and permanency continue to be major focuses in California.

4. Permanency Goals for Children in Foster Care (Point-in-Time Data Elements III & VIII and Cohort Data Elements III & V). Discuss the extent to which children in care are moving safely into permanent living arrangements on a timely basis and issues affecting the safe, timely achievement of permanency for children in the State.

SUMMARY

- *It is estimated that 87% of children who exited foster care in FFY 2000 exited to permanency through reunification, adoption or guardianship.*
- *Areas for improvement include:*
 - *The timeliness in which children achieve permanency.*
 - *More effectively meeting the permanency needs of the 13% of children who exited foster care for other reasons.*

Basing a discussion of children moving safely into permanent living arrangements on Data Element III (case plan goal) from both permanency profiles is problematic because of delays in child welfare agency implementation of the CWS/CMS case plan functionality. Although the proportion of cases that are missing case plan goal information is declining, the large percentage of missing case plan goal information renders any conclusion about the meaning of the relative proportions of the various options questionable. At best, these data elements highlight the need to continue efforts to ensure that case plan goal information is entered into CWS/CMS in a timely manner.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Outcomes 1999 Annual Report, Appendix C-1

The discharge data contained in Data Element IV of both Data Profiles contains more complete information. Therefore, this data is the basis of the discussion below.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

In spite of data entry problems, the statutory and regulatory framework is clear. California statutes require that every child have a case plan goal, which is ordered by the court and documented in each child's case record. When children are unable to remain safely in their own homes, the options for permanency are as follows:

- Reunification.
- Adoption.
- Guardianship.
- Transition from foster care to independent living.

Unless the court finds that certain, specified exceptional circumstances exist, reunification is the initial permanency goal for all children removed from their homes. California statutes require that children who are over the age of three receive 12 months of reunification services, and children who are under the age of three receive six months of reunification services. For all children, reunification may be extended to a maximum of 18 months after a Permanency hearing, if the court has determined there is a substantial likelihood that reunification will be successful within six months. 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. With the implementation of concurrent planning, any case with a primary case plan goal of family reunification must also specify a permanency alternative (i.e., adoption, guardianship, independent living) to be implemented when it is determined that reunification is unsuccessful.

For some children, all of these options may be inappropriate. Such children may have needs that require a higher level of care or require the continued supervision of the child welfare system. These children will remain in long-term foster care until one of the permanency options becomes appropriate and available.

As discussed above, several programs that focus on moving children to timely permanency have been implemented in recent years:

- The California Adoption Initiative more than doubled the number of California foster children who are adopted each year through a combination of funding increases, program simplifications and caseworker skill enhancements.
- The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program, which began in January 2000, provides payments to relative guardians of children who have been in stable foster care placements with these relatives. Approximately 7,000 children exited the foster care system into permanent relative guardianships during the initial 18 months of the program. The foster care re-entry rate for program participants has been minimal (approximately 55 children).
- Statewide efforts to increase permanent placements for older foster children. Such efforts include special interjurisdictional recruitment and consortiums of private

adoption agencies to increase the number of available permanent homes for older children.

DATA DISCUSSION:

As more children who have been in long-term foster care exit through the efforts discussed above, the Point-in-Time Data Element VIII increases. This data element shows the median number of months as the Length of Time to Achieve Permanency Goal. Because the efforts discussed have included children who have been in foster care for several years, the impact of these new efforts on timeliness will not be demonstrated by the data for a few years.

According to the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile, illustrated in Figure 5 below, 78% of children who exit foster care exit to some form of permanency. In actuality, this is probably closer to 87%, if the 9% of cases that are missing a discharge reason are distributed in the same proportion as those with an exit reason.

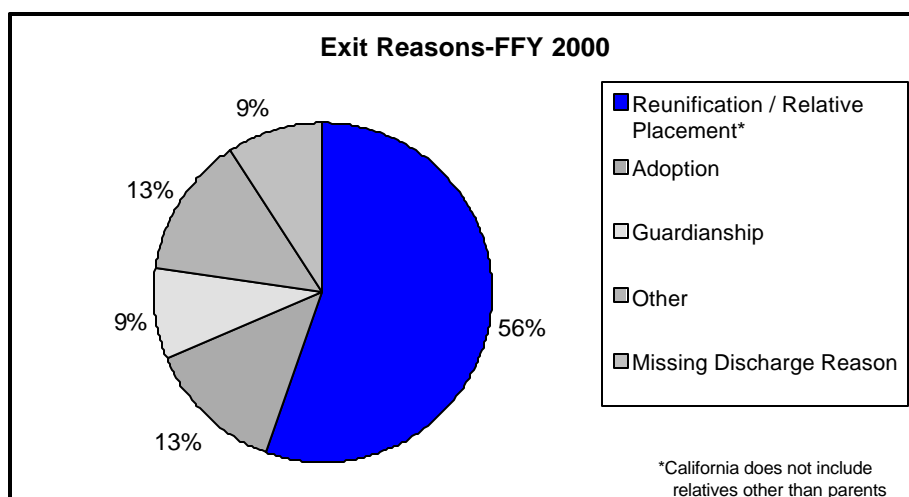


Figure 5: Point-in-Time Permanency Profile

The high proportion of children exiting to permanent homes is largely due to children exiting to their family members. As discussed previously, California does not count exiting to a relative, other than a birth parent, as reunification. If exiting to the home of a relative through guardianship or adoption was considered reunification, the State's reunification rate would be substantially higher. According to the U.C. Berkeley California Children's Services Archive, which distinguishes exits by relative placements, in 2000, 48,066 children exited from child welfare supervised foster care. Of those, 27,258 (57%) reunified and 7,888 (16%) exited through guardianship or adoption with relatives. Thus, 73% of children exiting foster care in 2000 returned to parents or other family members.³⁸

³⁸ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

FINDINGS:

California discharges a high proportion of children to permanency. It is estimated that only 13% of children exit for other reasons, which include transition to independent living. Despite California's recent successes in increasing foster care discharges to permanency, data does not indicate that permanency occurs within the timeframes prescribed by the National Standards. Because of the priority California has placed on moving children to permanency who have been in foster care the longest, it is unlikely that California will meet these standards in the near future.

Other factors must be considered as well. California is currently in the process of reforming its child welfare system. Among these efforts are two areas that are likely to impact the State's ability to achieve timely permanency in the future:

- Increased efforts to prevent children from entering care, as discussed in Section II, Part E, Item 2, will filter out all but those families most in need of placement services, as such efforts are intended to do. These families whose children come into care will be more dysfunctional, have a wider array of needs and use services across multiple agencies. Thus, reunification of such families will likely require a higher level of services than can be provided at current caseload levels.
- Increased efforts for permanency for those children who cannot reunify, such as those discussed in Section II, Part E, Items 1 and 3, will mean that children who can most readily exit, will, and those children most in need of intensive treatment or the ongoing supervision provided by foster care will most likely remain in care.

While these efforts are indeed positive directions, the result is likely to be a shift in the foster care population. Those families receiving services and those children remaining in care will have higher service needs and fewer extended family and social supports. They will be less likely to exit the system over time. Additionally, these children will be at higher risk for multiple placement changes and the problems associated with such instability. The increased service needs of what may be a smaller number of children and families over time are likely to strain the existing caseload standards.

5. *Achievement of Reunification (Point-in-Time Data Element IX). Discuss whether the State's data regarding achievement of reunification within 12 months from the time of latest removal from home conform with the National Standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss issues affecting conformity and how the State is addressing this issue.*

SUMMARY

- ***California did not meet the National Standard on the percentage of children who reunified within 12 months.***
- ***Of the children who exited care in FFY 2000, approximately 73% reunified with their parents or exited to extended family through guardianship or adoption.***

The National Standard for reunification within 12 months from the time of a child's latest removal from home is 76.2 %. The Point-in-Time Permanency Profile shows that California's statewide performance on this measure, at 53.7%, is below the National Standard.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The policy and program description regarding reunification timelines is the same as Section IV, Part 2, Item 4.

DATA DISCUSSION:

As identified above, California's performance is below the National Standard. However, of the 58 counties in California, 20 counties met the standard and another 24 counties performed at 60% or better. Eight counties were lower than 50%.³⁹ Several data quality issues impact this indicator and merit discussion. Children are often sent home on trial home visits as a step in reunifying with their parents. In compiling the Data Profile, U.C. Berkeley identified large numbers of children who had been in a trial home visit for over six months and had never been discharged on CWS/CMS. These children had an open placement *episode*, but were not in a *placement*. In all likelihood, they had reunified, but this fact had not been recorded in CWS/CMS. To keep the exit data as accurate as possible, children who had been in a trial home visit for more than six months were discharged from foster care, but no exit reason was identified. These children make up the bulk of the category "Missing Discharge Reason" under Data Element VIII of the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile. This category makes up over 9% of the discharges from foster care. Completion of missing discharge dates and reasons could substantially change California's performance on this data indicator.

When examining all children (29,862) who exited to reunification in FFY 2000, the median number of months to discharge was nine months. According to the First-Time Entry Cohort Permanency Profile (children who entered care in the first six months of the Federal Fiscal Year), 88.2% of children who exited during the year exited to reunification. This figure illustrates the priority that California places on reunification as a permanency goal. Therefore, very few children went directly to adoption or guardianship upon entering foster care.

A breakout of the data indicator by age,⁴⁰ in Table 20 below, shows that California performs better on this indicator for younger children, particularly those under one year of age. This fact suggests that the youngest, most vulnerable children who are able to reunify, do so quickly. It is likely that the law changes in 1996 that shortened the timeframes for younger children are having the desired impact. This effect is further underscored by the re-entry rates, which are considerably less for the youngest children, even after 12 months (identified under "Re-entry Over Time").

³⁹ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports> and based on National Standard data for individual counties.

⁴⁰ Provided by U.C. Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research for purposes of the Statewide Assessment

FFY 2000	Reunification		Re-entry Over Time					
	< 12 Months		Re-entered (In Months)				No Re-entry	
			12 or fewer		More than 12			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
All Ages	16,028	53.7	4,056	9.3	4,618	10.6	35,072	80.2
<1 yr	1,480	100.0	188	3.1	1	0.0	5,904	96.9
1-5 yrs	4,788	54.6	1,001	8.6	820	7.1	9,810	84.3
6-10 yrs	4,462	51.0	917	8.9	1,482	14.3	7,955	76.8
11-15 yrs	3,773	52.3	1,349	11.9	1,690	14.9	8,293	73.2
16-17 yrs	1,398	47.5	592	13.8	607	14.2	3,086	72.0
Missing	127	17.9	9	17.6	18	35.3	24	47.1

Table 20: Reunification and Re-entry

As described above, California does not count exiting to a relative, other than a birth parent, as reunification. If exiting to the home of a relative through guardianship or adoption was considered reunification, the State's reunification rate would be 73% of children exiting foster care in FFY 2000.

Based on input from the broad-based group of child welfare stakeholders reviewing this data, several obstacles were identified as potential barriers to timely reunification:

- **Lack of Available Services:** County representatives felt that inadequate availability of substance abuse programs was a significant obstacle to timely reunification.
- **Lack of Geographically Available Services:** Families often have difficulties obtaining services within a reasonable distance from their residence, particularly in rural areas. In larger counties, the limited availability of appropriate homes may require that children be placed in a foster care home that is not in close proximity to the birth parent's residence, making visits necessary to facilitate reunification more difficult.
- **Increased Drug Addiction:** Families are using substances that are more addictive, making rehabilitation much more difficult and a more lengthy process.

