

Executive Summary
Final Report: Vermont Child and Family Services Review
August 17, 2007

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

The CFSR assesses State performance with regard to seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. The Vermont CFSR was conducted the week of April 9, 2007. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the State child welfare agency – Vermont Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division (FSD);
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 2003 through 2005;
- Reviews of 64 cases across three sites in the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders, including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

Background Information

In the Outcomes Section of the CSFR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement 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 with regard to seven 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.

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

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95 percent standard established for the CFSR onsite review at the end of their Program Improvement Plan implementation. ACF 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 that change is likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with ACF to establish a specified amount of improvement or implement specified activities for their Program Improvement Plan. That is, for each outcome or item that is an area needing improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the Children's Bureau) specifies how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the areas needing improvement, and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of their Program Improvement Plan 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 a consistent, comprehensive, case-review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued Program Improvement Plans addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, even though prior Program Improvement Plan 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 Program Improvement Plan.

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 Program Improvement Plan to address those concerns. This discussion also focuses on whether the key concerns that emerged in the first CFSR continued to be present in the second review, or whether those concerns were resolved, but other concerns emerged.

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

- An increase in the sample size from 50 to 65 cases.

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

CFSR Findings

The CFSR case review process identified several areas of strength. For example, Vermont received a 100 percent Strength rating on the items pertaining to placing children in foster care with their siblings (item 12) and placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11). The State also performed well with regard to meeting children’s educational needs (item 21) and physical health needs (item 22), although for both of these items the percent of cases rated as a Strength was slightly less than that required for an overall rating of Strength. In addition, Vermont met the national standards for Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions, and also for the national data indicators pertaining to the absence of recurrence of maltreatment and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by their care providers.

With regard to systemic factors, Vermont was found to have a well established statewide information system; a well-functioning quality assurance system; operative systems for the licensing, training, recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents; and responsive coordination with community stakeholders. It was also apparent that the agency made concerted efforts to seek input from stakeholders in the development of the Statewide Assessment.

Despite these areas of strong performance, Vermont was not in substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes. One particular area of concern relates to the State’s performance on Well-Being Outcome 1—Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children’s needs. Only 23.4 percent of the cases reviewed were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome. Although performance on all of the items included in the outcome was generally low, a key concern pertained to the lack of sufficient contacts between caseworkers and the children and families they serve. Performance on the outcome and the items varied based on the type of case, with a higher percentage of foster care cases being rated as a Strength compared to in-home services cases.

The lack of caseworker contacts with children and families also may have affected the State’s performance on Safety Outcome 2—Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate. Only 46.9 percent of the cases were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome, with the key concern pertaining to a lack of adequate ongoing assessment of safety and risk and attention to providing services to address safety and risk issues.

Another area of concern identified through the CFSR pertains to the State’s criteria for accepting and substantiating reports of abuse and neglect. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that FSD criteria for accepting and substantiating reports, when the incidences involve child neglect or domestic violence, are not well understood in the community, particularly by individuals who report incidences of maltreatment to the agency. Stakeholders suggested that the existing criteria can result in some children being left at risk of harm, particularly in instances of child neglect and domestic violence.

As several stakeholders noted, Vermont statute regarding definitions of child abuse (Chapter 49) defines an acceptable child abuse report as one that involves one or both of the following: a) children whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare are harmed or at substantial risk of harm, or b) children who have been sexually abused or are at substantial risk for being sexually abused [33 V.S.A. §4912(2)(a)]. Vermont statute defines risk of harm as “a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which harm would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment or sexual abuse” (33 VSA §4912(4)). Vermont policy provides guidance on accepting, assessing and substantiating allegations of risk of harm. The concern raised by stakeholders during the onsite CFSR is that these criteria result in either (1) many maltreatment reports not being accepted for investigation or, (2) many maltreatment reports that are accepted for investigation, not being substantiated. Stakeholders noted that the State does have another statutory option—Chapter 55. Chapter 55 specifies that when a report does not meet the legal threshold for Chapter 49, the State may conduct an assessment, or file in court when no abuse or neglect has been substantiated under Chapter 49. However, stakeholders reported that there are many instances in which the agency is not using the option available under Chapter 55 to further assess the family and address possible risk situations before they become critical. Stakeholders and case reviewers expressed the opinion that the lack of response to many maltreatment reports, particularly those involving neglect or domestic violence, raises serious concerns about children’s safety.

Vermont also was not in conformity with three of the systemic factors—Case Review System, Training, and Service Array. One area of concern pertains to findings that appropriate placement options and independent and transitional living services for youth turning 18 are inconsistently available. Concerns also were expressed by stakeholders regarding the difficulties that children experience with regard to accessing specialized outpatient and residential mental and behavioral health treatment options.

Another area of concern identified through the CFSR pertains to the State’s pre-service and ongoing training. Although the State has made efforts to adapt the training and the training curriculum, problems remain with staff attendance and supervisory reinforcement of staff skills. Stakeholders also expressed concern that in some districts, children are sometimes placed in a foster family home even though the foster parents have not yet participated in the required training program.

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

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).

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 81.3 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. However, Vermont did meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- An investigation of a maltreatment report was initiated in accordance with State policy in 81 percent of the cases. Performance with regard to timeliness of investigations was marginally better in Burlington than Morrisville. (There were no applicable cases for this item in Springfield.)
- For the 11 applicable cases, there was no incidence of maltreatment recurrence.
- There were a number of cases in which there were multiple child maltreatment allegations during the life of the case, many of which were unsubstantiated.

Most stakeholders commenting on the items that comprise Safety Outcome 1 expressed the opinion that the agency generally is effective in responding to maltreatment reports in a timely manner and in preventing maltreatment recurrence. However, stakeholders suggested that FSD criteria for accepting and substantiating reports when there are allegations of child neglect or domestic violence are not well understood in the community and often leave some children at risk.

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 risk of harm to children.

Vermont was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 46.9 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity.

Key findings with regard to this outcome pertained to the inconsistency of the agency with regard to the following:

- Conducting adequate safety assessments to ensure children's safety.
- Conducting ongoing safety and risk assessments in the home.
- Monitoring service provision when there were safety or risk concerns in the home.

- Providing adequate services to address safety concerns, particularly when substance abuse and domestic violence were ongoing concerns.

Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR suggested that FSD generally is effective in assessing risk and conducting safety planning at the onset of case opening, but not as effective in conducting ongoing assessments. Stakeholders also expressed concern that safety and risk are not being assessed at all when a maltreatment allegation is not severe enough to meet the criteria for substantiation. As a result, there is no opportunity for the agency to intervene with families before the situation becomes a crisis.

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

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

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 30 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State did not meet the national standard for Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunifications; Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods; and Composite 4: Placement stability.

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- The State did meet the national standard for Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions.
- There was only one instance of foster care re-entry in the 14 applicable cases reviewed. However, the State's performance on the national measure of foster care re-entry was higher than the national median, suggesting that re-entry may be a concern in the State.
- Many children in the cases experienced placement instability during the period under review.
- The agency was effective in establishing appropriate permanency goals, but in many cases, the goals were not established in a timely manner.
- Concurrent planning was not consistently implemented.

- There are inconsistencies in the timely completion of adoptions.
- There were insufficient placements for children with a case goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement.
- Stakeholders expressed concern with the lack of appropriate placements options for children, specifically those children with intensive or specialized needs, and with the lack of independent living services and services for youth once they reach the age of 18.

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).

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 67.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- The agency was effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11) and in placing children with their siblings (item 12).
- The agency was inconsistent with regard to efforts to promote visitation between children in foster care and their fathers (item 13).
- In many cases the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members, friends, school and community (item 14).
- The agency was inconsistent with regard to efforts to search for and evaluate relatives as potential placement resources (item 15).
- The agency was inconsistent with regard to efforts to support the relationships between children and their mothers and fathers (item 16).

Stakeholders expressed the opinion that there are insufficient resources to consistently ensure sufficient visitation, placement of children within their communities and placement of large sibling groups together.

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 caseworker's contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 23.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was low across all three sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 19.3 percent of Burlington cases, 31.2 percent of Springfield cases, and 23.5 percent of Morrisville cases.

There was a difference in performance based on case type. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 14 (35 percent) of the 40 foster care cases, compared to 1 (4.3 percent) of the 24 in-home cases. Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- FSD was not effective in assessing and meeting the service needs of parents and children in the in-home services cases and was only marginally effective in meeting and assessing the needs of parents and foster parents in foster care cases. However, the agency usually was effective in assessing and meeting children's service needs in foster care cases.
- FSD was not effective in involving parents in the case planning process in the in-home services cases, and was only minimally effective in involving parents in case planning in the foster care cases.
- Contacts between caseworkers and the children and parents that they served were not of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the children. Although the frequency of contact with children was not sufficient for all cases, it was more frequent in the foster care cases than in the in-home services cases.
- Stakeholders noted that parents are rarely involved in case planning in juvenile probation cases.

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).

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 87.8 percent of the cases reviewed were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome. This percentage is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Vermont achieved substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 9 (64 percent) of the 14 applicable in-home services cases, compared to 34 (97 percent) of the applicable 35 foster care cases.

- FSD generally was effective in assessing and meeting the educational goals of children, although there were six cases in which the children's needs were not met.

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

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

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 72.1 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was similar in Burlington and Springfield, as compared to Morrisville. Cases were substantially achieved in this outcome in 79.3 percent of Burlington cases, 73.3 percent in Springfield, and 58.8 percent in Morrisville. Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this outcome were the following:

- Case reviews indicated that, for the most part, children's physical health needs were being assessed and addressed. However, there were five cases in which reviewers determined that the child's physical health needs were not met.
- Case Reviews found that children's mental health needs were adequately assessed and met in 30 (88 percent) of the 34 applicable foster care cases, compared to 9 (45 percent) of the 20 applicable in-home services cases.
- Stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency was generally effective in meeting children's physical health needs, but that there were considerable difficulties throughout the State with regard to accessing appropriate mental health services.

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.

Vermont was found to be in substantial conformity with this factor. It was determined that the State has a well-established child welfare information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for the placement of all children in foster care. Vermont was also found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first round of the 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 termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Vermont is not in substantial conformity with the Case Review System factor. Vermont was rated as being in substantial conformity with this factor during its first CFSR. In the 2007 CFSR, Vermont was found to hold periodic reviews of cases at least once every 6 months and to hold permanency hearings for each child in foster care at least every 12 months. The State also was found to have procedures in place for seeking termination of parental rights in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

The areas identified as needing improvement for this systemic factor pertained to item 25 (development of the case plan) and item 29 (notice and opportunity to be heard). Stakeholders noted that FSD is not consistent with regard to developing case plans in a timely manner and children and parents are not routinely involved in the case planning process. Stakeholders also noted that there were inconsistencies with regard to notifying foster parents and pre-adoptive parents regarding court hearings and that when they were notified and attended, they were not always allowed to be heard.

Quality Assurance System

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Quality Assurance 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 quality assurance system that evaluates the quality and effectiveness of services and measures program strengths and areas needing improvement (item 31).

Vermont is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. During the first round of the CFSR, Vermont was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor.

The rating of substantial conformity is based on the determination that the State has in place a functioning statewide quality assurance (QA) system that evaluates the quality of services included in the CFSP, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

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).

Vermont is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of training. The State was rated as being in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during its 2001 CFSR. Key findings pertaining to this factor were the following:

- New caseworker hires are not completing training before they assume a caseload, and are not consistently attending required training sessions.
- Supervisors are not receiving adequate training on how to assist caseworkers in integrating the teachings and skills acquired through the trainings into their daily case practice.
- Agency caseworkers are not consistently meeting the requirements for ongoing training.
- The agency places children in the foster homes before foster parents have completed training, and in some instances, before foster parents have even begun training.

Service Array

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

Vermont is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2001 CFSR.

Key findings with regard to this systemic factor in the 2007 review were the following:

- Stakeholders reported significant gaps in services across the State as well as waiting lists for many services in various parts of the State.
- Stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State is effective in individualizing services for children and families and that even where there are limited resources, many caseworkers will find creative ways to meet services needs.
- The most critical service gaps pertained to mental health services and services for youth preparing for the transition from foster care to independent living.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

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

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

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

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

Vermont is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Vermont was not in substantial conformity with this factor in the 2001 CFSR. The 2007 CFSR found that the State has licensing standards in place for foster homes and child care facilities, that these licensing standards are applied equally to all foster families and facilities, and that sufficient criminal background checks are conducted for all residents in the foster family home and for all child care facility staff. The CFSR also found that the State makes concerted efforts to use cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanent placements for children. A key concern identified with regard to this systemic factor, however, pertained to a lack of foster homes to meet the needs of the foster care population, particularly adolescents and children needing specialized care.

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Rating	
	<i>In Substantial Conformity</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards?</i>	<i>Rating**</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>
Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	NO	81.3	YES		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	81
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				Strength	100
Safety Outcome 2 – Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	NO	46.9			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	69
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	47
Permanency Outcome 1- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	NO	30.0	Met 1 out of 4		
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				Strength	93
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	75
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	57.5
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship and placement with relatives				ANI	60
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	57
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	70
Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	NO	67.5			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	100
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	100
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	70
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	87
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	68
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	62

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

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

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Rating**	Percent Strength
	<i>Substantial Conformity</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>		
Well Being Outcome 1 - Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	NO	23.4		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	36
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	44
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	39
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	23
Well Being Outcome 2 - Children receive services to meet their educational needs	NO	87.8		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	88
Well Being Outcome 3 - Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs are met	NO	72.1		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	89
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	72

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

**Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of strength, 90 percent of the cases 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: Vermont CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

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

Table 3: (Continued)			
Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity	Score*	Item Rating
SERVICE ARRAY	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.			Strength
AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY	YES	4	
Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, services providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.			Strength
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.			Strength
Item 40: The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.			Strength
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION	YES	3	
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.			Strength
Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.			Strength
Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.			Strength
Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom 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 Area Needing Improvement (ANI)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Vermont Child and Family Services Review
August 17, 2007

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

The CFSR was conducted the week of April 9, 2007. The period under review was from 4/1/06 to 4/8/07. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Vermont Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division (FSD).
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 2003, 2004, and 2005.
- Reviews of 64 cases at three sites throughout the State: 31 cases in Burlington, 17 cases in Morrisville, and 16 cases in Springfield. One in-home services case was eliminated because it was discovered during the onsite review that the case did not meet the required sampling guidance.
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

All 64 cases were open cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 64 cases reviewed are presented in the table on the following page.

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 and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Differences in findings across the sites included in the onsite review are described when noteworthy. Variations in outcome and item ratings as a function of type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services) also are identified when appropriate. The second section of the report (Section B: Systemic Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

TABLE OF CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases N = 40	In-Home Cases N = 24
When case was opened/child entered foster care		
Open prior to the period under review	27 (42.5%)	17 (71%)
Open during the period under review	13 (32.5%)	7 (29%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	14 (35%)	NA
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	14 (35%)	NA*
At least 10 but younger than 13	4 (10%)	
At least 13 but younger than 16	15 (37.5%)	
16 and older	7 (17.5%)	
Race/Ethnicity		
		By case**
African American (Non-Hispanic)	1 (2.5%)	
White (Non-Hispanic)	33 (82.5%)	70 (100%)
Hispanic (of all races)	3 (7.5%)	
Asian	1 (2.5%)	
Two or more races	2 (5%)	
Primary Reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	5 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)
Physical abuse	5 (12.5%)	2 (8%)
Sexual abuse	4 (10%)	0
Medical neglect	3 (7.5%)	1(4%)
Child's Behavior/Juvenile Justice	16 (40%)	5(21%)
Substance abuse by parent	4 (10%)	1(4%)
Domestic violence in child's home	0	1(4%)
Abandonment	2 (5%)	0
Mental physical health of child	0	1(4%)
Other ("Educational neglect and risk of harm")	1 (2.5%)	4(16.5%)

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

**Data are provided by case for a total of 70 children.

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes Section of the CSFR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement 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 a Strength. In addition to the item ratings, States are evaluated with regard to performance on seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for these outcomes are Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Achieved. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to seven 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.

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

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95 percent standard established for the CFSR onsite review at the end of their Program Improvement Plan implementation. ACF 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 that change is likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with ACF to establish a specified amount of improvement or implement specified activities for their Program Improvement Plan. That is, for each outcome or item that is an area needing improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the Children's Bureau) specifies how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the areas needing improvement, and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of their Program Improvement Plan 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 a consistent, comprehensive, case review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued Program Improvement Plans addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, even though prior Program Improvement Plan 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 Program Improvement Plan.

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 Program Improvement Plan to address those concerns. This discussion also focuses on whether the key concerns that emerged in the first CFSR continued to be present in the second review, or whether those concerns were resolved, but other concerns emerged.

Because many changes have been made in the onsite CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of data indicators or percentages regarding Strength and Area Needing Improvement 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 to specific outcomes and items.
- Changes in criteria for specific items to increase consistency and to ensure an assessment of critical areas, such as child welfare agency efforts to involve non-custodial parents.

