

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Minnesota Child and Family Services Review
July 2008

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Minnesota. 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 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau (CB) of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS.

The Minnesota CFSR was conducted the week of September 24 through 28, 2007. The period under review for the case reviews was from April 1, 2006, to September 30, 2007. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Child Safety and Permanency Division (CSP) of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
- The State Data Profile prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal year (FY) 2004, FY 2005, and the CFSR 12-month target period ending March 31, 2006
- Reviews of 64 cases (40 foster care cases and 24 in-home services cases¹) at 3 sites throughout the State: 32 cases in Hennepin County, 15 cases in Carlton County, and 17 cases in Washington County
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three 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 Systemic Factors Section B of the report, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI) based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements. Information relevant to each

¹ The CFSR usually includes 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. However, during the Onsite Review, it was discovered that one of the in-home services cases involved a child who was in foster care. Therefore, the case was eliminated from the sample.

item comes from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the onsite CFSR. The overall rating for the systemic factors is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either in substantial conformity with that factor (i.e., a score of 3 or 4) or not in substantial conformity with that factor (a score of 1 or 2).

Items relevant to the seven outcomes are discussed in Outcomes Section A of the report. An overall rating of Strength or ANI is assigned to each of the 23 items, depending on the percentage of cases that receive a Strength rating in the case reviews. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed are rated as a Strength. Performance ratings for each of the seven outcomes are based on item ratings for each case. A State may be rated as having Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved the outcome. The determination of whether a State is in substantial conformity with a particular outcome is based on the percentage of cases determined to have Substantially Achieved the outcome. Specifically, for a State to be in substantial conformity with an outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having Substantially Achieved the outcome.

A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome or systemic factor must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern associated with that outcome or systemic factor.

ACF has set very high standards of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our country's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be acceptable. The focus of the CFSR process is on continuous quality improvement; high standards are set to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95-percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review at the end of their PIP implementation. 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 ANI, 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 ANIs, and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of its PIP and still not perform at the 95-percent (for outcomes) or 90-percent (for items) level as required by the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of functioning with regard to achieving desired child and family outcomes by once more applying high standards and a consistent, comprehensive, case-review methodology. This is intended to serve as a basis for continued planning in areas in which the State still needs to improve. The goal is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the closing of the PIP.

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

- An increase in the sample size from 50 to 65 cases (with the exception of this review, see footnote ¹, above)
- Stratification of the sample to ensure a minimum number of cases in key program areas, resulting in variations in the number of cases relevant for specific outcomes and items
- Changes in criteria for specific items to increase consistency and to ensure an assessment of critical areas, such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents

In the following section, key findings are summarized for each outcome and systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each outcome and systemic factor during the 2001 CFSR.

Key Findings Related to Outcomes

The 2007 CFSR identified several areas of high performance in Minnesota with regard to achieving outcomes for children. Although Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes, the State did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the individual indicators pertaining to repeat maltreatment (item 2), with 94 percent of cases receiving a rating of Strength; foster care re-entry (item 5), with a 92-percent Strength rating; other planned permanent living arrangements (OPPLA) (item 10), with a 90-percent Strength rating; and placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11), with a 97-percent Strength rating.

Also, Minnesota performed at a relatively high level (although they did not meet the 90 percent required for substantial conformity) on the CFSR outcome pertaining to the provision of services to meet children's educational needs (86.0 percent in substantial conformity). The generally high level of performance on education may be attributed, in part, to Minnesota's efforts to ensure (1) children in residential care receive a full range of educational services, (2) caseworkers are actively involved as advocates in the Individualized Education Plan process (IEP), (3) case plans address the specific educational needs of children (including tutoring and mentoring), and (4) youth have access to tuition waiver programs and Educational Training Voucher (ETV) funds for college.

Minnesota met the national standard for the data indicator related to the absence of maltreatment recurrence. However, Minnesota did not meet the national standard for the data indicator related to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by parents or facility staff. The State also did not meet the national data indicators pertaining to the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Permanency Composite 1), timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2), achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods (Permanency Composite 3), and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4).

Safety Outcome 1 (Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect) was determined to be substantially achieved in 57.9 percent of the cases reviewed. Minnesota's lowest rating was for item 1 (58 percent), which pertains to the timeliness of investigations. However, Safety Outcome 1 findings were influenced by variation in practice across the sites, and concerns were found regarding how cases are assigned and a lack of clarity regarding who had responsibility for cases.

Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate) was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the cases reviewed. There were cases in which services were not provided and children remained in unsafe situations in their homes, a finding related to assessment of initial safety and risk needs. There also were situations in which no services were provided after reunification to ensure the child's ongoing safety. Safety Outcome 2 ratings also were influenced by the risk of harm to children when they were in their homes and did not receive services necessary to reduce that risk.

Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was determined to be substantially achieved in only 58 percent of the cases reviewed. With Permanency Outcome 1, Minnesota's lowest rating was for item 9, which pertains to achieving adoption in a timely manner. Performance on these items (5-10) may be attributed, at least in part, to delays due to the agency not filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) in a timely manner, or not requesting a court hearing for a finalized adoption and staff not completing necessary paperwork to complete the adoption.

The CFSR also identified areas of concern with regard to achieving well-being outcomes for children and families. Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs) was determined to be substantially achieved in only 46.9 percent of the cases. Item 20, which pertains to worker visits with parents, received the lowest rating, at 45 percent. In several instances there were no visits with fathers, and in some cases there were no efforts to locate the father. In several cases, visits with the mother were not substantive and did not address case goals.

For both item 17, which pertains to meeting the needs of children, parents, and foster parents, and item 18, which pertains to child and family involvement in case planning, 48 percent of cases received a rating of Strength. The agency was not consistent in assessing and meeting the needs of parents. For foster care cases, the agency was more likely to assess and meet the needs of children and foster parents than it was to assess and meet the needs of either fathers or mothers. For in-home services cases, the agency was more likely to meet the needs of mothers and children than it was to meet the needs of fathers. The agency was not consistent in involving fathers in the case planning process. The exclusion of fathers from case planning occurred even when the fathers' whereabouts were known.

Key Findings Related to Systemic Factors

With regard to systemic factors, Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with five of the seven systemic factors: Statewide Information System, Quality Assurance (QA) System, Training, Agency Responsiveness to the Community, and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. These systems were highly praised by most stakeholders. They noted that the Statewide Information System can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, placement, and goals of every child who is in foster

care. Stakeholders reported that the QA System, which for the most part replicates the Federal CFSR, conducts QA reviews, analyzes findings, and prepares reports to ensure continuous quality improvement with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The State has continued to update and improve its core training curriculum, and staff receive training within 6 months of hire and on an ongoing basis. This systemic factor was determined to be in substantial conformity in the initial CFSR.

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the Agency Responsiveness to the Community systemic factor. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor also was determined to be in substantial conformity. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has taken additional affirmative steps to reach out to both the public and private sectors, as well as to ensure representation of providers, consumers, Tribal representatives, and staff in the development and implementation of systemic reforms. The State's efforts to engage the community and to include community input in PIP activities also are reflected in the goals, objectives, and activities associated with the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The State continues to make significant investments in licensing, recruiting, and supporting foster and adoptive parents. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor also was determined to be in substantial conformity, and the State was not required to address it in the PIP. However, the lack of diligent targeted recruitment to reflect the children in the system, which also was identified as a need in the prior review, is an ongoing issue.

Minnesota was not in substantial conformity with two of the seven systemic factors: Case Review System and Service Array. While some of the CFSP and program requirements are in place, the requirements pertaining to (1) providing a process that ensures each child has a written case plan developed jointly with the child's parents and (2) the process for notification of court proceedings are rated as ANIs. The key concern identified by stakeholders and case reviewers pertained to the inconsistent involvement of parents in the development of case plans. Separately, the requirement pertaining to the State's process for TPR is rated as a Strength; however, there also were some notable concerns identified in both the Statewide Assessment and the Onsite Review related to timely filing or achievement of TPR. These delays were attributed for the most part to court practices, such as delays in scheduling, continuances, appeals, and problems with establishing paternity. The key concerns identified by stakeholders regarding notification of proceedings were (1) no formal notification required and (2) some reported notices were not given. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR.

With regard to Service Array, the key concerns identified by stakeholders and case reviewers revolved around the need for services exceeding resources, which often resulted in waiting lists for services and insufficient placement resources. While the statewide service delivery system is in place, service gaps do exist and were identified in some key service categories, including substance

abuse, housing, and transportation. In addition, some areas of the State were identified as not having sufficient services to meet demand. In the 2001 CFSR, the State was in substantial conformity and was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

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

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

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

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

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 57.9 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. In addition, Minnesota did not meet the national standard for the data indicator related to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by parents or facility staff. However, Minnesota did meet the national standard for the data indicator related to the absence of maltreatment recurrence relevant for Safety Outcome 1. Performance on Safety Outcome 1 varied substantially across sites. For Carlton County, 100 percent of cases were investigated in a timely manner, compared to 55 percent of cases in Hennepin County and 50 percent of cases in Washington County.

In the 2001 CFSR, although Minnesota met the two national data standards associated with Safety Outcome 1 for repeat maltreatment and maltreatment of children in foster care, the State was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 because it did not achieve the performance level required for the item addressing timeliness of investigations. In some instances in which abuse and neglect reports were given low priority, several days elapsed between when the supervisor assigned the case and when the investigator made the initial contact. Many reports were screened out or not investigated, and there was no documentation regarding the reason. With regard to repeat maltreatment (item 2), the 2001 CFSR found this area to be a Strength.

In its PIP, Minnesota identified the following strategies to improve timeliness of initiating investigations:

- The State issued a bulletin specifying guidance on the timelines for initiation of investigations and the need for documentation when a report of alleged abuse or neglect is not addressed.

- Structured Decision Making (SDM) was implemented on a statewide basis and included a priority response tree that assisted staff in determining the required timeframes for in-person contact.

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

Key findings of the 2007 review included the following:

- In the 2007 CFSSR, reviewers found that DHS was not effective in the initiation of investigations of child maltreatment reports in a timely manner. However, reviewers found that DHS was effective in preventing repeat maltreatment.

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

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

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. There was little variation in performance across sites. The outcome was substantially achieved in 60 percent of Carlton County cases, 63 percent of Hennepin County cases, and 65 percent of Washington County cases.

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 2 in its Round 1 CFSSR in 2001. Both items addressed in Safety Outcome 2 were rated as ANIs in the first review, and the following concerns relevant to these items were noted in the 2001 CFSSR:

- Case reviewers found in several cases that there was a lack of risk assessment and identification of needs.
- In other cases, while services were provided to the family, risk was not adequately assessed. Some children were returned home with very limited monitoring and follow-up.

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

- Statewide implementation of SDM
- Providing workers, supervisors, and managers with the data and specific feedback needed to improve practice
- Focusing on improving case planning and case documentation

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

During the 2007 CFSR, both items incorporated in Safety Outcome 2 continued to be rated as ANIs. Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the 2007 CFSR found some of the same concerns, including inconsistencies in ensuring that children received appropriate services in order to minimize risk of harm and prevent their removal from the home. While children in the majority of cases did receive appropriate services to support them at home, there were instances in which children remained in unsafe situations, without their service needs being appropriately assessed or addressed, and instances in which children were reunified without ongoing services to address safety.

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

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

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 58 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 the CFSR 12-month target period, Minnesota did not meet the national standards for any of the four Permanency Composites.

Minnesota's performance on Permanency Outcome 1 was high at one site. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of the Washington County cases, compared to 55 percent of Hennepin County and 30 percent of Carlton County cases.

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2001 CFSR. The following concerns were identified in the 2001 CFSR:

- In one county, half of the foster care cases had a history of multiple foster care re-entries prior to the period under review.
- The practice of sending children to emergency shelters and temporary homes has a negative impact on stability.
- The lower payments available for the Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) program and for adoption assistance reduced the number of children moved to permanent homes.
- The differential rate between foster care and adoption assistance discouraged adoptions, and in one-third of the cases, alternative placement options were not being considered prior to changing the goal to long-term foster care (LTFC).

The following strategies were implemented in the Minnesota PIP to address these concerns:

- Policy clarification and guidance—Child and Family Services staff worked with the Social Services Information System (SSIS) to clarify to counties that respite care should not be coded as a placement. This error was assumed to be affecting both re-entry and placement stability rates.
- Quality practices—This strategy supported supervisors in promoting improved practice in permanency planning and provided all parties with objective assessments of case practice in out-of-home placement and permanency planning.
- Assessment of factors related to Minnesota’s rates of re-entry into foster care and placement stability—This effort was focused on developing a better understanding of the factors affecting placement instability and re-entries into care.
- Reduction in the use of LTFC—Efforts identified as part of this strategy helped to improve permanency planning, with the goal of reducing the time required to finalize an adoption.

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

Key findings of the 2007 review included the following:

- The data profile for the Composite 1 individual measure on foster care re-entries indicates that Minnesota has challenges in preventing foster care re-entries within a 12-month period.
- The case review indicates that there are inconsistencies in maintaining stable placements for foster children. Children experienced multiple placements that were not related to achieving their permanency goal, or children’s current placements were not stable (item 6).
- Minnesota continues to experience challenges with children’s permanency goals not being established in a timely manner (item 7).
- The case review indicates that services necessary to support the goal of reunification were not provided, and there were concerns related to the legal process and delayed filing of petitions (item 8).
- Information from the case reviews and data from Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions indicate that the State is not consistently completing adoptions in a timely manner (item 9).

The case review findings suggest that the State is preventing foster care re-entry (item 5) and is consistently assisting youth in achieving transition from foster care to independent living or OPPLA (item 10).

Stakeholders also expressed the following with regard to this outcome:

- Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is reported to decrease foster care re-entry.
- Children are receiving the necessary services and supports to promote a successful transition from foster care to independent living once they reach the age of emancipation.

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance with regard to placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); placing siblings together (item 12); ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 72.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of Washington County cases, 70 percent of Carlton County cases, and 65 percent of Hennepin County cases.

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2001 CFSR, and the following concerns were identified:

- The agency was not consistent in placing siblings together (item 12).
- The agency was not consistent in supporting visitation between children and their parents, particularly children and their fathers (item 13).

Despite these concerns, the agency was consistent in the following ways:

- Placing children in foster care in close proximity to their communities and families (item 11)
- Ensuring that children's connections with extended family, community, culture, faith, and friends were preserved (item 14)
- Making efforts to search for and evaluate relatives as potential placement options, particularly paternal relatives (item 15)
- Effectively promoting the relationships between children and their mothers and fathers (item 16)

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Child and Family Services staff issued policy guidance for placement of siblings, contact among siblings, and best practices in visitation between parents and their children in foster care.
- Issues involving sibling placement and contact and visitation of parents with their children were emphasized as part of supervisors' best practices and considered as part of the QA reviews of the counties.
- Improved case planning and case plan documentation practices involving sibling placements and visitation were improved through the use of the revised out-of-home placement plan.

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

Key findings of the 2007 review included the following:

- Item 11 (proximity of foster care placement) was rated a Strength in the 2007 CFSR.
- Item 14 (preserving connections) was rated an ANI.
- Item 12 (placing siblings together), item 15 (relative placement), and item 16 (relationship of child in care with parents) were all rated as Strengths in the 2001 CFSR and as ANIs in the 2007 CFSR. However, while they were not rated as Strengths, the State was rated very high in sibling placement (88 percent) and preserving connections (87 percent).

Case reviews showed the following:

- The most consistent pattern of visitation frequency for mothers was weekly visits, the most consistent pattern of visitation frequency for siblings was less than once a month, and the most consistent pattern of visitation frequency for fathers was no visits during the period under review (item 13).
- The agency did not facilitate the child's connections to extended family members and siblings who are not in foster care (item 14).
- There were inconsistent efforts made to search for maternal and paternal relatives as placement resources for children (item 15).
- The support of the parents' relationship with their children while the children were in foster care was generally inconsistent; however, less attention was given to promoting children's bonds with fathers than mothers (item 16).

Despite these concerns, the case reviews also found the following:

- Children were routinely and consistently placed in proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers (item 11).

Stakeholders expressed the following opinions relevant to this outcome:

- They noted the primary challenge in placing siblings together is the shortage of foster homes willing to accept sibling groups.
- The agency does not always have the resources to facilitate visitation.
- Children are placed in a foster care placement prior to completing a relative search.

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

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

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 46.9 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was consistent across the sites, and there was little variation in the ratings based on whether the case was

a foster care or an in-home case. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 47 percent of Carlton County cases, 44 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 53 percent of Washington County cases. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 50 percent (20 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 42 percent (10 cases) of the 24 in-home services cases.

Key concerns in 2001 were predominantly related to needs assessment, service provision, and family involvement in case planning as follows:

- Cases with unmet needs were almost always the result of a lack of proper assessment when the case was opened, and there were major needs for treatment that were unmet by the agency and that affected safety and permanency (item 17).
- Even though parents signed the case plans, there were many instances in which the parents were not involved in the development of the plan (item 18).
- There were no guidelines on the frequency of county worker visits for youth served by the juvenile justice system, and there were no clear guidelines as to who was responsible for what aspects of the case when multiple staff were involved in the case (item 19).

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Policy guidance was issued by Family and Children's Services emphasizing the importance of in-person contact with children in out-of-home placement.
- SDM includes processes that support increased family involvement in case planning and a more thorough assessment of family strengths and needs.
- Quality practice efforts were designed to support supervisors in their role as consultants in case practice and provide workers, supervisors, and managers with the data and specific feedback they require to improve practice.
- Concerted efforts were directed to improve case planning and documentation process.

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

Key findings in the 2007 CFSR indicated that, similar to the 2001 CFSR, the needs and services of children, parents, and foster parents (item 17) and family involvement in case planning (item 18) remain as ANIs in the 2007 CFSR. Concerns were identified with regard to caseworker visits with children (item 19) and caseworker visits with parents (item 20), both of which were ANIs in the 2001 CFSR.

The 2007 case review yielded the following concerns:

- There continues to be a lack of consistency in assessing and meeting the service needs of parents, particularly fathers. In the cases reviewed, the agency more consistently assessed and addressed the needs of mothers and children than with fathers. Efforts to locate and/or engage fathers remain inconsistent (item 17).
- There also continues to be inconsistency in adequately involving families, particularly fathers, in case planning (item 18).

- The frequency of caseworker visits is not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and the visits do not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (item 19).
- In general, there are insufficient caseworker visits, and there are challenges associated with the frequency and quality of visits with both parents. However, these findings were more pronounced for fathers, as evidenced by inconsistent efforts to visit. While mothers and fathers were not separately addressed in the 2001 CFSR, the 2007 CFSR specifically differentiated between mothers and fathers in evaluating the frequency and quality of caseworker visits (item 20).

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

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

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 86 percent of the cases reviewed. This is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was consistent across the sites, and there was little variation in the ratings based on whether the case was a foster care or an in-home case. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 82 percent of Carlton County cases, 90 percent of the Hennepin County, and 83 percent of Washington County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85 percent (29) of the 34 applicable foster care cases and in 89 percent (8 cases) of the 9 applicable in-home cases.

Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR were the following:

- A reliance on foster parents to meet children's educational needs
- Multiple school changes related to placement changes
- Children in in-home cases not having their educational needs met
- A lack of educational documentation in the case records

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Quality practice efforts were designed to support supervisors in their role as consultants in case practice and to provide workers, supervisors, and managers with the data and specific feedback they require to improve practice.
- Improving Case Planning and Case Plan Documentation: This strategy was designed to support improvements in documentation and in case planning practice critical to improvement of this outcome.

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

As with the 2001 CFSR, the State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2007 CFSR. Key findings of the 2007 review included the following:

- In the cases reviewed, there was a lack of assessment of educational needs, even when there was clear evidence that the child was experiencing school-related problems. Educational needs were identified and noted in the case record, but no services were provided to address those needs, and educational issues were not included in the case plan.

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

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

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 77.2 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied little across the sites. Among applicable cases, this outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 83 percent of the Carlton County cases, 79 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 71 percent of the Washington County cases. There was little variation based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 75 percent (30 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 82 percent (14 cases) of the 17 applicable in-home services cases.

Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR were the following:

- There was too much reliance on foster parents to address health needs of children.
- It was very difficult to find adequate dental care for children in foster care because many providers did not accept Medicaid.
- If a mental health issue was not directly related to the presenting problem, typically it was not addressed.
- The lack of initial assessment resulted in the mental health needs of children going unmet.

DHS employed the following PIP strategy to address this outcome:

- DHS Children's Mental Health Division developed a mental health interview guide designed to identify needs for mental health assessment in children. It was piloted in six sites, including programs that serve all ages of children and one county foster care unit. Initial evaluations of the interview guidelines and a full validation study were completed.

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

Key findings in the 2007 CFSR included the following:

- Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the physical and dental health of children (item 22) and the mental health of children (item 23) remain ANIs in the 2007 CFSR.
- The key concern identified in the 2007 CFSR was that in some cases dental care services were not provided, in some instances there were no assessments of physical or dental health noted in the case file, and in some cases medical needs were assessed and identified, but no services were provided.

- Another key concern in some cases was that children’s mental health needs were not assessed.

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

With regard to systemic factors, Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with the factors of Statewide Information System, QA System, Training, Agency Responsiveness to the Community, and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Minnesota was not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Case Review System and Service Array. The systemic findings contribute directly to outcome performance.

Statewide Information System

There is one indicator used to assess the State’s performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Statewide Information System. The indicator examines whether the State’s information system can inform users immediately of the status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. The 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 in foster care.

Case Review System

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

The ANIs pertained to item 25 (case planning process) and item 29 (notification of reviews and hearings). Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR.

Key concerns identified in the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- Stakeholders were not in agreement that parents are involved in the development of their case plans, and there were inconsistent comments with regard to how often parents and youth are involved in the development of case plans.

- Stakeholders reported seeing case plans developed by staff that were not individualized and noted that parents do not always understand their plans.
- Stakeholders at the State interview level and from two sites reported they were not aware that formal notification is required, and responses varied in terms of whether or not notices are actually given.
- Some stakeholders at the State interview level reported they were not aware of procedures for notification of hearings and that the process varies from county to county and social worker to social worker.

Despite these concerns, the 2007 CFSR also found the following:

- County agencies conduct 6-month administrative foster care reviews that function in an efficient and timely manner and are often held earlier than required.
- The State provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of ASFA.
- Many stakeholders reported that the agency foster care reviews are quality reviews that help to move children toward permanency by examining children's case plan goals and by flagging areas that will require county agency consideration and action.
- Stakeholders said that permanency hearings are occurring in a timely manner and that they are effective in moving a case forward.

Quality Assurance System

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

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of a QA System. During the 2001 CFSR, Minnesota was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor and therefore was not required to address the factor in its PIP. Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- The State has implemented standards that are sufficient to protect the safety and health of children in care.
- The State has a functioning QA system that addresses key practice areas and provides feedback on key findings.

Stakeholders commented on standards specifically for children with disabilities, capacity standards, nutritional standards, medication storage, discipline standards, mental health standards, foster parent training on cardiopulmonary resuscitation, seat restraints, sudden infant death syndrome, and risk management for sexually active youth. Stakeholders were in agreement that Minnesota is operating a QA system that evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs, provides reports, and evaluates program improvement measures in 87 counties.

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).

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. However, item 33 (ongoing training) was rated as an ANI due to stakeholders' significant concerns with inconsistent practices of tracking completed training hours. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR and therefore was not required to address the factor in its PIP.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State-licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E, and this training addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out the duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

The key concerns noted in the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP and addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E; however, stakeholders noted concerns with inconsistent practices of tracking completed training hours. In addition, there were concerns expressed related to difficulties accessing training.

Service Array

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

Minnesota is not in substantial conformity with the Service Array systemic factor because all items associated with this systemic factor were rated as ANIs; although the State does have numerous services available in various counties, gaps in services, challenges with access to services, and inconsistently developed individual case plans were identified. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- There were gaps noted in key services across counties. Service array and resource development is variable across 87 counties depending on availability of local resources, community need, geographic and demographic characteristics of the counties, and/or other emerging issues.

- Stakeholders consistently identified barriers to accessing services due to challenges with waiting lists, transportation, and service location.
- Stakeholders noted challenges with fragmentation of services and inconsistencies with creating individualized plans.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the CFSP (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).