California has implemented many innovative programs to achieve timely reunification, including options that exit children into the care of relatives. Those programs include:

- **Wraparound Services:** These services are based on individualized, needs-driven case planning. It is a strength-based approach with a firm commitment to create services for a specific child to support normalized and family-inclusive services for youth and families with complex needs.
- **Family Conferencing:** The process of engaging a wider range of family members in case planning and goal setting ensures the family is fully engaged in and has ownership of the child's plan.
- **The Family to Family Initiative:** This program, discussed above, is being implemented in eight California counties, including Los Angeles County. Staff and providers at these sites receive enhanced training to encourage partnership among staff and foster parents; to promote placement of children in their local communities; to prevent placement moves and to train foster parents to mentor birth parents whenever possible.

- The Kinship Support Service Program (KSSP): A program that provides funding to eligible counties to establish community-based support programs that provide needed services to those relatives caring for abused and neglected children and those at risk of becoming dependent children in the child welfare system. Over the past three years, the 11 participating counties have partnered with 14 various non-profit agencies to develop over 20 KSSP sites currently in operation. During SFY 2000/01, these sites served over 5,000 children and over 3,100 relative families.
- The Kinship/Foster Care Emergency Fund: This fund was implemented in SFY 1999/00, in recognition of the number and importance of foster children being placed with relative caregivers on an emergency basis. The fund can also assist in helping retain placement when extenuating circumstances may alter a stable relative placement. The purpose is to enable successful placement with relative caregivers and foster parents by removing some of the barriers of initial and continuing placements.

FINDINGS:

According to the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile, California did not meet the National Standard for the percentage of children who exit to reunification within 12 months of their latest removal. However, over 73% of children who do exit, exit to their parents or other relatives. This high percentage of children returning to their families is due to recent efforts to develop additional permanency options and support for children and their relative caregivers. Statutory changes over the last several years demonstrate California's commitment to timely reunification, particularly for the youngest, most vulnerable children in foster care. Since data quality issues undoubtedly cloud any conclusions with respect to timeliness, it is difficult to anticipate the kind of progress that may occur in the future related to this data indicator. However, increased flexibility with federal Title IV-E funding, e.g., to provide services, would allow California to expand its array of services to more effectively meet client needs and to expedite reunification.

6. Achievement of Adoption (Point-in-Time Data Element X). Discuss whether the State's data on children exiting foster care to finalized adoption within less than 24 months from the latest removal from home conform to the National Standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss issues affecting the number of children placed for adoption in the State and how the State is addressing the issues.

SUMMARY

- *California did not meet the National Standard on the percentage of children who achieved adoption within 24 months. The enhanced efforts to promote adoption of children who otherwise would have remained in care have negatively impacted the State's performance on this measurement.*
- *Significant program reforms (e.g., concurrent planning, permanency planning mediation, kin adoption, etc.) in recent years have improved the State's capacity to achieve timely adoption for children who are unable to return to their parents.*
- *In spite of efforts to make the option of voluntary relinquishments more accessible to parents, the number of foster children relinquished to public agencies has decreased. Additional exploration of this issue is needed.*

The National Standard for this data element is 32%. California's performance, which falls below the National Standard, was 23.5% in FFY 1998, 25.8% in FFY 1999 and 16.4% in FFY 2000. California's failure to meet the National Standard for adoption within 24 months of the latest removal is due to the skewing of the data as more children who had been in long-term foster care were discharged to adoption. Had these children remained in foster care, their long stay would not have been computed in the data indicator. This increase in children adopted from long-term foster care resulted from the State's increased commitment to adoption and permanency, irrespective of how long a child has been in foster care.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

During SFY 2000/01, the California Legislature allocated special funding for the specific purpose of facilitating adoption for a backlog of waiting foster children. With this additional funding, California shifted its focus during this year to children who had been freed for adoption but were still in foster care. This shift undoubtedly contributed to the lower percentage rate in FFY 2000 for this indicator. It should be noted that the vast majority of foster children are adopted by the caregivers with whom they have been in placement for some time. Thus, they are not physically moved at the time they are formally "placed" for adoption and the adoption is finalized by the court.

California has made great strides in ensuring permanency through adoption for foster children who are unable to return home. Over the five-year period from 1995–2001, the likelihood of adoption for children in foster care who cannot return home improved by

108%.⁴¹ This improvement is in large part due to the California Adoption Initiative. This initiative increased funding and made statutory, regulatory, policy and practice reforms that focused on achieving legal permanency for children in foster care. Through significant State and county efforts, California increased the number of finalized adoptions reported for this effort for AFCARS by 155%, from 3,287 in FFY 1997 to 8,392 in FFY 2001. This performance enabled California to capture over \$17.6 million in federal adoption incentive funds and to receive the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's 2001 Adoption Excellence Award for increased adoptions.

During the five years of the California Adoption Initiative, public adoption agencies exceeded their pre-Initiative performance as follows.⁴²

- Freed an additional 16,200 children for adoption.
- Placed an additional 14,300 children for adoption.
- Completed an additional 10,500 adoptions.
- Laid the groundwork for the completion of an additional 20,000 adoptions over the next five years.

These achievements were related to major program reforms that included the following:

- Concurrent planning that requires the child welfare services case plan include, in addition to services to reunify the family, those services necessary to achieve safe, timely and legal permanency should reunification fail. In concurrent planning, alternative forms of permanency are identified and implemented early in the case-planning process. The case plan includes both how reunification can be achieved (the reunification services track) and how legal permanency can be achieved if efforts to reunify fail (the concurrent services track).
- Kin adoption, a practice that makes adoption more suited to the needs of kin caregivers by better respecting family relationships.
- Structured Applicant Family Evaluation, a uniform psychosocial evaluation methodology used to assess suitability of prospective foster and adoptive families.
- Permanency Planning Mediation, a specialized type of mediation that engages parents who have failed to reunify in proactive permanency planning. The most frequent outcome is a voluntary adoption plan by the birth parents with a legally binding post-adoption contact agreement. Voluntary adoption planning decreases the number of cases going through protracted contested court hearings to terminate parental rights.

The California Adoption Initiative increased adoption caseworker efficiency by at least 15%, thus increasing the number of children who were adopted and making adoption more cost-effective. This increase was the product of the many changes in child welfare

⁴¹ This figure represents the percentage increase in the number of children per 1,000 children in foster care at the end of the calendar year, over the five-year period from 1995 to 2001.

⁴² This data is based on the assumption that without the California Adoption Initiative, the annual number of children freed for adoption, children placed for adoption and adoptions completed would have remained at SFY 1995/96 levels. This data represents the cumulative increase in these events in the five State Fiscal Years following the SFY 1995/96 as reported by public adoption agencies on the *Agency Adoption Program - Quarterly Statistical Reports* (Form AD 56A).

and adoption program practice and the technical assistance and training provided through the Initiative.

Although California has made great strides in achieving permanency for children, there still is room for improvement. Efforts are underway to promote improvements, including the following:

- Adoption Assistance Program (AAP): Regulations have been changed to allow the financially responsible public agency to pay AAP benefits based on either their foster care rates or the receiving county or state rates, whichever are higher. This change will remove financial disincentives to adopting interjurisdictionally, thereby increasing potential adoptive placement resources.
- California has joined the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance. This compact allows children who are receiving state-only AAP benefits to be eligible for Medicaid benefits if the child and his or her family move to another state. Ensuring continuity of health care benefits, no matter where the adoptive family moves, will remove barriers inhibiting some families from considering adoption.
- The Private Adoption Agency Reimbursement Program rate has been increased from \$3,500 to \$5,000 for every AAP-eligible child who is adopted through a cooperative placement with a public adoption agency. This rate increase will encourage more partnering between public and private adoption agencies to increase the number of available adoptive families.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Section II, Part E, Item 3, contains data detailing the increase in the annual number of adoptions of foster children. Although there have been significant accomplishments in adoption for children in foster care, adoption is not achieved in a timely manner. The process of terminating parental rights often requires extended court hearings. Voluntary relinquishment by birth parents is one means of expediting the adoption process. In spite of efforts to make voluntary relinquishments more accessible to birth parents, voluntary relinquishment of court-dependent children has been occurring with less frequency. State data indicates that the percentage of children adopted whose mothers voluntarily relinquished them for adoption has decreased from 11% in SFY 1995/96 to 3.3% in SFY 2000/01⁴³. Preliminary exploration of the issues surrounding the use of voluntary relinquishments suggests that some agencies seek terminations in lieu of relinquishment, believing terminations to be more binding.

FINDINGS:

Over the last several years, California has increased adoptions of foster children significantly. Additional examination is necessary to understand the decline in the use of voluntary relinquishments. In spite of great strides in adoption performance, California performs poorly on this indicator. Achieving timely adoption is in the best interest of children and one of California's goals. However, concerns about this performance

⁴³ Compiled from CDSS data as reported by public adoption agencies on the *Agency Adoption Program Individual Case Report* (AD 42R).

measure exist. Holding states to a standard that measures permanency only in terms of timeliness of finalized adoption has two unintended consequences:

- It discourages states from pursuing adoption for children who have been in foster care over 24 months.
- It provides a disincentive to pursue adoption for children with mental, physical or age-related challenges that make finding a suitable adoptive family more difficult and time-consuming.

In times of limited resources, a singular focus on this data indicator as a measure of a state's adoption performance is likely to exacerbate this effect. While timeliness is of value, it should not be the sole focus to the detriment of the best interests and needs of children for whom more sustained efforts are required to achieve permanency through adoption. While California is likely to improve on this data indicator in the future, the State will not abandon its commitment to permanency for all children in care in order to achieve the National Standard.

7. Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) (Point-in-Time Data Element VI). Discuss the extent to which the State complies with the requirement at Section 475(5)(E) of the Act regarding termination of parental rights for children who have been in foster care 15 of the most recent 22 months, for abandoned infants and for children whose parents have been convicted of the listed felonies. Identify and discuss the issues that affect timely termination of parental rights, where appropriate, including the use of exceptions to the TPR provisions.

SUMMARY

- *California law and practice conform to federal requirements regarding termination of parental rights.*
- *According to California law, adoption is considered at the Permanency hearing, which occurs no later than 12 months after the child has entered foster care, and at hearings that occur at least every six months thereafter. If a compelling reason exists that indicates adoption is not in the best interest of the child, parental rights are not terminated.*

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

California statutes require that action to terminate parental rights (TPR) be initiated when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. However, consistent with federal law, such action is not required if a compelling reason is documented in the case record that such action would not be in the best interest of the child. According to California law, the court may forgo reunification services in any one of 14 exceptional circumstances. These circumstances include parents who are convicted of certain

felonies or infants who have been abandoned prior to terminating parental rights. If family reunification is not ordered because of such exceptional circumstances or because reunification efforts have failed, then adoption, including TPR, becomes the primary case plan goal, unless a compelling reason to the contrary is documented. The following are compelling reasons not to terminate the rights of a parent:

- The child's parents have maintained regular visitations and contact and the child would benefit from continuing the relationship.
- The child is 12 years of age or older and objects to termination of parental rights.
- The child is placed in a residential treatment facility and adoption is unlikely and continuation of parental rights will not prevent finding the child a permanent family if the parents cannot resume custody when residential care is no longer needed.
- The child is living with a relative or foster parent who is unwilling or unable to adopt the child because of exceptional circumstances, and removing the child would be detrimental to the child. This reason does not apply to a child who is living with a nonrelative foster parent and who is under the age of six or a member of a sibling group where at least one child is under six and the siblings should be placed together.
- The court has previously found that the child may return to his or her home within the extended period of time permitted.
- A judicial finding has been made that reasonable reunification services have not been offered or provided.
- The court has found that there would be a substantial interference with a child's sibling relationship as compared to the benefit of legal permanency through adoption.

