

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Report: North Carolina Child and Family Services Review

June 2007

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

The North Carolina CFSR was conducted the week of March 26, 2007. The period under review was from 10/1/05 to 3/26/07. The findings were derived from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the North Carolina Division of Social Services (DSS).
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 2003, 2004, and 2005.
- Reviews of 65 cases at 3 sites throughout the State, 31 cases in Mecklenburg County, 17 cases in Catawba County and 17 cases in Nash County.
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all 3 sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel and attorneys.

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items relevant to 7 outcomes and 22 items pertaining to 7 systemic factors. In the Outcomes Section of the report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 items. An item may be assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. State performance on the 7 outcomes is evaluated as Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved and Not Achieved. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern within that outcome.

CB, ACF, has set a very high standard of performance for the CFSRs. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our country's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be

acceptable. The focus of the CFSR process is on continuous quality improvement, standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency and well-being.

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

The second round of the CFSR is intended to assess the State's current level of functioning with regard to child outcomes by once more applying the high standards and a consistent, comprehensive, case review methodology. This is intended to serve as a basis for continued PIPs addressing areas in which the State still needs to improve, even though specific PIP requirements may have been achieved. The goal is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the closing of the PIP.

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

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

CFSR Findings

The CFSR identified several areas of exceptional performance in the State. North Carolina meets the national standards for Permanency Composite 1, pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunifications, and Permanency Composite 2, pertaining to timeliness of adoptions. In addition, although North Carolina did not meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 4,

pertaining to placement stability based on Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2005 data, recent data submitted by the State suggest that North Carolina's performance on this outcome may reflect a data quality issue rather than actual performance.

Another area of high performance pertains to the provision of services to meet children's educational needs (Well Being Outcome 2). This outcome was substantially achieved in 96 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, which exceeds the 95 percent required for an overall determination of substantial conformity.

According to North Carolina's Statewide Assessment, the State implemented the Multiple Response System (MRS) during North Carolina's PIP, following the first round of CFSTRs. MRS is a comprehensive reform of North Carolina's Child Welfare System that is based largely on the use of family centered practice with the goal of providing a more individualized response to reports of abuse, neglect and dependency. It is based on 7 strategies which include the implementation of a strengths-based, structured intake process; a choice of two approaches to reports of child abuse, neglect and/or dependency; coordination between law enforcement agencies and child protective services for the investigative assessment approach; a redesign of in-home services; utilization of a team-decision making approach in child and Family Team meetings; implementation of Shared Parenting meetings in placement cases; and collaboration between Work First and child welfare programs.

With regard to systemic factors, North Carolina's training program for agency caseworkers and supervisors, and for foster parents and other caregivers was determined to be of very high quality. North Carolina's DSS also was found to be highly responsive to the community in terms of seeking input from all relevant stakeholders regarding implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Plan. Although the CFSTR also determined that the State had a structurally and functionally effective quality assurance system modeled on the Federal CFSTR, some concerns were identified regarding the accuracy of the data generated from that system.

Despite these areas of positive performance, North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with 6 of the 7 CFSTR outcomes or with 2 of the systemic factors—Case Review System and Service Array. With regard to the Case Review System, key concerns pertained to the involvement of parents, particularly fathers, in developing the case plan. In addition, although the State has a process in place for filing termination of parental rights (TPR) for children who have been in foster care, in both the Statewide Assessment and the on-site review, stakeholders identified concerns with timely filing of TPR and/or timely achievement of TPR. Barriers to achieving TPR in a timely manner were court scheduling difficulties, the lengthy TPR appeals process, and the reluctance of some agency attorneys, caseworkers and judges to seek TPR, particularly for older children.

One of the primary areas of concern identified through the CFSTR was a lack of services necessary to address the needs of the children and families served by the child welfare agencies in the State, particularly substance abuse treatment services, mental health services and domestic violence services. In addition, although there was general agreement among stakeholders that existing services to assist children in transitioning from foster care to independent living were of very high quality, there also was general agreement that there

were not enough of these services. This also was evident in the case reviews. Although all of these services exist in the State and in the sites participating in the review, they were noted to be insufficient to meet the identified need. The scarcity of services was particularly problematic in the in-home services cases. For example, item 23, which pertains to services to meet the child's mental health needs, was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of the applicable foster care cases, compared to only 59 percent of the applicable in-home services cases. The insufficiency of key services tended to have a particularly negative affect on performance pertaining to Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate), Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), and Well-Being Outcome 3 (Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs).

Concerns also were identified with regard to maintaining goals such as guardianship or adoption for long time periods even when it was clear that the child was going to age out of foster care and little efforts were being made to achieve the goal. Stakeholders suggested that this may be due to the State policy that does not permit a goal of long-term foster care, requiring workers to establish goals of guardianship, adoption, or reunification even if those goals are not the most appropriate and are not likely to be achieved.