Minnesota is 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 CFSP. The CFSR also found that there is coordination between DHS and other Federal and Federally-assisted programs to meet the service needs of the children and families served by the agency (item 40). The agency also consistently engages stakeholders in the process of developing annual reports of progress and services delivered as a Federal requirement.

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).

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. During the 2001 CFSR, Minnesota was in substantial conformity with this factor.

The 2007 CFSR found the following:

- The State has established and implemented clear standards for licensing all foster family homes and child care institutions, to include minimum requirements for pre-service and ongoing training.
- There is clear delineation of the requirements that must be met for families wishing to adopt.
- The State has a process in place for compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances.
- The State has a process in place to ensure the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements.

A key concern of the 2007 CFSR with regard to this systemic factor was the following:

- Current recruitment mechanisms have not comprehensively addressed the growing need for ethnic and racially diverse foster homes that are reflective of changing demographics of the State and the foster care population.

Table 1. Minnesota CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	NO	57.9	NO		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	58
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				Strength	94
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	NO	62.5			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	76
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	63
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	NO	58	NO		
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				Strength	92
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	75
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	74
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	79
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	43
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				Strength	90
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	NO	72.5			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	97
Item 12: Placement with siblings				ANI	88
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	67
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	87
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	68
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	63

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

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

Table 2. Minnesota CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	Percent Strength
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	NO	46.9		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	48
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	48
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	78
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	45
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	NO	86		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	86
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	NO	77.2		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	80
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	84

*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: Minnesota CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	YES	4	
Item 24: State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care			Strength
Case Review System	NO	2	
Item 25: Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child’s parents that includes the required provisions			ANI
Item 26: Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review			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			Strength
Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child			ANI
Quality Assurance System	YES	4	
Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children			Strength
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identified strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluations program improvement measures implemented			Strength
Training	YES	3	
Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services			Strength
Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			ANI

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
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 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
Service Array	NO	1	
Item 35: The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency			ANI
Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP			ANI
Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency			ANI
Agency Responsiveness to the Community	YES	4	
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 that 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 adoptive homes are needed			ANI

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

*Scores range from 1 to 4. A score of 1 or 2 means that the factor is not in substantial conformity. A score of 3 or 4 means that the factor is in substantial conformity.

**Items may be rated as a Strength or as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

**Final Report
Minnesota Child and Family Services Review
July 2008**

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

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Minnesota. 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 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau (CB) of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS.

The Minnesota CFSR was conducted the week of September 24 through 28, 2007. The period under review was from April 1, 2006, to September 30, 2007. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal year (FY) 2004, FY 2005, and the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006
- Reviews of 64 cases at three sites throughout the State, including 32 cases in Hennepin County, 15 cases in Carlton County, and 17 cases in Washington County
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three 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

Information from each resource is presented for all of the items reviewed. All 64 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 64 cases are presented in the table below.

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

Table of Case Characteristics for Minnesota

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Cases
	N=40	N=24¹
When case was opened/child entered foster care		
Open prior to the period under review	34 (85%)	11 (46%)
Open during the period under review	6 (15%)	13 (54%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	13 (32.5%)	
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	13 (32.5%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	5 (12.5%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	14 (35%)	*
16 and older	8 (20%)	*
Race/Ethnicity		
African-American (Non-Hispanic)	8 (20%)	*
White (Non-Hispanic)	10 (25%)	*
Hispanic (of all races)	4 (10%)	*
Two or more races	12 (30%)	*
American Indian or Alaska Native	5 (12.5%)	*
Unable to determine	1 (2.5%)	*
Primary Reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	9 (22.5%)	10 (42%)
Physical abuse	4 (10%)	4 (17%)
Sexual abuse	1 (2.5%)	2 (8%)
Medical neglect	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Child's Behavior	5 (12.5%)	0
Juvenile Justice	1 (2.5%)	0
Substance abuse by parent	6 (15%)	2 (8%)
Domestic violence in child's home	2 (5%)	3 (13%)
Abandonment	2 (5%)	0
Mental/physical health of the child	8 (20%)	0
Emotional Maltreatment	0	1 (4%)
Other	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)

¹Originally, 25 cases were pulled for the review sample. One case was eliminated in Hennepin County because there was not enough information available due to the nature of the case, which involved services to a minor parent focused on meeting educational goals.

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

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

ACF has set a very high standard of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our country's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance are considered acceptable. The standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being. The goal of the CFSR is to promote continuous improvement in performance on these outcomes.

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 ANI, 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 compliance level requirements of the CFSR.

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

In the following sections, for each outcome assessed, there is a discussion of how the State performed on that outcome in the first round. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round of the CFSR, there is a discussion of the key concerns identified at that time and the strategies implemented in the State’s first PIP to address those concerns. This discussion also focuses on whether the key concerns that emerged in the first CFSR continued to be present in the second review, or whether those concerns were resolved, but other concerns emerged.

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

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

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	2	6	3	11	57.9
Partially Achieved	0	5	1	6	31.6
Not Achieved or Addressed	0	0	2	2	10.5
Total Applicable Cases	2	11	6	19	
Not Applicable Cases	13	21	11	45	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national data standards:					
	National Standard (%)		State’s Percentage		Meets Standard
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6		95.3		YES
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68		99.63		NO

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 57.9 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. In addition, Minnesota did not meet the national standard for the data indicator related to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by parents or facility staff. Minnesota did meet the national standard for the data indicator related to the absence of maltreatment recurrence relevant for Safety Outcome 1. Performance on item 1 varied substantively across sites. For Carlton County, 100 percent of cases were investigated in a timely manner, compared with 55 percent in Hennepin County and 50 percent Washington County.

2001 CFSR Findings

In the 2001 CFSR, although Minnesota met the two national data standards associated with Safety Outcome 1 for repeat maltreatment and maltreatment of children in foster care, the State was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 because it did not achieve the performance level required for the item addressing timeliness of investigations. In some instances when abuse and neglect reports were given low priority, several days elapsed between when the supervisor assigned the case and when the investigator made the initial contact. Many reports were screened or not investigated, and there was no documentation regarding the reason. With regard to repeat maltreatment (item 2), the 2001 CFSR found this area to be a Strength.

In its PIP, Minnesota identified the following strategies to improve timeliness of initiating investigations:

- The State issued a bulletin that specified guidance on the timelines for initiation of investigation and the need for documentation when a report of alleged abuse or neglect is not addressed.
- Structured Decision Making (SDM) was implemented on a statewide basis and included a priority response tree that assisted staff in determining the required timeframes for in-person contact.

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

2007 CFSR Findings

In the 2007 CFSR, reviewers found DHS was not effective in the initiation of investigations of child maltreatment reports in a timely manner. However, reviewers found that DHS was effective in preventing repeat maltreatment. The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 19 (30 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the policy requirements of the State child welfare agency.

DHS policy for report investigation timeframes is as follows:

- For reports alleging substantial child endangerment, a face-to-face contact with the child and primary caregiver is required immediately, defined as “as soon as possible but no longer than 24 hours” or daily attempts until contact is made.²
- For all other reports, the face-to-face contact with the child and primary caregiver must occur within 5 calendar days, or attempts every 5 calendar days until contact is made. In both categories, the contact must be sufficient to complete a safety assessment and ensure the immediate safety of the child.

Item 1	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	6	3	11	58
Area Needing Improvement	0	5	3	8	42
Total Applicable Cases	2	11	6	19	
Not applicable	13	21	11	45	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

There was variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Carlton County cases, compared with 55 percent of Hennepin County cases and 50 percent of Washington County cases.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was established with the child within the timeframes required by State policy or law. Item 1 was rated as an ANI when face-to-face contact was not established within the required timeframes. In seven of the eight cases rated as ANI, the investigation was not initiated within the mandated timeframe nor did face-to-face contact with the child occur in a timely manner. In the remaining case, although the investigation was initiated in a

² Minnesota Statutes 626.556, Subd 2(c) describing this policy was submitted as part of the Minnesota Statewide Assessment; however, the State asserted in response to the courtesy copy of the document that this information does not describe Minnesota’s current policies.

timely manner, face-to-face contact with the child did not occur in a timely manner.³ Three of the cases rated as ANI had been assigned for Investigation, requiring 24 hour face-to-face contact, and the remaining five cases were assigned to Assessment and required a face-to face visit within 5 days.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 58 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with the required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. For the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that DHS investigations are initiated and completed in a timely manner. County stakeholders noted that collaboration with law enforcement supports timely investigations, and the practice of conducting joint interviews or the use of forensic interviews has helped decrease the trauma children experience when undergoing multiple interviews during investigation. Most stakeholders report that the agency responds consistently when an immediate response (less than 24 hours) is required. Stakeholders also noted good collaboration with Tribes and conducting joint investigations. They also reported that agencies utilize a quality assurance (QA) tool to monitor timeliness of investigations.

Despite these generally positive perceptions, in Hennepin County some stakeholders indicated concerns on the timeliness of responses for reports received after traditional working hours.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota's response continuum supports an immediate intervention (investigative response) for reports alleging serious harm while allowing a less intrusive, strength-based response Family Assessment Response (FAR) for all other reports. Decisions are based on coordinated investigation efforts by child protection and law enforcement, and consultation with the county attorney occurring on an as-needed basis. Fifty-two counties have developed and implemented plans for improving timely initiation of assessments.

The Statewide Assessment notes the following challenges to timely initiation of responses to child abuse and neglect reports:

- When child maltreatment reports require a joint response with law enforcement, the logistics involved in arranging the investigation may delay meeting with the child and family.
- Loss of Federal and State funding has stressed the capacity of many counties to maintain sufficient staff to comply with all the requirements of the social service programs they manage, including child protection services and response timelines.

³ This description is based on the CFSR criteria related to item 1. In response to the State's review of the courtesy copy of this document, the State requested it be noted that its current policy equates face-to-face contact with the initiation of investigation.

- There is some variation across counties in screening reports of maltreatment and determining which reports constitute substantial child endangerment and require immediate county agency response.
- There is a perception that the shift in focus to FAR may contribute to a diminished sense of urgency and level of expertise in responding to reports of substantial child endangerment.
- Locating families is, at times, challenging, especially in more populated or larger geographic counties.
- Considerable variation across counties in screening child protection referrals was noted, specifically with decisions regarding the track to assign reports (FAR or traditional investigation), timely notification to Tribal agencies, and the level of collaboration with Tribes in conducting assessments or investigations.

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 16 (25 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine whether there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

Item 2	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	10	3	15	94
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	6
Total Applicable Cases	2	10	4	16	
Not applicable	13	22	13	48	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

There was variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Carlton County and Hennepin County cases, compared with 75 percent of Washington County cases.

Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was no indication of two or more substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period or when there were two or more substantiated reports, but they involved different maltreatment circumstances or perpetrators. Item 2 was rated as an ANI when there are two substantiated or indicated reports within a 6-month

period that involved the same general circumstances. One case rated as an ANI was an in-home services case involving parental substance abuse issues.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 94 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that no recurrence of maltreatment occurred within a 6-month period of time before or after an indicated or substantiated report during the period under review. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength; however, the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator for absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength, and the State did meet both national data standards.

Stakeholder Interview Information

While there are protocols in place supporting thorough investigation, assessment, and decision-making regarding the child's safety, some stakeholders expressed their perceived concern that use of FAR instead of Investigative Response may lead to incidents of repeat maltreatment in those cases where families had relocated to a new county and subsequently had multiple FAR experiences.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment indicates that Minnesota has well-established protocols that outline child protection and law enforcement duties and responsibilities in the investigative process. For reports alleging less serious harm, the FAR model is the preferred response.

Challenges outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Loss of Federal and State funding has stressed the capacity of many Minnesota counties to maintain sufficient staff and resources to adequately serve children and families, including limited ability to invest in prevention and early intervention services and, in some counties, pressure to close cases earlier.
- In the urban areas, Tribal child welfare staff expressed concerns that counties did not provide adequate services to support families, and cases were only addressed when serious child safety issues were present and placement of children was necessary.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to reduce instances of repeat maltreatment:

- Hennepin and Ramsey counties contract with community-based social service agencies to deliver post-assessment services to families addressed under the FAR. Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) supports family involvement in providing safe and stable homes for children and reducing future maltreatment.
- Child in Need of Protective Services review hearings every 90 days, along with Family Dependency Treatment Court programs, provide increased monitoring of parental behaviors related to matters of child safety.
- A validation study of SDM risk assessment tools and a subsequent recalibration of the tools occurred to improve the predictive capacity of the instrument across all major racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	9	20	11	40	62.5
Partially Achieved	3	4	2	9	14.1
Not Achieved or Addressed	3	8	4	15	23.4
Total Applicable Cases	15	32	17	64	

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. This outcome was substantially achieved in 60 percent of Carlton County cases, 63 percent of Hennepin County cases and 65 percent of Washington County cases. This outcome was substantially achieved in 24 (60 percent) of 40 foster care cases and 17 (67 percent) of the 24 in-home cases.

2001 CFSR Findings

The State did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 2 in the 2001 CFSR. Case reviewers found in several cases that there was a lack of assessment of risk and identification of needs. In other cases, while services were provided to the family, risk was not adequately assessed. Some children were returned home with very limited monitoring and follow-up.

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Statewide implementation of SDM helped improve performance in safety assessment and of the risk and safety concerns of the family.
- SDM tools were available in the Social Services Information System (SISS) in more than 45 counties as part of the risk assessment pilot authorized by the Legislature.
- Quality practice efforts supported supervisors in their role as consultants in case practice and provided workers, supervisors, and managers with the data and specific feedback required to improve practice.
- Improving case planning and case documentation supported improvements in documentation and in case planning practice critical to improvement of this outcome.

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

2007 CFSR Findings

The 2007 CFSR found some of the same concerns noted in the 2001 CFSR, including inconsistencies in ensuring that children receive appropriate services to minimize risk of harm and prevent removal from the home. While in the majority of cases reviewed children did receive appropriate services to support them at home, there were instances in which children remained in unsafe situations without their service needs being appropriately assessed or addressed and children were reunified without ongoing services addressing safety.

In the 2007 CFSR, there were inconsistencies identified in managing the risk of harm to children when they were in their own home. The services necessary to reduce that risk were not provided nor a sufficient safety plan established to address the risk. There were also instances identified where risk and safety were not assessed prior to children reunifying with their families.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 41 (64 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home, or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent placement of children in foster care while ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 3	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	16	8	31	76
Area Needing Improvement	3	4	3	10	24
Total Applicable Cases	10	20	11	41	
Not applicable	5	12	6	23	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Performance on this item did not vary considerably among the counties. The item was rated as a Strength in 70 percent of Carlton County cases, 80 percent of Hennepin County cases, and 73 percent of Washington County cases.

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

- Services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal (25 cases).
- The child was placed voluntarily with relatives, and services were provided to the relatives, parents, and children (one case).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home because removal was necessary to ensure the child's safety (six cases).
- The family received post-reunification services to prevent the child's re-entry into foster care (one case).

Item 3 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Services were not provided and children remained in unsafe situations in the home (four cases).
- Some services were provided, but they did not adequately address the safety issues in the family, and the children remained at-risk in the home (one case).
- No services were provided after reunification to ensure the child's ongoing safety and to prevent re-entry into foster care (four cases).
- No services were provided to protect children in the home and the child was subsequently removed (two cases).
- No services were provided to protect children who were left in the home (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 76 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that concerted efforts were made to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was also rated as an ANI in the 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that the State has challenges providing services for preventing removal. The concerns of stakeholders across counties focused primarily on the FAR process and children remaining in the home without adequate services, particularly mental health and sexual abuse treatment for parents. In addition, stakeholders indicated that the FAR cases can be open anywhere from 3 months to more than 2 years. For example, Hennepin County stakeholders noted that the 3-month limit on FAR services in the county was not always enough time to provide services, particularly as new issues emerge with the family. In addition, Washington County stakeholders related that families who move to different counties began the FAR process from the start with each move, which stakeholders expressed may negatively impact safety.

However, some stakeholders reported there have been increased efforts to provide services to prevent removal initially when the family first comes to the attention of the agency. In particular, stakeholders in Washington County praised the agency for the services

provided to families preventing removal and cited the county’s resources as one of the strengths. Stakeholders in Carlton County noted that the assessment phase of services takes 45 days, and then the case is transferred to case management and generally is open 6 to 9 months.

Statewide Assessment Information

In cases where children can be safely maintained in the home, family support or community-based services are provided to meet identified needs. Minnesota statute requires reasonable and active efforts to prevent out-of-home placement. It defines child protective services as assessment or investigation; protective intervention; and planning and provision of services. Placement prevention services include an array of protection, family support, and family preservation services; FAR and child protection investigations, including assessment of safety, risk and developing protective service plans; community-based services to meet basic needs and supportive services such as parenting education, respite care, individual and family counseling, and family-based home management; and FGDM, family-based crisis services, crisis nurseries, and children’s mental health.

Challenges in providing services to prevent removal outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- In some counties, county social workers are not available to assist law enforcement in responding to after-hours child welfare referrals. In these cases, children may be placed out of home until a social worker is available to meet with the child and family.
- Sometimes children are placed because their parents are incarcerated, or for other reasons not related to the parent’s capacity to properly care for their child. Minnesota has a high rate of children in care for less than 8 days.
- The range of placement prevention services varies considerably across counties. Families may wait several weeks before receiving in-home services. Restrictions of third-party payments make it prohibitive for service providers to consistently participate in “wraparound services” or other multi-disciplinary meetings.
- Services that match the linguistic and other cultural needs of families are not readily available throughout the State.

Item 4: Risk of harm to child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for all 64 cases. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to address the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 4	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	20	11	40	63
Area Needing Improvement	6	12	6	24	37
Total Applicable Cases	15	32	17	64	

As shown in the table, performance on this item was similar across all three of the sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 60 percent of the Carlton County cases, 63 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 65 percent of the Washington County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 60 percent (24 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 67 percent (16 cases) of the 24 in-home services cases.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children’s home or in children’s foster home and, addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and providing services to the parents to reduce risk of harm (17 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and seeking TPR (7 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remained in the home (18 cases).

Item 4 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- There was risk of harm to the children when they were in their homes and the services necessary to reduce that risk were not provided; the safety plan was not established or was not sufficient to address the risk (eight cases).
- There was insufficient ongoing risk assessment in the foster home or non-foster care (relative homes or fictive kin, meaning those individuals identified as having a significant relationship with the child) placement setting (four cases).
- The case was closed prematurely before safety issues were fully addressed, leaving children at risk of harm (one case).
- There was risk of harm (and safety issues) during visitation with parents, particularly trial home visits, and the agency did not address those risks (three cases).
- Risk of harm was assessed and addressed in the home of one parent only; no assessment of risk was conducted in the home of the other parent where the child visited frequently (one case).
- No risk and safety assessments were conducted prior to reunification (six cases).
- Risk of harm was not assessed for siblings who remained in the home (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 63 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that risk of harm to the children had been appropriately addressed. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that the agency seeks to address safety issues and minimize risk of harm through the provision of services. Several stakeholders described the agency's use of assessment tools to gauge safety in the home, particularly at the initiation of services. However, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that they were concerned children who are assigned to the FAR track, which is voluntary, may end up as an open investigation because risk was not adequately assessed during the initial intake. Stakeholders in Hennepin County expressed concerns that children are not protected in foster homes and that there is insufficient risk assessment in foster homes.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, in both traditional investigations and FAR, agency social workers meet with children and their primary caregivers to assess the immediate safety needs of children in the home. Safety plans are completed and made available when children's safety needs cannot be addressed in the home. According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency is responsible for conducting a FAR and will collect available and relevant information to determine child safety and risk of subsequent child maltreatment. Family strengths and needs are assessed when providing post-assessment services. The agency policy requires completion of SDM safety and risk assessment tools in all child protection investigations and FARs, including those for substance abuse, co-occurrence of domestic violence, referrals to early childhood developmental screenings, and children's mental health screenings. Safety assessments must be completed within 3 working days of initiating an investigation/assessment, and the caseworker and family and/or community workers continue to meet with the family until safety and risk issues are significantly mitigated to support case closing. Safety plans are completed and when children's safety needs cannot be addressed in the home and out-of-home placement in the least restrictive setting is made. Risk assessments must be completed at the conclusion of the investigation/assessment and prior to case closing.

Challenges in addressing risk of harm to children outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Sometimes children are receiving services from more than one program area, such as child protection, juvenile justice, and mental health; and the continuity of service delivery is at times disjointed. The roles and responsibilities of children, parents, and service providers are not clearly defined, which may affect service delivery and outcomes for children.
- Sometimes child protection investigation and/or assessment workers do not fully share the contents of their contacts with families, so important safety factors may not be addressed by the ongoing caseworkers.

- The Federal Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and other data-sharing restrictions limit professionals working with parents with substance and/or mental health problems from sharing important information with caseworkers.
- Minnesota has a growing homeless youth population and dedicated funding to address this increased need has diminished since 2004. No State agency has case management responsibility for this population.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to appropriately address risk of harm to children:

- The State's revised Child Mortality Review process includes an examination of cases of child mortality and near-fatality both at a State and county level. These case reviews involve multi-disciplinary teams that provide systemic and practice recommendations to county agencies.
- Minnesota statutes require that counties establish multi-disciplinary child protection teams authorized to share case information and discuss service needs pertinent to cases involving child abuse and neglect.
- The recalibration of the State's SDM Risk Assessment instrument is complete and now has greater predictive capacity, especially related to American Indian families.
- Several counties have adopted Andrew Turnell's *Signs of Safety*™ child protection case consultation model.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	3	11	9	23	58
Partially Achieved	7	5	1	13	32
Not Achieved or Addressed	0	4	0	4	10
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (Scaled Score)		State's Composite Score		Meets Standard (Yes/No)
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +		116.0		NO
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +		98.8		NO
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +		106.2		NO
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +		83.2		NO

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 58 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 the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006, the State did not meet the national standards for the four Composite measures including:
 - Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification
 - Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions
 - Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended periods of time
 - Composite 4: Placement stability

Minnesota' performance on Permanency Outcome 1 varied across sites. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of the Washington County cases, compared with 55 percent of the Hennepin County cases and 30 percent of the Carlton County cases.

Performance on the individual measures included in all composites is presented in the discussion of the items related to each measure.

2001 CFSR Findings

The 2001 CFSR identified the following key concerns with regard to achieving permanency for children in their living situations. The State did not meet the required performance level for three of the national standards associated with this outcome. The national standard addressing length of stay in foster care was rated not applicable for Minnesota in the 2001 CFSR. In addition, the case review identified the following: In one county, half of the foster care cases had a history of multiple foster care re-entries prior to the period under review; the practice of sending children to emergency shelters and temporary homes has a negative impact on stability; the lower payments available for the Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) program and for adoption assistance reduced the number of children moved to permanent homes; the differential rate between foster care and adoption assistance was discouraging adoptions; and in one-third of the cases, alternative permanency options were not being considered prior to changing the goal to long-term foster care (LTFC).

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Family and Children's Services staff worked with the SISS to clarify policy and provide guidance to counties that respite care should not be coded as a placement. This error was assumed to be affecting both re-entry and placement stability rates.
- Quality practices strategy supported supervisors in promoting improved practice in permanency planning and provided all parties with objective assessments of case practice in out-of-home placement and permanency planning.
- Assessment of factors related to Minnesota's rates of re-entry into foster care and placement stability focused on developing a better understanding of the factors affecting placement instability and re-entries into care.
- Reduction in the use of LTFC helped improve permanency planning with older youth in care.

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

2007 CFSR Findings

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, stability of foster care placements (item 6), permanency goal for the child (item 7), and adoption (item 9) remain challenging areas for DHS as indicated by the 2007 CFSR. Related and additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR are presented as follows:

- The data profile for the Composite 1 individual measure on foster care re-entries indicates that Minnesota has challenges in preventing foster care re-entries within a 12-month period.
- The case review indicates that there are inconsistencies in maintaining stable placements for foster children, particularly related to children experiencing multiple placements whose placement changes were neither related to achieving the children’s permanency goals nor the children’s current placement being unstable (item 6).
- Minnesota continues to experience challenges with children’s permanency goals not being established in a timely manner (item 7).
- The case review indicates that services necessary to support the goal of reunification were not provided, and there were concerns related to agency and court delays (item 8).
- Information from the case reviews and data from Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions, indicate that the State is not consistently completing adoptions in a timely manner (item 9).