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total Number	Total Percent
Substantially Achieved:	10	0	3	13	81.3
Partially Achieved:	0	0	3	3	18.7
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	21	16	11	48	
Total	31	16	17	64	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)		State’s Percentage		Meets Standard
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6		96.0		Yes
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68		99.86		Yes

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 81.3 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. However, Vermont did meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during its 2001 CFSR. During that review, both item 1 (timeliness of initiating investigations) and item 2 (repeat maltreatment) were rated as Areas Needing Improvement and were addressed in the State's Program Improvement Plan. The key concern identified during the 2001 CFSR was that there was insufficient documentation regarding the investigation in a number of cases making it impossible to know if the investigation was initiated in a timely manner or to identify the results of the investigation (i.e., whether the report was substantiated or unsubstantiated).

The Statewide Assessment reports that in response to this concern, as part of its Program Improvement Plan, FSD developed automated Structured Decision Making tools for investigations and intake in 2003 and delivered on-going training and supervision on investigation commencement timeframes in all 12 districts.

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

Key Findings from the 2007 CFSR

The key concern identified in the 2001 CFSR with regard to incomplete documentation of the investigation process was not found in the 2007 CFSR. Case reviewers in the 2007 CFSR did not note concerns regarding documentation.

Additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- An investigation of a maltreatment report was initiated in accordance with State policy in 81 percent of the cases. Performance with regard to timeliness of investigations was marginally better in Burlington than Morrisville. (There were no applicable cases for this item in Springfield.)
- There were no incidences of maltreatment recurrence in the 11 applicable cases assessed for item 2.

Most stakeholders commenting on the items that comprise Safety Outcome 1 expressed the opinion that the agency generally is effective in responding to maltreatment reports in a timely manner and in preventing maltreatment recurrence. However, several stakeholders also expressed the opinion that FSD criteria for accepting and substantiating reports, when the incidences involve child neglect or domestic violence in the family, are not well understood by individuals in the community, particularly by individuals who

report incidences of maltreatment to the agency. They noted that the existing criteria reflect a somewhat narrow definition of child maltreatment and therefore, can result in some children being left at risk of harm.

As several stakeholders noted, Vermont statute regarding definitions of child abuse (Chapter 49) defines an acceptable child abuse report as one that involves one or both of the following: a) children whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare are harmed or at substantial risk of harm, or b) children who have been sexually abused or are at substantial risk for being sexually abused [33 V.S.A.§4912(2)(a)]. Vermont statute defines risk of harm as “a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which harm would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment or sexual abuse” (33 VSA §4912(4)). Vermont policy provides guidance on accepting, assessing and substantiating allegations of risk of harm. The concern raised by stakeholders during the onsite CFSR is that these criteria result in either (1) many maltreatment reports not being accepted for investigation or, (2) many maltreatment reports that are accepted for investigation, not being substantiated. Stakeholders noted that the State does have another statutory option—Chapter 55. Chapter 55 specifies that when a report does not meet the legal threshold for Chapter 49, the State may conduct an assessment, or file in court when no abuse or neglect has been substantiated under Chapter 49. However, stakeholders reported that there are many instances in which the agency is not using the option available under Chapter 55 to further assess the family and address possible risk situations before they become critical. Stakeholders and case reviewers expressed the opinion that the lack of response to many maltreatment reports, particularly those involving neglect or domestic violence, raises serious concerns about children’s safety.

Some stakeholders also suggested that Vermont’s high percentage of absence of recurrence of substantiated maltreatment may be, in part, the result of the State’s strict definitions of child maltreatment and requirements for substantiation. They noted that because of these definitions and requirements, only a small percentage of incidents that are reported are substantiated.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 16 (25 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency requirements. Vermont’s policies with regard to initiating investigations are the following:

- For a Level 1 report, the investigation must be initiated by the end of the current work day unless a waiver of the requirement is granted.

- For Levels 2.1 and 2.2 reports, the child must be interviewed or observed within 72 hours of report acceptance, unless a waiver of the requirement is granted by the district director because 1) it would be harmful to the child (or caseworker) or 2) the victim can not be located.

Information regarding the ratings for this item is provided below.

Item 1	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	10	0	3	13	81
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	3	3	19
Not Applicable	21	16	11	48	
Total Cases	31	16	17	64	

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated (i.e., face-to-face contact was established with the children in the family) within the time frames required by Vermont policy. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when the investigation was not initiated (i.e., face-to-face contact was not established with the children in the family) within the required time frames.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item reported that FSD is effective in initiating investigations of maltreatment reports in accordance with agency timeframes. Stakeholders were in agreement, however, that FSD criteria for accepting reports are unclear to many stakeholders in the community, particularly individuals who are reporting instances of maltreatment to the agency. Stakeholders pointed out that although FSD criteria and policy are clear when the reports allege physical or sexual abuse, they are less clear when the reports allege neglect or domestic violence. Stakeholders noted that as a result of this uncertainty, many reports are screened out (i.e., they are not referred for an investigation or assessment), which can result in many children being left at risk of harm. They also noted that often there are multiple reports on a family and no agency response until the situation escalates to a crisis or a level of severity that warrants investigation.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 81 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required FSD time frames. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. For the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency responded to reports of abuse and neglect within the 72-hour timeframe in 86 percent of the cases in the last CFSR. Challenges relevant to this item related to the documentation of investigation activity and staff understanding of agency timeframes. In response, FSD developed automated Structured Decision Making tools for investigations and intake in 2003 and delivered on-going training and supervision on investigation commencement timeframes in all 12 districts.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in calendar year (CY) 2005, 78 percent of investigations were initiated within 72 hours and 22 percent of investigations were granted waivers that allowed the agency more than 72 hours to initiate the investigation. In CY 2006, these numbers were similar, with 77 percent of investigations initiated within 72 hours and 23 percent of investigations commencing with waivers after 72 hours. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the median length of time to investigation was more than 24 hours, but less than 48 hours in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2004 and FFY 2005, and the mean time to investigation was 81.4 hours in FFY 2004 and 82.1 hours in FFY 2005. The Statewide Assessment notes that the mean time-to-investigation data are consistent with the number of waivers granted.

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

The assessment of Item 2 was applicable for 11 (17 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. Over half (33) of the cases were opened for reasons other than child maltreatment. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine whether there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

Item 2	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	7	0	4	11	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
Not applicable	24	16	13	53	
Total Cases	31	16	17	64	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in all 11 applicable cases. In all of these cases, there was a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report involving the family during the period under review, but there was no substantiated or indicated report within 6 months of that report.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item generally agreed that FSD is effective in preventing the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment. However, they also expressed concerns regarding the policies and practices associated with substantiation. These concerns are similar to those voiced by stakeholders regarding agency policy for accepting maltreatment reports. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that the criteria for substantiating neglect reports are not always clear when the allegation involves neglect or domestic violence, and are so strict that it is rare that these allegations are substantiated as abuse or neglect. Stakeholders suggested that the result of this is that families do not get needed services until the family situation escalates, which often means that children are put at unnecessary risk. Some stakeholders also noted that children who are the alleged victims of multiple unsubstantiated reports, particularly those alleging neglect or domestic violence, eventually come to the attention of the juvenile justice system.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 100 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percent exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont conducted a 2004 data analysis of 13 cases with repeat risk of harm and determined that the most common denominator in all of the cases was substance abuse by the perpetrator. A second analysis of repeated risk of harm, completed in 2005, indicated that substance abuse by the caretaker also was present, but to a lesser degree. According to the Statewide Assessment, challenges inherent in cases with substance abuse were discussed at an agency practice forum in 2005. As a result, FSD has incorporated substance use disorders training into their new employee training and has conducted opiate dependence and treatment training for all intake and investigations supervisors.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont's absence of maltreatment rate was 96 percent in FFY 2005, meeting the national standard (94.6 percent). The Statewide Assessment pointed out that, in 2006, FSD adopted new policy for unsubstantiated, high-risk cases requiring 1) formal risk assessment for unsubstantiated cases, 2) written communication with the family about risk factors and services, and 3) sharing concerns with other service providers involved with the family.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	15	10	5	30	46.9
Partially Achieved:	6	0	5	11	17.2
Not Achieved or Addressed:	10	6	7	23	35.9
Total	31	16	17	64	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Vermont was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 46.9 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of Springfield cases, compared to 48 percent of Burlington cases and only 29 percent of Morrisville cases.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR:

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR. During that review, item 3 (services to protect children in home and prevent removal) was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR included:

- A lack of ongoing and comprehensive family assessment.
- A reliance on contracted providers for feedback regarding the progress of treatment services rather than on agency caseworker’s face-to-face visits with children and families.
- A lack of an effective system to monitor the quality, appropriateness, and effectiveness of services.

Vermont implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan to address these concerns:

- Designing, implementing, and integrating into practice the use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) investigation, risk and safety assessment tools.
- Establishing new guidelines for caseworker contacts with the children and families that they serve.
- Developing a comprehensive quality assurance system that would monitor the quality, appropriateness, and effectiveness of services.

- Developing a contractual checklist to be added to the licensing review process for residential services agencies that would ensure compliance with specific contract requirements and thereby improve the quality, and effectiveness of the services provided by these agencies.

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

Key Findings from the 2007 CFSR

The findings of the 2007 CFSR indicate that, despite PIP efforts, many of the concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR remained, particularly those pertaining to a lack of ongoing assessments of children and families and insufficient contact between caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads. The 2007 review findings also indicate that the lack of contact between caseworkers and children and families hinders the ability of the agency to assess and monitor service provision.

Additional findings from the 2007 case reviews were the following:

- Inconsistencies with regard to the agency’s assessment of family safety and provision of services to address safety concerns. This usually was found in families in which substance abuse and domestic violence were ongoing concerns.
- A lack of ongoing assessment of safety and risk and insufficient service provision to address issues that did arise.

Some stakeholders commenting on this outcome during the onsite CFSR expressed concern about accessibility of resources and services, particularly for children and parents in the in-home services cases. They also expressed concern about the availability of services to families who are not involved with FSD because the maltreatment report involving the family did not meet the criteria for an investigation or substantiation. Stakeholders noted that although FSD collaborates with sister agencies and community providers to assess risk and deliver services, many families are not receiving the services that they need.

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

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

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 35 (55 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home (13 cases), or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the children in the home during the period under review (16 cases). 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 at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 3	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	14	4	6	24	69
Area Needing Improvement	5	4	2	11	31
Not applicable	12	8	9	29	
Total Cases	31	16	17	64	

As shown in the table, performance on this item was higher in Burlington (73.6 percent Strength) and Morrisville (75 percent Strength), than in Springfield (50 percent Strength).

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

- Services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal or reentry (18 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home due to risk of harm (6 cases).

Case review information indicates that a wide range of services was offered or provided to families. These included (but were not limited to) the following: intensive family-based services, substance abuse treatment, parenting education, counseling, early intervention, child mentoring, Streetchecker services (supervision and monitoring services for delinquent youth), family infant/toddler services, residential treatment, visiting nurses services, alternative schooling for pregnant and parenting teens, and domestic violence and Section 8 referrals.

Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Services were not provided and children remained in unsafe situations in the home (5 cases).
- There was a lack of assessment to determine the types of services needed by the family (4 cases).
- Post-reunification services were needed but not provided (1 case).
- Services to ensure safe visitation were not provided (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that FSD has collaborative policies and practices in place that are intended to ensure that cases labeled as high risk are able to access community-based and FSD-contracted services. Stakeholders generally agreed that FSD makes concerted efforts to work collaboratively with other agencies to provide wrap-around services to families to prevent removal and reentry.

On the other hand, stakeholders reported that resources and services are not consistently made available to low- or medium-risk cases until these cases emerge as very high risk. Stakeholders pointed out that community services that are preventive in nature do not have enough resources to meet the needs of these families, and children remain at risk for future maltreatment. Stakeholders also agreed that more services need to be provided to families upon reunification.

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 69 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that FSD had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes or appropriately removed children due to their risk of harm. This percent is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, 67 percent of the cases reviewed in the last CFSR assessed Item 3 as a Strength. In the resulting PIP, the State focused on the development of Structured Decision Making tools for safety and risk assessment that guide decision making to determine the following:

- A child’s level of safety in the home.
- The need for interventions to eliminate threat of harm.
- Removal and return of children to their families when warranted.

The Statewide Assessment reports that “In a review of repeat maltreatment incidents in 2005, policy guidelines on ‘case-opening for on-going service when found to be high or very high risk’ was followed in 94 percent of the cases. In 2005, 938 cases were substantiated, and 290 (31 percent) cases were opened for service based on the determination.” The Statewide Assessment also points out that in the 2001 CFSR, the agency was found to have a strong level of community collaboration around service provision and that as such, FSD is less likely to open a CPS case unless out-of-home placement is needed. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the number of CPS-open family cases has always remained a relatively low percentage of total cases in Vermont, with the average percentage of open CPS cases from 2001-2006 being approximately 4.5 percent.

Item 4: Risk of harm to child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

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

Item 4	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	15	10	5	30	47
Area Needing Improvement	16	6	12	34	53
Total Cases	31	16	17	64	

As shown in the table, performance on this item differed across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 62.5 percent of Springfield cases, 48 percent of Burlington cases, and 29 percent of Morrisville cases. There were substantial differences in performance based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 5 (21 percent) of the 24 in-home services cases reviewed and in 25 (62.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases.

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from home either prior to or during the period under review and by providing services to reduce risk of harm (18 cases).
- The risk of harm was appropriately assessed and no risk or safety concerns were identified (5 cases, all of which involved children coming into contact with FSD through the juvenile justice system).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by removing the children from the home either prior to or during the period under review and by seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) (4 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remain in the home (3 cases).

Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- There was risk of harm to the child in the home, and the services necessary to reduce that risk were not provided (13 cases).
- There was risk of harm to the child in the foster care setting, and the services necessary to reduce risk were not provided (14 cases).
- Risk was not assessed on an ongoing basis, due primarily to insufficient contact between the agency caseworker and the child and family (4 in-home services and 2 foster care cases).
- Risk management was left to service provider with little agency coordination or oversight (1 foster care case).

A key finding of the case reviews was that in 27 of the cases, there were five or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case, most of which were not substantiated or indicated. Specific findings were the following:

- In 11 cases, there were 5 to 7 maltreatment reports during the life of the case.
- In 9 cases, there were 8 to 10 maltreatment reports during the life of the case.
- In 4 cases, there were 12 to 14 maltreatment reports during the life of the case.
- In 3 cases, there were 15 or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions on the manner in which FSD manages risk for children and families. Some stakeholders reported that FSD is effective at safety planning and risk management early on in a case, particularly in high-risk cases. They suggested that utilization of SDM tools promotes effective risk management practices. Some stakeholders also noted that “Chapter 55” (which allows for an assessment of families even though an allegation was not substantiated) ensures that families with safety risks are identified and cases are opened for services when necessary.

Other stakeholders, however, reported that although FSD is effective at safety planning and risk management in the early stages of a case, they are not as effective at ongoing safety planning and risk management. Stakeholders pointed out that many caseworkers are unable to conduct ongoing risk assessment and safety planning with low- to moderate-risk cases because most of their available time is spent focusing on the higher risk cases. Stakeholders also noted that SDM risk assessment and planning tools are integrated into case-level practice in varying degrees from caseworker to caseworker. A few stakeholders pointed out that there is a need for more consistent risk assessment and safety planning in the in-home services cases and at the point of case closure.

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 47 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that FSD had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength. However, criteria for rating this item changed from the 2001 to the 2007 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, safety and risk assessments are completed for all substantiated cases of child abuse and/or neglect, and service referrals are made routinely. A general summary of results from Vermont’s 2005 District Review yielded very high strength ratings for completion of safety and risk assessments, appropriate referral and service delivery, and risk and safety management practices.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that Vermont’s performance for the measure of maltreatment by foster care providers met the national standard in the first CFSR, and no program improvement was necessary. The Statewide Assessment notes that Vermont has maintained success in keeping children safe from abuse by foster and residential care providers, with sustained performance near or exceeding the national standard. The Statewide Assessment associates this success with the following:

- Commitment to having a resource coordinator in every district.
- Provision of respite care for all foster parents.
- Case planning for children in care that addresses both the needs of the child and the foster parents.
- Support and training for foster parent associations.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	4	4	4	12	30.0
Partially Achieved:	15	6	5	26	65.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	0	1	2	5.0
Not Applicable:	11	6	7	24	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (Scaled Score)		State's Composite Score		Meets Standard (Yes/No)
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6		107.7		No
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4		106.5		Yes
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7		114.2		No
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5		64.0		No

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 30 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State did not meet the national standard for Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunifications; Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods; and Composite 4: Placement stability.

Vermont did meet the national standard for Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions.

