

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Final Report: Nebraska Child and Family Services Review**  
**April 2009**

**INTRODUCTION**

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

The Nebraska CFSR was conducted the week of July 14, 2008. The period under review for the onsite case reviews was from October 1, 2006, to July 18, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Children and Family Services
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal years 2005 and 2006, and the CFSR 12-month target period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services) at three sites—33 cases in Douglas County, 16 cases in Dawson County, and 16 cases in Hall County—all open child welfare cases at some time during the period under review
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders, including but not limited to children, 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 on 23 items relevant to seven outcomes and 22 items pertaining to seven systemic factors.

In Outcomes: Section A of the report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement (ANI) is assigned to each of the 23 items incorporated in the seven outcomes depending on the percentage of cases that receive a Strength rating in the onsite case review. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed are rated as a Strength. Performance ratings for each of the seven outcomes are based on item ratings for each case. A State may be rated as having “substantially achieved,” “partially achieved,” or “not achieved” the outcome. The determination of whether a State is in substantial conformity with a particular outcome is based on the percentage of cases that were determined to have substantially achieved that

outcome. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome.

In Systemic Factors: Section B of the report, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an ANI based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements. Information relevant to each item comes from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the onsite CFSR. The overall rating for each systemic factor is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in that systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either in substantial conformity with that factor (receiving a score of 3 or 4) or not in substantial conformity with that factor (receiving a score of 1 or 2).

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

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

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

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

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

Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performances 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

Specific findings with regard to the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance with regard to the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR.

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

The 2008 CFSR identified several areas of high performance in Nebraska with regard to achieving desired outcomes for children. Although Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes, the State did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the individual indicators pertaining to repeat maltreatment (item 2), foster care reentry (item 5), placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11), and placement with siblings (item 12).

Nebraska meets the national standard for the data indicator pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended periods of time. The State does not meet the national standard for the safety data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment in foster care. The State also does not meet the national standards for the permanency data indicators pertaining to the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Permanency Composite 1), timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2), and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4).

The CFSR also identified key areas of concern with regard to achieving outcomes for children and families. Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was substantially achieved in only 25 percent of the cases reviewed. Within Permanency Outcome 1, Nebraska's lowest ratings were for item 9 (adoptions), which was rated as a Strength in 23 percent of the cases reviewed; and for item 10 (other planned permanent living arrangement or OPPLA), which was rated as a Strength in 17 percent of the cases reviewed. Nebraska also was rated low for item 7 (permanency goal for child), which was rated as a Strength in 43 percent of the cases reviewed; and for item 8 (reunification, guardianship, or placement with relatives), which was rated as a Strength in 41 percent of the cases reviewed.

Concerns also were identified with regard to Well-Being Outcome 1 (families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs), which was substantially achieved in only 32 percent of the cases reviewed. The lowest ratings were for item 17 (assessing and meeting the needs of children, parents, and foster parents), which was rated as a Strength in 40 percent of the cases reviewed; item 18 (child and

family involvement in case planning), which was rated as a Strength in 39 percent of the cases reviewed; and item 20 (caseworker visits with parents), which was rated as a strength in 30 percent of the cases reviewed.

In addition, concerns were identified with regard to Safety Outcome 1 (children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect), which was substantially achieved in only 38 percent of the cases reviewed. The lowest rating within this outcome was for item 1 (timeliness of investigations), which was rated as a Strength in 37 percent of the cases reviewed.

The State's low performance with regard to the CFSR outcomes may be attributed, at least in part, to the following key factors:

- In many areas of the State caseworkers carry high caseloads; there is a high rate of turnover in the caseworker position; and there is an insufficient level of experience in the supervisory positions.
- Across the State, the number of foster homes and placement resources is insufficient to meet the needs of the children.
- The State's most effective approach to engaging families—family team meetings—is not utilized consistently.
- The State does not consistently search for or engage noncustodial parents in case planning or services.
- The State does not consistently engage in practices that promote permanency for children including the following: timely establishment and attainment of permanency goals, consistently conducting permanency review hearings, timely filing for termination of parental rights (TPR), maintaining stable placements, and consistently conducting caseworker visits.
- Court continuances, lengthy appeals, and calendaring barriers lead to delays in the timeliness of permanency.
- There is a lack of sufficient mental health and substance abuse treatment resources for children and families.
- Sufficient services are not available to the rural population of the State.
- The State does not consistently address the safety, permanency, and well-being of children who are brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services. For example, 23 of the 65 cases reviewed onsite were brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services. DHHS has placement and care responsibility for the children receiving juvenile justice services.

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

With regard to systemic factors, Nebraska is in substantial conformity with five of the seven systemic factors: Statewide Information System; Quality Assurance (QA) System; Training; Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Case Review System and Service Array.

## I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

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

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment (item 2). Safety Outcome 1 also incorporates two national data indicators for which national standards have been established: the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 37.5 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 67 percent of the applicable Dawson County cases, 50 percent of the applicable Hall County cases, and 27 percent of the applicable Douglas County cases. Nebraska did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant for Safety Outcome 1 pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Key case review findings from the 2008 CFSR indicate Nebraska is preventing repeat maltreatment, although data indicators show that the State is not achieving the national standard for repeat maltreatment. In addition, the findings indicate that Nebraska struggles to achieve face-to-face contact with children within the timeframes required by State policy. The 2008 Statewide Assessment acknowledges that, while improvements have been made in the timeliness of responses to reports of abuse and neglect, the State is not currently meeting its own goals for timely response.

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were the following:

- Item 1 (timeliness of initiating investigations) was rated as a Strength in 37 percent of the cases.
- Item 2 (repeat maltreatment) was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of the cases.

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were in relation to improving the timeliness of investigations and reducing repeat maltreatment. To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State strengthened policy and practice related to the intake process.
- The State enhanced the Nebraska Family Online Client User System (N-FOCUS) to provide an accurate intake date.
- The State implemented a specialized intake staffing structure and developed monitoring regarding the receipt of reports of abuse and neglect and to determine acceptance for assessment to ensure that comprehensive assessments are consistently accepted in a timely manner.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring on the use of the comprehensive assessment.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP 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 indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the issue of child welfare agency efforts to prevent children's removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children.

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 52.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 63 percent of the Dawson County cases, 52 percent of the Douglas County cases, and 44 percent of the Hall County cases.

Key findings from the 2008 CFSR indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- The risk of harm to children is not consistently addressed when the services provided to families do not adequately address the safety issues in the family.
- The risk of harm to children is not consistently addressed due to inadequate risk and safety assessments and follow-up.

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were the following:

- Item 3 (services to prevent removal) was rated as a Strength in 68 percent of the cases.
- Item 4 (risk of harm) was rated as a Strength in 52 percent of the cases.

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome for the 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were related to the timely identification and provision of services to prevent removal of children from their homes. To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State used N-FOCUS reports to track the timeframe between the beginning of the comprehensive assessment and the provision of services.
- The State strengthened DHHS, law enforcement, and county attorney use of the local 1184 multidisciplinary teams to address issues of child safety.
- The State strengthened policy to mandate monthly caseworker visits at a minimum, or more frequently, based on identified needs with children, biological families, and providers to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanency of children.
- The State developed and implemented methods to monitor visitation policy including quality of visits.

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

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

There are six indicators incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the child welfare agency's efforts to prevent foster care 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 (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the child welfare agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9) or to ensure that children who have OPPLA as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10). Permanency Outcome 1 also incorporates four national data composites for which national standards have been established: Permanency Composite 1 (Timeliness and permanency of reunification), Permanency Composite 2 (Timeliness of adoptions), Permanency Composite 3 (Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods), and Permanency Composite 4 (Placement stability).

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 25 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 33 percent of the Hall County cases, 27 percent of the Dawson County cases, and 20 percent of the Douglas County cases.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for the CFSR 12-month target period, the State met the national standards for only one of the four data composites: Composite 3, Permanency for children in foster care for extended periods of time.

Key findings from the 2008 CFSR revealed the following Strength in the State:

- The rate of reentry into foster care was found to be a Strength for the State (item 5).

Despite this strength, the findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- Placement stability continues to be a challenge for the State, with 33 percent of children either having two or more placements during the period under review or remaining in unstable placements (item 6).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to establishing a child's permanency goal in a timely manner (item 7).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to attaining the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner (item 8).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to achieving adoptions in a timely manner (item 9).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to ensure a long-term stable placement for children with the goal of OPPLA and provide necessary services to prepare for independent living (item 10).

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were the following:

- Item 5 (foster care reentry) was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the cases.
- Item 6 (stability of foster care placements) was rated as a Strength in 67 percent of the cases.

- Item 7 (permanency goal for child) was rated as a Strength in 43 percent of the cases.
- Item 8 (reunification, guardianship, or placement with relatives) was rated as a Strength in 41 percent of the cases.
- Item 9 (adoption) was rated as a Strength in 23 percent of the cases.
- Item 10 (OPPLA) was rated as a Strength in 17 percent of the cases.

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State did not meet the national standard for length of time to reunification and adoption or for stability of foster care placement.
- The State did not consistently provide stable foster care placements due to the inappropriate use of shelter placements, the lack of support for foster parents, and the lack of adequate foster homes.
- The State did not consistently provide timely permanency goals for children, and did not consistently meet Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timelines for filing TPR petitions.
- The State did not effectively manage adoption cases.
- Concerns were identified regarding the use of the permanency goal of guardianship for young children without consideration of adoption as a possible option.
- Concerns were also identified regarding the provision of sufficient resources to assist youth in making a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State strengthened placement stability policy including policy related to the use of emergency shelters and efforts to locate and assess noncustodial parents and relatives for potential placement resources.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and measured compliance regarding the timely establishment of permanency goals within 60 days of placement and the timely reassessment of goals.
- The State developed policy and implemented methods for measuring compliance regarding guardianship policy.
- The State developed policy and monitoring regarding timely initiation and completion of home studies on adoptive parents and the listing of available children on adoption exchanges.
- The State strengthened the DHHS Legal Services that support permanency for State wards by working with the courts to locate and assess other relatives as potential placements, file for TPR within Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) guidelines, and obtain adoption finalizations in a timely manner.
- The State strengthened policy and practice regarding independent living (IL) plans for children 16 years of age and older.

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

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

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

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 67.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 80 percent of the Douglas County cases, 67 percent of the Hall County cases, and 45 percent of the Dawson County cases.

Key findings in 2008 for this outcome indicate the following strengths:

- Children were routinely and consistently placed in close proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers (item 11).
- Children were routinely and consistently placed with siblings (item 12).

Despite these strengths, the findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- The agency was not consistent with regard to promoting visitation between or among siblings in foster care (item 13).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to efforts to maintain the child's connection with extended family, culture, and community (item 14) or with regard to efforts to maintain and strengthen the parent-child relationship while children are in foster care (item 16).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to seeking and evaluating relatives as potential placement resources (item 15).

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were the following:

- Item 11 (proximity of placement) was rated as a Strength in 97 percent of the cases.
- Item 12 (placement with siblings) was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of the cases.
- Item 13 (visiting with parents and siblings in foster care) was rated as a Strength in 73 percent of the cases.
- Item 14 (preserving connections) was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of the cases.
- Item 15 (relative placement) was rated as a Strength in 64 percent of the cases.
- Item 16 (relationship of child in care with parents) was rated as a Strength in 59 percent of the cases.

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State did not consistently search for relatives, particularly paternal relatives, as potential placement resources.
- The State did not consistently promote visitation and bonding with parents, particularly fathers.

- There was no clear State policy identifying the parties responsible for Tribal notification when a Native American child is placed in foster care.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring regarding diligent efforts to locate and assess noncustodial parents and relatives for potential placement resources, visitation with children in foster care, and appropriate involvement in case planning.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring to mandate quality visits, at a minimum of once per month, between children and their families, or more frequently based on identified needs to assure timely progress is being made toward permanency.
- The State developed policy to enhance the ability of DHHS to support important connections for children including the use of culturally competent providers and compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

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

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

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

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 32.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 44 percent of Dawson County cases, 30 percent of Douglas County cases, and 25 percent of Hall County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 45 percent (18 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 12 percent (3 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases.

Key findings in 2008 for this outcome indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- There continues to be a lack of consistency in assessing and meeting the services needs of parents, particularly fathers. However, in the foster care cases reviewed, the agency is consistently assessing and addressing the needs of children.
- There also continue to be inconsistencies in adequately involving families, particularly fathers, in case planning.
- Caseworkers were more consistent in maintaining visitation with children in the foster care cases, but there were inconsistencies in caseworker visits with children in the in-home cases.

- The 2008 CFSR specifically differentiated between mothers and fathers in evaluating the frequency and quality of caseworker visits. In general, there were insufficient caseworker visits and challenges associated with the quality of visits with both parents. However, these findings were more pronounced for fathers, as evidenced by inconsistent concerted efforts to visit or engage fathers in either case planning or services.

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were the following:

- Item 17 (needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents) was rated as a Strength in 40 percent of the cases.
- Item 18 (child and family involvement in case planning) was rated as a Strength in 39 percent of the cases.
- Item 19 (caseworker visits with child) was rated as a Strength in 65 percent of the cases.
- Item 20 (caseworker visits with parents) was rated as a Strength in 30 percent of the cases.

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State did not consistently assess needs and provide services for children, parents, and foster parents due to the lack of complete assessments, a lack of assessments of fathers or of all children in the home, and a lack of service provision to meet identified child or family needs or to support foster parents.
- The State did not consistently facilitate the involvement of children and families in case planning.
- The State did not consistently maintain frequent or effective contact with children due, in part, to the lack of a State policy pertaining to the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children.
- The State did not consistently maintain frequent or effective contact with parents due to the high caseloads and the lack of agency policy pertaining to caseworker visitation with parents.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State strengthened case planning policy and practice and developed monitoring to ensure needed services are identified in the comprehensive assessment process and provided to the family as well as to the noncustodial parent.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring regarding diligent efforts to locate and assess noncustodial parents and relatives for appropriate involvement in case planning.

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

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

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

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 76.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 92 percent of the applicable Dawson County cases, 72 percent of the applicable Douglas County cases, and 71 percent of the applicable Hall County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 86 percent (32 cases) of the 37 applicable foster care cases and 50 percent (7 cases) of the 14 applicable in-home services cases.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that the agency does not consistently ensure that children's educational needs are met and does not consistently assess children's educational needs and maintain contact with children's schools. In the cases reviewed, the agency did not consistently assess children's educational needs when educational issues were identified.

