

**Final Report**  
**Mississippi Child and Family Services Review**  
**September 2010**

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

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Final Report: Mississippi Child and Family Services Review**  
**September 2010**

**INTRODUCTION**

This document presents a summary of the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Mississippi. 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. The CFSR is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) 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 of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS.

The Mississippi CFSR was conducted the week of May 17, 2010. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2009, to May 21, 2010. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides the State's child welfare data for the 12-month CFSR data period ending March 31, 2009
- Reviews of 64 cases<sup>1</sup> (40 foster care and 24 in-home services cases) at three sites: 30 cases in Hinds County, 17 cases in DeSoto County, and 17 cases in Lauderdale County
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

**Background Information**

The CFSR assesses State performance with regard to its substantial conformity with seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. For the outcome assessments, each outcome incorporates one or more of the 23 items included in the review, and each item is rated as a Strength or Area Needing Improvement based on the results of the case reviews. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent or more of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as Strengths. The evaluation options for these outcomes are "substantially achieved," "partially achieved," or "not achieved." For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent or more of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two

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<sup>1</sup> For the Mississippi 2010 CFSR, originally there were 25 in-home services cases. However, one in-home services case was determined to be ineligible and was eliminated, leaving 24 in-home services cases.

outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met.

There are 22 items that are considered in assessing the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors. Each item reflects a key Federal program requirement relevant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for that systemic factor. An item is rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement based on whether State performance on the item meets the Federal program requirements. A determination of the rating is based on information provided in the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. Additional information may come from other Federal reports or assessments.

Overall performance on each systemic factor 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 (a score of 3 or 4) or “not in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 1 or 2). Specific requirements for each rating are shown in the table below.

**Rating the Systemic Factor**

<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>In Substantial Conformity</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
None of the CFSP or program requirements is in place.	Some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, and no more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement.

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

Because many changes were made in the 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. Key changes in the process that make comparing performance difficult 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

The specific findings regarding the State’s performance on safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of this 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 sections, 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 Federal fiscal year 2004 CFSR.

### **Key CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes**

The 2010 CFSR identified the following areas of high performance with regard to the State's performance in achieving the outcomes assessed during the review:

- Items pertaining to repeat maltreatment and foster care reentry were rated as Strengths for the State.
- The State met the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to (1) absence of maltreatment recurrence, (2) timeliness and permanency of reunification, (3) timeliness of adoptions, and (4) permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.
- Although the State's performance on Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect) did not meet the required 95-percent level for substantial conformity, performance on this outcome was fairly high, with the outcome being substantially achieved in 85.7 percent of the cases.
- Although the State's performance on the items pertaining to timeliness of investigations, proximity of placement, placement with siblings, and physical health of the child did not reach the 90-percent level required for an overall rating of Strength, these items were rated as Strengths in over 87 percent of the cases.

In addition to these positive CFSR findings, HHS acknowledges the efforts being made by Mississippi to continuously strengthen the services provided to children and families involved in the child welfare system. The State's commitments to improvement in child welfare case practice and policy reform are clear strengths in Mississippi.

The CFSR also identified the following key concerns with regard to the State's performance in achieving the desired outcomes for children and families:

- The State was not in substantial conformity with any of the seven outcomes.
- Some of the lowest performing areas included promoting visitation with parents and siblings in foster care; promoting the relationship of the child in care with parents; assessing and addressing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; involving the child and parents in case planning; ensuring caseworker visits with parents; and achieving adoption, reunification, and guardianship.
- The State did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to (1) absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff and (2) placement stability.

The State's low performance with regard to these CFSR outcomes and national data standards may be attributed in part to the following key factors:

- The distribution of resources across Mississippi is uneven, resulting in inconsistency in practice.
- There is an insufficient amount of prevention services and foster homes statewide.

- The State’s automated child welfare information system is not responsive to case management needs.
- The State has not made consistent, concerted efforts statewide to locate and engage fathers in case planning, assessment, and service provision.

### **Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors**

With regard to systemic factors, Mississippi is in substantial conformity with the systemic factors pertaining to Staff and Provider Training and Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The State is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors pertaining to Statewide Information System; Case Review System; Quality Assurance System; Service Array and Resource Development; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

## **I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES**

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

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two items. 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 within a 6-month time period (item 2). Safety Outcome 1 also incorporates two national data indicators for which national standards have been established. These data indicators measure the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85.7 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 91 percent of applicable DeSoto County cases, 82 percent of applicable Hinds County cases, and 83 percent of applicable Lauderdale County cases. In addition, the State met the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence but did not meet the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or residential facility staff.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews indicated that, in 94 percent of the cases reviewed, there was no maltreatment recurrence within a 6-month period. In addition, the 2010 CFSR case reviews showed that, in 89 percent of the cases reviewed, the agency initiated a response to a maltreatment report within the timeframes established by State policy.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not meet the national standard for the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.
- The State was not consistent in its efforts to initiate investigations within the State's required timeframes, particularly in Hinds County.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented policy and provided staff training and practice guides for intake, screening, and investigations in its Program Improvement Plan.

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

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

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two items. One item (item 3) assesses State efforts to prevent children's removal from their homes by providing the family with services to ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other item (item 4) assesses efforts to manage safety and reduce risk of harm to children in their own homes and in their foster care placements.

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.2 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 53 percent of DeSoto County cases, 30 percent of Hinds County cases, and 53 percent of Lauderdale County cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found that the agency was not consistently effective in providing services to the family to prevent the child's removal from the home or in conducting initial and ongoing risk and safety assessments to ensure the child's safety.

The 2010 CFSR identified the following concerns in the cases reviewed:

- Children remaining in their own homes continued to be at risk either because services were not provided or the services that were provided did not target the key safety concerns.
- There was a lack of initial and ongoing safety and risk assessments.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was inconsistent in its efforts to provide services to families to prevent the removal of children from their homes.
- There were many cases in which MDHS either did not provide services to ensure the child's safety while remaining in the home or provided services that were insufficient to address risk of harm to the child in the home.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Maximized the utilization of family preservation services to prevent removal of children from their homes
- Provided staff training to foster a better understanding of domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness
- Implemented a supervisory case review to assess the quality of caseworker practice related to safety and risk assessments

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

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

Six items are incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all of the foster care cases reviewed. The items pertain to State efforts to prevent foster care reentry (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 as well as seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining items focus on an assessment of State efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have a case goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) are in stable long-term placements and are adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 25.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 30 percent of DeSoto County cases, 25 percent of Hinds County cases, and 20 percent of Lauderdale

County cases. In addition to case review findings, Mississippi met the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification, timeliness of adoptions, and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. However, the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to placement stability.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews determined that, in 93 percent of the cases reviewed, there was no foster care reentry. However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns in the cases reviewed:

- Many children did not experience placement stability.
- The permanency goal for many children was either not appropriate or not established in a timely manner.
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to achieve reunification with parents or relatives in a timely manner.
- There were agency-related delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner as well as delays in the TPR process.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to support children with the goal of OPPLA.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children reunified who were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care, (2) the percentage of children adopted who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months who experienced no more than two placements.
- The State was not consistent in its efforts to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent in its efforts to match children adequately with foster placements to ensure placement stability in foster care.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training and practice guides related to case planning, concurrent planning, engaging families and youth, and establishing timely and appropriate permanency goals
- Implemented the revised Foster Care Review instrument and developed Regional Action Plans to improve the timely achievement of permanency plans and to provide information to Area Social Work Supervisors and caseworkers to improve practice
- Tracked the use of shelter placements and current policy compliance to reduce the inappropriate use of shelter placements and the length of stay in shelters

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

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six items that assess State performance with regard to (1) placing children in foster care near their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting relationships between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 30.8 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 40 percent of DeSoto County cases, 25 percent of Hinds County cases, and 33 percent of applicable Lauderdale County cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews determined that, in many cases the State was effective with regard to placing children in close proximity to their parents and, in many cases, the State made concerted efforts to ensure that children were placed with their siblings when appropriate. However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The frequency and quality of visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings were insufficient to meet the needs of the children and families.
- The agency had not made concerted efforts to preserve important connections for children in foster care.
- The agency had not made concerted efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives as potential placement resources.
- The agency had not made concerted efforts to support the child's relationship with the mother or father while the child was in foster care.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to ensure sufficient visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to seek relatives as placement resources.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to promote the parent-child relationship while children were in foster care.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training and practice guides related to case planning that included the development of visitation plans to promote visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care
- Developed Regional Action Plans to improve family connections

- Implemented a supervisory case review to assess caseworker practice related to the diligent search for paternal and maternal relatives
- Implemented the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess caseworker practice related to relative placements

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

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

Well-Being Outcome 1 incorporates four items. One item pertains to State 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 item examines State efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining items examine the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 15.6 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 17.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 12.5 percent of the 24 in-home services cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 18 percent of DeSoto County cases, 7 percent of Hinds County cases, and 29 percent of Lauderdale County cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to assess and address the service needs of children, parents (especially fathers), and foster parents. However, children and foster parents were more likely than parents to have their needs assessed and addressed.
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to involve children, mothers, and fathers in case planning. However, children in foster care were more likely to be involved in case planning than their parents.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children were not sufficient to ensure the child's safety and well-being. However, children in foster care were more likely to experience regular caseworker visits than children in the in-home services cases.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to assess the service needs and provide services to children, parents, and foster parents.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to involve children and parents in the case planning process.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to establish sufficient face-to-face contact with children and parents.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training regarding assessments, case planning, and family engagement
- Implemented a supervisory case review and the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents and children and the engagement of families in the case planning process

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

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

Only one item is incorporated under Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to State efforts to assess and meet the educational needs of children in foster care and, when relevant, children in the in-home services cases (item 21).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 73.8 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 81 percent of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 33 percent of the 6 applicable in-home services cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 70 percent of applicable DeSoto County cases, 73 percent of applicable Hinds County cases, and 80 percent of applicable Lauderdale County cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews determined that in many cases, the educational needs of children in foster care were being appropriately and adequately assessed and addressed. In addition, children in foster care were more likely to have their educational needs met than children in the in-home services cases.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The key concern identified in the 2004 review was that MDHS was not effective in consistently meeting children's educational needs, particularly children in the in-home services cases.

To address the identified concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training to include the engagement of community partners, including education agencies, in the case planning process
- Implemented a supervisory case review and the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess the quality of children's educational assessments and caseworker practice related to the accurate identification of educational needs and services provided

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

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

This outcome incorporates two items pertaining to State efforts to assess and meet the physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs of children in foster care and children in the in-home services cases, if relevant.

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 67.2 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 75 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 50 percent of the 18 applicable in-home services cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 80 percent of applicable DeSoto County cases, 55 percent of applicable Hinds County cases, and 79 percent of applicable Lauderdale County cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews determined that, in most of the cases, the physical and dental needs of children were appropriately assessed and adequately addressed. In addition, the 2010 CFSR found that children in foster care were more likely to have their physical, dental, and mental health needs assessed and addressed than children in the in-home services cases.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to meet children's physical or mental health needs.
- There was a lack of dentists who would accept Medicaid.
- There was a general lack of mental health services throughout the State.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Developed policy and practice guides regarding the comprehensive family assessment and accessing mental health services as identified in the assessment
- Initiated meetings with the Department of Public Health to identify programs and services to improve interagency coordination

- Implemented a supervisory case review to assess the quality of family assessments and the accurate identification of mental and physical health needs and services provided
- Implemented the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess caseworker practice related to family assessment and the accurate identification of physical health needs and services provided

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

## **II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

### **Statewide Information System**

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating an information system that can provide accurate and timely information pertaining to the status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. There are delays in data entry that prevent the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS) from reflecting accurate information with regard to the location or goals of every child in foster care.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- Information available from MACWIS did not reflect children's current situation consistently. Therefore, MDHS was unable to readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child.
- The data quality was compromised due to poor data entry practices.

The State's Program Improvement Plan addressed these concerns with the following strategies:

- Used surveys to assess MACWIS training and staff needs
- Developed and provided training to address identified needs to improve caseworker utilization of the system

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## Case Review System

Five items are included in the assessment of State performance for the systemic factor of Case Review System. The items examine 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), implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established in ASFA (item 28), and notification of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers about case reviews and hearings to be held regarding the children in their care and about their right to be heard in those proceedings (item 29).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State's administrative review process, which is called the Foster Care Review, is held in a timely manner every 6 months, and these reviews are effective in addressing the status of each child in foster care. In addition, the State ensures that a permanency hearing is held for each child in foster care every 12 months. However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns with regard to Case Review System:

- Although each child has a written case plan, the case plans are not always developed jointly with the child's parents.
- There are limited data to track whether TPR petitions are being filed in a timely manner, and there are delays in filing TPR petitions in accordance with ASFA provisions.
- Although caregivers are routinely notified of and have the opportunity to be heard in Foster Care Reviews, caregivers are not notified consistently about court hearings and court reviews and do not consistently have the opportunity to be heard in these reviews.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- Case plans were not developed jointly with the child's parent on a consistent basis.
- There was inconsistency across the State with regard to holding administrative or court periodic reviews of the status of each child at least once every 6 months.
- There was inconsistency across the State with regard to holding permanency hearings for children in a timely manner.
- The State did not provide a statewide process for filing for TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA.
- The State did not provide a statewide 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 with respect to the child.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training and practice guides related to case planning, including the subjects of family engagement in case planning and convening Family Team Meetings

- In collaboration with the Court Improvement Project (CIP) and the Administrative Office of the Courts, developed and distributed monthly reports for judges to use to track the timely 6-month periodic review of each child's case
- Developed a reminder function in MACWIS to notify the Area Social Work Supervisor that a 12-month permanency hearing must be scheduled
- Established a State-level task force, in collaboration with CIP, to identify barriers to timely filing of TPR petitions and solutions for removing those barriers
- Provided staff training and practice guides related to engaging foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers in the 6-month periodic review

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Quality Assurance System**

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Quality Assurance (QA) System is based on whether the State has developed standards that 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 areas needing improvement (item 31).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided with quality services that protect their health and safety. However, a comprehensive continuous quality improvement system was not yet fully operational at the time of the CFSR Onsite Review.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

The key concern identified in the 2004 review was that the State's quality improvement system was not fully operational.