Performance on the individual measures included in these composites is presented in the discussion of the related items.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR:

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR. During that review, three of the six items were rated as Areas Needing Improvement—item 6 (placement stability), item 7 (permanency goal), and item 9 (timely adoption).

Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR included the following:

- A lack of sufficient services and resources for children in foster care, including residential treatment options, specialized services for children (particularly adolescent girls) with difficult/challenging behaviors, therapeutic foster homes, and specialized services for adolescents with severe mental health issues.
- A lack of timely assessment of children’s needs to ensure appropriate matching of children with available placements.
- Insufficient attention to setting permanency goals in a timely manner.
- A lack of thorough assessments to assist in determining the most appropriate permanency goals.
- Delays in achieving permanency caused by court processes and backlogs, particularly around termination of parental rights.
- A lack of a statewide strategy for recruiting foster and adoptive families.
- A reluctance of agency staff to consider cross-jurisdictional placements for children who are legally free for adoption.

Vermont implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan to address these concerns:

- The agency participated in a Casey Breakthrough Series on recruitment and retention to design and implement a system that would ensure ongoing, systematic efforts to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families to expedite adoptions and promote placement stability.
- The agency received training by Project Family staff on better ways to recruit, train, and support resource families.
- The agency integrated family assessments and in-service components into its foster parent training program.
- The agency finalized departmental re-organization plans and allowed for the creation of new System of Care positions and Field Service teams to provide increased supports to districts for development and evaluation of placement resources and supports, including in home supports.
- The agency made improvements to the State’s data reporting system and created new reports that summarized reasons for placement changes to better target efforts to increase placement stability.
- A public awareness campaign called “Project Family” was developed to promote awareness of the importance of permanency for children and youth.
- The agency implemented permanency planning team meetings to be held prior to the 11th month administrative reviews.
- The agency conducted a needs assessment to obtain information about how to better support district use of cross-jurisdictional placements of children who were legally free for adoption. This was followed by agency and court staff trainings based on the findings of the needs assessment.
- The agency revised policy providing clear direction on consideration of cross-jurisdictional placements.
- The Vermont Court System, through the Vermont Court Improvement Program, worked to identify and address court delays at all stages of the court process. A variety of activities were undertaken including a) the development of a case management protocol

for children in custody, b) the identification of training needs, c) provision of training to judges, court staff, and attorneys, and d) the implementation of strategies to address TPR backlogs.

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

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, in the 2007 CFSR, reviewers continued to find a lack of sufficient mental health treatment options and appropriate placement options such as residential, specialized services and therapeutic foster care for children and youth with intensive needs. Case reviewers also found that many youth are still inappropriately matched with placement resources. In addition to a lack of timely assessment of the child’s needs, the 2007 CFSR also found a lack of appropriate and specialized placement options for youth, and a lack of supports for foster parents to prevent placement disruptions. These concerns have important implications for the State’s performance with regard to placement stability.

The concern identified in the 2001 CFSR regarding the lack of timeliness in establishing permanency goals continued to be found in the 2007 review. In the recent CFSR, reviewers determined that although most of the children’s permanency goals were appropriate, the agency was inconsistent with regard to establishing the goals in a timely manner.

Additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- There was only one case in which a child re-entered foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. However, the State’s performance on the national measure of foster care re-entry was above the national median, which suggests that there may be some concerns with regard to this issue that were not identified in the case review.
- The State’s policy with regard to concurrent planning does not appear to be clearly defined or understood, resulting in inconsistencies in practice.

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

Item 5: Foster care re-entries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of Item 5 was applicable for 14 (35 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for assessment if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 5	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	6	3	4	13	93
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	7
Not applicable	14	7	5	26	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

State performance in 2005 on the individual measure of foster care reentry included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was as follows: 15.8 percent of the children exiting foster care in 2004 reentered foster care within 12 months. For the data set used to establish the national standards for the data composites, the median performance on this measure was 15.0 percent, and the 25th percentile was 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength when the entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of the child’s discharge from a prior foster care episode. There was one case in which the child entering foster care during the period under review was re-entering 4 years after a prior foster care episode.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item agreed that re-entries into foster care have declined and do not happen very frequently.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 92.9 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the entry into foster care during the period under review did not occur within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. This percent meets the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. However, the State’s data for the national measure of re-entry into foster care exceeds the national median for this measure, indicating that there may be concerns about reentry on a statewide basis. This item was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this item was a Strength in 100 percent of the cases reviewed in the 2001 CFSR. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, FSD data show that ‘re-entries in less than 12 months’ declined from 14.3 percent in FY 2004 and 13 percent in FY 2005 to 12.2 percent in FY 2006. Vermont’s Data Profile shows a similar trend for “re-entries in less than 12 months” at 19.1 percent in FY 2004 and 15.8 percent in FY 2005. The Statewide Assessment identifies the following as contributors to the reduction in re-entries:

- Reliance on a community family support services network.
- Use of Family Group Conferencing and Family Finding.

- Treatment teams that develop post-custody support plans with families.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, Vermont’s foster care population includes children who have suffered abuse and neglect, children who are delinquent, and children who are beyond the control of their parents and considered in need of services. Children can exit one part of the system (e.g. abuse and neglect) and re-enter another (e.g. through delinquency) and State data from 2005 indicates that 61.1% of re-entries were delinquent youth during the first or second episode. The Statewide Assessment points out that these different populations give Vermont one of the highest median ages of children in out-of- home care of all States reporting AFCARS data. The Statewide Assessment also notes that delinquent youth aged 12-17 make up the largest proportion of children who re-enter foster care. As such, the State suggests that a strategy to further reduce re-entry rates should target youth. The Statewide Assessment reports that the Division will implement the Youth Assessment and Screening Inventory (YASI) to improve case planning with delinquent youth and their families in late 2007.

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

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

Item 6	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	16	6	8	30	75
Area Needing Improvement	4	4	2	10	25
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

The item was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of Burlington and Morrisville cases, compared to 60 percent of Springfield cases.

Vermont’s performance in 2005 on the individual measures of placement stability included in ‘Composite 4: Placement Stability’ indicate that the State is below the national median for all three measures. The percentages were the following:

- 63.3 percent of the children in foster care for less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings (national median = 83.3 percent).
- 39.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings (national median = 59.9 percent).

- 19.7 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings (national median = 33.9 percent).

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 (23 cases).
- The placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest in that they were intended to promote achievement of the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (5 cases). For example, a move that resulted in the child being placed with a relative, or a move that resulted in a child being in a less restrictive placement.
- The child reentered foster care (4 years later) or after a trial reunification, and the agency tried to place the child with former foster parents (2 cases).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The child experienced multiple placements, and at least one placement change was not in the child's best interest (6 cases). These placement changes were typically related to the children's aggressive behaviors.
- The child's current placement was not stable (4 cases). The instability of the placement was typically related to the child's behavior and the appropriateness of the placement for the child.

Case review findings on placement stability revealed the following:

- Children in 23 cases experienced 1 placement during the period under review.
- Children in 10 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 7 cases experienced 3 or more placements during the period under review.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that placement stability is a challenge in the State. They attributed this for the most part to the lack of placement settings that adequately address the full range of levels of care needed by the children and youth in foster care. Stakeholders suggested that children and youth often are placed in inappropriate settings due to a lack of options, particularly with regard to high-end levels of care. They indicated that this can contribute to placement instability. In addition, stakeholders noted that residential and "high-end" placement options often have limited timeframes for providing treatment and that, for some children, these limited timeframes are not sufficient to address the treatment needs.

Stakeholders also suggested that an increase in the number of relative foster placements (i.e., kin foster homes) would contribute to placement stability. However, they noted that support services for these families are necessary to ensure that placements with relatives are a stable resource for children. Stakeholders also pointed out that additional training and supports for foster parents are needed to minimize placement disruptions, particularly since many foster parents are matched with children prior to receiving training. Furthermore, several stakeholders pointed out that placements in residential settings could be avoided if more supports (e.g. wrap

around services in the foster parent homes, respite care, etc.) were in place for foster parents. In addition, stakeholders noted the need for greater supports for children who are making placement transitions that are related to level of care.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 75 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in their best interests. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont quarterly outcome reports and the State Data Profile both indicate that children are moving too often. The Statewide Assessment reports that Vermont children who have been in care for a relatively short time experience greater placement stability while youth in care for long periods of time tend toward more placement disruptions. Statewide Assessment focus group participants identified the following reasons for placement instability in Vermont:

- Challenges to appropriately matching children with available resources.
- Lack of support and focused training for foster parents who foster youth with challenging behaviors.
- Lack of skills and/or willingness on the part of all parties to work through challenging issues.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont did not meet the national standard for placement stability, and the State engaged in program improvement to address identified needs for more comprehensive and timely assessments, additional support for foster parents caring for older youth, and increased engagement between caseworkers, foster parents and the youth in their care. According to the Statewide Assessment, PIP activities included an emphasis on integrating assessment information into case planning. FSD has also implemented a comprehensive screening process to help inform placement decisions, identify appropriate services for children and families, and identify any additional evaluations/assessments children and families may need. In addition, the Statewide Assessment points out that FSD has initiated a Permanency Youth Initiative, revitalized family group conferencing efforts, and required districts to design strategies to increase permanency for older youth in care.

Item 7: Permanency goal for child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of Item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	10	8	5	23	57.5
Area Needing Improvement	10	2	5	17	42.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Vermont’s performance in 2005 was the following with regards to the individual measures incorporated in Permanency Composite 3: Achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time:

- 25.7 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the fiscal year were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the fiscal year. This percent is close to the national median for this measure (25.0 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- 94.6 percent of the children exiting foster care in 2005 who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percent is less than the national median for this measure (96.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- 47.0 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care in 2005 with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percent is close to the national median for this measure (47.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards. For this measure, a lower score means higher performance.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. The case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The goal was appropriate but was not established in a timely manner (9 cases).
- The child was in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, but the agency did not file or join a TPR petition or document a compelling reason for not filing for TPR (3 cases).
- There was no clearly established permanency goal (3 cases).
- The permanency goal was inappropriate (1 case).
- The goal was appropriate and established in a timely manner, but the biological parent and the foster parent did not know that the agency had established the goal (1 case).

Case review findings pertaining to case goals were as follows:

- 14 children had a goal of reunification only.
- 11 children had a goal of adoption only.
- 9 children had a goal of APPLA only.
- 3 children had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification.
- 1 child had a goal of guardianship only.
- 1 child had a concurrent goal of reunification and guardianship.

- 1 child had a concurrent goal of APPLA and reunification.

Case review findings pertaining to termination of parental rights (TPR) were as follows:

- At the time of the on-site review, 23 of the 40 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- TPR had been filed in 10 (43 percent) of the 23 cases (in 13 cases TPR had not been filed).
- A compelling reason for not filing for TPR was noted in only 6 of the 13 cases for which TPR had not been filed, despite the passing of the 15-month mark.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders reported that FSD establishes appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner, particularly for very young children, and that the agency begins to consider the child's permanency goal when a case is first opened. The majority of stakeholders, however, expressed the opinion that the agency is inconsistent with regard to establishing permanency goals in a timely manner. They identified the following concerns with regard to this issue.

- There are delays in establishing permanency goals that can be attributed to the fact that the agency is not always timely in developing case plans.
- There are delays in changing permanency goals when parents are in substance abuse treatment, because the agency and the courts often want to wait until the parent completes treatment before making decisions regarding changes in a goal. Because substance abuse treatment can be a lengthy process, goals are not being changed in a timely manner.
- Older children are being assigned a case goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement without full consideration of other permanency options.
- Some parents are encouraged by attorneys not to participate in services until the dispositional hearing, and disposition of cases may take as long as 6 months with numerous hearings. In these instances, FSD may assign a default goal of reunification which may adversely impact the timeliness and appropriateness of the child's permanency goal.

Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that FSD caseworkers engage in concurrent planning, although this may not always be formalized in the case plan. Some stakeholders reported that caseworkers tend to not implement a concurrent goal until there is an indication that the initial goal (usually reunification) may not be achieved. A few stakeholders pointed out that concurrent planning is rarely used with youth.

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57.5 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR conducted in 2001, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the permanency goal for the child/youth was rated as a strength in 49 percent of cases reviewed in the State’s 2001 CFSR. The assessment process, permanency goal establishment and attainment, and appropriate use of the goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement were all areas cited for improvement.

Vermont’s 2005 District Review found that the appropriateness of permanency goals was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of reviewed cases, and timeliness of permanency planning was rated a strength in 73 percent of the cases. The Statewide Assessment highlights plans for a third Permanency Convening in 2007 to review progress and goals toward improving permanency for young people of all ages.

Item 8: Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 8 was applicable for 20 (50 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 8	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	7	2	3	12	60
Area Needing Improvement	4	2	2	8	40
Not applicable	9	6	5	20	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

- 65.9 percent of the reunifications occurred in less than 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care. This percent is lower than the national median (69.9 percent) for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 7.8 months. This length of stay is higher than the national median (6.5 months) for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards for composite 1. (Note that a lower number of months means higher performance.)
- 35.2 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months of 2004, were discharged from foster care to reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care. This percent is lower than the national median (39.4 percent) for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards.

The applicable cases for this item included 14 cases with a goal of reunification, 3 cases with concurrent goals of adoption and reunification, 1 case with a goal of guardianship, 1 case with a concurrent goal of reunification and guardianship, and 1 case with a concurrent goal of APPLA and reunification.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when the agency had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders were in general agreement that the goal of reunification is the most consistent goal established for children in foster care. Several stakeholders noted, however, that FSD and the courts often support the goal of reunification for too long, which delays a child's movement toward a permanent living situation if the reunification is not achieved.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 60 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was not part of the review process for those States reviewed in FY 2001.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Vermont Data Profile shows that Vermont does not reach the national standard or the median for the measures pertaining to timeliness of reunification. The Statewide Assessment reports that the State conducted an analysis of data to determine if time to reunification varied by age group or adjudication type, and the analysis determined that children who enter custody before the age of five are most likely to achieve early reunification.

Division Outcome Reports indicate that significant improvements have been made on reunifying youth with their families. For example, the total number of reunifications within 12 months increased from 54 percent in 1999 to 65 percent in 2005. According to the Statewide Assessment, the Statewide Youth Justice Workgroup and the Family Services Management Team suggest that Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) programming may be a contributing factor to the improvement in reunification time for delinquent youth in custody. BARJ programs serve youth who have been adjudicated delinquent, who are on probation and/or in custody, and they provide intensive supervision and a wide range of services.

Item 9: Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

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

Item 9	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	6	1	1	8	57
Area Needing Improvement	3	2	1	6	43
Not Applicable	11	7	8	26	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Vermont exceeds the national standard for Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions. The following information describes Vermont’s performance on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 2:

- 35.5 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percent is close to the 75th percentile for this measure (36.6 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards for the composite.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 28.4 months. This length of stay is close to the 25th percentile for this measure (27.3 months) for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite. (Note that the lower the number of months, the higher the performance.)
- 19.6 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the year. This number is less than the 75th percentile (22.7 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.
- 8.3 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percent is less than the national median (8.8 percent) for this measure for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.
- 58.7 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This number is higher than the 75th percentile (53.7 percent) for this measure for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.

These data suggest that the State performs at the highest level with regard to achieving finalized adoptions in a timely manner for children who were legally free for adoption and performs at the lowest level with regard to achieving TPR in a timely manner for children who had been in foster care for 17 months or longer.

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 Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the State had not made diligent efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. There was a wide range of concerns related to delays in achieving adoptions. Some of the concerns were court-related and pertained to continuances and court delays in terminating parental rights to give parents time to meet their case plan requirements. Other concerns were agency-related and pertained to poor case documentation, delayed establishment of paternity, delays in locating an incarcerated parent, paperwork delays, insufficient recruitment for an adoptive family, and inadequate search for relatives out of State.

Additional case review findings related to the goal of adoption are as follows:

- There were 11 cases with a single goal of adoption, and the adoption was finalized in 7 of the 11 cases with 2 of the finalizations occurring within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care.
- Of the four remaining children with a single goal of adoption, one was identified as being in a pre-adoptive placement. For two cases, the current placement was identified as a relative placement, and for one case the current placement was identified as a foster care placement (non-relative).
- There were three cases with a concurrent goal of adoption. Of the three cases with a concurrent goal of adoption, one child was placed with a relative, one child was placed in a foster home and one child was reunified with the parent. (Of the two foster home placements, neither was identified as a pre-adoptive placement.)

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the agency is improving in timeliness in achieving adoptions. In general, stakeholders pointed out that younger children and children in pre-adoptive homes tend to move to adoption more quickly than other children. Stakeholders noted that more training is needed for caseworkers to engage children in the discussion of adoption, and the agency needs to improve around adoption preparation and post-adoption service provision. Stakeholders identified the following issues as contributing to delays in adoptions:

- Delays in filing paperwork and completing background checks on adoptive families.
- A lack of sufficient recruitment for adoptive homes.
- The lengthy TPR appeals process.