The State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2002 CFSR and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. The key concern identified at that time was that, although the agency was effective in meeting children's educational needs in the majority of cases reviewed, stakeholders expressed the opinion that the educational system was not supportive of children in State custody, particularly children with special needs. To address this concern, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State developed a standardized case file format, including an educational section, and directives regarding what is to be included in the section.
- The State strengthened its ward education policy and practice, developed monitoring regarding appropriate educational assessments and educational records, and followed up with educational recommendations to be documented in the case plan and addressed at the periodic review.

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

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

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

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 62.3 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 70 percent of the applicable Douglas County cases, 67 percent of the applicable Dawson County cases, and 44 percent of the Hall County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 68 percent (27 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 52 percent (11 cases) of the 21 applicable in-home services cases.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- The State does not consistently conduct assessments of children's physical and dental health and provide access to needed services.

- The State does not consistently conduct appropriate assessments and address the mental health needs of children.

Additional findings in 2008 for this outcome were the following:

- Item 22 (physical health of child) was rated as a Strength in 77 percent of the cases.
- Item 23 (mental health of child) was rated as a Strength in 70 percent of the cases.

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State did not consistently provide for the comprehensive physical health needs of children; it was found that all children did not receive regular preventive physical health and dental services and that there was a lack of available medical services throughout most areas of the State.
- The State did not consistently provide for the mental health needs of children either because mental health needs were not adequately assessed or needed services were not provided.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring to ensure that health and dental examinations are received as required by policy, including follow-up care.
- The State expanded the use of the Integrated Care Coordination Unit across the State, in collaboration with Nebraska Regional Mental Health agencies, to expedite reunification and permanency and reduce the number of moves while in placement.
- The State developed a standardized pre-treatment protocol that addresses the child's mental health needs and recommends treatments as needed, including treatments for substance abuse and eating disorders.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP 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 a statewide information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care.

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The 2008 CFSR found that the State's information system, N-FOCUS, provides statewide information regarding the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care and tracks changes in that information. N-FOCUS provides information to caseworkers and supervisors to assist in case management.

Nebraska was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2002 CFSR.

### **Case Review System**

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of Case Review System. The indicators examine the development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), the implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established by ASFA (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System for 2008. Although data are not available for this item, there was general agreement among stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR that the State conducts timely and meaningful 6-month administrative reviews for all children in foster care (item 26).

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- Although case plans are developed for all children and the implementation of team decision-making has enhanced the case planning process, case plans are not consistently developed jointly with the parents nor are they developed in a timely manner. The Statewide Assessment indicated that high caseloads may be a factor in the timely and joint development of case plans (item 25).
- Although the State has a process in place for conducting permanency hearings, they are not being conducted in a timely manner due, in part, to full court calendars and delayed court reports. The Statewide Assessment reports that only 30 percent of the children in foster care for more than 15 months had permanency hearings within the last 12 months (item 27).
- Although the State has a process in place to provide TPRs in accordance with ASFA requirements, TPR petitions are not consistently filed in a timely manner due, in part, to a lack of initial planning and establishment of paternity. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, case reviewers determined that only 67 percent of the applicable cases met the TPR requirements of ASFA (item 28).
- Although the State has a statute that provides foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers opportunities to be heard at reviews and hearings regarding the children in their care, the State has not implemented a consistent process to ensure that notification occurs (item 29).

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address it in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- Although the State had a process to provide written case plans for each child in foster care, case plans were not present for all children. In addition, parents were not active participants in the case planning process.
- Although the State had a process to provide for TPR within the required timeframes, practice did not follow this process due to cultural and administrative barriers.

- The State did not have a process to provide notification to a child’s caregivers of hearings.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State strengthened case planning policy and practice and developed monitoring to ensure needed services are identified in the comprehensive assessment process and provided to the family as well as to the noncustodial parent.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring regarding TPR including appropriateness, timeliness, and compelling reasons not to file.
- The State strengthened policy and practice regarding the procedures for notifying the court of who is relevant to a particular case and who should be invited to future court proceedings.

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

### **Quality Assurance System**

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

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The 2008 CFSR found that the State has developed and implemented effective standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services to protect their safety and health (item 30). In addition, the State has an identifiable QA system that includes a Comprehensive Quality Improvement/Operations Unit; its staff, located across the State, conduct ongoing case reviews, provide feedback to local offices, and inform policy development in the following areas: performance accountability, specialized case reviews, ICWA compliance reviews, and consumer satisfaction surveys. The State has a process in place to share information, develop a plan of improvement, and reassess performance. Reports are provided to the Protection and Safety Administrators with the expectation that program improvement plans will be implemented as necessary (item 31).

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the State’s 2002 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State does not have a policy to require supervisory visits of children in foster homes.
- The State does not have a comprehensive, statewide approach to QA to measure the quality of care provided and outcomes.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State developed a comprehensive framework for QA in collaboration with the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement and field staff.
- The State identified and developed practice standards.

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

## **Training**

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

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The 2008 CFSR found the following strengths of the State's training program:

- Nebraska has in place pre-service training that covers a 6-month period and that is effective in preparing caseworkers for their job responsibilities. Caseworkers are required to complete training prior to assuming a full caseload (item 32).
- Nebraska requires a minimum of 24 hours of annual in-service training for caseworkers that addresses both general and specialized issues. In-service training is also provided for supervisors and managers (item 33).
- Foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and staff of licensed placement facilities are required to complete 21 hours of training prior to licensure and 12 hours of in-service training annually (item 34).

The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR.

## **Service Array**

The systemic factor of Service Array incorporates an assessment of answers to three questions: Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? Are these 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)?

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array for the 2008 CFSR.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR indicate that Nebraska has the following challenges:

- Although collaborative efforts among the child welfare agency and other government agencies are occurring to maximize services, there are gaps across the State in key service areas such as placement resources, residential treatment, and IL services (item 35).
- Service accessibility is limited due to the great distances that must be traveled to obtain services in the rural areas of Nebraska, and the lack of transportation limits access to services. In addition, there are waiting lists for some mental health services and gaps for many services statewide (item 36).

- Although the State model of family team meetings is designed to individualize services, these meetings are not consistently held. In addition, services are not always individualized to meet the needs of children and families due, in part, to service limitations and a lack of available bilingual services (item 37).

Nebraska did not achieve substantial conformity with this factor in the 2002 CFSR and was required to address this factor in the PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- According to the Statewide Assessment and stakeholders, key gaps in services included parent education, family support, substance abuse treatment, foster care placements, services for developmentally disabled children, dental care, culturally and linguistically competent providers, IL services, residential treatment, community-based services, juvenile justice services, and services for sexual offenders and sexual abuse victims.
- Services are not consistently available statewide, and there are frequently long waiting lists.
- Services are not individualized to meet the needs of children and families primarily due to service gaps throughout the State.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State conducted a service array pilot in two areas using the National Family Centered Practice model that identified service needs, gaps, and improvements required to address timely initiation of services; assure the ability to offer needed services; develop in-home services; and reduce waiting lists.
- The State partnered with the Nebraska Public Health Improvement Initiative to expand health and dental services for State wards.

The State met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP 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 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) (items 38 and 39) and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The 2008 CFSR found the following strengths in the State agency's responsiveness to the community:

- The State has consulted with stakeholders in the community regarding child welfare initiatives and the goals of the CFSP. The State agency has effectively partnered with the governor, the Legislature, and the courts to develop and improve child welfare practice (item 38).
- Focus groups and collaboratives regularly discuss annual reports of the CFSP and service delivery across the State (item 39).

- DHHS collaborates with the judicial and legislative branches of government as well as with other executive agencies and Indian Tribes to coordinate services and benefits of other Federal programs serving the same population under the CFSP, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, child care, and child support (item 40).

The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR.

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

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

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The 2008 CFSR found the following strengths in the State's policies regarding foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention:

- Nebraska has in place effective standards for licensure of foster family homes and child care institutions (item 41).
- Licensing standards are applied uniformly to all foster family homes, including licensed relative homes and child care institutions. Although the State did not provide data regarding the extent to which standards are applied to licensed or approved foster family homes and child care institutions, the results of the title IV-E Eligibility Review support the stakeholder comments and Statewide Assessment indications that standards are applied appropriately (item 42).
- Nebraska conducts criminal background clearances in compliance with Federal requirements. Although the State did not provide data regarding the extent to which criminal background clearances are conducted, the results of the title IV-E Eligibility Review support stakeholder comments and Statewide Assessment indications that criminal background clearances are conducted appropriately to address the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children (item 43).
- Although the State did not provide data regarding the number of children placed in other jurisdictions, Nebraska effectively uses diverse methods, including both State and national adoption exchanges and photo listings, to obtain placements for children across counties and outside the State (item 45).

Despite these areas of strength, the CFSR noted that although DHHS and the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NFAPA) have an ongoing partnership to recruit foster and adoptive parents, there is a lack of planned activities for the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care (item 44).

In the 2002 CFSR, Nebraska was not in substantial conformity with this factor and was required to address this factor in its PIP. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State did not consistently implement background checks although they were required.
- The State did not conduct recruitment due to staffing and resource limitations.
- The State did not use adoption exchanges to promote the adoption of children who are legally free for adoption.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- The State developed policy and monitoring that requires all licensed and approved foster parents to be fingerprinted for criminal background checks prior to licensure.
- The State conducted a targeted foster parent/resource family recruitment campaign to reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in State custody in collaboration with NFAPA to support stability of foster placements.

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

**Table 1. Nebraska 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	37.5	Met 0 of 2		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	37
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				Strength	92
<b>Safety Outcome 2:</b> Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	52.3			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	68
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	52
<b>Permanency Outcome 1:</b> Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	25.0	Met 1 of 4		
Item 5: Foster care reentry				Strength	100
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	67
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	43
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, or placement with relatives				ANI	41
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	23
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	17
<b>Permanency Outcome 2:</b> The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	67.5			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	97
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	91
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	73
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	80
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	64
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	59

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

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or an ANI. For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of the cases must be rated as a Strength.

**Table 2. Nebraska 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	32.3		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	40
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	39
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	65
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	30
<b>Well-Being Outcome 2:</b> Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	76.5		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	77
<b>Well-Being Outcome 3:</b> Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	62.3		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	77
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	70

\*To be in substantial conformity with the outcome, 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome for Nebraska.

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

**Table 3. Nebraska CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items**

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>In Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
<b>Statewide Information System</b>	Yes	3	
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
<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 parents that includes the required provisions			ANI
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			ANI
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 (ASFA)			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>	Yes	3	
Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children			Strength
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the 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			Strength
<b>Training</b>	Yes	3	
Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services			Strength
Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			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

<b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>	<b>In Substantial Conformity?</b>	<b>Score*</b>	<b>Item Rating**</b>
<b>Service Array</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			ANI
Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP			ANI
Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency			ANI
<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 reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP			Strength
Item 40: The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally assisted programs serving the same population			Strength
<b>Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention</b>	Yes	3	
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards			Strength
Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds			Strength
Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children			Strength
Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom adoptive homes are needed			ANI
Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

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

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or as an ANI.

**Final Report  
Nebraska Child and Family Services Review  
April 2009**

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

## INTRODUCTION

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

The Nebraska CFSR was conducted the week of July 14, 2008. The period under review was from April 1, 2007, to July 18, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal years 2005 and 2006, and the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases at three sites throughout the State (33 cases in Douglas County, 16 cases in Dawson County, and 16 cases in Hall County)
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders, including but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

All 65 cases reviewed onsite were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 65 cases reviewed are presented in the Table of Case Characteristics on the following page.

Twenty-three of the 65 cases reviewed onsite were brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services. DHHS has placement and care responsibility for the children receiving juvenile justice services.

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

The second section of the report (Section B: Systemic Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

**Table of Key Characteristics**

<b>Case Characteristics</b>	<b>Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>In-Home Cases</b>
	<b>40</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>When case was opened/child entered foster care</b>		
Opened prior to the period under review	29 (72.5%)	10 (40%)
Opened during the period under review	11 (27.5%)	15 (60%)
<b>Child entered foster care during the period under review</b>	13 (32.5%)	*
<b>Child's age at start of period under review</b>		
Younger than age 10	23 (57.5%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	2 (5%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	8 (20%)	*
16 and older	7 (17.5%)	*
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
African-American (Non-Hispanic)	5 (12.5%)	*
American Indian/Native American	3 (7.5%)	*
White (Non-Hispanic)	20 (50%)	*
Hispanic (of any race)	11 (27.5%)	*
Two or more races (Non-Hispanic)	1 (2.5%)	*
<b>Primary reason for opening case</b>		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	11 (27.5%)	4 (16%)
Medical neglect	2 (5%)	2 (8%)
Physical abuse	1 (2.5%)	3 (12%)
Sexual abuse	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Substance abuse by parent	9 (22.5%)	2 (8%)
Abandonment	1 (2.5%)	0
Mental/physical health of the child	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Child's behavior	7 (17.5%)	5 (20%)
Domestic violence in child's home	1 (2.5%)	0
Child in juvenile justice system	5 (12.5%)	7 (28%)
Other	1 (2.5%)	0

\*Information on these characteristics for in-home services cases is not provided because all children in the family are considered in these cases.

## SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes section of the CFSR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement (ANI) is assigned to each of the 23 indicators (items) reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. In addition to the item ratings, States are evaluated with regard to performance on seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for these outcomes are “substantially achieved,” “partially achieved,” and “not achieved.” In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance on six national data indicators. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, the national standards for each data indicator must be met as well as the case review requirements. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern identified for that outcome.

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

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

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

In the following sections, for each outcome assessed, there is a discussion of how the State performed on that outcome in the first round. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round of the CFSR, there is a discussion of the key concerns identified at that time and the strategies implemented in the PIP to address those concerns.

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

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

For the tables, figures displayed may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

## 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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	2	4	3	9	<b>37.5</b>
Partially Achieved	1	3	2	6	<b>25.0</b>
Not Achieved or Addressed	0	8	1	9	<b>37.5</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	13	18	10	41	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	
<b>Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards</b>					
	<b>National Standard (%)</b>		<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6 +		91.3	No	
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68 +		99.43	No	

### Status of Safety Outcome I

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 37.5 percent of applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 67 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 50 percent of applicable Hall County cases, and 27 percent of applicable Douglas County cases. In addition, for the CFSR 12-month data period ending March 31, 2007, Nebraska did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant to Safety Outcome 1 pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

### Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, the State was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 because both item 1 (timeliness of investigations) and item 2 (repeat maltreatment) were rated as ANIs. For item 1, reviewers found that delays in the agency's response to reports of maltreatment were found to occur in response to both low-risk and high-risk maltreatment reports. With regard to item 2,

although reviewers did not find cases of repeat maltreatment of children in foster care, the State’s Data Profile for repeat maltreatment was 7.6 percent, which did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State strengthened policy and practice related to the intake process.
- The State enhanced the Nebraska Family Online Client User System (N-FOCUS) to provide an accurate intake date.
- The State implemented a specialized intake staffing structure, and developed monitoring of the receipt of reports of abuse and neglect and to determine acceptance for assessment to ensure that comprehensive assessments are consistently accepted in a timely manner.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring on the use of the comprehensive assessment.