To address the identified concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Revised and implemented a qualitative Foster Care Review instrument
- Developed and implemented the supervisory case review instrument and process for all cases and used the MACWIS Supervisory Review Reports to inform and improve practice
- Developed a data collection tool from the Foster Care Review instrument to report to MDHS leadership
- Used MACWIS reports as management tools to track the improvement of data entry quality and caseworker practice quality

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## **Staff and Provider Training**

The systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training incorporates an assessment of the State's training provided to new caseworkers (item 32), the ongoing training provided to agency staff (item 33), and both initial and ongoing training provided to foster and adoptive parents (item 34). This systemic factor does not assess the training of service providers other than child welfare agency staff unless the service providers are private agency caseworkers, operating under a contract with the State, who have full case management responsibilities.

Mississippi is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State's required pre-service and ongoing training programs support the goals and objectives of the CFSP and provide initial and ongoing training for staff that prepares them for their job duties. In addition, the State provides a pre-service and in-service training program for prospective foster and adoptive parents that addresses the skills needed to carry out their duties.

Mississippi was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was unable to provide ongoing training to address the skills and knowledge base needed by staff to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.
- The State's 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 did not adequately address the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Developed and implemented ongoing training curricula and practice guides based on the three skill areas of assessment, case planning, and family/community engagement
- Developed and implemented ongoing targeted training relating to substance abuse, domestic violence, and working with the courts
- Coordinated with the Mississippi title IV-E Child Welfare Training Institute to develop and implement ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents in identified specialized areas and pre-service training to address the roles of foster and adoptive families as team members

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## **Service Array and Resource Development**

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development incorporates answers to three questions: Does the State have in place an array of services that meets the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? Are the services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State has an appropriate array of key services to assess the strengths and address the needs of children and families. However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- There often is a lack of sufficient services and resources available in the community or county where the family or child live, and there is a lack of available transportation, requiring families to travel long distances to access needed services, including key services such as placement services, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services.
- Although the State has the ability to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families through the use of flexible funding mechanisms, the State does not consistently individualize services due, in part, to insufficient services and resources necessary to meet the needs of children and families, such as insufficient services for non-English speakers and insufficient interpretation services.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

The following key concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not have in place a sufficient array of services to assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs.
- Critical gaps in the service array were foster homes for children of all ages, substance abuse services for adolescents and adults, and mental health services for children and families.
- Services were not accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.
- County staff had a limited ability to individualize services for all children and families served by the agency.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Developed community relationships and support among Regional Directors, Area Social Work Supervisors, service providers, community-based groups, and parent support groups
- Continued MDHS participation with the Interagency Coordinating Council for Children and Youth and the Interagency Systems of Care Council to improve mental health services for seriously emotionally disturbed children and youth
- Expanded Children's Justice Act Multidisciplinary Teams to all counties and replicated effective models statewide

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## **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 and producing Annual Progress and Service Reports (APSRs) (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).

Mississippi is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State engages in ongoing consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in developing the goals and objectives for the CFSP and in preparing the APSRs. In addition, the State's child welfare agency services are coordinated with the services and benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs.

Mississippi also was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2004 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

## **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 who 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).

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- The State has implemented effective and comprehensive licensing standards for foster homes and congregate care facilities.
- The State conducts criminal background clearances prior to placing children in relative homes and foster family homes.
- The State has a process to facilitate cross-jurisdictional adoptive and permanent placements for waiting children.

However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- The State's licensing standards are not applied equally statewide, and waivers or exceptions are granted for different reasons in different regions of the State.
- The State does not ensure the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic diversity of children in foster care.

Mississippi was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was not required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

**Table 1. Mississippi 2010 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
<b>Safety Outcome 1:</b> Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	85.7	Met 1 of 2		
Item 1. Timeliness of investigations				ANI	89
Item 2. Repeat maltreatment				Strength	94
<b>Safety Outcome 2:</b> Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	42.2			
Item 3. Services to protect children in home				ANI	45
Item 4. Risk of harm				ANI	47
<b>Permanency Outcome 1:</b> Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	25.0	Met 3 of 4		
Item 5. Foster care reentry				Strength	93
Item 6. Stability of foster care placements				ANI	57.5
Item 7. Permanency goal for child				ANI	45
Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	31
Item 9. Adoption				ANI	0
Item 10. Other planned living arrangement				ANI	75
<b>Permanency Outcome 2:</b> The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	30.8			
Item 11. Proximity of placement				ANI	87.5
Item 12. Placement with siblings				ANI	88
Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	32
Item 14. Preserving connections				ANI	54
Item 15. Relative placement				ANI	53
Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	18

\* 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 Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANIs). For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of cases must be rated as Strengths.

**Table 2. Mississippi 2010 CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes and Items**

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	Percent Strength
<b>Well-Being Outcome 1:</b> Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children’s needs	No	15.6		
Item 17. Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	16
Item 18. Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	21
Item 19. Caseworker visits with child			ANI	61
Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents			ANI	15
<b>Well-Being Outcome 2:</b> Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	73.8		
Item 21. Educational needs of child			ANI	74
<b>Well-Being Outcome 3:</b> Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	67.2		
Item 22. Physical health of child			ANI	88
Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of child			ANI	67

\* 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 Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANIs). 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 Strengths. Because item 21 is the only item for Well-Being Outcome 2, the requirement of a 95-percent Strength rating applies.

**Table 3. Mississippi 2010 CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items**

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
<b>STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM</b>	No	2	
<i>Item 24. 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</i>			ANI
<b>CASE REVIEW SYSTEM</b>	No	2	
Item 25. The State 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			ANI

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
Item 26. 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			Strength
Item 27. 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			Strength
Item 28. The State provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act			ANI
Item 29. The State 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
<b>Quality Assurance System</b>	No	2	
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
Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (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			ANI
<b>Staff and Provider Training</b>	Yes	4	
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			Strength
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

\* 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 Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANIs). 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 Strengths. Because item 21 is the only item for Well-Being Outcome 2, the requirement of a 95-percent Strength rating applies.

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
<b>Service Array and Resource Development</b>	No	2	
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
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
<b>Agency Responsiveness to the Community</b>	Yes	4	
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
Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, Annual Progress and Services Reports 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
<b>Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention</b>	No	2	
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			ANI
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 foster and adoptive homes are needed			ANI
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 Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANIs).

## INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Mississippi. The CFSR is the Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. It is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (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 of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS.

The Mississippi CFSR was conducted the week of May 17, 2010. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2009, through May 21, 2010. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides the State's child welfare data for the 12-month CFSR data period ending March 31, 2009
- Reviews of 64 cases (40 foster care and 24 in-home services cases) at three sites: 30 cases in Hinds County, 17 cases in DeSoto County, and 17 cases in Lauderdale County
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

All 64 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the children in the cases reviewed are presented in the table at the end of this section. For this table, and for other tables in the report, figures displayed may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

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. 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.

### Key Characteristics of Cases Reviewed

Case Characteristics	Foster Care	In-Home Services**
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Date case was opened</b>		
Open prior to the period under review	29 (72.5%)	12 (50%)
Open during the period under review	11 (27.5%)	12 (50%)
<b>Child entered foster care during the period under review</b>	14 (35%)	N/A
<b>Child's age at start of period under review</b>		
Younger than 10	21 (52.5%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	2 (5%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	9 (22.5%)	*
16 and older	8 (20%)	*
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian/Alaskan Native Non-Hispanic	0	*
Asian Non-Hispanic	0	*
Black Non-Hispanic	25 (62.5%)	*
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic	0	*
Hispanic (of any race)	4 (10%)	*
White Non-Hispanic	10 (25%)	*
Unknown/Unable to Determine	0	*
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	1 (2.5%)	*
<b>Primary reason for opening case</b>		
Physical abuse	3 (7.5%)	5 (21%)
Sexual abuse	5 (12.5%)	1 (4%)
Emotional maltreatment	0	1 (4%)
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	21 (52.5%)	8 (33%)
Medical neglect	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Abandonment	3 (7.5%)	0
Mental/physical health of parent	0	1 (4%)
Mental/physical health of child	0	1 (4%)
Substance abuse by parent	3 (7.5%)	3 (12.5%)
Child's behavior	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Domestic violence in child's home	1 (2.5%)	0
Child in juvenile justice system	1 (2.5%)	0
Other	0	1 (4%)

\*Information on in-home services cases is not available for these characteristics.

\*\*For the Mississippi 2010 CFSR, originally there were 25 in-home services cases. However, one in-home services case was determined to be ineligible and was eliminated, leaving 24 in-home services cases.

## SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes Section of the CFSR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 items reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent or more of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The item ratings are used to determine the performance of a State on the 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.” For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent or more of the applicable 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. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan to address the areas of concern identified for that outcome.

The Children’s Bureau has established very high standards of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our nation’s most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be 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. This approach is consistent with the goal of the CFSR 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 or the national standards for the six data indicators by the end of their Program Improvement Plan implementations. The Children’s Bureau recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often take time to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with the Children’s Bureau to establish a specified amount of improvement or to determine specified activities for their Program Improvement Plans. That is, for each outcome that is not in substantial conformity or item that is rated as an Area Needing Improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the Children’s Bureau) specifies the following: (1) how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the Areas Needing Improvement and (2) 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 Program Improvement Plan and still not perform at the 95 percent (for outcomes) or the 90-percent (for items) levels established for the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSRs assesses a State’s current level of performance once more by applying the high standards and a consistent, comprehensive, case review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued Program Improvement Plans addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, even though prior Program Improvement Plan goals may have been achieved. The purpose is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the completion of a Program Improvement Plan.

The following sections provide information on how Mississippi performed on each outcome in the first round of the CFSR as well as the current CFSR. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round, the key concerns observed at that time and the strategies implemented in the Program Improvement Plan to address those concerns are discussed.

Because many changes were made in the 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 Area Needing Improvement ratings. Key changes in the CFSR case review process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increase in the sample size from 50 to 65 cases (see footnote page 3)
- 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 enhance consistency and ensure an assessment of critical areas such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents in planning for their children

For each outcome, there is a table presenting the data for the case review findings and national indicators (when relevant). The table is followed by a discussion of Mississippi's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR report, which was held in fiscal year (FY) 2004, the State's status relevant to the current review, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Performance of individual sites included in the Onsite Review is presented in the tables. 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.

## I. SAFETY

### Safety Outcome 1

<b>Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	10	9	5	24	<b>85.7</b>
Partially Achieved	1	0	1	2	<b>7.1</b>
Not Achieved	0	2	0	2	<b>7.1</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>28</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	6	19	11	36	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>83%</b>		

<b>Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards</b>			
<b>National Data Indicators</b>	<b>National Standard (%)</b>	<b>State's Percent</b>	<b>Meets Standards?</b>
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6 +	95.4	Yes
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68 +	98.28	No

### Status of Safety Outcome 1

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85.7 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. In addition, although Mississippi met the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to absence of maltreatment recurrence, the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not meet the national standard for the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

- The State was not consistent in its efforts to initiate investigations within the State’s required timeframes, particularly in Hinds County.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented policy and provided staff training and practice guides for intake, screening, and investigations in its Program Improvement Plan.

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR**

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

#### **Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

##### **Case Review Findings**

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 28 (44 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports 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 State child welfare agency policy requirements.

State policy regarding reports of child abuse or neglect is the following:

- Level I: No investigation required. The information provided in the report does not meet the criteria to initiate a child protective services investigation. These reports may be referred for information or services.
- Level II: Non-Felony Child Abuse or Neglect. The caseworker must initiate an investigation within 72 hours of the time the report is assigned.
- Level III: Felony Child Abuse or Neglect. The caseworker must initiate an investigation within 24 hours of the time the report is assigned.

The results of the assessment of item 1 are presented in the table that follows.

<b>Item 1 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	11	9	5	25	<b>89</b>
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	1	3	<b>11</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>28</b>	
Not Applicable	6	19	11	36	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>83%</b>		

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 25 cases when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy. Item 1 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in three cases when the investigation was designated as priority Level III and was not initiated within the 24-hour timeframe.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 89 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 1 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Mississippi requires that an investigation of a report of child abuse or neglect must take place within 24 or 72 hours (depending on the level of priority) of the time at which the report is assigned to an investigative caseworker. The Statewide Assessment notes that the agency supervisor has 24 hours from the time that the report is received to screen the report and assign it for investigation.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS reached a Settlement Agreement with Children's Rights, Inc., in January 2008 pursuant to a lawsuit. The Settlement Agreement included a Reform Plan setting out benchmarks to be completed in five implementation periods from January 2008 through January 2013. The Reform Plan called for the statewide development of centralized intake, which was implemented in November 2009. The Statewide Assessment notes that Mississippi Centralized Intake (MCI) now accepts and screens reports of child abuse/neglect and requests for services. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that, prior to November 2009 and during the CFSR period under review, individual counties handled intake activities.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, as of December 15, 2009, DFCS had 1,209 overdue investigations that were not completed within required timeframes, which is less than 1 percent of the total number of investigations received from January 1, 2009, through November 30, 2009. The Statewide Assessment also reports data from the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS) indicating that investigations were initiated in a timely manner 78.3 percent of the time in State FY 2009. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that MACWIS does not capture the timeliness of initiating investigations using the same timeframe as that established in State policy. Instead, MACWIS tracks the timeliness of initiating investigations based on the time that the report is

received, rather than the time that the report is assigned to a caseworker. The Statewide Assessment also notes that MACWIS cannot distinguish between face-to-face contact with the alleged victim and an attempted contact.

The Statewide Assessment reports that all reports of maltreatment of children in foster care are assigned priority Level III and investigated.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the State’s timeliness in initiating investigations of reports of abuse and neglect. Many stakeholders indicated that the agency responds consistently in a timely manner. However, several other stakeholders indicated that there are delays in the agency’s response times. Various stakeholders identified the following concerns related to the agency’s practice in initiating investigations of reports of abuse and neglect:

- MACWIS does not track the time of assignment of reports for investigation accurately.
- There is key information missing or inaccurately captured in referrals from MCI.
- There are delays in the transfer of information from MCI to the local agency.
- It is difficult to make a report after regular business hours.
- MCI does not make screening decisions consistently or appropriately. Sometimes reports are inappropriately screened-in for investigation, and sometimes reports are inappropriately screened-out.

**Item 2. Repeat maltreatment**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 18 (28 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 if 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. The results of the assessment of item 2 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 2 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	6	6	5	17	<b>94</b>
Area Needing Improvement	1	0	0	1	<b>6</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	
Not Applicable	10	24	12	46	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>		

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 17 applicable cases when there was one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family and there was not another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when there were two substantiated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period.

In addition to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment reports, reviewers reported the following findings with regard to the number of maltreatment reports on the family during the life of the case (“life of the case” refers to the time from the date of the first allegation of abuse or neglect to the time of the Onsite Review):

- In 40 cases, there were three or fewer reports.
- In 20 cases, there were between four and nine reports.
- In four cases, there were between 10 and 14 reports.