Children for whom a compelling reason not to terminate parental rights is documented at a given point in time are not excluded from adoption in the future. Adoption must be considered at each review hearing following the termination of reunification. At that time, action to terminate parental rights will be pursued, or a compelling reason will be documented anew.

It is worth noting that, unlike most other states, a fundamental tenet of adoption in California is the belief that parental rights should not be terminated unless it is highly likely that the child will be adopted. This likelihood is best demonstrated by the identification of a prospective adoptive home. This value is acknowledged in the statutory framework and permeates many juvenile courts and child welfare/adoption agencies. As a result, most children are living with the family that will adopt them by the time parental rights are terminated. This value is based on the desire to avoid creating legal orphans by terminating the parental rights of children who do not wish to be adopted or for whom an adoptive home is unlikely to be found.

DATA DISCUSSION:

To determine the percentage of children who have been in out-of-home care 17 of the most recent 22 months,⁴⁴ Point-in-Time Data Element VI, the total foster care population was divided into the following groups:

- Children placed in a pre-adoptive home.
- Children placed with a relative.
- Children whose parental rights have been terminated.
- All remaining children.

The first three groups listed above are not included as part of the population used to determine the percentage of children who have been in out-of-home care 17 of the most recent 22 months. For FFY 2000, the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile shows that 65% of the children in the remaining group, or 31,885 children, had been in out-of-home care 17 of the most recent 22 months. This figure means that 32% of the foster care population has been in care 17 of the most recent 22 months and has not had parental rights terminated. Seventy-one percent of these children are 11 years of age or older. This fact suggests that many of these children may have declined to be adopted or have emotional or behavioral issues that must be resolved prior to readiness for adoption. This data suggests further that additional efforts need to be made to make adoption more feasible and appealing to older children.

FINDINGS:

California believes this data element suggests that the parental rights for these children *should* be terminated when that is not necessarily the case. Moreover, the criteria for reporting this indicator does not identify children whose cases *have* been reviewed and, because of compelling reasons, parental rights have not been terminated.

Furthermore, the large proportion of older children among those who have been in care 17 of the most recent 22 months suggests that adoption needs to be made more accessible for older children who may be declining adoption. Despite achievements in the last few years, additional efforts can be made in this area. A promising and growing practice in this area is Permanency Planning Mediation, described in Section IV, Part 2, Item 6. This program facilitates children maintaining contact with birth family members after being adopted.

⁴⁴ This indicator is designated “17 of the most recent 22 months” rather than the statutory timeframe for initiating termination of parental rights proceedings at “15 of the most recent 22 months” since the AFCARS system cannot determine the date the child is considered to have entered foster care as defined by federal regulations. This element uses the outside date for determining the data the child is considered to have entered foster care, which is 60 days from the actual removal date.

8. Stability of Foster Care Placements (Point-in-Time Data Elements IV & XI and Cohort Data Element IV). Using Data Element XI on the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile, discuss whether the percentage of children in the State who have been in foster care less than 12 months and have had more than two placement settings conforms to the National Standard for this indicator. Using all three data elements noted above, identify and discuss the reasons for the movement of children in foster care in the State. If there are differences in placement stability for children newly entering the system (cohort data) compared with the total population of children in care (permanency data), identify and discuss those issues.

SUMMARY

- *California's performance regarding the stability of children placed in foster care does not meet the National Standard.*
- *California law and regulations contain safeguards to promote stability for children.*
- *Kinship care placements are more stable than placements in unrelated foster homes.*
- *Further examination is necessary to determine the best way to improve placement stability of children in foster care.*

According to the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile, California's performance on Data Element XI of 82.9% does not meet the National Standard of 86.7%.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

California's statutory and regulatory framework, based on principles of good practice, contains safeguards that aim to promote children's stability. These safeguards apply to circumstances in which children are initially removed either from the home of their parent/guardian(s) or from a home (foster or relative) in which they are placed. The law requires that children not be removed except in cases where it is clear that the child cannot be maintained safely in the home, even if services are provided or the safety and protection of the public is at issue. Further, it is required that the placement be the least restrictive, most family-like setting, in a location as close as possible to the child's family (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 16000 and Family Code (FC) 7950). Consistent with these requirements, placement with a relative is preferred by statute.

As with the initial placement, safeguards exist to prevent unnecessary moves once a child comes into care. Both the court and the child's parents must be notified of any placement changes. Furthermore, in circumstances where a child is moving to a more restrictive setting (e.g., from a relative home to an unrelated foster home, from a foster home to a group home, etc.), a hearing must be held to determine the necessity. Additionally, unless the child is in immediate danger, regulations require that a notice be given to the foster parent or the agency, by the party initiating the move, seven days prior to the removal of a child.

Once a child first comes into care, and after an initial assessment, a case plan is completed and a placement is arranged based on the child's specific needs (Child Welfare Services MPP 31-200 and 31-400). Thus, a child is often initially placed in an emergency shelter home or facility. This temporary placement allows the agency to make an in-depth assessment of the child's placement needs and to identify the most suitable placement. The degree to which emergency shelter care is used depends on individual county practice. In all counties, information and training are provided to caregivers in an effort to maximize their ability to effectively parent the children who come into their care. The child welfare agency is required to provide to foster parents and other providers information that is pertinent to the child's needs, including educational, medical, family background and behavioral needs. Training is required of foster parents and available to relatives to improve their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children in their care.

DATA DISCUSSION:

In examining California's performance on this data indicator, a number of issues must be considered. Upon examination of the data in preparation for the Statewide Assessment, the CDSS became aware that the automatic placement counter in CWS/CMS, from which this data element is derived, overcounts placement moves. Additionally, this automatic counter does not count placements in a manner consistent with the federal definitions, as they have been clarified. Overcounts occur in the following ways:

- When a child moves with the foster family to a new residence.
- When a child returns to a home he or she has been placed in previously, e.g., after placement in a group home.
- When a child goes to another foster home for respite care.
- When a placement designation changes from "emergency shelter" to "foster care," even if the child does not move.
- When a home's license status changes, e.g., prior to implementation of the federal Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), when a home pending licensure was licensed, it was considered a status change and, therefore, counted as another placement setting.
- When a child's foster placement changes to an adoptive placement.

It is uncertain whether the State would meet the National Standard currently if the data was corrected. In any case, placement stability is an area that bears further examination for future data reporting as well as for program improvement.

Despite data quality issues, significant findings emerge from data on placement stability, particularly when broken down by placement type (kin vs. non-kin) and by age.⁴⁵ Table 21 provides these breakouts for all 1999 foster care entrants who have been in care for as long as 18 months. Of these children, 72.9% placed in kin homes and 46.9% in non-kin foster homes have had two or fewer placements. This data clearly demonstrates that children experience increased stability when placed with relatives.

⁴⁵ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

1999 Entries % of Child Welfare Supervised Children w/ "n" Placements After 18 Months, All Ages						
Type of Foster Home	% w/ 1	% w/ 2	% w/ 3	% w/ 4	% w/ 5+	Total
Kin	37.0%	35.9%	16.4%	6.6%	4.2%	100.0%
Non-Kin	18.4%	28.5%	22.9%	13.8%	16.4%	100.0%

Table 21: Placement Stability by Age

Though not addressed in this data indicator, another aspect of stability that should be considered is a child's placement with a sibling. California laws and regulations contain requirements that are intended to maximize the opportunity for siblings to be placed together. Data⁴⁶ indicates that 61% of children in care who have one or more siblings are placed with at least one sibling. Similar to placement stability, children fare better when placed with relatives in this regard. Data generated by U.C. Berkeley regarding the proportion of children who are placed with siblings reveals that sibling groups are more likely to remain together when placed in the home of a relative (78.3%) than when they are placed in a non-relative foster home (57.6% if in a foster family home; 61.7% if in a foster family agency home).

FINDINGS:

While California does not meet the National Standard as defined for stability in foster care, the State has strengths to build on in this area. Placement stability is likely affected by a number of factors, including:

- **Type of Placement:** Not only does placement with relatives provide important family continuity for children removed from their parents, it also provides more stability, as demonstrated by the data. The use of family decision-making models may improve the likelihood of placing a child with an appropriate relative and, thereby, promote stability. Increased efforts to support kin caregivers will, in turn, enable them to more effectively meet the needs of the children in their care and mitigate against further placement moves and resulting higher costs.
- **Recruitment, Assessment and Training of Foster Homes:** Having a sufficient pool of well-prepared families provides more potential placement options and improves the likelihood of making an effective placement selection. Furthermore, preparing foster parents to engage as partners in the treatment of children and their families is a growing practice. Efforts such as the Family to Family Initiative, discussed above, are now being implemented in several counties. In the Family to Family Initiative, staff and providers receive enhanced training to encourage partnerships among birth families and foster families. This initiative also promotes placement of children in their local communities.
- **Multidisciplinary Efforts:** Increased multidisciplinary efforts show promise in further meeting the needs of children in placement. Public health nurses located in county welfare and probation offices often assist in identifying physical and mental health needs of children in care and assist in coordinating the resources to meet them. Additionally, the California Mental Health Directors Association has established the Administrative Services Organization through a partnership with a private firm, ValueOptions. This partnership assists in providing mental health services to

⁴⁶ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

children in out-of-home placement and children adopted from foster care (and eligible for the Adoption Assistance Program). This agency has been successful in streamlining the billing and payment process that previously impeded obtaining needed services.

California is finding ways to provide needed support to children in placement, and efforts to increase placement stability will continue. However, California's practice of using emergency shelter care as an initial assessment placement is unlikely to change. More effective initial assessments and thoughtful placement selection of a relative or well-prepared foster home that receives ongoing support appear to be the best chances of minimizing placement moves.

9. *Foster Care Re-Entries (Point-in-Time Data Elements V & XII). Using Data Element XII, discuss whether the percentage of children who entered foster care during the period under review who had a prior entry into foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode conforms to the National Standard for this indicator. Using both data elements, discuss the extent of foster care re-entries for all children in the State's placement and care responsibility, the issues affecting re-entries and how the State is addressing the issues.*

SUMMARY

- ***California's performance regarding children who re-enter foster care within 12 months does not meet the National Standard.***
- ***Additional resources and services are necessary to help families maintain improved functioning when a child is returned home.***
- ***High caseworker caseloads appear to impact the ability of child welfare agencies to provide sufficient aftercare to ensure the family is functioning well enough to maintain the child safely in the home.***

The National Standard for the data element on foster care re-entry is 8.6%. California's performance, which exceeds the National Standard, is 9.3% for FFY 2000.