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

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

The findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

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

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

#### **Case Review Findings**

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 24 (37 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with State child welfare agency policy requirements.

The Nebraska DCFS policy for report investigation timeframes is as follows:

- Priority 1: Face-to-face contact with a child within 24 hours
- Priority 2: Face-to-face contact with a child within 5 calendar days
- Priority 3: Face-to-face contact with a child within 10 calendar days

The case review findings for this item are presented below.

<b>Item 1</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	2	4	3	9	<b>37</b>
Area Needing Improvement	1	11	3	15	<b>63</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	13	18	10	41	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 67 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 50 percent of applicable Hall County cases, and 27 percent of applicable Douglas County cases.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was established with the child within the timeframes required by State policy or law. Item 1 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that face-to-face contact was not established within the required timeframes and was not conducted with all the children who were subjects of the report within the mandated timeframe. Of the cases rated as an ANI, two cases involved reports that were assigned a Priority 1 designation, nine cases involved reports that were assigned a Priority 2 designation, and four cases involved reports that were assigned a Priority 3 designation.

**Rating Determination**

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with the required timeframes in only 37 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, in 2003 DHHS implemented a new intake tool and process and centralized the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline. The Statewide Assessment notes that intake workers are specially selected and trained, which has improved decision-making, consistency, and the timeliness of response. The Statewide Assessment notes that more effective screening is improving the identification of life-threatening situations requiring immediate response. Calls that are screened out undergo secondary review by supervisors.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the N-FOCUS, priority 1 contacts were made on time in 86 percent of the cases, priority 2 contacts were made on time in 72 percent of the cases, and priority 3 contacts were made on time in 75 percent of cases. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that, while improvements have been made in the timeliness of responses to reports of abuse and neglect, the State is not currently meeting its own goals for timely response. The Statewide Assessment notes that the

number of hotline calls alleging child abuse and neglect has continued to increase over time; however, the number of reports investigated has decreased in the past 3 years. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the decrease in reports investigated may be due, in part, to a delay in the completion of investigation reports.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that reports of allegations of child abuse or neglect are virtually always made through the State hotline. Some stakeholders in all three sites reported that DHHS and law enforcement personnel conduct investigations of screened-in reports jointly in some cases. Some stakeholders also reported that partnerships between law enforcement agencies and local child welfare authorities have become stronger due to co-location in some regions and mandatory joint response in other regions.

**Item 2. Repeat maltreatment**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 12 (18 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there were no substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine whether there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review and, if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

<b>Item 2</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	2	5	4	11	<b>92</b>
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	<b>8</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	14	27	12	53	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable Dawson and Hall County cases, and 83 percent of applicable Douglas County cases.

Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was no indication of two or more substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period (11 cases). Item 2 was rated as an ANI in one case where there were two substantiated maltreatment reports within 6 months.

### Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 92 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percentage is more than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when initial reports of maltreatment are received, intake workers check N-FOCUS for prior reports and consider any new report in context with prior reports. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Nebraska Safety Intervention System (NSIS) was implemented in March 2008 to comprehensively assess safety rather than focus on incident-based intervention, and this system is expected to reduce cases of repeat maltreatment. The Statewide Assessment notes that reports of maltreatment perpetrated by providers in foster homes or child care facilities are assessed by DHHS in collaboration with law enforcement.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the State’s internal CFSR (NE-CFSR) sampling 50 cases in 2006, the State recorded an absence of maltreatment in 95 percent of the applicable cases, an improvement over the 86 percent recorded in 2005. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, the majority of the children experiencing repeat maltreatment were male with a median age of 5, and that there is an overrepresentation of Black, Native American, and Hispanic youth in the population of children identified to have experienced recurrent maltreatment. The Statewide Assessment also reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, of the 219 children who experienced repeat maltreatment in 2006, eight children were abused by a foster parent.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders in Hall County commenting on this item expressed the opinion that repeat maltreatment is due to an inappropriate emphasis on reunification from both the courts and the agency.

### Safety Outcome 2

<b>Safety 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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	10	17	7	34	<b>52.3</b>
Partially Achieved	3	8	4	15	<b>23.1</b>
Not Achieved	3	8	5	16	<b>24.6</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

## Status of Safety Outcome 2

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 52.3 percent of cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 63 percent of Dawson County cases, 52 percent of Douglas County cases, and 44 percent of Hall County cases.

## Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

The State was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2 in the 2002 CFSR although both item 3 (services to family to protect children in home and prevent removal) and item 4 (risk of harm to child) were rated as Strengths. There were not a sufficient number of cases in which both items 3 and 4 were rated as a Strength to attain the 90 percent requirement for substantial conformity. Key concerns identified at that time were related to the timely identification and provision of services to prevent removal of children from their homes.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State used N-FOCUS reports to track the timeframe between the beginning of the comprehensive assessment and the provision of services.
- The State strengthened DHHS, law enforcement, and county attorney use of the local “1184” multidisciplinary teams (1184 teams) to address issues of child safety. (1184 teams are described under item 3 below).
- The State strengthened policy to mandate monthly worker visits at a minimum, or more frequently based on identified needs with children, biological families, and providers to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanency of children.
- The State developed and implemented methods to monitor visitation policy, including quality of visits.

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

## Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented below.

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

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 41 (63 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home, or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or an identified risk of harm to the children in the home (including children reunified from foster care) during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent placement of children in foster care while ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below:

<b>Item 3</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	7	16	5	28	<b>68</b>
Area Needing Improvement	3	5	5	13	<b>32</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>41</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	6	12	6	24	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 76 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, 70 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, and 50 percent of applicable Hall County cases.

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

- Services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal (20 cases).
- The family received post-reunification services to prevent the child’s reentry into foster care (eight cases).
- The child was removed from the home without service provision to ensure the safety of the child (five cases).
- The child was placed voluntarily with relatives, and services were provided to the relatives, parents, and children (three cases).

Case review information indicates that a range of services was offered or provided to families. These included (but were not limited to): Multi-System Therapy and in-home family-based services, individual and family counseling and therapy, inpatient and outpatient psychiatric evaluation and treatment, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence intervention and treatment, anger management services, electronic monitoring for youth offenders, family team meetings, early intervention services, community resource and medical referral, housing vouchers, transportation, and bilingual services.

Item 3 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- Some services were provided but did not adequately address the safety issues in the family, and the children remained at risk in the home (one case).
- Some services were provided but addressed the safety issues for only one child in the family, and the other children in the family remained at risk in the home (four cases).

- No services were provided and the children remained at risk in the home (seven cases).
- Although services were arranged, there was no follow-up to ensure that the children were safe in the home (one case).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 68 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DHHS 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. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the new NSIS process, implemented statewide in the spring of 2008, requires every reasonable effort to be made to provide any necessary services in the least intrusive and least restrictive method possible to ensure the safety of children in their homes. The Statewide Assessment notes that in 2003 a Governor's Task Force revealed that 1184 teams were not functioning throughout the State. The Statewide Assessment notes that, subsequent to the findings of the Governor's Task Force, a team coordinator was hired in each of the State's regions to provide training and coordinate the implementation of the NSIS approach to improve investigation and service coordination. The 1184 teams are designed to provide a regular forum to review the case, including risk and safety issues, with all relevant service providers and caseworkers.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the State's NE-CFSR in 2006, 74 percent of the cases assessed for this item were rated as a Strength. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that delays in service provision after assessment affect the agency's ability to protect children in their homes and that N-FOCUS is tracking these delays to inform targeted practice enhancements.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item in all three sites indicated that the NSIS safety evaluation tool provides for a more comprehensive assessment of needs than past assessments and provides for more precise planning for services. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that NSIS provides families with the opportunity to keep their children at home and still manage safety concerns appropriately. Some stakeholders indicated that improved relationships with law enforcement agencies have resulted in further opportunities to prevent removals. Some stakeholders in Douglas County noted that 1184 teams are active and that they are used to provide a forum for service providers to share information regarding a case.

### **Item 4. Risk of harm to child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for all 65 cases. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to address the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below:

<b>Item 4</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	10	17	7	34	<b>52</b>
Area Needing Improvement	6	16	9	31	<b>48</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 63 percent of Dawson County cases, 52 percent of Douglas County cases, and 44 percent of Hall County cases.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through (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.

In addition, item 4 was rated as an ANI in 15 in-home services cases and 16 foster care cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was risk of harm to the children when an initial assessment of safety and risk was conducted but ongoing safety and risk assessments were not conducted (14 cases).
- The risk of harm to the children was not addressed when adequate safety and risk assessments were not conducted (10 cases).
- The risk of harm to the children was not addressed when adequate safety and risk assessments were conducted for only one child in the home, while safety and risk were not assessed for the other children in the home (12 cases).
- There was risk of harm to the children when safety and risk were not assessed at case closure (seven cases).

### Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 52 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DHHS had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the new NSIS policy provides a formal process to assess child safety on an ongoing basis, targeting safety threats with specific interventions. The Statewide Assessment notes that policy requires ongoing safety assessments to

occur weekly during the safety assessment process and a minimum of monthly for ongoing cases. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Protective Capacity Assessment (PCA) is a key tool in identifying safety threats and enhancing parental skills.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 87 percent of the cases assessed for this item were rated as a Strength. The Statewide Assessment notes that, according to data from N-FOCUS, 68 children were reported as being abused during the time they were placed in a foster care setting in 2006, and of the 219 children who experienced repeat maltreatment that year, 8 were abused by a foster parent.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders in all three sites commenting on this item indicated that safety assessments are now routinely completed on a timely and ongoing basis using NSIS. Some stakeholders noted that NSIS focuses on safety as the primary concern and guides caseworkers in the development of service plans based on changing unsafe behaviors.

**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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	3	4	3	10	<b>25.0</b>
Partially Achieved	6	13	6	25	<b>62.5</b>
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	3	0	5	<b>12.5</b>
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	
<b>Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards</b>					
	<b>National Standard (Scaled Score)</b>		<b>State's Composite Score</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +		110.8	No	
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +		90.7	No	
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +		154.1	Yes	
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +		89.8	No	

## **Status of Permanency Outcome 1**

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 25.0 percent of cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that, for the 12-month CFSR data period ending March 31, 2007, while the State met the national standard for Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended periods of time, the State did not meet the national standards for the remaining three data indicators including:
  - Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification
  - Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions
  - Composite 4: Placement stability

Permanency Outcome 1 was substantially achieved in 33 percent of Hall County cases, 27 percent of Dawson County cases, and 20 percent of Douglas County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 7 percent (1 case) of 11 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

## **Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR**

The State was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 during the 2002 CFSR. The following key concerns were identified at that time with regard to achieving permanency for children in foster care:

- The State did not meet the national standard for the timeliness of reunification or adoption or for stability of foster care placement.
- The State did not consistently provide stable foster care placements due to the inappropriate use of shelter placements, the lack of support for foster parents, and the lack of adequate foster homes.
- The State did not consistently provide timely permanency goals for children and did not consistently meet Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timelines for filing termination of parental rights (TPR) petitions.
- The State did not effectively manage adoption cases.
- Concerns were identified regarding the use of the permanency goal of guardianship for young children without consideration of adoption as a possible option.
- Concerns were also identified regarding the provision of sufficient resources to assist youth in making a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State strengthened its placement stability policy including policy related to the use of emergency shelters and efforts to locate and assess noncustodial parents and relatives for potential placement resources.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and measured compliance regarding the timely establishment of permanency goals within 60 days of placement and the timely reassessment of goals.
- The State developed policy and implemented methods for measuring compliance regarding guardianship.
- The State developed policy and monitoring regarding timely initiation and completion of home studies on adoptive parents and listing available children on adoption exchanges.
- The State strengthened DHHS Legal Services that support permanency for State wards by working with the courts to locate and assess other relatives as potential placements, file for TPR within ASFA guidelines, and obtain adoption finalizations in a timely manner.
- The State strengthened policy and practice regarding independent living (IL) plans for children 16 years of age and older.

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

### Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

#### Item 5. Foster care reentries

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

#### Case Review Findings

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

Item 5	Dawson County	Douglas County	Hall County	Total	Percent
Strength	4	6	3	13	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	14	6	27	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable cases reviewed in all three counties.

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

**Rating Determination**

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is more than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Performance on the Measure Relevant to Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification**

State performance for the 12-month CFSR data period ending March 31, 2007, on the individual measure of foster care reentry (Measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was as follows: 14.6 percent of the children discharged from foster care to reunification reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge. This percentage is less than the national median of 15 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance. These data are presented to provide additional information about foster care reentry. There is no national standard for this measure. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite scores.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the new NSIS approach offers a more comprehensive ongoing assessment of safety that will ultimately reduce foster care reentries. The Statewide Assessment notes that family-centered practice focuses on helping families identify and address their needs to maintain change throughout the case and after case closure.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, zero instances of foster care reentry were found in the sample. However, the Statewide Assessment acknowledges that service limitations affect foster care reentry, particularly a lack of preventive and early intervention services.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that a child may, in some cases, reenter foster care due to the child’s chronic mental health and substance abuse concerns.

**Item 6. Stability of foster care placement**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

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

<b>Item 6</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	7	15	5	27	<b>67</b>
Area Needing Improvement	4	5	4	13	<b>33</b>
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of Douglas County cases, 64 percent of Dawson County cases, and 56 percent of Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 31 percent (4 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- The child did not experience a placement change during the period under review, and either the current placement was stable, the child was discharged from foster care, or the child was adopted during the period under review (18 cases).
- The placement changes experienced were in the child’s best interests and were intended either to promote achievement of the child’s permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (nine cases).

Item 6 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The child experienced multiple placements, and at least one placement change was not planned to meet the child’s needs (10 cases).
- The child experienced multiple unplanned placement changes, and the current placement was not stable (three cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 18 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 11 cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in 11 cases experienced three or more placements during the period under review. In three cases the child experienced four placements; in two cases, the child experienced six placements; and in one case, the child experienced seven placements.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 67 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interests of the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

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

Nebraska's performance for the 12-month CFSR data period ending March 31, 2007, was below the national median on two of the three individual measures of placement stability included in Composite 4: Placement stability, as presented below:

- C4.1: 84.0 percent of the children in foster care for less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is better than the national median of 83.3 percent.
- C4.2: 54.7 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: 29.0 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.