With regard to the TPR appeals process, several stakeholders reported that although the process still is lengthy, it has greatly improved in efficiency and on average appeals take approximately 6 months.

Additional information on stakeholder perceptions of the adoption process is provided under Items 25, 26, 27, and 28 in the Systemic Factors section of the report.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that FSD had made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, item 9 was an area identified as needing improvement in 40 percent of cases during the last CFSR. The following were cited as challenges for FSD:

- Delays in family court proceedings.
- A lack of statewide recruitment activities.
- Staff reluctance to place children cross-jurisdictionally.
- A lack of commitment and timely completion of paperwork by adoptive parents.

Vermont's quarterly outcome reports indicate that performance in adoptions has remained fairly consistent for the past few years with steady improvement showing in quarterly reporting for 2006. Vermont finalized 170 adoptions in 2006. In the first quarter, 16.7 percent of adoptions were finalized within 24 months, and in the second quarter, 45.7 percent of adoptions were finalized within 24 months. The Statewide Assessment reports that, according to the 2005 Vermont Juvenile Court Reassessment, the average length of time to adoption in FY 2004 was the shortest in a 6-year period, with the highest number of children being adopted. Also, the 2.7 years to adoption in FY 2004 was a year shorter than in FY 2000 and FY 2001. The 2005 Juvenile Court Reassessment also found the following:

- The overall court time from case filing to decision on appeal is 4 months shorter than in prior years.
- The percent of TPRs decided within 18 months of custody increased from 28 percent in calendar year (CY) 2000 to 54 percent in CY 2004.
- The average time from TPR filing to decision decreased by 1.5 months.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the adoption unit was decentralized and adoption caseworkers were assigned to the field to reduce caseloads in March of 2006. As a result of decentralization, the child's ongoing caseworker is responsible for supporting children and pre-adoptive families until the adoption is finalized, and contracted private adoption agencies handle the legalization process. Also in 2006, the State's central office developed a Permanency Unit to help FSD establish an integrated permanency framework. The Unit conducts permanency training, participates with staff in case review meetings, and provides individual case consultations. The Unit also supports district efforts in family finding and family group conferencing.

Item 10: Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

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

Item 10	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	1	3	3	7	70
Area Needing Improvement	1	2	0	3	30
Not applicable	18	5	7	30	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

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

- The child was living in a permanent placement with foster parents and receiving the necessary services and supports to promote a successful transition from foster care to independent living (4 cases).
- The child was receiving the necessary services and supports to promote independent living until the parent and child wished to reunify and the reunification was successful (2 cases).
- The child had long-term special needs that were being adequately addressed in a specialized institutional setting and the State was planning a transition to a supervised living arrangement at the age of majority (1 case).

Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in three cases when reviewers determined that there was no indication that the child’s current placement will be permanent until the child leaves foster care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR noted that although transition planning services for youth exist, the extent of support and the appropriateness of planning for youth varies depending on the experience and expertise of the caseworker. Stakeholders also noted that the quality and availability of transition services varies. Springfield stakeholders, in particular, noted that there is a need for more mentoring, life skills classes, and job development training. The majority of stakeholders said that there are insufficient services and supports for youth once they turn 18. They reported that once a child turns 18, the foster parents may maintain a connection with them, but the youth have very little access to the kinds of resources they need to successfully transition into independent living. Stakeholders indicated that the agency has increased its efforts to find relatives who can serve as permanent connections for youth once they leave foster care.

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 70 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the goal of alternative planned living arrangement was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR conducted in 2001, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this was an area cited as a Strength in 77 percent of the cases reviewed in the State's 2001 CFSR. In 23 percent of cases there was an identified need to engage in more careful exploration of other permanency options, particularly for older youth.

The Statewide Assessment reports that Vermont quarterly management reports show a decrease in the percentage of children in custody with other planned permanent arrangement as a case plan goal from 15.9 percent in 1999 to 5.95 percent on 9/30/06. The AFCARS preliminary report for FFY 2005 indicates that 7 percent of children have a goal of long term foster care and that 6 percent of children have a goal of emancipation. Vermont management report data indicates that on 9/30/2006, 17 children, or 1.18 percent of all children, had a goal of legal independence. Thirteen of these children were ages 12-17, and 4 were over the age of 18.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the Statewide Inventory of Juvenile Court Practices conducted in 2006 indicates that on a 1 to 5 scale (1=rarely to 5=almost always), the court was rated a 4 in how well it monitors the physical, emotional and educational needs of youth, and was rated as a 3.9 in how well the court ensures that youth are receiving appropriate independent living services.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that half of the youth who responded to the CFSR Youth Survey indicate that the Youth Development Program (Chafee Transitional Services) is helping them get ready to live on their own. According to youth respondents, preparation for their transitions should include money and money management skills, employment training, safe places to live, and supportive people. Approximately 100 youth in foster care attended the Governor's Youth Summit in 2005, and task forces made recommendations to address several areas of identified need including, personal and community engagement, ongoing support for living arrangements beyond age 18, improved case work practice and permanency options, higher education, employment and vocational training, housing, and health care. The Statewide Assessment reported that the Transition-Aged Youth Initiative which, if funded by the State Legislature, would provide foster youth with funds for housing deposits, allow youth to obtain a driver's license prior to age 18, and would allow youth to continue in foster care past high school graduation.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	13	8	6	27	67.5
Partially Achieved:	7	2	3	12	30
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	1	1	2.5
Not Applicable	11	6	7	24	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 67.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR. Specifically, item 16 (agency effectiveness in maintaining parent-child relationship) was rated as an Area Needing Improvement due to concerns that some caseworkers did not appear to have sufficient skills or knowledge relevant to developing, maintaining, or strengthening the bond between parents and their children in foster care.

Vermont's Program Improvement Plan addressed this concern through a general focus on improving quality assurance, which would have implications for caseworker efforts to support parent-child relationships, as well as other issues.

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

Key Findings from the 2007 CFSR

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, the 2007 CFSR also found a lack of consistency with regard to caseworkers supporting the relationships between parents and children. Additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- The agency was very effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11) and in placing siblings together (item 12).
- In most cases the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child's connections with extended family members, friends, school and community, although performance on this item did not meet the 90 percent required for an overall rating of Strength (item 14).

- There were inconsistencies in agency efforts to promote sufficient visitation between children and their parents, particularly visitation between children and their fathers (item 13).
- There were inconsistencies in agency efforts to search for maternal and paternal relatives and/or to assess relatives as possible placement resources for children (item 15).

Burlington stakeholders agreed that there are insufficient resources in the Burlington area to consistently support visitation between children and their parents. These stakeholders pointed out that judges may order multiple visits per week, and once the local visitation program reaches capacity, the caseworkers must arrange for the visitation. This is complicated by the fact that in cases with young children, the local visitation program can facilitate visits but cannot transport children. Stakeholders also pointed out that there are an insufficient number of placement resources for larger sibling groups.

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

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

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 interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing Item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 11	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	18	8	6	32	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	
Not applicable	2	2	4	8	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed in the same community or county as the parents or that the child's placement was not in the same community or county, but was still in close proximity to the parents.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that FSD makes an effort to keep children in their communities. Stakeholders agree that where children are typically placed outside of their community, it is because there is not an appropriate placement resource available.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 100 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State agency had made diligent efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives or that were necessary to meet special needs. This percent exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this item was rated as strength in 100 percent of cases reviewed during the 2001 CFSR. Stakeholders for the 2007 CFSR Statewide Assessment indicated agreement that placing children in their own communities is typically best practice and that caseworkers are trying to do this when it is in the best interest of the child.

Item 12: Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 13 (32.5 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 needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 12	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	8	4	1	13	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	
Not applicable	12	6	9	27	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

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

- The child was in a placement with all siblings (8 cases).

- The child was not placed with any siblings, but the siblings were separated due to the special needs of one of the siblings (Examples of special needs include intensive health, mental health and behavioral needs) (5 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that FSD tries to place siblings together whenever possible and appropriate. They also noted that these efforts are hindered by a lack of placement resources for sibling groups larger than two.

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of a Strength. In 100 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care unless a separation was necessary to meet the child’s special needs. This percent is greater than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this area was cited as strength in 84 percent of cases reviewed during the last CFSR. Where cases were not rated a Strength, a lack of documentation had made it difficult to determine whether children were being placed with their siblings. According to Vermont’s 2005 District Review, children were placed with siblings when appropriate in 92 percent of the cases reviewed. Teamwork between resource coordinators and caseworkers was cited as a contributing factor toward successful sibling placements. The District Review also revealed that when siblings entered custody at different times there were successful efforts to place them together.

Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 13 was applicable for 33 (82.5 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 not be 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	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	13	6	4	23	70
Area Needing Improvement	6	2	2	10	30
Not applicable	1	2	4	7	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of visitation met the needs of the child (21 cases).
- The frequency of visitation did not meet the needs of the child but the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation (2 cases).

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

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the father (5 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother (2 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with either the father or the siblings (1 case).
- The agency did not provide adequate supervision of the child’s visits with either parent (1 case).
- The quality of the visitation with the mother did not meet the needs of the child (1case).

The frequency of visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings is presented in the table below

Visitation Frequency (During the period under review)	Mother (Number of cases)	Father (Number of cases)	Siblings (Number of Cases)
Visits occurred more than once a week	10	4	3
Visits occurred at least on a weekly basis	8	4	2
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	4	4	4
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	2	2	3
Visits occurred less frequency than once a month	5	5	2
There were no visits during the period under review	1	4	0
Total cases for which item 13 was applicable	30	23	14

Additional findings are as follows:

- In 4 of the 6 cases in which visits with mother occurred less frequently than once a month or not at all, reviewers determined that this frequency was sufficient and/or the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.
- In 3 of the 9 cases in which visits with father occurred less frequently than once a month or there were no visits, reviewers determined that the frequency was sufficient and/or the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

- Of the two cases in which sibling visits occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the frequency was sufficient to meet the child’s needs in one of those cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that FSD makes concerted efforts to promote visits between children and their parents. However, other stakeholders reported that older youth have inconsistent contact with their siblings. In general, stakeholders agreed that more resources are required to support visitation efforts. One county in the State was noted to not have a supervised visitation program, for example. Transportation also was described as a barrier to sufficient visitation. Stakeholders reported that when Judges order multiple visits per week, caseworkers find it difficult to keep up with the transportation required for visits, particularly when placements are in other areas of the State.

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 69.7 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 percent is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this item was rated a Strength in 86 percent of the cases reviewed in the 2001 CFSR. Results of Vermont’s District Reviews revealed that in 84 percent of the cases reviewed, families were visiting with one another. In particular, the following factors were noted as contributing to sibling visits:

- Case plans contained visitation plans that were driven by the needs of children and adjusted as necessary.
- Transition plans were developed and implemented when reunification was the goal.
- Foster families are an important resource in organizing, transporting and supervising visitation.

Item 14: Preserving connections

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 14 was applicable for 38 (95 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. For the two cases rated as not applicable for this item, the children were adopted and had no prior ties to community or family. 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, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The results of the assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 14	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	15	10	8	33	87
Area Needing Improvement	4	0	1	5	13
Not applicable	1	0	1	2	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Performance on this item varied somewhat across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Springfield cases, 89 percent of Morrisville cases, and 79 percent of Burlington cases.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members, friends, school and community (20 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members and friends (e.g., through phone contact and visits) (10 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the school and community (e.g. selecting placements that do not require a change of school) (2 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with the child’s religious or cultural heritage (e.g., placement with Native American, Hispanic, or Vietnamese families) (1 case).

Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to extended family (2 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to explore tribal affiliation, and the child had Native American heritage (3 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholder input varied on this item. A few stakeholders noted that the agency is making stronger efforts to connect youth to their extended families. They noted that the State has a family finding initiative that helps to identify connections for youth in foster care, some of which have been lost for many years. Some stakeholders observed that the agency could make more of an effort to help children maintain connections with their communities.

Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 87 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, 89 percent of cases were rated a Strength on preserving connections for children and youth in the first CFSR. The first CFSR also revealed that some youth were aging out of care with no identified home and no connections. Approximately 50 percent of the youth who responded to the CFSR Youth Survey said that they are staying connected to their families and communities. The Statewide Assessment reports that “many of them said it is their foster parents, not their caseworkers, who understand the importance of connections and facilitate them.” The Youth Survey also revealed that “forty one percent said no one helps them remain connected.”

The Statewide Assessment also reports that 1450 children and youth were in FSD custody at the time the report was written, and each year approximately 150 youth leave the State’s custody at age 18 or upon completion of high school. Approximately 50 youth return home and another 100 “age out” of the system without reliable permanent connections. According to Vermont policy, formal services cease for youth at age 18 or upon high school graduation, although informal supportive services are available to youth through the Youth Development Program until their 22nd birthday. Currently, approximately 300 youth are enrolled in that program following discharge from formal services.

Item 15: Relative placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 15 was applicable for 34 (85 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 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.

Item 15	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	15	4	4	23	68
Area Needing Improvement	3	3	5	11	32
Not applicable	2	3	1	6	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Performance on this measure varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 83 percent of Burlington cases, 57 percent of Springfield cases, and 44 percent of Morrisville cases.

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

- The child was placed with relatives (11 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives, but relatives were assessed as potential placement resources (10 cases). In these cases, the children were not placed with relatives because the relatives were unable or unwilling to care for the children (6 cases), lived too far from the family (1 case), and/or had a criminal record or a history of substantiated child maltreatment (3 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives, but the agency made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (2 cases).

Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency had not made diligent efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives (8 cases).
- The agency had made efforts to search for maternal relatives but not paternal relatives (3 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic had somewhat divergent opinions on how consistent FSD is with regard to attempts to find relatives as placement resources for children in foster care. Some stakeholders noted that relatives are typically explored by a caseworker at case opening and/or in court at a family's first hearing (or detention hearing). They also noted that FSD is prioritizing relative searches for placement options for children who are coming into foster care, and they are increasingly seeing FSD place children with extended family members.

On the other hand, some stakeholders observe that FSD is inconsistent in early identification and assessment of both maternal and paternal relatives and that FSD is not diligently searching throughout the life of a case. A few stakeholders report that caseworkers do not have enough time to invest in family finding. A few stakeholders mentioned that Vermont Kin as Parents is an available resource that supports caretakers who have relative kin placed with them.

Rating Determination

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

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this area was cited as a strength in 95 percent of the cases reviewed for the last CFSR. For the current review, "52 percent of the youth responding to the CFSR Youth Survey said that no efforts were made to find family members. However some of them added that, even if relatives were found, it probably was not in their best interest to live with them." As reported in the Statewide Assessment, staff focus groups suggest that there is caution and skepticism regarding the practice of

family finding and placement with relatives. Data from the Vermont quarterly reports indicate that 11.16 percent of the children were placed with family in 2006.

The Statewide Assessment reports that Vermont “has focused work this past year to help staff gain the knowledge and skills necessary to engage families in a meaningful way as placement options, natural supports and as permanent connections for youth when placement is not an option.” In addition, FSD has engaged in the following strategies:

- Family Services managers, staff and community partners have been trained on new family finding techniques.
- FSD Central office has devoted a full time position to build capacity in the district offices by supporting caseworkers in family finding and family group conferencing efforts.
- The Child Benefits Unit locates absent parents and other relatives who may be able to provide some type of support to children in custody.
- FSD held a Permanency Convening to inspire Family Services staff, judges and community partners to focus on the permanency needs of adolescents. After the Convening, district offices designed strategic plans that included objectives for appropriate use of kinship care.

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 34 (85 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.

Item 16	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	12	7	2	21	62
Area Needing Improvement	6	2	5	13	38
Not applicable	2	1	3	6	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a strong bond between the parent/s and the child that the agency supported (17 cases).
- There was not a strong bond between the parent and the child, but the agency made concerted efforts to promote bonding (4 cases).

The following are examples of FSD efforts to promote bonding:

- Encouraged parents to attend their child's medical appointments and school meetings
- Provided opportunities for therapeutic situations to strengthen the parent child relationship
- Encouraged foster parents to serve as role models to the parent
- Facilitated visits to incarcerated parents
- Encouraged parents to participate in the child's activities

Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child's relationship with the mother (7 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child's relationship with the father (3 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child's relationships with either the mother or the father (3 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that greater efforts are needed on the part of the agency to support youth in maintaining contact with their parents, particularly when they are on restriction in residential or detention facilities. Several stakeholders, however, noted that foster parents often are helpful in facilitating parental connections for youth, although some stakeholders said that a few youth have reportedly had to seek these connections with family on their own.

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 62 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 percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this area was cited as an Area Needing Improvement in the first CFSR, with 81 percent of the cases reviewed found to be promoting parent-child relationships. The Statewide Assessment points out that FSD and the UVM Partnership are planning division trainings for 2008, which will focus on skills and approaches that promote successful caseworker contacts with parents and children. Maintaining parent-child relationships will also be part of the training.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	6	5	4	15	23.4
Partially Achieved:	12	6	7	25	39.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	13	5	6	24	37.5
Total Cases	31	16	17	64	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 23.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome was low across all three sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 19.3 percent of Burlington cases, 31.2 percent of Springfield cases, and 23.5 percent of Morrisville cases.