The case review findings suggest that the State is preventing foster care re-entry (item 5) and is consistently and appropriately assisting youth in achieving the goal of OPPLA (item 10).

Stakeholders also expressed the following with regard to this outcome:

- When FGDM is used with families, it is reported to decrease foster care re-entry.
- Children are receiving the necessary services and supports to promote a successful transition from foster care to independent living (IL) once they reach the age of emancipation.

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

Item 5: Foster care re-entries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 13 (33 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for assessment if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 5	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	5	5	12	92
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	8
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	6	5	13	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	14	5	27	

There was little variation in performance on this item across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of both Carlton and Washington County cases and 83 percent of Hennepin County cases.

State performance for the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006, on the individual measure of foster care re-entry (Measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification, was as follows: 27.8 percent of the children exiting foster care re-entered foster care in less than 12 months. For the dataset used to establish the national standards for the data composites, the median performance on this measure was 15 percent, and the 25th percentile was 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance. This data indicate that Minnesota performed below the median performance for the data used to establish the national standards.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength when the entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Item 5 was rated as an ANI when the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of the child's discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of the cases, which is greater than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, although all applicable cases reviewed during the On-site Review received strength ratings, this item was rated as an ANI as the State did not meet the national standard for foster care re-entries.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that once children are reunified, they do not re-enter foster care. In particular, when FGDM is used with families, it is reported to decrease foster care re-entry. However, a few stakeholders indicated that issues around pressure to close the case too soon, lack of post-reunification services, and accessibility of services are barriers to stability after reunification.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, prior to placing children in foster care, caseworkers assess the safety needs of children and evaluate the capacity of parents or guardians to meet those needs. Recommendations to place children are made when a child's safety cannot be reasonably ensured through the provision of individualized in-home services. Prior to returning a child from foster care to their home, caseworkers increase contact with parents, children, and service providers to determine the likelihood of successful reunification; and the SDM reunification tool is used to inform this decision. Post-reunification services are provided, and when a trial home visit disposition is ordered, the agency retains custody and provides services to support both the parent and children.

Challenges in preventing foster care re-entry outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Parents with serious mental and/or chemical health problems are, at times, unable to provide a safe environment for their children. Frequently in these cases, agency and community providers have regular contact with the parents and children so they are keenly aware of the safety risks.
- Minnesota has a very high rate of reunifying children within 12 months of placement. The State and its county partners have had a strong historical commitment to family preservation and the allocation of resources to maintain families. This commitment and related practices increase the potential for foster care re-entry.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to monitor foster care re-entry:

- Minnesota's statewide information system tracks child re-entries across county lines.
- Both child welfare and juvenile justice placements are recorded on the State's information system, which provides an opportunity for child welfare and juvenile justice professionals to review re-entry events.

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. Reviewers also assessed the stability of the child's current placement setting. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 6	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	13	9	30	75
Area Needing Improvement	2	7	1	10	25
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied across counties. The item was rated a Strength in 80 percent of the Carlton County cases and 90 percent of the Washington County cases, compared with 65 percent of the Hennepin County cases.

Minnesota's performance for the 12-month period ending March 31, 2006, was below the national performance standards on all three individual measures of placement stability included in Composite 4: Placement stability, as presented below.

- 79.3 percent of the children in foster care for less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. The State scored below the national median (83.3 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards for the data composites.
- 46.7 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. The State scored below the national median (59.9 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards for the data composites.
- 28.7 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. The State scored below the national median (33.9 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards for the data composites.

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

- The child did not experience a placement change during the period under review, and the current placement was stable (16 cases).
- The placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest and were intended either to promote achieving the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (14 cases).

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

- The child experienced multiple placements that were not related to achieving the child's permanency goal (10 cases).
- The child's current placement was not stable, which included one case in which the child had only one placement (two cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 17 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 12 cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in 11 cases experienced three or more placements during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of an ANI. In 75 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interest of the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 was also rated as an ANI in the 2001 CFSR because the State did not meet the national standard for placement stability.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites who commented on this item consistently reported that (1) many children are placed in shelter care initially, (2) in some instances children are placed with inappropriate relatives, and (3) children with behavioral issues may be placed with foster parents not prepared to handle these issues. Those were the primary reasons given regarding why children are placed in multiple settings.

Statewide Assessment Information

Challenges with stability in foster care outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- A few county agencies initially place children in short-term shelter care to assess their needs. If an extended placement is deemed necessary, appropriate placement resources are located, and the agency makes a placement recommendation to the court.
- Changes in child placements sometimes occur when relatives are not identified early in the case and later come forward offering to provide a home for children previously placed in non-relative foster care.
- There is a lack of culturally diverse foster parents and foster parents able and willing to care for youth and children with significant emotional and behavioral problems. This may result in some children placed in homes not equipped to meet their multiple needs.
- It is not clear that county agencies offer the same level of support to relative foster parents as non-relative foster parents, which may result in placement changes.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to increase stability in foster care:

- Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association and Minnesota Adoption Support and Preservation (MN ASAP) offer regional contacts and support groups for foster and adoptive parents.
- In a few counties, mental health and/or family support staff meet with foster parents and discuss which services are needed to support successful placement. Ongoing services are provided both in the foster home and at the service provider's offices. The primary caseworker, service provider, foster parent, and the children in care meet and discuss case progress and needs.
- The inclusion of foster parents in FGDM conferences or case planning meetings occurs in some counties.

Item 7: Permanency goal for child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Thirty-nine (98 percent) of the 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. One case was not applicable because the child was in care for 4 days. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	14	8	29	74
Area Needing Improvement	3	6	1	10	26
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	9	39	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 70 percent of the Carlton County and Hennepin County cases, compared with 89 percent of the applicable Washington County cases. One case in Washington County was considered not applicable because the child was in care for 4 days.

Minnesota’s performance for the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006, on the individual measures incorporated in Permanency Composite 3: Achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of Time is presented below.

- 16.1 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the fiscal year were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the fiscal year. This percentage is below the national median (25 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards.
- 91.3 percent of the children exiting foster care who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage is below the national median (96.8 percent) and below the 75th percentile (98 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards for this measure.
- 42.0 percent of the children discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percentage exceeds the national median of 47.8 percent but does not meet the 25th percentile (37.5 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards. For this measure, lower scores indicate more positive performance.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner.

Case review findings pertaining to case goals were as follows:

- Eleven children had a goal of adoption.

- Nine children had a goal of OPPLA.
- Fifteen children had a goal of reunification with parents, relatives.
- Three children had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification with parents.
- One child had concurrent goals of reunification and OPPLA.

The case was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner nor was it appropriate to the needs of the child (three cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (five cases).
- The goal of reunification was maintained for too long a period of time (two cases).
- TPR was not sought in accordance with ASFA timelines (one case).
- There was no goal (one case).

Case review findings pertaining to TPR were as follows:

- At the time of the Onsite Review, in 27 of 39 applicable cases for this item, the children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- In 14 of 27 cases, a TPR petition had been filed in a timely manner.
- In 13 of 27 cases, a TPR petition was not filed in a timely manner.
- In 10 of 13 cases for which TPR had not been filed at 15 months, a compelling reason for not filing for TPR was noted. In the three remaining cases, there was no compelling reason identified for not filing for TPR.

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Case reviewers found that in 74 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was also rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item had varying opinions about permanency planning and concurrent planning. Some felt caseworkers are not working toward both goals simultaneously, while other stakeholders report concurrent planning is working well.

Stakeholders in Hennepin County and Washington County noted Permanency Teams, which are established to review cases 4 to 6 months after entering placement to determine how to proceed with permanency planning. This helps the county to ensure appropriate permanency goals are in place for each child.

Some stakeholders in Washington County noted court hearings occurred every 30 days to review for appropriate levels of compliance with concurrent case plans. They also noted that appropriate permanency goals for children over the age of 8 are established.

Stakeholders felt that 6-month timelines to permanency and/or to finalize permanency were appropriate and that very intensive services to work toward permanency were provided to all cases, particularly in the first 6 months. In addition, permanency goals are reviewed every 6 months by way of permanency assessment meetings with social workers to ensure children are being served appropriately. However, stakeholders perceived that caseworkers were not able to work equally toward both goals due to resource and time constraints.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when children are placed in foster care, caseworkers meet with families to develop out-of-home placement plans within 30 days. Caseworkers review goals and services to promote reunification, along with permanency timelines with children, parents, and other key persons in the case. When appropriate, concurrent permanency goals and related services are discussed and documented in the case plan. When children meet Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) criteria for TPR, agencies are required to file or join a TPR petition unless an exception, or compelling reason, for not filing is specified. FGDM is available in 71 counties and 10 Tribes and at times is used to engage family members in developing appropriate permanency goals for children.

Challenges with establishing timely and appropriate permanency goals and seeking TPR in a timely manner outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Courts and county agencies sometimes find it difficult to integrate permanency requirements found in the ASFA with provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- Scheduling timely permanency hearings is often a challenge for court administrators due, in part, to the high level of court activity.
- The lack of public defenders to serve as counsel for parents and children can delay permanency proceedings and may be an impediment to parents fully understanding their rights in the permanency planning process.
- When children are placed in foster care due to parental drug abuse, reunification timelines do not provide adequate time for some parents to recover and successfully resume care and custody of their children.
- In some cases where older children are placed in foster care and reunification is not a viable permanency option, LTFC is ordered without a rigorous examination of more preferable permanency options.
- Statutory guidance and policies exist to support timely permanency for children; however, some courts do not consistently follow this guidance.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 19 (48 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 8	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	4	7	4	15	79
Area Needing Improvement	1	2	1	4	21
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	9	5	19	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	11	5	21	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item did not vary across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of the Carlton County and Washington County cases, compared with 78 percent of the applicable Hennepin County cases.

Minnesota's performance in the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2006, on the national indicators for timeliness of reunification measures included in Data Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification were as follows:

- 88.8 percent of the reunifications occurred in less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percentage is better than the median of 69.9 percent for the dataset used to establish the national standards.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 3.4 months. This length of stay is less than the national median of 6.5 months and the 25th percentile (5.4 months) for the dataset used to establish the national standards for composite 1. (Note that lower number of months means higher performance.)
- 61.4 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months were discharged from foster care to reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage exceeds the 75th percentile (48.4 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 15 cases when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner.

Item 8 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Reviewers noted that services necessary to support the goal of reunification were not provided (one case).

- Children had a goal of Permanent Placement with Relative and there was a court delay in responding to a petition to transfer permanent legal custody to the relative (one case) and a delay in placing the child with the relative, including issues related to Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) (one case).
- Reviewers noted that there were court and agency delays in holding timely dispositional hearings, establishing the permanency goal of reunification with parents, and providing services to assist the youth and parents of the youth's behavioral issues (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of an ANI. Case reviewers found that in 79 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSSR, there was no comparable item. At that time, item 8 pertained to IL services. The change for item 8 from an assessment of IL services to an assessment of timeliness of achieving goals of reunification, guardianship, and permanent placement of relatives was not made until FY 2001.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders identified several issues related to attaining reunification. Stakeholders from Hennepin and Washington County indicated that children are returned home too soon, and necessary services are not in place to support reunification. Also, funding issues due to budget cuts have impacted services. In addition, they reported that Hennepin County caseloads continue to be high, which affects staff capacity to provide necessary services to support reunification. Some Hennepin County stakeholders indicated concern with the reunification of children in out-of-home care for delinquency reasons. It was reported that services are often not provided to the children's parents because the agency does not have jurisdiction over them in these cases, or there is resistance to doing so because the parents might not want the child back in their care if they are required to participate in services. As a result, these children sometimes move from delinquency centers to group homes because they are "not ready" for home, and consequently spend a longer time in out-of-home care.

Stakeholders in Washington County reported that most children are reunified or attained TPR and adoption goals within 24 months of entry. However, they also stated that barriers to reunification included inadequate community resources, noting that there is only one child psychologist in the area available to provide services.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers and families develop out-of-home placement plans that identify services designed to address safety concerns and promote reunification. Concurrent permanency planning is provided in cases where children under 8 years of age are placed in foster care. Caseworkers maintain frequent contact with families, service providers, foster parents, and others to review progress toward meeting reunification goals. Judges review progress at regular intervals and reunite children with parents when safety concerns are adequately addressed. When the court determines that reunification is not possible and an able and

willing relative is available to provide care, transfer of permanent legal and physical custody (TPLPC) to a relative may be ordered. The caseworker’s primary focus shifts to supporting relative custodians in caring for children permanently. Caseworkers and families prepare RCA agreements arranging financial assistance and health insurance for children.

Challenges with achieving the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner outlined in the Statewide Assessment include the following:

- Delays in achieving permanency may occur when comprehensive and timely relative searches are not conducted and/or specialized assessments or services are not available or accessible in the early stages of a case. This includes failure to access psychiatric and parental capacity evaluations, and/or alcohol and other drug treatment resources.
- When children are placed in foster care, parents may lose their public assistance, including subsidized housing. These losses, along with a lack of available transportation and inadequate insurance coverage, create serious barriers to timely reunification.
- It is difficult to schedule timely permanency hearings because court continuances are sometimes granted when parents have severe chemical and mental health needs, noncustodial parents are not being identified in a timely manner, and there is a shortage of judges and/or public defenders.
- Noncustodial parents have “participant” status in juvenile court proceedings and are not assigned public defenders. Only when permanency trials occur are noncustodial parents provided public defenders. In these cases, continuances may be granted to allow public defenders time to prepare for permanency trials.

Item 9: Adoption

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 14 (35 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been made or were being made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below.

Item 9	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	0	4	2	6	43
Area Needing Improvement	3	5	0	8	57
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	9	2	14	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	11	8	25	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the Washington County, compared with 44 percent of the Hennepin County cases and 0 percent of the applicable Carlton County cases.

The following information describes Minnesota's performance on the individual measures included in the CFSR Data Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions:

- 48.8 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percentage is greater than the national median of 26.8 percent for the dataset used to establish the national standards for the composite.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 24.3 months. This median length of stay is less than the national median of 32.4 months for the dataset used to establish the national standard for the composite. (Note that for this measure, the lower the number of months, the higher the performance.)
- 17.1 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the year. This percentage is below the national median of 20.2 percent for the dataset used to establish the national standard for this measure.
- 2.5 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percentage is below the national median (8.8 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standard for this measure.
- 47.0 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage exceeds the national median (45.8 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standard for this composite.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an ANI in eight cases when reviewers determined that the State had not made diligent efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner.

Adoptions were not completed in a timely manner as indicated by the following:

- Delays due to agency not filing TPR in a timely manner (three cases)
- Lack of concerted effort on the part of the agency to seek an adoptive family for a child (three cases)
- Agency failed to determine the child's Tribal membership, which caused delays in TPR (one case)
- Court administrative delays (one case)

Case review findings pertaining to the goal of adoption were as follows:

- There were 14 cases with a goal of adoption.
- Adoption was finalized in 5 of the 14 cases, with 2 of these 5 finalized within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care.
- Of the remaining 10 children whose adoptions were not finalized, only 1 was placed in a pre-adoptive home.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of ANI, and the State did not meet the national standard for Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions. Case reviewers determined that diligent efforts were made to achieve adoptions in a timely manner in 43 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was also rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that, although there have been efforts to improve outcomes for children with a permanency goal of adoption, those efforts have generally not been effective in achieving adoptions in a timely manner. Some of the concerns identified by stakeholders included the following:

- Adoption subsidies are less than the foster care rate, creating a disincentive for families to adopt.
- Services to adoptive families are not as comprehensive as services to foster families.
- There is a perception that ICPC requires that a child be placed in foster care for 6 months before the department can consider adoption.
- Adam Walsh background checks have slowed down the adoption process.
- The public defender's office appeals most involuntary TPRs, which can stop the adoption process for 12 months or more.
- There is sometimes conflict when TPR is recommended, and the Tribe would prefer to seek reunification.
- The courts are extending the timeframes for parents when they start to comply with case plan requirements, despite the child being in foster care for a long period of time.

Despite these concerns, stakeholders also identified the following factors as promoting timely adoptions.

- DHS has developed an adoption checklist as part of an initiative to track the adoption process and make changes accordingly.
- There have been positive legislative changes to the adoption process.
- There is now an option for open adoptions.
- Stakeholders in Washington County describe concurrent and transitional planning to adoption as seamless, and there are no barriers to timely home studies or meeting other relevant requirements.

Additional information on stakeholder perceptions of the adoption process is provided under items 27 and 28 in the Systemic Factors section of the report.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when the primary or concurrent permanency goal for children is adoption, caseworkers initially try to recruit family members able and willing to adopt. If relatives are not available, recruitment efforts are expanded and include contact with private adoption agencies. Agencies file TPR petitions consistent with the timelines and exceptions required in

ASFA. When court-ordered TPR has occurred and adoption is the permanency goal, court hearings are held every 90 days to review progress toward identifying an adoptive resource and completing the steps necessary to legally finalize the adoption.

Challenges with achieving adoptions in a timely manner outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Some counties lack specialized social workers familiar with adoption best practices, have needed clinical skills, and are expert in completing required paperwork.
- Contested adoption cases may extend the time to finalize an adoption by 1 year or more, which significantly increases the State average time for completing adoptions.
- There is sometimes difficulty locating adoptive resources for older children, especially if they have emotional and/or behavioral problems. Some counties believe that older children are not adoptable and consequently do not actively pursue resources to locate adoptive homes for these children.
- Specialized training for social workers and guardians *ad litem* is needed to improve their knowledge of the adoption process and their abilities to skillfully discuss adoption as a permanency option with children.
- Incomplete and/or untimely initiation of relative searches, including efforts to contact noncustodial fathers, can result in delaying adoptions.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to achieve adoptions in a timely manner:

- The Public Private Adoption Initiative (PPAI) allows the department to contract with nine private adoption agencies to provide a continuum of adoption services.
- The Homecoming Project is a 5-year Federal Adoption Opportunities Activities Grant demonstration initiative that provides child-specific recruitment efforts for adolescents to increase the rate and frequency of adoption for waiting children ages 13 to 17.
- Counties use the Adoption Process Checklist for Children Under State Guardianship tool, developed by the department, in completing the steps required to legally finalize adoptions.
- The department implemented policies and hired additional staff to review and process county requests to complete ICPC forms and adoption assistance paperwork.
- In Tribal court, suspension of parental rights and customary adoptions are used to establish permanency for American Indian children, consistent with traditional Tribal values.

Item 10: Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 10 (25 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to OPPLA. The results are presented in the table below.

Item 10	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	4	3	9	90
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	10
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	5	3	10	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	8	15	7	30	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was receiving the necessary services and support to promote a successful transition from foster care to IL once the child reaches the age of emancipation (six cases).
- The child had long-term special needs that were being adequately addressed in a specialized setting, and the agency was planning to transition the child to a supervised living arrangement at the age of majority (one case).
- The child was in group home placement and successfully transitioned to IL (two cases).

Item 10 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The child is not in a long-term placement and the current placement is unstable (one case).

Case review findings pertaining to the age of children with the goal of OPPLA at the beginning of the period under review were as follows:

- Five of the 10 cases assessed for this item involved children who were 16 or older.
- Four of the 10 cases assessed for this item involved children who were at least age 13 but younger than age 16.
- One of the 10 cases assessed for this item involved a child who was younger than age 13.

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 90 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage meets the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, this item was rated an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported mixed opinions regarding the State's IL program. Some reported IL services are increasing across the State to include a conference for youth in transition and an IL website where youth can find valuable resources. They describe utilizing the Ansel-Casey Independent Living assessment to determine the needs of youth and report that funds are available to pay for items such as graduation gowns and health insurance. Stakeholders in Carlton County noted that youth are encouraged to attend a 12-week life skills training. They also describe educational vouchers, funds for rent, and support with getting a drivers license. For American Indian youth, IL programs are provided on the reservation.

Stakeholders in Hennepin County report that while they are attempting to provide transitioning conferences for youth aging out of care and planning discussions regarding college, housing, and employment starting at age 14, many programs have waiting lists. Others report that youth must be self-motivated to get into the programs and that it is especially difficult for youth with developmental disabilities or mental health issues to access these services. Stakeholders describe that youth who are not assigned to the LTFC unit can fall through the cracks and describe this as a "gray area" in terms of who is responsible for getting life skills training for these individuals. Another barrier noted is that youth must have an assigned caseworker to access the Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) program. If they are no longer in care but want to access the ETV program, the youth must find away to get their case reopened.

Stakeholders in Washington County identified the following factors as promoting IL services for youth:

- Countywide task force that meets monthly and looks specifically at the needs of youth and services in the county
- Use of the Ansel-Casey assessment tool with youth
- Use of a "Healthy Transitions" grant to provide funding that supports milestone achievement including housing and employment
- Excellent communication with the schools, helping to secure free participation in school activities and good transition plans that identify educational and employment options
- A committee working specifically to develop an Independent Assessment Plan and IL services for youth with disabilities

Some of the concerns identified by Washington County stakeholders included the following:

- There is a lack of services available to meet the needs of youth due to lack of funding.
- Changes in funding have limited the population eligible for IL programs and services.
- Affordable housing, transportation, and obtaining a driver's license were cited as particular challenges.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, an IL plan must be developed for all foster care youth 16 years old or older. The plan must address the individual needs of youth, including but not limited to housing, employment, education, health, social and recreational issues, and connection with family and community. Foster youth described their Support for Emancipation and Living Functionally (SELF) group experiences as helpful in providing them with IL skills and encouragement in setting and reaching personal goals.

Challenges with assisting children in attaining their goals related to OPPLA outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- IL skills programs are not readily available in all parts of the State. Courts do not always request or consistently receive detailed information pertaining to adolescents’ IL skills and which services are in place to address those needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to achieve OPPLA in a timely manner:

- Chafee funds are made available to all Minnesota counties and Tribes to support programs that teach life skills to youth. The department contracts with 25 nonprofit agencies to provide intensive transition services to youth in foster care and to assist youth who have aged out of care from experiencing homelessness
- Adolescent services staff have collaborated with the Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (MCWTS) to establish two curriculums that promote successful transitions for youth in foster care.
- Several Minnesota counties use FGDM conferences for youth aging out of care.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	7	13	9	29	72.5
Partially Achieved	3	7	1	11	27.5
Not Achieved	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 72.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of the Hennepin County, 90 percent of Washington County cases, and 70 percent of the Carlton County cases.

2001 CFSR Findings

The State did not achieve substantial conformity on Permanency Outcome 2 in the 2001 CFSR. Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR were the following:

- The agency was not consistent in placing siblings together (item 12).
- The agency was not consistent in supporting visitation between children and their parents, particularly children and their fathers (item 13).

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Family and Children’s Services staff issued policy guidance for placement of siblings, contact among siblings, and best practices in visitation between parents and their children in foster care. Consideration was to be given to modifications of the host county contract format so that residential care providers do not use denial of family contact as punishment.
- Issues involving sibling placement as well as contact and visitation of parents with their children were emphasized as part of supervisors’ best practices and considered as part of the QA reviews of the counties.
- For improved case planning and case plan documentation; practices involving sibling and visitation were improved through the use of the revised out-of-home placement plan.

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

The agency was consistent in placing children in foster care in close proximity to their communities and families (item 11). The agency was consistent in ensuring that children’s connections with extended family, community, culture, faith, and friends were preserved (item 14). The agency was consistent with regard to efforts to search for and evaluate relatives as potential placement options, particularly paternal relatives (item 15). The agency was consistently effective in promoting the bond between children and their mothers and fathers (item 16).