**Rating Determination**

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 94 percent of the applicable cases, there was no recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month period. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 2 also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, MCI determines risk for repeat maltreatment by conducting a review of previous reports and intakes, along with consideration of other factors.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that Mississippi does not track data regarding the recurrence of maltreatment.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

A few stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that family preservation programs in place statewide are effective in preventing repeat maltreatment.

**Safety Outcome 2**

<b>Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	9	9	9	27	42.2
Partially Achieved	2	5	1	8	12.5
Not Achieved	6	16	7	29	45.3
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>53%</b>		

## **Status of Safety Outcome 2**

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.2 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

### **Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR**

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was inconsistent in its efforts to provide services to families to prevent the removal of children from their homes.
- There were many cases in which MDHS either did not provide services to ensure the child's safety while remaining in the home, or provided services that were insufficient to address risk of harm to the child in the home.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Maximized the utilization of family preservation services (FPS) to prevent removal of children from their homes
- Provided staff training to foster a better understanding of domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness
- Implemented a supervisory case review to assess the quality of caseworker practice related to safety and risk assessments

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR**

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

#### **Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal or reentry into foster care**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

#### **Case Review Findings**

An assessment of item 3 was applicable for 38 (59 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were excluded 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 applicable cases, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families that would prevent placement of children in foster care and at the same time ensure their safety.

The results of the assessment of item 3 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 3 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	6	5	6	17	<b>45</b>
Area Needing Improvement	4	14	3	21	<b>55</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>	
Not Applicable	7	11	8	26	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>67%</b>		

Item 3 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- Although no services were provided when the child was removed from the home, the removal was necessary to ensure the safety of the child (four cases).
- Services were provided to the family to ensure the safety of the child and prevent removal or reentry (13 cases).

Case review information indicates that a range of services was offered or provided to families. This included but was not limited to the following: substance abuse treatment, FPS, mental health treatment, individual and family therapy, parenting classes, anger management classes, acute medical care, intensive inpatient therapeutic treatment, financial assistance with utilities and housing, and transportation assistance.

Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 21 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Services were not provided to the family, and the children remained at risk in the home (seven cases).
- Services were provided but did not target the key safety concern in the family, leaving children at risk in the home (seven cases).
- No services were provided to prevent the children’s removal from the home, although the removal was not immediately necessary to ensure the children’s safety (four cases).
- No services were provided at the time of reunification, and the children were at risk in the home (four cases).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 45 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 3 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS is required to provide services to children and families relating to the needs that are identified through the assessment and service planning process. These services include intensive in-home services, which are provided through contracts with private agencies, and therapeutic services provided through contracts to children who are in the State’s custody.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that a Family Team Meeting (FTM) or Individual Team Meeting (ITM) can be conducted early in the life of the case to design a service plan with the family that addresses immediate safety concerns.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that the following programs provide preventive services:

- FPS provides intensive home-based services to families with children who are at risk of being removed. The Statewide Assessment reports that FPS program data from July 1, 2008, through June 30, 2009, show that, of the 835 children served, 712 children (85 percent) remained safely in the home and 123 required an out-of-home placement. Of 332 families served, 302 families (91 percent) remained intact.
- Mississippi Youth Programs Around the Clock (MYPAC) provides services to enable children to remain safely in their homes.
- Family First Resource Centers (FFRC) provide counseling, parenting, after-school programs, tutoring, marriage counseling, and fatherhood programs.
- Regional Mental Health Centers are available statewide and provide counseling and assessments in addition to drug and alcohol screening and treatment.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS has not had a primary focus on preventing maltreatment and is unable to provide direct services to families unless substantial risk for maltreatment is identified or an allegation of child maltreatment is reported that meets the statutory criteria of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the family preservation programs available across the State are effective in preventing foster care placement.

**Item 4. Risk assessment and safety management**

     Strength        **X**   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 the assessment of item 4 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 4 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	10	11	9	30	<b>47</b>
Area Needing Improvement	7	19	8	34	<b>53</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>53%</b>		

Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 30 cases when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through the following: (1) conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children's home or in the children's foster home and (2) addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 34 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was no initial safety or risk assessment (seven cases).
- There was no ongoing safety and/or risk assessment in the child's home during the period under review (30 cases).
- There were continued risk concerns in the home that were not addressed and/or monitored by the agency, and the children were at risk in the home (20 cases).
- The case was closed without any safety and risk assessment (five cases).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 47 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to assess and address the risk of harm to the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 4 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, a Safety Assessment must be completed on every investigation of a report assigned a Level II or Level III before the investigation is completed. The Statewide Assessment notes that caseworkers gather comprehensive information to assess child safety and risk through the Strength and Risk Assessment (SARA) process. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the Safety Assessment must be completed within 7 days of the date the report is assigned for investigation. When safety issues are identified through the assessment, a Safety Plan will be developed with the family and implemented immediately. The Statewide Assessment notes that sometimes the Safety Plan is ordered by the court. The risk assessment, which is completed in conjunction with the Safety Assessment, gauges the well-being of the child and the risk factors for abuse and neglect.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that caseworkers are required to assess and address safety risks regularly during monthly visits and that a Supervisory Administrative Review (SAR) process ensures that safety is addressed regularly throughout the life of the case and specifically at the point when a case has been open for 90 days or a child has been in foster care for 15 months. In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the agency has increased safety for children through the use of the FTM, which results in involvement of children and parents in case planning.

The Statewide Assessment notes that, although MCI conducts a review of previous reports and intakes during the screening process, MACWIS currently does not allow for all requests for assistance and previous reports to be linked to a case history, resulting in an incomplete risk assessment process. However, the Statewide Assessment indicates that MACWIS has been modified recently to include a link to previous intake data. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that the State does not have data to indicate the timeliness or frequency of risk assessment.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the SARA is used to assess safety and risk initially and on an ongoing basis. However, a few stakeholders indicated that the SARA is too lengthy to be used effectively because caseworkers do not take the time to complete it.

## II. PERMANENCY

### Permanency Outcome 1

<b>Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	3	5	2	10	<b>25.0</b>
Partially Achieved	5	12	7	24	<b>60.0</b>
Not Achieved	2	3	1	6	<b>15.0</b>
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>20%</b>		

<b>Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards</b>			
<b>National Data Indicators</b>	<b>National Standard (Scaled Score)</b>	<b>State Score (Scaled Score)</b>	<b>Meets Standards?</b>
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +	127.4	Yes
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +	112.5	Yes
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +	125.9	Yes
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +	86.9	No

### Status of Permanency Outcome 1

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 25 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. In addition, although Mississippi met the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification, timeliness of adoptions, and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods, the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to placement stability.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

### **Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR**

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children reunified who were reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care, (2) the percentage of children adopted who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months who experienced no more than 2 placements.
- The State was not consistent in its efforts to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent in its effort to match children adequately with foster placements to ensure placement stability in foster care.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training and practice guides related to case planning, concurrent planning, engaging families and youth, and establishing timely and appropriate permanency goals
- Implemented the revised Foster Care Review instrument and developed Regional Action Plans to improve the timely achievement of permanency plans and to provide information to Area Social Work Supervisors and caseworkers to improve practice
- Tracked the use of shelter placements and current policy compliance to reduce the inappropriate use of shelter placements and the length of stay in shelters

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### **Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR**

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

#### **Item 5. Foster care reentries**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 14 (35 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable 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 the assessment of item 5 are presented in the table below.

Item 5 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	4	6	3	13	93
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	7
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	13	7	26	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>100%</b>		

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 13 cases when the child's 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 Area Needing Improvement in one case when the child's entry into foster care occurred within 4 months of the date of discharge from a prior foster care placement episode.

### Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. The item was rated as a Strength in 93 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 5 also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### Performance on the Composite 1 Measure Relevant to the Permanency of Reunification

The data below are presented to provide additional information about foster care reentry. There is no national standard for the measure of foster care reentry. National standards with regard to permanency have been established only for the scaled composite scores. The measure of foster care reentry is part of Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification. The State's performance on Composite 1 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

Mississippi's performance on the individual measure of foster care reentry (measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was as follows: In the 12 months prior to the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators, 5.9 percent of children exiting foster care to reunification reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is less than the national 25th percentile of 9.9 percent. (For this measure, a lower percentage reflects a higher level of performance.)

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS ensures that children discharged from foster care return to safe and stable family placements. The Statewide Assessment notes that a precustodial FTM is held prior to reunification to improve family stabilization and prevent reentry into foster care. However, the Statewide Assessment acknowledges that the provision of post-reunification services has not been consistent statewide.

The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating that there were 212 foster care reentries in State FY 2007; 232 in State FY 2008; and 295 in State FY 2009.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

A few stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that reentry into foster care is likely to occur when children are reunified before all safety and risk concerns are addressed or when there is a lack of post-reunification support services.

### 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 most recent placement setting. The results of the assessment of item 6 are presented in the table below.

Item 6 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	5	11	7	23	57.5
Area Needing Improvement	5	9	3	17	42.5
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>70%</b>		

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

- The child's current placement was stable and the child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (19 cases).
- The child's current placement was stable and the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interests (i.e., the changes were intended to further achievement of the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services for the child) (four cases).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 17 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review, and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to attain the child's permanency goal (16 cases).
- The child's placement setting at the time of the onsite CFSR was not stable (six cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 19 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 13 cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in eight cases experienced three or more placements during the period under review.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Performance on the Individual Measures Included in Composite 4: Placement stability**

The data below are presented to provide additional information about placement stability. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 4 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Mississippi's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 4: Placement stability was as follows:

- C4.1: 80.2 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 83.3 percent.
- C4.2: 56.6 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 59.9 percent.
- C4.3: 28.2 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 33.9 percent.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the following strategies have improved the stability of foster care placements and reduced the use of shelter care:

- Making concerted efforts to recruit resource homes
- Giving priority to placing children with relatives

- Expediting licensing for relatives as caregivers
- Conducting 6-month Foster Care Reviews
- Convening FTMs on a regular basis

The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating the following information:

- 77.8 percent of the children in foster care had two or fewer placements in Federal FY 2007.
- 79.4 percent of the children in foster care had two or fewer placements in Federal FY 2008.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

Various stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR identified the following barriers to the agency’s effectiveness in ensuring stable placements for children in foster care:

- There are not enough foster homes in locations where children need them.
- Too frequently, children are placed in temporary shelter placements in emergency situations.
- Foster parents sometimes are not prepared for the challenges that children in foster care bring to the family and, as a result, the placements disrupt.
- There are not enough foster homes for adolescents and, as a result, there is an increased use of temporary placements, such as group homes or shelters, for this age group.

### Item 7. Permanency goal for child

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. 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. Reviewers also were to determine whether the agency had sought termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The results of the assessment of item 7 are presented in the table below.

Item 7 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	4	7	7	18	45
Area Needing Improvement	6	13	3	22	55
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>70%</b>		

Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 18 cases when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate, had been established in a timely manner, and, if relevant, that the agency had filed for TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA.

Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 22 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's permanency goal at the time of the onsite CFSR was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (eight cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (11 cases).
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA, including the requirement to document compelling reasons for not filing for TPR in the case file (10 cases).

ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 47 percent of 19 applicable cases.

The following case goals were identified for the 40 foster care cases:

- Adoption only (eight cases)
- Reunification with parents only (nine cases)
- Guardianship only (one case)
- Other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) only (six cases)
- Concurrent goals of adoption and reunification with parents (one case)
- Concurrent goals of guardianship and reunification with parents (two cases)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and reunification with relatives (11 cases)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and OPPLA (two cases)

### **Rating Determination**

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 45 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and had met ASFA requirements when relevant. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 7 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Performance on the Individual Measures Included in Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods**

The data below are presented to provide additional information about permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards were established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 3 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Mississippi's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods was the following:

- C3.1: 33.5 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the target period. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 29.1 percent.
- C3.2: 97.6 percent of the children exiting foster care during the target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage is greater than the national median of 96.8 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 98.0 percent.
- C3.3: 46.9 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percentage is less than the national median of 47.8 percent but greater than the national 25th percentile of 37.5 percent. (For this measure, a lower percentage reflects a higher levels of performance.)

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS requires that the case plan, which includes the child's permanency goal, must be developed within 30 days of custody. The Statewide Assessment reports that every case must have a concurrent plan and that caseworkers must provide clear documentation to the court regarding the compelling reason for the alternate, or concurrent, plan. The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that despite guidance provided regarding concurrent planning, most caseworkers pursue one permanency plan at a time.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following case plan goals:

- Reunification with a parent or primary caregiver
- Custody with a relative
- Adoption
- Durable legal custody or legal guardianship
- Living independently
- Long-term foster care

The Statewide Assessment notes that children cannot be assigned the goal of living independently unless they are age 16 or older and cannot be assigned the goal of long-term foster care unless they are age 14 or older. Children who are placed voluntarily without a court order assigning jurisdiction to the agency also may not be assigned to the goal of long-term foster care.

The Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review show that 95.6 percent of children had a permanency plan in State FY 2009. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review program monitoring the appropriateness of permanency plans on a small sample of cases monthly show that 92 percent of permanency plans were appropriate in State FY 2008.

The Statewide Assessment notes that State statute requires that a petition for TPR must be filed when a child has been in custody for 6 months and the parents have not made reasonable efforts toward reunification.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

The key concerns addressed by stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR are whether appropriate case plan goals are established in a timely manner and whether concurrent planning occurs.

With regard to the agency’s effectiveness in setting appropriate goals in a timely manner, most stakeholders expressed the opinion that goals are set in a timely manner and that the court approves goals.

With regard to the agency’s effectiveness in concurrent planning, most stakeholders indicated that concurrent goals usually are established as secondary to the main case plan goal, and thus are not a focus of case plan activity.

**Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 8 was applicable for 26 (65 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, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of the assessment of item 8 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 8 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	2	4	2	8	<b>31</b>
Area Needing Improvement	4	10	4	18	<b>69</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	6	4	14	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>33%</b>		

Item 8 was rated as a Strength in eight cases when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency had made concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 18 cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner. Some of the specific concerns identified pertained to a lack of effort to establish paternity, a lack of effort to identify appropriate relatives for placement, and a lack of effort to ensure adequate visitation.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 31 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 8 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Performance on the Individual Measures Pertaining to Timeliness Included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification**

The data below are presented to provide additional information about the timeliness of reunification. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 1 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Mississippi's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification is presented below for the measures pertaining to timeliness:

- C1.1: 66.0 percent of the reunifications occurred in more than 8 days but less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 69.9 percent.
- C1.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification after being in foster care for at least 8 days was 7.9 months. This length of stay is longer than the national median of 6.5 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.)
- C1.3: 43.0 percent of children entering foster care in the 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in more than 7 days but less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage is greater than the national median of 39.4 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 48.4 percent.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the use of FTMs ensure that families are involved in case planning throughout the case and that appropriate support services are put into place prior to and after reunification.

