



North Carolina Department of Health and Human
Services
Division of Social Services

Child and Family Services Reviews End of Biennium Report

2001-2003 Biennium

STATE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES BIENNIAL REVIEWS END OF BIENNIUM REPORT 2001-2003 BIENNIUM

BACKGROUND In 1992, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the N.C. Division of Social Services to conduct reviews of county child protective services programs once every biennium. The intent of these reviews was to strengthen the child protective services delivery system statewide and to document the county agencies' achievement of the level of practice identified in the Standards for CPS Delivery. In 1996, Standards were developed for Child Placement Services programs also. The CPS Program biennial review was expanded to an all-inclusive Children's Services review. The intent was to strengthen the delivery of all children's services programs statewide and to document the county agencies' adherence to Child Protective Services and Child Placement Services Standards. Both Standards and the review process were developed with the involvement of the Children's Services Advisory Committee, which was made up of county DSS and Division staff.

Each biennium brought changes and improvements to the biennial review process. During the 1998-2000 biennium, several new aspects were added to the biennial review process and resulting reports. In addition to case record reviews of compliance with the Children's Services Standards, outcomes data analysis was added to look at trends in each county's child protective services, foster care and adoption programs. Each county DSS was asked to include discussion in their self-surveys about improvements made by the agency since the previous biennial review, strengths identified by the agency, their use of data resources for self-evaluation, and areas that the agency needed to improve. Highlights of this information were included in the biennial review report. The process for the 2000-2002 biennium shifted more focus to measuring outcomes rather than just compliance with Standards.

After the Federal Child and Family Services Review in March of 2001 and the State's entrance into Program Improvement Status, the Division suspended biennial reviews mid-biennium in July 2001. Staff from the Division spent the next two months completely redesigning the review protocol, process and instruments to mirror the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews. In September 2001, the Division piloted this redesigned review process in two volunteer counties, Lenoir and Washington Counties. With the unanimous approval of the Children's Services Advisory Committee, the Division resumed the biennial reviews

full-time in October 2001 using the redesigned process. Biennial Reviews are now called Child and Family Services Reviews. In addition to using the Federal review instrument that was adapted for the State's use, these reviews include input from community stakeholders' surveys and interviews with parents, placement providers, age-appropriate children, social workers, supervisors and other professionals involved with the families. County DSS staff are paired with the state reviewers in reviewing records, conducting interviews, and rating the items and outcomes. Full team debriefings are conducted on each case as in the Federal Review process. The subsequent reports continue to include data analysis related to the outcomes and the agencies' self-analyses of strengths, areas needing improvement, and community issues. Formal Program Improvement Plans are required from each county in any outcome area that does not meet substantial conformity.

Between September 1, 2001, and June 30, 2003, all 100 county DSS agencies were reviewed. Mecklenburg County Youth and Family Services has been reviewed every quarter for the past six quarters. After the state's Program Improvement Plan was approved by the federal government in December 2001, the state began submitting quarterly reports on the Child and Family Services Reviews with cumulative results from the reviews completed during the previous quarter. In August 2002, the Division implemented the revised federal review instrument in the state's Child and Family Services Reviews. It should be noted that the basic outcomes did not change with this revision. However, there were changes to some of the instructions for rating the items and outcomes. Also, some of the items under the first Permanency Outcome were changed. In July 2003, the federal government released a second revised review instrument, which will be implemented shortly.

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The purpose of the Child and Family Services Review process (formerly known as biennial reviews) is to ultimately assist in realizing the goals, mission, vision, and desired outcomes for the Children's Services System in North Carolina. The reviews provide a mechanism for evaluating the Children's Services System's response to children and families; for identifying management, training, system and policy issues; for recognizing strengths in practice; and for making recommendations to strengthen the delivery of all children's services programs statewide. Each county is reviewed at least every other year.

The process is designed to measure outcomes and practice. The process is intended to provide public accountability for all 100 county Departments of Social Services and for the Children's Services System statewide. The

process is also intended to bring all 100 county Departments of Social Services, and thus the state, into substantial conformity in all seven-outcome areas before the next federal review.