There was a difference in performance based on case type. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 14 (35 percent) of the 40 foster care cases, and in 1 (4.3 percent) of the 24 in-home cases.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR:

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR. During that review, item 17 (assessing needs and providing services), item 19 (caseworker visits with children), and item 20 (caseworker visits with parents) were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR with regard to these items include:

- Insufficient direct contact between caseworkers and the children and families they serve.
- A lack of systematic and comprehensive assessments of children and families.

Vermont implemented the following Program Improvement Plan strategies to address these concerns:

- The agency designed, implemented, and integrated into practice the use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) investigation, risk and safety assessment tools.
- The agency established caseworker contact guidelines as part of the SDM tools. These were organized by risk level, case type, and placement of child. Monthly contact guidelines were established for intact families, families with children in custody living at

home, and families with children in custody placed out of home with a goal of reunification. Minimum contact guidelines were established for children in out-of-home placement and their caregivers.

- The agency developed and implemented a comprehensive quality assurance system in order to monitor performance with regard to the areas included in Well-Being Outcome 1.

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

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

In the 2007 CFSR case reviewers found that concerns identified in 2001 still remained. These related to a lack of sufficient systematic and comprehensive assessments of children and families, and insufficient direct contact between caseworkers and the children and families they serve. Additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- The insufficient comprehensive assessments of children and parents were particularly problematic in the in-home services cases.
- There were inconsistencies in involving parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process, particularly in the in-home services cases and cases involving children in the juvenile justice system.

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

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

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 17 was applicable for all 64 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. This item excludes the assessment of children’s (but not parents’) needs pertaining to education and physical and mental health. These are addressed in later items. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 17	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	12	6	5	23	36
Area Needing Improvement	19	10	12	41	64
Total	31	16	17	64	

Performance on this measure was consistently low across all three sites. However, there was variation in performance on this item based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 19 (47.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases, compared to 4 (17 percent) of the 23 in-home services cases.

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

The data in the table below indicate that for mothers, fathers, and children, FSD was more likely to assess and address service needs in the foster care cases than they were in the in-home services cases. In addition, for the in-home services cases, the agency was more likely to assess and meet the service needs of the mothers and children compared to the fathers. In the foster care cases, FSD was more likely to assess and meet the needs of the children and foster parents compared to either mothers or fathers.

In-home Cases			
Needs Assessment and Service Provision (if relevant)	Number of Cases		
	NO	YES	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	13 (57%)	10	23
Father's needs assessed and met	18 (82%)	4	22
Child's needs assessed and met	15 (62.5%)	9	24
Foster Care Cases			
Needs Assessment and Service Provision (if relevant)	Number of Cases		
	NO	YES	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	15 (43%)	20	35
Father's needs assessed and met	13 (45%)	16	29
Child's needs assessed and met	5 (12.5%)	35	40
Foster parent's needs assessed and met	8 (27%)	22	30

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders reported a mixture of strengths and challenges with regard to needs assessment and service provision. Stakeholders noted that programs and practices such as Family Group Conferencing and Signs of Safety improve the quality of assessment and service provision. They also noted that the new assessment tools implemented by the agency are comprehensive and have the potential to improve assessment and service delivery, although it was reported that the tools have not yet been fully integrated into case practice.

Despite these positive practices, stakeholders generally agreed that there are insufficient services and supports for foster care providers and that contact between foster care providers and agency caseworkers is insufficient to ensure ongoing needs assessment. Stakeholders also agreed that when a case involves a youth in juvenile probation, the focus tends to be on the youth and the needs of parents are rarely assessed or addressed.

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 36 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children and parents. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this area was identified as one needing improvement in 24 percent of the cases reviewed during the last CFSR. Issues identified in the first CFSR included a tendency to focus primarily on the child’s needs, a lack of services to address identified issues, and a need for initial comprehensive evaluations that guide case planning. PIP activity included the development of Structured Decision Making assessment tools that guide decision making in assessment and case planning. According to the Statewide Assessment, the State also developed an initial screening process that is to be completed for all children in custody within 30 days. Key screens capture information on parent stress, family genealogy, children’s behavior, medical and dental, developmental milestones, etc, and this information informs SDM assessments, the initial case plan, and placement decisions. According to the Statewide Assessment, staff feedback indicates that the tools provide quality information, although the technical challenges have hindered caseworkers’ ability to use the information as it is intended. The State is seeking to alleviate these challenges by making automation improvements and by providing technical training.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that Vermont has developed a comprehensive system of family support and preservation services designed to assist any family who needs them. The Statewide Assessment identifies a number of available programs and services mechanisms in Vermont to meet the needs of children and families.

Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 18 was applicable for 63 (98 percent) of the 64 cases. In the one case that was not applicable for this item, the child was too young to be involved in case planning and parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child’s best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

Item 18	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	14	8	6	28	44
Area Needing Improvement	16	8	11	35	56
Not applicable	1	0	0	1	
Total	31	16	17	64	

Performance on this item was quite similar across the review sites. There was, however, substantial variation in performance based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 24 (61 percent) of the 39 applicable foster care cases, compared to 4 (16.6 percent) of the 24 in-home cases.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency had not made concerted efforts to involve parents or the child in case planning (24 cases).
- The case was open during the period under review but the agency had minimal or no contact with the family and no case planning occurred (7 in-home services cases).
- A case plan was never developed by the caseworker (4 in-home services cases). In two of these four cases, the caseworkers reported to the CFSR reviewers that they did not know they were required to develop a case plan for an in-home services case.

The table below provides information regarding the involvement of mothers, fathers, and children in case planning. As indicated in the table, fathers were less likely to be involved in case planning than were mothers or children.

Item 18 Summary: Families Involved in Case Planning			
Family Member	Involved	Not Involved	Total Applicable
Mother	31 (55%)	25	56
Father	20 (41%)	29	49
Child	31(62%)	19	50

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite review expressed differing opinions. Most stakeholders suggested that FSD is usually effective in engaging parents in case planning. However, stakeholders expressed divergent opinions regarding the involvement of children (when age appropriate) in case planning. Some stakeholders pointed out that FSD is improving in this area, and that children have opportunities to provide input, particularly during administrative reviews. However, other stakeholders expressed concern about the involvement of children (when age-appropriate) in case planning. Several stakeholders also noted that case plans sometimes are not completed in a timely manner, often just prior to the 6-month administrative review. They suggested that this raises questions about the extent of involvement of both children and parents in developing the case plan.

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 44 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, child and family involvement in case planning was cited as a Strength in 85 percent of the cases reviewed during the last CFSR. In 15 percent of the cases, concerns were based on case plans that were negotiated in court and delayed merits hearings that limited parent engagement and participation. The Statewide Assessment reports that on the recent "CFSR Court Survey 12 percent of the respondents said that they *always* and 78 percent of the respondents said that they *sometimes* feel that disputed cases result in the inability to engage parents in early case planning." However, the Statewide Assessment states that "many respondents report noticing improved court timelines and improved relationships between all parties in districts where collaborative case consultations are happening, even when parents disagree."

According to the Statewide Assessment, "30 percent of the CFSR Case Planning Survey adult respondents said they were *always* involved in case planning, 64 percent said they are *sometimes* involved, and 6 percent said they are *never* involved in case planning." Only 20 percent of the youth who responded to the CFSR Youth Survey (all who were involved in the Youth Development Program) said they are involved in case planning, and 70 percent report no involvement at all. Data analyzed during the 2005 Vermont District Reviews showed that in 68 percent of the cases reviewed, children, families and caretakers were involved in case planning. Common reasons cited during the reviews for lack of case planning involvement were 1) caseworkers often complete plans in isolation to manage required timeframes, 2) there is a lack of use of treatment teams for planning, and 3) there is an inability to engage families due to caseworker skill and/or family resistance. An analysis of focus group feedback from the Vermont District Reviews indicates that while many caseworkers report using treatment teams as vehicles to gather input for case planning, parents and caretakers do not perceive this as involvement in the case planning process.

Item 19: Worker visits with child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

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

Item 19	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	6	9	10	25	39
Area Needing Improvement	25	7	7	39	61
Total	31	16	17	64	

Performance on this item was similar in Springfield and Morrisville, and notably different in Burlington. The item was rated as a Strength in 59 percent of Morrisville cases and 56 percent of Springfield cases, compared to 19.3 percent of Burlington cases. Ratings for the item also varied across case type. The item was rated as a Strength in 21 (52.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases, compared to 4 (16.6 percent) of the 24 in-home cases.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children was 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 Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (22 cases).
- There were no caseworker visits for either the majority of the period under review or the entire period under review (13 cases). In a number of these cases, the case remained open although the agency was neither conducting visits nor providing services.
- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits did occur, they were substantive (2 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (2 cases).

For most of these cases, the insufficient frequency of caseworker visits with children was not due to an over-reliance on contracted services providers to conduct the visits. This had been a concern in the 2001 CFSR when it was determined that the agency was using contracted service providers who did not have case planning responsibilities to visit children and report to the agency on the children and their progress instead of having the agency caseworker establish face-to-face contact with the children. However, this was true only in a few cases in the 2007 CFSR review.

Specific information from the case reviews on caseworker visits is presented in the table below. In 42.5 percent of the foster care cases caseworker visits with the child occurred less than once a month or not at all during the period under review. In 83 percent of the in-home services cases, caseworker visits with the child occurred less than once a month or not at all during the period under review.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Child	Number of Foster Care Cases	Number of In-Home Services Cases
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	5	1
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	2	1
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	16	2
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	15	10
There were no visits during the period under review	2	10
Total cases	40	24

Stakeholder Interview Information

There was a consensus of opinion among stakeholders that FSD is very inconsistent in making contact with children in their caseloads. Stakeholders pointed out that although the degree of contact varies from caseworker to caseworker, even experienced caseworkers may have difficulty in making contacts depending upon their caseloads. Stakeholders cited the following barriers to consistent contact:

- High caseloads.
- Time consuming, supervised visitation schedules and a lack of visitation resources.
- Out of district placements.
- Time consuming data entry to meet Information System demands.

Stakeholders pointed out that caseworker contact is typically an issue across districts, and that caseworkers tend to have more phone contact with children than face-to-face contact. Also, stakeholders reported that in situations in which there are treatment team meetings, there also seem to be more consistent contacts. Stakeholders also noted, however, that many youth report that their phone calls to caseworkers are not returned and youth in locked facilities are rarely visited by caseworkers.

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 39 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the current policy that guides caseworker contact is based on a workload system that is outdated. In the last CFSR, 29 percent of cases reviewed were found to be an area needing improvement. The CFSR noted a lack of direct contact between caseworkers and children and an over-reliance on providers for contact and monitoring. PIP activity included the development of new caseworker guidelines, and these have not yet been adopted. According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont’s 2005 District Review found that in 47 percent of the cases reviewed caseworker contact was happening at least monthly

with parents and children. The Statewide Assessment relates that in the CFSR Youth Survey, twenty percent of the 30 youth who responded said that they see their caseworkers once a month or more. Other youth reported that they rarely see their caseworkers or they reported seeing them on a 2 to 3 month schedule.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that staff focus groups indicated agreement that monthly face-to-face contact is appropriate. However, they also highlighted factors such as workload, travel distance, court requirements, paperwork, casework crisis, intake responsibility, and meetings that impede consistent contact. A report that accurately reflects new caseworker contact reporting requirements is under development.

Item 20: Worker visits with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 60 (94 percent) of the 64 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. 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	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	8	4	2	14	23
Area Needing Improvement	23	10	13	46	77
Not applicable	0	2	2	4	
Total	31	16	17	64	

The item was rated as a Strength in 26 percent of Burlington cases, 28 percent of Springfield cases and 13 percent of Morrisville cases. There was a substantial difference in performance as a function of the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 13 (36 percent) of the 36 applicable foster care cases, compared to 1 (4 percent) of the 24 applicable in-home cases.

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

- Visits with parents were not of sufficient frequency or quality (15 cases).
- Visits with mother were not of sufficient frequency or quality (13 cases).

- Visits with father were not of sufficient frequency or quality (9 cases).
- There were no parent visits for the majority of the period under review or for the entire period under review (9 cases).

In many of these cases, the parent was seen in court or at a team meeting, which was determined to be insufficient to meet the needs of the family. In some cases, the case remained open, but there were no visits or service provision to the family. In other cases, the case was transferred to a new caseworker, and there were neither visits made nor services provided. Also in some cases, the parents were not sufficiently engaged in visits, despite their needs for supportive services. In at least two cases, visits with the parents did not occur as needed once the family was reunified.

Additional information from the case reviews is provided below.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Parents	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred at least weekly	3	3	1	0
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	3	2	1	0
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	6	4	3	1
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	19	11	14	6
There were no visits during the period under review	4	9	5	15
Not Applicable	5	11	0	2
Total Cases	40	40	24	24

The data in the table above indicate the following:

- For the 35 foster care cases and the 24 in-home services cases for which caseworker visits with mothers were applicable, there were 42 (71 percent) cases in which these visits occurred less than once a month or not at all.
- For the 29 foster care cases, and 22 in-home services cases for which caseworker visits with fathers were applicable, there were 41 cases (80 percent) in which these visits occurred less than once a month or not at all.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item noted that the barriers to caseworker contacts with parents were the same as those with children, particularly high caseloads.

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 23 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or

promote attainment of case goals. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

Relevant information regarding this item is reported under item 19.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	20	12	11	43	87.8
Partially Achieved:	1	0	0	1	2.0
Not Achieved:	1	2	2	5	10.2
Not Applicable	9	2	4	15	
Total	31	16	17	64	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 87.8 percent of the cases reviewed were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome. This percentage is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Although performance on this item did not vary considerably across sites, there was variation as a function of the type of case. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 9 (64 percent) of the 14 applicable in-home services cases compared to 34 (97 percent) of the 35 applicable foster care cases.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Vermont achieved substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR and therefore the outcome was not addressed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

The CFSR found that although FSD was generally effective in routinely assessing and meeting the educational goals of children, there were 6 cases in which the children’s needs were not met. Often the needs were not met because of a lack of ongoing assessment and planning and lack of caseworker contact with the children.

Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 49 (77 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if any of the following applied: (1) children were not of school age; or (2) children did not have service needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below.

Item 21	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	20	12	11	43	88
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	2	6	12
Not applicable	9	2	4	15	
Total	31	16	17	64	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary. Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a lack of assessment and coordination around the child’s educational needs (3 cases).
- There was a lack of ongoing assessment of educational needs due to lack of caseworker visits (2 cases).
- The child was truant and there was no associated case planning or coordination (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that FSD usually is effective in addressing children’s educational needs. They noted that there is a lot of coordination and collaboration around educational service provision, particularly through Act 264 for children with mental health and special educational needs. However, they also noted that there are some education-related difficulties when foster children move in and out of districts. Stakeholders suggested that there is a process in place for transitioning children to alternative school districts, but that often there are problems with ensuring that children are properly registered, that their needs are properly identified, and that their information and accomplishments accompany them on multiple moves and school changes. Another challenge that stakeholders noted related to Vermont regulations that children can not attend school in an alternative district from the district in which they reside. One stakeholder pointed out that FSD and the Department of Education are formalizing a Memorandum of Understanding to allow children in FSD custody to stay in the same school district if everyone is in agreement.

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 88 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percent is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. (Note that the requirements for this item are different because there is only one item assessed under the outcome. For the other outcomes, an item rating of 90 is considered sufficient for a strength rating because there are multiple items within the outcome, and they involve fewer cases than those incorporated in the overall outcome rating. This is not the case for Item 21. Therefore, for this item, the rating of Strength is based on the same criteria as the rating of substantial conformity.) In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, 2.1 percent of cases were identified as an area needing improvement in the 2001 CFSR. The Statewide Assessment also notes that Vermont’s 2005 District Review found that, in 90 percent of the cases reviewed, the educational needs of children were appropriately met. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the new case plan format addresses educational needs for all open cases.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that Commissioners from FSD and the Department of Education are working on a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at improving educational continuity and school stability for children and youth in out-of-home care. Also, the Barre district office is participating in a Breakthrough Series project to identify, develop, test, implement and spread promising strategies for improving practice in Vermont’s education and child welfare systems.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	23	11	10	44	72.1
Partially Achieved:	3	0	2	5	8.2
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	4	5	12	19.7
Not Applicable:	2	1	0	3	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 72.1 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required

for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 79.3 percent of Burlington cases and 73.3 percent of Springfield cases, compared to 58.8 percent of Morrisville cases.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR:

Vermont did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR. At that time, item 23 (adequate services to meet mental health needs) was rated as an Area Needing Improvement, although item 22 was rated as a Strength. Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR with regard to this item included the following:

- Insufficient mental health services for severely emotionally disturbed children and juvenile sex offenders.
- Insufficient numbers of skilled child psychiatrists.
- Inadequate assessments of children needing out of home placement.