The Statewide Assessment reports that during November 2009, 53 percent of children leaving custody were reunited with a parent or caregiver; 69 percent of these occurred within 12 months. At the time of reunification, 10 percent were placed with a relative who was given durable legal custody.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

A few stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in achieving reunification when the agency works diligently with the family and involves the parents in case planning.

## Item 9. Adoption

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 9 (22.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. The results of the assessment of item 9 are presented in the table below.

Item 9 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	0	0	0	0	0
Area Needing Improvement	2	4	3	9	100
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	16	7	31	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>		

Item 9 was not rated as a Strength in any of the cases reviewed. Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers identified one or more of the following:

- Delays in filing for TPR (four cases)
- Delays in the TPR process after filing (three cases)
- Delays in identifying appropriate adoptive placements (three cases)

Additional findings relevant to this item were the following:

- Of the nine children with a goal of adoption, four achieved the goal during the period under review.
- Of the four children who had a finalized adoption during the period under review, one had been in foster care for less than 24 months, but reviewers determined that the adoption could have been achieved sooner.
- Of the five children with a goal of adoption who were not adopted during the period under review, four had been in foster care for at least 24 months.

### Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that there were no cases in which the agency had made concerted efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. Item 9 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Performance on the Individual Measures Included in Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions**

The data below are presented to provide additional information about the timeliness of adoptions. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 2 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Mississippi's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions is presented below:

- C2.1: 28.8 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 but less than the national 75th percentile of 36.6 percent.
- C2.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 32.7 months. This median length of stay is longer than the national median of 32.4 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflect a higher level of performance.)
- C2.3: 24.6 percent of children who were 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 greater than the national 75th percentile of 22.7 percent.
- C2.4: 15.7 percent of children who were 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 greater than the national 75th percentile of 10.9 percent.
- C2.5: 57.3 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 53.7 percent.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS provides for concurrent planning and dual licensure for resource families to expedite permanency plans, including adoption, for children in custody. The Statewide Assessment notes that the use of FTMs promotes the development of permanent relative placement resources.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that State statute requires that a petition for TPR must be filed when a child has been in custody for 6 months and parents have not made reasonable efforts toward reunification. In these circumstances, caseworkers must prepare a TPR referral packet and obtain permission from the Permanency Unit prior to forwarding the referral to the attorney general's office for legal action. The TPR referral must be made within 30 days from the time the goal of adoption becomes the permanent plan for the child.

The Statewide Assessment reports that data from Chancery Court districts in Mississippi show that in Federal FY 2009, 59.9 percent of children who became free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of TPR.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Various stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR identified the following factors that facilitate timely adoptions for children:

- When parents voluntarily relinquish their parental rights
- When a home is identified for children prior to TPR
- When the TPR referral packet is complete and error-free and the TPR can be finalized quickly

Various stakeholders identified the following barriers to achieving timely adoptions for children:

- Difficulties in assembling the TPR referral packet for the attorney general’s office
- Delays in the court setting hearings to finalize TPR and adoption
- High turnover in the caseworker position and resulting delays in completing paperwork and other tasks associated with finalizing adoptions
- Courts routinely granting additional time to allow parents to continue to work toward reunification
- The reluctance to file TPR petitions prior to receiving court permission to file
- Resistance from adolescents to the concepts of TPR and adoption

**Item 10. Other planned permanent living arrangement**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 10 was applicable for 8 (20 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 of the assessment of item 10 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 10 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	2	4	0	6	75
Area Needing Improvement	1	0	1	2	25
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	16	9	32	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0</b>		

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in six cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement for the child and/or to provide the necessary service to prepare the child for independent living.

Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in two cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- Concerted efforts were not made to provide the child with independent living (IL) services (one case).
- Concerted efforts were not made to ensure that the child was placed in a permanent living arrangement (two cases).

The following provides information about the age of the child at the time the goal of OPPLA was established:

- Three children were older than age 12 but younger than age 16.
- Five children were age 16 or older.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 75 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 10 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS has an IL program to help youth attain self-sufficiency. For youth age 16 or older, an FTM is held every 90 days and a transitional living plan is developed that includes a step-by-step plan for achieving a permanent living arrangement after emancipation. The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS has developed a manual, *A Resource Guide for Living Independently in Mississippi*, that provides information and assistance related to housing, medical care, mental health, legal issues, education, and financial needs.

The Statewide Assessment reports that at the time the Statewide Assessment was prepared there were 920 children in foster care between the ages of 16 and 18, representing 25 percent of the total foster care population. The Statewide Assessment also reports that an independent assessment of the IL program found that, although the program is well received by the youth, there are no indications that youth are actively involved in the development of their independent living plans and there are limited services available to tailor plans to the individual needs of youth in foster care.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally provides IL services to youth in foster care. A few stakeholders noted that the MYPAC is effective. However, several stakeholders indicated that the State does not have sufficient resources statewide to assist youth in making a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

## Permanency Outcome 2

<b>Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	4	5	3	12	<b>30.8</b>
Partially Achieved	6	13	6	25	<b>64.1</b>
Not Achieved	0	2	0	2	<b>5.1</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>39</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	0	1	1	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>33%</b>		

### Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 30.8 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to ensure sufficient visitation among children and their parents and siblings in foster care.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to seek relatives as placement resources.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to promote the parent-child relationship while children are in foster care.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training and practice guides related to case planning that included the development of visitation plans to promote visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care
- Developed Regional Action Plans to improve family connections
- Implemented a supervisory case review to assess caseworker practice related to the diligent search for paternal and maternal relatives
- Implemented the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess caseworker practice related to relative placements

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

**Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 11 was applicable for 32 (80 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if: TPR was attained prior to the period under review, contact with parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interests, and/or parents were deceased or their whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child’s most current foster care setting was near the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of the assessment of item 11 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 11 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	8	15	5	28	<b>87.5</b>
Area Needing Improvement	1	3	0	4	<b>12.5</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>32</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	2	5	8	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>100%</b>		

Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 28 cases when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed in the same community or county as the parents or in close proximity (21 cases).
- Even though the child was placed out of his or her community or county, the placement was necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the permanency goal (seven cases).

Item 11 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in four cases when reviewers determined that the child was not placed in close proximity to the child’s parents.

**Rating Determination**

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 87.5 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed children in locations close to their parents or relatives when appropriate. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 11 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to make reasonable efforts to place a child in a foster care placement in close proximity to the child’s family of origin. Caseworkers also are required to place children within 50 miles of their homes and must have approval from the regional director for any placements outside that radius. For example, caseworkers may place children outside a 50-mile radius from their homes when the placement is necessary to keep siblings together.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that DFCS does not have data to track the number of placements outside a 50-mile radius from the home.

The Statewide Assessment also acknowledges that, although efforts are being made to license more relatives and resource families, there is still a lack of resource foster homes in the locations where placements are needed.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

A few stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in placing children in foster care in close proximity to their homes. However, a few stakeholders indicated that there are not enough foster homes located in the communities from which many of the children enter foster care.

### Item 12. Placement with siblings

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 25 (62.5 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 currently were or had been placed together and, if separated, whether the separation was necessary to meet the service or safety needs of one or more of the children. The results of the assessment of item 12 are presented in the table below.

Item 12 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	6	10	6	22	88
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	1	3	12
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>25</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	8	3	15	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>86%</b>		

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

- The child was placed with siblings (13 cases).
- The separation of siblings was necessary because one of the siblings had special placement needs or because placement with siblings was not in the child’s best interests (nine cases).

Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in three cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together. The cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement involved sibling groups of two, three, and four.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 88 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever appropriate. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 12 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS is required to determine the appropriateness of placement of siblings together and, if siblings are not placed together initially, diligent efforts must be made to place them together as expeditiously as possible. Caseworkers are required to obtain approval from the regional director before siblings are placed separately. The Statewide Assessment indicates, however, that siblings will be placed separately when it is necessary to meet the unique needs of each child.

The Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review for January through March 2008 show that 62.5 percent of the children are placed with one or more of their siblings and that 93 percent of the children who are separated from all of their siblings have clear evidence documented that the separation is necessary to meet their needs. The Statewide Assessment reports that DFCS does not track the number of placements of children who are placed separately from their siblings.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that, although resource home capacity can be increased to accommodate a sibling group, there are not enough resource homes available to accommodate large sibling groups.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

A few stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there are challenges in keeping sibling groups of more than three together in foster care.

### **Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### **Case Review Findings**

Item 13 was applicable for 34 (85 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 were deceased; or visitation with a parent was not considered in the best interests 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 between children in foster care and their siblings also in foster care, and whether the visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families.

The results of the assessment of item 13 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 13 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	6	3	2	11	<b>32</b>
Area Needing Improvement	4	14	5	23	<b>68</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	3	3	6	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>29%</b>		

Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 11 cases 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 Area Needing Improvement in 23 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother (16 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the father (17 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings in foster care (seven cases).

Additional information about visitation frequency is provided in the table below.

<b>Typical Frequency of Child's Visits During the Period Under Review</b>	<b>With Mother</b>	<b>With Father</b>	<b>With Siblings in Foster Care</b>
Visits occurred at least once a week	7 (23%)	2 (8%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	6 (20%)	5 (20%)	2 (18%)
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	4 (13%)	0	2 (18%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	9 (30%)	5 (20%)	6 (55%)
There were no visits during the period under review	4 (13%)	13 (52%)	1 (9%)
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>11</b>

The data indicate that children visited at least once per month with their mothers in 57 percent of applicable cases, with their fathers in 28 percent of applicable cases, and with their siblings in foster care in 36 percent of applicable cases.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 32 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency 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. Item 13 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, every child in custody shall have visitation with parents and siblings in foster care to maintain connections unless a court or mental health professional determines that visitation is not in the best interests of the child. DFCS is required to arrange contact for a child with parents and with any siblings not in the same placement within 24 hours of placement and a visitation plan must be developed as part of the child's service plan.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DFCS policy requires that, when siblings are not placed together, the sibling visitation plan must include monthly face-to-face visits or contact by phone or in writing when face-to-face visits cannot take place. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that resource families facilitate visitations for children and their parents and siblings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DFCS does not have data to track the frequency of children's visits with parents and siblings in foster care and that caseworkers do not document this type of visitation consistently. The Statewide Assessment reports the following data collected during implementation of the Program Improvement Plan:

- 62.5 percent of siblings placed separately had at least monthly visitation during the period January through March 2008.
- 49.1 percent of children visited regularly with their mothers during 2008.
- 30.8 percent of children visited regularly with their fathers during the period January through March 2008.

The Statewide Assessment notes that visitation for children with parents and siblings is monitored during the SAR and the Foster Care Review process.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions with regard to whether the State generally is effective in providing regular visitation for children in foster care with their parents and siblings. A few stakeholders indicated that regular visitation occurs, including telephone contact. However, a few other stakeholders indicated that visitation does not occur regularly.

### **Item 14. Preserving connections**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### **Case Review Findings**

Item 14 was applicable for 37 (92.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Three cases were not applicable for this item due to one of the following reasons: the child's entry into foster care as an abandoned infant, the child's status as an unaccompanied minor refugee, or

the child’s stay in foster care was only 8 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, faith, language, extended family, Tribe, school, 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 of item 14 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 14 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	6	9	5	20	<b>54</b>
Area Needing Improvement	4	9	4	17	<b>46</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>37</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	2	1	3	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>56%</b>		

Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 20 cases when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members, religious or cultural heritage, schools, community, and friends.

Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 17 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to neighborhood, community, school, or friends (seven cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to extended family (13 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to his or her faith (four cases).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 54 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections with neighborhood, community, faith, language, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 14 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS is required to strengthen and preserve families. The Mississippi Child Welfare Practice Model includes Preserving Connections as one of the six practice model components. The Statewide Assessment indicates that every effort must be made to provide visitation for the child in order for the child to have continuing connections with community, school, religious entities, and relatives. The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS is required to comply with all the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act. The Statewide Assessment also notes that caseworkers use the FTM process to identify and strengthen connections for children.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the State’s effectiveness in maintaining connections for children in foster care. A few stakeholders indicated that the caseworkers and foster parents assist children in maintaining connections to churches and schools. However, other stakeholders indicated that the agency does not provide assistance to children in maintaining connections.

### Item 15. Relative placement

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 32 (80 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 needing specialized services that could not be provided in a relative placement. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency made diligent efforts to locate and assess both maternal and paternal relatives as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of the assessment of item 15 are presented in the table below.

Item 15 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	4	7	6	17	53
Area Needing Improvement	4	9	2	15	47
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	4	2	8	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>75%</b>		

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

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

Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 15 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency had not made efforts to search for maternal relatives (nine cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to search for paternal relatives (15 cases).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 53 percent of applicable 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 required for a rating of Strength. Item 15 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires that priority of foster care placement shall be given to relatives within the third degree and that, when a child is placed with a relative, case management and other treatment services shall be provided to the child's relatives. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Family Centered Concurrent Permanency Planning guidelines require that the caseworker make all possible contact with interested relatives within the first 2 months following the child's entry into foster care. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the use of FTMs and Family Centered Practice has improved the ability of DFCS to identify and engage relatives early in the case.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS licensure policy provides for an expedited licensure process for relative placements within 14 days of referral. After an initial law enforcement, background, and home safety check, children may be placed with relatives on an emergency basis while the home is waiting for final licensure. All relative placement families are required to complete full licensure requirements within 60 days of the child's placement in the home.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the use of relatives as placement resources is growing. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that MACWIS currently is not able to identify the number of children placed with relatives due to the inability to capture placement information in sufficient detail.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there is need for improvement in the areas of establishing paternity, working with fathers, and identifying paternal relatives as potential placement resources.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the State's effectiveness in placing children with relatives and exploring relative resources. A few stakeholders indicated that the agency conducts a diligent search for relatives and that relative placements can be more stable than non-relative placements. However, other stakeholders indicated that the agency does not conduct a diligent search for relatives, particularly paternal relatives.

### **Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 34 (85 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if parental rights had been terminated before the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, a relationship with the parents was not considered in the child’s best interests throughout the period under review, or both parents were deceased. 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. Results of the assessment of item 16 are presented in the table below.