Another area of concern identified through the CFSR pertains to an inconsistency with regard to agency efforts to engage fathers either in services to meet their own needs or in the process of planning for their children, particularly when the fathers did not have custody of their children or had been absent from their children's lives for an extended amount of time. This tended to have a negative affect on performance pertaining to Permanency Outcome 2 (The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved), and Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for the children's needs).

These key concerns identified applied primarily to Catawba County and to some extent to Mecklenburg County, with Nash County exhibiting the fewest problems in these areas. In general, Nash County, although it is a rural county and not resource rich, appeared to have developed the necessary collaborations and relationships to ensure that the children and families served by that county's child welfare system received the necessary services and that all family members were involved in planning for the children. The main concern identified in that county pertained to the availability of mental health services.

Some general concerns also were noted in the review. One general concern pertained to the State's own quality assurance ratings for the items as reported in the Statewide Assessment. For many items, these ratings were extremely high and differed considerably from the Federal 2007 CFSR case review findings. This raises questions regarding (1) the effectiveness of the State's quality assurance case review system in identifying the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, and (2) the capability of the QA system to accurately evaluate program improvement measures.

Despite the concerns noted, review results show that the largest metropolitan area, Mecklenburg County, has made great strides in improving their system and their practice since the first CFSR was conducted in North Carolina.

The specific findings with regard to the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance with regard to the 7 systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following section, key findings are summarized for each outcome.

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates 2 indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment (item 2).

North Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 66.7 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. In addition, North Carolina did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. However, the data for FFY 2005 for these indicators demonstrate consistent improvement in performance over time from 2001. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR.

Performance on both items 1 and 2 included in this outcome were determined to be Areas Needing Improvement. Key findings for these items were the following:

- DSS did not initiate an investigation of a maltreatment allegation within the required timeframes in 7 (19 percent) of the 36 applicable cases. Performance on this item 1 was more of a concern in Mecklenburg and Catawba Counties than in Nash County. However, when maltreatment allegations were received on families in which there was already an open case, those allegations were treated as new investigations and assigned to an investigative caseworker.
- Although several stakeholders identified various strategies that DSS uses to prevent the recurrence of maltreatment, in 7 (29 percent) of the 24 applicable cases, there was a recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month period.

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

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

remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children.

North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 73.8 percent of the 65 cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. Performance with regard to this outcome varied across counties. The outcome was substantially achieved in 82 percent of Nash County cases and 74 percent of Mecklenburg County cases compared to 65 percent of Catawba County cases. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- For both items 3 and 4, although DSS established safety plans and provided services to the family to address safety and risk issues, in several cases, neither the services nor the safety plans were sufficient to address all of the safety and risk issues in the family and thus could not ensure the safety of the children remaining in the home.
- Catawba County experienced greater challenges than other counties with regard to addressing risk of harm concerns (item 4).
- Although many stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency is effective in conducting safety and risk assessments, several stakeholders reported that substance abuse treatment and domestic violence services are not sufficient to address the needs of the children and families coming into contact with the child welfare system.
- Stakeholders reported that children's mental health needs are not being effectively managed in the community, which results in children entering foster care because of behavioral and mental health problems.

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

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

North Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 57.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.

- The State Data Profile indicates that for FFY 2005, the State did not meet the national standard for Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods, and Composite 4: Placement stability.

The State did meet the national standard for Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunifications, and Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR.

North Carolina's performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 80 percent of Nash County cases compared to 55 percent of Mecklenburg County cases and 40 percent of Catawba County cases.

Performance was fairly low on this outcome across all sites. Key concerns identified through case review findings were the following:

- Although North Carolina's percentage for the national indicator of foster care reentry within 12 months of a prior episode is the lowest in the nation, the CFSR case review found 2 cases of foster care reentry out of only 12 applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that the data for the national indicator may underestimate the percentage of re-entries in the State because the State does not have a system of unique statewide identifiers for children (item 5).
- The agency's performance was inconsistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care. Most of the placement changes were due to the child's behavior and the lack of intervention on the part of the agency to support foster families before behavior problems resulted in a disrupted placement (item 6).
- The agency's performance was inconsistent with regard to establishing permanency goals in a timely manner. A key finding in this area was that goals were being maintained for long time periods even when it was clear that the goal would not be achieved and even when the child was close to aging out of foster care. Stakeholders suggested that this may be due to the State policy that does not permit a goal of long-term foster care, requiring workers to establish goals of guardianship, adoption, or reunification even if those goals are not the most appropriate and are not likely to be achieved, e.g. a goal of guardianship established for a youth who is moving to emancipation and there are no prospective guardians and no work to achieve that goal (item 7).
- The agency's performance was inconsistent with regard to efforts to achieve goals in a timely manner, particularly adoption (item 8).
- In the 2 cases where the agency did assign a goal similar to an Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, the agency was effective in establishing a formal agreement with foster parents regarding the permanency of the placement and in providing services to the child to prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living.