Vermont implemented the following strategies in its Program Improvement Plan to address these concerns:

- The agency finalized departmental re-organization plans and created new System of Care positions and field service teams to provide increased supports to districts for development and evaluation of placement resources and supports, including in-home supports.
- The agency designed, implemented, and integrated into practice the use of Structured Decision Making automated intake and investigation tools, including a Report and Acceptance tool, a Response Priority Tool, a Safety Assessment, and a Risk Assessment. In addition, a process was initiated to develop mental health assessments for all new entrants into custody.

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

Key findings in the 2007 case reviews were as follows:

The concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR also were noted in the 2007 CFSR. For example, the 2007 review found that the State continues to lack a sufficient number of child psychiatrists and adequate mental health services to address intensive mental health needs. The 2007 review also found that residential treatment services and emergency mental health evaluation services were insufficient to meet the needs of children and families. Stakeholders reported that there are not enough therapists who accept Medicaid or who have a sufficient number of Medicaid openings to address children’s mental health concerns.

A particular concern emerged in the 2007 CFSR with regard to performance on this outcome in the in-home cases. In assessing whether mental health needs were met, 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 item was rated as a Strength in 30 (88 percent) of the 34 applicable foster care cases, compared to only 9 (45 percent) of the 20 applicable in-home services cases.

Case reviews indicated that for the most part children’s physical health needs were being assessed and addressed. There were five cases in which the child’s needs were not met, and in three of these, the concerns were due primarily to insufficient caseworker visits, and inadequate ongoing assessment and planning.

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

Item 22: Physical health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 46 (72 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Most cases that were not applicable were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not relevant to agency involvement. 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	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	22	10	9	41	89
Area Needing Improvement	0	4	1	5	11
Not applicable	9	2	7	18	
Total	31	16	17	64	

This item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable Burlington cases and 90 percent of Morrisville cases, compared to 71 percent of Springfield cases.

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

- There was no evidence of ongoing assessment of medical or dental needs (3 cases).
- Dental care services were not appropriately provided (1 case).
- Medical check-ups were not appropriately provided (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that FSD generally is effective in ensuring that the physical and dental health needs of children are met. Stakeholders pointed out that the Health Inventory Questionnaire is completed in partnership between the agency and the Health Department in order to identify the physical health needs of children. Stakeholders also noted that

there are public health nurses co-located in FSD district offices. However, stakeholders expressed concern that foster parents are not receiving complete medical information for the children in their care on a consistent basis.

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 89 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, FSD provides the following to ensure the health of children in care and custody:

- EPSTD initial health screening through Fostering Healthy Families.
- Service coordination with the Department of Developmental and Mental Health Services.
- Department of Health Nurses complete Health Intake Questionnaires for initial assessment to ensure that a) children with serious health needs are identified, b) every child has a medical home, and c) health, mental health and educational needs are addressed in the child’s case plan and discussed frequently in case team meetings.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that FSD conducted an analysis of 1,101 child assessments completed from September 2005 to April 2006 and found that 94 percent were rated as having positive or adequate physical health. According to the 2005 Vermont District Review, medical needs of children were appropriately met in 90 percent of the cases reviewed.

Item 23: Mental health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 54 (84 percent) of the 64 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, or if there were no mental health concerns. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (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.

Item 23	Burlington	Springfield	Morrisville	Total N	Percent
Strength	19	10	10	39	72
Area Needing Improvement	6	3	6	15	28
Not applicable	6	3	1	10	
Total	31	16	17	64	

This item was rated as a Strength in 76 percent of applicable Burlington cases, 77 percent of applicable Springfield cases, and 62.5 percent of applicable Morrisville cases. There were substantive differences in performance between foster care and in-home cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 30 (88 percent) of the 34 applicable foster care cases, compared to 9 (45 percent) of the 20 applicable in-home services cases.

Item 23 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's mental health needs were appropriately assessed and the identified mental health needs were addressed. Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Mental health needs were not adequately assessed or addressed (8 cases).
- Initial assessment was done, and service referrals were made, but there was no ongoing assessment (6 cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed but not appropriately addressed (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic pointed out that there are services to meet the mental health needs of children and families. However, there is a lack of services proportionate to regional needs, and there are services or specializations within the mental health array that are not easy to access across the State. Stakeholders' examples of mental health services that are lacking or difficult to access include psychiatrists, emergency evaluations, family therapists, private therapists with enough Medicaid slots, and residential mental health services. There are indications from the interviews with stakeholders that the behavioral problems of many children may not meet the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living eligibility requirements for mental health services. According to stakeholders, children may end up in FSD custody because their behaviors are unmanageable when what they really need is improved access to mental health services.

Rating Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont's 2001 CF SR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, FSD conducted an analysis of 1,101 child assessments completed from September 2005 to April 2006 and found that 42 percent were rated as having positive or adequate emotional/behavioral health. Forty-three percent were rated as having emotional/behavioral health concerns and 15 percent were rated as severe emotional/behavioral health issues.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont's 2005 District Reviews indicate that in 94 percent of the cases reviewed the mental health needs of children were appropriately addressed, and in 63 percent of the cases reviewed substance abuse needs were appropriately addressed. The Statewide Assessment reports that reviewers found the following:

- "There was good, clear documentation in case plans and files regarding evaluations and treatment."
- "When treatment teams existed they were essential in identifying needs and securing services."
- "There was good collaboration and coordination of services with community partners to meet mental health needs."

The Statewide Assessment notes that there are challenges in assuring that children in custody receive quality mental health services. Low wages, long waiting lists, and staff turnover at local mental health agencies make for a struggling mental health system. The State points out that children are in need of residential and outpatient substance abuse treatment services, and these are not consistently available across 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 for the items included in each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. A score for substantial conformity is established for each systemic factor. In addition, information is provided regarding the State’s performance on each systemic factor for the State’s first CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State’s Program Improvement Plan, the key concerns addressed in the Program Improvement Plan and the strategies for assessing those concerns are noted, as well as any changes in ratings that occurred as a result of the State’s second CFSR.

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Vermont is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Vermont was found to be in substantial conformity with this item during its 2001 CFSR. Findings for the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because the State’s information system can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of all children in foster care. This item also was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont operates an AFCARS compliant system called SSMIS. The system is not a SACWIS system, but it does readily identify demographic characteristics, location, and goals of foster children. In the last 5 years, Vermont has rolled out several components of a web-based, case-management system with applications for intake and investigations, case contact notes, case planning and assessment, and initial case plans. The Statewide Assessment notes that the system produces a wide variety of reports including case lists, tickler lists for important due dates, and quarterly management outcome reports. The outcome reports include data on five of the six CFSR outcome measures as well as demographic information on both custody and non-custody cases. According to the Statewide Assessment, the variety of outcome reports is expanding, and these reports have become an important tool for State program improvement. Challenges with the system include a) data quality issues related to keeping up with timely entry of changes in child placement and b) technical issues involving case planning and assessment tools that are frustrating users.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 13 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders expressed the opinion that the system is effective in maintaining demographic and placement data for children, including children in the juvenile justice system. Stakeholders also highlighted several positive functions of the system:

- It is useful in obtaining histories on family involvement with FSD and juvenile justice, child abuse and neglect reports, and child placement histories.
- There are interfaces with the Department of Corrections for criminal background checks for certain users, and some staff have access to Court system data. The system can also run data matches with IV-B/TANF and IV-D Child Support.
- Caseworkers enter information in case contacts, and contacts are tracked through case notes reports.
- Stakeholders indicate that there is regular training for district staff on effective use of data and outcome reports, with a primary focus on training supervisors.

Stakeholders reported challenges regarding the accuracy of data related to child placement changes. They noted that data entry is done by clerical and supervisory staff, resulting in some lag time in updating databases. Although agency policy requires that information be entered within 3 days of placement moves, stakeholders report that data entry is actually driven by end-of-month payment procedures. Stakeholders reported that Vermont is considering the adoption of a 24-hour policy for entering placement change information into the system and also is working on a Disaster Recovery Plan that could positively impact the accuracy of placement data. Stakeholders also reported that automated intake and investigation SDM tools have been successfully integrated into practice, but that the automated, initial case plan and assessment tools are time consuming, repetitive and frustrating to use. Stakeholders noted that there is no single place to access the information they need, that the SSMIS is cumbersome, and that users sometimes have to navigate a number of screens in order to acquire information.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Vermont is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The areas identified as needing improvement pertain to item 25 (development of the case plan) and item 29 (notice and opportunity to be heard). Vermont was rated as being in substantial conformity with this factor during its first CFSR and therefore, it was not addressed in the State's Program Improvement Plan.

Key findings from the 2007 review are the following:

- Case plans are not consistently developed in a timely fashion, and there is insufficient involvement of parents and children (when age appropriate) in the case planning process.
- Foster and pre-adoptive parents are not consistently notified of court hearings. In addition, foster and pre-adoptive parents are not consistently provided with the opportunity to be heard in court hearings.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because case plans are not consistently developed in a timely manner and because there is insufficient involvement of parents and children (when age appropriate) in the case planning process. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for children entering custody, initial case plans are required within 60 days of the child's entry into care. The Statewide Assessment also notes that case plan reviews are required annually at 6 and 11 months. A written case plan review is required for open family cases, protective supervision cases and probation cases 6 months after the initial case plan and

every 6 months thereafter. Policy does not require parental signature on case plans as they are developed. However, they must be signed by parents after an administrative review to signify that parents either approve or disapprove of the plan.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the agency revised and automated its initial case plan in 2005 to facilitate and support an enhanced approach to case planning. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that there are technical difficulties with the automated system which are causing some staff to revert to a paper process.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that the Agency developed reports using data from their automated system to determine initial case plan completion rates. These data indicated a 65 percent completion rate in the first quarter of 2006 and only a 27 percent completion rate in the second quarter. However, given the reliance by some staff on a paper process, the State speculates that these data are most likely not valid. Earlier data collected for the 2005 CIP Reassessment found that 79 percent of inventory respondents said that there was a written case plan for every child within 60 days of placement into FSD custody.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, 30 percent of the adult respondents to a recent CFSR Case Planning Survey said that they were always involved in case planning; 64 percent said that they were sometimes involved; and 6 percent said that they were never involved in case planning. In addition, only 20 percent of the age-appropriate youth who responded to the CFSR Youth Survey said that they were involved in case planning, while 70 percent reported no involvement. However, a higher rate of participation in case planning was found during District Office Reviews. While the Agency reported that it is not able to discern individualized participation rates for each of the parties, reviewers found that in 68 percent of the cases, children, families and caregivers were involved in case planning.

According to Vermont's analysis of focus group feedback from the Vermont District Reviews, there may be a difference between perception and reality in case planning. Many caseworkers reported using treatment team meetings to gather input for case planning, yet parents and caretakers did not perceive this activity as involvement in the case planning process.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was the topic of discussion in 23 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Stakeholders generally agreed that while the basics of case planning are done, case plans are not consistently created in a timely manner. Further, stakeholders noted that while parental input is expected in case planning and treatment team meetings, it is not consistently sought by caseworkers in the case planning process. Stakeholders cited the following as key barriers to consistent case planning and involvement of parents in case planning:

- There is extensive variation in the abilities and skills of caseworkers with regard to completing and following a case plan, involving parents in the case planning process, and updating and revising case plans based on an ongoing basis.
- FSD's efforts to engage families involved with the Juvenile Justice system differ from their efforts to involve families with CPS reports. Specifically, FSD does not usually engage families when a child enters foster care through the Juvenile Justice System,

because the focus is on the child's behavior, and not on the family situation. In comparison, when a child enters the system through a maltreatment allegation, the focus is on the family situation.

- The case plan goals are not clearly stated on dispositional orders so that parents do not always know what they are expected to do and FSD and the courts cannot mutually reinforce case plan goals (Burlington stakeholders).

Stakeholders indicated that some promising practices are emerging from the Morrisville District Office as a result of that agency's investment in Family Group Conferencing and Signs of Safety. These approaches support and encourage the involvement of families and children in case planning, as well as other parties who have a stake in the outcome of a case. Stakeholders also noted that the State plans to expand the use of Family Group Conferencing and to develop a constellation of case plans that are relevant to initial, dispositional, ongoing, and probationer case planning.

The findings of the onsite case review with regard to child and family involvement in case planning (item 18) are consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder opinions. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 56 percent of the cases. The rating was due to a lack of current case planning and a lack of involvement of various family members in case planning.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because there is a clear process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months by an Administrative Review process. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that Vermont has an automated system designed to ensure that case reviews are scheduled at 6 month and 11 month intervals. The automated system prompts district offices to mail case plans to parents 2 weeks in advance of the case plan review, and Districts receive quarterly compliance reports that measure this activity. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the review system is effective due to the automated scheduling and the use of contracted facilitators, many of whom are seasoned mental health professionals. However, focus group participants reported that there is a need for standardization and oversight of the way that reviews are conducted and suggested centralized supervision of contracted facilitators. In addition, the State does not have a mechanism to track levels of participation in case plan reviews at this time.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 20 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. There was general agreement among stakeholders that the State uses an Administrative Review process for the periodic review of each child, and it is happening at 6 and 11-month intervals. Efforts are made to ensure that parents, providers, and other caregivers are present for the reviews.

Various stakeholders identified the following concerns related to the function of the reviews:

- The quality of the reviews is poor due primarily to a lack of standardization in the way that reviews are conducted and a lack of training targeting review expectations, particularly at the outset of the review.
- There is a lack of flexibility in the scheduling of administrative reviews, which means that attorneys are not always able to be present for their clients.
- There may be some duplication of effort between FSD and the Court now that a statutory change has been proposed requiring a court review 60 days after disposition to ensure proper progression of cases.
- The 6-month reviews should be held by the court, and not by a FSD-contracted facilitator.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

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

Statewide Assessment Information

Vermont policy requires that a permanency hearing be held by the court no later than 12 months after the child enters foster care and every 12 months thereafter. If requested by a party, earlier permanency hearings may be held for younger children (under 3 yrs, every 3 months and if between 3 and 6 years, every 6 months).

According to the Statewide Assessment, permanency hearings are generally held on time, and district offices work with the courts to schedule permanency meetings. One district has cited a backlog challenge due to family court day occurring on Mondays, a common day for holidays. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the summary of findings from the 2005 Vermont Juvenile Court Reassessment found that 63 percent of the initial permanency hearings were held within 12 months for children who were abused and

neglected, and the average length of time from case filing to the first permanency hearing has been decreasing over the last 5 years. The Statewide Assessment points out that disputed abuse and neglect cases often delay disposition until legal issues are resolved. Vermont has been looking at ways to involve youth more meaningfully in permanency hearings.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, Vermont statute allows family courts to have an “administrative body” conduct permanency hearings in order to allow judges to attend to findings and other court-related matters. The Statewide Assessment notes that “according to the 2005 Vermont Juvenile Court Reassessment, Chittenden Family Court has used this practice for more than 8 years.”

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 27 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Most stakeholders reported that there is a process in place for 12-month hearings and that these hearings are substantive and occurring in a timely manner. They noted that permanency hearings for young children can be expedited and put on a 6-month track. Although stakeholders indicated that permanency hearings typically occur in a timely manner, they noted that there often are delays due to contested hearings, lack of notice to the parents and/or incorrect addresses, incarcerated parents without transportation to Court, and absent parties or court personnel. Stakeholders also observed that due to workload constraints, attorneys often do not have time to meet with their clients, and as a result, judges allow time for attorneys to work with families prior to court hearings. This consistently causes delays in scheduled hearings on any given day.

Although judges typically oversee permanency hearings across the State, stakeholders noted that in Burlington, where the Chittenden County Family Court is located, all permanency hearings are heard by the Court Clerk, except in instances of contested cases, which are heard by the judge. Although stakeholders cite improvements in court scheduling, Springfield stakeholders reported that caseworkers spend an excessive amount of time in court waiting for hearings. Also Springfield stakeholders said that the judges there do annual rotations in family court, and this can make it difficult to establish rapport between the agency and the judge and sometimes leads to delays in scheduling.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as a Strength because the State has a process in place for termination of parental rights proceedings that is in accordance with ASFA guidelines. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont statute, policy and practices allow for and support termination of parental rights (TPR). FSD regularly generates a report that identifies any child in custody who is approaching 15 months and is without a compelling reason for not filing for TPR. Discussion of relevant TPR issues typically occurs in the administrative case plan review which is held 11 months after the custody date. According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont does not have a formal concurrent goal policy. However, caseworkers use concurrent planning in practice, and there is a central office permanency unit that offers consultation to caseworkers who are using concurrent planning in order to support timely achievement of goals. Vermont also has a policy that parents of children in foster care are to be informed about the possibility of termination of parental rights at the onset of a case.