These data 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 scores.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, placement decisions must be individualized and meet the following criteria: least restrictive, closest to the family, and in settings that provide continuity for the children. The Statewide Assessment notes that placements are made with relatives or someone known to the child if possible, prior to considering other out-of-home placement options. The Statewide Assessment also notes that caseworkers are required to make diligent efforts to locate, contact, and involve noncustodial parents in the case planning process. According to the Statewide Assessment, policy requires that any placement change must be made based solely on the children's needs; however, caseworker practice is inconsistent due to high turnover rates among caseworkers.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 76 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, the percentage of wards placed in emergency shelters decreased from 3.2 percent to 1.7 percent from 2005 to 2006; however, the percentage of children placed in emergency shelters that stayed beyond 30 days continues to be high at 28 percent for 2006. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the percentage of children placed with relatives increased during the same period from 19.8 percent to 21.2 percent. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that placement resources are lacking in many areas of the State and that matching efforts suffer due to the lack of these resources.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that DHHS makes every effort to match children to appropriate placements for their needs. Some stakeholders indicated that there are instances where children are placed in foster homes that do not meet their needs, who do not receive appropriate supportive services, and subsequently are moved to a higher level of care. Some stakeholders also indicated that there is a lack of sufficient placement resources across the State, which may, in some cases, account for inappropriate placement matching.

**Item 7. Permanency goal for child**

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

All of the 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. In addition, reviewers determined whether TPR was sought in accordance with ASFA requirements. The results of this assessment are shown below.

<b>Item 7</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	5	6	6	17	<b>43</b>
Area Needing Improvement	6	14	3	23	<b>57</b>
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 67 percent of Hall County cases, 45 percent of Dawson County cases, and 30 percent of Douglas County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 38 percent (5 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s permanency goal was appropriate, had been established in a timely manner, and that the agency had adhered to ASFA requirements in filing for TPR.

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

- The child’s permanency goal was not established in a timely manner, nor was it appropriate to the needs of the child (one case).
- The child’s permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (15 cases).
- The child’s permanency goal was not appropriate to the needs of the child (two cases).
- TPR was not sought in accordance with ASFA requirements and compelling reasons were not noted in the case file (nine cases).

Case review findings pertaining to case plan goals were as follows:

- Thirteen children had a single goal of reunification (including living with other relatives). More information on children with this goal is presented under item 8 below.
- Three children had a single goal of guardianship.
- Eleven children had a single goal of adoption. More information on children with the goal of adoption is presented under item 9 below.
- Two children had a single goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA). More information on children with the goal of OPPLA is presented under item 10 below.
- One child had concurrent goals of reunification and guardianship.
- Six children had concurrent goals of reunification and adoption.
- Four children had concurrent goals of reunification and OPPLA.

Case review findings show that, at the time of the onsite review, there were 24 cases in which children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. ASFA requirements were applicable for 17 of these cases. ASFA requirements were not applicable for seven cases because the child was in placement with a relative. ASFA requirements (with regard to both filing for TPR and documenting compelling reasons for not filing) were met in 47 percent (8 cases) of the 17 applicable cases.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Case reviewers determined that in only 43 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and had met ASFA requirements with regard to TPR. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

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

Nebraska's performance for the 12-month CFSR period ending March 31, 2007, on the individual measures incorporated in Permanency Composite 3: Achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods is presented below:

- C3.1: 40.0 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the FY were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the FY. This percentage is higher than the national 75th percentile of 29.1 percent.
- C3.2: 98.3 percent of the children exiting foster care who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage is higher than the national 75th percentile of 98.0 percent.
- C3.3: 22.5 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percentage is lower than the national 25th percentile of 37.5 percent. For this measure, lower scores indicate more positive performance.

These data 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 have been established only for the scaled composite scores.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, permanency goals must be established within 60 days and must be developed based on the best interests of the child. The Statewide Assessment notes that caseworkers are required to consider the possibility of using concurrent planning at specific points in a case: at initial assessment, during the PCA, and each time cases are reviewed. However, the Statewide Assessment indicates that, despite extensive training in 2003, county attorneys in some parts of the State do not believe that concurrent planning supports permanency for children and may argue against concurrent plans during court hearings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 68 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, concurrent goals were documented in 55 percent of all cases as of October 31, 2007, and 11 percent of cases had no permanency goal documented. The Statewide Assessment also reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, on September 30, 2007, 30 percent of children in out-of-home care for 15 of the past 22 months had a permanency hearing within the past 12 months. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that barriers to the appropriate and timely establishment of permanency goals include a lack of effective communication among the agency, the courts, and families in addition to delays in the TPR process.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders in all three sites commenting on this item indicated that concurrent planning occurs. However, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that those plans are not addressed concurrently and that actual planning is linear or sequential. Some stakeholders in all three sites noted that reunification is the preferred goal for children in foster care, while guardianship also is commonly used. Some stakeholders noted that guardianship often is preferred to adoption. Stakeholders also noted that Tribes do not support TPR and focus on the preservation of parental ties.

Some stakeholders interviewed in Hall County reported that family team meetings are used to develop appropriate goals for children and to track progress toward those goals.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 8 was applicable for 27 (67.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, 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 this assessment are shown in the table below:

<b>Item 8</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	2	5	4	11	<b>41</b>
Area Needing Improvement	5	8	3	16	<b>59</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	7	2	13	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 57 percent of applicable Hall County cases, 38 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, and 29 percent of applicable Dawson County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 27 percent (3 cases) of 11 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 11 cases when reviewers determined that the goal of reunification, guardianship, or placement with relatives had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an ANI in 16 cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner because the services necessary to support the goal of reunification were not provided.

**Rating Determination**

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Case reviewers determined that in only 41 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

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

Nebraska’s performance in the 12-month CFSR data period ending March 31, 2007, on the national indicators for timeliness of reunification measures included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification is as follows:

- C1.1: 64.8 percent of the reunifications occurred in at least 8 days but less than 12 months after 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 who were in foster care for at least 8 days and who were discharged to reunification was 8.2 months. This length of stay is longer than the national median of 5.4 months. For this measure, a lower number of months indicates higher performance.
- C1.3: 47.1 percent of children entering foster care in the past 6 months who were in foster care for at least 8 days and who were discharged from foster care to reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage is higher than the national median of 39.4 percent.

These data are presented to provide additional information about permanency of reunification. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite scores.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS policy is to develop permanency goals based on the best interests of the child, and if a child must be removed from the home, the first permanency goal considered is family reunification. The Statewide Assessment notes that, although Nebraska policy does not identify permanent placement with relatives as a permanency option, relative placement is preferred when seeking short-term foster care for a child, and in more permanent placement decisions such as adoption or legal guardianship. The Statewide Assessment notes that legal guardianship is considered for a child 14 years or older, when all reunification efforts have been exhausted, and when adoption is not in the best interests of the child.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 50 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that data from N-FOCUS is monitored regularly with regard to children ages zero to 10 who have been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, children who are still at home, and children who have been reunified but are still in State custody. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that providing effective reunification and guardianship services to families is a challenge for the State and that support for guardianship services is needed.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders in all three sites commenting on this item indicated that DHHS focuses on reunification as the primary permanency goal for children in foster care. Some stakeholders across the sites indicated that communication barriers between DHHS and the courts delay reunification when DHHS recommends reunification, but the court retains jurisdiction. Some stakeholders indicated that the lack of substance abuse treatment services available to parents delays reunification for children.

**Item 9. Adoption**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 17 (42.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been made or were being made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below:

Item 9	Dawson County	Douglas County	Hall County	Total	Percent
Strength	1	2	1	4	23
Area Needing Improvement	3	9	1	13	77
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	9	7	23	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 50 percent of applicable Hall County cases, 25 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, and 18 percent of applicable Douglas County cases. The item was rated as an ANI in the only applicable case brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

In four cases, item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an ANI in 13 cases when reviewers determined that the State had not made diligent efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner due to one or more of the following circumstances:

- Delays in court hearings and appeals (two cases)
- Delays on the part of the agency in filing for TPR (six cases)
- Delays on the part of the County Attorney in filing for TPR (two cases)
- Lack of service provision to support the goal of adoption (10 cases)
- Delays caused by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) process (two cases)
- Delays caused by the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) process (one case)

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

- There were 17 cases with a goal of adoption, including 6 cases with the concurrent goal of adoption and reunification.
- Adoption was finalized in 7 of the 17 cases, 3 of which were finalized within 24 months of the child’s entry into foster care.
- In 1 case, the child was in a preadoptive placement.
- In 13 cases, efforts to achieve adoption were either not on track or adoption had not been achieved within 24 months of the child’s entry into foster care.

## **Rating Determination**

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Case reviewers determined that DHHS made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner in only 23 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

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

For the CFSR Data Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions, Nebraska scored 90.7 for the 12-month period ending March 31, 2007, which is below the national standard of 106.4. The following information describes Nebraska's performance on the individual measures included in the CFSR Data Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions:

- C2.1: 17.7 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 less than the national median of 26.8 percent.
- C2.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 37.2 months. This median length of stay is longer than the national median of 32.4 months. For this measure, a lower number of months indicates a higher level of performance.
- C2.3: 23.2 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the target period were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the target period. This percentage is higher than the national 75th percentile of 22.7 percent.
- C2.4: 11.3 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the target period became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the target period. This percentage is higher than the national 75th percentile of 10.9 percent.
- C2.5: 49.7 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is higher than the national median of 45.8 percent.

These data are presented to provide additional information about timeliness of adoption. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite scores.

## **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, when children cannot be reunited with their families, adoption is the preferred alternative to guardianship, and relatives are given preference in adoptive placements. The Statewide Assessment notes that, for Native American children, preference is given to a member of the child's extended family, other members of the child's Tribe, and other Native American families. The Statewide Assessment notes that pre-placement, post-placement, and post-finalization services are available to adoptive families. The Statewide Assessment also notes that a separate adoption home study is not required for families already licensed as foster parents.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 23 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. According to the Nebraska Supreme Court's Office of Public Information, changes in the TPR appeal process have resulted in an average reduction of 3 months (from 11 to 8) in the time it takes an appeal to finalize. The Statewide Assessment

also reports that efforts to include children who are legally free for adoption on national exchanges and the Heart Galleries have increased. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that barriers to timely adoptions continue to include delays associated with the filing of TPR and the lack of effective concurrent planning.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that many caseworkers, county attorneys, and Tribes do not support TPR, causing delays in the filing of TPR petitions. In addition, some stakeholders across the sites reported that court continuances and calendaring barriers lead to delays in timely adoption. Some stakeholders across the sites noted that adoption is also delayed after TPR due to lengthy appeals and, contrary to information provided in the Statewide Assessment, an inefficient process for conducting home studies and fingerprinting for foster parents who want to adopt.

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

**Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 10 was applicable for 6 (15 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to OPPLA. The results are presented in the table below:

<b>Item 10</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	1	0	0	1	<b>17</b>
Area Needing Improvement	0	3	2	5	<b>83</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	17	7	34	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength for the only applicable Dawson County case, and none of the three applicable cases in Douglas County or the two applicable cases in Hall County. The item was rated as a Strength in 20 percent (one case) of five applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in one case when reviewers determined that the child was in a long-term, stable placement and was receiving the necessary services and supports to promote a successful transition from foster care to independent living once the child reaches the age of emancipation.

This item was rated as an ANI in five cases when reviewers determined that the agency was not providing the child with sufficient services to assist in transitioning to independent living. In four of these cases, the child was brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Case review findings pertaining to the age of children with the goal of OPPLA when the goal was established were as follows:

- In four of the six cases assessed for this item, the child was 16 or older.
- In two of the six cases assessed for this item, the child was at least age 13 but younger than age 16.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In only 17 percent of the 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. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Nebraska allows for independent living as a permanency goal for children 16 years or older. If the goal is independent living, policy requires the development of a team consisting of a caseworker, Preparation for Adult Living Services (PALS) specialist, and a parent, if appropriate. The preference is for the youth to be engaged in full-time academic or vocational training or employment. The Statewide Assessment notes that children with disabilities are linked to specialized services to transition to independent living. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the State offers Educational Training Vouchers (ETV) to current and former foster care youth to help with post-secondary school expenses.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 100 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, 49 percent of youth age 16 years and older had a written IL plan on March 31, 2007. The Statewide Assessment indicates that a need for additional IL services exists throughout the State.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the PALS program provides excellent one-on-one IL services to youth. Some stakeholders in all three sites noted that there is a lack of adequate IL services. Some stakeholders also noted that foster parents are expected to provide IL services to the youth in their care.

## 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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	5	16	6	27	<b>67.5</b>
Partially Achieved	5	4	3	12	<b>30.0</b>
Not Achieved	1	0	0	1	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

### Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 67.5 percent of cases, which does not meet the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 80 percent of Douglas County cases, 67 percent of Hall County cases, and 45 percent of Dawson County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 46 percent (6 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

### Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

The State was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 in the 2002 CFSR.

The 2002 CFSR found the following concerns with regard to the State's ability to maintain the continuity of family relationships and connections:

- The State did not consistently search for relatives, particularly paternal relatives, as potential placement resources.
- The State did not consistently promote visitation and bonding with parents, particularly fathers.
- There was no clear State policy for identifying the parties responsible for Tribal notification when a Native American child is placed in foster care.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring regarding diligent efforts to locate and assess noncustodial parents and relatives for potential placement resources, visitation with children in foster care, and appropriate involvement in case planning.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring to mandate quality visits, at a minimum once per month, between children and their families or more frequently based on identified needs to assure timely progress is being made toward permanency.

- The State developed policy to enhance the ability of DHHS to support important connections for children including the use of culturally competent providers and compliance with ICWA.

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

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

The findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

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

  X   Strength           Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 11 was applicable for 32 (80 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interests, and/or (3) 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 in close proximity to the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

<b>Item 11</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	7	17	7	31	<b>97</b>
Area Needing Improvement	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>32</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	3	2	8	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable Douglas County and Hall County cases and 88 percent of applicable Dawson County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent (12 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- The child was placed in the same community or county as their parents or that the child’s placement was not in the same community or county but was still in close proximity (30 cases).

- The child’s placement was not in close proximity to the parents but the placement was necessary to meet the child’s needs in a relative placement (one case).

This item was rated as an ANI in one case brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services when the child was placed in a residential treatment center across the State due to a lack of appropriate resources to meet the child’s placement needs.

**Rating Determination**

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 97 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DHHS placed children in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents’ or relatives’ homes or that met their special needs. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to consider placements that are in close proximity to the child’s family in settings that provide continuity for the child in school, church, or other community relationships whenever possible. The Statewide Assessment notes that the NSIS process provides caseworkers with the tools needed to identify local resources for children more effectively.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 81 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that a lack of placement resources and the therapeutic needs of some children contribute to the occasional placement of a child outside their home community.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that children are usually placed near their homes and are only placed far from their homes when appropriate placement resources are not available in the community.