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates 6 indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of

children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

North Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 80.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this measure did not differ substantially across the counties. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR.

Key case review findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- Children were routinely and consistently placed in close proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers (item 11).
- Children were routinely and consistently placed with their siblings unless there was a valid reason for separating siblings (item 12).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to efforts to ensure sufficient visitation (or other forms of contact) between the children in foster care and their fathers (item 13).
- The agency was effective in maintaining children's connections to extended family and communities. However, it was noted that the agency is not consistently exploring with the child and family possible Native American heritage (item 14).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to agency efforts to search for relatives as potential placement options for children in foster care, particularly paternal relatives (item 15).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to agency efforts to support the relationship between children and their fathers while the child was in foster care (item 16).

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

Well Being Outcome 1 incorporates 4 indicators. One pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to ensure that the service needs of children, parents and foster parents are assessed, and that the necessary services are provided to meet identified needs (item 17). A second indicator examines the child welfare agency's efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The 2 remaining indicators examine the frequency and quality of caseworker's contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

North Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 63.1 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined

to be substantially achieved in 82 percent of Nash County cases and 74 percent of Mecklenburg County cases, compared to only 24 percent of Catawba County cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 70 percent (28 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared to 52 percent (13 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR.

Case reviews resulted in the following key findings:

- The agency was highly effective with regard to assessing and meeting the services needs of children and foster parents, but it was inconsistent with regard to concerted efforts to assess and meet the services needs of parents, particularly fathers (item 17).
- The agency was highly effective in involving children and mothers in case planning, but it was inconsistent with regard to concerted efforts to engage fathers in the case planning process (item 18).
- The agency was effective in ensuring frequent contact between caseworkers and children. Although the percentage was under the required 90 percent for an overall rating of Strength, it was very close (88 percent) and the cases of concern were primarily in Catawba County (item 19).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to caseworkers making concerted efforts to search for and make contact with the fathers (item 20).

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

There is only 1 indicator for Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

North Carolina was found to be in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 96.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage exceeds the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR. Improved performance on this outcome may be attributable in part to the positive relationship between the agency and the school system at both the State and local levels. Most stakeholders praised the relationship between the agency and the schools and attributed the strength of the relationship to the involvement of the State education agency in the State Collaborative for Children and Families. School personnel are invited to child and family team meetings, information is provided to schools on a timely basis, and many services are being offered in the schools

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

This outcome incorporates 2 indicators that assess the child welfare agency's efforts to meet children's physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs.

North Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 78.7 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. North Carolina was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR.

Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 86 percent of Mecklenburg County cases and 81 percent of Nash County cases, compared to 62.5 percent of Catawba County cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent (36 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases, compared to 57 percent (12 cases) of the 21 applicable in-home services cases

Key findings were the following:

- Case reviews indicated that the agency was effective in addressing the physical health needs of children. Although a few stakeholders expressed concern about dental services, this concern was not found in the cases reviewed.
- Although many children in the cases were appropriately assessed for mental health service needs and were receiving the necessary mental health services, the agency was not consistent in meeting mental health needs, particularly for children in the in-home services cases. Item 23, which addresses mental health issues, was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of foster care cases compared to 59 percent of in-home services cases. This finding is consistent with stakeholder comments indicating that mental health services were easier to access for children in foster care than for those children remaining in their homes.

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

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

North Carolina is in substantial conformity with this factor. The CFSR determined that the State has a system in place that can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for children in foster care. North Carolina also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR.

Case Review System

5 indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine the development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), the implementation of procedures to seek termination of parental rights (TPR)

in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

North Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the factor of the Case Review System. North Carolina was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR.

In the 2007 CFSR, the State was found to hold periodic reviews of cases at least once every 6 months, and usually more often. In addition, a key area of strength for the State was that foster parents are notified about court hearings and reviews in a timely manner, and judges ensure that, when foster parents attend the hearings or reviews, their views are heard.

However, despite these strengths, there were areas identified as needing improvement, specifically item 25 (development of the case plan) and item 28 (TPR proceedings). Key concerns were the following:

- Although the State has established a process to include parents in developing case plans, it does not appear to be fully implemented, as evidenced by the CFSR case review ratings. Case ratings indicate that there is a particular need for the State to focus on engaging parents in case planning in the in-home services cases and on engaging fathers in both in-home services and foster care cases.
- While the State has a process in place for filing termination of parental rights (TPR) for children who have been in foster care, in both the Statewide Assessment and the on-site review, stakeholders identified concerns with timely filing of TPR and/or timely achievement of TPR. Key concerns were court scheduling, the lengthy TPR appeals process and the reluctance of some agency attorneys, caseworkers and judges to seek TPR, particularly for older children.