2007 CFSR Findings

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, item 11 (Proximity of foster care placement) was rated as a Strength in the 2007 CFSR, while item 14 (Preserving connections) was rated as an ANI. Item 12 (Placing siblings together), item 15 (Relative placement), and item 16 (Relationship of child in care with parents) were all rated Strengths in the 2001 CFSR; they are rated as ANIs in the 2007 CFSR. However, it should be noted that although they were not rated as Strengths, the State was rated very high in sibling placement (88 percent) and preserving connections (87 percent). Additional findings were as follows:

- In the cases reviewed, the most consistent pattern of visitation frequency for mothers was weekly visits, the most consistent pattern of visitation frequency for siblings was less than once a month, and the most consistent pattern of visitation frequency for fathers was no visits during the period under review (item 13).
- In some instances, the agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to extended family members and siblings who are not in foster care (item 14).
- There were inconsistent efforts made to search for maternal and paternal relatives as placement resources for children (item 15).
- The support of the parent’s relationship with their children while the children were in foster care was generally inconsistent; however, less attention was given to promoting children’s bonds with fathers than mothers (item 16).

Despite these concerns, the case reviews also found the following:

- Children were routinely and consistently placed in proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers (item 11).

Stakeholders expressed the following opinions relevant to this outcome:

- They noted the primary challenge in placing siblings together is the shortage of foster homes willing to accept sibling groups.
- The agency does not always have the resources to facilitate visitation.
- Children are placed in a foster care homes prior to completing a relative search.

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

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 33 (83 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which a TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, contact with parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interest, and/or parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child’s most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 11	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	15	9	32	97
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	3
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	16	9	33	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	4	1	7	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child was placed in the same community or county as parents or relatives (17 cases).
- The child’s placement was not in the same community or county as parents or relatives, but the placement was necessary to meet the child’s needs (seven cases).

- The child's placement was not in the same community or county as parents or relatives, but was in close proximity to them (11 cases).

Item 11 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The distance between the child's family and the foster care placement was a barrier to reunification efforts and was not necessary to meet the child's needs (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 97 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that concerted efforts were made to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to the homes of parents or relatives or that were necessary to meet special needs. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item also was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in Carlton County commented that the out-of-county placements occurred in instances in which the child's service needs warranted such placement. Additionally, when children were placed out of the community, the county used volunteer drivers to keep the child and parent connected.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers, often in conjunction with foster care licensors, make diligent efforts to locate foster homes that are best suited to meet the needs of the child requiring foster care. The Statewide Assessment also reports that some counties regularly use temporary shelter care as the first placement setting until a more thorough assessment of the child's needs and complete search of available and appropriate placement resources is conducted. Relatives, foster, or treatment homes in close proximity to the residence of the child's parent or guardian are initially considered.

Challenges with placing children close to their families outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Over 70 self-assessments completed as part of the State's QA process (MnCFSTRs, which are completed by counties), indicate that, in most counties, there is a need for more foster homes for adolescents and sibling groups. In rural counties, it is difficult to recruit and retain foster families in every school district.
- Children with specialized treatment needs may be placed away from their home counties to access appropriate services.
- Caseworkers may have conflicting priorities when making child placement decisions. Placement with relatives or placing children in culturally appropriate homes may require moving children from their home community.
- Some specialized treatment facilities, located across State lines but in close proximity to the child's home community, are underutilized because they are not eligible for State medical assistance (MA) reimbursement.
- Some children are placed out of State in non-MA reimbursable facilities because the facilities are less costly.

Item 12: Placement with siblings

_____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 17 (43 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not have a sibling in foster care at any time during the period under review. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the service or safety needs of one or more of the children. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 12	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	7	2	15	88
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	0	2	12
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	9	2	17	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	11	8	13	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Item 12 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was in a placement with all siblings (11 cases).
- The child was in a placement with some siblings and the separation from other siblings was determined to be in the best interests of one of the siblings (one case).
- The child was not placed with any siblings, but the siblings were separated due to the special needs of one or more of the siblings (one case).
- The child was not placed with any siblings due to the special needs of the child (two cases).

Item 12 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- Children were not placed with siblings, and the separation was not deemed to be in the best interests of the siblings (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 88 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever possible and appropriate. This percentage does not meet the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders across the sites agreed that the agency makes every effort to place siblings together and that is it a high priority for the State and the courts. DHS has developed a team for children under State guardianship that looks at requests to separate siblings and requires documentation showing why separation would be in the child’s best interest. They noted the primary challenge in placing siblings together is the shortage of foster homes that will accept sibling groups.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that when sibling groups require out-of-home placement, caseworkers make concerted efforts to locate foster homes able and willing to care for all the siblings. In the following situations siblings are placed apart: sexual perpetration among siblings; significant physical aggression among siblings; a sibling has special needs necessitating therapeutic services available only in a separate setting; a noncustodial parent to one or more siblings, but not all, is willing to provide substitute care; or existing foster care resources are not licensed to care for a large sibling group. As part of out-of-home placement plans, caseworkers, parents, children, and other key persons involved in the case develop visitation plans to ensure that siblings placed in separate foster homes have regular contact, including face-to-face visits, when appropriate.

Challenges with placing siblings together outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Siblings involved in multiple service areas, such as child protection, juvenile justice, children’s mental health, chemical health, and developmental disabilities do not share the same program caseworkers, which may result in infrequent sibling contact and/or siblings remaining separated longer than necessary.
- Locating foster homes able and willing to care for large sibling groups, especially when children have significant emotional, behavioral, and/or developmental issues, is often challenging.
- When initial decisions to place siblings separately are not comprehensively reviewed by the agency and the court, siblings may remain separated longer than necessary.
- Once sibling separation is approved by the Commissioner, adoptive parents may commit to ensuring sibling contact; however, there is no further monitoring once the adoption is finalized.

Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 13 was applicable for 33 (83 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item if the child had no siblings in foster care and if one of the following conditions was met with regard to the parents: TPR was established prior to the period under review, and parents were no longer involved in the child’s life (or parents were deceased), or visitation with a parent was not considered in the best interest of the child. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had

made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care, and whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 13	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	4	9	9	22	67
Area Needing Improvement	3	7	1	11	33
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	16	10	33	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	4	0	7	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item was varied somewhat across sites. Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of the Washington County cases, compared with 57 percent of the Carlton County cases and 56 percent of the Hennepin County cases.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children. Item 13 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with mothers, fathers and/or siblings.

The frequency of visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings during the period under review is presented in the table below. For cases in which visitation was applicable, the most consistent pattern of visitation during the period under review for mothers was weekly, for siblings it was at least once a month, and for fathers it was no visits. The table below provides further information on visitation.

Parent and Sibling Visitation Frequency			
Visitation Frequency (During the period under review)	Mother (Number of Cases)	Father (Number of cases)	Siblings in Foster Care (Number of cases)
Visits occurred more than once a week	5 (19%)	2 (10%)	1 (8.3%)
Visits occurred once a week	9 (33%)	5 (25%)	1 (8.3%)
Visits occurred less than once a week, but at least twice a month	7 (26%)	4 (20%)	1 (8.3%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	5 (19%)	0	6 (50.0%)
Visits occurred less than once a month	1 (3%)	1 (5%)	2 (16.7%)
There were no visits during the period under review	0	8 (40%)	1 (8.3%)
Total cases for which item 13 was applicable	27	20	12*

* Percentages add up to 99.9.

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 67 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders from the State indicated that agencies do not always have the resources to facilitate visitation, and in some cases judges restrict visits based because a parent's urinalysis was not being clean. They also indicated that the frequency of visits is not always based on the child's needs.

Statewide Assessment Information

Upon a child's entry into foster care, the caseworker and parents jointly develop visitation plans. Careful consideration of the level of supervision and the overall quality of visits is made. The planned frequency of visits between parents and siblings separated in foster care is consistent with the children's age and development, and supportive of each child's permanency goal. On an ongoing basis, caseworkers assess the needs of children, parents, and foster providers and make adjustments to visitation plans to promote achievement of case plan goals.

Challenges with visiting with parents and sibling in foster care outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- In some counties, there is a lack of resources to facilitate visits, such as supervised visitation centers, visitation exchange programs, and available transportation.

- Courts may order supervised visitation more frequently than necessary, placing undue restrictions on parents and resulting in less frequent child/parent contact.
- Despite State licensing regulations to the contrary, on occasion a few placement facilities deny child/parent visits as a consequence for children’s behavior.
- Arranging visits between children in care and their siblings placed separately and visits between children and noncustodial parents often requires additional coordination and resources.
- Visitation protocols are not consistent across child placing programs, such as chemical health, children’s mental health, developmental disabilities, and child protection.
- In cases where siblings have caseworkers from multiple programs, such as child protection, probation, and mental health, clear identification of roles and responsibilities is needed or the frequency and quality of visits may be compromised.
- Caseload size and lack of transportation resources and/or family-friendly visitation centers are obstacles to appropriate visitation.
- At times, conflict between custodial and noncustodial parents creates additional barriers to consistent visitation.

The agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to support visitation between children in foster care with their parents and siblings:

- Multi-disciplinary placement screening and county child protection teams are utilized by county caseworkers to discuss child placement considerations, including parent/child visitation needs.
- Guardians *ad litem*, assigned to represent the “best interest of children” in child welfare cases, meet with caseworkers, children, parents, and foster parents and discuss related issues, including the frequency and quality of visits.

Item 14: Preserving connections

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for 39 (98 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. One case was not applicable for assessment under this item as the child was only in foster care for 4 days. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child’s connections to neighborhood, community, cultural heritage, extended family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. This item is not rated on the basis of visits or contacts with parents or siblings in foster care. The results of the assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 14	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	10	15	9	34	87
Area Needing Improvement	0	5	0	5	13
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	9	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	1	1	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied across sites. This item was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of the Hennepin County cases, compared with 100 percent of the applicable cases in Washington and Carlton County.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members and siblings not in foster care through phone contact and visits (27 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the school, friends, and community (19 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the child’s religious or cultural heritage (17 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to ensure child’s connections to service providers (three cases).

Item 14 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined if the following:

- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to extended family members and siblings who were not in foster care (three cases).
- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to cultural and religious heritage (one case).
- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to a Tribal affiliation (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of an ANI. Reviewers determined that in 87 percent of the applicable cases, DHS made concerted efforts to ensure that children in foster care maintained their connections to extended family, communities, schools, and cultural heritage. This percentage does not meet the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

State-level stakeholders indicated that while the agency has worked with Tribes to keep children connected, there are still issues across the State that affect a child’s connection to their Tribe. Several stakeholders in all three counties noted that caseworkers routinely inquire about a child’s possible American Indian heritage and that Tribes are notified and ICWA guidelines observed if children are identified as American Indian. Stakeholders from Carlton County report that the county reviews intakes in a daily action call and, if an

American Indian family is identified, a contact is made immediately with the Fond du Lac Tribe to jointly investigate, plan, and provide services. However, a few stakeholders from Hennepin County reported that Tribes are not consistently notified of placement changes and 72 hour holds. Stakeholders also reported that Tribes are not receiving notice and do not, therefore, have the opportunity to be heard in court. Stakeholders from Hennepin County also suggested that foster parents need additional training on the cultural needs of children.

Stakeholders commenting from Washington County indicated that the agency does a good job preserving connections with the child's family and community. They also noted that staff is using the Internet to locate family members, and overall caseworkers have become increasingly diligent about locating paternal relatives. Keeping a child in his or her same school is perceived as a challenge. Stakeholders in Carlton County related that the agency does make concerted efforts to maintain the child's placement in the same school.

Statewide Assessment Information

When a decision is made to place any child in out-of-home care, preserving family, cultural, educational, social, and other community connections, as well as the child's treatment needs, are considered by caseworkers when determining the most appropriate placement setting. If the child is American Indian, the agency notifies the appropriate Tribe and requests the involvement of either the Tribe or their designated Tribal representative as early as possible in the life of the case. If a placement is made, the agency maintains ongoing communication with the Tribe or Tribal representatives, and all provisions of ICWA, MIFPA, and the Tribal/State Agreement are observed.

Challenges with preserving connections outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Children with significant mental, behavioral, development, and chemical health needs may need specialized treatment requiring placement outside of their community and away from family and friends.
- County agencies are challenged to understand the many diverse cultural needs of the children and families they serve. Access to culturally appropriate resources, including foster homes, is a struggle for most counties, especially those located outside urban areas.
- Counties that have less Tribal populations are challenged to develop or maintain an expertise regarding implementation of ICWA requirements.
- There are fundamental differences and expectations regarding communication between county and Tribal social workers.

The agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to preserve children's connections:

- A meeting between Minnesota's 11 Tribes and the department occurs annually to examine child welfare issues affecting American Indian children, including potential legislation to address systemic barriers and issues affecting compliance with ICWA.
- The Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council, comprised of Tribal and urban representatives, advises the DHS Commissioner on child welfare matters affecting American Indian children.

- An Indian Child Welfare Compliance Review Process, as amended in the Tribal/State Agreement, provides a mechanism for receipt and resolution of reports alleging noncompliance with ICWA.
- The Minnesota Office of Ombudspersons for Families, representing communities of color, advocates in support of placement with relatives to preserve significant family relationships.
- The MCWTS has developed and provided cross-cultural competency curricula, as recommended by the Culture and Diversity Subcommittee.
- ICWA service units, established in a few counties, allow caseworkers the opportunity to develop expertise and cooperative relationships with their Tribal counterparts and American Indian service providers.

Item 15: Relative placement

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 22 (55 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if relative placement was not an option during the period under review because the child was in an adoptive placement at the start of the time period, or the child entered foster care and required specialized services that could not be provided in a relative placement. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess both maternal and paternal relatives as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 15	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	10	2	15	68
Area Needing Improvement	1	6	0	7	32
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	16	2	22	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	6	4	8	18	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied across the three sites. Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the Washington County cases, 63 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 75 percent of the Carlton County cases.

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

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

- Despite diligent efforts made by the agency, the children were not placed with relatives for reasons including the relative's inability or unwillingness to care for the children (two cases).

Item 15 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (four cases).
- The agency did make efforts to search for maternal relatives but did not make efforts to search for paternal relatives (one case).
- The agency had made efforts to search for paternal relatives, but not maternal relatives (one case).
- The agency located relatives, but did not make efforts to place with them (three cases).

Rating Determination

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 68 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item expressed that relatives are sought as a placement option when children must be removed from their homes; however, foster care placement occurs prior to completion of a relative search. Stakeholders expressed concern that this practice causes damage to the child and the family. Some stakeholders in Hennepin County indicated the agency does not search far beyond the county for relatives and that paternal relatives are not consistently considered as a placement option. Stakeholders in Washington County reported that creative work has been done with the agency's police department to support the pursuit of relative placements as emergency options and for long term placements. In Carlton County, stakeholders identified that the agency searches for both maternal and paternal relatives as placement resources, and they reported the county does a good job in identifying relatives and getting them licensed.

Statewide Assessment Information

As soon as possible after determining the need for placing a child in foster care, the caseworker and/or law enforcement engage parents to identify relatives and determine if they are willing and able to provide a safe home for the child. The relative search must be comprehensive and include both maternal and paternal relatives of the child, if paternity is adjudicated. Relatives are considered as a placement resource each time a child enters foster care and each time the child is moved to a different placement location.

Challenges with efforts to locate and assess relatives include the following:

- Social worker attitudes toward relative placement may influence the depth of the search and recruitment and retention of relative foster parents.
- Parents at times are unwilling to identify relatives.

- Suitable relatives are sometimes ruled out due to licensing requirements. Background studies may reveal past concerns that have little relevance to the current capacity of a relative to provide a safe and stable home.
- Adjudicated and non-adjudicated fathers and paternal relatives are less likely to be identified than mothers and maternal family members during the relative search process.
- It is challenging for counties to conduct thorough relative search when children in care have relatives living outside of the country.

The agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to locate and assess relatives:

- DHS foster care and adoption staff developed a curriculum on policy, research, best practice, and procedures regarding relative/kinship searches and placement.
- The Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association offers regional support groups and information for relative caregivers.
- The Minnesota Office of Ombudspersons for Families, representing communities of color, advocates in support of placement with relatives to preserve important family relationships.
- FGDM conferences conducted in the early stages of a case have been effective in identifying relatives able and willing to care for children.
- Larger counties have designated staff or a contract with private agencies to initiate and complete relative searches, which supports more timely and comprehensive relative searches.

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 30 (75 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, or a relationship with the parents was considered not to be in the child’s best interest throughout the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 16	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	9	7	19	63
Area Needing Improvement	4	6	1	11	37
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	15	8	30	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	5	2	10	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied across the three sites. Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of the Washington County cases, compared with 60 percent of the Hennepin County cases and 43 percent of the Carlton County cases.

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children. Examples of efforts to promote bonding between the child and parents included the following:

- The agency provided opportunities for therapeutic situations to help the parent and child strengthen their relationship.
- The agency encouraged the parent’s participation in school activities and extra curricular activities.
- The agency provided or arranged for transportation so the parent could attend the child’s medical appointments.
- The agency facilitated contact with incarcerated parents.
- The agency encouraged foster parents to provide mentoring to parents.

Item 16 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support positive relationships with the mother and father (three cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child’s father (six cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child’s mother (two cases).

Efforts to Enhance Relationship of Child in Care with Parents			
Concerted Efforts Made	With Mother (Number of cases)	With Father (Number of cases)	Total (Number of cases)
Encourage the parent's participation in school activities and case conferences, attendance at doctors' appointments with the child, or engagement in the child's after school or sports activities	13	10	23
Provide or arrange for transportation or provide funds for transportation so that the parent could attend the child's special activities and doctors' appointments	4	4	8
Provide opportunities for therapeutic situations to help the parent and child strengthen their relationship	17	9	26
Encourage the foster parents to provide mentoring or serve as role models to the parent to assist her/him in appropriate parenting	3	1	4
Encourage and facilitate contact with incarcerated parents (where appropriate) or with parents not living in close proximity to the child	4	1	5

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 63 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in Hennepin County were concerned about the lack of continued services to noncustodial parents, particularly fathers, who have been actively involved in the case planning process, once legal custody is transferred to the other parent.

Statewide Assessment Information

Upon placement, and throughout children's time in foster care, caseworkers conduct formal and informal assessments to better understand the dynamics of child/parent relationships. Caseworkers meet with parents, foster parents, and other service providers to determine the best methods and means for maintaining and/or promoting meaningful child/parent relationships. This may include parental attendance at children's medical appointments, school meetings, and other community activities. Telephone calls, letters, and email messaging between parents and children also are encouraged when appropriate.

Challenges with efforts to support a positive relationship with the father and mother outlined in the Statewide Assessment include the following:

- When children or sibling groups are placed in foster care, caseworkers are confronted with the challenge of assessing and promoting the quality of relationships between children and, at times, several parents.
- Some parents may live in different States and/or had little past contact with their children.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well-Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	7	14	9	30	46.9
Partially Achieved:	5	13	5	23	35.9
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	5	3	11	17.2
Total Applicable Cases	15	32	17	64	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 46.9 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was consistent across the sites, and there was little variation in the ratings based on whether the case was a foster care or an in-home case. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 47 percent of Carlton County cases, 44 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 53 percent of Washington County cases.

2001 CFSR Findings

The State did not achieve substantial conformity for Well-Being Outcome 1 in the 2001 CFSR. Key concerns were predominantly related to needs assessment, service provision, and family involvement in case planning as follows:

- Cases with unmet needs were almost always the result of a lack of proper assessment when the case was opened and there were major needs for treatment that affected safety and permanency that were unmet by the agency (item 17).

- Even though parents signed the case plans, there were many instances in which the parents were not involved in their development (item 18).
- There were no guidelines on the frequency of county worker visits for youth served by the juvenile justice system, and there were not clear guidelines as to who was responsible for which activity when multiple staff were involved in the case (item 19).

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Policy guidance was issued by Family and Children’s Services, which emphasizes the importance of in-person contact with the children in out of home placement.
- SDM includes processes that supported increased family involvement in case planning and a more thorough assessment of family strengths and needs.
- Quality practice efforts were designed to support supervisors in their role as consultants in case practice and provide workers, supervisors, and managers with the data and specific feedback they require to improve practice.
- Concerted efforts were directed to improve case planning and documentation process.

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

2007 CFSR Findings

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the needs and services of children, parents, and foster parents (item 17) and family involvement in case planning (item 18) remain as ANIs in the 2007 CFSR. However, concerns were identified with regard to caseworker visits with children (item 19) and caseworker visits with parents (item 20), both of which were ANIs in the 2001 CFSR.

The 2007 case review yielded the following concerns:

- There continues to be a lack of consistency in assessing and meeting the service needs of parents, particularly fathers. In the cases reviewed, the agency is more consistently assessing and addressing the needs of mothers and children than with fathers. Efforts to locate and/or engage fathers remain inconsistent (item 17).
- There also continue to be inconsistencies in adequately involving families, particularly fathers, in case planning (item 18).
- The frequency of caseworker visits is not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and the visits do not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (item 19).
- In general, there are insufficient caseworker visits and challenges associated with the frequency and quality of visits with both parents. However, these findings were more pronounced for fathers, as evidenced by inconsistent efforts to visit. While mothers and fathers were not separately addressed in Minnesota’s 2001 CFSR, the 2007 CFSR specifically differentiates between mothers and fathers in evaluating the frequency and quality of caseworker visits (item 20).

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 17 was applicable for all 64 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents and provided the services necessary to meet those needs. This item excludes the assessment of children’s (but not parental) needs pertaining to educational, physical health, and mental health. These are addressed in later items. The case review results are presented in the table below.

Item 17	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	14	9	31	48
Area Needing Improvement	7	18	8	33	52
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Performance on this item indicates challenges across all three sites, but particularly so in Hennepin County. This item was rated as a Strength in 53 percent of the Carlton County cases, 53 percent of the Washington County cases, and 44 percent of the Hennepin County cases. Performance on the item did not vary based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 50 percent (20 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 46 percent (11 cases) of the 24 in-home services cases.

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

Specific case review findings for item 17 are shown in the table below. These data suggest that the agency is more consistently assessing and addressing the needs of mothers and children in the in-home cases and children and foster parents in foster care cases and less effectively assessing and meeting the service needs of fathers in both in-home and foster care cases (43 percent Strength in the in-home cases and 38 percent Strength in the foster care cases).

Item 17: Needs Assessment and Service Provision			
In-Home Cases			
Assessment and Services	Number of Cases		
	Strength	ANI	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	16 (67%)	8 (33%)	24
Father's needs assessed and met	9 (43%)	12 (57%)	21
Child's needs assessed and met	16 (67%)	8 (33%)	24
Foster Care Cases			
Assessment and Services	Number of Cases		
	Strength	ANI	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	15 (58%)	11 (42%)	26
Father's needs assessed and met	8 (38%)	13 (62%)	21
Child's needs assessed and met	33 (83%)	7 (17%)	40
Foster parents' needs assessed and met	22 (81%)	5 (19%)	27

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 48 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children and parents. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2001 CFSR. In instances where the case focus centered on the child's mental health, behavioral, or developmental disability concerns, parental needs relative to parenting these children were inconsistently assessed and addressed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders from Carlton County reported that caseworkers and team leaders identify what services are needed when they staff a case. Stakeholders also noted that not all staff consistently inform foster parents of children's needs and that the county is unable to respond to all of the family's identified needs. Others noted, however, that needs not identified previously are now being identified and addressed due to the Parallel Protection Process (PPP), which provides an in-depth assessment of family needs. Stakeholders also report that, for cases involving Tribes, case plans can be individualized to meet the needs of the family and assessments are completed jointly between the Tribe and the county.

Stakeholders from Hennepin County describe the use of the Child Well-Being Tool to assess education, health, and other needs with families. Stakeholders also described the spectrum of IL services offered to include the Youth in Transition Conference, job skills training, employment services, housing services, and life skills training. However, some stakeholders indicate that the agency is not meeting the needs of American Indian families and foster families.

Statewide Assessment Information

When cases are opened for in-home services, child protection investigations or assessments determine a need for subsequent services. SDM safety and risk assessments are completed early and throughout the life of the case; and in FAR cases, family strengths and needs assessments are also completed. Caseworkers conduct informal needs assessments and when more formal assessments are indicated, referrals are made to appropriate community service providers.

Youth interviewed in focus groups indicated that services provided to their families were helpful, including anger management courses for their parents and family and individual counseling for family members. However, homeless youth reported difficulty in getting help to meet their basic needs, such as stable housing and employment. Once they were in a youth shelter program or subsidized housing, they felt supported and better prepared to address other personal, goals related to independence. Homeless youth also reported a lack of resources to support their efforts to live independently, specifically not enough youth shelter programs or transitional living facilities. There was consensus across youth focus groups that more support services to locate and maintain employment were needed.