**Item 12. Placement with siblings**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 12 was applicable for 23 (57.5 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 were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the service or safety needs of one or more of the children. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

<b>Item 12</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	3	12	6	21	<b>91</b>
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	1	2	<b>9</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>23</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	7	2	17	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 92 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, and 86 percent of applicable Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 33 percent (one case) of three applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- The child was in a placement with all siblings (14 cases).
- The child was not placed with all siblings, but the siblings were separated due to the special needs of one or more of the siblings (seven cases).

Item 12 was rated as an ANI in two cases brought to the attention of DHHS by the Office of Juvenile Services (OJS) when reviewers determined the following:

- In one case, there was a shortage of placement resources to place siblings together.
- In one case, the child was separated from siblings for a period of 9 months due to a delay on the part of the agency in approving a relative for the placement of more than one child.

### **Rating Determination**

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 91 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever possible and appropriate. This percentage is higher than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, efforts are made to place siblings in the same home, both in temporary foster care and in permanent adoptive or guardianship situations. The Statewide Assessment notes that children are placed separately from their siblings when a child has intensive therapeutic needs and, in some cases, where limited placement options are available.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 82 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that children are generally placed with their siblings.

### 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: (1) TPR was established prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the child’s life (or parents were deceased), or (2) visitation with a parent was considered to be not in the best interests of the child. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care, and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 13	Dawson County	Douglas County	Hall County	Total	Percent
Strength	3	17	5	25	73
Area Needing Improvement	5	2	2	9	27
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	1	2	6	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 89 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, 71 percent of applicable Hall County cases, and 37.5 percent of applicable Dawson County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 54 percent (7 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children, or that the agency made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation, if appropriate.

Item 13 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- In five cases, the agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother.
- In seven cases, the agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the father.
- In one case, the agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings.

Specific information from the case reviews is presented in the table below. These data indicate that children visited with their mothers at least once a month in 82 percent of the applicable cases; children visited with their fathers at least once a month in 62 percent of the applicable cases; and children visited with their siblings in foster care at least once a month in 89 percent of the applicable cases.

<b>Typical Frequency of Visitation</b>	<b>Child and Mother</b>	<b>Child and Father</b>	<b>Child and Siblings in Foster Care</b>
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	16 (57%)	9 (43%)	5 (56%)
Visits occurred less than weekly but at least twice a month	3 (11%)	2 (9.5%)	1 (11%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month but at least once a month	4 (14%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (22%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	3 (11%)	6 (28.5%)	1 (11%)
Visits never occurred	2 (7%)	2 (9.5%)	0
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>

**Rating Determination**

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 73 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers must ensure that visitation is provided between parents and children in foster care, and between siblings who are in foster care but placed apart, at least once per month. The Statewide Assessment notes that efforts must be made to include both children’s mothers and fathers in visitation planning when appropriate.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 53 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that barriers to timely visitation with parents include a lack of providers to offer transportation to visits and to supervise visits.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that sibling visitation occurs regularly. However, some stakeholders also reported that the lack of transportation resources throughout the State limits the ability of the agency to supervise and facilitate visitation among family members.

**Item 14. Preserving connections**

       Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

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

<b>Item 14</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	8	18	6	32	<b>80</b>
Area Needing Improvement	3	2	3	8	<b>20</b>
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of Douglas County cases, 73 percent of Dawson County cases, and 67 percent of Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 69 percent (9 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members and siblings not in foster care (26 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with school, friends, and community (14 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the child’s religious or cultural heritage (five cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the child’s Tribal affiliation in accordance with the provisions of ICWA (one case).

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

- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to extended family members and siblings who are not in foster care (one case).
- The agency did not make efforts to preserve the child’s important connections (six cases).
- The agency did not make efforts to preserve the child’s Tribal connections in accordance with the provisions of ICWA (one case).

### Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that in 80 percent of the applicable cases, DHHS made concerted efforts to ensure that children in foster care maintained their connections to extended family, communities, schools, and cultural heritage. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to consider placements for children that provide continuity for the children in school, church, or other community relationships whenever possible. The Statewide Assessment notes that the NSIS process facilitates the development of a plan for the child, often using a family team meeting, to maintain and preserve connections while in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHHS utilizes the following programs:

- Through the Eyes of the Child teams support mediation services.
- A Better Service Through Enhanced Partnering grant facilitates collaboration with the child support program.
- ICWA-based preferences support placement of Native American children.
- Parent Resources for Information Development and Education (PRIDE) training assists foster families in maintaining community connections for children.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 59 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DHHS makes every effort to maintain children in their home schools. Some stakeholders reported that Tribes provide culturally competent services for Native American families. However, other stakeholders noted that there is a lack of service providers who speak the same language as families of Hispanic and Somali descent.

### **Item 15. Relative placement**

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

### **Case Review Findings**

Item 15 was applicable for 33 (83 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if relative placement was not an option during the period under review because (1) the child was in an adoptive placement at the start of the time period or (2) 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 had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

<b>Item 15</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	5	13	3	21	<b>64</b>
Area Needing Improvement	5	5	2	12	<b>36</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>33</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	2	4	7	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 72 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, 60 percent of applicable Hall County cases, and 50 percent of applicable Dawson County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 30 percent (3 cases) of 10 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- The child was placed with relatives (13 cases). In one of these cases, a genogram was completed for the child.
- Despite diligent efforts made by the agency, the child was not placed with relatives (eight cases). In two of these cases, an eco-map and genogram were completed for the child.

Item 15 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make diligent efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives (six cases).
- The agency made efforts to search for maternal relatives but did not make efforts to search for paternal relatives (three cases).
- The agency made efforts to search for paternal relatives but did not make efforts to search for maternal relatives (two cases).
- The agency did not make efforts to search for maternal relatives and searching for paternal relatives was not applicable (one case).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 64 percent of the 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. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to make diligent efforts to locate, contact, and involve noncustodial parents and other relatives in the case planning process. The Statewide Assessment notes that, for Native American children, diligent efforts must include providing notification to the relevant Tribe and following the Tribe's definition of "relative" in placement decisions.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 59 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, the number of children placed with relatives has increased from 19.8 percent for FY 2005 to 21.2 percent for FY 2006. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that barriers to the use of relative placements include a lack of emphasis on locating relatives and the low usage of family team meetings, in addition to a reduction in the number of licensed and approved relative foster homes. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the implementation of the NSIS approach will result in more effective identification of relative resources and will provide direction to caseworkers in selecting relatives for placement.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that caseworkers generally consider relatives as the first placement option for children who must be removed from their homes. Some stakeholders also reported that pre-hearing conferences, genograms, eco-maps, and family team meetings support the identification of relatives.

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

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 16 was applicable for 32 (80 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. A case was not applicable if (1) parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child or (2) a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child’s best interests throughout the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below:

<b>Item 16</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	3	11	5	19	<b>59</b>
Area Needing Improvement	5	6	2	13	<b>41</b>
<b>Total Applicable Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>32</b>	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	3	2	8	
<b>Total Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	

Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 71 percent of applicable Hall County cases, 65 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, and 37.5 percent of applicable Dawson County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 46 percent (6 cases) of 13 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bonds between parents and children. Examples of DHHS efforts to promote bonding between the child and parents included one or more of the following: promoting family therapy and modeling, encouraging the parents' participation in school activities and extracurricular activities, encouraging and facilitating the parents' participation in the child's medical care, providing or arranging for transportation to facilitate visitation, and facilitating contact with an incarcerated parent.

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

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support positive relationships with either the mother or father (six cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child's mother, but not with the father (two cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child's father, but not with the mother (two cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child's mother, and the child's father was not applicable (two cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child's father, and the child's mother was not applicable (one case).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 59 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to involve parents in case planning and, further, to encourage parents to attend medical appointments, school events, and to participate in activities with their children. The Statewide Assessment notes that the State has an active Fatherhood Initiative to encourage and promote the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children and families.

The Statewide Assessment recognizes the lack of data that measures bonding between parents and their children.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that parents are often encouraged to be involved in children's school activities and medical care. Some stakeholders also noted that Tribes offer the well-received Fatherhood is Sacred and Motherhood is Sacred programming to promote positive parenting.

### 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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	7	10	4	21	<b>32.3</b>
Partially Achieved	7	13	7	27	<b>41.5</b>
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	10	5	17	<b>26.2</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

#### Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 32.3 percent of cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 44 percent of Dawson County cases, 30 percent of Douglas County cases, and 25 percent of Hall County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 45 percent (18 cases) of 40 foster care cases and 12 percent (3 cases) of 25 in-home services cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 9 percent (two cases) of 23 cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

#### Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

The State also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 in the 2002 CFSR. The following key concerns were identified at that time with regard to the enhanced capacity of families to provide for their children’s needs:

- The State did not consistently assess needs and provide services for children, parents, and foster parents due to the lack of complete assessments, a lack of assessment of fathers or of all children in the home, and a lack of service provision to meet identified child or family needs or to support foster parents.
- The State did not consistently facilitate the involvement of children and families in case planning.
- The State did not consistently maintain frequent or effective contact with children due, in part, to the lack of a State policy pertaining to the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children.
- The State did not consistently maintain frequent or effective contact with parents due to the high caseloads and the lack of agency policy pertaining to caseworker visitation with parents.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State strengthened case planning policy and practice and developed monitoring to ensure needed services are identified in the comprehensive assessment process and provided to the family as well as to the noncustodial parent.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring regarding diligent efforts to locate and assess noncustodial parents and relatives for appropriate involvement in case planning.

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

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

The findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented below.

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

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 17 was applicable for all 65 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 issues are addressed in later items. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below.

<b>Item 17</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	7	14	5	26	<b>40</b>
Area Needing Improvement	9	19	11	39	<b>60</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 44 percent of Dawson County cases, 42 percent of Douglas County cases, and 31 percent of Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 53 percent (21 cases) of 40 foster care cases and 20 percent (5 cases) of 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 9 percent (2 cases) of 22 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

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

Assessment of Needs and Services	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Cases	
	Yes	Total	Yes	Total
Mother's needs assessed and met	17 (59%)	<b>29</b>	13 (52%)	<b>25</b>
Father's needs assessed and met	12 (50%)	<b>24</b>	4 (18%)	<b>22</b>
Child's needs assessed and met	36 (90%)	<b>40</b>	13 (52%)	<b>25</b>
Foster parents' needs assessed and met	26 (84%)	<b>31</b>		

### Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In only 40 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children and parents. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers conduct assessments of the family and individual members on an ongoing basis throughout the family's involvement with DHHS, and begin with a PCA. The Statewide Assessment notes that the PCA is reviewed every 6 months or more frequently. The Statewide Assessment also notes that, although there is no formal assessment required of the needs of foster parents, questions and concerns are addressed in a variety of ways across the State. The Statewide Assessment indicates that NSIS implementation training has provided caseworkers with guidance and clarity on identifying parental needs based on enhanced and diminished parental protective capacities to focus service delivery.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 67 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS in 2007, the State documented initial case plans in 82 percent of the cases and documented current case plans in 81 percent of the cases. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that the main barrier to appropriately assessing and addressing the needs of families is a lack of adequate service options available in many areas of the State.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item at all three sites expressed the opinion that needs are assessed for families initially and on an ongoing basis. Some stakeholders indicated that the NSIS safety evaluation tool provides for a more comprehensive assessment of needs than past assessments and provides for more precise planning for services. However, other stakeholders indicated that caseworkers do not consistently provide services to noncustodial parents and do not consistently follow up with families to ensure that appropriate services were provided. In addition, some stakeholders indicated that service plans are developed based on the services that are available, rather than the services needed by the family. Some stakeholders noted that the

Caregiver Information Form is used to provide information to the courts. However, other stakeholders expressed the opinion that the needs of foster parents, and especially relative caregivers, are not consistently addressed. Some stakeholders across the sites and at the State level noted that the regular 1184 teams provide a forum for service providers to share information regarding a case and identify available services.

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

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 18 was applicable for 59 (91 percent) of the 65 cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were not involved with the child in any way and 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 (if age appropriate) had been involved in case planning 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 had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. Findings from this assessment are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 18</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	6	13	4	23	<b>39</b>
Area Needing Improvement	7	18	11	36	<b>61</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>59</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	3	2	1	6	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 46 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 42 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, and 27 percent of applicable Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 53 percent (18 cases) of 34 applicable foster care cases and 20 percent (5 cases) of 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 22 percent (5 cases) of 23 cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

Specific information from the case reviews is presented in the table below. The data indicate that fathers are least likely to be involved in case planning.

<b>Families Involved in Case Planning</b>	<b>Involved</b>	<b>Total Applicable</b>
Mother	35 (65%)	<b>54</b>
Father	16 (35%)	<b>46</b>
Child	29 (60%)	<b>48</b>

**Rating Determination**

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In only 39 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children, when appropriate, in the case planning process. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to involve family members in case planning and are required to complete a genogram and an eco-map to identify family members and potential supports. The Statewide Assessment notes that family team meetings and the NSIS process provide caseworkers with the tools to involve parents and youth in planning for their needs. The Statewide Assessment notes that, although DHHS requires diligent efforts to locate and involve noncustodial parents in case planning, caseworkers are still challenged in this task. The Statewide Assessment indicates that there is a fundamental lack of trust between families and DHHS that impedes the agency’s ability to involve families in case planning.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 51 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to a DHHS quality assurance (QA) review, family team meetings were conducted in 42 percent of the cases in the Eastern and Southeast service areas.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that pre-hearing conferences, genograms, eco-maps, and family team meetings support the identification of relatives and noncustodial parents. In addition, some stakeholders reported that pre-hearing conferences and family team meetings involve parents in resolving issues related to the safety of their children. Other stakeholders noted, however, that case plans are not consistently developed jointly with parents and children. In addition, some stakeholders reported that OJS youth are involved in case planning as a part of the Youth Level of Service case planning module.

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

**Item 19. Caseworker visits with child**

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 19 was applicable for all 65 cases. In conducting the assessment of this item, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child’s safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 19</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	13	19	10	42	<b>65</b>
Area Needing Improvement	3	14	6	23	<b>35</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of Dawson County cases, 62.5 percent of Hall County cases, and 58 percent of Douglas County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 77.5 percent (31 cases) of 40 foster care cases and 44 percent (11 cases) of 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 65 percent (15 cases) of 23 cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child’s safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals. Item 19 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that the frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and/or the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

Specific information from the case reviews is presented in the table below. The data indicate that caseworkers visited with children at least monthly in 87.5 percent of foster care cases and 48 percent of in-home services cases.