DATA DISCUSSION:

The rate of re-entry to foster care is related to the data indicators for both the rate of recurrence of maltreatment and the rate of reunification within 12 months. As discussed in Section IV, Part B, Item 4, of the children who reunified during FFY 2000, the percentage of children who did so in 12 months or less is 53.7%. This figure is below the National Standard, indicating that reunification is taking longer for more children in California than is desirable.

Although children may take longer to exit to reunification, from FFY 1998 through FFY 2000, more children have reunified.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the data in Table 22 suggests that children returning home appear to be doing so with more stability. This trend is demonstrated by the fact that even though more children have reunified, fewer children are re-entering foster care,⁴⁸ experiencing a recurrence of maltreatment⁴⁹ or entering foster care due to maltreatment⁵⁰ over the same time period. The data in Table 23 indicates this trend is particularly true for the youngest children in the foster care system.

Stability of Reunification	1998		1999		2000	
VIII. Length of Time to Achieve Permanency Goal⁵¹ Reunification/Relative Placement (# Discharged)	28,987		28,024		29,862	
XII. Foster Care Re-entry	5,801	11.4%	3,780	8.5%	4,056	9.3%
VI. Recurrence of Maltreatment	6,730	11.8%	6,897	11.3%	6,640	10.9%
IV. Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Report	34,649	31.3%	34,248	29.9%	33,376	29.2%

Table 22: Permanency Profile: Stability of Reunification

The longer range picture suggests that children also re-enter care after the 12-month time period of the federal indicator as shown in Table 23 in the column marked ">12 mos."⁵² Similar to the short-term re-entry picture, the State performs better for the youngest children who exit care. Please refer to Section II, Part E, Item 1, for discussion of stakeholder survey results regarding effective reunification services.

FFY 2000	Reunification		Re-entry Over Time					
Age at Exit			Re-entered (in months)				No Re-entry	
	< 12 mos.		<12 mos.		> 12 mos.			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
All	16,028	53.7	4,056	9.3	4,618	10.6	35,072	80.2
<1 yr	1,480	100.0	188	3.1	1	0.0	5,904	96.9
1-5 yrs	4,788	54.6	1,001	8.6	820	7.1	9,810	84.3
6-10 yrs	4,462	51.0	917	8.9	1,482	14.3	7,955	76.8
11-15 yrs	3,773	52.3	1,349	11.9	1,690	14.9	8,293	73.2
16-17 yrs	1,398	47.5	592	13.8	607	14.2	3,086	72.0
Missing	127	17.9	9	17.6	18	35.3	24	47.1

Table 23: Permanency Profile: Reunification and Re-entry Over Time (Data Elements IX and XII)

⁴⁷ Point-in-Time Profile Data Element VIII

⁴⁸ Point-in-Time Profile Data Element XII

⁴⁹ Safety Data Element VI

⁵⁰ Safety Data Element IV

⁵¹ For the Median Months to Discharge, please refer to the full data profile.

⁵² Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

FINDINGS:

While California does not meet the National Standard for the data indicator for foster care re-entry, the State appears to be reunifying more children more effectively (i.e., they are not returning to care). This appears to be the case particularly for children ages five and under. Despite such progress, the CDSS remains concerned about the number of children re-entering foster care, especially those returning after the 12-month timeframe used for the National Standard.

Some of the factors affecting the rate of re-entry to foster care are:

- Singular focus by the court or child welfare agency on compliance with timelines, which 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 and stable.
- Insufficient resources available to help families maintain functioning when children are returned home, e.g., job training, housing assistance, Supportive and Therapeutic Options Program (STOP), etc.
- High caseloads, which may impact the ability of child welfare agencies to provide sufficient post-reunification services to families to ensure that they are functioning well enough to maintain the children in the home over time.

In circumstances where reunification has not occurred within the statutory timeframes, caseworkers, agencies and the courts must face a difficult choice—to return a child prematurely, thus risking reabuse and re-entry, or to move the child to permanency (i.e., adoption or guardianship), thus eliminating any future chance for reunification. California appears to be improving in its ability to effectively manage this dilemma. Further examination of cases that re-enter foster care will provide additional clarity for future efforts.

10. Length of Stay in Foster Care (Point-in-Time Data Element VII & Cohort Data Element VI). Using Data Element VI in the Cohort Data Profile, discuss how length of stay in foster care for first-time foster care entries in the State compares with the National Standard for this indicator (although this indicator is not used to determine substantial conformity). Examining the data on length of stay in both profiles, identify and discuss factors affecting length of stay in foster care and how the State is addressing the issues. If there are differences in the length of stay between children newly entering foster care in the State (cohort data) and the total population of children in care (permanency data), identify and discuss the reasons.

SUMMARY

- ***A typical child in foster care in California stays longer in care (26 months) than the national average (20 months).***
- ***When compared to children in unrelated foster homes, data indicates that children in kinship care stay in care longer but have fewer moves.***

- ***Children placed in foster family agency homes or in group homes stay in care longer than those placed in either kinship care or licensed foster homes.***
- ***The same factors affecting timeliness of reunification, adoption and guardianship, discussed in Section IV, Part B, Items 4 through 6, also impact a child's length of stay in foster care.***

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) Report for FFY 1999,⁵³ the national figures for the median length of stay for children in foster care was 20 months. According to the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile, this figure for California for the same time period was 26 months.

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Section IV, Part B, Items 4 through 6, discuss efforts to maximize opportunities for children in out-of-home care to exit to a permanent home through reunification, adoption or relative guardianship. Other than the statutory and policy framework discussed in those sections, no policy exists that specifically addresses a child's length of stay in care. In recognition of the deleterious effects that long-term foster care placement may have on children, California has dramatically increased the number of children exiting foster care in recent years. As discussed previously, recent efforts to exit children who otherwise would have continued in care has had a negative impact on Point-in-Time Data Element VII. Had these children remained in care, California's performance on this indicator would have been better.

DATA DISCUSSION:

Data compiled by U.C. Berkeley⁵⁴ from the California Children's Services Archive, a longitudinal database derived from CWS/CMS data, examines the median length of stay by various placement types. This data indicates the following:

- The median length of stay for children who *entered* child welfare supervised foster care for the first time between 1998 and 2000 was 19 months.
- Among those children who entered child welfare supervised foster care between 1998 and 2000, those who spent most of their time in FFA homes stayed longer (median length of stay 23 months) than children in either kinship care (21 months) or non-kin foster care (16 months).
- "Other" placement types had a median stay of 25 months, group homes had a median stay of 15 months and those identified under shelter (e.g., shelters, mental health and health care facilities) had a median stay of 10 months.⁵⁵
- Children in "mixed" (no particular placement type accounted for at least half of a child's time in care) placement types stayed the longest (31 months).

⁵³ <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/june2001.htm>, most recent report available

⁵⁴ Source: U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>. This data is based on the Kaplan-Meier method for computing length of stay

⁵⁵ The median length of stay for children placed in the category of "shelter" appears to be extremely inflated due to a large number of children incorrectly coded with this facility type in Los Angeles.

FINDINGS:

Care must be taken when comparing California with national figures. Out-of-home care populations are not the same across states. Some states consider relative placements a form of reunification and, therefore, do not include these placements in their foster care population. Yet in California, a significant percentage of children are placed with relatives. The median length of stay is longer in relative care than in foster family homes. However, as discussed in Section IV, Part B, Item 8, these placements are significantly more stable. Undoubtedly, parents may feel less urgency to reunify when a child is placed in the care of a relative than with a stranger.

Overall, a broad range of factors impact a child's length of stay in foster care. Court continuances, available exit options and resources (e.g., the Kin-GAP program and Permanency Planning Mediation), availability of adoptive homes, placement type, availability of appropriate services, etc. are all factors that influence how long a child stays in out-of-home care. The issues impacting timeliness to reunification, adoption and achievement of permanency goals have been discussed at length under the prior sections. Those are the very same issues that impact length of stay. Please refer to those items for more information (Section IV, Part B, Items 4 through 6).

11. Other Permanency Issues. Discuss any other issues of concern, not covered above or in the data that affect the permanency outcomes for children and families served by the agency.

All issues of concern have been discussed above.

OUTCOMES:

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

1. ***Frequency of Contact between Caseworkers and Children and Families.***
Examine any data the State has available about the frequency of contact between caseworkers and the children and families in their caseloads. Identify and discuss issues that affect the frequency of contacts and how the frequency of contacts affects the outcomes for children and families.

SUMMARY

- *The percentage of counties passing the compliance reviews on making monthly contacts with the child improved from 69% in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1998/99 to 90%* in SFY 2001/02. (*SFY 2001/02 represents the 10 counties, as of June 2002, that have been reviewed and whose Oversight Reports have been sent to the county.)*
- *Stakeholders believe that reducing caseworker caseloads would improve both the quantity and quality of the monthly contacts.*

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The California Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) 31-320 defines specific contact requirements with children in foster care and their parents. Except for the first month when more frequent contact is required, the caseworker is mandated to visit the child at least monthly, whether the child is in the home or in out-of-home placement. The frequency of visitation may be reduced under specified circumstances.

DATA DISCUSSION:***Compliance Review Data:***

Current CDSS policy requires that each of California's 58 counties has an onsite compliance review every three years. Approximately one-third (19-20) of the counties are reviewed every year. The purpose of the compliance review is to obtain baseline data to determine specific areas of compliance and noncompliance with CWS regulations and to help identify county CWS program areas that may need improvement.

Compliance reviews identify and report if the child was seen by a caseworker within the required timeframe, not the quality of that contact.

A statistically valid random sample of cases receiving Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanent Placement services is selected for the review process. The methodology used requires a 90% or higher compliance level for all review questions. Compliance is indicated if the contact was made and was on time.

Table 24 below, indicates the percentage of California counties found in compliance for this element of the compliance review in the fiscal year identified.

FISCAL YEAR	“Was face-to-face contact made with the child within the latest required regulatory time?”
98/99	69%
99/00	56%
00/01	65%
01/02	90%

Table 24: Monthly Contact⁵⁶

The data suggests a drop in the number of counties found to be in compliance between FY 1998/99 and FY 1999/00. A statistically valid, random sample of cases was not obtained prior to July 2000; cases were chosen by another means. This change in procedure may account for some of the decline.

The data suggests that from FY 1999/00 to the present, the percentage of cases found in compliance with face-to-face contact between the caseworker and the child have steadily increased. Ongoing staff training on documentation will continue to improve compliance. However, high caseloads also affect the frequency of contact between the caseworker and the child.

Qualitative Data:

The CDSS conducted focus groups in Sacramento and Oakland with public agency child welfare caseworkers. In addition, other public agency caseworkers were asked to complete an extensive questionnaire. Caseworkers (18%) indicated that caseloads are too high and that reducing them would help them do a better job. Caseload size, “peripheral duties” (e.g., data entry, paperwork), referral coordination and insufficient administrative support all reduce caseworkers’ participation in training opportunities that would help improve performance.

⁵⁶ FY 2001/ 02 represents the 10 counties that have been reviewed and whose Oversight Reports have been forwarded to the county.

The CDSS also facilitated a focus group with 12 representatives of the California Youth Connection (CYC) from the San Francisco Bay area, California's second largest urban area. The CYC is an advocacy and youth leadership organization for current and former foster youth. Its goals are to improve foster care, to educate the public and policy makers and to remove the negative stereotypes of foster youth.