The 2005 Vermont Juvenile Court Reassessment found that TPRs decided within 18 months of custody increased from 28 percent in CY00 to 54 percent in CY04. Although there have been improvements, the Statewide Assessment notes that there continues to be delays in the court for scheduling hearings and issuing decisions about TPR petitions.

Stakeholder Interview Information

This item was a topic of discussion in 22 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Stakeholders were in general agreement that FSD typically adheres to ASFA guidelines and files for TPR in a timely manner. Stakeholders pointed out that the TPR process is timelier now than it has been in the past, although delays still occur. Stakeholders indicated that the courts have implemented what is called the “rocket docket.” This is a panel of three Justices who make decisions on appeals in an expedited manner. Stakeholders noted that the “rocket docket” has decreased the length of time from filing to decision from 1 year to 6 months.

According to stakeholders, the most commonly cited reasons for delaying TPR are the age of the child (i.e., the child is an older adolescent) and the child’s bond to their parents. Other stakeholders noted that the practice of annually rotating family court judges affects timeliness and a judge’s ability to establish rapport with families. Stakeholders indicated that there are delays and that these are due primarily to scheduling difficulties, situations in which there is an open criminal case involving the parents, and difficulties locating absent parents. Stakeholders also identified the Justice for Children’s Task Force as an avenue for strengthening collaboration with the Courts and improving court processes.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers are not consistently notified about court hearings nor consistently afforded an opportunity to be heard in court. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont policy states that “individuals who must be invited to the permanency hearing are those who are invited to the case plan review meeting held prior to the permanency hearing and those who were party to the original disposition hearing.” Parents whose rights have been terminated are not notified of reviews or hearings. District offices provide caregivers a Notice of Hearing for permanency hearings that reads “FSD shall provide any foster or pre-adoptive parent(s) or relative(s) providing care for the child with a copy of this Notice of Hearing so the caregiver may have the opportunity to attend and be heard at the hearing.” However, the Statewide Assessment notes that Vermont does not have a process in place for consistent notification of hearings to individuals without party status, and this affects the consistency with which foster parents are notified.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the 2005 Vermont Juvenile Court Reassessment found that foster parents routinely attend administrative case review meetings although their participation or involvement in court hearings varies. Further, a survey conducted for the Reassessment found that one-third of the attorney, caseworker, and GAL survey respondents said that judges *often* or *usually* address foster parents during court hearings, and one-third said judges *occasionally* address foster parents during hearings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 13 interviews, many with multiple participants. While stakeholders were in general agreement that foster parents receive notice regarding administrative reviews, there were differing opinions about whether foster parents are notified about court hearings. Stakeholders in the Burlington and Springfield sites indicated that foster and pre-adoptive parents are not consistently notified about court hearings, while stakeholders in Morrisville indicated that foster and pre-adoptive parents are properly notified.

Although stakeholders offered differing opinions on the notification process, stakeholders in all three sites were in agreement that aside from being a party to a TPR hearing, when foster and pre-adoptive parents are notified of hearings, they are not typically invited to be heard in the court room. Various stakeholders identified the following potential reasons why foster parents are not invited to be heard in court hearings:

- Parent attorneys and biological parents do not want foster parents in the court room and may make a request to the judge for the foster parent not to be heard in the court.
- Foster parents, agency attorneys, and caseworkers do not always know that foster parents have the right to be heard.
- Foster parents’ input is represented by the Guardian ad litem or the child’s attorney and therefore there is no need for the foster parent to be heard in court.

II. 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

Vermont is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. During the first round of the CFSR, Vermont was found not to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. Key concerns identified at the time were the following:

- There was a need for clear practice standards for agency casework and supervision.
- There was a lack of practice standards and utilization review for contracted case management service providers.
- Vermont had not had a formal statewide quality assurance system since 1996, when the Case Review Unit was eliminated due to budget cuts.

PIP strategies developed to address these concerns were the following:

- The State designed a comprehensive quality assurance system to focus on outcomes and address statutory and compliance issues, consumer/stakeholder input, and outcome reporting.
- The State implemented the quality assurance system by conducting reviews of each district office (called District Reviews) modeled after the Federal CFSR. Each of the 12 district offices has undergone a self assessment, onsite review, and two-year district improvement plan. Comprehensive data reports are developed on a quarterly basis, posted on the agency's intranet, and are used to monitor district and statewide improvement. Vermont uses their District Review results for planning purposes, the 2006 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), and for the CFSR Round 2 Statewide Assessment.
- A contractual checklist was added to the licensing review of residential service providers to ensure compliance with all of the contract requirements.

During the 2007 review, it was found that concerns over the lack of a formal statewide quality assurance system had been resolved because the State now has an operational, statewide, quality assurance system. However, despite PIP activity to develop new guidelines regarding caseworker contact with foster children, the guidelines had not been adopted by the time of the 2007 onsite CFSR and this lack of contact standards raised concerns in the case reviews.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although there are many standards in place to protect the safety and health of the children in foster care, the established standards pertaining to caseworker contacts with foster children are outdated and no longer used, which raises potential concerns regarding foster children’s safety and health. Although the agency has drafted new standards that address this issue, the new standards had not been adopted by the time of the onsite CFSR, and thus were not in effect during the period under review. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement during the first round of the CFSR.

According to Vermont’s Policy Submission Form, used during the on-site review, “The Division’s policy (Policy No. 35) on contact standards is outdated, and the workload standards on which it is based do not reflect currently valid workload measures and are no longer used. A revised policy, based on safety and risk, is in draft form and addresses caseworker/child contact, caseworker/parent contact and sibling contact.” As reported, practice guidance on caseworker contacts is not current. Further, information collected in the case review for Item 19 (Worker Contacts with Children) indicates that 42.5 percent of children in foster care cases were visited by their caseworkers less than once a month or not at all during the period under review.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the 2001 CFSR indicated that there was a need for improving practice standards, contracted provider standards, and standards for monitoring safety of children in care. PIP activity following Round 1 of the CFSR focused on improvements on statutory and policy compliance and included changes made to ensure compliance with residential service provider contracts. According to the Statewide Assessment, the FSD has standards in place to guide program evaluation in a number of areas. The Residential Licensing Unit (RLU) evaluates compliance with standards applicable to foster care, residential care, child placing agencies, and runaway shelters. In addition, the RLU evaluates compliance with practice and procedures for the following contracted services: Intensive Family-Based, Parent Educator, Foster Care Support, and Post Adoption. Both providers and contractors are reviewed annually, and special reviews are conducted by the RLU when problems are identified. If child abuse or neglect is alleged, the centralized Special Investigations Unit will conduct an investigation. As relates to the health of children, the Statewide Assessment reports that FSD works in conjunction with the Vermont Department of Health (VDH). In all districts, VDH nurses work with FSD caseworkers to assist with initial assessment of the medical needs of children entering custody.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the current policy that guides caseworker contact is based on a workload system that is outdated. In the last CFSR, 29 percent of cases reviewed were found to be an area needing improvement. PIP activity included the development of new caseworker guidelines, and these have not yet been adopted.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that in December 2006, FSD created and released a set of Core Practice Principles which outline basic beliefs associated with child safety, permanency, well-being, law abidance, and staff support and development. According to the Statewide Assessment, these practice principles will guide policy, practice, training, planning and service contracting, and staff and partners will work together to design new standards which reflect these principles.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in eight stakeholder interviews, most of which involved multiple participants. Most stakeholders express the opinion that foster care safety standards ensure that foster children are receiving safe care. Stakeholders attribute foster care safety to the following:

- FSD has a full licensing unit that ensures compliance with licensing standards.
- FSD has a special investigations unit, specifically for maltreatment in foster care.
- FSD has hired resource staff that split their time between working directly with foster parents and working centrally with State staff.
- There is a strong foster parent training program and partnership with UVM.
- There are Public Health Nurses in district offices.
- The agency is using Structured Decision Making.

Stakeholders also noted, however, that while expectations and standards are clear in the licensing packets, foster parents are not always given the training and supports they need to provide consistent, quality care at the level of need that is required for many children in custody.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the State has in place a functioning statewide quality assurance (QA) system that evaluates the quality of services included in the CFSP, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, this item was an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont’s 2001 CFSR, and as such, the State conducted many program improvement activities in this area. In 2003, the Division developed a quality assurance system that:

- Evaluates the quality of services, practice and program improvement measures.
- Identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system.
- Provides relevant reports for management and program improvement.
- Monitors Title IV-E eligibility and compliance.
- Solicits staff, community, and consumer input.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the pivotal function for QA is the District Review, a process which is modeled after the Federal CFSR. Comprehensive State- and district-level data reports are run on a quarterly basis and posted on the FSD's intranet. These reports are used to inform the district self-assessment process prior to the district onsite review. Districts develop improvement plans to address review findings, and every 6 months, central office and district managers, staff, and stakeholders meet to discuss and evaluate progress and challenges. According to the Statewide Assessment, findings from Vermont's 12 district reviews indicate that districts are developing mechanisms to facilitate continuous quality improvements. Vermont has used their District Review results for planning purposes, the 2006 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), and for the CFSR Round 2 Statewide Assessment.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, staff feedback on the district review process is diverse. There were expressions of appreciation for, and interest in, the process, a sense of being overwhelmed by the increased work, and increased interest in seeing district directors more focused on district review outcomes and systemic factors. Additionally, some foster parents, staff, and residential providers noted that they have not observed any changes in interactions with staff or in service delivery and outcomes following district reviews.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, the Quality Assurance system was a topic of discussion in nine interviews, many of which included multiple participants. Stakeholders agreed that there is a functioning quality assurance system that evaluates the quality of services. According to stakeholders, there are twelve districts, and four districts are reviewed each year. Districts conduct self assessments and incorporate Federal outcomes and community input into the development of each district's Program Improvement Plans. Each district has a 2-year Program Improvement Plan that it works on in conjunction with the statewide Program Improvement Plan.

Stakeholders reported that district offices receive quarterly reports that reflect the statewide goals as well as the local office strategies. In addition, a variety of reports are disseminated to the district offices, and information is posted on the intranet for those who are interested in using it. Stakeholders noted that Directors use quarterly reports regularly to identify promising practices and trends and to share that information with supervisors. However, a few stakeholders noted that the transfer of information from supervisor to caseworker does not happen on a consistent basis. Stakeholders also noted that some districts need more technical assistance than others in interpreting the data and using findings to guide district planning.

According to stakeholders, Vermont has made some organizational and customer relations changes in addition to the service and practice QA process. Organizationally, FSD has created a child Safety Assessment Coordinator position to focus on improving the SDM and assessment process for user ability and data reliability. FSD has also created a permanency team to address long term planning around placement stability and permanency for children. On the customer service side, the State has developed an automated system for handling consumer complaints from biological parents, foster parents and others. Complaints are prioritized by central office, and local offices must respond. Stakeholders point out that this can be a time consuming practice for caseworkers.

IV. TRAINING

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

STATUS OF TRAINING

Vermont is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of training. The State was rated as being in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first CFSR and therefore did not address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key concerns identified during the 2007 CFSR are the following:

- New caseworkers are inconsistently attending and completing the initial staff development and training program.
- Supervisors are inconsistent in their support of new caseworkers in the process of integrating training and skills into their case practice and do not receive sufficient training on how to do this.
- Many caseworkers are not completing the required amount of annual ongoing training.
- In some districts, children may be placed in a foster family home even though the foster parents have not yet participated in the required training program.

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 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although the State is operating a staff development and training program, some new staff are not attending or completing the training. In addition, supervisors are not consistent with regard to supporting new

caseworkers in their efforts to integrate training and skills into case practice. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Department of Social Work at the University of Vermont (UVM) and the Department's Human Resources Unit formed a partnership in 1993 to provide child welfare education and training to employees and foster and adoptive parents. Over the past 2 years, the Child Welfare Training Project (CWTP) has partnered with representatives from all levels of the FSD to redesign the professional development program to address some of the issues identified in the first CFSR. All professional development activities are guided by FSD core practice principles.

The Statewide Assessment describes the New Employee Service Training (NEST) as a 12-day course that is spread out over a 6-month period. New employees spend 2 days in classroom training each month and spend the rest of the time in on-the-job training. This format allows new employees to begin their orientation training in the month that they begin work. The Statewide Assessment notes that supervisors like the new training format and structure because:

- Caseworkers do not have to wait as long to receive classroom instruction (they can begin the training at any point in the year and continue until they complete the 6-month cycle).
- The alternating training format gives caseworkers a good mix of experience and instruction.
- Two days a month out of the office is easier to cover than 2 consecutive weeks.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the classroom instruction topics as Intake & Investigation, Child Abuse & Neglect, Facilitating Placements, Medical Aspects of CA/N/SA, Collaboration & Teamwork, Case Planning with Families, Sexual Abuse, Working with Youth & Families, and Juvenile Delinquency & Probation. According to the Statewide Assessment, there is a Supervisors' Orientation Manual under development which outlines a structured program of reading, shadowing exercises, interviewing activities, self reflective activities and policy and statute reviews. The manual will provide a structured on the job training program that will link to NEST and to the core training program.

Results from the State's first round of District Reviews indicate that only 42 percent of staff completed the required core training.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 27 stakeholder interviews, most of which involved multiple participants. Stakeholders agreed that FSD has a strong training partnership in place with the University of Vermont, and that NEST is a helpful course of basic instruction that is open to all FSD staff. In addition to the training descriptions outlined in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders pointed out that the training includes both outside experts and in-house trainers.

Stakeholders praised two cross-district approaches to training. One was the opportunity for caseworkers in one district to be trained with FSD staff from other districts. The second was the use of shadowing in the on-the-job training component. They noted that new investigators in Springfield have had the opportunity to shadow investigators in other districts.

Stakeholders reported that the training program is no longer truly a “pre-service” training. In the past, training was offered in 2-week sessions twice a year which at times resulted in new caseworkers carrying caseloads before experiencing initial training. This system resulted in scheduling issues and did not make sense due to the fact that Vermont hires a small number of caseworkers (approx. 10) each year. However, under the current training system, stakeholders said that new staff can start training at any time, attending 2 days a month for a 6-month cycle. However, stakeholders questioned whether all caseworkers are attending the 2-day training sessions.

Despite problems with attendance, stakeholders indicated that the new design is preferred by supervisors because it is easier to establish coverage when caseworkers are absent 2 days versus 2 weeks. Also, stakeholders in Burlington and Springfield point out that they like the convenience of the new training design since new staff can begin upon hiring. Stakeholder concerns regarding the State’s initial training program were the following:

- There are differences in district supervisory support for staff attendance at NEST.
- While new employees should reportedly experience a gradual increase in the assignment of cases during NEST, some stakeholders expressed concern that district supervisors are inconsistently managing caseload assignments for new caseworkers.
- If an employee has not completed NEST, there is no associated action to ensure that the employee will be appropriately trained.
- Transfer of learning for new staff is largely dependent upon how effectively supervisors reinforce the practice principles addressed in NEST, and the practice principles are reinforced differently across the districts.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although the State provides opportunities for ongoing training, the staff are not consistently completing the required amount of annual training. In addition, supervisors are not consistently trained to support the integration of training and skills in case practice. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, FSD staff are required to attend 30 hours of ongoing training annually. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Department’s Human Resources Development Unit (HRD) is responsible for the development and delivery of comprehensive education and training programs for agency staff and foster/adoptive parents. This is accomplished in collaboration with UVM through the Child Welfare Training Partnership (CWTP). Additional training for agency staff is developed and provided

through the Agency of Human Services Department for Children and Families new Human Resources Division and through the State of Vermont Department of Human Resources Cyprian Learning Center. The Statewide Assessment states that the CWTP is in the process of developing a comprehensive professional development program which incorporates multi media service delivery methods and focuses on mission policy and quality assurance, yearly regional training needs, and the education and reinforcement of best child welfare skills and practices for supervisors and caseworkers. In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that staff are supported to attend a number of annual conferences such as the Vermont Foster/Adopt Family Association Conference and the Annual New England Sexual Abuse Conference.

Results from the State's first round of District Reviews, indicate that it can be challenging for staff to attend trainings, even when they are interested in learning more about the topic. Only 50 percent of staff had completed the 30 hours of training required annually. As such, the CWTP has restructured the delivery of staff training to provide targeted, skills-based training and consultation for teams within their districts. The Statewide Assessment states that by 2008 the CWTP will formalize a professional development planning process with each district to ensure that goals are met and that resources are provided fairly throughout the state.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 15 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. According to stakeholders, training is available and a schedule of ongoing training is provided to staff. In addition to district-relevant, in-service trainings and centralized core trainings, which are offered once a year, all staff are offered a yearly training budget for outside training. However, stakeholders reported that there are barriers associated with these options. For example, some stakeholders said that the training budget per caseworker is not enough to support attendance at conferences with advanced or more specialized content. Other stakeholders pointed out that supervisors and caseworkers find it difficult to take the time to attend trainings, given their caseloads and daily schedules. Stakeholders reported that, as a result of these concerns, the State is moving training into the district offices to make it more accessible to staff.