Challenges with efforts to assess and provide services to parents and children outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Transportation to and from specialized service providers is a significant challenge in most counties.
- Problems in accessing parenting classes and psychiatric evaluations may be due in part to low MA reimbursement rates.
- A traditional case management model can involve many service providers, potentially placing stress on families because of frequent meetings and conflicting expectations from various service providers.
- There is a need for more consistent sharing of child protection safety and risk assessment information with community providers so they can deliver services that specifically address these critical needs.
- Cases involving methamphetamines and other addictive drugs are a significant stressor on community capacity to address the safety, permanency and well-being needs of children.
- Assessing the needs and providing services for American Indian children, parents, and foster parents is challenging due to a lack of culturally appropriate services.

Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 60 (94 percent) of the 64 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in case planning, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best

interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

Item 18	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	17	7	29	48
Area Needing Improvement	8	15	8	31	52
Total Applicable Cases	13	32	15	60	
Not Applicable Cases	12	0	2	4	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Performance on this item indicates challenges across all three sites, but particularly so in Carlton County. Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 53 percent of the Hennepin County cases, 47 percent of the Washington County cases, and 38 percent of the Carlton County cases. Performance on the item did not vary based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 50 percent (18 cases) of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 46 percent (11 cases) of the 24 in-home services cases.

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

Item 18 Summary: Families Involved in Case Planning			
Family Member	Number of cases Involved	Number of cases Not Involved	Total Applicable Cases
Mother	37 (74%)	13 (26%)	50
Father	19 (46%)	22 (54%)	41
Child	28 (68%)	13 (32%)	41

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 48 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was also rated as an ANI in Minnesota’s 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders from the State reported that policy requires that youth participate in the planning process and that staff complete a needs assessment and youth sign the plan. They also indicated that the Citizens Review Panel reviews youth participation in case planning as part of their QA efforts.

Stakeholders in Carlton County indicated that fathers and mothers are notified of the PPP, which is implemented prior to admit or deny court hearings in child protection cases, including emergency child placements. Key persons in the case are assembled to discuss the issues that precipitated court involvement. Other counties have adopted this model within the past few years. Arrangements are made for incarcerated parents to attend PPP meetings. They also report that both parents and relatives are involved when FGDM is used for reunification cases in Carlton County. Stakeholders also identified the use of homework sheets in FAR cases that identify specific tasks to be completed by families and workers between visits.

Stakeholders in Hennepin and Washington Counties had differing opinions as to whether or not youth are involved in case planning. Some indicated that the Youth in Transition conferencing encourages youth to have a say in their future and report it is working very well. However, other stakeholders indicated that youth do not have adequate input into their plans and could be involved at an earlier age. Stakeholders also had differing opinions about whether fathers are involved in case plans, with some reporting that the plan has nothing to do with fathers, while others report that fathers are invited to attend and that plans are not activated until they have met with parents.

The majority of stakeholders interviewed in the Washington County reported that children, youth, and parents are involved in case planning and that their voices are heard in the process. They also indicated that plans are tailored to meet the individual needs of the family and that staff works hard to communicate to the family all of their options.

Statewide Assessment Information

When cases are opened for in-home services, caseworkers are required to complete initial case plans within 30 days and update the plan quarterly. Caseworkers are expected to engage children, parents, and service providers in the case planning process. Case plans include an identification of the reasons the protective service plan was opened and a discussion of family strengths and needs. Specific safety, permanency and well-being case goals and plans to achieve them are established. When children are placed in foster care, caseworkers are required to complete initial case plans within 30 days of placement and update the plan semi-annually. Children, parents, and other persons involved in the case, including guardians *ad litem*, are expected to be engaged in the case planning process.

Challenges with involving children and parents in case planning outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- Scheduling case planning meetings to include custodial and noncustodial parents, service providers, Tribal representatives, and guardians *ad litem* is often challenging and sometimes a barrier to completing initial and ongoing case plans.
- Engaging noncustodial parents and children in case planning is a significant challenge when providing in-home services.

- Determining when and how best to engage non-English-speaking children and parents is a challenge. While the SSIS case plan format is available in several languages, it is not easily understood by all clients; the document is complicated, in part, because it is designed to meet specific Federal title IV-E and State requirements.
- High caseloads, data entry requirements, and frequent court review hearings require considerable caseworker time. Agencies report that there is not always adequate time to fully engage children and parents in case planning.
- Juvenile probation has historically focused on working with children, not parents; no clear legal authority exists for probation to require parents to participate or comply with case plans.
- The current FAR Service Plan format does not include or require a child’s signature to indicate involvement in case planning. This does not support best practices to involve/engage children, when appropriate, in case planning.

Item 19: Worker visits with child

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 19 was applicable for all 64 cases. In conducting the assessment of this item, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child’s safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 19	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	11	27	12	50	78
Area Needing Improvement	4	5	5	14	22
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

This item was rated as a Strength in 73 percent of the Carlton County, 84 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 71 percent of the Washington County cases. Performance on the item varied based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 85 percent (34 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 67 percent (16 cases) of the 24 in-home services cases.

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

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (one in-home case and five foster care cases).

- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits did occur, they were substantive (one foster care case).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (five in-home cases).
- There were long periods of time during the period under review in which the agency caseworker did not visit the child (one in-home case and one foster care case).

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

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Child	Foster Care Cases (Number and Percent)	In-Home Services Cases (Number and Percent)
Visits occurred more than once per week	2 (5%)	0
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	6 (15%)	8 (33%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	24 (60%)	10 (42%)
Visits occur less than once a month	5 (12.5%)	4 (17%)
Visits never occurred	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Total cases	40	24

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 78 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR this item was rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed differing opinions regarding the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children. Several Carlton County and Washington County stakeholders said that caseworkers were visiting children every 30 days and were consistently accessible as needed. However, stakeholders in Hennepin County reported that visitation varied by worker; some reported weekly and monthly visits, while others described last-minute visits that were not substantive.

Statewide Assessment Information

When children are placed in foster care, generally caseworkers visit with foster parents and the children in their care on a regular basis; however, it is not always clear that caseworkers meet with children privately to hear their viewpoint. When cases are open for in-home services, agencies often contract with family-based service staff to provide supportive family services. Workers meet with parents and children on a weekly basis and gradually, as the risk of harm lessens, the frequency is reduced.

Challenges with worker visits with the child outlined in the Statewide Assessment include the following:

- Minnesota does not have clear guidance in statute or rule pertaining to the frequency of caseworker contact with children.
- Caseworker turnover and reassignment within county agencies were identified in QA reviews as impediments to frequent, consistent, and high-quality caseworker contact with children.
- Infrequent caseworker contact with children may occur in cases involving both social services and juvenile justice caseworkers when a clear identification of roles and responsibilities is not made.
- Significant reductions in Federal and State funding to local agencies has resulted in counties reducing their workforce, making it more challenging to contact children frequently.
- In some in-home cases, improving specific parenting skills is the primary service focus.
- With regard to American Indian families, if cooperation with the Tribe is not present, children are not seen as often and the quality of contacts are not as closely related to meeting children’s safety, permanency, and well-being needs.

Item 20: Worker visits with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 55 (86 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. All cases that were not applicable were foster care cases. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children’s safety and well-being. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 20	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	4	13	8	25	45
Area Needing Improvement	8	14	8	30	55
Total Applicable Cases	12	27	16	55	
Not Applicable Cases	3	5	1	9	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Performance on this item indicates challenges across all three sites, but particularly so in Carlton County. Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 50 percent of the Washington County cases, 33 percent of the Carlton County cases, and 48

percent of the Hennepin County cases. There was little variation based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 45 percent (14 cases) of the 31 applicable foster care cases and 46 percent (11 cases) of the 24 in-home cases.

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

- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency or quality (14 cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency, although when they did occur they were of sufficient quality (three cases).
- Visits with the mother were of sufficient frequency, but not quality (three cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency or quality (five cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency, although when they did occur they were of sufficient quality (one case)
- Visits with the father were of sufficient frequency, but not quality (one case)
- There were no visits with father (14 cases).
- There were no visits with mother (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 45 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Hennepin County stakeholders reported that the expectation is that the parents have the responsibility to stay involved and make contact with the agency. They also noted that some staff do not work to engage families and that the variability in workers impacts this outcome.

Statewide Assessment Information

When cases are open for in-home services, agencies frequently contract with family-based service staff to provide services. When children are placed in foster care, caseworkers consult with mothers and fathers regarding the development of the case plan and ongoing decisions related to the child's health and education. In both in-home and placement cases, the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with mothers and fathers is to be based on providing appropriate support for parents relative to meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of their children.

Challenges with worker visits with parents outlined in the Statewide Assessment include:

- When cases are opened for in-home services, often the biological parents are living in separate homes, sometimes in different cities or States. Custodial parents may be averse to involving noncustodial parents in the case planning process.
- With in-home child protection services, it is a challenge to assess when it is reasonable and necessary to engage incarcerated, or otherwise absent, parents in the case planning process.
- Caseworker turnover and reassignment within county social service agencies was identified in QA reviews as an impediment to frequent and quality caseworker contact with parents.
- Roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined between agencies resulting in infrequent caseworker contact with parents.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	9	18	10	37	86.0
Partially Achieved:	0	2	1	3	7.0
Not Achieved:	2	0	1	3	7.0
Total Applicable Cases	11	20	12	43	
Not Applicable Cases	4	12	5	21	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 2

Minnesota is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. Reviewers determined that 86 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as substantially achieved for this outcome. This percentage does not meet the required 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was consistent across the sites, and there was little variation in the ratings based on whether the case was a foster care or an in-home case. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 82 percent of Carlton County cases, 90 percent of Hennepin County cases, and 83 percent of Washington County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85 percent (29) of the 34 applicable foster care cases and in 89 percent (eight cases) of the 9 applicable in-home cases.

Key Findings of the 2001 CFSR

The 2001 CFSR found that there was a reliance on foster parents to meet children’s educational needs; there were multiple school changes related to placement changes; children in in-home cases were not having their educational needs met; and there was a lack of educational documentation in the case records.

The following PIP strategies were employed by DHS to address this outcome:

- Quality practice efforts were designed to support supervisors in their role as consultants in case practice and provide workers, supervisors, and managers with the data and specific feedback they require to improve practice.
- Improving case planning and case plan documentation was designed to support improvements in documentation and in case planning practice critical to improvement of this outcome.

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

Key Findings in the 2007 CFSR

As with the 2001 CFSR, the State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2007 CFSR. In the cases reviewed, there was a lack of assessment of educational needs even when there was clear evidence that the child was experiencing school-related problems. Educational needs were identified and noted in the case record, but no services were provided to address those needs, and educational issues were not included in the case plan.

Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 43 (67 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if children were not of school age or children in in-home cases did not have service needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below.

Item 21	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	18	10	37	86
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	2	6	14
Total Applicable Cases	11	20	12	43	
Not applicable	4	12	5	21	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary. Examples of ways in which children’s educational needs were met include the following:

- The agency maintained consistent contact with the child’s school through phone calls and meetings in order to monitor the child’s school performance.
- Caseworkers regularly attended the child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings.
- Educational Surrogate Parents and guardian *ad litem* educational advocates consistently represented children’s educational needs.
- The agency ensured that the child was in the right educational setting to meet their needs.
- The agency promoted higher education opportunities and assisted children with college applications and college tuition.

Item 21 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a lack of assessment of educational needs even when there was clear evidence that the child was experiencing school-related problems (four cases).
- Educational needs were identified and noted in the case record, but no services were provided to address those needs, and educational issues were not included in the case plan (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating as an ANI. In 86 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percentage is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as an ANI.

Note: The requirements for rating this item are different because there is only one item assessed under the outcome. For the other outcomes, an item rating of 90 percent is considered sufficient for a strength rating because there are multiple items within the outcome, and they involve fewer cases than those incorporated in the overall outcome rating. This is not the case for item 21. Therefore, for this item, the rating of either a Strength or an ANI is based on the same criteria as the rating of Substantial Conformity.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders expressed varied opinions with regard to performance on addressing the educational needs of children. Statewide stakeholders and those from the Hennepin County indicated that early intervention services for children 3 to 5 years old is available and includes the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to determine the needs of young children. Stakeholders from the State indicated that the educational systems and collaboration varies from county to county. They also reported that there is disparity in the educational system across the State for minority children. In particular, the dropout rate for minority children is higher. In an effort to combat this issue, Hennepin County has instituted a pilot project focusing on keeping youth in school by identifying children with chronic absenteeism and assigning a social worker to work with their families.

Stakeholders expressed the opinion that agencies try to keep children in the same school, that case plans often address the educational needs of children, and that case managers attend IEP meetings. They also indicated that there are tuition waiver programs for college and that ETV funds, while not consistently available due to funding cuts, have helped youth pay for books and tuition.

Statewide Assessment Information

When children are placed in foster care, caseworkers share information with foster parents, including relevant educational information. Caseworkers, foster care providers, and parents negotiate respective roles in ensuring that the child's educational needs are met. Caseworkers are expected to gather and use pertinent educational information to develop the case, which includes completing the Child Well-Being Tool. When cases are opened for in-home services, the agency and parent(s) determine if educational concerns for the children need to be included in the case plan. This determination is based on completion of a Child Well-Being Tool and the ability of the parent to ensure the children's educational needs are being met.

Challenges with meeting the educational needs of children outlined in the Statewide Assessment include the following:

- With considerable responsibilities placed on caseworkers when a child enters foster care, informing the school of the child's placement and obtaining educational information are, at times, delegated to the foster care provider.
- Some schools and social service agencies struggle with data privacy issues in terms of what to share with educational providers (administrators, counselors, and teachers) regarding the circumstances that led to the child's placement into foster care.
- Community response to truancy varies across the State.
- Significant reduction in Federal funding of local collaborative organizations has contributed to an erosion of available resources and services for children.
- Truancy and the need for greater coordination among Tribes, counties, and local schools to improve school attendance for American Indian children and youth was identified as a significant need with serious consequences for children, families, and the community.

The agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to meet the educational needs of children:

- Children in residential care receive integrated treatment and a full range of educational services.

- Young children involved in the child welfare system are referred to local Interagency Early Intervention Committees comprising special education, social services, public health, early childhood service providers, and parents.
- Children’s Mental Health and Family Service Collaborative organizations promote cooperative interaction between agency staff, school personnel, and other community professionals to enhance child well-being, including improved access to educational services.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	10	22	12	44	77.2
Partially Achieved	0	3	4	7	12.3
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	3	1	6	10.5
Total Applicable Cases	12	28	17	57	
Not Applicable:	3	4	0	7	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

Minnesota did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 77.2 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied little across the sites. Among applicable cases, this outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 83 percent of the Carlton County cases, 79 percent of the Hennepin County cases, and 71 percent of the Washington County cases. There was little variation based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 75 percent (30 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 82 percent (14 cases) of the 17 applicable in-home services cases.

2001 CFSR Findings

The 2001 CFSR noted the following key findings with respect to the State’s ability to meet the physical and mental health needs of children:

- There was too much reliance on foster parents to address health needs of children.
- It is very difficult to find adequate dental care for children in foster care because many providers do not accept Medicaid.
- If a mental health issue was not directly related to the presenting problem, typically it was not addressed.

- The lack of initial assessment has resulted in the mental health needs of children going unmet.

DHS employed the following PIP strategy to address this outcome:

- DHS Children’s Mental Health Division developed a mental health interview guide designed to identify needs for mental health assessment in children. It was piloted in six sites, including programs that serve all ages of children and one county foster care unit. Initial evaluations of the interview guidelines and a full validation study were completed.

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

2007 CFSR Findings

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the physical and dental health of children (item 22) and the mental health of children (item 23) remain ANIs in the 2007 CFSR. Key concerns identified in the 2007 CFSR were:

- Dental care services were not provided.
- There were no assessments of physical or dental health noted in the case file.
- Medical needs were assessed and identified, but no services were provided.
- Mental health needs were not assessed in some instances.

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

Item 22: Physical health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 51 (80 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children’s physical health needs (including dental needs) had been appropriately assessed, and whether the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 22	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	10	19	12	41	80
Area Needing Improvement	2	5	3	10	20
Total Applicable Cases	12	24	15	51	
Not Applicable Cases	3	8	2	13	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Performance on this item varied little across sites. Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 83 percent of Carlton County cases, 79 percent of Hennepin County cases, and 80 percent of Washington County cases. There was variation based on the type of case. The item was determined to be a Strength in 78 percent (31 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 91 percent (10 cases) of the 11 applicable in-home services cases.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children’s health needs (medical and dental) were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Item 22 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- Dental care services were not provided (three cases).
- There were no assessments of physical or dental health noted in the case file (two cases).
- Medical needs were assessed and identified, but no services were provided (two cases).
- The foster care child did not receive routine medical care during the period under review (two cases).
- Assessments were completed, but ongoing health care needs were not met (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 80 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. This percentage does not meet the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was rated an ANI.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Statewide stakeholders indicated that dental services, and in particular locating dentists who accept Medicaid, constitute a problem across the State. They also indicated that while some counties have dental resources, for example as Smile Center, it can require a 2-hour drive. In some areas, children have access to university dental schools. Some stakeholders also indicated that accessing medical services for children with Medicaid is difficult. Washington County stakeholders noted that children in care have limited access to dental providers and dental services. Two providers provide dental care resources for children receiving services in Washington County, but one provider is physically located in neighboring Hennepin County, which can result in transportation barriers for some families.

Several stakeholders in Carlton County noted that children and youth are receiving yearly physicals and specialty medical care, and they are utilizing Medicaid without an issue.

Statewide Assessment Information

When children are placed in foster care, agency caseworkers share child-specific information with foster parents, including relevant health information. Caseworkers, foster care providers, and parents negotiate respective roles to ensure that the child’s medical and dental needs are met. Physical health exams are scheduled for all children placed in foster care according to the statutory requirement and for children receiving in-home services when necessary. When cases are opened for in-home services, the agency and parent(s) determine if health concerns for the children need to be included in the case plan.

Challenges with meeting the physical and dental health needs of children outlined in the Statewide Assessment include the following:

- Undocumented immigrant children are increasingly represented in some county child welfare systems. Although these children are eligible for emergency MA, they are ineligible for ongoing MA, which limits their access to preventative and routine health and dental services.
- With considerable responsibilities placed on caseworkers when a child enters foster care, obtaining medical and dental information and services is at times delegated to the foster care provider.
- Across the State, there has been a shortage of dental providers willing to provide services to children on MA.

The agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to meet the health needs of children:

- Local public health agencies coordinate with social service agencies to provide outreach for the Child and Teen Checkup program, which meets the Federal requirements for offering and providing Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment services to children eligible for MA.
- County social service agencies have joined with law enforcement, public health, county attorney, and medical providers to develop multi-systemic response protocols when children are exposed to methamphetamine.
- Regional dental clinics that specialize in treating children on MA have developed in some locations across the State. These clinics are often established through public/private initiatives.
- The availability and quality of medical services for American Indian children living on some reservations has improved due to investment by Tribes in local health resources and facilities.

Item 23: Mental health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 45 (70 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, or if there were no mental health concerns. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether mental health needs had been appropriately assessed and if appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 23	Carlton County	Hennepin County	Washington County	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	18	11	38	84
Area Needing Improvement	1	3	3	7	16
Total Applicable Cases	10	21	14	45	
Not Applicable Cases	5	11	3	19	
Total Cases	15	32	17	64	

Among applicable cases, this item was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of the Carlton County cases, 86 percent of Hennepin County cases, and 79 percent of Washington County cases. This item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent (28 cases) of the 32 applicable foster care cases and 77 percent (10 cases) of the 13 applicable in-home services cases.

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

- Mental health needs were not assessed or addressed (four cases).
- Mental health needs were being addressed through psychotropic drugs without appropriate monitoring (one case).
- Services were provided but they were not appropriate to the child’s needs (one case).
- Mental health needs were not assessed, but services were provided (one case).

Ratings Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 84 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was also rated as an ANI in Minnesota’s 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders expressed different opinions regarding the agency’s effectiveness in meeting children’s mental health needs. Some statewide stakeholders reported that mental health evaluations are being done, but not adequately because serious issues surface after the evaluation is completed. Others described effective identification of mental health issues, in particular assessing infant mental health. Stakeholders in Washington County noted good collaboration between caseworkers and mental health professionals, and they

described working with the entire family to improve their overall functioning. They also noted that children requiring medication for mental health issues are monitored every 3 months. However, transportation, lack of attachment disorder specialists, and waiting lists were cited as challenges in Washington County.

Statewide Assessment Information

Caseworkers must provide or arrange a mental health screening for eligible children ages 3 months to 18 years old. Children identified at risk of needing immediate attention, intervention, or more thorough assessment through the screening process should be referred for a mental health assessment.

Challenges with meeting the mental health needs of children outlined include the following:

- In cases involving child protection, children’s mental health, substance abuse, and juvenile justice, often caseworkers’ roles and duties are not well defined, which results in unmet mental health and/or substance abuse needs for children.
- Access to a full continuum of mental health and substance abuse services may not be available in rural counties. To access these services, children must travel to regional centers. Child psychiatric services are lacking in most Minnesota counties.
- Children’s mental health screenings sometimes do not occur due to parent’s refusal.

The agency has conducted the following activities in an effort to meet the mental health needs of children:

- The Children’s Mental Health Division supports a statewide “specialty provider network” that represents mental health providers with experience and expertise in meeting needs of difference cultural and ethnic groups. A directory of these providers is published and available on the DHS website.
- The Minnesota DHS has published guidelines for health and human services organizations and providers to enhance their abilities to serve individuals from diverse cultures. *Guidelines for Culturally Competent Organizations* and clinical guidelines for culturally competent mental health services for American Indians are available online.
- The Minnesota Juvenile Justice and Mental Health Initiative has been launched with a goal of improving outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system with mental health or co-occurring disorders by making systemic changes. Primary partners leading the initiative are the Minnesota Department of Corrections and the Minnesota DHS, with the support of Commissioners of Education, Health, Public Safety, and the States Court Administrator.
- The Governor’s Mental Health Initiative is aimed at improving the accessibility, quality, and accountability of publicly funded mental health services.

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

This section of the CFSR Final Report provides information regarding the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors examined during the CFSR. Information for the items included in each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. A score for substantial conformity is established for each systemic factor. A score of either 1 or 2 represents that a State is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor; a rating of 1 means that none of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) requirements is in place, and a 2 indicates that some or all of the CFSP requirements are in place but more than one of the requirements fails to function. Scores of 3 and 4 represent substantial conformity; a rating of 3 means that all of the CFSP requirements are in place, and no more than one fails to function; and a 4 indicates all of the CFSP requirements are in place and functioning. In addition, information is provided regarding the State’s performance on each systemic factor for the State’s first CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State’s PIP, the key concerns addressed in the PIP and the strategies for assessing those concerns are noted, as well as any changes in ratings that occurred as a result of the State’s second CFSR.

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

Status of Statewide Information System

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings for the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 24: State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because the 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. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota's SSIS is compliant with the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) with an approved action plan and fully reports to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). SSIS has been in operation statewide since 1999 and was reviewed by the Federal team for SACWIS requirements in 2001. SSIS incorporates Federal and State statutes by a combination of alerts and enforcement of requirements at appropriate points in the case process. The Statewide Assessment reports that social workers access a tool that identifies required case information, and all significant events in the life of a case are documented within SSIS, including intake, assessment, case management, placement, court involvement, case plans, IV-E eligibility, and case closure. In addition, the caseworker can enter case notes, write case plans and letters, and track timelines and financial responsibilities for children and families on their caseload. SSIS also offers county agency staff approximately 100 general reports in the areas of caseload tracking, client data, eligibility reports, intake statistics, maltreatment, and placement data and time reporting. The Statewide Assessment reports that statewide and county-specific performance on Federal and State outcome indicators is available through SSIS Charting and Analysis.