The youth had the following suggestions to improve case contact and communication with their caseworkers:

- Reduce the caseloads of the caseworkers.
- Provide better training and better compensation for caseworkers.
- Meet with foster parents and youth in placement separately and then together.
- Disclose why the youth cannot go home.
- Establish age-specific caseloads for caseworkers.
- Require more than monthly contact with the caseworker.
- Ask the youth in care if they are being harassed or abused.

FINDINGS:

Face-to-face contacts between the child and his/her caseworker and between the caseworker and parent(s), out-of-home care provider(s) and allied service providers are integral to the case plan. Statewide, county compliance reviews, training and technical assistance have contributed to improved documentation and data accuracy.

The data shows an improvement in the face-to-face contacts between the caseworker and the child from FY 1999/00 to FY 2001/02. Focus group data suggests that caseload reductions would further improve both the quality and the frequency of contacts.

California has not been immune from the national shortage of educated people willing and able to accept positions in child welfare. Vacancies, staff turnover and caseload size affect the caseworkers' ability to see the child, parent and caretaker once each month. In addition, the current method for allocating basic child welfare funds in California, established many years ago, is based on caseload standards and average monthly case counts. In the years since this methodology was established, extensive changes in child welfare service delivery resulting from numerous legislative, demographic, programmatic, administrative and/or technical changes have necessitated a re-evaluation of this methodology.

Passage of California Senate Bill (SB) 2030 (Chapter 785, Statutes of 1998) required the CDSS to undertake an evaluation of the workload and budgeting methodologies for CWS and 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 represents a 22.3% cumulative increase, over the three-year period of 1999 through 2001. While the infusion of additional funding is helpful, it does not resolve the issue of caseload standards.

Two years after passage of SB 2030, pursuant to the Budget Act of 2000-2001, the California Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group was charged by Governor Davis

and the Legislature to “think outside the box” to develop a comprehensive approach for the 21st century. As part of this effort, its Human Resources subcommittee has had the task of integrating the SB 2030 Workload Study recommendations into a redesigned CWS system. The group reached consensus in its belief that the core technology of the renovated system is relationships. Providing the resources and opportunity for caseworkers to create and sustain supportive relationships with children, families and allied service providers is a primary goal of this effort. Face-to-face contacts are a key vehicle for developing these relationships; however, high caseloads are a significant barrier to achieving this change.

The CDSS is reviewing the implications and viability of using an incremental approach to achieving the recommended “minimum standards” for caseworkers’ caseloads, as suggested in the SB 2030 Workload Study. An immediate decrease in caseload standards would require additional State and county funding. Federal Title IV-E funds have a 50% federal financial participation and are limited only by the amount of funding the State and counties make available to meet the required “match.” Funding for foster care cases and administrative costs, including caseworker contacts, is further complicated by the use of federal eligibility standards linked to the old Aid to Families with Dependant Children program, which limits Title IV-E eligibility.

Within the purview of the State of California, steps are being taken to address the dual issues of resources and high caseloads. It is anticipated that this additional funding, in concert with implementation of social work practices that have demonstrated effectiveness and system improvements, will further enhance outcomes for the children and families served.

2. Educational Status of Children. Examine any data the State has available regarding the educational status of children in its care and placement responsibility. How does the State ensure that the educational needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning and that those needs are addressed through services?

SUMMARY

- ***California law requires that case plans address the educational needs of children in foster care. Although agencies have improved the documentation of these needs and how they are being met, additional improvements are needed.***
- ***The Foster Youth Services program, established at the State Department of Education, is designed to better meet the educational needs of children in foster care. Partnerships with the same goals also exist among local county child welfare agencies, the education system and community-based services.***

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

California's Child Welfare Services MPP 31-206 defines the case plan requirements to meet the educational needs of children in out-of-home placement.

State law requires all children over the age of six years and under the age of 18 years to attend school unless, under specified circumstances, an alternative educational venue is appropriate. Children under the age of six are eligible for Head Start, state-funded pre-school and therapeutic day care.

The educational needs and the status of children in out-of-home care are reported at periodic court reviews held every six months. Educational conditions, grade level and school names are documented in case plan updates and included within or attached to the court report. Special needs of the child(ren) and the services identified to meet those needs are documented. Furthermore, foster family homes, foster family agencies and group homes are required under licensing regulations to have a child's educational needs addressed in each child's Needs and Services Plan.

DATA DISCUSSION:

The CWS/CMS data system has the capacity to generate a Health and Education Passport (HEP) for each child in foster care. A number of fields that populate the HEP are not mandatory and, thus, are underutilized. However, improvement is being made in capturing HEP information in CWS/CMS. In FFY 2000, 31% of the children in care had information stored into a HEP. As of June 2001, this figure rose to 49%, indicating that recording of the HEP data is increasing.⁵⁷

With respect to children in out-of-home care in a group home setting, the American Institutes for Research recently completed a report entitled *Education of Foster Group Home Children, Whose Responsibility Is It: Study of the Educational Placement of Children Residing in Group Homes (2001)* for the California Department of Education. The purposes of this study were to determine a more clearly established count of children in group homes, the practices affecting their education placement, the degree of coordination between education and non-education agencies and the impact of these factors on educational outcomes for group home children. For the first time, two major State databases with information on these issues for group home children were matched. The number of children in group home care as of 1999 was shown to be 18,416. Approximately 12,000 were under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Of this count, it is estimated that 47% are in special education, and 46% of those are educated in non-public schools.

FINDINGS:

The findings suggest the following changes in policy and practice are necessary to ensure that the educational needs of children in the child welfare system are identified in assessments and case planning and that those needs are addressed through appropriate services:

⁵⁷ California Department of Social Services data extracted from CWS/CMS

- Clearly established accountability and responsibility guidelines for care and placement of foster youth.
- Improvement in interagency coordination and collaboration at the State and county level.
- Implementation of a viable State-level information system for children in foster care.
- Improved systemic capacity with broader range of residential options for children residing in group care.
- Significant programs and supports for children in group care enabling consistent enrollment in public school.
- Removal of fiscal incentives for practices that are not in the best interests of children in foster care. For example, children are often placed in high-level group homes that require an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for placement in a non-public school (NPS). The result is that children who need an NPS setting cannot receive the service unless placed in residential treatment. Due to funding constrictions, school districts typically are reluctant to suggest residential placement as an element of the IEP. Meeting the needs of the child often then falls to the CWS system.

Efforts to improve educational services to children and youth in out-of-home care are under way at both the State and county levels. At the State level, the Department of Education has established the Foster Youth Services (FYS) program, funded with State General Fund dollars. FYS provides support services to reduce the traumatic effects on children of having been displaced from family and school. FYS programs have the ability and authority to ensure that health and school records are obtained to establish appropriate placements and to coordinate instruction, counseling, tutoring, mentoring, vocational training, emancipation services, training for independent living and other related services. The Department of Education anticipates these services will increase the stability of placements for foster children and youth. These services are designed to improve children's educational performance and personal achievement, directly benefiting them, as well as providing long-range cost savings to the State. Initially this program was operational in only two County Offices of Education (COEs) statewide. Currently, 42 COEs are funded to provide foster youth services.

At the county level, a number of initiatives address the educational needs of children in foster care. A survey of county welfare and probation departments indicated the following:

- Fifteen of the 21 respondent counties indicated that they had ongoing collaborative relationships with their respective county COEs. In several cases, the COE completes educational assessments.
- In Santa Clara County, the Educational Rights Project, County Office of Education "Foster Youth Services" unit, works to ensure that children who are dependents or wards of the juvenile court are enrolled in and attending school and an appropriate education program. The project is the result of collaboration among county departments and community agencies to remove barriers to success at school and to build bridges among the children, their families and the school.
- Other examples of collaborative relationships include:
 - Orange County: Collaborative Options for Resource Development (CORE).
 - Yolo County: Conservation Partnership (YCCP).

- Monterey County: Community Schools that are established as collaboratives with the county's Office of Education.
- Sacramento County: The Interagency Management and Authorization Committee (IMAC).
- Riverside County: Office of Education assessments in relationship to Independent Living Skills Program.
- Butte County: Interagency Services Placement Unit with a COE liaison.
- San Joaquin County: System of Care/SARB.
- San Mateo County: Educational Assessment Specialists.
- Alameda County: South Hayward Our Kids Program/Parents Helping Parents.
- Lassen County: System of Care.
- San Luis Obispo County: School-based social workers/Multidisciplinary Teams/CASA.

3. Health Care for Children. Examine any data the State has regarding the provisions of health care, including Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT), to children in its care and placement responsibility. How does the State ensure that the physical health and medical needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services?

4. Mental Health Care for Children. Examine any data the State has available regarding the mental health needs and status of children in its care and custody. How does the State ensure that the mental health needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services?

SUMMARY

- *The percentage of counties passing the compliance reviews on elements related to timely medical and dental exams improved over the last five years.*
- *Based on county compliance review data, significant improvement is needed in providing health and education information to the caregiver/provider in a timely manner.*
- *Little data is available regarding mental health care for foster children; however, the State is increasing its capacity to meet the mental health needs of children in foster care.*

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

California's Child Welfare Services MPP 31-206 defines case plan requirements and ensures that the health and mental health needs of children in out-of-home placements are met.

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, based on the age of the child, beyond the health examination provided within 30 days of initial placement. The following is the required frequency:

Age of the Child	Interval Until Next Exam
Under 1 month old	1 month
1 month through 6 months	2 months
7 months through 15 months	3 months
16 months through 23 months	6 months
2 years through 3 years	1 year
4 years through 5 years	2 years
6 years through 8 years	3 years
9 years through 19 years	4 years

Table 25: Frequency of Health Examinations

DATA DISCUSSION:

Current CDSS policy requires that each of California's 58 counties has an on-site compliance review every three years. Approximately one-third (19-20) of the counties are reviewed every year. The purpose of the compliance review is to obtain baseline data to determine specific areas of compliance and noncompliance with CWS regulations and to help identify the county CWS program areas that are working well and those that may need improvement. Compliance reviews identify and report whether the health information was provided to caregivers and the timeliness of medical and dental exams.

A statistically valid random sample of cases receiving Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanent Placement services are selected for the review process. The methodology used requires a 90% or higher compliance level for all review questions. The table below signifies the percentage of counties found in compliance for this element in the fiscal year identified.

Fiscal Year of County Review	Health Education Info. Given To Provider	Medical Exam Timely	Dental Exam Timely
	% of Counties In Compliance	% of Counties In Compliance	% of Counties In Compliance
FY 97/98	32%	63%	26%
FY 98/99	15%	92%	31%
FY 99/00	13%	88%	31%
FY 00/01	25%	94%	65%
FY 01/02	10%	100%	80%

Table 26: Physical Health and Dental Health⁵⁸

The automated statewide data system has the capacity to store data on a variety of conditions and disorders. It is anticipated that as county child welfare agencies become more adept at using this system, health and dental care needs of foster care children will be more clearly identified and tracked.

The report, *Code Blue: Health Services for Children in Foster Care (1998)* suggests that children and adolescents in foster care typically suffer serious health, emotional and developmental problems. As a group, children in foster care suffer higher rates of serious physical or psychological problems compared with other children from the same socio-economic backgrounds. Nearly 50% suffer chronic conditions, approximately 40-72% require ongoing medical treatment and studies indicate that 50-60% have moderate to severe mental health problems.