**GOALS,
MISSION, AND
VISION FOR
CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

There are three main **Goals** for the Children's Services System. They are to achieve **Safety, Permanence, and Well-being** for all children in North Carolina.

Our **Mission** for the Children's Services System is to ensure safe, permanent, nurturing families for children.

Our **Vision** is to build a system that accomplishes the following:

- Community-Based Support for All Families that promotes the family's ability to cope with difficult situations and resolve family problems.
- One Coordinated Assessment Process that involves the family in a comprehensive evaluation of their strengths and needs.
- One Caseworker or Casework Team that ensures everyone is working together toward a permanent plan for the child.
- One Single, Stable Foster Care Placement within the child's own community that provides temporary stability until a lifelong home for the child is achieved.
- A Safe and Permanent Home within One Year for all children for whom a County Department of Social Services has legal custody or placement responsibility.

**CHILD AND
FAMILY
SERVICES
REVIEW
OUTCOMES**

In an effort to achieve the goals, mission, and vision for Children's Services, the reviews measure the following outcomes through a combination of outcome data analysis for each county and assessment of practice from the case record reviews that are conducted on site:

- **Safety 1:** Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.
- **Safety 2:** Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- **Permanency 1:** Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- **Permanency 2:** The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
- **Well Being 1:** Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- **Well Being 2:** Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- **Well Being 3:** Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

**ITEMS
MEASURED
RELATED TO
OUTCOMES**

Safety Outcome S1:

- Item 1** Assessment of Intake Decisions and Thoroughness of Investigation
- Item 2** Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment
- Item 3** Repeat maltreatment

Safety Outcome S2:

- Item 4** Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal
- Item 5** Risk of harm to child(ren)

Permanency Outcome P1:

- Item 6** Foster care re-entries
- Item 7** Stability of foster care placement
- Item 8** Permanency goal for child
- Item 9** Reunification, Guardianship with, or Custody to Relative (Prior to 8/1/03: "Independent Living Services – Required for Children age 16 or older")
- Item 10** Adoption
- Item 11** Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Permanency Outcome P2:

- Item 12** Proximity of foster care placement
- Item 13** Placement with siblings
- Item 14** Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care
- Item 15** Preserving connections
- Item 16** Relative placement
- Item 17** Relationship of child in care with parents

Well-Being Outcome WB1:

- Item 18** Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents
- Item 19** Child and family involvement in case planning
- Item 20** Worker visits with child
- Item 21** Worker visits with parents

Well-Being Outcome WB2:

- Item 22** Educational needs of the child

Well-Being Outcome WB 3:

- Item 23** Physical health needs of the child
- Item 24** Mental health needs of the child

THE STATE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN

As a part of the State’s Program Improvement Plan, benchmarks were identified for each outcome area that the State would have to meet through its Child and Family Services Reviews of county DSS agencies. The agreement with the federal government in the Program Improvement Plan was that the state would come out of Program Improvement Status in any outcome that the state met or exceeded the benchmark for that outcome in two consecutive reporting quarters. Outcomes Safety 1 and Permanency 1 also had to meet or exceed identified benchmarks for five of the six National Data Standards in order for the State to come out of Program Improvement Status in those two outcomes in addition to meeting the Child and Family Services Review benchmarks. One of the requirements of the Program Improvement Plan was that Mecklenburg County would be reviewed each quarter. After the first two reporting quarters, the state had exceeded the benchmarks for all of the outcome areas through the Child and Family Services Reviews as outlined in the Program Improvement Plan. The chart below illustrates the cumulative ratings for each of the outcome areas as of June 30, 2003, as compared to the negotiated Program Improvement Plan benchmarks:

Case Review Outcomes

Outcomes	Benchmark for Program Improvement	Cumulative Score for reviewed counties – 1 st Reporting Quarter	Cumulative Score for reviewed counties – 2 nd Reporting Quarter	Cumulative Score for reviewed counties – 3 rd Reporting Quarter	Cumulative Score for reviewed counties – 4 th Reporting Quarter	Cumulative Score for reviewed counties – 5 th Reporting Quarter	Cumulative Score for reviewed counties – 6 th Reporting Quarter	Total Cumulative Score 9/1/01 through 6/30/03 *
S1	86%	96%	95%	93%	93%	90%	93%	92%
S2	80%	92%	92%	95%	90%	92%	95%	92%
P1	82%	93%	96%	94%	93%	78%	87%	90%
P2	87%	100%	99%	98%	100%	100%	100%	99%
WB1	80%	89%	90%	92%	92%	88%	91%	89%
WB2	86%	99%	99%	99%	99%	100%	98%	99%
WB3	80%	94%	96%	96%	99%	98%	97%	96%