<b>Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Child</b>	<b>Foster Care Cases</b>	<b>In-Home Services Cases</b>
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
Visits occurred less than weekly but at least twice a month	4 (10%)	0
Visits occurred less than twice a month but at least once a month	29 (72.5%)	11 (44%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	5 (12.5%)	9 (36%)
Visits never occurred	0	4 (16%)
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>25</b>

### Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 65 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. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, as of February 2008, DHHS policy requires caseworkers to conduct monthly in-person visits with children at each child's residence. The Statewide Assessment notes that contracted visitation service providers do not consistently provide high quality visitation and documentation.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 51 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, caseworkers made monthly visits in 80 percent of the cases in 2007.

### Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that caseworkers visit monthly with children in foster care. Some stakeholders noted, however, that visits are not consistently documented in N-FOCUS.

### Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 57 (88 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. All cases that were not applicable were foster care cases. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker's face-to-face contact with the children's mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well-being. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 20	Dawson County	Douglas County	Hall County	Total	Percent
Strength	5	7	5	17	30
Area Needing Improvement	8	23	9	40	70
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>57</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	3	3	2	8	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 38 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 36 percent of applicable Hall County cases, and 23 percent of applicable Douglas County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 38 percent (12 cases) of 32 applicable foster care cases and 20 percent (5 cases) of 25 in-home cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 26 percent (6 cases) of 23 cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

Item 20 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency (31 cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency (19 cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient quality (16 cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient quality (20 cases).

Specific information from the case reviews is presented in the table below. The data indicate that caseworkers visited with mothers at least monthly in 55 percent of applicable foster care cases and 64 percent of applicable in-home services cases. Caseworkers visited with fathers at least monthly in 39 percent of applicable foster care cases and 14 percent of the applicable in-home services cases.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Parents	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	0	0	2 (8%)	0
Visits occurred less than weekly but at least twice a month	5 (17%)	1 (4%)	0	0
Visits occurred less than twice a month but at least once a month	11 (38%)	8 (35%)	14 (56%)	3 (14%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	11 (38%)	8 (35%)	8 (32%)	5 (24%)
There were no visits during the period under review	2 (7%)	6 (26%)	1 (4%)	13 (62%)
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>

### Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In only 30 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. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS policy requires caseworkers to conduct monthly in-person visits with parents when reunification is the permanency goal. The Statewide Assessment notes that the NSIS process, family team meetings, and family-centered practice principles improve the agency’s contact efforts with family members, including noncustodial parents.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 35 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS, monthly visits occurred with parents in 61 percent of the cases in 2007. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that barriers to visitation with parents include high caseloads and a lack of appropriate documentation.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that caseworker performance measures include the completion of monthly visits with parents. Some stakeholders noted, however, that visits are not consistently documented in N-FOCUS.

**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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	11	18	10	39	<b>76.5</b>
Partially Achieved	0	1	0	1	<b>2.0</b>
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	6	4	11	<b>21.6</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>51</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	4	8	2	14	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

**Status of Well-Being Outcome 2**

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 76.5 percent of applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 92 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 72 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, and 71 percent of applicable Hall County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 86 percent (32 cases) of 37 applicable foster care cases and 50 percent (7 cases) of 14 applicable in-home services cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 67 percent (14 cases) of 21 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

## **Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR**

The State also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 in the 2002 CFSR because item 21 (education needs) was rated as an ANI. The key concern identified at that time with regard to meeting the educational needs of children was that children’s educational needs had not been consistently assessed appropriately and, in some cases, when educational needs were identified, the services identified were not provided.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State developed a standardized case file format including an educational section and directives regarding what is to be included in the section.
- The State strengthened State ward education policy and practice, developed monitoring of appropriate educational assessments and records, and followed up with educational recommendations to be documented in the case plan and addressed at the periodic review.

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

## **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

The findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific item assessed under Well-Being Outcome 2 are presented below.

### **Item 21. Educational needs of the child**

     Strength              X   Area Needing Improvement

#### **Case Review Findings**

Item 21 was applicable for 51 (78 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if either of the following applied: (1) children were not of school age, or (2) children in in-home cases did not have service needs pertaining to education issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below.

<b>Item 21</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	11	18	10	39	<b>77</b>
Area Needing Improvement	1	7	4	12	<b>23</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>51</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	4	8	2	14	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, 72 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, and 71 percent of applicable Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 86 percent (32 cases) of 37 applicable foster care cases and 50 percent (7 cases) of 14 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 67 percent (14 cases) of 21 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency assessed the child’s educational needs and maintained contact with the child’s school in order to monitor the child’s school performance (30 cases).
- The agency assessed the child’s educational needs and ensured that specialized services, tutoring, or an Individual Education Plan (IEP) was in place (14 cases).
- The agency assessed the child’s educational needs and ensured that early intervention services were in place (four cases).

Item 21 was rated as an ANI when case reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was a lack of assessment of educational needs even when there was evidence that the child was experiencing school-related problems (nine cases).
- Educational needs were identified and noted in the case record, but no services were provided to address those needs (one case).
- Truancy issues were not addressed by the agency (two cases).
- Not all children in the home were assessed for educational issues (two cases).

### **Rating Determination**

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 77 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 for this item. A 95 percent standard is set for this item because it is the only item assessed for the outcome. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS is required to notify the school district when a child comes into State custody and when placement or custody changes occur. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHHS utilizes the ETV program and the PALS program for youth and works with the schools to facilitate and monitor the IEP for children who need specialized educational services.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 64 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that confusion exists among educational personnel and caseworkers around who is responsible for ensuring that IEP services are provided for children in State custody.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that DHHS makes every effort to maintain children in their home schools. Some stakeholders noted that IEPs are tracked consistently for children in foster care and that early intervention services are available. Some stakeholders noted that American Indian Tribes use the Health, Education, Assessment, Referral, and Treatment (HEART) Program to assess and track services for children. Some stakeholders indicated that school systems do not consistently transfer records for children who change schools as a result of foster care placement. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that youth are not prepared to graduate due to the instability of their living situations and inadequate academic services. Some stakeholders in Douglas County reported that DHHS has worked with schools to provide mandated reporter information to teachers and counselors.

**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>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Substantially Achieved	10	21	7	38	<b>62.3</b>
Partially Achieved	4	5	4	13	<b>21.3</b>
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	4	5	10	<b>16.4</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>61</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	1	3	0	4	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

**Status of Well-Being Outcome 3**

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.3 percent of applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially

achieved in 70 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, 67 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, and 44 percent of Hall County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 68 percent (27 cases) of 40 foster care cases and 52 percent (11 cases) of 21 applicable in-home services cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 64 percent (14 cases) of 22 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

### **Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR**

The State also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 during the 2002 CFSR because both item 22 (physical and dental health needs) and item 23 (mental health needs) were rated as ANIs. The 2002 CFSR noted the following key concerns with respect to the State’s ability to meet the physical and mental health needs of children:

- The State did not consistently provide for the comprehensive physical health needs of children due to the finding that all children did not receive regular preventive physical health and dental services and due to the lack of available medical services throughout most areas of the State.
- The State did not consistently provide for the mental health needs of children either because mental health needs were not adequately assessed or needed services were not provided.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring to ensure that health and dental examinations are received as required by policy, including follow-up care.
- The State expanded the use of the Integrated Care Coordination Unit across the State in collaboration with Nebraska Regional Mental Health agencies to expedite reunification and permanency and reduce the number of moves while in placement.
- The State developed a standardized pretreatment protocol that addresses the child’s mental health needs and recommends treatments as needed, including substance abuse and eating disorders.

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

### **Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

Findings of the onsite 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented below.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

### Case Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 48 (74 percent) of the 65 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 (1) children’s physical health needs (including dental needs) had been appropriately assessed and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 22	Dawson County	Douglas County	Hall County	Total	Percent
Strength	10	19	8	37	77
Area Needing Improvement	1	7	3	11	23
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>48</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	5	7	5	17	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of applicable Dawson County cases and 73 percent of applicable Douglas County and Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 85 percent (34 cases) of 40 foster care cases and 37.5 percent (3 cases) of 8 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent (14 cases) of 16 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- There were no medical or dental assessments conducted during the period under review (four cases).
- Medical needs were assessed and addressed; however, dental needs were not assessed or were not addressed (four cases).
- Medical needs were not assessed or addressed (three cases).

### Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 77 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was adequately addressing the 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 ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

### Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, medical services are available to all children in State custody; however, an initial assessment is only required for children in State custody and is not required for children receiving in-home services. The Statewide Assessment notes that a dental examination is provided annually.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 68 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to N-FOCUS, 74 percent of the children zero to 3 years old who were eligible for early intervention services were actually referred for such services.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the physical and dental health of children in foster care is routinely assessed and that identified services are provided. Some stakeholders noted that American Indian Tribes use the HEART program to assess and track services for children.

**Item 23. Mental health of the child**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

**Case Review Findings**

Item 23 was applicable for 50 (77 percent) of the 65 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 (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed, and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

<b>Item 23</b>	<b>Dawson County</b>	<b>Douglas County</b>	<b>Hall County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strength	8	20	7	35	<b>70</b>
Area Needing Improvement	4	3	8	15	<b>30</b>
<b>Total Applicable Cases</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>50</b>	
Not Applicable Cases	4	10	1	15	
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	

Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 87 percent of applicable Douglas County cases, 67 percent of applicable Dawson County cases, and 47 percent of applicable Hall County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 74 percent (23 cases) of 31 applicable foster care cases and 63 percent (12 cases) of 19 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 68 percent (15 cases) of 22 applicable cases brought to the attention of DHHS for juvenile justice services.

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

- Mental health needs were assessed but not properly addressed (six cases).
- Mental health needs were neither assessed nor fully addressed (nine cases).

**Rating Determination**

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 70 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 ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, mental health assessments are provided if a family assessment indicates undue stress and severe social, emotional, or behavioral problems that threaten or negatively affect the family's structure and stability. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHHS implemented a standardized pretreatment assessment of children's mental health needs, the Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Assessment, to identify treatment options to meet each child's needs. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHHS awarded a new statewide contract to Magellan Behavioral Health Services to authorize, coordinate, consult, and provide utilization management for mental and behavioral health services effective July 1, 2008.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from the NE-CFSR in 2006, 92 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the Administrative Services Organization, Magellan Behavioral Health Services, coordinates and provides utilization management for mental health services in each region. Some stakeholders noted that transportation difficulties are a barrier to accessing mental health services and that there is a lack of mental health services in many areas of the State, particularly rural areas. In addition, some stakeholders noted that there is a lack of sufficient residential treatment facilities and treatment foster homes 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. It should be noted that ratings for the systemic factors are not based on single comments from an individual stakeholder; however, these comments are included in the report when they provide important insight or clarification regarding the State’s performance on a particular systemic factor.

A score for substantial conformity is established for each systemic factor. Scores of 3 and 4 represent substantial conformity. Scores of 1 and 2 indicate that the State is not in substantial conformity with the requirements of that systemic factor. Specifically, a score of 4 is given when all of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement. A score of 3 is given when 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. A score of 2 indicates that 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. A score of 1 indicates that none of the CFSP or program requirements are in place.

<b>Rating the Systemic Factor</b>			
<b>Not in Substantial Conformity</b>		<b>Substantial Conformity</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
None of the CFSP or program requirements are 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.

Information also is provided regarding the State’s performance on each systemic factor for the State’s first CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State’s PIP, the key concerns addressed in the PIP and the strategies for assessing those concerns are noted, as well as any changes in ratings that occurred as a result of the State’s second CFSR.

**I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM**

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

**Status of Statewide Information System**

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The Nebraska Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System is called N-FOCUS. Nebraska also was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2002 CFSR, and therefore, the State was not required to address this factor in the PIP.

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

Findings of the 2008 CFSR for the item assessed for this systemic factor are presented 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**

  X   Strength      \_\_\_\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because the State’s automated system, N-FOCUS, provides statewide information regarding the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care and tracks changes in that information over time. N-FOCUS provides information to caseworkers and supervisors to assist in case management. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, N-FOCUS is used by caseworkers and supervisors to identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child who is in foster care. The Statewide Assessment reports that N-FOCUS is updated regularly in response to new legislation and initiatives. The Statewide Assessment notes that N-FOCUS offers numerous data reports for caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators to use in their day-to-day work. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the required timely entry of data by caseworkers is a challenge due to high caseloads and perceived system usage barriers.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that N-FOCUS identifies the Federally-required information for each child in foster care. Some stakeholders reported that Tribal child welfare program caseworkers and the juvenile justice system have the ability to enter information into N-FOCUS. Some stakeholders also reported that the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) has access to N-FOCUS to conduct periodic reviews. In addition, some stakeholders reported that N-FOCUS data is routinely presented to the public on a State website known as COMPASS that tracks agency performance on key outcomes. Some stakeholders noted that reports are generated and utilized by managers and supervisors to track cases, timelines, outcomes, and to monitor casework. Some stakeholders in Dawson County and Douglas County noted that reports assist managers in the development of performance targets and strategies.

Some stakeholders across the sites and onsite CFSR reviewers noted that, due to high caseloads and a lack of sufficient training, caseworkers do not consistently or completely enter case planning and placement information into N-FOCUS on a timely basis. Some stakeholders in Douglas County noted that all caseworkers do not enter data directly into N-FOCUS and that caseworkers submit Word documents to data entry staff to be entered into N-FOCUS. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that N-FOCUS can be a cumbersome system to navigate and it requires extensive time to complete case entries.

**II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM**

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

**Status of Case Review System**

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System.

**Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR**

Nebraska also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR, and therefore, was required to address this factor in the PIP. Item 26 (periodic review) and item 27 (permanency hearings) were rated as Strengths. Item 25 (written case plan), item 28 (TPR), and item 29 (notification to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of hearings) were rated as ANIs for the following reasons:

- Although the State had a process to provide written case plans for each child in foster care, case plans were not present for all children. In addition, parents were not active participants in the case planning process.
- Although the State had a process to provide for TPR within the required timeframes, practice did not follow this process due to cultural and administrative barriers.
- The State did not have a process to provide notification to a child’s caregivers of hearings.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State strengthened case planning policy and practice and developed monitoring to ensure needed services are identified in the comprehensive assessment process and provided to the family as well as to the noncustodial parent.
- The State strengthened policy and practice and developed monitoring regarding TPR including appropriateness, timeliness, and compelling reasons not to file.
- The State strengthened policy and practice regarding the procedures for notifying the court of who is relevant to a particular case and who should be invited to future court proceedings.