Item 16 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	4	2	0	6	18
Area Needing Improvement	6	15	7	28	82
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	3	3	6	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>0</b>		

Item 16 was rated as a Strength in six cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children through various activities. Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 28 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the mother (21 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the father (19 cases).

Specific findings pertaining to this item are shown in the table that follows.

Efforts Made	With Mother Number of Cases	With Father Number of Cases
Encouraging the parent’s participation in school or after-school activities and attendance at medical appointments and special events	7	6
Providing transportation so that parents can participate in these events, activities, or appointments	3	1
Providing opportunities for family therapeutic situations	5	2
Encouraging foster parents to mentor biological parents and serve as parenting role models for them	6	3
Encouraging and facilitating contact with incarcerated parents (when appropriate) or with parents living far away from the child	2	1
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>

### Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 18 percent of the applicable 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 required for a rating of Strength. Item 16 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, The Mississippi Child Welfare Practice Model includes Preserving Connections as one of the six practice model components. The Statewide Assessment does not provide information related to supporting the relationship of children in foster care with mothers and fathers beyond the use of visitation.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive comments from stakeholders regarding this item during the onsite CFSR.

## III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

### Well-Being Outcome 1

<b>Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	3	2	5	10	<b>15.6</b>
Partially Achieved	11	11	9	31	<b>48.4</b>
Not Achieved	3	17	3	23	<b>35.9</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>29%</b>		

### Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 15.6 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 17.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 12.5 percent of the 24 in-home services cases.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

## Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to assess the service needs and provide services to children, parents, and foster parents.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to involve children and parents in the case planning process.
- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to establish sufficient face-to-face contact with children and parents.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training regarding assessments, case planning, and family engagement
- Implemented a supervisory case review and the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents and children, and the engagement of families in the case planning process

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

### Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents

     Strength        X   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 parents') needs pertaining to education, physical health, and mental health. These areas are addressed in later items. The results of the assessment of item 17 are presented in the table below.

Item 17 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	3	2	5	10	16
Area Needing Improvement	14	28	12	54	84
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>29%</b>		

Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 17.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 12.5 percent of the 24 in-home services cases. Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 10 cases 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 Area Needing Improvement in 54 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was an inadequate assessment of children’s needs (18 cases).
- There was an inadequate assessment of mothers’ needs (29 cases).
- There was an inadequate assessment of fathers’ needs (43 cases).
- There was an inadequate assessment of foster parents’ needs (six cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address children’s needs (18 cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address mothers’ needs (39 cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address fathers’ needs (47 cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address foster parents’ needs (eight cases).

Additional case review findings pertaining to needs assessments and service provision are shown in the table below.

Target Person for Needs Assessment and Services	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Yes	Applicable	Yes	Applicable
Child’s needs assessed and met	31 (77.5%)	40	13 (54%)	24
Mother’s needs assessed and met	7 (22%)	32	9 (39%)	23
Father’s needs assessed and met	3 (10%)	30	4 (17%)	24
Foster parents’ needs assessed and met	23 (74%)	31		

**Rating Determination**

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 16 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 17 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires that an adult and/or a child Individual Services Plan (ISP) be developed within 30 days and updated at a minimum of every 3 months. An adult ISP is completed in all in-home and out-of-home care cases and a child ISP is completed for each child in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that, although there is no formal tool to assess the needs of foster parents, these needs are addressed during the Foster Care Review.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that the ISP, which includes a SARA, is used to assess all needs of children and families, to develop plans to meet the needs, and to monitor provision of services. The Statewide Assessment notes that the FTMs and the Foster Care Review ensure that needs are adequately assessed and that appropriate services are provided.

The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating that on December 31, 2009, 6.6 percent of the cases open for more than 30 days did not have a service plan, either with a parent/caregiver or for a child. The Statewide Assessment reports the following findings from client satisfaction surveys distributed at Foster Care Review county conferences over the past 2 years:

- Primary services reported as being provided to parents of children in foster care were parenting skills classes, mental health counseling, family counseling, and drug/alcohol counseling.
- Primary services reported as being provided to children in foster care were mental health counseling, placement, and IL services.
- Parents reported that barriers to access to services include a lack of transportation, hours of operation, cost of services, location of services, and timeliness of response.
- Children in foster care reported that barriers to access to services included a lack of child care, a lack of transportation, timeliness of response, and availability of staff.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions about the State’s general effectiveness in assessing and addressing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents. Various stakeholders indicated that FTMs, risk assessment protocols, frequent caseworker visitation, and monthly case staffing facilitate needs assessment and service provision. However, other stakeholders indicated that resources and services are not always available to support families and foster families.

### Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 61 (95 percent) of the 64 cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review, parents were not involved with the child in any way, and/or the child was too young or had cognitive delays or other conditions that were barriers to participation in case planning. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (when appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and, if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child’s best interests. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. The results of the assessment of item 18 are presented in the table below.

Item 18 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	6	3	4	13	21
Area Needing Improvement	11	27	10	48	79
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>61</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	0	0	3	3	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>29%</b>		

Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 27 percent of the 37 applicable foster care cases and 12.5 percent of the 24 in-home services cases. Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 13 cases when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process or that the agency had made concerted efforts to involve them in the case planning process where applicable. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 48 cases 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.

Specific information about involving mothers, fathers, and children in case planning is shown in the table below.

Person Involved in Case Planning	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Yes	Applicable Cases	Yes	Applicable Cases
Mother involved in case planning?	14 (44%)	32	10 (43%)	23
Father involved in case planning?	9 (29%)	31	5 (21%)	24
Children involved in case planning?	20 (71%)	28	8 (50%)	16

**Rating Determination**

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 21 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined 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 required for a rating of Strength. Item 18 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, parents and children are actively involved in the case planning process in out-of-home care and in-home cases, when appropriate. The Statewide Assessment indicates that policies were revised to promote family and child participation in case planning, primarily through the use of the FTM.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that an FTM or ITM must be conducted within 30 days of opening a case and throughout the life of the case to design and monitor the service plan with the family and to address specific interventions that will be taken to ensure safety. Ongoing FTMs shall be convened, at a minimum, once every 90 days to review and update the ISP. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that caseworkers gather comprehensive information to assess child safety and risk through the SARA using techniques that engage the family and nurture trust.

The Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review show that 0.5 percent of cases were found to have a lack of child and/or parent involvement in case planning during State FY 2009. The Statewide Assessment indicates that, although the FTMs are tracked at the case level, no aggregate data are collected to indicate what percentage of cases used the FTM process or what percentage of case plans were developed with parent/child involvement. The Statewide Assessment also reports that an independent assessment of the IL program found that there are no indications that youth are actively involved in the development of their plans.

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that family engagement is monitored during the SAR for in-home cases and during the Foster Care Review for foster care cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that the DFCS Mississippi Child Welfare Practice Model and Practice Guide include two components relevant to this item: Involving Family Members in Decision-Making, and Individualized and Timely Case Planning.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following results of combined statewide surveys for State FY 2008. The parents of children in foster care and their children who are in foster care were asked if they had a chance to assist in the development of their ISPs.

- 83 percent of parents strongly or somewhat agreed.
- 94 percent of children strongly or somewhat agreed.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the State’s effectiveness in involving parents and children in the development of their case plans. A few stakeholders indicated that children are involved in case planning. However, other stakeholders indicated that parents are not involved consistently in case planning activities. Some stakeholders indicated that FTMs are used to engage families in case planning.

Additional information on stakeholder perceptions of the involvement of parents in the case planning process is provided under item 25 in the Systemic Factors section of this report.

**Item 19. Caseworker visits with child**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 19 was applicable for all 64 cases. In assessing 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 of item 19 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 19 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	12	13	14	39	<b>61</b>
Area Needing Improvement	5	17	3	25	<b>39</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>82%</b>		

Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 72.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 42 percent of the 24 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 39 cases when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between the caseworkers and

children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child’s well-being and promote attainment of case goals. Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and if visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (10 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits did occur, they focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (two cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (13 cases).

Specific information regarding the frequency of visitation is provided in the table below.

<b>Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits With Child During the Period Under Review</b>	<b>Foster Care Cases Number and Percent</b>	<b>In-Home Services Cases Number and Percent</b>
Visits occurred at least once a week	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	16 (40%)	2 (8%)
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	21 (52.5%)	14 (58%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	2 (5%)	7 (29%)
There were no visits during the period under review	0	0
<b>Total cases</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>24</b>

The data indicate that caseworkers visited with children at least once per month in 95 percent of the foster care cases and 71 percent of the in-home services cases.

**Rating Determination**

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 61 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and quality. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 19 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to visit children in foster care weekly during the first 30 days of placement and to maintain monthly face-to-face contact in the placement setting. The Statewide Assessment notes that caseworkers are required to conduct at least one monthly visit with any child in foster care and with any child at risk remaining within a home and with the family.

The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating that an average of 89.4 percent of the children in foster care had monthly face-to-face contact with their caseworkers in State FY 2009. These data also show that an average of 74.7 percent of the children in foster care had monthly face-to-face contact with their caseworkers in their placement setting.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the Foster Care Review monitors the timeliness and quality of caseworker contacts with children. Data from the Foster Care Review show that in State FY 2009, 0.8 percent of cases reviewed were found to have a lack of monthly contacts; 0.2 percent of cases were found to have contacts that were not focused on issues pertaining to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment; 3.2 percent of cases were found to have a lack of monthly face-to-face contact in the placement setting.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that, although the State is working to provide sufficient casework staff across the State, there are still counties that are understaffed, which leads to challenges in completing monthly visits.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in ensuring that caseworkers visit children at least once per month.

**Item 20. Caseworker visits with parent(s)**

     Strength        **X**   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 20 was applicable for 60 (94 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 their children. All cases that were not applicable are 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 ensure the children’s safety and well-being. The results of the assessment of item 20 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 20 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	5	1	3	9	<b>15</b>
Area Needing Improvement	12	28	11	51	<b>85</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>60</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	0	1	3	4	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>21%</b>		

Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 17 percent of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 12.5 percent of the 24 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in nine cases 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 Area Needing Improvement in 51 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency (34 cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient quality (24 cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency (40 cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient quality (20 cases).

Additional information from the case reviews is provided in the table below.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits With Parents During the Period Under Review	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred at least once a week	0	0	1 (4%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	1 (4%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	11 (34%)	5 (17%)	6 (26%)	7 (29%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	13 (41%)	8 (27%)	11 (48%)	8 (33%)
There were no visits during the period under review	5 (16%)	16 (53%)	4 (17%)	9 (37.5%)
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>

The data indicate that caseworkers visited at least once per month with mothers in 44 percent of the applicable foster care cases and 35 percent of the applicable in-home services cases; caseworkers visited at least once per month with fathers in 20 percent of the applicable foster care cases and 29 percent of the applicable in-home services cases.

### Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 15 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and 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 required for a rating of Strength. Item 20 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires that caseworkers maintain monthly face-to-face contact with the parent, primary caregiver, or legal guardian of each child in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS policy requires

that diligent efforts to locate absent parents be made at least every 6 months. In addition, the Statewide Assessment states that caseworkers must contact all parents or primary caregivers in the in-home services cases a minimum of once every month.

The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating that 19.73 percent of parents of children in foster care with a permanent plan of reunification had a face-to-face visit with the caseworker during the month of November 2009. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Foster Care Review monitors the frequency of caseworker visits with parents.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that the lack of sufficient casework staff throughout the State leads to challenges in completing monthly visits with parents. In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the State has not made consistent efforts to locate absent parents and establish paternity.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions with regard to whether the State generally is effective in ensuring that caseworkers visit parents at least once per month. A few stakeholders indicated that caseworker visits with parents do not occur regularly once per month. However, a few other stakeholders indicated that caseworker visits regularly occur at least once per month.

**Well-Being Outcome 2**

<b>Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	7	16	8	31	<b>73.8</b>
Partially Achieved	3	2	0	5	<b>11.9</b>
Not Achieved	0	4	2	6	<b>14.3</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>42</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	7	8	7	22	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>80%</b>		

**Status of Well-Being Outcome 2**

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 73.8 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 81 percent of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 33 percent of the 6 applicable in-home services cases.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

## Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The key concern identified in the 2004 review was that MDHS was not effective in consistently meeting children’s educational needs, particularly children in the in-home services cases.

To address the identified concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training to include the engagement of community partners, including education agencies, in the case planning process
- Implemented a supervisory case review and the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess the quality of children’s educational assessments and caseworker practice related to the accurate identification of educational needs and services provided

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

## Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

Findings pertaining to the single item assessed under Well-Being Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

### Item 21. Educational needs of the child

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

#### Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 42 (66 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if either of the following applied: Children were not of school age, or children in the in-home services 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 the assessment of item 21 are presented in the table below.

Item 21 Ratings	DeSoto	Hinds	Lauderdale	Total	Percent
Strength	7	16	8	31	74
Area Needing Improvement	3	6	2	11	26
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>42</b>	
Not Applicable	7	8	7	22	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>80%</b>		

Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 31 cases when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary.

Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 11 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child's educational needs were not assessed (six cases).
- The child's identified educational needs were not addressed (11 cases).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 74 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 required for a rating of Strength. A 95-percent standard is established for this item because it is the only item assessed for this outcome. Item 21 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires that the ISP must address the educational needs of everyone in the home. Educational assessments are completed on every open case and are designed to address the educational needs of all household members and those persons not in the home who are working with the agency. The Statewide Assessment notes that the child's educational needs are documented in the ISP in MACWIS.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the Foster Care Review and the SAR monitor the inclusion of education issues in the ISP. The Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review process indicate that some ISPs are found to be incomplete due to a lack of up-to-date educational information. However, the Statewide Assessment indicates that there are no data in MACWIS to track whether educational assessments are included in the ISP.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that there is no memorandum of understanding between the Mississippi Department of Education (DOE) and MDHS to address the educational needs of children and youth.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in ensuring that the educational needs of children are met. However, a few stakeholders indicated that there is a lack of coordination between the agency and schools and a lack of support for education.

Various stakeholders identified the following factors that facilitate the agency's support of children's educational needs:

- Caseworkers participate in IEP meetings.
- Children are enrolled in Head Start programs.
- Financial support is available for tutoring and for college.

### Well-Being Outcome 3

<b>Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs</b>					
<b>Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>					
<b>Degree of Outcome Achievement</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	12	16	11	39	<b>67.2</b>
Partially Achieved	1	6	1	8	<b>13.8</b>
Not Achieved	2	7	2	11	<b>19.0</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>58</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	2	1	3	6	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Substantially Achieved by Site</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>79%</b>		

#### Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 67.2 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 75 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 50 percent of the 18 applicable in-home services cases.

Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

#### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- MDHS was not consistent in its efforts to meet children’s physical or mental health needs.
- There was a lack of dentists who would accept Medicaid.
- There was a general lack of mental health services throughout the State.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Developed policy and practice guides regarding the comprehensive family assessment and accessing mental health services as identified in the assessment
- Initiated meetings with the Department of Public Health to identify programs and services to improve interagency coordination
- Implemented a supervisory case review to assess the quality of family assessments and the accurate identification of mental and physical health needs and services provided
- Implemented the revised Foster Care Review instrument to assess caseworker practice related to family assessment and the accurate identification of physical health needs and services provided

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

**Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR**

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

**Item 22. Physical health of the child**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 22 was applicable for 49 (77 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 the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of the assessment of item 22 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 22</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	11	21	11	43	<b>88</b>
Area Needing Improvement	2	4	0	6	<b>12</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>49</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	4	5	6	15	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>100%</b>		

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 78 percent of the 9 applicable in-home services cases.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 43 cases when reviewers determined that children’s medical and dental needs were routinely assessed and necessary services were provided. Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in six cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child’s physical health needs were not adequately addressed (five cases).
- The child’s dental health needs were not adequately addressed (four cases).

**Rating Determination**

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 88 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was effective in assessing and meeting children’s physical health needs. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 22 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires the following medical and dental health interventions:

- For each child age 3 and older, caseworkers will ensure that a dental exam is obtained within 90 days of the child entering custody or within 90 days of his or her third birthday.
- Dental checkups shall occur every 6 months and all medically necessary dental services shall be provided.
- The caseworker shall obtain an initial health screening for all children within 72 hours of custody.
- Within 30 days of placement in foster care and annually thereafter, each child shall receive a comprehensive health assessment.
- Health examinations may be obtained through the Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment program for Medicaid-eligible children.
- All medically necessary follow-up services and treatment shall be provided.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DFCS does not have policy providing for the medical and dental needs of children in the in-home cases.

The Statewide Assessment notes that FTMs, Foster Care Reviews, and SARs monitor the provision of medical and dental health services to children in foster care and in-home cases. The Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review process indicate that some ISPs are found to be incomplete due to a lack of up-to-date medical and dental information.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, an independent assessment of dental and medical services for children identified the following concerns:

- There is a lack of access to dental providers in rural areas of the State and families must travel long distances to access dental care providers.
- Many health and dental care providers will not accept Medicaid, and services are limited.
- There is a lack of documentation regarding medical and dental issues in the case file and provided to resource families.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally assesses and addresses the physical and dental health needs of children.

### **Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of the child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### **Case Review Findings**

Item 23 was applicable for 42 (66 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 appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The results of the assessment of item 23 are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 23 Ratings</b>	<b>DeSoto</b>	<b>Hinds</b>	<b>Lauderdale</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	11	11	6	28	<b>67</b>
Area Needing Improvement	2	9	3	14	<b>33</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>42</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	4	10	8	22	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Strength by Site</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>67%</b>		

Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 79 percent of the 29 applicable foster care cases and 38 percent of the 13 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 28 cases 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 Area Needing Improvement in 14 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- Mental health needs were not assessed (seven cases).
- Mental health needs were not addressed (14 cases).

**Rating Determination**

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 67 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 required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires that each child shall be provided with a mental health assessment within 30 days of entering custody and that each child shall receive follow-up mental health services.

The Statewide Assessment notes that FTMs, Foster Care Reviews, and SARs monitor the provision of mental health services to children in foster care and in-home cases. The Statewide Assessment reports that data from the Foster Care Review process indicate that some ISPs are found to be incomplete due to a lack of up-to-date mental health information.

The Statewide Assessment reports that an independent assessment of dental and medical services for children identified the following concerns:

- Although promising strategies such as wraparound services are being implemented, they are not available to all children in all areas.

- Community mental health centers do not offer a consistent range of services across the State, particularly in rural areas.
- There is a lack of mental health providers who will accept Medicaid.
- Mental health assessments are not conducted or documented consistently.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally assesses and addresses the mental health needs of children. However, several stakeholders indicated that the State does not have sufficient mental health resources statewide. In addition, a few stakeholders indicated that there are concerns with regard to monitoring the children placed on psychotropic medication given the lack of child psychiatrists in the State.

**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 on the items included under each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. Additional information may come from other Federal reports or assessments.

Each item included in a systemic factor reflects a key Federal program requirement relevant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for that systemic factor. The overall rating for each systemic factor 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). Specific requirements for each rating are shown in the table below.

**Rating the Systemic Factor**

Not in Substantial Conformity		In Substantial Conformity	
1	2	3	4
None of the CFSP or program requirements is in place.	Some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, and no more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement.

It should be noted that ratings for the items included in each systemic factor are not based on single comments from an individual stakeholder; however, these comments are included in the report when they provide important insights or clarification on the State’s performance on a particular systemic factor.

If a State is not in substantial conformity with a particular systemic factor, then that factor must be addressed in the State's Program Improvement Plan. For each systemic factor, information is provided about the State's performance in its first CFSR as well as in the current CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State's Program Improvement Plan, the key concerns addressed in the Program Improvement Plan and the strategies for assessing those concerns are noted.

## I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

### Status of Statewide Information System

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- Information available from MACWIS did not reflect children’s current situation consistently. Therefore, MDHS was unable to readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child.
- The data quality was compromised due to poor data entry practices.

To address the identified concerns in its Program Improvement Plan, the State used surveys to assess MACWIS training and staff needs and developed and provided training to address identified needs to improve caseworkers’ use of the system.

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

### Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the item assessed under Statewide Information System are presented and discussed below.

**Item 24. 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**

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State’s statewide information system, MACWIS, has the capacity to identify the key information for children in foster care, information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews

indicates that there are delays in data entry that prevent MACWIS from reflecting accurate information with regard to the location or goals of every child in foster care. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

#### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State is operating a statewide information system, MACWIS, that can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that MACWIS tracks the exact location for every child, including children placed with a private agency. The Statewide Assessment indicates that MACWIS is considered to be effective by administrative, supervisory, and direct service staff and that it produces a variety of aggregate management reports for use at the county level.

The Statewide Assessment reports that MACWIS is designed to capture information for the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that DFCS currently is not meeting AFCARS requirements due to delays in entering the child's date of discharge. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that DFCS has difficulty with data entry due to timeliness and accuracy despite the fact that supervisors and regional directors monitor data entry for accuracy and completeness.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there are inconsistencies in the timeliness with which caseworkers enter children's placements into MACWIS.

#### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the ability of MACWIS to identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care. Various stakeholders identified the following barriers to the capability of MACWIS to track key information for children in foster care:

- The data regarding children's permanency goals and placement locations is not always accurate or entered in a timely manner. Sometimes placement locations are not entered for several weeks.
- There is a perception that caseworkers have large caseloads and not enough time to enter key information into MACWIS in a timely manner.

Despite these concerns, several stakeholders indicated that MACWIS has the capacity to identify the key information for every child in foster care and that MACWIS is available to caseworkers at any hour. In addition, several stakeholders noted that MACWIS reports are useful tools for case management.

## II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

### Status of Case Review System

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- Case plans were not developed jointly with the child’s parent on a consistent basis.
- There was inconsistency across the State with regard to holding administrative or court periodic reviews of the status of each child at least once every 6 months.
- There was inconsistency across the State with regard to holding permanency hearings for children in a timely manner.
- The State did not provide a statewide process for filing for TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA.
- The State did not provide a statewide process for foster parents, preadoptive 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 with respect to the child.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Provided staff training and practice guides related to case planning, including the subjects of family engagement in case planning and convening FTMs
- In collaboration with the Court Improvement Project (CIP) and the Administrative Office of the Courts, developed and distributed monthly reports for judges to use to track the timely 6-month periodic review of each child’s case
- Developed a reminder function in MACWIS to notify the area social work supervisor that a 12-month permanency hearing must be scheduled
- Established a State-level task force, in collaboration with CIP, to identify barriers to timely filing of TPR petitions and solutions for removing those barriers
- Provided staff training and practice guides related to engaging foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers in the 6-month periodic review

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

**Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR**

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Case Review System are presented and discussed below.

**Item 25. The State 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        X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that, although each child has a written case plan, the case plans are not developed jointly with the child’s parents consistently. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve mothers in case planning in 44 percent of the applicable cases and fathers in case planning in 25 percent of the applicable cases. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS requires that each child in the State’s custody must have a written case plan, the ISP, which must be approved by a supervisor and be updated at least every 180 days. The Statewide Assessment reports that this plan is expected to be developed with the family during the FTM, which must be held within 30 days of a child’s placement in foster care and every 90 days thereafter.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the Mississippi Child Welfare Practice Model includes a component entitled “Involving Children and Families in Case Planning and Decision Making.” In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the SAR monitors the development of case plans.

The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating that, on December 31, 2009, 6.6 percent of the cases open for more than 30 days did not have a service plan for either the parent/caregiver or for the child. The Statewide Assessment also reports State FY 2009 data from the Foster Care Reviews indicating that 84 percent of parents surveyed said that they assisted in the development of their ISPs.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there are some barriers to the development of case plans with the involvement of parents, including barriers such as the difficulty of locating absent parents and of establishing paternity.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

The key concerns addressed by stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR are whether case plans are developed for every child in foster care and whether the case plans are developed jointly with the child’s parents.

Most stakeholders indicated that case plans are developed for every child in foster care.

Stakeholders expressed different opinions with regard to whether case plans are developed jointly with the child's parents. Although many stakeholders indicated that FTMs are effective in engaging parents in case planning activities, several stakeholders indicated that FTMs are not held routinely throughout the case and that, when FTMs are not held, parents are not involved in case planning decisions.

**Item 26. 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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State's administrative review process, which is called the Foster Care Review, is held in a timely manner every 6 months and that these reviews are effective in addressing the status of each child in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that fewer than 9 percent of Foster Care Reviews were overdue in 2009. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Foster Care Review process is used to meet the Federal periodic review requirement. The Foster Care Review is conducted by a reviewer who is not responsible for the case management or supervision of the case. The Statewide Assessment notes that a Foster Care Review is held every 6 months and consists of two parts: a review of the case record, which generally takes approximately 90 minutes, and a conference, which usually lasts 45 minutes. Family members are invited to participate in the conference component of the review.

The Statewide Assessment reports that MACWIS produces a report that lists all cases due for a Foster Care Review to assist caseworkers in planning for a timely review. The Statewide Assessment reports data from MACWIS indicating that 8.97 percent of the children in custody were overdue for a conference review in State FY 2009.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in holding a periodic review for every child in foster care consistently and in a timely manner. In addition, several stakeholders noted that the Foster Care Review addresses the status of each child.

**Item 27. 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**

X   **Strength**                   **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 27 is rated as a Strength. The State ensures that each child in foster care has a permanency hearing within 12 months of entry into foster care and every 12 months thereafter. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute mandates a permanency hearing within 12 months of a child's entry into foster care and annually thereafter. The Statewide Assessment notes that MACWIS produces a report to remind the caseworker to request a permanency hearing when a child has been in custody for 305 days and every 305 days thereafter.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the SAR and the Foster Care Review monitor compliance with the permanency hearing requirement. Data from the Foster Care Reviews show that 0.5 percent of 4,495 cases reviewed were found to have an overdue permanency hearing in State FY 2009.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that when there are delays in the timeliness of permanency hearings, the delay usually can be attributed to both court-related and agency-related delays, as well as erroneous information about custody dates entered into MACWIS.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the timeliness with which permanency hearings are held for children in foster care every 12 months. Several stakeholders indicated that permanency hearings are held in a timely manner. However, some Hinds County stakeholders indicated that sometimes there are delays in the timeliness of permanency hearings due in part to continuances and overloaded court dockets.

**Item 28. The State provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act**

       **Strength**              X   **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 28 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that there are limited data to track whether TPR petitions are being filed in a timely manner. In addition, information from stakeholder interviews indicates that there are delays in filing TPR petitions in accordance with ASFA provisions. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, reviewers determined that ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 47 percent of applicable cases. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires that a petition for TPR must be filed when a child has been in custody for 6 months and the parents have not made reasonable efforts toward reunification, unless there is a compelling reason not to file for TPR. The Statewide Assessment notes that, when parents have not made reasonable efforts toward reunification, caseworkers must prepare a TPR referral packet and obtain permission from the Permanency Unit prior to forwarding the referral to the attorney general's office for legal action. In addition, the TPR referral must be made within 30 days from the time the goal of adoption becomes the permanent plan for the child.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that MACWIS generates administrative reports of children who have been in custody for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months, per ASFA provisions, and that these reports include the following information: ASFA exceptions, the date of the TPR request, the date the TPR was filed, and the date the TPR was finalized. To assist with case management, MACWIS also produces a report to remind the caseworker to request a TPR when a child has been in custody for 13 of the most recent 22 months or to take steps to document reasons why the TPR was not requested.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, January 2010 MACWIS data for the 621 children who have not had a TPR petition but who have been foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months indicate the following with regard to documented exceptions:

- 34 percent were being cared for by a relative.
- 58 percent had a determination that TPR was not in the child's best interests.
- 5 percent needed services to the family that had not been provided.
- 31 percent were age 14 or older and objected to adoption.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that, because the attorney general's office files the TPR petition, there is no consistent documentation across the State for the date TPR petitions are filed.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is not effective in ensuring that TPR petitions are filed in accordance with the provisions of ASFA. Various stakeholders identified the following barriers to the agency's timeliness in filing TPR petitions:

- It is difficult to assemble the TPR referral packet correctly, and there are delays in preparing the packet for the attorney general's office. These delays result in delays in filing TPR because the attorney general's office cannot file until the referral packet is complete and correct.
- There were reports from many stakeholders that the court must grant permission to file TPR petitions and so there is a reluctance to file TPR petitions prior to court permission.
- Courts routinely grant additional time to allow parents to continue to work toward reunification. During this time, TPR is not filed in accordance with ASFA provisions.

**Item 29. The State 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              X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that, although caregivers are routinely notified of and have the opportunity to be heard in Foster Care Reviews, caregivers are not notified consistently about court hearings and court reviews and do not consistently have the opportunity to be heard in these reviews. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS is required to invite foster, adoptive, or kinship-care parents to review hearings, including FTMs, Foster Care Reviews, and court permanency hearings. The Statewide Assessment notes that MACWIS produces a report indicating which parties are to be invited to participate in the Foster Care Review and that the caseworker is responsible for providing that notification. However, the Statewide Assessment acknowledges that notification of caregivers about court permanency hearings is inconsistent throughout the State and that, in some areas of the State, the courts do not allow foster parents or relatives to participate in the permanency hearings.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the Foster Care Review monitors whether appropriate parties are notified of and have the opportunity to be heard in the conferences held as part of the administrative review process. State FY 2009 data from the Foster Care Review show that 8 percent were found to have notification issues.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

The key concerns addressed by stakeholders on this item are whether caregivers are notified of and have the opportunity to participate consistently in Foster Care Reviews and court hearings with regard to the children in their care.