Stakeholder Interview Information

A majority of stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR reported that Minnesota's SSIS successfully tracks all children in foster care and those in private agencies. The majority of stakeholder comments on this item were consistent with what was reported in the Statewide Assessment. Stakeholders agreed that SSIS tracks the demographic characteristics, goals, locations, and legal information associated with all foster children across the State. Some described the system as "complete" and the data as "accurate" and up-to-date and as having checks and balances in place to monitor the thoroughness and accuracy of the system. Stakeholders also indicated that the system identifies missing data and inconsistencies. In addition, a few stakeholders reported that workers are comfortable with the system, and the alerts and reminders for staff were described as helpful. According to stakeholders, there is ongoing training available to staff beyond the initial training on the SSIS, and tip sheets are available to provide workers with additional support.

Some stakeholders noted the challenges associated with SSIS, including difficulty getting information from the system, the time it takes to complete data entry, and supervisors are not yet fully adept at using the system.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

Status of Case Review System

Minnesota is not in substantial conformity with the factor of the Case Review System. The areas identified as needing improvement pertained to item 25 (Case planning process) and item 29 (Notification of reviews and hearings). While some CFSP and program requirements are in place, the requirements pertaining to both the case planning process and notification of court proceeding notification are rated as an ANI. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 was rated an ANI because although the State has a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly, it is not being used, and parents are not involved in case planning on a consistent basis. This item was rated as an ANI during the first round of the CFSR. In addition, item 18 in the case review, which examines child and family involvement in the case planning process, was also rated ANI.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, agency caseworkers meet with parents and children individually or as part of family meetings to develop case plans. Social workers may prepare drafts or outlines of case plans in advance and later incorporate family input. Supervisors review plans before they are finalized, and family members, foster parents, guardians *ad litem*, social workers, and supervisors sign final case plans. Case plans are filed with the court and approved by the judge subject to hearing. The out-of-home placement plan template in SSIS includes all statutory and title IV-E required case plans elements, including required IL Skills (ILS) plans. Supervisors monitor the timely completion of case plans by reviewing SSIS reports.

The Statewide Assessment reports findings from QA reviews, which indicate that counties overall rate their case review system a strength. While counties consistently assess the process for ensuring written case plans and family involvement in case planning as a strength, this assessment often does not coincide with performance on item 18 for child and family involvement in case planning. County agencies have access to an SSIS general report, *Placements Without Open OHPP*, that county managers use to monitor cases that do not have case plans developed within 30 days.

Challenges noted in the Statewide Assessment include judges and attorneys having a difficult time understanding the content and purpose of case plans. In the current case review system, a case plan is developed, followed by a disposition order. Later, as a result of one or more subsequent review hearings, previous disposition orders are modified but not the case plan. This creates some confusion regarding, “what constitutes the current plan/order?” Judicial stakeholders reported that it would be helpful for all parties, and most importantly parents, if there was an efficient way of developing and maintaining a single, up-to-date working document that contains all of the elements of the case plan and court order.

Approximately half of the youth surveyed for the internal CFSR indicated their opinions were considered in the development of their case plans. Some foster care youth reported that they had developed an ILS plan with their caseworker and foster care provider that included educational, employment, and future housing goals.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item were of the opinion that service plans are developed in a timely manner. However, stakeholders were not in agreement that parents are involved in the development of their case plans, and there were inconsistent comments with regard to how often parents and youth are involved in the development of case plans. Stakeholders describe two processes that can be used to develop a case plan or that can be used to add goals on to the case plan, the PPP, which is a neutral court ordered process in instances where parents are denying the allegations in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIPS) petition, and the Family Decision Making (FDM) process. Several stakeholders reported that plans are developed in a timely manner and that parents and children are part of the case planning process. Specifically, there was consensus among Hennepin County stakeholders that plans are developed in a timely manner with few delays. They also reported seeing an improvement in plans; the plans are more individualized and have more objectives than they had previously. Stakeholders in Carlton County reported that Tribes are involved in case planning and youth are very involved in case planning.

In contrast, some stakeholder groups in Hennepin County reported seeing nonindividualized plans that are developed by staff, and they noted that parents do not always understand their plans. Stakeholders in Hennepin County also reported that Tribes are not always included in the planning process and expressed that American Indian parent concerns related to case planning were not always appropriately considered or responded to. A Carlton County stakeholder noted that the length of the service plans has been reduced, but there is still a lot of information that is not germane to what needs to be done to achieve the child’s goal.

Item 26: Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because the State 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. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statute requires an in-court hearing, “if the court orders a child placed in foster care, the court shall review the out-of-home placement at least every 90 days to determine whether continued out-of-home placement is necessary and appropriate or whether the child should be returned home.” The statute also states that the court will review all juvenile justice dispositional orders at least every 6 months or sooner in the event of a probation violation that requires an in-court hearing, “no later than six months after the child’s placement in foster care, the court shall review agency efforts . . . and order that the efforts continue if the agency has failed to perform the duties.” The Statewide Assessment indicates that social workers and guardians *ad litem* submit court reports updating all parties on progress toward achieving case plan goals. Timely and effective review hearings, focused on meeting all judicial review requirements, monitoring progress on case plans or lack thereof, and the court’s findings of reasonable or active efforts avert later legal challenges and promote more timely achievement of permanency.

Some of the challenges noted in the Statewide Assessment include the following:

- For court administrators responsible for maintaining master calendars, scheduling of disposition review hearings, including additional time necessary for contested review hearings and permanency hearings
- Public defender availability to serve as counsel for parents and children and to ensure that parents fully understand their rights
- Availability of judges and county attorneys
- Late or incomplete reports to judges from social workers and guardians *ad litem*
- Lack of Tribal involvement in court proceedings early in the case, causing delays

However, the Statewide Assessment also describes efforts, through the Children’s Justice Initiative (CJI), that have been made to strengthen the periodic review process. Using the *CJI County Practice Guide*, multi-disciplinary CJI teams are looking at ways of improving the timing and quality of disposition review hearings and permanency hearings. CJI has developed and distributed to all judges, court administrators, and county attorneys, order templates that comply with Federal and State requirements, including templates for disposition review and permanency hearings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in some counties, CJI has changed the culture of how the courts and counties address permanency issues for children. Judges play an active role in managing cases, supporting children and families, and holding all parties accountable. “One judge-one family” is a key practice to promote this cultural change. One county adapted their court assignment and scheduling practice by assigning each public defender to a specific judge as a strategy to alleviate scheduling conflicts. In one county, the Citizen Review Panel members participate in administrative reviews for children in LTFC. This review process is in addition to the annual court review required for children in LTFC. Concurrent permanency planning cases involving very young children are reviewed with greater frequency in some courts to maximize reunification efforts within the permanency timelines.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders generally echoed the description of review process described in the Statewide Assessment, and in addition, the dominant opinion was that the county agencies conduct 6-month administrative foster care reviews that function in an efficient and timely manner and are often held earlier than required. In addition, many stakeholders reported that the foster care reviews are quality reviews that help to move children toward permanency by examining children’s case plan goals and by flagging areas that will require consideration and action. Washington County stakeholders also specifically spoke to the effectiveness of the guardians *ad litem* in this process. A few stakeholders suggest that CJI has led to many improvements in ensuring timely reviews and overall standards relating to the process. Collaboration and effective problem-solving between social services and legal representatives resulted in a decrease in continuances in one jurisdiction.

Item 27: Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as a Strength because the State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statute requires that in all cases where the child is in foster care or in the home of the noncustodial parent, “the court shall commence proceedings to determine the permanent status of a child not later than 12 months after the child is placed.” According to Minnesota policy, as soon as children enter foster care, courts and agency social workers advise parents of permanency timelines, the importance of timely permanency decisions, and the potential outcomes if reunification is not achieved within timelines.

The Statewide Assessment noted these challenges with permanency hearings:

- Scheduling of disposition review hearings and permanency hearings often is a challenge for court administrators who are responsible for maintaining master calendars.
- There is limited public defender availability to serve as counsel for parents and children, to ensure that parents fully understand their rights, and to avoid delays in achieving permanency.
- Lack of Tribal involvement early in court proceedings contributes to delays in achieving permanency.
- Delays in determining paternity lead to delays in achieving permanency.
- In cases involving children under 8 years old, permanency hearings are held within 6 months of placement, and often agency recommendations include requesting additional time to attempt reunification. Generally courts approve these requests, sometimes without significant probing into what case plan changes are needed to support reunification or if it is in the best interest of the child to develop an alternative permanency goal.
- In less populous counties, judges handle many different kinds of cases and may not have expertise in managing child permanency cases. In more populous counties, judges rotate in and out of juvenile court, limiting the extent of their juvenile court experience.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The opinions of stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR differed with regard to the timeliness of the permanency hearings. Many stakeholders said that permanency hearings are occurring in a timely manner and that they are effective in moving a case forward. Several stakeholders described permanency hearings as distinct from regular reviews, noting that courts have lots of contact with staff before hearings so there are fewer surprises. In all sites, there were stakeholders who described positive communication with the courts.

However, some stakeholders noted that there are court delays, due primarily to court scheduling issues, defense attorneys requesting continuances, and the need to locate a private attorney for the noncustodial parent. Another reason for cases not moving forward is the lack of available services for the family, even if the review is held in a timely manner. Stakeholders reported that continuances were attributed to judges wanting to give the family more time to meet their goals and other facts in the case that may arise. Additionally, Hennepin County stakeholders expressed concern that permanency hearings for children involved with the juvenile justice system were focused on rehabilitation more than permanency.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as a Strength because the State provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of ASFA. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statutes and Juvenile Protection Rules require the filing of a permanency petition by the 11th month, such as a petition for TPR. The hearing on the petition must take place by the 12th month and will be followed by a trial within 60 to 90 days if the petition is denied. The filing of a TPR petition is mandatory in certain cases where the statutes authorize the agency to "bypass" the child protection phase. There are no circumstances under the statutes or rules that allow the agency to not file a TPR, unless they file one of the other permanency petitions in lieu of a TPR petition. TPR trials "may not be continued or adjourned for more than one week unless the court makes specific findings that the continuance or adjournment is in the child's best interest."

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that when children meet ASFA requirements criteria for TPR, agencies are required to file or join a TPR petition unless an exception, or compelling reason, for not filing is specified. Agencies, county attorneys, guardians *ad litem*, family members, and other key persons in the case are consulted in these decisions. The court may order a child into LTFC only when there are compelling reasons why other preferred permanency options are not in the child's best interest, the child has reached 12 years of age and reasonable efforts to locate an adoptive or relative home have not been successful, or a younger child is ordered into the same LTFC home as a sibling who is 12 years of age or older. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that court reviews of LTFC must be held at least every 12 months and must find that the placement continues to be appropriate and meets the child's permanency and stability needs.

Nevertheless, the Statewide Assessment reports that some counties routinely hold a trial for a day or two and then hold a little more of the trial in a week or month and then finalize it a week or month later. The court is required to issue its TPR order within 15 days of the conclusion of the trial, but it can be extended for an additional 15 days if briefs are to be submitted. Appeals in TPR matters are filed within 30 days of when the court administrator serves notice that the TPR order was filed. The appellate court has 60 days to issue its decision from the time the case is deemed submitted.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in 2005, it took approximately 260 days from the filing of the trial court order until the filing of the appellate decision. In 2005, the court of appeals implemented internal procedures designed to expedite the appellate process. Recent statistics from May 2007 show that the current time from trial court decision to appellate court decision is still about 240 days. The Juvenile Protection Rules Committee intends to review the procedures to determine if there are other improvements that could be made to reduce the time from filing to appellate decision. The courts maintain data about the timing and frequency of disposition review hearings, permanency progress review hearings, and permanent placement determination hearings.

The Statewide Assessment noted two challenges associated with filing TPR:

- TPR trials may last several days. With the volume of juvenile cases, it is very difficult to schedule enough consecutive days to complete these trials.

- The number of court and county agency personnel required to prepare for and conduct TPR trials is considerable. With the increase in TPRs over the last few years, the court system is challenged to meet ASFA permanency requirements.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, the majority of stakeholders commenting on this item reported that although there is a process in place that supports timely TPR filing and documentation of compelling reasons across the State, both strengths and ongoing issues associated with delays were also identified.

Various stakeholders attributed delays in the TPR process to the following:

- Larger counties have large caseloads and TPRs may be filed but are not heard in a timely manner due to court scheduling difficulties. The delay particularly occurs in Hennepin County, where there was consensus among almost all stakeholders interviewed that the filing of TPRs was occurring in a timely manner, but progress and finalization were heavily delayed by court calendar challenges including “piecemeal trials” and the length of the appellate process.
- Continuances occur as a result of the difficulty of scheduling the number of participants required for a TPR hearing.
- Appeals are on the increase in several counties, becoming standard practice for public defenders, which is contributing to overall delays in the TPR process.
- Problems establishing paternity were identified as a barrier by stakeholders at both a State and county level.
- Tribes sometimes have philosophical issues with TPR, and ASFA and ICWA clash sometimes in terms of permanency timeliness and transfer of jurisdiction. In one jurisdiction, Tribal cases are all heard in the county court as a Tribal court is not in operation; therefore, customary adoptions are not occurring.
- Judge’s attitudes about giving parents more chances delay moving to permanency.
- Legal documents are not maintained in the case files, this makes it sometimes unclear to workers the status of TPR.
- Cases where parents are incarcerated or have substance abuse issues are harder to move forward.

Alternatively, stakeholders also identified useful practices that facilitate more timely TPRs:

- Implementation of the Alcohol or Drug policy in conjunction with the National Center on Substance Abuse to address tension between the recovery timelines and the timelines for permanency for children in ASFA
- The development of a computer-generated tool to help track TPR timelines for judges
- Increased efforts to locate fathers earlier in the process prevent delays
- Compelling reasons identified to the court and put in the court orders
- Voluntary TPRs and the use of transfers of permanent and legal custody, which are becoming more common
- Appeals to TPR and extensions, which are often denied by the court

Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child

___Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an ANI because of inconsistencies related to the notification process and a lack of understanding among stakeholders of these requirements. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, “The foster parents, if any, of a child and any pre-adoptive parent or relative providing care for the child must be provided notice of and an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing to be held with respect to the child.” This language is mirrored in juvenile protection statutes, and rules have been recently amended to provide for a “right to be heard.” Court administrators are required to send a Notice of Hearing for every child protection hearing to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers. During court proceedings, judges ask whether any foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, or relative caregivers are present and whether they have any information to share. Agency social workers provide identifying information to county attorneys and court administrators, including addresses for parents, children, and caregivers as part of the original CHIPS petition and provide informal notifications to foster parents and/or adoptive parents in the course of regular visits.

The Statewide Assessment reports that MCWTS is revising the pre-service curriculum for foster parents to include an overview of the roles of court personnel, general information about the court process, and the role of foster parents in court hearings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Minnesota statutes and rules require that notice be given to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care and that they be given the right to be heard. Stakeholders from the State level and from two sites reported that they were not aware formal notification is required, and responses varied in terms of whether or not notices are actually given. Some stakeholders from the State level reported they were not aware of procedures for notification of hearings and that the process varies from county to county and social worker to social worker. Another issue identified by stakeholders from the State is that wait times, sometimes up to 4 hours, can make it difficult for families and children to attend. However, other stakeholders reported that foster parents are being invited to hearings, and they described a form that is used by judges that helps ensure that foster parents who attend are heard.

There were varying opinions in Carlton County regarding notification and the right to be heard. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that many foster parents were not notified about hearings and, even when told of hearings, might be unclear as to whether or not they should be attending, while other stakeholders indicated that notices are sent, with quite a few families attending hearings and receiving the opportunity to be heard. One stakeholder described children as being encouraged to participate in the hearing by phone if necessary. Stakeholders also reported that Tribal foster parents are notified, and they are encouraged to participate.

Stakeholder responses in Hennepin County reflected a lack of unified understanding about the notification process and their right to be heard. Some stakeholders perceived that no formal notification was required. Others reported varying levels of notification, notification sources, and understanding of their right to be heard in court, and some reported that they do receive notice but participation was not successful.

Stakeholders in Washington County reported that notices are sent to all parties on the petition, and children and foster parents have the right to be heard.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

Status of Quality Assurance System

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as Strength because the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statutes include child placement licensing standards, standards associated with conducting all background studies, State regulations for residential care and treatment of children in out-of-home placement, including child foster care, and State regulations for county and private licensing agencies, and statutes define standards for performing licensing responsibilities. DHS conducts bi-annual reviews of licensed treatment facilities and group homes programs. Facilities develop corrective action plans based on performance on established standards. Progress is monitored by the department staff, and review results are classified as public information. Licensing of child foster care programs are delegated to counties and private agencies.

The Statewide Assessment reports child foster care programs are visited for purposes of licensing at least every 2 years, and when licensing rules are violated, corrective action plans are developed and monitored. Background studies are required for (1) persons applying for license, (2) individuals living in the household over 13 years of age, (3) current or prospective employees or contractors who will have direct contact with persons served by the program, (4) volunteers who will have direct contact, (5) individuals age 10 to 12 living in the household where the license services will be provided when there is reasonable cause, (6) people who might have access, and (7) management officials. Complaints received by the department are investigated, and orders or licensing sanctions may be issued. These include correction orders, conditional orders, fines, suspension, or revocation. Compliance with background study requirements are monitored as part of investigations as well as routine monitoring contacts. The department has established standards for mental health treatment foster care and new assessment tools and treatment standards for chemical health and mental health. Recent department priorities include increased public access to a variety of licensing data and information and guidance on implementing the Adam Walsh Federal requirements for a fingerprint-based Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) check on all applicants for child foster care prior to final approval of a placement.

Development of the current licensing rule required extensive collaboration with the Department of Corrections to develop common understanding and interpretation of rule and statute, develop current regulations, and propose amendments to existing rules and statutes. State Departments of Education and Health, together with DHS Divisions of Children's Mental Health and Chemical Health, county agencies, and provider organizations, collaborate on current practice issues, emerging issues, and proposed statutory changes. Advocacy organizations meet with DHS to express concerns and discuss needs for changes in policy and practice.

The Statewide Assessment reports it is a challenge to recruit, train, and retain adequate numbers of qualified State and county staff to ensure that licensing reviews are conducted and new and established standards consistently observed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item noted that service standards ensure quality services and the safety and health of children in foster care. Stakeholders gave examples of standards specifically for children with disabilities, capacity standards, nutritional standards, medication storage, discipline standards, mental health standards, foster parent training on cardiovascular resuscitation (CPR), seat restraints, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and risk management for sexually active youth. Notably, stakeholders in Washington County verified that counties regularly receive instruction from DHS regarding these standards.

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

Strength ANI

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the State is operating an identifiable QA system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measure implemented. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS conducts QA reviews of county child welfare systems, under the general supervision and oversight duties of the Commissioner of Human Services. Minnesota statutes also require a child mortality review process to review deaths and near fatalities of children in Minnesota, including deaths attributed to maltreatment or in which maltreatment may be a contributing cause.

The Statewide Assessment reports that Citizen Review Panels evaluate county child protection practices, policies, and procedures. Panel members participate in ongoing child protection QA by conducting case file reviews, focus groups, surveys, and interviews. Annually, the panels make formal recommendations to improve the child protection system based on the results of these activities. QA reviews involve Citizen Review Panels in stakeholder interviews during Minnesota CFSRs, and panel members participate in the preparation of their county PIPs and monitoring of those plans. An Annual Minnesota CFSR Program Report summarizes performance of all counties reviewed during the year. This report is distributed to all county and community partners and posted on the DHS public website.

Most counties have planned improvements to their QA system in response to MnCFSRs. Challenges noted in the Statewide Assessment include:

- MnCFSRs are rigorous and time intensive. It is a challenge for counties to allocate the necessary staff resource to the review process and still adequately attend to their ongoing operational responsibilities.
- It has become increasingly difficult, especially in less populated counties, to recruit peer reviewers to participate in reviews outside of their home counties.
- More frequent QA is needed in some counties to better integrate the CFSR structure into day-to-day operations.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following strengths:

- DHS developed a Child Protection Supervisors website to provide supervisors with technical resources, information, and data to assist them in supporting their staff.
- The QA Toolkit provides counties with a condensed version of the MnCFSR case review instrument and a series of Excel spreadsheets to record case review results. Fifty counties have instituted quarterly MnCFSR-style case reviews and report their review results to DHS.
- DHS issues three statewide performance reports: Caseworker Contact With Parents, Caseworker Contact With Children, and Time to Initiate Child Protection Assessments.
- DHS adolescent services staff and Citizen Review Panel members completed a review to determine if social workers had addressed the ILS needs of youth 16 or older in LTFC. Findings informed development of a best practices guide and a new curriculum for social workers.
- DHS introduced a series of Virtual Presences Communications child welfare supervisor forums that addressed improving systems and practices that impact outcome achievement for children and families.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR were in agreement that the Minnesota is operating a QA system that evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs, provides reports, and evaluates program improvement measures in 87 counties. Many stakeholders described the State CFSR process, and some described it as a “learning tool” that has “improved the quality of services across the State.” Stakeholders at the State level report using technical assistance from the National Resource Center and training managers across the State in QA practices. Some of these stakeholders reported having access to a QA toolkit that was developed for supervisors and caseworkers. The toolkit is designed to assist them with integrating QA outcomes from case reviews. Stakeholders also reported that each county has its own PIP, and the State issues a PIP Tip Newsletter to support the counties with their QA efforts. Stakeholders in Washington County described the mock CFSR process, noting that the findings and in-depth feedback was very helpful for all staff. Carlton County stakeholders indicated that the findings from the county’s review had been addressed and that stakeholder input was valued and integrated into practice improvement. In addition to the overall State level QA process, several counties have instituted county-specific review processes.

However, some stakeholders from across all sites interviewed reported the process as time intensive and noted concerns about staff’s ability to manage their casework while focusing on QA recommendations. Some stakeholders in Carlton County report that it is difficult to meet QA outcomes due to interfaces with other disciplines. Several stakeholders from Hennepin County were unclear about the significance of the QA process and could not describe the feedback mechanism for getting QA results to county staff.

IV. TRAINING

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

Status of Training

Minnesota is in substantial conformity with systemic factor of Training. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength because the State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objective in the CFSP, addresses the services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the MCWTS, established through Minnesota statute, requires the Commissioner of Human Services to develop a competency-based program of foundational and advanced training for child protection workers. Employees attend social worker core training within the first 6 months of employment. In addition, Minnesota statutes require that new children’s mental health case managers receive 40 hours of training approved by DHS. Core training for social workers is divided into seven training modules that provide the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for child welfare caseworkers. The training consists of 16 days of classroom instruction, plus a computer-based training on ICWA. Training topics include family-centered child protective services, cultural competence, legal aspects of child protection, family-centered case planning, effects of abuse and neglect on child development, and separation, placement, and reunification. Social worker core training is updated to reflect changes in statutes, juvenile court rules, best practice, DHS initiatives, QA findings, and Tribal/State agreement. Changes in statutes, policy, and practice related to investigations and assessments are integrated into core training.

Children’s mental health core is a 42-hour training series designed for new county children’s mental health case managers to meet training requirements and is offered three to four times per year. The training is focused on developing skills that encompass the

children's mental health case process from an outcome-based perspective; teaching collaborative strategies that empower the child's family; helping case managers understand the roles and responsibilities of families and community service providers; teaching collaborative methods for assessing a child's needs and identifying resources; and providing information about advocacy and the wraparound process.

The Statewide Assessment reports that area training managers are responsible for maintaining contact with county and Tribal social service agencies, organizing and coordinating all core training, and identifying staff needing social worker and children's mental health core training. Area training managers also provide orientation on transfer of learning to social worker core training participants. Increased social worker caseloads and at times significant travel distance to attend training are challenges to some counties to ensure that all new child welfare workers attend core training within the first 6 months of their employment. County social workers with both child protection and children's mental health cases must attend the social worker core and children's mental health core series. As a result, some workers are not able to manage all their case-related duties during these extended periods of training.

Stakeholder Interview Information

According to stakeholders, the core training for new child protection caseworkers consists of 96 hours of training, 16 days within the first 6 months of hire. Stakeholders in all counties reported that core training is received by staff within 6 months of hire. Statewide stakeholders consistently noted strong initial training system in place for both caseworkers and supervisors. State Information System staff also noted recent efforts with increased automation and incorporating policy and SSIS training with core training efforts. Carlton County also noted that new staff are mentored in addition to receiving core training. Carlton County stakeholders describe that in instances in which caseworkers are assigned cases prior to core training, they are considered to be the "secondary worker" on the case. Stakeholders also noted that while child protection staff must attend core training, not all Children's Services staff are required to attend. Stakeholders in each site reviewed reported that staff can receive cases prior to core training, but several noted that these staff members were often those with previous experience and/or recent M.S.W. students who had received training as a part of their education.