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

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

Findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented 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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an ANI. Although case plans are developed for all children and the implementation of team decision-making has enhanced the case planning process, case plans are not consistently developed jointly with the parents nor are they developed in a timely manner. The Statewide Assessment indicated that high caseloads may be a factor in the timely and joint development of case plans. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

The findings of the Onsite Review with regard to child and family involvement in case planning (item 18) show that this item was rated as an ANI in 61 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. Out of 59 applicable cases, the rating was due to the lack of involvement of 65 percent of fathers and/or 35 percent of mothers.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS provides a process to ensure that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parents. The Statewide Assessment notes that case plans are considered as a written, working agreement between the family, caseworker, and other team members and that case planning must be a collaborative, ongoing process that continues throughout the time DHHS is involved with the family. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the case plan must be developed and documented within 60 days and updated every 6 months.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to data from N-FOCUS in 2007, family team meetings were conducted in 41.6 percent of the cases in the Eastern and Southeast service areas; custodial parents attended 87.3 percent of the meetings, and noncustodial parents attended in 29.7 percent of the cases.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that case plans are developed in a timely manner, updated every 6 months, and contain key information regarding goals and service plans. Some stakeholders at all three sites also reported that the NSIS safety assessments, preadjudicatory conferences, and family team meetings are used as tools to engage parents in case planning.

Other stakeholders noted, however, that case plans are not consistently developed jointly with parents. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that when preadjudicatory conferences or family team meetings are conducted, parents are involved in case planning; however, these meetings are not consistently held.

### **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       Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because, although data are not available for this item, there was general agreement among stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR that the State conducts timely and meaningful 6-month administrative reviews for all children in foster care. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS provides a process that allows for the periodic review of the status of each child every 6 months. The Statewide Assessment notes that both the courts and the FCRB conduct 6-month case reviews that are tracked in N-FOCUS, in addition to multidisciplinary team reviews. The Statewide Assessment reports that all child welfare cases are reviewed every 6 months, but acknowledges that there are inconsistencies in the quality and documentation of court reviews. The Statewide Assessment does not provide data related to the percentage of 6-month reviews that are held in a timely manner.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, although the State did not provide data related to the completion of 6-month reviews, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated consistently that the State or Tribal courts review the status of children in foster care at least every 6 months. Some stakeholders also reported that the FCRB reviews the majority of cases every 6 months in order to track trends and accountability. Some stakeholders noted that the 6-month review hearings review the case plan goals and service provision. Some stakeholders also noted that youth are encouraged to attend court hearings. However, a few stakeholders in Douglas County expressed the opinion that court continuances are common at periodic review hearings, leading to a delay in permanency decisions.

**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              X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an ANI because, although the State has a process in place for conducting permanency hearings, hearings are not being conducted in a timely manner due, in part, to full court calendars and delayed court reports. The Statewide Assessment reports that only 30 percent of the children in foster care for over 15 months had permanency hearings within the past 12 months. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS provides a process to ensure that each child in foster care has a permanency hearing every 12 months, as long as the child remains in DHHS custody. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that a permanency hearing is held within 30 days of a TPR, within 30 days of a court determination that reasonable efforts to reunify the child with the parent are not required, and when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there is a lack of consistent documentation of permanency hearings in N-FOCUS. The Statewide Assessment also noted that, according to data from N-FOCUS, as of September 30, 2007, only 30 percent of the children in out-of-home care for 15 of the past 22 months had a permanency hearing within the past 12 months.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that a permanency hearing is held at 12 months to review the progress toward achieving permanency. Some stakeholders noted that permanency hearings offer a key opportunity to move the case forward toward permanency. However, some stakeholders in Douglas County expressed the opinion that court continuances are common at the permanency hearing, leading to a delay in permanency decisions due, in part, to full court calendars and delayed court reports. In addition, some stakeholders in all three sites indicated that the substantive issues addressed in the permanency hearings at 12 months do not differ from those addressed during status review hearings held at 6 months.

**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 ANI because, although the State has a process in place to provide TPRs in accordance with ASFA requirements, TPR petitions are not consistently filed in a timely manner due, in part, to a lack of initial planning and establishment of paternity. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, case reviewers determined that only 67 percent of the applicable cases met the TPR requirements of ASFA. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Case review findings show that, at the time of the Onsite Review, ASFA requirements (with regard to both filing for TPR and documenting compelling reasons for not filing) were met in 47 percent (8 cases) of the 17 applicable cases. The findings of the Onsite Review with regard to achieving adoptions (item 9) noted that, in eight cases, there were delays in filing TPR petitions that impeded the timely achievement of adoptions.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS provides a process that allows for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of ASFA. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHHS contracts with private attorneys to file TPR petitions, providing a more timely process. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that delays in achieving TPR may be related to a lack of early involvement of noncustodial parents and, in cases where ICWA applies, a lack of early involvement of Tribes. The Statewide Assessment states that cases can be delayed due, in part, to a lack of initial planning and establishment of paternity. The Statewide Assessment did not provide data regarding the timely filing of TPR petitions.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that petitions for TPR are filed timely in the majority of cases. Some stakeholders reported that a TPR petition must include a statement that TPR is in the best interests of the child. Some stakeholders in all three sites noted that compelling reasons for not filing a TPR petition usually relate to an extension of time to pursue reunification or provide services to parents, but also may include mental illness of the parent or incarceration of the parent for a crime other than child abuse. Some stakeholders in Dawson County indicated that voluntary relinquishments are sought in lieu of seeking TPR.

However, some stakeholders in Douglas County and Hall County noted that delays in filing TPR petitions are due, in part, to a lack of effort to locate and engage noncustodial parents and frequent court continuances. Some stakeholders also noted that a lack of attorney expertise in some parts of the State contributes to a reluctance to file TPR petitions. Some stakeholders indicated that County Attorneys in some cases do not file petitions for TPR unless they are assured of a positive outcome. In addition, stakeholders noted that there is a dilemma in filing for TPR when there is a lack of available services, especially for substance abuse treatment.

Some stakeholders noted that Tribal child welfare programs do not support TPR as a permanency option for Native American children.

**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 ANI because, although the State has a statute that provides foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers an opportunity to be heard at reviews and hearings regarding the children in their care, the State has not implemented a consistent process to ensure that notification occurs. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS provides a process to ensure that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care are notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child. The Statewide Assessment notes that Nebraska passed a State law in 2007, requiring notice of hearings and reviews to be given to caregivers and gives caregivers the right to be heard in court. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that courts do not consistently provide notice to caregivers of hearings and that Tribes in particular may not consistently receive notice of hearings of Native American children. The Statewide Assessment does not provide data regarding the percentage of caregivers who are notified of hearings and reviews held with respect to the child.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that courts are required to provide notice to caregivers of hearings for the children in their care. Some stakeholders noted that notice is provided by the agency in some jurisdictions and by the courts in other jurisdictions. Some stakeholders also reported that foster parents are provided with the opportunity to submit a Caregiver Information Form to the court as a record of progress and that foster parents are welcome to provide testimony during court hearings regarding the children in their care.

### III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

#### Status of Quality Assurance System

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System.

#### Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

Nebraska was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the State’s 2002 CFSR, and therefore, was required to address this factor in its PIP. Item 30 (standards) and item 31 (QA System) were rated as ANIs. Key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State does not have a policy to require supervisory visits of children in foster homes.
- The State does not have a comprehensive, statewide approach to QA to measure the quality of care provided and outcomes.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State developed a comprehensive framework for QA in collaboration with the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement and field staff.
- The State identified and developed practice standards.

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

#### Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the State has developed and implemented effective standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services to protect their safety and health. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has developed policies and processes to ensure quality services to children in foster care in the following practice areas:

- Licensing of foster homes, child care institutions, and child-placing agencies
- Child protective investigations
- Adoption and subsidized adoption
- Guardianship and subsidized guardianship
- Former wards
- ICPC
- Case planning
- Judicial reviews

The Statewide Assessment reports that DHHS has partnered with the Nebraska Association of Homes and Services for Children to examine ways to move toward performance-based contracting for group homes. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that performance-based contracts are already in place with behavioral health-care providers in each region, and the State is collecting data to establish baselines for these contracts.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that State standards for licensing and service provision are in place throughout the State. In addition, some stakeholders reported that State standards are used in Tribal areas as a guide for licensing, investigations, and service delivery. Some stakeholders in Douglas County and Dawson County noted that accountability measures were introduced in the past 2 years focusing on performance standards for caseworkers to assure that quality services, with a focus on caseworker visits to ensure safety, are being provided to families. Some stakeholders also noted that the State developed new evidence-based contracts with all service providers.

**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**

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the State has an identifiable QA system that includes a Comprehensive Quality Improvement/Operations Unit with staff located across the State who conduct ongoing case reviews and provide feedback to local offices and to inform policy development concerning the following areas: performance accountability, specialized case reviews, ICWA compliance reviews, and consumer satisfaction surveys. The State has a process in place to share information, develop a plan of improvement, and reassess performance. Reports are provided to the Protection and Safety Administrators with the expectation that PIPs will be implemented as necessary. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS maintains a Comprehensive Quality Improvement/Operations Unit with staff across the State to conduct QA activities, audits, case reviews, and consultations. The Statewide Assessment notes that this unit conducts an internal NE-CFSR on an annual basis, conducts stakeholder surveys, implements the Performance Accountability Plan developed in 2004, and conducts ongoing case reviews providing feedback to local offices and to inform policy development. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DHHS works with judges throughout the State to review court orders to enhance title IV-E compliance and timeliness.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that the NE-CFSR conducted in each region provides valuable information and feedback to each office regarding specific strengths and challenges. Some stakeholders noted that administrators can investigate specific issues by using the extensive data collected statewide. For example, some stakeholders in Douglas County noted that specific data are examined regarding adoption, and stakeholders in Hall County noted that specific well-being outcomes are tracked regularly. Some stakeholders also noted that reports regarding case timelines for documentation and case planning are provided to local offices to track results and caseworker performance.

**IV. TRAINING**

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

**Status of Training**

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in the 2002 CFSR and, therefore, was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

## Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

  X   Strength                   Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength because Nebraska has in place pre-service training that covers a 6-month period and that is effective in preparing caseworkers for their job responsibilities. Caseworkers are required to complete training prior to assuming a full caseload. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

#### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, staff training is provided primarily through a contract with the Center on Children, Families, and the Law at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to support cross-system coordination. The Statewide Assessment reports that new staff must complete the Protection and Safety New Worker Employment Practicum Curriculum over a 6-month period, including classroom and field training components. The Statewide Assessment reports that, in 2007, 161 individuals were enrolled in new worker training, including all new child welfare staff (112 Protection and Safety Trainees, 46 ICCU staff, and 3 employees of other DHHS programs).

In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that Nebraska uses the Competency Development Tool (CDT) to assess trainee knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide feedback to each employee on performance and determine promotion feasibility. The Statewide Assessment notes that trainees do not make any independent case decisions during the 6-month training period. The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that the results of the CDT have shown that the current training model may not be as effective as prior models based on a shorter training period.

#### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that the initial training period of 6 months provides a mixture of classroom, shadowing, and field training for incoming caseworkers and addresses the following three core areas: case management; legal and court issues; and children, youth, and family issues. In addition, some stakeholders reported that caseworkers carry a minimum number of cases during the training period and that caseworkers do not assume responsibility for case decisions until the 6-month training period ends. Some stakeholders in all three sites expressed the opinion that the training is effective in preparing caseworkers for their job responsibilities.

Some stakeholders also reported that State training is available to Tribal caseworkers; however, it does not directly address their training needs. Some stakeholders in Douglas County and Hall County indicated that 6 months of initial training is too long and that caseworkers would benefit from more intensive field training.

**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 because Nebraska requires a minimum of 24 hours of annual in-service training for caseworkers that addresses both general and specialized issues. In-service training also is provided for supervisors and managers. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Nebraska provided supplemental data to the Statewide Assessment indicating that trainers, training content, and training processes are evaluated after each in-service training session. Evaluation feedback is used to adjust and improve subsequent training.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS requires staff and supervisors to have a minimum of 24 hours of ongoing, supervisor-approved training annually. The Statewide Assessment reports that, in 2007, 450 staff received in-service training, including Protective Service Workers, Protective Services Specialists, and Protective Services Administrators. The Statewide Assessment reports that if required training is not completed, disciplinary action is taken.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the content of training that is offered changes in response to new initiatives and practice issues. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that the DHHS intranet offers a document repository containing program guidance and policy manuals and memoranda available to all staff. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DHHS offers financial support for staff to attain a Bachelor of Science or Masters in Social Work degree. Finally, the Statewide Assessment notes that staff competency, knowledge, and ability are evaluated annually through employee performance evaluations.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges that there is a lack of adequate training on data entry and documentation, IEP development and school-related issues, and on Tribal coordination. The Statewide Assessment indicates that high turnover rates in combination with the large geographical size of the State have placed increasing demands on training resources.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DHHS holds an annual supervisors conference to increase the knowledge and skill of administrators and supervisors.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that a minimum of 24 hours of annual training for caseworkers and supervisors is mandatory and consists of both general and specialized areas such as new initiatives, supervisory issues, drug-affected families, court issues, adoption, investigation, juvenile justice, and domestic violence. Some stakeholders in all three sites indicated that supervisors and local administrators identify training needs through annual performance evaluations for caseworkers.

Some stakeholders noted that supervisors are required to complete training when they enter the position and that they are required to complete 24 hours of annual 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 because foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and staff of licensed placement facilities are required to complete 21 hours of training prior to licensure and 12 hours of in-service training annually. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Nebraska provided supplemental data to the Statewide Assessment indicating that the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NFAPA), the provider of foster and adoptive parent training, collects and maintains evaluations of trainers and the quality of training sessions. Evaluation feedback is used to improve training and to identify new material for training.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, foster and pre-adoptive families are required to participate in 21 hours of initial PRIDE training prior to being licensed and 12 hours of in-service training annually. The Statewide Assessment reports that staff members of out-of-home care placement facilities are required to receive between 21 and 24 hours of initial training and between 12 and 15 hours of in-service training annually. The Statewide Assessment notes that NFAPA provides both preservice and in-service training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of child care facilities.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that the PRIDE training provided by NFAPA provides useful and important information for foster and adoptive parents. Some stakeholders noted that training is available twice per year across the State and is provided as needed at interim times. Some stakeholders at all three sites indicated that, although relatives are not required to participate in training, they have the opportunity to participate.

**V. SERVICE ARRAY**

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

**Status of Service Array**

Nebraska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array.

**Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR**

Nebraska also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2002 CFSR, and therefore, was required to address this factor in the PIP. Item 35 (array of services), item 36 (accessibility of services), and item 37 (individualized services) were rated as ANIs due to the following concerns at that time:

- According to the Statewide Assessment and stakeholders, key gaps in services included parent education, family support, substance abuse treatment, foster care placements, services for developmentally disabled children, dental care, culturally and linguistically competent providers, IL services, residential treatment, community-based services, juvenile justice services, and services for sexual offenders and sexual abuse victims.
- Services are not consistently available statewide, and there are frequently long waiting lists.
- Services are not individualized to meet the needs of children and families primarily due to service gaps throughout the State.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State conducted a service array pilot in two areas using a model from the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice that identifies the service needs, gaps, and improvements needed to address timely initiation of services, ensures the ability to offer needed services, develops in-home services, and shortens waiting lists.
- The State partnered with the Nebraska Public Health Improvement Initiative to expand health and dental services for State wards.

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

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

Findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an ANI. Although collaborative efforts between the child welfare agency and other government agencies are occurring to maximize services, there are gaps across the State in key service areas such as placement resources, residential treatment, and IL services. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS currently administers funding to support community agencies and organizations in providing abuse-related services to children and families, including programs in the following areas: domestic violence, shelters, in-home services, health care, family development, and behavioral health care. The Statewide Assessment reports that collaborative efforts between child welfare and juvenile services, behavioral health, developmental disability groups, law enforcement, and multidisciplinary teams have increased service availability across the State.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DHHS conducted a service array assessment in two pilot sites in 2004. The Statewide Assessment notes that this assessment expanded statewide in 2005, and has been completed in 28 counties. The goals of the service array assessment are to consolidate planning, assess community capacity, strengthen preventive care, and adjust policy to support best practices.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that clients and caseworkers are unable to consistently locate and access services in the following areas: residential treatment, inpatient and outpatient psychiatric services, and Tribal-based services. The Statewide Assessment also indicates that State cutbacks have resulted in insufficient service availability for high-risk youth and families.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that core services such as investigations, medical evaluation, out-of-home placement, and permanency planning are available statewide. Some stakeholders also reported that certain areas of the State have a rich array of services available including multisystem therapy to provide support to the whole family and a strong network of coordinated community-based services.

Other stakeholders noted concern about the statewide behavioral health services contract and limitations on the availability of ongoing treatment. In addition, some stakeholders noted that there is a lack of sufficient foster homes in certain regions of the State and that

children who must be removed from their homes are sometimes placed for extended periods of time in shelters, detention facilities, or hospitals. Some stakeholders across the sites indicated that IL services are not always available.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an ANI because service accessibility is limited due to the great distances that must be traveled to obtain services in the rural areas of Nebraska, and the lack of transportation limits access to services. In addition, there are waiting lists for some mental health services and gaps for many services statewide. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the NSIS initiative is designed to improve the accessibility of services for each family. However, the Statewide Assessment recognizes that Nebraska is a largely rural State and that there is a lack of services in remote areas. The long distances some clients must travel to access services in some areas limits access to many services for many families.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that limited services are available in rural areas of the State. Some stakeholders noted that a lack of transportation and the long distances required to access certain services presents a barrier for families in securing treatment and support. Some stakeholders noted that gaps in services available in various regions of the State include: methamphetamine treatment, psychiatric and mental health evaluation and treatment, transportation, language-specific services, IL services, adoption support, sexual abuse treatment, and residential treatment.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an ANI. Although the State model of family team meetings is designed to individualize services, these meetings are not consistently held. In addition, services are not always individualized to meet the needs of children and families due, in part, to service limitations and a lack of available bilingual services. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

The findings of the Onsite Review with regard to assessing and meeting the needs of children and families (item 17) noted that the needs of children were appropriately assessed and met in 75 percent of cases, the needs of mothers were appropriately assessed and met in 56 percent of applicable cases, and the needs of fathers were appropriately assessed and met in only 35 percent of applicable cases.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, the NSIS initiative is designed to individualize case planning and service delivery, especially for in-home voluntary service cases, and provides for culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that family team meetings provide caseworkers with the opportunity to design specialized case plans to support each family individually. However, other stakeholders reported that family team meetings are not consistently held throughout the State and that service limitations negatively impact the ability of families to succeed in achieving their goals. Some stakeholders indicated that, in areas where services are limited, case plans may be designed based on the services available rather than the needs of the family.

Some stakeholders noted that Tribal child welfare programs throughout the State offer a Native American-based parenting curriculum called Fatherhood is Sacred. In addition, some stakeholders noted that IL services provided by the PALS program are delivered one-to-one for each child addressing specific needs. Some stakeholders also noted that bilingual services are not always available to families of Hispanic or Somali descent, especially in relation to case planning, parenting support, and mental health treatment.

**VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY**

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

**Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community**

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. In the 2002 CFSR, Nebraska also was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor, and therefore, was not required to address it in the PIP.

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

Findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the specific items assessed for this systemic factor are presented below.

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because the State has consulted with stakeholders in the community regarding child welfare initiatives and the goals of the CFSP. The State agency has effectively partnered with the Governor, the legislature, and the courts to develop and improve child welfare practice. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, there is tremendous effort, energy, and enthusiasm in all branches of Nebraska’s government, partner organizations, and the community at large to improve the child welfare system and outcomes for abused and neglected children. The Statewide Assessment reports that State law provides for public comment and a hearing process as a part of the promulgation of any policies, regulations, or the State plan. In particular, the Statewide Assessment notes that Through the Eyes of a Child collaborative teams provide local court systems an opportunity to jointly plan with DHHS administrators; the Drug Endangered Children’s Committee brought DHHS together with various law enforcement and service providers to address the effects of methamphetamine in the community; and the Committee on the Education of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Placements examined the success of children in school systems. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes collaborative endeavors with developmental disabilities providers, child support providers, IL service providers, substance abuse treatment providers, youth, and Tribal leaders.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that the Chief Justice and the Governor have provided critical leadership to the executive branch in the importance of partnerships across public agencies and with private agencies. In particular, some stakeholders noted that the Through the Eyes of the Child teams at the administrative level and the multidisciplinary treatment teams at the case level have improved the success of new initiatives by providing a forum for partners to share information. Some stakeholders also noted that Tribes have had the opportunity to provide input into the CFSP. Although some stakeholders expressed the opinion that DHHS does not consider input from partner agencies in the development of goals and objectives, the majority of stakeholders indicated that they contribute to the development of the CFSP.

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

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because focus groups and collaboratives regularly discuss Annual Progress and Service Reports (APSRs) of the CFSP and service delivery across the State. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

The Statewide Assessment did not provide information on this item.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across sectors indicated an awareness of the title IV-B State plan and APSRs. Some stakeholders noted that focus groups and collaboratives regularly discuss ongoing development of and progress toward meeting the goals set by DHHS for the CFSP.

**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 because DHHS collaborates with the judicial and legislative branches of government as well as with other executive agencies and Indian Tribes to coordinate services and benefits of other Federal programs serving the same population under the CFSP, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), child care, and child support. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS collaborates with the judicial and legislative branches of government, in addition to other executive agencies and the Tribes in providing comprehensive services to children and families. The Statewide Assessment reports that multidisciplinary and interagency advisory councils, ad hoc committees, and task forces are active in all regions of the State. Please see item 38 above for more information on specific initiatives.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that DCFS is responsible for the TANF, child care, and child support programs in addition to the titles IV-E and IV-B programs. Some stakeholders across the sites noted that DHHS maintains strong partnerships with education providers, mental health providers, developmental disabilities agencies, and law enforcement agencies.

**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>Substantial Conformity</b>	
	1	2	3X	4

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

Nebraska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

**Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR**

In the 2002 CFSR, Nebraska was not in substantial conformity with this factor, and therefore, was required to address this factor in its PIP. Item 41 (standards for foster homes and child care institutions) and item 42 (universal application of standards for foster homes and child care institutions) were rated as Strengths. However, item 43 (criminal background checks), item 44 (foster and adoptive resource recruitment), and item 45 (cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanency) were rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified at that time were the following:

- The State did not consistently implement background checks, although these were required.
- The State did not conduct recruitment due to staffing and resource limitations.
- The State did not use adoption exchanges to promote the adoption of children who are legally free for adoption.

To address these concerns, Nebraska implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The State developed policy and monitoring that requires all licensed and approved foster parents to be fingerprinted for criminal background checks prior to licensure.
- The State conducted a targeted foster parent/resource family recruitment campaign to reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in State custody in collaboration with NFAPA to support stability of foster placements.

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

**Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR**

Findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the specific items assessed for this systemic factor are presented 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 because Nebraska has in place effective standards for licensure of foster family homes and child care institutions. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Nebraska statute provides standards for approval and licensing of all out-of-home placement settings including background checks, a health information report, a fire safety inspection, a sanitation inspection, and an evaluation and recommendation. The Statewide Assessment reports that the combined number of licensed and approved foster care homes decreased 19 percent from 2006 to 2007. The Statewide Assessment notes that delays in the home study process and background checks can be barriers to foster and adoptive parent licensing.

The Statewide Assessment notes that reports of maltreatment perpetrated by providers in foster homes or child caring facilities are assessed by DHHS in collaboration with local law enforcement and result in a licensing review. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that, according to data from N-FOCUS, 68 children were reported as being abused during the time they were placed in a foster care setting in 2006, and of the 219 children who experienced repeat maltreatment that year, 8 children were abused by a foster parent.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that State standards are comprehensive, include background checks and home studies, and apply to licensed and approved foster homes in addition to child care facilities. Some stakeholders reported that for a foster home to be relicensed every 2 years, foster families must complete required in-service training, undergo renewed background checks, and complete a home visit.

**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**

  X   Strength             Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength. Licensing standards are applied uniformly to all foster family homes, including licensed relative homes and child care institutions. Although the State did not provide data regarding the extent to which standards are applied to licensed or approved foster family homes and child care institutions, the results of the title IV-E Eligibility Review support the stakeholder

comments and Statewide Assessment indications that standards are applied appropriately. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

The title IV-E Eligibility Review held in July 2008 found that licensing standards were applied to all licensed foster homes and child care facilities.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Nebraska offers a streamlined approval process for kinship placements, waiving training requirements, while providing licenses to non-relative foster families or facilities.

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that State standards apply to both licensed and approved relative foster homes, requiring home studies and background checks. For approved relative foster homes, the training requirement may be waived. Some stakeholders noted that Tribes use the State's licensing standards and issue licenses directly.

**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. Nebraska conducts criminal background clearances in compliance with Federal requirements. Although the State did not provide data regarding the extent to which criminal background clearances are conducted, the results of the title IV-E Eligibility Review support stakeholder comments and Statewide Assessment indications that criminal background clearances are conducted appropriately to address the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

The title IV-E Eligibility Review held in July 2008 found that criminal background clearances were completed for all licensed foster homes.

**Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, Nebraska requires the completion of the following background checks for all prospective foster and adoptive parents and adult relatives and non-relatives living in the home prior to licensure or approval:

- FBI National Criminal History System
- Nebraska Central Register for Child Abuse

- Nebraska Adult Central Registry
- Nebraska State Patrol Sex Offender Registry

**Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that licensing specialists for foster care and adoptive home licensing routinely process background clearances and fingerprints. Some stakeholders noted that delays in fingerprint processing due to the quality of the fingerprint can cause delays in licensing or placement.

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an ANI because, although DHHS and NFAPA have an ongoing partnership to recruit foster and adoptive parents, there is a lack of a planned activities for the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care in the State. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for Nebraska for the 12-month period ending March 2008 shows the following information regarding the race of children in the foster care population:

- 62.9 percent are Caucasian.
- 16.79 percent are African-American.
- 9.5 percent are American Indian.
- 0.46 percent are Asian.
- 10.27 percent are of Hispanic origin.
- 10.35 percent are either not reported or unable to determine.

In addition, for the same period, AFCARS data shows the following information regarding the race of the primary caregiver:

- 27.78 percent are Caucasian.
- 9.42 percent are African-American.
- 1.35 percent are American Indian.
- 0.09 percent are Asian.
- 2.68 percent are of Hispanic origin.
- 61.33 percent are either not reported or unable to determine.

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHHS and NFAPA have an ongoing partnership to recruit and retain foster and adoptive parents. The Statewide Assessment reports that a media campaign was developed to produce “Why You Should Become a Foster Parent” and “When I Get Home,” two public service announcements designed to increase the number of foster and adoptive resources. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the Adoption Partnership successfully produces a National Adoption Day celebration resulting in an annual increase in adoptions. The Statewide Assessment notes that stakeholder interviews indicated that little recruitment or outreach is made to churches or to targeted communities such as the Hispanic or Asian communities. There is a lack of foster parents with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds to serve the population of children in their communities of origin.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item across the sites and at the State level indicated that DHHS has identified a need for Spanish-speaking placement resources, Native American foster families, and foster homes that reflect the immigrant population in the State. Some stakeholders in Douglas County noted that NFAPA holds a contract to increase recruitment in the Hispanic population. Some stakeholders noted that there continues to be a need to develop placement resources in general.

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

Strength       Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because, although the State did not provide data regarding the number of children placed in other jurisdictions, Nebraska effectively utilizes diverse methods, including both State and National adoption exchanges and photo listings, to obtain placements for children across counties and outside the State. This item was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

During the onsite CFSR, reviewers noted in one case that an adoption was delayed due to an incomplete home study and a lack of coordination between ICPC caseworkers.

Nebraska provided supplemental data to the Statewide Assessment regarding the use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placement for waiting children. On March 1, 2008, DHHS entered into a contract with three leading adoption agencies in the State. They are referred to as the Adoption Partnership and they provide the following services to support the adoption work of DHHS.

- Maintenance of the list of all DHHS wards free for adoption, which includes ensuring youth are on the Adoption Exchanges or that a DHHS exception exists
- Registration of children on the exchanges and Heart Gallery, which includes the gathering of information and supplying professional quality photos

- Update of exchange information at least annually
- Monitoring of responses from families interested in registered children by making the initial response to the family; determining if the family is licensed or approved in the family's State of residence; obtaining a copy of the home study; initially screening the family and providing a copy of the home study and comments on the initial screening to the Department worker
- Review of case records of youth free for adoption to identify potential adoptive placements, contacting the families to determine their interest, and prioritizing their potential for placement
- Creation of a file summary that includes historical and current information from the child's file for use in determining the child's needs and sharing with adoptive parents

### **Statewide Assessment Information**

The Statewide Assessment did not provide information on this item.

### **Stakeholder Interview Information**

During the onsite CFSR, stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that caseworkers utilize the ICPC process to facilitate and monitor placements for children outside the State. Some stakeholders noted that DHHS uses the Heart Galleries, AdoptUsKids, and the Adoption Exchange to identify appropriate homes for children waiting for permanent placement with families.