With regard to the 6-month administrative reviews, known as Foster Care Reviews, most stakeholders indicated that caregivers are notified of and participate in the reviews routinely. However, with regard to court hearings, most stakeholders indicated that caregivers are not notified consistently and that some courts do not allow foster parents to be heard.

### III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

#### Status of Quality Assurance System

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance (QA) System. Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

#### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The key concern identified in the 2004 review was that the State’s quality improvement system was not fully operational.

To address the identified concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Revised and implemented a qualitative Foster Care Review instrument
- Developed and implemented the supervisory case review instrument and process for all cases, and used MACWIS Supervisory Review Reports to inform and improve practice
- Developed a data collection tool from the Foster Care Review instrument to report to MDHS leadership
- Utilized MACWIS reports as management tools to track the improvement of data entry quality and caseworker practice quality

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

#### Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under QA System are presented and discussed 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**

  X   Strength      \_\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength. Mississippi has developed and implemented standards, such as its practice model, to ensure that children are provided quality services. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS developed the Mississippi Child Welfare Practice Model to outline practice standards in the areas of caseworker/child contact, medical and mental health assessment, resource homes and group care facilities, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of goals and services. The Statewide Assessment notes that the model was implemented in two counties in January 2010 and will be implemented throughout the State in planned phases.

The Statewide Assessment also identifies the following strategies that protect the safety and health of children in foster care:

- The Foster Care Review monitors the child's ISP to ensure that safety, permanency, and well-being are addressed appropriately.
- The SAR monitors case practice and must be conducted within 90 days of the case opening.
- The Settlement Agreement led to the development of standards for performance-based contracting that monitor the quality of services delivered to children.
- The Special Safety Review Team reviews all licensed resource homes with two or more reports of maltreatment, including corporal punishment, to determine whether any children are at risk of harm or if licensing standards are not being met. Corrective actions are subsequently implemented.
- To ensure that practice meets safety standards, the State is applying for accreditation by the Council on Accreditation as stipulated in the Reform Plan.
- The Citizens Review Panel regularly evaluates State standards to ensure effective programs.
- The State Child Fatality Review Board reviews fatalities to provide recommendations to the State regarding preventive efforts.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State has implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services. Several stakeholders noted that safety and health standards are in place and that supervisors are responsible for monitoring casework practice to ensure that it meets standards. Several stakeholders noted that the Settlement Agreement and the development of the practice model have provided the State with a comprehensive set of standards. In addition, a few stakeholders indicated that the Foster Care Review monitors compliance with standards. Although several stakeholders suggested that service provider contracts are monitored regularly, a few stakeholders noted that performance-based contracting for service providers is not yet in place.

**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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that, although the State is in the process of developing a comprehensive continuous quality improvement system, this system was not yet fully operational at the time of the CFSR onsite review. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Office of Performance and Quality Improvement oversees units relating to MACWIS, Foster Care Review, and Evaluation and Monitoring. The Statewide Assessment notes that the current Foster Care Review process requires a review of each case within 120 days after placement in custody. Beyond the case-level review, the Foster Care Review produces a monthly report of case issues observed during the course of the case reviews that is shared with county and regional senior management and supervisors in an effort to promote continuous improvement. Regional directors and county staff are required to respond to the Foster Care Review program director within 30 days of the report.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that data tables are provided to senior management on a monthly basis identifying performance on a number of measures identified for improvement during the CFSR program improvement plan period. Aggregate data from the Foster Care Reviews show that 78.2 percent of cases had no concerns pertaining to safety, permanency, and well-being in State FY 2009.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that it has been a challenge to develop a unified and cohesive statewide QA system and that there are multiple QA systems in need of coordination at the State level.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that the Reform Plan called for the implementation of a separate continuous quality improvement system by 2013. This system will be designed to identify areas needing improvement and will require that local areas develop improvement plans to achieve performance targets, program goals, client satisfaction, and positive client outcomes. This system is in the initial stages of development.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there is no statewide comprehensive QA system in place. Several stakeholders noted that the Foster Care Review or the SAR provide a measure of QA on a case-specific level. However, many stakeholders indicated that the data in MACWIS and the results of the existing reviews are not routinely organized in a way that provides an opportunity for analytic review of performance with regard to outcomes and continuous improvement.

#### IV. STAFF AND PROVIDER TRAINING

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

#### Status of Staff and Provider Training

Mississippi is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. Mississippi was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

#### Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was unable to provide ongoing training to address the skills and knowledge base needed by staff to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.
- The State’s 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 did not adequately address the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Developed and implemented ongoing training curricula and practice guides based on the three skill areas of assessment, case planning, and family/community engagement
- Developed and implemented ongoing targeted training relating to substance abuse, domestic violence, and working with the courts
- Coordinated with the Mississippi title IV-E Child Welfare Training Institute to develop and implement ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents in identified specialized areas and pre-service training to address the roles of foster and adoptive families as team members

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

#### Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Staff and Provider Training are presented and discussed 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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength. The State’s required pre-service training program supports the goals and objectives of the CFSP and provides training for staff that prepares them for their job duties. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that caseworkers are not assigned caseloads prior to the completion of pre-service training. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to receive a minimum of 270 hours of pre-service training prior to assuming case responsibility. The Child Welfare Professional Development Instruction Training provides pre-service training for newly hired DFCS staff using classroom instruction and on-the-job training (OJT). Pre-service training includes the following subjects: MACWIS, Family Centered Practice, safety and risk assessment throughout the life of the case, case planning, family engagement, visitation, and child well-being. The Statewide Assessment notes that training must begin within 90 days of hire date. Classroom instruction training is 4 weeks long and is interspersed with OJT, which begins on the date of hire and continues throughout the training period. The Statewide Assessment indicates that new caseworkers are not assigned any cases until they have completed the pre-service training and passed the competency test.

The Statewide Assessment reports that 40 hours of supervisory training was developed for new supervisors and must be completed prior to assuming supervisory responsibilities.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that participation in training and completion of training hours for new caseworkers and supervisors are tracked by regional training coordinators using information in MACWIS. The Statewide Assessment reports that nearly 100 percent of new caseworkers and new supervisors completed the required training during the last State fiscal year.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that DFCS has expanded the number of caseworkers hired recently and has an inexperienced workforce. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that surveys conducted by a national association found that approximately 74 percent of the DFCS staff has less than 5 years of experience, and approximately 50 percent of staff had less than 2 years of experience. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Reform Plan requires the agency to increase its efforts to recruit and retain caseworker and supervisory staff; these efforts have begun and will continue through 2013. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that despite efforts to recruit and hire staff, caseworkers have high caseloads in some areas of the State.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in providing comprehensive pre-service training for casework staff. Several stakeholders noted that a larger percentage of incoming

caseworkers have social work degrees. Various stakeholders identified the following factors that promote the effectiveness of pre-service training:

- There are no barriers to accessing pre-service training.
- Pre-service training is provided in relevant subject areas, including intake, court issues, and MACWIS.
- 270 hours of pre-service training is required and includes both classroom training and OJT.
- Supervisors new to the agency are required to complete pre-service training.
- Each training module is evaluated with an exam and caseworkers are required to pass a comprehensive final exam.
- Trainees complete surveys with regard to the different training modules to measure effectiveness.
- Training prepares caseworkers for their job duties.
- Training completion is tracked by supervisors and in MACWIS.
- Caseworkers do not receive a caseload until training is completed.

**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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as a Strength. The State’s required ongoing training program addresses the skills that caseworkers and supervisors need to perform their job duties and is accessible to staff. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Reform Plan requires all direct service caseworkers to have 40 hours of ongoing training and supervisors to have 24 hours per year. The Statewide Assessment reports that, although this requirement has not been issued as a formal policy, it has been implemented in practice for the last 2 years. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, ongoing training has been provided in the following areas: child abuse and MDTs, head injuries, burns, death scene investigation, sudden infant death, quality visitation, family engagement, family connections, adoption, court rules, and supervisory learning labs.

The Statewide Assessment reports that approximately 95 percent to 100 percent of supervisors attend monthly learning labs, meeting the requirement for ongoing training. The Statewide Assessment notes that, although the quantity of training provided by the agency to caseworkers can fall short of requirements, caseworkers are able to obtain the required hours of training from sources outside of the agency, such as conferences and workshops sponsored by outside groups. The Statewide Assessment notes that MACWIS recently was programmed to produce a monthly training tracking report that displays the number of hours remaining for caseworker completion of ongoing training requirements.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in providing comprehensive ongoing training for casework staff. Various stakeholders identified the following factors that promote the effectiveness of ongoing training:

- Caseworkers are required to complete 40 hours and supervisors are required to complete 24 hours of ongoing training.
- Training completion is tracked by supervisors and in MACWIS.
- Trainees complete surveys with regard to the different training modules to measure effectiveness.
- Certain ongoing training subject areas are mandatory and support new policies.
- Training prepares and supports caseworkers and supervisors in their job duties.
- There are no barriers to accessing ongoing training.

### **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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength. The State provides pre-service and in-service training programs for prospective foster and adoptive parents that address the skills needed to carry out their duties. Data presented in the Statewide Assessment show that pre-service training requirements are met for all licensed resource parents and approximately 98 percent of DFCS resource parents comply with in-service training requirements. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, prospective resource parents are required to complete 15 hours of pre-service training. The Statewide Assessment notes that monthly pre-service training is provided in each region and that there is an average time lag of 30 days between the prospective foster parents' initial contact with DFCS and the mailing of an invitation to the family. The Statewide Assessment reports that DFCS uses an adapted version of the Parents as Tender Healers (PATH) curriculum. The Statewide Assessment also reports that licensed relative caregivers receive the same training as non-relative resource parents. The Statewide Assessment indicates that private child placing agencies are responsible for training families providing therapeutic foster care for children with special needs.

The Statewide Assessment notes that resource parents are required to complete 5 hours annually of approved in-service training for license renewal. Resource homes for parenting teens are required to complete an additional 8 hours of specialized training annually. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DFCS provides in-service training opportunities and that resource parents are encouraged to attend support group meetings, which include ongoing training. The Statewide Assessment indicates that resource parents are given the opportunity to recommend needed subject areas that will meet training needs and enhance parenting skills and that resource

parents are permitted to attend any training session and submit documentation to DFCS for approval as in-service training. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that the availability of in-service training may vary in different regions.

The Statewide Assessment reports that families generally express the opinion that training is adequate; however, there is no pre- or post-training examination for resource families.

The Statewide Assessment reports that training is monitored for each resource parent and that pre-service training requirements are met for all licensed resource parents. The Statewide Assessment also notes that approximately 98 percent of DFCS resource parents comply with in-service training requirements. For those resource parents who do not comply with in-service training requirements, the resource home is closed or the license is not renewed.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in providing comprehensive pre-service and in-service training for foster and adoptive parents. Various stakeholders identified the following factors as promoting the effectiveness of foster and adoptive parent training:

- Prospective foster and adoptive parents are required to complete 15 hours of pre-service training and 5 hours of annual in-service training to maintain licensure.
- Training completion is tracked in MACWIS.
- Training prepares and supports resource parents in their duties.
- There are no barriers to accessing training.
- Training from sources outside of the agency is accepted as meeting ongoing training requirements.
- Foster parent support groups provide training opportunities.

**V. SERVICE ARRAY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

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

**Status of Service Array and Resource Development**

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development. Mississippi also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

## Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not have in place a sufficient array of services to assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs.
- Critical gaps in the service array included foster homes for children of all ages, substance abuse services for adolescents and adults, and mental health services for children and families.
- Services were not accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State’s CFSP.
- County staff had a limited ability to individualize services for all children and families served by the agency.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan:

- Developed community relationships and support among regional directors, Area Social Work Supervisors, service providers, community-based groups, and parent support groups
- Continued MDHS participation with the Interagency Coordinating Council for Children and Youth (ICCCY) and the Interagency Systems of Care Council (ISCC) to improve mental health services for seriously emotionally disturbed children and youth
- Expanded Children’s Justice Act Multidisciplinary Team (MDTs) to all counties and replicated effective models statewide

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

## Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Service Array and Resource Development are presented and discussed 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**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as a Strength. Although the availability and accessibility of services varies by county and region, Mississippi has an array of key services in place statewide to assess the strengths and address the needs of children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Mississippi has an array of services to assess and meet the needs of children and families. The Statewide Assessment indicates that children and family needs are assessed through the Safety Assessment, FTMs, SARAs, Family Centered Practice, and ISPs.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the following services are part of Mississippi's statewide service array:

- Prevention services and FPS are provided to families with children who are at risk of removal from their homes following an initial Safety Assessment.
- MCI accepts and screens reports of child abuse/neglect and requests for services.
- Placement services are available for children who cannot be safely maintained in their homes and include emergency shelters, licensed relative homes, licensed foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, therapeutic group homes, residential treatment facilities, and a specialized treatment facility.
- Intensive in-home therapeutic services are provided by contracted service providers to children in foster and adoptive homes.
- Therapeutic reunification services are provided to children with serious emotional disorders who remain in their own homes or in adoptive homes.
- MYPAC is administered through a Medicaid waiver and contracted service providers to support youth in their homes.
- FFRCs provide counseling, parenting, after-school programs, tutoring, marriage counseling, and fatherhood programs.
- Regional mental health centers provide counseling and assessments in addition to drug and alcohol screening and treatment.
- IL services provide youth with support to attain self-sufficiency.
- Adoption services promote timely adoption with the assistance of private service providers.

The Statewide Assessment notes that support services must be stipulated in the ISP and must be provided by DFCS staff, by contracted providers through a purchase of services contract, or by other agencies or community providers that provide services at no cost. Support services are designed to assist the client in addressing barriers to attaining case plan goals and must relate to the need of the client as identified through the assessment and service planning process.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following findings from client satisfaction surveys distributed at Foster Care Review county conferences over the past 2 years:

- The primary services reported as being provided to parents of children in foster care were parenting skills classes, mental health counseling, family counseling, and drug/alcohol counseling.
- The primary services reported as being provided to children in foster care were mental health counseling, placement, and IL services.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State has a comprehensive array of key services to assess the strengths and address the needs of children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being. However, many stakeholders indicated that the availability and accessibility of these services varies by county or region.