*Data for the quarter ending 12/1/01 were prior to the approval of our Program Improvement Plan and were not reported

Note: The required rating for passing the first federal CFSSR was 90% in all outcome areas.
 The required rating for passing the next and subsequent CFSSR’s will be 95% in all outcome areas.

**NATIONAL
DATA
STANDARDS**

In addition to meeting the negotiated benchmarks for the outcome areas for the Child and Family Services Reviews, the Program Improvement plan also set benchmarks for the National Data Standards for the state to meet or exceed in order to successfully exit program improvement status. These benchmarks for the National Data Standards relate only to Outcomes Safety 1 and Permanency 1. The following information presents the federal standards for each of the National Data Standards, North Carolina's rate at the time of the federal review and the negotiated benchmark for the state's Program Improvement Plan. These data continue to be assessed and will determine the state's status for achieving its Program Improvement Plan after the end of the Program Improvement Plan period, the end of December 2003.

Safety 1: Recurrence of Maltreatment Within 6 Months

12/28/00 Federal Standard – 5% or fewer
Revised Federal Standard – 6.1% or fewer
NC Data 2001 – 7.98
NC PIP Benchmark – 7.1% or fewer

Safety 1: Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect in Foster Care

12/28/00 Federal Standard – 0.4% or less
Revised Federal Standard – 0.57% or less
NC Data 2001 – 0.83%
NC PIP Benchmark – 0.69% or less

Permanency 1: Foster Care Re-entries

12/28/00 Federal Standard – 6% or less
Revised Federal Standard – 8.6% or less
NC Data 2001 – 1.19%
NC PIP Benchmark – **NC met National Standard at time of review.**

Permanency 1: Stability of Foster Care Placements

12/28/00 Federal Standard – 89% or more
Revised Federal Standard – 86.7% or more
NC Data 2001 – 61.29%
NC PIP Benchmark – 63.2% or more

Permanency 1: Reunification within 12 Months of Placement

12/28/00 Federal Standard – 78% or more
Revised Federal Standard – 76.2% or more
NC Data 2001 – 57.66%
NC PIP Benchmark – 60% or more

Permanency 1: Adoption within 24 Months of Placement

12/28/00 Federal Standard – 36% or more
Revised Federal Standard – 32% or more
NC Data 2001 – 25.96%
NC PIP Benchmark – 28.9% or more

**NUMBER OF
CASES
REVIEWED**

Because of the in-depth review process and inclusion of interviews with persons relevant to each case, the number of cases to be reviewed in each category had to be limited significantly. The sample is selected from the universe of cases in the program area under review for each county. The universe includes all children and all families whose cases were open for services during the period under review. Sample cases must have been open for Child Welfare services (either CPS Case Planning/Case Management Services or Child Placement Services) a minimum of 60 days during the period under review, even though services may be closed at the time of the on-site review. Additional samples are also selected for review from reports not accepted for investigation and from Investigative Assessments that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed without further services. The selection process for cases to be reviewed is designed to ensure that cases are randomly selected. Following are the numbers for cases to be reviewed in each category, depending on the size of the county:

Level III counties have six Placement cases, six Case Planning/Case Management cases, six cases that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed, and twenty reports not accepted for Investigative Assessment.

Level II counties have four Placement cases, four Case Planning/Case Management cases, five cases that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed, and twelve reports not accepted for Investigative Assessment.

Level I counties have three Placement cases, three Case Planning/Case Management cases, four cases that were either unsubstantiated or substantiated and closed, and eight reports not accepted for Investigative Assessment.

In general, Level III counties are the larger counties in the state. Level II counties are the medium sized counties, and Level I counties are the smaller counties in the state.