FINDINGS:

Physical Health:

Despite the fact that relatively little data is available on the HEP (as mentioned above), compliance review data indicates that the great majority of children/youth receive a mandatory health examination as they enter out-of-home care. The number of children historically receiving timely dental examinations is less than promising.⁵⁹ Likewise, efforts to provide caregivers with health (and education) information need to be improved significantly.

The report entitled *Code Blue: Health Services for Children in Foster Care (1998)*, indicates that children and youth in foster care rarely enter the system with useful health records or mental health histories, and access to full documentation is restricted by confidentiality issues, bureaucratic requirements or limited parental knowledge and

⁵⁸ FY 01/02 represents the ten counties that have been reviewed and whose Oversight Reports have been forwarded to the County.

⁵⁹ Due to the small number of counties included in the current year's figures, conclusions are difficult to draw.

unavailability. Burdened by heavy caseloads, caseworkers frequently lack the time and training to track elusive health data. A child's repeated moves in and out of the CWS system further limit the quality of information available for health assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

California received a waiver from the Health Care Financing Administration to allow for a transition from fee-for-service to managed care for Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

Approximately 212 Public Health Nurses (PHNs) have been hired across the State to oversee the provision of physical, mental and dental health care to children in foster care and, in so doing, to ensure that managed care plans meet their needs. These children include those in out-of-county and out-of-state placements. The PHNs are co-located in the county welfare and probation departments. They collaborate with welfare and probation department staff and provide consultation and assistance in the collection and interpretation of health care information and the development of health resources. They also plan and provide training programs for health, child welfare, probation and juvenile court staff. Since the inception of this program in January 2000, utilization of the health and education passport for those children with open CWS/CMS cases has been steadily increasing.

Mental Health:

In 1993, statutes established The Children's Mental Health Services Act. The goal of this Act is to support counties in developing interagency coalitions to help children with serious emotional disturbances avoid out-of-home placements and to provide services to help children already in out-of-home placement return to their families or a more family-like environment. The CDSS has supported the principles and values of this Act.

The California Department of Mental Health/Children's System of Care Program has done long-term research on the outcomes of implementing the Act. Much of this data is on cost outcomes and placement rates. The Department of Mental Health indicates that while the trends are positive, little information is available on the mental health treatment needs of children in foster care. The number of children in foster care with developmental disabilities and involved in regional centers is also not known. The number of foster care youth moving into adult mental health systems is not available, and collaborative data collection among State agencies on the variety of mental health needs for children and youth in foster care is absent.

Physical and Mental Health:

The ability to make a comprehensive, complete and accurate assessment is the foundation necessary to ensure that physical health and mental health needs are adequately identified and addressed in case-planning activities. Adequately trained CWS staff is essential to identification and recognition of children's physical health and mental health issues. As identified in Section II, Part D, the Standardized Core Curriculum Project (a multi-year statewide collaborative effort among the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), CalSWEC, the five Regional Training Academies and the CDSS) is designed to meet this need. It is aimed at ensuring that each new child welfare worker in California is provided with a comprehensive, competency-based

training before he or she assumes an independent caseload. State General Fund dollars have been allocated to develop a standardized training curriculum for child welfare workers.

Many of the child well-being indicators are outside the direct authority and/or control of the child welfare system. Funding for physical health, mental health and educational services is not within the scope of Title IV-B. Thus, meeting potential child well-being outcome targets requires commitment to ongoing collaborative relationships at both the State and local levels.

5. Other Well-Being Issues. Discuss any other issues of concern, not covered above or in the data, that impact on the well-being outcomes for children and families served by the agency.

All issues of concern have been discussed above.

SECTION V: State Assessment of Strengths and Needs

1. *What specific strengths of the agency's programs has the team identified?*

As is clear from the preceding discussion, defining 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. In recent years, major system enhancements have been implemented through such programs as the California Adoption Initiative and the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program, as well as through such best practice innovations as wraparound, Family to Family Initiative, Permanency Planning Mediation, Structured Applicant Family Evaluation 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 that do come into care are exited to permanency in higher numbers.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS:

While there are challenges inherent in the complexity of California's State-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, its central strength lies in the flexibility afforded each county to determine how best to meet the needs of its children and families. The backbone of this system is the clear statutory and regulatory framework supported by an extensive infrastructure of technology, county-administered local programs, a broad array of community-based services and well-trained staff.

Quality services to children and families are 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 and university-based training for county child welfare staff. Case plans, the foundation of service delivery, are developed and updated in a system of regular court reviews that ensures due process for parents. The entire State-supervised, county-administered system is buttressed by extensive collaboration among all child welfare stakeholders, but principally between the State and counties.

OUTCOMES:

Safety:

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

In recent years, new categories have been added to the list of individuals who are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse. In addition, the increased training provided to these individuals has been accompanied by increased reporting. However,

in spite of these changes, the number of substantiated reports has remained relatively stable. Furthermore, the incidence of child maltreatment per 1,000 children in the general population is about the same in California (12.0)⁶⁰ as it is nationally (11.8).⁶¹ Together, these factors suggest that child maltreatment is reported in California at a rate close to the rate at which it occurs.

The rate of recurrence of maltreatment and the rate at which children enter foster care, based on substantiated reports of abuse and neglect, has decreased slightly over the three-year period from Calendar Year 1998 to 2000. This combination indicates improving performance in maintaining children safely at home. This may be due, in part, to preplacement preventive services that aim to keep children safely in their homes following a substantiated report of maltreatment. However, continued progress in this area is likely to be hampered by the limitations inherent in the categorical funding of Title IV-E, which funds services only to children in out-of-home placement. Therefore, services that best support and stabilize families and effectively prevent recurrences of maltreatment, initial out-of-home placement and re-entry into foster care are likely to be limited.

The extensive efforts to place and support children in the homes of their relatives must be acknowledged as contributing to California's ability to maintain children safely, if not in their "own home," at least with their family, whenever possible and appropriate. These families, too, often need ongoing support to provide children safety while maintaining this kind of stability and continuity.

Permanency:

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Permanency for children in foster care has been a significant priority in California in recent years. As a result, California's foster care population has declined 9% over the three-year period from FFY 1998 through FFY 2000. More children have exited foster care than entered during this period, demonstrating that efforts to increase permanency for children in out-of-home care have been successful. Further examination indicates that in 2000, the vast majority of children who exited care (73%) did so to return to their parents or to live with extended family members. Only 14% of children who exited care did so to guardianship or adoption with non-relatives. Thus, about 87% of children who exited foster care, exited to a legally permanent situation (reunification, adoption or guardianship).

Furthermore, California is successful in placing children in the most family-like setting possible, as demonstrated by the fact that 40% of children in out-of-home care at the end of FFY 2000 were placed with relatives. The number of children placed in group

⁶⁰ U.C. Berkeley, California Children's Services Archive, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

⁶¹ Highlight of findings from *Child Maltreatment 1999, Safety, Permanency and Well-Being Child Welfare Outcomes 1999: Annual Report*, Appendix B, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

homes has decreased over the three-year period from FFY 1998 through FFY 2000. In addition, California performs better on almost all permanency measures for the youngest, most vulnerable children in care.

California's emphasis over the last several years on ensuring permanency for more children in out-of-home care is clearly one of its main strengths. The California Adoptions Initiative won the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001 Adoption Excellence Award. To date, the State has captured over \$17.6 million in federal Adoption Incentive Funds. Furthermore, implementation of the successful Kin-GAP program has allowed thousands of children to exit care to the home of relatives. Unfortunately, because of how the data indicators are constructed, California appears to perform poorly on the data indicator for the National Standard on timeliness to adoption. By emphasizing permanency over long-term foster care and by securing adoption for children who would likely have remained in foster care, California's performance on this data element was jeopardized. California's performance would have appeared better if many of these children had remained in foster care.

While California does not meet the National Standard as defined for stability in foster care, the State has strengths to build on in this area. Data indicates that kin placements are more stable. Therefore, continuing to provide or expand services to support kin caregivers will enhance placement stability. Additionally, continuing to build a sufficient pool of well-prepared families will ensure the best opportunity to identify a family suitable for each child who comes into care. Finally, making improvements to data reporting in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) will also help California meet the National Standard in the future.

Well-Being:

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

California has clear regulatory requirements for face-to-face contact with children, whether they reside with their families or are in out-of-home placement. County compliance reviews evaluate the counties' level of compliance with these and other requirements.

Efforts to improve educational services to children and youth in out-of-home care are underway at both the State and county levels. At the State level, the Department of Education has established the Foster Youth Services (FYS) program funded with State General Fund dollars. FYS provides support services to reduce the traumatic effects on children of having been displaced from family and school. To date, FYS programs exist in 42 counties. Additionally, data from CWS/CMS indicates that caseworkers are more consistently entering data regarding a child's educational needs into the system.

California's statutes and regulations have clear mandates regarding timelines for medical examinations. The recent funding to provide public health nurses for health

care case management to foster children has resulted in positive outcomes. According to county compliance reviews, counties have made significant improvement in recent years to ensure that children receive timely medical examinations and that such examinations are documented in the case record.

Attention to the mental health needs of children in foster care has improved as well. Most counties have developed collaborative Children's Systems of Care within their local county mental health departments to provide a systemic and prevention-based response to the mental health needs of children in out-of-home care.

2. What specific needs has the team identified that warrant further examination in the Onsite Review? Note which of these needs are the most critical to the outcomes under safety, permanency and well-being for children and families in the State.

The Statewide Assessment has provided an opportunity to identify areas of California's child welfare system in which improvement or expansion would likely lead to better outcomes for children and families. In many such areas, existing systemic strengths provide a solid foundation upon which to build improvements. The following are some key issues that have been identified:

- The Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) provides comprehensive and immediately accessible case information necessary for effective decision making by line caseworkers. The effectiveness of this system could be improved by more timely updates to ensure consistency with changes in laws and regulations. Additionally, the Statewide Assessment has identified areas in which data quality can be improved by reviewing and modifying data recording, extracting and reporting processes.
- Case planning and review are fundamental to California's child welfare system, but their effectiveness and timeliness have been hampered by high caseloads. Due to time constraints, caseworkers are not consistently able to engage parents fully in an individualized case planning process. High caseloads also result in late or incomplete court reports that sometimes delay court review hearings. Efforts are already underway to address these issues, particularly in the work of the Human Resources subcommittee of the California Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group, to integrate the Senate Bill 2030 Workload Study recommendations into the redesigned child welfare services system. Furthermore, many counties are already planning implementation or expansion of family-centered practices such as family decision-making and wraparound services.
- California has an extensive quality assurance system. However, this system in general, focuses on *whether* the required services have been provided rather than on *how effective* these services have been. The enactment of Assembly Bill 636 will shift the focus of State reviews from evaluating procedural compliance to assessing the impact of services on outcomes for clients.
- In California, 29.2% of children with a substantiated report of maltreatment are placed in foster care to ensure their safety. Nationally, this figure is 20%. Limits on capitated federal Title IV-B funding and the inflexibility of Title IV-E funds combine to

create fiscal disincentives that make it difficult to expand the kind of preplacement preventive services necessary to keep children safely in their homes. The Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group is focusing on the system changes necessary to better serve at-risk children to reduce the risk of reabuse and the necessity for foster care placement.