Quality Assurance System

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

North Carolina was found to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. North Carolina also was found to be in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. The State has developed and implemented licensing standards and other provisions to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care. In addition, the State has implemented a quality assurance case review system similar to the Federal CFSR. Reviews are conducted biennially and formal PIPs are completed by every county for any outcome areas that are not in substantial conformity. Although the State is operating an identifiable QA, the findings of the 2007 CFSR raise questions regarding the State's QA process. Specifically, the State's ratings for the majority of individual items were extremely high and differ considerably from the Federal 2007 CFSR case review findings. As a result, there is a

concern that the State's QA case review system may not be effective in identifying the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, and therefore may not result in an accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of program improvement measures.

Training

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

North Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of training. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. The State has a well-established, comprehensive, competency-based, pre-service training program for both new staff and supervisors and has clear requirements and provides multiple opportunities for ongoing training. The State also has a well-established training program for caregivers that is functional and effective. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State did not place children in a home until the initial training was completed. They also noted that the same training is required for relative foster parents as well as non-relative foster parents.

Service Array

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

North Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The State was found to be in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. However, although the State has a broad array of services in place, both the Statewide Assessment and the on-site review identify gaps and insufficient resources to address important needs, such as substance abuse treatment, domestic violence and independent living services. Stakeholders in all sites noted concerns regarding the State's system reform for mental health services, which they believe creates difficulties in locating and accessing appropriate mental health services. The CFSR also found the accessibility of services varies considerably across jurisdictions in the State and according to the type of case. The review found that children placed in foster care were more likely to receive needed mental health assessments and services than children being served in their own homes.

Despite these concerns, the State was found to have the capacity to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families served by DSS. A particular strength noted was the ability of DSS caseworkers to access flexible funds to pay for services that are not contracted for by the agency, but that are needed by children and families, and to provide foster children with special activities such as summer camps.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the Child and Family Services Plan (items 38 and 39), and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

North Carolina was found to be in substantial conformity with the factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. The general finding in the 2007 CFSR was that the State engages in ongoing consultation with key stakeholders to obtain their input regarding the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Service Plan. The State also includes the input of these stakeholders in the development of annual reports of progress and services. Finally, the CFSR found that there was extensive coordination between DSS and other Federal or federally-assisted programs to meet the service needs of the children and families served by the agency.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

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

North Carolina was found to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. The 2007 CFSR found that the State has clear standards for foster family homes and child care institutions and that these standards are implemented in a uniform manner. In particular, the same standards are applied to both non-relative and relative foster homes. In addition, there was clear evidence that the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances.

The one concern noted with regard to this systemic factor pertained to the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care in the State. The CFSR found that, although the State works with counties to establish plans for diligent recruitment of homes, the level of recruitment and the need for homes varies across the State. A key concern was that efforts to target recruitment of homes for special populations were not consistent across sites.

Table 1. North Carolina CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Rating	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	NO	66.7	NO		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	81
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				ANI	71
Safety Outcome 2 - Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	NO	73.8			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	72
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	75
Permanency Outcome 1 - Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	NO	57.5	Met 2, Did Not Meet 2		
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				ANI	83
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	82.5
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	80
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship and placement with relatives				ANI	68
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	56
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				Strength	100
Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	NO	80.0			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	97
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	90
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	74
Item 14: Preserving connections				Strength	90
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	83
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	72

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

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

Table 2. North Carolina CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well Being Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Percent Strength
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	
Well Being Outcome 1 - Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	NO	63.1		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	69
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	73
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	88
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	65
Well Being Outcome 2 - Children receive services to meet their educational needs	YES	96.0		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			Strength	96.0
Well Being Outcome 3 - Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	NO	78.7		
Item 22: Physical health of child			Strength	90
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	82

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

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

Table 3: North Carolina CFPSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM			
Item 24: State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.	YES	3	Strength
CASE REVIEW SYSTEM			
Item 25: Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parents that includes the required provisions.	NO	2	ANI
Item 26: Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.			Strength
Item 27: Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the States has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.			Strength
Item 28: Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act			ANI
Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.			Strength
QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM			
Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children.	YES	3	Strength
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFPSR are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identified strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluations program improvement measures implemented.			Strength
TRAINING			
Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFPSR, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.	YES	4	Strength
Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFPSR.			Strength
Item 34: The States provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or			Strength

adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.				Strength
Table 3: (Continued)	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating	
Systemic Factors and Items SERVICE ARRAY	NO	2		ANI
Item 35: The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.				ANI
Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.				ANI
Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.	YES	4		Strength
AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY				
Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, services providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.				Strength
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.				Strength
Item 40: The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.				Strength
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION	YES	3		
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.				Strength
Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.				Strength
Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.				Strength
Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom				ANI