**END OF
BIENNIUM
RESULTS**

As of June 30, 2003, the first biennium ended using the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process and instrument. All 100 county Departments of Social Services have been reviewed, and Mecklenburg has been reviewed six times, for a total of 105 reviews since September 1, 2001. It should be noted that the federal review instrument was revised in 2002, and North Carolina implemented the revised instrument in its reviews of counties effective August 1, 2002.

Attachment A lists the counties reviewed in chronological order. The attachment indicates by a "1" each of the outcomes areas that the county achieved substantial conformity. A "blank" under the outcome indicates that the county did not achieve substantial conformity for the outcome listed in that column.

It is important to maintain the perspective that individual outcome ratings are based on a relatively small sample of records that are measured against a high level of performance expectation. Any record selected for review is presumed to be representative of all agency records with regard to adherence to statutes, policies and standards. A significant modification of the review process is the opportunity for reviewers to expand the record review to include interviews with persons who are important to the case and who can provide supporting, corroborating, and clarifying information that may not have been evident in the record.

In previous biennial reviews, case documentation was the sole determinant of agency compliance with law, policy, and standards. Presently, interviews with children, parents, foster parents, social workers, and other community persons and professionals may be used to validate case documentation or serve as confirmation of agency activities that may not have been clearly documented in the record. In addition, this review process is much more focused on specific outcomes for children and families, rather than a more procedural approach.

It should be understood that an outcome rated as in substantial conformity does not indicate there is no room for improvement, or that an outcome rated as not in substantial conformity indicates that much excellent work has not been done.

Attachment B provides a listing of the counties reviewed ranked by the number of outcomes that achieved substantial conformity out of the seven outcome areas reviewed. Again, the attachment indicates by a “1” each of the outcomes areas that the county achieved substantial conformity. A “blank” under the outcome indicates that the county did not achieve substantial conformity for the outcome listed in that column. As can be seen in this attachment, over 25% of the 105 reviews conducted during the biennium resulted in all seven outcomes achieving substantial conformity. Another 24% of the reviews resulted in six out of the seven outcomes achieving substantial conformity. No county failed to achieve substantial conformity in all outcome areas.

Attachment C provides a listing of the counties reviewed by county level with the corresponding results.

Attachment D lists the results of the items reviewed within each outcome for each county review. In this attachment, a “1” under an item number indicates that that item was rated as an “Area Needing Improvement” for the county. Shaded areas under each of the items indicate that that item was not applicable for that county’s review. The attachment also lists the number of reviews out of the 105 that were rated as “Strengths” and the number rated as “Areas Needing Improvement”, as well as the percentage of items that were rated as strengths.

Clearly, the items needing the most improvement statewide are all five items related to the two Safety Outcomes. Also, Item #8 under Permanency Outcome 1 related to the permanency goals for children and meeting the federal Adoption and Safe Family Act (ASFA) requirements for filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) is a significant area needing improvement statewide. This item measures the appropriateness of the permanency goals for children. According to North Carolina law, when a child has been in care twelve of the most recent twenty-two months, a petition to terminate parental rights should be filed, or the court order should note one of the allowable exceptions for not doing so. The allowable exceptions include: the child is being cared for by a relative, the agency has documented a compelling reason for determining that a TPR would not be in the best interests of the child, or the agency has not provided the services deemed necessary for the safe return of the child to the home. Finally, all four items under the Well Being Outcome 1 are areas needing considerable improvement statewide. In the remaining items, the review results indicate that most or all of the counties are performing strongly.

CONCLUSION The Division appreciates the counties' investment of staff and time in making these reviews a valuable learning tool for both county staff and the Division. These efforts should contribute to the state's success in achieving its Program Improvement Plan with the federal government and in preparing for the next federal Child and Family Services Review. With continued efforts and the ongoing reviews in the current biennium, these efforts should also contribute to the state's ability to achieve substantial conformity in all outcome areas in the next review. Ultimately, achieving substantial conformity in all outcome areas contributes to the ability of North Carolina's child welfare system to successfully provide for Safety, Permanence and Well Being for all children and families that are served by that system.