- Examination of California's performance on the data indicators for the National Standards, when broken out by age, indicates that the State is more effective overall at serving the needs of the youngest, most vulnerable children in the system. While protecting the youngest children is important, these figures highlight the need to better address the needs of older children and youth.
- While California has made substantial improvement in moving children to permanency, children in care take longer to exit than federal timeframes and good practice allow. It is anticipated that efforts California has recently begun will reduce the time it takes for children to achieve permanency through reunification, adoption or guardianship. Together, implementing the recommendations of the Human Resources subcommittee of the California Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group, concurrent planning and Assembly Bill 1695 provisions for foster family assessments will improve timeliness to permanency.

Of the issues listed above, California would like to focus on two critical areas of its child welfare system in the Onsite Review. One high priority area combines two data elements examined in the assessment process: the rate at which children are apparently subjected to repeat maltreatment and the rate at which children enter foster care. The State's performance on these interrelated indicators suggests the need to better stabilize families and to enhance their functioning so that removal of the child can be avoided without risking a recurrence of maltreatment.

The second critical area is the length of time it appears to take children to achieve permanency through reunification, adoption or guardianship. Although California excels in moving children to permanency, it appears to do so slowly. Each of these areas is impacted by broader systemic issues that have, in part, been informed by the Statewide Assessment process.

FOSTER CARE ENTRY AND RECURRENCE OF MALTREATMENT:

The rate of admission to foster care based on maltreatment in California (29.9% in 1999) exceeds national figures (20% in 1999), although the prevalence of maltreatment in the general population in California is about the same as it is nationally. This fact suggests that a child who is a subject of abuse or neglect has a greater chance of ending up in foster care in California than in the country as a whole. Additionally, the rate at which children re-enter foster care following a return home exceeds the National Standard. California also exceeds the National Standard for the rate of recurrence of maltreatment.

Therefore, whether it is the family's first contact with the child welfare system or whether a child is being reunified with his or her family, it seems that more effective services are needed to stabilize and enhance functioning of at-risk families to prevent reabuse, entry or re-entry into foster care. It is unclear if the broad array of services intended to prevent the need for out-of-home placement is focused and coordinated in such a way as to maximize the State's ability to improve family functioning so that at-risk children are

safely maintained in their homes. The availability of effective services combined with effective protocols to assess the child's risk should reduce the recurrence rate of child maltreatment.

As indicated by the data, it appears that California has begun to make some improvement in these areas but has been limited by categorical funding restrictions and high caseloads. However, additional information and more reliable data are needed about the dynamics of this area of the child welfare system before substantial systemic and practice improvements can be made. Therefore, this area needs to be examined further in the Onsite Review.

THE LENGTH OF TIME FOR CHILDREN TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY:

Although California has excelled in moving children from foster care to permanency, it does not meet the National Standards for timeliness in this area. As discussed above, efforts over the last several years to provide permanency to children who have been in long-term foster care have skewed this picture. However, it is clear that additional improvements can be made in this area. A number of systemic factors impact California's ability to provide timely permanency to children in care. More effective engagement of the parents in the development of the case plans, reducing court continuances due to late reports and better alignment of the processes for licensing/approval of foster homes, kin caregivers and adoptive homes may yield improvements. However, high caseloads remain a barrier to be addressed.

In both the areas that the State needs improvement, counties vary significantly in their individual performance. Identifying effective practices in well-performing counties will benefit the State as a whole.

HIGH CASELOADS AND INFLEXIBLE FUNDING:

Fundamental issues beyond those encompassed by the systemic factors and outcomes exist. High caseworker caseloads impact caseworkers' ability to consistently meet program requirements and to provide the level of individualized services necessary to maintain children safely in their homes or achieve timely permanency. A system that provides funding primarily for *case management*, cannot deliver the benefits of *case work*. Furthermore, the inflexibility of federal Title IV-E funding provides incentives for keeping children in foster care and limits progress toward the desired outcomes set forth in federal statutes. Efforts to address these issues and others within California are currently underway through the work of the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group, charged by the Governor to redesign the State's child welfare system. To achieve safety, permanency and well-being for all children at-risk in California, these efforts must be supported by changes in the federal framework.

3. Which three locations, e.g., counties or regions, in the State are most appropriate for examining the strengths and concerns noted in the Onsite Review?

Of 58 counties in California, Los Angeles County is the largest metropolitan area in the State. For this reason, Los Angeles County is automatically pre-selected for Onsite Review. In addition to Los Angeles County, California recommends San Mateo and Stanislaus Counties be selected. These counties, in combination with Los Angeles County, best represent the state of child welfare practice in California. Taken together, these counties provide a counterbalance to one another in their implementation of the systemic factors and their performance on the outcomes, particularly the areas of concern identified in the Statewide Assessment. Because these three counties exhibit complementary performance in the strengths and needs identified in the Statewide Assessment, the team believes that California would best be served by closer examination of their practices during the Onsite Review.

FOSTER CARE ENTRY AND RECURRENCE OF MALTREATMENT:

As discussed above, an area of concern is the rate of admission to foster care based on substantiated reports of child maltreatment. A child who is a subject of abuse or neglect has a greater chance of ending up in foster care in California than in the country as a whole. Examination of individual county data indicates that Stanislaus County exceeds the statewide median number of substantiated child abuse reports per 1,000 children in the general population. However, the county has a significantly lower prevalence of children in care (4.9 per 1,000 in 2001) than is the case for the State as a whole (9.3 per 1,000). Moreover, the rate of recurrence of maltreatment is better than the State as whole. This data suggests that Stanislaus may have preplacement preventive services worth examining more closely in the Onsite Review that could benefit other counties.

THE LENGTH OF TIME FOR CHILDREN TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY:

As discussed above, California excels in moving children to permanency, but, when examined against the National Standards, it does not do so in a timely manner. In part, this apparent level of performance is due to improved efforts to discharge children who have been in long-term foster care to permanent homes. Without being thus discharged, they likely would have remained in care. While high caseloads and worker turnover undoubtedly impact the timeliness in which children achieve permanency, other factors likely play a part as well. Therefore, further examination of individual county practices is necessary to achieve improvement in this area.

County-specific data indicates a wide range of performance among counties. Individual county data for the measures used in the National Standards indicates that fewer children in Los Angeles County exit within the federal timeframes. Los Angeles County performs substantially below both the National Standard and California as a whole on indicators related to timeliness of adoption (Los Angeles: 4.2%; California: 16.4%) and to reunification (Los Angeles: 18.8%; California: 53.7%). Additionally, according to the U.C.

Berkeley California Children's Services archive, the median number of months children stay in foster care in Los Angeles County is 25 months.

In contrast to its performance on timeliness indicators, Los Angeles County performs better than both the National Standard and the State as a whole on the data indicator for the rate of re-entry to foster care (Los Angeles: 6.2%; California: 9.3%). This data suggests that although reunification may take longer in Los Angeles, it may be more stable once it occurs.

San Mateo County provides a counterpoint to Los Angeles because it exceeds the National Standards on indicators related to timeliness of adoption (44.8%) and reunification (74.8%). Furthermore, in contrast to Los Angeles County, the rate at which children re-enter foster care after being discharged in San Mateo County (13.1%) is higher than either the National Standard (8.6%) or California as a whole (9.3%). The median number of months that children typically stay in foster care in San Mateo County is four months. This is much less than that for Los Angeles County or for California as a whole (for which the median stay is 19 months).

In contrast to both Los Angeles and San Mateo Counties, Stanislaus County performs more like California as a whole on indicators related to timeliness and re-entry.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

In addition to program performance, these three counties provide a representation of California's diversity with respect to geography, population, economics, urban/rural and child welfare practices.

Los Angeles County:

Los Angeles County remains one of the nation's largest counties with 4,081 square miles, an area larger than the combined area of the states of Delaware and Rhode Island. It has the largest population (9,802,800 as of January 1, 2001) of any county in the nation and is exceeded in population by only eight states. Los Angeles County has a diverse population with 31% of county residents identified as White, 45% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 10% African-American, less than 1% Native American and less than 1% Pacific Islander. Approximately 29% of California's residents live in Los Angeles County. The major industries in the county are services, trade and manufacturing.

San Mateo County:

San Mateo County is located on the San Francisco Peninsula, bordered by the City of San Francisco on the north, San Francisco Bay on the east, Santa Clara County on the south and the Pacific Ocean on the west. It covers 553 square miles (105 are in water) and includes 45 miles of coastline and beaches. Although geographically the third smallest county in California, San Mateo holds the rank of thirteenth most populous county. The total population is 707,100 with 50% identified as White, 22% Hispanic, 20% Asian, 3.4% African-American, 1.3% Pacific Islander and less than 1% Native American. Major industries in the county are services, retail trade and transportation.

San Mateo County offers several areas to examine in the Onsite Review. San Mateo County is one of the wealthier counties in California and augments the State and federal funding received for child welfare services with county funds. These factors make it unusual among counties. This circumstance will allow the review to examine the impact this additional funding has on county performance relative to both the child and family outcomes and the systemic factors (particularly service array). On the data indicators for the National Standards related to Foster Care Re-entries and Length of Time to Achieve Reunification and Adoption, San Mateo County performance was in contrast to that of Los Angeles County, allowing reviewers an opportunity to examine practices in both counties that have impacted outcomes on these indicators.

San Mateo County has also implemented a number of innovative programs and strategies designed to impact outcomes, such as Answers Benefiting Children, concurrent planning, Family to Family Initiative and wraparound. Where those programs are not offered in the other two counties, their presence in San Mateo will provide the opportunity to examine their impacts on the outcomes for children and families. The Family to Family Initiative is also offered in Stanislaus County. The Onsite Review can determine if the additional county funding in San Mateo in any way impacts that program's effectiveness.

Stanislaus County:

Stanislaus County reaches from the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains to California's Coastal Range in the Central Valley. It is one of the largest agricultural areas in the world. The major industries in the county, in addition to the \$1 billion gross farm income produced by agriculture, are manufacturing/food processing, health care and retail trade. The county has a total population of 447,000 with 57% of the population identified as White and 32% as Hispanic. The remaining 11% of the population are Asian (4%), African-American (2%), Native American (1%) and other groups (4%).

Certain aspects of Stanislaus County's casework practice also present important areas for examination. The county offers several innovative programs and strategies, such as the Family to Family Initiative and Family Group Decision Making, which are designed to impact outcomes for children and families. Stanislaus County also conducts administrative reviews in lieu of court hearings for the six-month status reviews required for dependency cases. The impact of this process on both systems and outcomes merits close analysis. In addition, Stanislaus County is the only California county accredited by the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services (COA). An issue that merits analysis is how those system and performance features that qualified Stanislaus County for this accreditation enhance the county's performance in regard to the systemic factors examined in this review.

SITE SELECTION PROCESS:

California formed a Site Selection Proposal Committee representing the California Department of Social Services, county welfare and probation departments and the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. In their deliberations, this committee evaluated a number of factors. The following four sequentially applied criteria formed the basis for the selection of the San Mateo and Stanislaus County sites: The two counties are of sufficient size to facilitate sampling. Each individual county's performance is consistent with statewide performance data and enables the review team to explore any major issues emerging from the Statewide Assessment. The two counties, in combination with Los Angeles County, represent the diversity of California. And, the two counties have the capacity to perform the host duties of the Onsite Review.