Some concerns expressed by stakeholders include inconsistencies with tracking systems to ensure staff are trained, as well as difficulties accessing training in a timely manner due to location limitations. It was noted that in metropolitan areas, core training is more readily available and that many counties rely on neighboring metropolitan areas for access to trainings. In Carlton County, stakeholders raised concern that core training is more suited to traditional child protection responses rather than skills that are needed for family assessment response (alternative response cases), although specific training for family response has now been instituted.

Stakeholder opinions varied to some degree on training quality. Some reported that the material is overwhelming, the curriculum needs to be modified to reflect the "real world," and some trainers had no practice experience, which affects the quality of training. Other stakeholders described core training as effective at preparing workers; it is comprehensive, practical, and strengths-based.

In addition, stakeholders described the supervisor core training as encompassing six 2-day modules, and they reported that although the training is not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged that all supervisors attend.

Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP

_____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an ANI because, while the State provides specialized and related skills training for staff to address the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties, stakeholders noted significant concerns with inconsistent practices of tracking completed training hours. In addition, there were concerns expressed related to difficulties accessing training. This item was rated as Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statutes require the Commissioner of DHS to develop advanced training for child protection workers, require that all child protection workers develop a plan to complete 15 hours of training on specified child protection-related topics annually, and require continuing training for mental health case managers. A mental health case manager with 2,000 hours of supervised experience must complete at least 30 hours of training in a 2-year period. The training must be approved by the case management provider and be related to the needs, characteristics, and services available to the clients in the caseload assigned to the case manager.

The Statewide Assessment reports that MCWTS schedules training based on needs identified by county and Tribal social service agencies. Area training managers contact county and Tribal social service agencies, at least annually or more often based on need, to identify training needs, organize the training, and provide transfer of learning support. The area training managers also participate in MnCFSR exit conferences and county PIP meetings to identify training needs. Ongoing staff training includes “specialized skills” and “related skills” training for county and Tribal social workers, supervisors, directors, managers, economic support staff, and private agency staff. Specialized skills training addresses knowledge and skills needed by social workers serving special client populations. Related skills training includes presentation of knowledge and skills that refine and enhance child welfare practice. Specialized skills and related skills curricula are updated to reflect changes in statute, juvenile court rules, best practice guidance, DHS initiatives, and revisions to the Tribal/State Agreement.

According to the Statewide Assessment, gathering data on individual worker training needs at a system level is challenging. MnCFSRs provide data and information on agency practices and systemic issues but not directly on individual social worker training needs. County staff, especially from out-of-State county agencies and Tribal social service agencies, have difficulty attending training due to the travel time. This can result in trainings being cancelled and/or low participant numbers. Agency staff report difficulty attending trainings that are scheduled for more than 1 day due to extensive case management responsibilities and lack of available

back-up staff. For some training topics, the opportunity to practice skills learned in training may be delayed because of caseload obligations.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR noted that caseworkers were required to complete 15 hours of ongoing training each year. Several stakeholders from the State described the quality of training as good, and they reported that DHS does a good job in identifying new training needs. They also indicated that each county is required to complete an annual training plan and that a training steering committee helps develop ongoing trainings. Stakeholders at the State level indicated that all curriculums developed for advanced training go through a quality control process. Stakeholders from all sites reported that they receive an annual stipend for training and tuition reimbursement for graduate courses offered at the university. Stakeholders from the State and in Washington County described a cross-training partnership with Corner House child advocacy center as an excellent source of ongoing training and partnering. Carlton County stakeholders identified a collaborative 2-day training/conference held on a yearly basis with two adjacent counties that provide ongoing training opportunities [CEUs] at a minimal cost.

However, stakeholders were not in agreement about tracking ongoing trainings; some reported having a tracking system while others described no tracking of training for QA and no consequences if the requirement is not met. State-level stakeholders reported that most counties are tracking ongoing training hours. Stakeholders in Hennepin County reported that some supervisors keep track of ongoing training using an electronic system and use the information as part of staff evaluations, while others do not ask about training or recognize it in the evaluation process. Stakeholders in Washington County reported staff are responsible for tracking their own hours and that there are no consequences for not completing training hours. Stakeholders noted that high caseloads, scheduling issues, travel funds, and paperwork present barriers to receiving ongoing training, but they reported that trainings are available. It was also noted that there were not many opportunities for ongoing supervisor trainings.

Item 34: The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State-licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoptive assistance under title IV-E, and the training addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out duties with regard to foster and adoptive children. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statute requires that, “a non-relative foster parent must complete a minimum of six hours of orientation before admitting a foster child. Orientation is required for relative foster parents to be licensed as the child’s foster parent. Orientation for relatives must be completed within 30 days following the initial placement, and each foster parent must complete a minimum of 12 hours of training per year.” The statute includes training requirements for all group residential license holders and staff, and the license holder must provide and document training. Minnesota statutes require child foster care and other programs licensed by DHS that serve a child or children younger than 9 years of age to complete child passenger restraint systems training at orientation and every 5 years. Statutes require that child foster care providers complete training on reducing the risk of SIDS and shaken baby syndrome prior to caring for an infant and every 5 years thereafter, and statutes require foster parents to complete training on operating life-sustaining equipment. The agency supervising the foster care provider shall keep the training and skills form on file for each foster care provider and update the form yearly. PPAI requires licensed private adoption agencies to provide prospective adoptive parents of children under State guardianship 16 to 21 hours of training, in conjunction with the adoption home study process. Training topics include issues related to adopting children with special needs.

Foster parents are licensed by county, Tribal, and private agencies. Agency staff and foster parents develop individualized training plans based on the needs identified during the licensing and re-licensing process. Agency staff develop and approve trainings for providers to fulfill training requirements. Area training managers assist county and Tribal social services agencies in matching provider’s needs with training offered through the MCWTS. Private agency staff and providers can attend MCWTS trainings. The MCWTS offers pre-service and specialized/related trainings. The 36-hour pre-service training is a competency-based, culturally relevant training series for prospective and licensed foster parents. The series provides an overview of topics that support positive performance on safety, permanency, and well-being items. Specialized and related skills trainings address specific issues pertinent to foster, adoptive, and kinship providers. PPAI agencies provide adoption training and education to prospective adoptive families. MN ASAP presents workshops and training sessions on adoption-related topics. Adoptive, foster, kinship parents, and professionals attend these trainings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that challenges with training include (1) the need for agency training plans to better reflect the specific training needs of individuals and (2) greater congruency between agency training plans and worker needs, which would support the delivery of more relevant training at the local level. Important trainings that are longer than 6 hours are not in demand or well attended, for example, the 12-hour ILS training, which is the least requested training offered by the MCWTS. There are a limited number of training topics that meet the needs of experienced providers.

The Statewide Assessment describes a collaboration of county, Tribal, private, and community agencies, DHS staff, and MCWTS trainers form the Kinship Advisory Committee, which provides direction and training recommendations and reviews QA reports, focusing on performance items related to foster parents and related training needs. MCWTS partners with area medical and child welfare experts to develop, deliver, and review training, including shaken baby syndrome, SIDS, methamphetamine use, and kinship care. The MCWTS and the Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association collaborate on annual statewide video conference trainings on

topics relevant to kinship caregivers. MCWTS also provides training upon request at the annual Minnesota Foster Care Association Conference. To provide post-adoption services, DHS contracts with two nonprofit agencies to manage MN ASAP, which includes training for both adoptive parents and professionals. The majority of these training sessions cover topics related to parenting children with special needs. MN ASAP has developed a Learning Alternative Behavior Strategies training approach with multiple sessions and in-depth trainings offering practical ideas to help adoptive parents understand and meet the needs of their children.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the CFSR Onsite Review had varying opinions regarding the training for foster parents, the requirement for ongoing training, and the availability of ongoing training opportunities. Several stakeholders cited State training requirements of 6 hours of orientation training and 12 hours of ongoing training required by the State. They also noted that foster parent training is tracked for licensing purposes; however, how the tracking occurs is unclear. Stakeholders in Carlton County reported that the county notifies all foster parents about upcoming training, trainings are based on a foster parent's self-identified needs, requirements can be met through researching and reading material, and registration fees for conferences and mileage are reimbursed. Some stakeholders in Hennepin County described basic training as great, with four to six training opportunities offered each month, including trainings at nights and on weekends. Stakeholders in Hennepin County also reported that the county will pay for Spanish classes as part of ongoing training and that they receive a monthly newsletter titled *Essentials* that announces training and has in-depth articles and a quiz that can be completed for ongoing training credit. Several stakeholders in Washington County describe the training as excellent, easily accessible, comprehensive, and realistic. They also describe receiving ongoing support through support groups and Foster Care Association conferences.

Specific components of the training cited as challenges were the following:

- County-level stakeholders offered varying degrees of relative caregiver training ranging from perceived unavailability to appropriately available and comprehensive in content.
- There are inconsistencies in quality noted between private agency trainings and county training.
- There is a lack of specialized training, and training needs to be updated to better reflect the kinds of children who are currently in placement in the State.
- Sites need more local training because distance to trainings, as well as training times, are noted as issues.
- Videos used in training are dated.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

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

Status of Service Array

Minnesota is not in substantial conformity with the Service Array systemic factor because all items associated with this systemic factor were rated as ANIs. Although the State does have numerous services available in various counties, gaps in services, challenges with access to services, and inconsistently developed individual case plans were identified. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 35: The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an ANI because there were several noted gaps in needed services across counties. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota defines child protective services as assessment or investigation, protective intervention, and planning and provision of services. Placement prevention services include an array of protection, family support, and family preservation services, including family assessment and child protection investigations; assessment of safety and risk and the development of protective service plans; community-based services to meet basic needs; supportive services such as parenting education, respite care, individual and family counseling, and family-based home management; and FGDM, family-based crisis services, crisis nurseries, and children’s mental health services. Services to achieve reunification include FGDM, concurrent

permanency planning, chemical health treatment, and adult mental health services. Services to achieve permanency through adoption include MN ASAP programs, the Homecoming Project, RCA, and the Minnesota Permanency Demonstration Project.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following challenges regarding service array:

- In QA reviews, counties reported gaps in services, including transportation, affordable housing, adult and child mental health assessments and treatment, and treatment options to address methamphetamine use.
- In 2007, the Minnesota Children's Trust Fund completed an assessment of service array for early intervention/prevention services with the assistance of local child abuse prevention councils in 40 counties, using the service array assessment tool developed by the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. Counties reported that support services such as parenting education, parent mentoring, respite care, life skills training, and crisis nurseries were available in about half of the counties that replied and typically rated as only meeting some of the local need.
- Service array and resource development is variable across 87 counties depending on availability of local resources, community need, geographic and demographic characteristics of the counties, and/or other emerging issues. Many counties in the State are rural, sparsely populated, and characterized by an aging population that creates competing demands for local resources.
- In some suburban and rural counties, there is an influx of racially and ethnically diverse families, and there is a need to develop expertise and local services/resources to meet their culturally specific needs. Urban counties are challenged to meet the complex needs of new populations and families experiencing poverty and violence, with diminished resources available. Some specialized, high demand/short supply services, such as child psychiatric or parenting capacity assessments, may require waiting time or out-of-county travel to access the service.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholder comments on this item during the onsite CFSR are consistent with information found in the Statewide Assessment. These comments varied in terms of the array of services, and some stakeholders felt that services were more sufficient than others. That is, there is a wide array of services, but there also are multiple service gaps and shortages. Across all sites, funding was reported to be the overarching barrier to ensuring communities have an adequate service array to meet the needs of families and children.

A few stakeholders from the State reported that there is a good service array; however, they noted that it varies from county to county. They noted, in particular, services for children from birth to 3 years are a strength, and agencies were noted as providing needed services statewide. The FGDM process was noted as a key factor in terms of determining the needs of families. However, stakeholders from the State listed multiple services that are a challenge, including mental health (specifically, child psychologists' services), substance abuse services (lack of providers), services that are culturally appropriate, domestic violence services, agencies that work with Latino families, shelters that will take mothers with older children, therapeutic foster homes, respite for foster parents, and services for children after they have been adopted. Stakeholders reported that county dollars have an effect on the array of services.

Stakeholders in Carlton County cited strengths in the service array, specifically Chafee funds and State money to access services, good IL services, outpatient drug treatment for teens, and a good domestic violence program. The service gaps identified by multiple stakeholders in Carlton County during the Onsite Review included the following:

- Although there is an excellent and preferential relationship with the one mental health center in the county, there is still a need for mental health services for children, including psychiatric and day treatment services.
- Transportation and unemployment are issues.
- Parenting classes were phased out due to funding issues.
- There is no longer a male offender program in the county.
- Although there is a domestic violence program, there is no domestic violence shelter.
- There is not enough flexible funding for concrete services to keep the family together.
- There is no inpatient substance abuse treatment.
- Despite foster parents arranging and paying for it among themselves, some stakeholders indicated a need for easier access to respite care for foster parents.

Some stakeholders indicated that foster parents receive whatever services they need for their children in Hennepin County. They describe the task force that has been developed to better identify children's needs and become more client centered in terms of prevention services. They also describe efforts to look at gaps in services for the Hispanic population with Casa de Esperanza, an organization serving the Hispanic community. However, most Hennepin County stakeholders noted large service gaps, including the following:

- Services for sexual offenders and victims of sexual abuse and their families
- Services for children with extreme mental health issues/behavioral issues or MR service, specifically, a shortage of psychiatric care for children
- Services for specific cultural groups, especially in their primary languages, including the Somali, Hmong, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian populations
- Lack of affordable housing and housing supports
- Mental health services for children and in particular for children in detention
- Services for pregnant teens involved in corrections
- Dental providers
- Post-adoption services
- Child care
- Services for children when they emancipate from LTFC

Funding cuts were also a primary reason cited for lack of appropriate services in Hennepin County. Some affected areas mentioned include in-home services, mental health services, programs for parents with developmental disabilities, and direct assistance to families for immediate financial needs.

Some stakeholders in Washington County reported that the service array meets the needs of the community, and they noted several specific strengths with regard to the service array, including a great deal of mental health services, child truancy services, and collaboration with the county Youth Services Bureau and IL services. Prevention services were mentioned as an umbrella of accessible services that required one-stop in order for families to access services. However, Washington County stakeholders reported several notable gaps in services, including the following:

- Limited dental services and lack of providers willing to accept Medicaid
- Transportation
- Parent coaching
- Sober housing services
- Psychiatric services/evaluations and mental health placements
- Dual diagnosed mental health and substance abuse treatment for children and families
- Services that are culturally appropriate
- Foster homes for children with special needs and/or behavioral difficulties

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an ANI because stakeholders consistently identified barriers to accessing services due to challenges with waiting lists, transportation, and service location. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, counties determine service array and resource development needs as part of their biennial needs assessment and public planning process. Counties choose to provide services directly, execute contracts for services with local/regional private providers, or form regional alliances to meet the service and resource needs of a particular geographic or demographic, or target population area of need. There is variability in the services that are available and accessible across 87 counties, and this is sometimes publicly perceived as a deficit in the State-supervised, county-administered child welfare system. Counties plan for service array based on an assessment of needs of the population. This may mean that in order to access highly specialized services, for which the need may arise only occasionally in a county, children and families may have to travel out of county or wait for access to the service. Counties outside the urban areas are often required to provide additional supportive services, such as transportation or child care, to accommodate access to services.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There was general consensus among stakeholders that availability of needed services varies considerably across the State. The common opinion expressed was that although there is a large array of services available in the larger urban areas such as Hennepin County, there is a dearth of services in the rural areas, and services vary based on providers and county funding for services. Several stakeholders indicated that children and families are often placed on waiting lists for services, including services for psychiatric care for children, housing, and culturally appropriate chemical dependency treatments. Stakeholders also noted that those who do not reside in major urban areas must travel to neighboring counties and sometimes beyond to access services. In Carlton County, while children are able to enter residential treatment programs, these programs are located out of county (3 to 4 hours away), or there are waiting lists. Washington County stakeholders spoke about relying on neighboring counties to supplement services and unanimously expressed major concerns related to transportation barriers and access to services as the county has no public transportation system.

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

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as a ANI because of challenges with fragmentation of services and inconsistencies with creating individualized plans. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, *Family Centered Practice Guide: Engaging, Assessing and Building Strengths with Families* (DHS 4938) is designed to help caseworkers utilize individualized assessments, along with an array of formal and informal services and relationships to support families. When cases are open for in-home services, or when children are placed in foster care, caseworkers develop case plans that identify individualized child safety, permanency, and well-being goals and describe the social and other supportive services or resources required to achieve the goals. DHS supports FGDM through grants to counties and Tribes. FGDM is used to convene children and families, along with their extended network of support, to develop plans for family preservation or child permanency that take into consideration the unique needs and culture of each family and the individualized needs of each child and parent.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in some rural counties there are fewer options/choice of service providers, making it difficult to achieve individualized services. Urban counties have been forced to reduce contracts with community service providers, due to diminished resources, which limits options for receiving individualized services. County agencies consult with Tribal child welfare services or with organizations that advocate on behalf of other racial/ethnic groups in order to meet the individualized needs of children and families.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the Onsite Review, the general consensus of stakeholders was that many agency caseworkers make concerted efforts to individualize services, despite the limited range of services. They noted that there are many caseworkers who try very hard to ensure that the service needs of the children and families they work with are identified and that they receive the services they need. Stakeholders in Washington County noted that caseworkers work hard to tailor appropriate services to meet the needs of families and, in particular, the county is successful in using waiver funds to individualize developmental disability services.

Stakeholders in Hennepin County indicated that workers have the ability to individualize services due to agency contracts, so that community agencies are able to provide services to their clients. However, in practice this is not consistent, and it was reported that much depends on the worker(s) assigned to the family. The Hennepin County structure, based on specialized workers, was noted as a major barrier affecting the individualization of services and service provision in the county. It was described as not a seamless system, allowing cases to “fall through the cracks” when workers do not communicate and collaborate with one another. Another challenge noted was the added losses sustained by the children involved with the system, when they repeatedly lose workers to whom they have grown attached. Regarding mental health services, stakeholders report that staff are able to talk with the provider or make suggestions as to which therapist would be most appropriate to work with a family.

Most stakeholders acknowledged, however, that the level of effort taken to individualize and tailor services to children and families varies across caseworkers and that the practice is not built into the system. Stakeholders noted that there are many instances of nonindividualized services and case plans. Stakeholders cited another barrier to individualizing services, which is determining the needs of families whose primary language is not English. Some Hennepin County stakeholders identified challenges with workers’ understanding of historical grief experienced by the American Indian community. As a consequence, they may not be aware of which services, either available or not, would best address the needs of American Indian families. Several stakeholders described that the process required by ICWA helps to ensure individualized services to meet those children’s needs.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Minnesota is in substantial conformity on the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because in implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and provide child-and-family-servicing agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS develops and implements the title IV-B CFSP according to Federal regulations requiring broad involvement and consultation with a range of public and private nonprofit agencies and community-based organizations, parents, and others. The Tribal/State Agreement states the policies and procedures agreed to by both the Tribes and the State and specifies the roles and duties of each in the implementation of child welfare services to American Indian families and children. This agreement was signed by each of Minnesota's Federally-recognized Tribes and DHS in February 2007. The Children and Community Services Act of 2003 requires counties to develop a Biennial Service Agreement to set performance targets and describe strategies for achieving child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for child and community services. Development of the Biennial Service Agreement requires that the public is informed and has the opportunity to provide input on the use of State and Federal funds. Minnesota statutes require multi-disciplinary Child Protection Teams and describe their membership and function to provide public/professional education; develop resources for prevention, intervention, and treatment; and provide case consultation. The Minnesota Children's Trust Fund for the Prevention of Child Abuse Act provides for the establishment of local child abuse prevention councils, which require the membership of child abuse/neglect professionals, community stakeholders, and parents.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the development of the 2004-2009 CFSP was launched with a series of internal meetings that included representation from child protective services, foster care and adoption, reunification services, family preservation and support services, adolescent services, Indian Child Welfare, Children's Justice Act, Children's Justice Initiative, Citizen Review Panels, Child Mortality Review, statewide information system, research and planning, training system, and QA. The internal meetings represented first stages of data analysis, priority setting, and goal development. External consultation was conducted through a number of

interactive presentations with key constituency and stakeholder groups representing other divisions/administrations within the State agency, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Part H, Part C, Community Based Child Abuse Prevention Program, child development/child care assistance; county social services administration and staff; Tribes, through the Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council; an array of community-based agencies and organizations, both public and private; parents; youth; professional and advocacy organizations; and representatives of other Federal programs. The CFSP incorporated findings and recommendations from other ongoing and special advisory groups to DHS on topics such as African-American disparities, American Indian disparities, an advisory committee to reduce foster care re-entry and improve placement stability, an advisory group to reduce the use of LTFC, and an advisory group to integrate alternative response with traditional child protection. Twenty-three focus groups were conducted, facilitating the involvement of more than 200 participants in the development of the 2004 - 2009 CFSP. Input on the plan resulted in a heightened awareness of service needs for older youth, and these were incorporated in DHS's Chafee plans.

Findings from ongoing QA reviews indicate that counties overall rate the systemic capacity for agency responsiveness as a strength. Specific areas of strength, included coordination/collaboration with stakeholders, functioning of child protection teams, functioning of children's mental health/family service collaboratives, and policies/procedures to ensure compliance with ICWA.

However, the Statewide Assessment notes at both the State and county levels, facilitating access and supporting involvement of parents and youth in ways that are meaningful to planning and review is challenging. Attempts to achieve input occur through use of public hearings, surveys, attendance at focus groups or participation in advisory committees. Stipends or incentives to support these activities have limited success.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting during the onsite CFSR from the State suggested that DHS is diligent about garnering collaborations, developing interagency agreements, and getting input into their programs.

Specific strengths that were noted include the following:

- The State encourages agencies to pool their resources, particularly between child welfare and early intervention programs.
- There is a committee that looks at racial/ethnic disparities in child welfare.
- There is a strong collaboration between ombudsmen and DHS.
- CJI has been very successful as a collaboration project with the courts in 83 counties.
- The Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council provides Tribal input into the State's plan. Tribal/court collaboration is described as a strength in some counties.
- The youth advisory groups provide input into the State plan.
- The Mortality Review Committee reviews decisions and offers feedback to the State and county agencies.
- There is collaboration with the university social work program.
- Statewide there is Tribal consultation for CFSP through the Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council, which meets quarterly.

- In Carlton County, although a formal agreement between the Fond du Lac Tribe and the county is in place, the informal working relationship is just as important in ensuring the positive working relationship between entities.
- In Carlton County, there are weekly meetings of community child protection and case consultation teams to review children and families. These meetings reveal community trends and result in a concerted effort to look for ways to better coordinate services for families working with multiple agencies.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because the State agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS develops the Title IV-B Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) according to Federal regulations, using updated information and current data and requiring broad involvement and consultation with a range of public and private nonprofit agencies and community-based organizations, parents, and others. According to the provisions of the Tribal/State Agreement of February 2007, a Tribal/State Meeting between the Commissioner of Human Services and Tribal leaders is held each year to discuss how DHS and Tribes can work together to improve outcomes and services for Indian children and families. Additionally, the Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council meets quarterly with DHS and advises the Commissioner on child welfare issues affecting Indian children and families.