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

     Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that there often is a lack of sufficient services and resources available in the community or county where the family or child live. In addition, there is a lack of available transportation, and families are required to travel long distances to access needed services, including key services such as placement services, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, services are not accessible or available to families and children throughout the State due in part to long waiting lists for many key services, a lack of services in the rural areas, and a lack of available transportation for families to access services.

The Statewide Assessment indicates the following barriers to the State's ability to provide access to services:

- There are few service providers across the State who will accept Medicaid for mental health, physical health, and dental health services.
- Transportation is a barrier for many families in accessing the services they need for services such as family preservation, health, and mental health.
- There are not enough providers of juvenile sexual offenders treatment services, visitation centers, intensive in-home services, therapeutic reunification services, substance abuse treatment services for adolescents and adults, legal services, health and dental services, and mental health services across the State.
- There is a lack of placement services including foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, group homes, IL group homes, and residential treatment facilities.
- The FFRC program is not able to serve many rural areas of the State due to insufficient funding.

The Statewide Assessment reports that client satisfaction surveys distributed by the Foster Care Review over the past 2 years found that parents reported that barriers to accessing to services were a lack of transportation, non-flexible hours of operation, cost of services, location of services, and timeliness of the agency's response.

Despite concerns about the accessibility and availability of services, the Statewide Assessment reports the following findings from client satisfaction surveys conducted by Foster Care Reviewers from 2009:

- 87 percent of parents said that they strongly or somewhat agree that there is easy access to services.
- 94 percent of children in foster care said that they strongly or somewhat agree that there is easy access to services.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that many services are not accessible to children and families in all jurisdictions in the State, and transportation is not available consistently to assist families and children in accessing services.

Various stakeholders identified the following services or resources that are not available in sufficient quantity in various parts of the State:

- Foster homes, group homes, treatment foster homes, or shelter placements located in the communities from which children enter foster care
- IL resources and placements for teens
- Mental health assessment and treatment, and child psychiatrists
- Medical and dental providers who will accept Medicaid
- Parenting classes
- Housing assistance
- Substance abuse treatment, inpatient and outpatient

### **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 an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that although the State has the ability to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families through the use of flexible funding mechanisms, the State does not consistently individualize services, which is due in part to a lack of services and resources necessary to meet the needs of children and families, such as insufficient services for non-English speakers and insufficient interpretation services. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, services are not always individualized because of resource constraints and limited service availability in each county. However, the Statewide Assessment indicates that service providers make efforts to individualize services for clients even when resources are limited. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, when specific individualized needs are identified for a child or parent that are not covered by other funding sources, flexible funds are available through the region, county, or the title

IV-B State program. Some of the services and supplies paid for through flexible funding include babysitters, attorney’s fees, orthodontia, utility bills, food, clothing, tutoring, and speech therapy.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that the development of the ISP during the FTM is helpful in individualizing services for families.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following concerns with regard to individualizing services for children and families:

- There is a lack of bilingual caseworkers and service providers to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic population.
- Language interpretation services and deaf interpretation services are not accessible statewide.
- Although parenting services are available throughout the State, many are not individualized to meet the specific needs of the family.
- There are limited services available to tailor plans to the individual needs of youth in foster care.

Despite the lack of individualized services reported above, the Statewide Assessment reports the following findings from client satisfaction surveys conducted by Foster Care Reviewers in 2009:

- 90 percent of parents said that they strongly or somewhat agree that services fit personal and cultural beliefs.
- 91 percent of children in foster care said that they strongly or somewhat agree that services fit personal and cultural beliefs.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there are insufficient services available in foreign languages and insufficient interpretation services, including a lack of interpretation services for the deaf. In addition, a few stakeholders noted that resources such as parenting classes and IL services are not individualized to meet the needs of the family or youth. However, many stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State has the ability to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families through the use of flexible funds and ISPs using the FTM.

**VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY**

<b>Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity</b>				
<b>Rating</b>	<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>In Substantial Conformity</b>	
	1	2	3	4X

**Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community**

Mississippi is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Mississippi also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was not required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

## Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Agency Responsiveness to the Community are presented and discussed 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. The State engages in consultation with key stakeholders through statewide committees and conferences held to assist the State in developing the goals and objectives of the CFSP. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, a Five-Year Strategic Planning Conference was convened in February 2009 with 110 participants (approximately 70 DFCS staff and 40 stakeholders) to develop the Mississippi CFSP. In addition, regional CFSP meetings that included local stakeholders were held in all regions in 2009. Among the 40 stakeholders were representatives from other State agencies, Tribes, and the Administrative Office of the Courts; judges; guardians *ad litem* (GAL); service providers; and Citizen Review Panel members.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that the results of client satisfaction surveys collected during Foster Care Reviews for the period from January through June 2009 influenced the focus of the CFSP.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State engages in ongoing consultation with stakeholders, including court partners, in developing the goals and objectives of and implementing the CFSP. Various stakeholders said that they were involved in statewide or regional committees to develop the CFSP and had input into the design of the Settlement Agreement. However, a few stakeholders indicated that they had not been involved in developing the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

**Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, Annual Progress and Services Reports pursuant to the CFSP**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength. The State consults with stakeholders on an ongoing basis in developing the APSR. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the APSR is developed based on the plans outlined during the Five-Year Strategic Planning Conference and is posted on the MDHS/DFCS website for public review. In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the annual reports from the Citizens Review Panel and the State Child Fatality Review Board are included in the APSR.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State engages with key stakeholders on an ongoing basis in the development of the APSR.

**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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength. The State coordinates child welfare services with those provided by other Federally-assisted programs serving the same population. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS has established memoranda of understanding and collaborative agreements with outside agencies and divisions within MDHS to coordinate the provision of services. The Statewide Assessment identifies the following collaborative relationships:

- DFCS works with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to support MCI and prepare for future disasters.
- DFCS coordinates with the U.S. Department of State, Office of Refugee Resettlement to provide placement and services to unaccompanied minor refugees.
- DFCS coordinates with Economic Assistance/Temporary Assistance for Needing Families to support preventive services and establish title IV-E eligibility.
- DFCS coordinates with the Supplemental Security Income program to support services for children with disabilities.
- DFCS collaborates with the Division of Child Support to locate parents.
- DFCS participates with the Department of Health and Education and the divisions of Youth Services and Medicaid on the ICCCY and the ISCC to address and improve services to children and youth.
- DFCS has a memorandum of understanding with the Mississippi Department of Public Health regarding the provision of services to children in foster care.

- DFCS has a working relationship with the Choctaw Nation to ensure that the needs of American Indian children are met.
- MDT meetings are held to review child abuse cases and expedite criminal prosecution.

Despite these collaborative efforts, the Statewide Assessment indicates that there is no memorandum of understanding between the DOE and MDHS to address the educational needs of children and youth in foster care. In addition, the Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there is a lack of communication among DFCS and other agencies about services available through each agency.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following findings from client satisfaction surveys conducted by Foster Care Review members from State FY 2008 and the first half of State FY 2009:

- 87 percent of parents said that they strongly or somewhat agree that the people who provided services to them worked well together.
- 98 percent of children in foster care said that they strongly or somewhat agree that the people who provided services to them worked well together.
- 94 percent of placement providers said that they strongly or somewhat agree that service providers worked well together.
- 100 percent of GALs and court-appointed special advocates said that they strongly or somewhat agree that there is coordination of services with regard to the services the children they represent are receiving.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in coordinating child welfare services with the services provided by other Federally-assisted programs serving the same population. Various stakeholders noted collaborative relationships between DFCS and the following programs: Department of Mental Health, Department of Health, DOE, Head Start, Child Support, Child Care, Economic Assistance, Citizen Review Panels, Attorney General, Children’s Justice Act, Multidisciplinary Assessment and Planning, and the ICCCY.

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

<b>Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity</b>				
<b>Rating</b>	<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>In Substantial Conformity</b>	
	1	2X	3	4

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

Mississippi is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Mississippi was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2004 CFSR and was not required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

### **Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR**

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention are presented and discussed below.

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength. The State has implemented effective and comprehensive licensing standards for foster homes and congregate care facilities. This item also was rated as a Strength in the Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, licensing standards for resource homes and residential child caring facilities are in place and are updated regularly to reflect changes in Federal and State laws or to implement policy changes.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following attributes of the resource home licensing process:

- Resource workers in each region are responsible for issuing and renewing licenses.
- State licensing staff is required to visit a resource home monthly if no children are placed and semiannually if children are in placement.
- In order to be licensed, resource home applicants must complete training, a home study, fingerprinting, and background checks.
- Licenses are reviewed and renewed annually.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following attributes of the congregate care facility licensing process:

- State licensing staff is responsible for licensing child care facilities.
- Providers that offer therapeutic services must meet additional licensing standards set forth by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health.
- DFCS monitors each facility several times a year to perform safety checks and inspect personnel records.

- Licenses are reviewed and renewed annually. MACWIS provides notification of the expiration date of a resource home license to facilitate timely relicensure.
- All licenses are dual-purpose for both foster and adoptive placement.
- If standards are not met, the facility is placed on a Corrective Action Plan.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DFCS policy outlines procedures for a license to be denied, revoked, denied on renewal, or suspended due to allegations of abuse or neglect or failure to cooperate with regulations and policies. The Statewide Assessment also notes that Special Safety Reviews are conducted of resource homes with two or more reports of maltreatment and on all congregate care facilities. In addition, the Statewide Assessment tracks Serious Incident Reports from resource homes and congregate care facilities.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State has implemented effective and comprehensive licensing standards for foster homes and congregate care facilities. Several stakeholders noted that licensing standards include training, a home safety inspection, and fingerprinting and background checks. In addition, several stakeholders noted that the standards are stringent and that there are no barriers to timely licensure or relicensure.

**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        X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from stakeholder interviews indicates that the State’s licensing standards are not applied equally statewide and that waivers or exceptions are granted for different reasons in different regions of the State. This item was rated as a Strength in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

The Mississippi title IV-E Review, conducted in July 2008, found concerns with regard to licensing practices. Mississippi successfully completed a Program Improvement Plan to address licensing concerns.

**Statewide Assessment**

According to the Statewide Assessment, all foster family homes, including relative homes, must meet State licensure standards.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following policies for facilitating foster care placements in certain circumstances:

- Exceptions are made in order to keep siblings together in licensed placements but require an additional level of administrative approval.

- There is a 14-day expedited licensing process for relative placement that allows a child to be placed following a Safety Assessment and the receipt of clear criminal background checks and Central Child Abuse Registry checks. Thereafter, the relative home must meet all other requirements for licensure, including training, within 60 days, with no variance or waivers of the standards.

The Statewide Assessment notes that in some cases children are placed in unlicensed homes or facilities by court order. In such cases, DFCS works with the family or facility to license the home. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that in some cases children may remain in unlicensed relative homes that may have met the safety standards for expedited licensing but cannot meet the full licensing requirements. In such cases, a child will remain in the home until another appropriate placement is located.

The Statewide Assessment reports that title IV-E payments are made only to licensed resource homes.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

A key State-level stakeholder and other stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that licensing standards are not applied equally across the State, and waivers or exceptions are granted for different reasons in different regions of the State. However, several stakeholders expressed the opinion that licensing standards are applied equally to foster homes statewide, including relative foster homes, and that waivers are not granted.

**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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength. The State conducts criminal background clearances prior to placing children in relative homes and foster family homes. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

The Mississippi title IV-E Review, conducted in July 2008, found concerns with regard to criminal background clearance practices. Mississippi successfully completed a Program Improvement Plan to address criminal background clearance concerns.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute and policy require the following criminal background clearances:

- All individuals over the age of 14 in the resource home or congregate care facility must be fingerprinted using Live Scan to determine criminal history.
- A background check must be conducted within the agency and also with private contractors to determine any history of child abuse or neglect.

- A Central Child Abuse Registry check must be completed for all household members age 14 years old and older.
- Background checks are completed annually for resource families.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS has a memorandum of understanding with the Mississippi Department of Public Safety to conduct fingerprinting and with the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics to conduct background checks. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that the average timeframe for the completion of criminal history checks is 2 weeks.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State conducts criminal background clearances routinely as a part of the licensing process for all adults in foster family homes, relative resource homes, and staff of congregate care facilities. Several stakeholders indicated that background checks are completed prior to the placement of children in the home. Various stakeholders noted that background checks include fingerprinting and checks of law enforcement records, the central registry, sex offender registry, and Federal Bureau of Investigation records.

**Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who 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 Area Needing Improvement. Information in the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State does not ensure the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic diversity of children in foster care. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Mississippi’s 2004 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Mississippi has several recruitment efforts in place: **AdoptUsKids**, Wednesday’s Child, Wendy’s Wonderful Kids, Tuesday’s Child, and the Resource Adoption Exchange.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there are no recruitment plans or strategies specifically targeting African-American or Hispanic communities. In addition, the Statewide Assessment does not provide data regarding the relationship between the percentage of Hispanic foster homes and the percentage of Hispanic children in foster care.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following information from MACWIS:

<b>Children in Custody and Primary Caregiver Race Comparison in DFCS and Private Provider Homes, July 4, 2008, to July 3, 2009</b>				
<b>Race</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Primary Caregiver</b>	<b>Percent</b>
White	2,513	45.08	1,644	42.90
Black	2,807	50.35	2,032	53.03
Asian	0	0.00	0	0.00
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4	0.07	9	0.23
Two or More Races	124	2.22	11	0.29
American Indian/Alaskan Native	13	0.23	1	0.03
Unknown/Unable to Determine	97	1.74	124	3.24
None Indicated	17	0.30	11	0.29
<b>Statewide Total</b>	<b>5,575</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3,832</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that recruitment plans are not targeted to reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State conducts generalized recruitment for foster homes.

#### **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**

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength. The State has a process to facilitate cross-jurisdictional adoptive and permanent placements for waiting children. This item also was rated as a Strength in Mississippi's 2004 CFSR.

#### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Mississippi provides a photo listing for every child available for adoption to **AdoptUsKids** and maintains the Mississippi Adoption Resource Exchange. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Interstate Compact Unit of DFCS has collaborated with the Fingerprinting Unit to secure background checks for home studies in a timely manner.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there are challenges in facilitating cross-jurisdictional placements for adoptive and permanent homes due in part to the cross-State criminal background check process and difficulties in tracking cases across State lines.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there are no barriers to the placement of children across county or State lines. A few stakeholders noted that the agency uses **AdoptUsKids** and participates in the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.