The two counties are of sufficient size to facilitate sampling:

The threshold number of child welfare services cases that would be necessary to facilitate sampling was carefully evaluated in consultation with research staff at the University of California at Berkeley and members of the Site Selection Proposal Committee. It was determined that a minimum of 300 child welfare services cases is needed to provide enough diversity to attempt to gauge statewide performance and to establish a large enough sample of cases to ensure an adequate number for which case participants are willing and able to participate in the review process.

Each individual county's performance is consistent with statewide performance data and enables the review team to explore any major issues emerging from the Statewide Assessment:

The Site Selection Proposal Committee developed measures to select those counties that have strengths and needs that warrant further examination in the Onsite Review. Counties that had an adequate sample of cases were evaluated on a number of factors. Individual county data was compared to both the National Standards for the data indicators and the statewide performance on those data indicators. The number of innovative programs and strategies they have implemented that may have an impact on outcomes, and which are discussed in the Statewide Assessment, were also considered.

Another area examined was the counties' level of compliance with Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures Division 31 regulations in four program areas: Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanency Placement. In addition, county performance on the Data Profile elements Foster Care Re-Entries and Length of Time to Achieve Reunification, when compared to Los Angeles County's data, was evaluated. Because these two indicators are linked in their impact on case outcomes, it was reasoned that a comparison with counties whose data was in contrast to that of Los Angeles County in those particular indicators might yield helpful information.

The two counties, in combination with Los Angeles County, represent the diversity of California:

Counties were then evaluated using criteria designed to contrast with Los Angeles County. A comparison of counties was done based on population size. Counties with populations of one million or more were designated as large. Counties with populations between one million and 500,000 were designated as medium-sized. Counties with populations of 500,000 or less were designated as small. The large counties were eliminated for being too similar to Los Angeles. Southern counties were ruled out due to their proximity to Los Angeles. Major metropolitan areas were ruled out for their similarity to the City of Los Angeles. Counties were then arrayed into regional groups (Bay Area/Coastal, Mountain/Valley) so that the pair of counties selected would best represent the different geographic areas of the State.

The two counties have the capacity to perform the host duties of the Onsite Review:

The Site Selection Proposal Committee determined that only the individual counties could adequately assess their own ability to perform the full range of host duties. After careful evaluation of the host duty responsibilities and Onsite Review process, San Mateo and Stanislaus Counties indicated that they would be able to perform that function.

<p><i>4. Comment on the statewide assessment process in terms of its usefulness to the State, involvement of the entire review team membership and recommendation for revision.</i></p>
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USEFULNESS TO THE STATE:

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) has provided a vehicle to review California's child welfare services delivery system and identify the State and county 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 we serve. Despite some limitations of this review process (as described below), this 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 California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group in redesigning a new child welfare services system.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE ENTIRE REVIEW TEAM MEMBERSHIP:

In conducting the CFSR, the CDSS has mobilized an extensive task force that includes all stakeholders. This task force was organized with both State and county co-chairs for every committee. It included representatives from the County Welfare Directors Association; Chief Probation Officers of California; Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts; California Health and Human Services Agency; and the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley. Moreover, focus groups, written surveys and structured in-person and phone interviews were conducted with additional key stakeholder groups such as birth parents, county social workers, juvenile court judges, tribal members, service providers and others listed in Section V, Item 5, below.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISION:

It is impossible to implement a large-scale system or process without encountering difficulties; the CFSR is no exception. Recognizing that the review can be a useful tool in promoting positive program change, it should be fine-tuned and improved as more states are reviewed and feedback is received. California's recommendations for revision highlight the major concerns raised by the CSFR thus far. Some of the challenges that have surfaced are the nature of the review coupled with a lack of funding to support it, data limitations, methodological issues and timeframes. Additional issues and concerns may well develop as California completes the first full cycle of the CFSR.

The CFSR is a labor-intensive process which, as currently implemented, overlaps and replicates portions of the federally mandated Social Security Act Title IV-B planning process. To fully comply with federal instructions and to ensure the objectivity and validity of the Statewide Assessment, it was necessary for California to dedicate 18 months of work involving approximately 100 people on various committees. This effort effectively pulled expert State and county staff away from ongoing program development work and service delivery, resulting in a temporary reduction in resources for the State's child welfare services program.

The same will be true as California prepares for the Onsite Review. Much of this effort in conformance with the CFSR duplicates requirements of the Title IV-B planning process. This duplication exists in both the mandated contents of the Title IV-B plan and the CFSR Statewide Assessment and in the need to fully and actively engage all stakeholders in the development of these products. The CFSR and Title IV-B plan processes should be combined into a single effort. Federal funding should be provided to cover the costs of conducting the Child and Family Services Review, as well as to address the needs identified through the review process that may require fiscal solutions.

A hallmark of the Child and Family Services Review is its dependence on data. While the concept is good, problems occur in its application. For example, states are evaluated against National Standards derived from data they reported through both voluntary and mandatory reporting systems, which lack uniformly enforced, consistent data definitions. These National Standards were developed without data from every state. Of those states that reported data on any specific standard, the values were set so that only 25% of the states could "pass." Since failing even a single National

Standard results in a finding of nonconformity, failure of the CFSR is virtually certain. Questions exist about the selection of the data indicators for which the National Standards were established: Do these indicators, in combination with one another, accurately capture program outcomes that are truly desirable? Moreover, questions about statistical validity exist. A 50-case sample for the Onsite Review is not statistically valid for a state with a child welfare population the size of California's. This size sample risks inconsistency between case record findings and the statewide aggregate data reported for the National Standards. It also risks presenting a misleading picture of California's clients and casework. All these issues need to be addressed with all states engaged in their resolution.

Methodological issues surface in several areas of the CFSR. First, the review attempts to blend features of an audit, complete with a finding of nonconformance and fiscal penalties, and an evaluation examining the long-term impacts of service delivery and how those might be enhanced. An audit does not engender creative collaboration between the oversight agency and the organization under review; a program evaluation focused on outcome improvement functions best with such collaboration. The attempt to meld both types of evaluation into a single process can be self-defeating as the creative collaboration needed between the oversight agency and the organization under review is undermined by the threat of fiscal sanction.

Moreover, the stated goal of the CFSR is to promote an outcome focus in child welfare service delivery. But many components, such as the core interview questions in the Stakeholder Interview Guide, are more process- than outcome-oriented. Second, the review process does not take into account the significant differences existing among states. For example, working within multi-layered, state-supervised, county-administered systems (such as California's) is more complicated and time-consuming than working within direct state-administered systems. (In state-supervised systems, state government regulates and monitors the delivery of services through individual county governments. In state-administered systems, state government actually delivers the services at the local level.)

Another example is size. The size of the state's caseload needs to be considered when determining the number of cases to review. Likewise, inconsistencies exist among states in fundamental aspects of the review, such as the makeup of the foster care population. California includes probation youth and relative placements in the foster care caseload, while other states do not. In short, the methodology of the review should be adjusted to improve consistency and to be more applicable to the 50 states.

Finally, the timeframes of the CFSR present difficulties for the states, particularly in preparing for the Onsite Review and executing the Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The deadline for federal approval of the two counties selected for onsite case review, in addition to the largest metropolitan center, is just 60 days before the Onsite Review begins. This timeline is insufficient for the counties and the State to adequately organize the site-specific details of the Onsite Review, including case sample selection and preparation.

The time allotted for completing the PIP and beginning the subsequent re-review is also difficult. Within two years (one year if the issues in nonconformance involve safety) the state is expected to engineer the appropriate changes in law, regulations, policy and/or practice; execute those changes; and capture the impacts of the change in its data to

demonstrate achievement of the goal. Depending on state legislative cycles and practices and on individual state law, enacting statute and promulgating regulations may not be possible in such a timeframe.

Moreover, based on experience with the initial CFSR, the data used in the review is not current. For California's review in 2002, data was used from 2000. The short re-review cycle may not allow the data used in a subsequent review to reflect the results of prior PIP implementation. For example, if California is re-reviewed on safety related issues in the fall of 2003, presumably the data that will be used will be from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2001. Since this year has already passed, it is impossible for it to reflect any changes made as a result of the PIP. Even FFY 2002 data will face the same problem. Lengthening the time for re-review would permit states to achieve PIP improvements and to demonstrate their impact.

Despite its challenges, the CFSR process will provide much useful data to inform the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families on how best to reform national policy to improve federal stewardship of the Title IV-B programs. This process can assist the federal government in better aligning program funding to support program goals. California joins other states in working toward this end and in embracing the ultimate goal of improving the ability of the child welfare services system to positively impact the lives of the children and families it serves.

5. List the names and affiliations of the individuals who participated in the development of the statewide assessment.

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Category	Participants	Date	Location
Included representation from the following tribes: Pomo-Big Valley; Manchester-Point Arena; Robinson Rancheria	6	9/21/01	Santa Rosa (1st Annual Tribal Child Care Conference)
Public Agency Case Worker	10	9/24/01	Sacramento
Public Agency Case Worker	5	10/18/01	Oakland
Foster Parents	2	9/24/01	Sacramento
Minority Foster Parents	4	10/18/01	Oakland
Foster Parents	3	10/19/01	Sacramento
Foster Family Agency Foster Parents	2	11/2/01	Los Angeles
Relative Caregivers	8	10/19/01	San Francisco
Relative Caregivers	8	11/2/01	Los Angeles
Public Agency Supervisors	4	10/18/01	Oakland
Foster Family Agency Administrators	9	11/2/01	Los Angeles
California Youth Connection (former foster youth)	12	10/18/01	Oakland
Adoptive Parents	9	11/12/01	Sacramento
CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Committee: Included representation from the following tribes: Tyme Maidu; Washoe of Nevada and California; Pinoleville Band of Pomo and Torres Martinez	5	2/15/02	Sacramento

SURVEYS:

Category	Responses	Date
County Survey:	49	
County Child Welfare Agencies and Probation Departments		8/01
Child Welfare Stakeholder Survey:	516	
Venues:		
• 8 th Annual Family-Centered Services Conference		9/24/01
• Public Meeting on Child and Family Services Review		11/16/01
• Child Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) Survey for Child Welfare Service Agencies and Probation Departments		9/12/01
• State Department of Health Services-Maternal and Child Health Branch-Black Infant Health Contractors Meeting		12/05/01
• California Alliance of Child and Family Services		12/10/01
• Child Welfare Services/ Case Management Services (CWS/CMS) Users Survey		12/10/01
• California Tribal Representatives		1/02
Public Health Nurse Survey:	11	
Quarterly Meeting of Public Health Nurses in Sacramento		8/31/01
Birth Parent Telephone Survey:	96	1/02
Randomly Selected Statewide Sample Of Birth Parents		
Total	672	

STRUCTURED PHONE INTERVIEWS:

Category	Participants	Date
Judicial Officers	Counties of Marin, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Sutter, Stanislaus, Tulare	11/8/01
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)	State Director	12/11/01
Dependency Court Legal Services, Los Angeles	Law Director	1/18/02
Youth Law Center	Director	1/29/02
Court Appointed Special Advocates, Los Angeles	Director	12/21/02