The Statewide Assessment describes that the development of the APSR is initiated each spring with a division-wide meeting and includes program staff responsible for implementing strategies and monitoring progress on the goals/objectives of the CFSP. Updates on progress toward meeting goals and objectives, along with new Federal reporting requirements, and/or new assignments are discussed at this annual event. The APSR is developed in ongoing consultation with the Children’s Justice Initiative Advisory Committee, Child Mortality Review, Citizen Review Panels, African-American Disparities Committee, MCWTS Central Steering Committee, SSIS Partnership and County Operations Committee, and the Public Private Adoption advisory committee. In addition, ad hoc advisory committees have been convened by DHS to gather community input on development of statewide screening criteria, SDM improvements to risk assessment and assessment of strengths and needs tools, and improving outcomes for children in LTFC. Recommendations from these committees are incorporated into the APSR. Findings from MnCFSRs also inform the annual update to the CFSP. Goals, objectives, and action steps of the CFSP are considered achieved, carried forward, modified, or withdrawn, according to input received on the APSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the Onsite Review, stakeholders commenting on the item reported that they had the opportunity to provide input into the APSR. Stakeholders also reported that the State is effective in consulting individuals and organizations in the development of the annual reports and CFSP and that, in 2006, DHS held 29 focus groups. Washington County also noted that counties were kept informed via DHS policy bulletins and meaningful discussions held through the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators.

Item 40: The State’s services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength because the State services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally assisted programs serving the same population. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS develops and implements the title IV-B CFSP according to Federal regulations and ensures coordination of services or benefits serving the same population. The Statewide Assessment reports that the goals, objectives, and strategies of the 2004-2009 CFSP were conceptually integrated and structurally aligned with the Federal CFSRs. Coordination of services to children and families at the local level occurs informally through cooperative working relationships among local service providers and formally through wraparound models, interdisciplinary case planning teams, case management services, and/or delivery of services through children’s mental health/family service collaboratives. Examples in the Statewide Assessment of Federal and/or Federally-assisted programs that serve the same population (i.e., Head Start; Women, Infants and Children (WIC); housing; Juvenile Justice; employment and training) operate under the jurisdictions of varying Federal and/or State agencies, which creates data sharing and programmatic barriers to coordination of services. CJI/Alcohol and Other Drug project is a collaborative effort of human services, courts, and chemical health intended to achieve improved outcomes for children and families. DHS has launched a collaborative effort with Juvenile Justice and children’s mental health to address the common and unmet needs of children served across these systems of care.

However, according to the Statewide Assessment, other service providers operating under DHS’s broad human services umbrella (i.e., mental health, substance abuse, MA, EPSDT [Medicaid’s Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment], food stamps, and Part H programs) must respond to varying Federal requirements that often inhibit coordination with DHS. There is not a comprehensive initiative or systematic approach for accomplishing data sharing across administrations within the State agency and/or across external State agencies for purposes of coordinating services and tracking/monitoring child and family outcomes.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item cited a number of collaborations with Federally-funded or Federally-assisted programs. Stakeholders from the State report DHS is working to streamline systems so they do not duplicate services, and some funds are used to fund local committees to do “child find” activities to identify children who are at-risk. However, they report that this varies from county to county. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the CJI is co-chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of DHS and a representative from the Supreme Court. State-level stakeholders also spoke about a permanency demonstration project for children in long-term settings. This is part of the IV-E waiver program and is a collaboration between DHS and Medicaid that enables children to maintain Medicaid benefits when they are adopted. Seven hundred families were reported to be enrolled at the time of the CFSR. Stakeholders also described DHS collaborating with TANF and mental health in ways to better deliver services. In addition, several stakeholders described the Integrated Services Project, which coordinates child welfare, health care, and social services and looks at 11 items. The Urban Institute is conducting an evaluation of the eight pilot projects, and they are in their third year of delivering services. Stakeholders from the State also report using TANF funds to coordinate staff training on the use of a mental and chemical screening tool.

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

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

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

Minnesota is in Substantial Conformity for the systemic factor Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Minnesota was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below. The State’s most recent onsite Title IV-E Eligibility Review was conducted on June 11 through June 14, 2007. The review verifies the accuracy of a State’s claim for reimbursement of payments made on behalf of eligible children placed in homes and institutions and revealed high-quality licensing and safety check practices. These practices in the Minnesota case files were exceptional, and no concerns emerged during the review process about licensing or safety checks. All foster care providers were fully licensed during all periods for which the State claimed title IV-E funds on behalf of children placed with them, and this information was clearly documented in the case files. Criminal background check information was readily available for all foster family homes and child care institutions in the sample. Several reviewers also noted while examining the licensing information that Minnesota has already taken steps to comply with the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of

2006, which is not presently under the purview of the eligibility review. Licensing and safety checks were clear strengths during this review. However, the State did not provide data to support the rating of their licensing and safety check practices in the Statewide Assessment.

Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota rules define licensing standards for residential facilities and foster care homes, along with certification requirements for related program service delivery, including mental health treatment, chemical health treatment, non-secure correctional facilities, and family foster homes. Minnesota statutes define the standards for facilities that serve persons with developmental disabilities and establish the requirements for adoption home studies, including completion of criminal and social services background checks. The DHS Division of Licensing enforces standards adopted to protect the health, safety, rights, and well-being of children in programs required to be licensed. The licensing standards for all licensed facilities that serve children were updated in 2004 and 2005. The DHS Division of Licensing directly licenses all residential child treatment facilities. The Department of Corrections licenses correctional facilities. Both departments conduct periodic onsite reviews and monitor plans for corrective action when indicated. County social service agencies license, support, and monitor local family foster homes. A few approved, private child placing agencies license, support, and monitor treatment family foster homes. Treatment homes often provide care for children with more serious emotional and behavioral needs. Both county and private licensing agencies share licensing recommendations with DHS.

Minnesota statutes permit emergency placement of a child with a relative who is not licensed provided that the following occurs:

- An initial inspection is performed. Whenever possible, this inspection should occur before the child is placed but no later than 3 working days after placement.
- The relative is provided with an application for a foster care license.

Since 2003, DHS has utilized the *Commissioner's Designated Format for Completion of an Adoption and Child Foster Care Study*, which merged the foster care and adoption home studies into one format. The Statewide Assessment reports that in order to assist counties in the adoption process, DHS contracts with nine licensed private adoption agencies to recruit, train, and conduct home studies of families interested in adopting one or more children under State guardianship. In addition to State statutory requirements,

DHS’s contractual agreements establish minimum training and home-study standards. With the support of AdoptUSKids, Minnesota initiated a Breakthrough Series Collaborative for Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families. Eight county-based teams elected to participate and commit to improving the quality of their foster care system through self-evaluation, planning, goal setting, and ongoing measurement of their progress.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, the majority of stakeholders across the sites was in agreement with the Statewide Assessment and reported that DHS standards are uniform statewide, and they are in place for all types of residential environments, including group homes, treatment centers, foster homes, and relative homes. Stakeholders report that licensing for children in residential facilities is monitored by the State Licensing Division, and foster care licensing is monitored by the counties. In terms of the home study process, stakeholders indicated that there is one application process for foster and adoptive homes. Stakeholders also reported that Health Department and building code approval are required for all licensing.

Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength because the State has demonstrated that standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota rules define licensing standards for residential facilities and foster care homes, along with certification requirements for related program service delivery with mental health treatment, chemical health treatment, non-secure correctional facilities, and family foster homes all covered under this chapter. Minnesota rules also define licensing standards for family child care and child care centers and establish minimum standards for performing licensing functions and uniform enforcement rules regarding family foster care and other licensed child and health care programs.

The Statewide Assessment reports that State, county, and private child placing agencies employ staff to conduct license inspections for new and existing programs, monitor compliance with license regulations, process variances to licensing rules, provide technical assistance and training, conduct investigations of alleged licensing violations, issue correction orders, and, if appropriate, recommend fines and conditional licenses or other licensing actions. Site visits are required at least once every 2 years. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that the DHS Division of Licensing issues licenses for private child-placing agencies and conducts onsite compliance reviews every 2 years. The Licensing Division also reviews county social service agencies every 4 years to certify compliance with Minnesota rules. DHS reviews and approves all title IV-E facility applications, makes site visits when necessary, and publishes a

quarterly bulletin identifying IV-E approved facilities. In 2005 and 2007, a Federal Title IV-E Audit was conducted in Minnesota, and the State was found in substantial compliance with IV-E requirements.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that child foster care and child care licensing functions are carried out across 87 counties and several private agencies. Uniformly applying licensing regulations is a continuous effort, especially if agencies are understaffed and licensors have mixed caseloads. The MCWTS offers training for caseworkers and foster families that address key practice issues and promote teamwork between licensing agencies and providers. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety developed and provides car seats and restraints training statewide for child foster care and childcare providers. This training was required in 2005 for all licensed providers.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Information from the Statewide Assessment is consistent with the CFSR onsite stakeholder interviews, which indicate that the standards are applied equally to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving IV-E or IV-B funds. In addition, the same standards were reported to apply to both relative/kinship foster homes and non-related foster family homes. In addition, stakeholders noted appropriate relative placement on an emergency basis, with families required to begin the licensing process immediately.

Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as Strength because 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. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, currently DHS, county, and/or private child placing agencies complete background studies. Minnesota statutes establish the requirements for criminal and social services background checks that must be completed as part of an adoption home study. This statute does not preclude adoption by a person with a criminal conviction or finding of substantiated maltreatment. However, the statute does require an evaluation of the effect of a conviction or finding on the ability to care for the child. Minnesota statutes require agencies to complete a post-placement assessment and file a report to the court within 90 days of receipt of an adoption petition. The assessment and report must evaluate the environment and antecedents of the child to be adopted, the home of the petitioners, and whether placement with the petitioners meets the needs of the child. The report must also include a

recommendation to the court on whether the petition should or should not be granted. Minnesota statutes require that an out-of-home placement plan be developed within 30 days of placement for all children in foster or pre-adoptive placement. Safety and related service delivery issues must be addressed in all plans. Background studies are completed by the foster care or adoption agency for all applicants and household members over age 13. The DHS Division of Licensing completes background studies for correctional institutions. The subject of the background study provides identifying information and his or her home addresses for the past 5 years. Convictions, arrests, and investigation information and maltreatment records, if the subject is age 23 or younger, are reviewed. Background checks are completed every 2 years for family foster care and institutions staff.

The Statewide Assessment reports that background studies for adoptive parents are completed annually. Background studies are completed within 15 days, and the subject is notified of the results in writing. Specific crimes and serious or recurring maltreatment findings are disqualifiers for foster care licensure. When a disqualification factor is identified, the subject of the background study and the license holder are notified in writing that the subject is disqualified from direct contact. The subject may ask for the disqualification to be reconsidered. A disqualification factor that is not set aside or variance granted is reason to deny a foster care license. Background studies for adoptive placements are reviewed individually by the adoption agency to assess safety and risk. County or child placing agencies approve or not approve studies, and DHS determines title IV-E eligibility. Through a legislative change in 2005, Minnesota reduced the “look back” period for criminal and social services background checks for a prospective adoptive parent to 5 years to match the look back period for criminal and social services background checks for a prospective foster parent.

Challenges in complying with Federal standards are outlined in the Statewide Assessment and include the following:

- The quality of the background study relies on individuals providing accurate information.
- Foster and adoptive families may not always notify the agency when changes occur in their household.
- Completing a comprehensive background study and the reconsideration process can delay placement decisions.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, there was general consensus among stakeholders that the State is effective in conducting criminal background checks on all prospective foster and adoptive parents. They noted that all background checks are completed before approval of home, and the checks are done every 2 years thereafter. For all new foster parents, Adam Walsh background checks are completed, fingerprints are required as well as FBI checks, and all costs are reimbursed to the family. Some stakeholders noted that there are some inconveniences in terms of fingerprinting only being done on Sunday and variance in wait time to get the fingerprint check back.

Stakeholders also reported that when disqualification of a potential home occurs, licensing workers evaluate the severity of the disqualification and the circumstances around it. Workers can appeal if the disqualification is not related to safety issues or is low-risk.

Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an ANI because there is a lack of statewide process in place targeting efforts to identify potential foster and adoptive families. A general finding of the CFSR was that the effectiveness of the State’s efforts varies by location. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that Minnesota statutes require child-placing agencies to develop and implement a plan to diligently recruit adoptive and foster families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children needing foster or adoptive homes. Minnesota statutes require agencies to diligently recruit potential adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom adoptive homes are needed. For children under the guardianship of the Commissioner and whose interests would be best served by adoptive placement, the Commissioner may contract with a licensed child-placing agency or a Minnesota Tribal social services agency to provide adoption services. Minnesota statutes require the State to maintain an adoption exchange that contains a photograph and description of each child who has been legally freed for adoption. *Foster Care* (DHS-3468) supports general foster care recruitment efforts. *Coming Home* (DHS-4591) supports efforts to recruit American Indian foster and adoptive families. *Will You Care for the Children?* (DHS-3497B) supports permanency and provides information about foster, concurrent planning, and adoptive parents. *Family Matters* (DHS-4672) provides information for relatives considering becoming a foster parent for a relative’s child.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota places first priority for foster care recruitment and permanent placement with the extended family and kin of children in need of foster or adoptive placement. County and private child-placing agencies develop and implement written plans to recruit foster and adoptive families that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children they serve. DHS contracts with nine private adoption agencies to provide services through the PPAI. The nine agencies provide a variety of adoption services. The PPAI agencies represent all regions of the State and are required to recruit potential adoptive families that reflect the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of Minnesota’s waiting children. In calendar year 2006, the PPAI agencies recruited, trained, and conducted home studies of 251 prospective adoptive families for children under State guardianship. DHS contracts with a private nonprofit agency to manage the State Adoption Exchange. The State Adoption Exchange includes a secure web-based system to match waiting children with waiting families and a State public photo weblist, www.marn.org.

The Statewide Assessment reports that findings from QA reviews indicate that counties overall rate the systemic capacity for foster and adoptive homes a strength; however, they acknowledge challenges to recruiting foster and adoptive families that reflect ethnic and

racial diversity. Some counties work loosely with American Indian child welfare agencies to assist in recruitment of American Indian foster and adoptive homes.

A challenge noted in the Statewide Assessment is adequate staffing. Developing and implementing comprehensive adoptive and foster family recruitment efforts require having adequate staff with expertise in locating and supporting families through the licensing process and placement experience. Many agencies are challenged to develop and carry out recruitment plans but instead conduct recruitment as needed to meet priority needs.

The Statewide Assessment outlines the strengths of the State's recruitment efforts:

- The PPAI has developed a successful partnership between county and private child-placing agencies and enhanced Minnesota's effort to ensure that children available for adoption achieve timely permanency. The PPAI is a successful collaboration between DHS, county social services agencies, and private adoption agencies.
- The Twin Cities ABC affiliate KSTP-TV has been an exchange partner for several years. The TV station regularly features waiting children on a segment called *Thursday's Child* that airs during the local news. The State Adoption Exchange regularly collaborates with DHS, KSTP-TV, and the Hennepin County Star Tribune to feature waiting children. Positive media coverage generated by the Homecoming Project led to unexpected success in recruiting prospective families exclusively interested in adopting waiting adolescents.
- Minnesota initiated a Breakthrough Series Collaborative for Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families, with the support of AdoptUSKids. Recruiting and maintaining a diverse cadre of foster and adoptive families was a primary objective.
- DHS awarded grants to one Tribal and two county social service agencies to specifically enhance their capacity to recruit foster and adoptive families.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item identified successful strategies used by DHS and counties to recruit foster and adoptive parents; however, they also reported that there are some challenges in the recruitment efforts.

Stakeholders in Hennepin County cited several multi-media strategies used to recruit foster and adoptive parents, including billboards, recruitment commercials, local radio announcements, bus benches, Internet blasts, and faith-based efforts to target African-American families. In addition, the county has a 24-hour hotline with an informational menu system that is used to take inquiries. They also conduct two to three "informational meetings" each month that are a prerequisite to getting started in the licensing process. Stakeholders report the county has found that posting dates for these meetings in a public setting, along with notifying previously identified interested persons, has been a successful way to generate broader community interest and participation. Stakeholders report that the county recruiter develops and/or updates the recruitment plan annually, using information provided, regarding the number of placement requests that have been received for particular racial/ethnic groups during the year, including any possible shortages identified in geographic areas of the county. At the time of the onsite CFSR, stakeholders reported that Hennepin County currently has

an African-American foster parent pool that matches the number of African-American children needing foster care. Stakeholders from the county reported that one of the biggest barriers in recruiting and retaining foster parents is the lack of daycare assistance. Many families who would otherwise agree to foster are not able to because of this expense.

Stakeholders from the State reported that the agency has received a recruitment grant to be used in two counties and one Tribe and that they have met or exceeded their goals and the funding has been renewed for another 2 years. Stakeholders also described several efforts to recruit foster and adoptive homes for teens including the Homecoming Project, which is specifically designed to target teens and involves youth doing public speaking events. Several stakeholders noted that the State does a good job recruiting and they have reduced delays in permanency because of their recruitment efforts. Also noted were changes in the approval process for both adoptive and foster care, which has reduced barriers for families who wish to be approved for both.

However, stakeholders from Carlton County report that there is no active recruitment of foster parents, including American Indian families, nor does the county have a recruitment plan. A few stakeholders indicated that many families are recruited through “word of mouth.” They describe needs for foster parents who will accept older children, children with special needs, and emotional needs. Additional barriers described by stakeholders from Carlton County are the length of time it takes to complete adoption, the paperwork involved, and the attorney fees that must be paid up front. Given these needs, stakeholders also reported that the foster parent population has been very stable, with some being licensed for over 20 years. Additionally the County is able to utilize foster homes of the Fond du Lac Tribe, which has 20 licensed homes on the reservation and 15 licensed homes off the reservation.

Stakeholders in Washington County noted that although there are general recruiting efforts, there is no target recruitment aimed at servicing the changing demographics of growth in both Hmong and African-American populations within the county.

Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because the State has in place a process for effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Minnesota statutes require consent of the Commissioner to bring or send into the State any child for the purpose of placing the child or procuring the child’s adoption. Minnesota statutes require consent from the Commissioner for any person, except a parent or guardian, to take or send a child out of the State for purposes of placing the child in foster care. Minnesota statutes outline ICPC requirements. DHS ICPC staff convene quarterly meetings with the State’s most populous county to

discuss ICPC issues and reduce barriers to timely permanency for children. DHS enacted legislation to bring Minnesota into compliance with new Federal ICPC regulations, including requirements found in the Adam Walsh Act.

The Statewide Assessment describes the procedure as follows: County agencies submit required ICPC request forms to DHS's ICPC unit. Once paperwork is processed, a decision on the request is made and communicated to the county, and if the request is granted, follow-up contact by ICPC staff is made with the appropriate jurisdiction. In 2006, DHS amended policies and hired additional ICPC staff to review and process requests. The Statewide Assessment reports that ICPC requests are now completed in 48 hours. These staffing changes have contributed to a significant reduction in the overall time to permanency for children. In 2006, Minnesota ICPC processed 867 requests for approval of placements of Minnesota children in other States, and Minnesota ICPC processed 762 requests for approval of placements of children from other States to Minnesota.

The Statewide Assessment reports that although the State ICPC office has improved efficiencies to assist in more timely placements of children, the timeliness of county social services agencies, as well as other State ICPC offices in initiating and processing ICPC requests varies, and these inconsistencies may contribute to delays in child placements.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, there was general consensus among stakeholders that the State is effective in seeking resource families outside of Minnesota and that the ICPC is used to the full extent of the law. Stakeholders describe the hiring of two staff specifically to work with ICPC, noting that this has improved the timeliness of the process. Stakeholders also report that DHS operates an electronic adoption exchange so that when a county registers a waiting child on the State exchange, the child is automatically registered on AdoptUsKids. However, some stakeholders expressed concern about the length of time that was required for completion of the ICPC approval process and that it causes delay in achieving permanency.

**Minnesota Child and Family Services Review
Final Report Addendum
Round 2**

This addendum responds to Minnesota's (MN) June 2, 2008 correspondence identifying what the State believes were factual or technical inaccuracies contained in our May 5, 2008 courtesy copy of its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Final Report. The following is a recap of your requests along with our responses:

- Clarity on the State's (DHS) role and county role in MN's state-supervised county-administered child welfare system
 - This has been addressed where appropriate throughout the report.
- Clarifying and/or amending stakeholder comments
 - This has been addressed where appropriate throughout the report.
- Inaccurate and/or inconsistent finding regarding the Training System ratings on pages 7, 17, 19, and 24
 - The discrepancy was resolved on all relevant pages.
- Inaccurate statements regarding MN's performance in WB1 items 19 and 20 on pages 14 and 76
 - The discrepancy was resolved on all relevant pages.
- Misleading stakeholder comments related to foster care reviews on page 18
 - Remarks were clarified with appropriate county language.
- Value-laden language related to case plans on page 18 and throughout report
 - This has been addressed with revised language in all appropriate areas.
- Technical inaccuracy regarding emergency investigations on page 32
 - Inaccuracy has been deleted.
- Revised language related to initiating investigations and assigning priority levels on pages 32 and 33
 - These sections were not altered because the language used is based on CFSR rating guidance and not the State's policy. However, footnotes were added to address the State's position and accurately present current State policies.
- Revise statements related to P1, Item 9 regarding adoption performance and tribal adoptions
 - No change was made to language regarding adoption performance. While the agency exceeds the 75th percentile, MN's performance of 50.5% of adoptions completed within 24 months does not meet the national standards, and stakeholders are expressing valid concerns related to agency performance.
 - Language related to the Department of Human Service's role in Tribal adoptions was corrected.
- Request for reconsideration of Item 17
 - No changes were made beyond those previously mentioned regarding language describing case plans and the county agencies' role. After review of onsite case findings, information appears consistent with current report language and the Area Needing Improvement (ANI) rating is supported by case review findings and stakeholder comments.

- Request to delete comments related to Hispanic population access to health care services discussed in Item 22 on page 93
 - After careful review, the section was deleted because the statement was based on minimal comments and no specifics regarding the nature of the difficulty accessing care were noted.
- Request for clarification of stakeholder comments on page 99 related to involvement of American Indian parents in the case planning process
 - Comments revised and clarified.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating of Item 29
 - The rating of ANI was maintained because it is based on consistent reports by stakeholders of widely varying degrees of knowledge regarding the notification of review hearings. While the State provided helpful information showing that a process is in place, stakeholders across all locations, with the exception of Carlton County, had noticeably different understandings of what they were and if it was done.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating of Item 32
 - After careful review, the Children’s Bureau (CB) changed the rating from ANI to a Strength, based on the fact that both the Statewide Assessment and Stakeholder comments were consistently supportive regarding information about the initial training system in place for staff. Previously considered concerns related to tracking completed training hours is appropriately captured in Item 33 and did not impact initial training to the same extent.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating of Item 33
 - The ANI rating was maintained because of consistently noted challenges with tracking of training hours and opportunities for supervisor-level training. While the State did provide helpful information on the tracking system in place, it is important that stakeholders (mainly caseworkers and supervisors) expressed consistent and notable concerns related to access, availability, and tracking.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating of Item 35
 - The ANI rating was maintained because of consistently noted challenges related to access to mental health services and sizable gaps in other areas noted in stakeholder comments from each county. CB hopes the State’s request for the definition of “key services” was addressed by clarifying these services as those needed by the families served.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating for Item 36
 - The ANI rating was maintained because there were multiple stakeholder comments related to access, particularly from Carlton and Washington Counties. CB hopes the State’s request to clarify distance barriers was addressed with additional information on this matter inserted into the section.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating for Item 37
 - The ANI rating was maintained because of consistent comments by stakeholders at all levels related to a lack of individualized case plans.
- Request to reconsider ANI rating of Item 44
 - The ANI rating was maintained because information was not present to support statewide strategies or recruiting efforts. While the State provided more information, there is no supporting data available in the Statewide Assessment or additional State submissions.

CB Response to Items the State Imbedded in the Courtesy Copy:

Note: Responses to imbedded comments pertaining to minor changes related to grammar, language, punctuation and formatting are not addressed individually in this addendum, but were addressed in the Final Report.

- Page 19 – The section related to recording training hours was not altered as requested by the State for reasons stated above related to Item 33.
- Page 38 – The section related to the Family Assessment Response process was not altered as requested by the State because the language used reflects stakeholder opinion.
- Page 56 – The section related to adoption was not altered as requested by the State because the language used reflects stakeholder opinion.
- Pages 62 and 70 – The State submitted questions regarding placing a child in care prior to completing an extensive relative search. While CB understands that states have differing background check and search processes, several states have implemented search and background check processes that support a child's first placement to be with a relative. Staff in CB's Region V office would be happy to discuss this matter at greater length with the State if desired.

We hope you find this information useful.