While stakeholders across the three sites indicated that ongoing training is a requirement for FSD employees, these stakeholders had different perceptions regarding who tracks participation in training. Some stakeholders reported that training hours are monitored by the individual employees rather than by management. Others report that HRD tracks training attendance, and that this information is shared with the districts.

Stakeholders also expressed concern about a lack of training for supervisors to help them reinforce the practice principles that underlie the training offered to new caseworkers. They noted that supervisory support for practice principles varies across districts.

Finally, stakeholders expressed a variety of opinions regarding specific trainings. Although offered only once per year, the legal skill training is reportedly excellent, and although there have been low numbers in attendance, the domestic violence training also received praise.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because in some districts, is not unusual for children to be placed in foster care prior to the foster parents having begun any training program. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Child Welfare Training Project (CWTP) uses the PRIDE training curriculum for foster parent instruction. The CWTP offered 24 PRIDE courses in FY 2006, training a total of 355 new relatives and non-relative foster parents. Kinship Care training was offered twice, with a total attendance of 21. Ninety five new adoptive parents attended 10 Preparation for Adoption courses around the State.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that the CWTP caregiver training coordinators developed and implemented a new delivery model for caregiver training. Instructors and co-trainers were hired for each district and trained to deliver existing curricula, and the PRIDE trainer's manual was revised for new instructors. The Statewide Assessment notes that caregivers and resource coordinators report considerable satisfaction with the new model which is consistent with the Division's new Core Practice Principles.

The Statewide Assessment points out that most FSD staff trainings are available to foster parents, adoptive parents, residential program staff, case managers, and state employees. The training calendar is mailed annually to programs and practitioners who provide services to abused and neglected children around the State, and it is available on the FSD public website. In addition, the CWTP has instituted the use of an online pilot of Foster Parent College Courses. Caregivers have had the opportunity to take online courses on such topics as eating disorders, ADHD, lying, and sexualized behaviors, for example. The Statewide Assessment reports that of the 77 courses completed in the Foster College pilot, 53 percent of them were on topics related to managing youth with challenging behaviors. Instruction topics related to challenges in youth behavior were identified as a gap in the first CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 14 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. According to stakeholders, the PRIDE training is a 30-hour, 10-day pre-service training offered 2-3 times per year for foster and pre-adoptive parents through the FSD/University of Vermont partnership. PRIDE is co-led by two instructors, one of whom is a resource parent. Some stakeholders indicated that it was their perception that pre-service training is not required for relative caregivers although policy requires all foster and adoptive parents, whether relative or not, to attend training. Stakeholders also note that some districts offer special training for kin which can be taken in place of the PRIDE training. Stakeholders note that

the acquisition of a license can occur prior to completion of the training. Foster and adoptive parents have a year to complete the training, and if they do not complete the training then their license is termed “limited” and only certifies the family for the current children in their home. It is not unusual for foster parents to begin the PRIDE training with children in custody already in their care. Stakeholders note that this happens across the State, quite consistently in Burlington, and may be a factor in placement instability.

Stakeholders generally agreed that ongoing training is available to foster parents, although it may be difficult for some to attend because of child-care needs and long distances to travel. Stakeholders noted that foster and adoptive parents must complete 20 hours of ongoing training a year in order to maintain licensure. However, they also noted that there is a need for improved access to training for all foster and pre-adoptive caregivers, particularly since training is linked to a level system. FSD and UVM have made online training available, and a number of stakeholders spoke favorably about the accessibility and relevancy of these trainings. In addition, there is an annual conference with scholarship funding available for foster and pre-adoptive parents, and FSD staff training is open to foster parents at no cost. A monthly newsletter for foster parents identifies available trainings, and stakeholders in Springfield point out that monthly Foster Parent Association meetings are a strong support and training mechanism.

Several stakeholders expressed the need for more training in the following areas:

- Fostering aggressive children.
- Local education agency requirements.
- Foster parent responsibilities and caseworker responsibilities.
- Child welfare and court processes and how the system really functions.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

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

STATUS OF SERVICE ARRAY

Vermont is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2001 CFSR and therefore it was not addressed in the Program Improvement Plan.

Key findings from the 2007 review are:

- The array of services is not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families, most particularly in regard to the availability of appropriate placement options and independent and transitional living services/programs.
- The accessibility of some services, particularly specialized outpatient and residential mental and behavioral health services and treatment options, varies considerably across the districts.

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 Area Needing Improvement because the array of services is not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families. Particular concerns pertain to the lack of placement options that allow for matching of appropriate placements to meet children’s needs, and the lack of independent living services and transitional living programs for youth who are transitioning out of foster care. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, FSD contracts with a variety of community agencies to provide services that supplement casework services delivered by FSD caseworkers once a case is opened. These services are part of a statewide network of family support and preservation services and are reported to be available in all districts. Services include parenting education, intensive family based services, sexual abuse victim and offender treatment services, supervised visiting programs, mentoring programs, after school programs, family tailored individual services, and district-specific services which can include case management. A Program Management Unit is beginning to work with district directors to evaluate specific programs to provide better supports to the emerging practice framework.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the systemic factor of Service Array was identified as a Strength in the CFSR conducted in 2001, although the Statewide Assessment also notes that stakeholders at that time identified gaps in services. The unmet service needs most frequently cited were in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, and sex offender treatment. The Statewide Assessment reports that since the first CFSR, progress has been made in the areas of substance abuse treatment and mental health services. For example:

- In 2004, a new residential substance abuse treatment facility opened in the southern part of the State.
- State legislation (ACT 264) dating back to 1988 has afforded a coordinated planning process for children with serious emotional disturbances (SED) and their families. However, to promote increased collaboration between Agency of Human Services (AHS)

and the Department of Education (DOE) and to ensure that all required services are coordinated and provided to students with disabilities, these agencies signed a new and expanded Interagency Agreement in 2005. This new agreement expands eligibility for services beyond adolescents experiencing severe emotional disturbance and targets the population of disabled children and adolescents who are eligible for both special education and disability-related services.

- In 2006, the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) was awarded a 3-year grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment to establish six Centers of Excellency that will focus on improving access to substance abuse treatment; expanding treatment options, and increasing best practices in Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants comprised of parents, youth, resource coordinators, and staff overwhelmingly agreed that if families could receive the same types of support the State provides to foster parents, the numbers of children in FSD custody would decrease significantly.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 47 stakeholder interviews, many involving multiple participants. Most stakeholders indicated that although there is a wide array of services with many service strengths, there also are multiple service gaps and shortages. Almost all stakeholders were in agreement that the most critical service gaps in Vermont are mental health services, including therapeutic or specialized foster homes, and independent living services for youth who are transitioning out of foster care. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that fewer children would be taken into foster care if there were more mental health services for children and families. Stakeholders also raised concern specifically with the lack of therapeutic and specialized foster care, which they believe may adversely affect placement stability and result in placing children in residential treatment rather than with families.

Many stakeholders voiced concern about youth aging out of foster care without the life skills they need. They noted that services such as life-skills development, housing, substance abuse education and treatment, and the like are necessary to ensure a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

A number of stakeholders pointed out that the service array is generally more available to children in foster care, particularly those children with severe or complex needs, than it is to children in the in-home services cases.

Primary service gaps noted by multiple stakeholders include the following:

- Specialized residential or group care services for adolescent girls (there is only one program in the State for girls)
- Services for children with developmental disabilities (particularly foster homes and residential treatment)
- Psychiatric services
- Gender specific services
- More local foster and adoptive homes

- Sex offender treatment services
- Non-secure, short-term detention and/or juvenile crisis stabilization services
- Transportation services
- Respite care for foster parents
- Transitional housing for domestic violence victims
- More substance abuse services for adults with children
- Quality developmental child care for children (particularly in rural areas)
- GALs/CASAs for all children in care

Despite concerns with gaps, stakeholders expressed positive opinions regarding the availability and use of the following services:

- Post-adoption services across the state in conjunction with post-adoption coordinators located in all 12 Districts
- Parent services
- Wrap-around family preservation services
- Early Intervention Services
- Kinship placement supports
- Domestic violence services and batterer intervention services (FSD has domestic violence specialists)
- Family Group Conferencing
- Family Treatment Court (there is one in the State, located in Burlington)

Stakeholders pointed out two current efforts in Vermont that are aimed at assessing system of care needs. The first effort involves a child-specific survey of all providers who had contact with a child who entered residential care during a specified period. The second effort is an evaluation conducted by the Vermont Public Managers Program which will identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the Vermont system of care. A report is due out by this group in early summer, 2007.

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

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because accessibility of some services, particularly specialized outpatient and residential mental and behavioral health services and treatment options, varies considerably across the districts. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, FSD’s contracted services are available in all districts in the State. CFSR Service Array survey respondents indicated that while there has been some progress in closing service gaps in the areas of mental health and substance abuse, gaps do remain in some parts of the State. The Statewide Assessment states that stakeholders identified lack of transportation and waiting lists as barriers to service availability.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 22 stakeholder interviews, many with multiple participants. Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that intensive, family-based services, supervised visitation services, and post-adoption services are accessible statewide. Stakeholders also were in general agreement that several services were either lacking in a particular geographic area or had long waiting lists. Services that are perceived by stakeholders to be present in one district but lacking in others include: sex offender treatment, substance abuse treatment, and residential treatment. Services with waiting lists include: intensive outpatient mental health for adults and behavioral health for children, forensic and psychological evaluations, sex offender treatment, and residential treatment. According to stakeholders, while there are 10 mental health centers around the State, the quality of the services provided by these centers is inconsistent, and there are not enough specialized outpatient and residential mental and behavioral health services to meet the needs of FSD’s clients. Stakeholders in Burlington reported that it is difficult to access interpreter services for immigrant and refugee families and that the refugee resettlement services are too time-limited.

Stakeholders indicated that there is a need for a continuum of care for children in all jurisdictions of the State. Stakeholders pointed out that often it is necessary to move children to a different county or even State to get a needed service. For example, children needing higher levels of care such as residential treatment may be moved to another county or State in order to receive that service. In addition, children and families in need of substance abuse treatment services may not have access to those services in their communities. Stakeholders pointed out that transportation services are problematic and some districts have implemented volunteer driver programs, particularly when transportation needs are not health related and therefore not covered by Medicaid.

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 a Strength because despite the service gaps in many areas of the State, agency workers make concerted and creative efforts to individualize service needs of the children and families they serve. Collaborative processes such as those outlined by Act 264 support individual approaches to serving children and families and are particular strengths. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Structured Decision Making assessment tools and an initial screening process allow caseworkers to identify and individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families. The SDM tools assist in the identification of needs associated with physical health, family relationships, emotional/behavioral health, substance abuse, education, and social/community. The Statewide Assessment also notes that information from assessments is compiled into reports and shared with district directors for internal and community service planning.

The Statewide Assessment reports that Act 264 dictates methods of collaboration across child welfare, education, mental health, public health, disability services, corrections and other related service systems, and these services are geared toward meeting unique needs of children and families. Similarly, Vermont has a network of post-adoptive services through the Vermont Adoption Consortium that is helpful to adoptive families who have not otherwise had access to needed services.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was a topic of discussion in 24 stakeholder interviews. The general consensus among stakeholders was that all districts have the capacity to address unique needs in service provision and that FSD staff and service providers often individualize services to meet the needs of children and families. Stakeholders pointed out that due to the rural nature of the State, caseworkers often seek out creative ways to meet family needs. Stakeholders reported, for example, that they have seen creative approaches in the delivery of counseling, substance abuse treatment, parent education, and independent living services. In addition, stakeholders suggested that collaborative processes, such as those outlined by Act 264, support individual approaches to serving children and families. One stakeholder in Burlington pointed out, however, that more tailoring of services is needed for immigrant and refugee families in the area.

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

Vermont is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The State was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor for its first CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because the agency routinely engages stakeholders in ongoing consultation in order to include their major concerns in the goals and objectives of the CFSP. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont engages a variety of community partners, consumers and stakeholders in committees and teams in order to inform agency planning and reporting. In particular, the Statewide Assessment identifies a number of mechanisms for acquiring information for the crafting of the goals and objectives of the CFSP as well as for preparation for the CFSR. These have included the district reviews and reports such as the Juvenile Court Reassessment, the Inventory of Juvenile Court Practices (2006) and the report on the Dialogue on the Child Welfare System convened by The Vermont Children’s Aid Forum (October 2006). In addition, the State has received input for the Statewide Assessment process from web based surveys, the Justice for Children’s Task Force, the Youth Development Coordinators, and the State Youth Advisory Council.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 17 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that FSD solicits their opinions and feedback on a regular basis. While some stakeholders indicated that FSD generally implements their suggestions, others noted that they were not always confident that their suggestions were implemented. Burlington stakeholders reported that at that site they have a Community Advisory board that came into existence since the last CFSR. The Burlington office requested its formation to serve as a sounding board for agency issues. Springfield stakeholders reported that there is a Prevention Coalition at that site that provides input on a variety of child welfare-related issues.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because FSD engages partners identified in Item 38 to provide input for the annual reports of progress and services. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information and Stakeholder Interview Information

The Statewide Assessment notes that FSD engages in strong collaboration efforts in fulfilling reporting requirements, and that examples of these collaborations were reported in item 38. Stakeholders commenting on this item report that they have the opportunity to provide input into the annual reports of progress on an ongoing basis due to the atmosphere of collaboration.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength because FSD coordinates its services and benefits with other Federally assisted programs serving the same population. This coordination is due in large part to FSD being located within the Department for Children and Families, which is one of multiple Departments within the Agency of Human Services (AHS). This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Vermont AHS is comprised of multiple Departments which provide an array of human services and benefits to Vermont individuals and families. AHS and its policies are structured in a way that allows for coordination of these services and benefits across Departments and across Districts. An AHS re-organization undertaken in 2004 led to the formation of the Department for Children and Families and was reportedly guided by a desire to provide more integrated, consumer friendly services. The Statewide Assessment points out that while FSD does contract for case management services with IV-B funds, the agency retains all core IV-E and IV-B responsibilities.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 12 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Almost all stakeholders reported that there is good coordination of services between FSD and other agencies, particularly those that operate with funding support from the Federal government. Stakeholders noted that with the reorganization in 2004, there was a creation of a field services structure for overall delivery of human services in the State. Most stakeholders reported that since the reorganization, there has been increased coordination across all Federal programs with the exception of TANF. Some stakeholders suggest, however, that there needs to be better coordination across agencies at the local level.

Stakeholders noted strong partnerships with the University of Vermont, Vermont Foster and Adoptive Association, the Youth Advisory Committee, the Department of Education, and the Courts. They noted that the passage of Act 264 has supported the engagement of community partners. Act 264 is a statutory framework that dictates methods of collaboration across child welfare, education, mental health, public health, disability services, corrections and other related service systems. Also indicative of strong

community and agency partnerships, stakeholders reported that FSD shares certain management reports with stakeholders in Economic Services, the Department of Education, the Court System, and the Department of Corrections.

One point of concern that stakeholders highlighted is that with these different mechanisms of collaboration, at times there is confusion in local districts about who has the lead or jurisdictional responsibility for certain types of cases. Stakeholders observed that collaborative coordination becomes more challenging when needed services are costly.

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

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

STATUS OF FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Vermont is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. During the first CFSR, Vermont was found not to be in substantial conformity with this factor. Key concerns identified at the time were the following:

- A need was identified for more state level planning and activity to recruit foster and adoptive families.
- A need was identified for policy and procedure which would address staff reluctance to place children cross-jurisdictionally.

PIP Strategies developed to address these concerns include the following:

- Participation in a Casey Breakthrough Series on recruitment and retention.
- Training by Family to Family Project staff on better ways to recruit, train, and support resource families, and the implementation of family assessments and in-service components into the Agency’s foster parent training program.
- An assessment of needs which would support district use of cross-jurisdictional placements of children free for adoption, and agency and court staff trainings based on the needs assessment
- A revised policy providing direction on consideration of cross-jurisdictional placement.

During the 2007 review, it was found that concerns over use of cross jurisdictional resources had been resolved and that improvements had been made in both the utilization and timeliness of the process since the 2001 CFSR. Despite PIP activity which included an increase in State-level planning and activity focused on recruitment of foster and adoptive families, a general finding of this review is that there are an insufficient number of foster homes to meet the needs of the foster care population.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State has in place standards that govern the licensure and approval of foster family homes and other placement facilities. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Vermont has three sets of regulations which outline the procedures the State uses for licensing family foster homes, child placing agencies and residential child care facilities. These regulations were revised in 2000 by committees that represented community consumers and professionals who considered the CWLA standards in addition to laws and regulations that have been adopted by other states. The Statewide Assessment notes that the current Licensors Team is comprised of experienced staff who report that “the current licensing process is thorough and effective.” The State notes that licensing violations - while rarely found - are largely due to the structural requirements for facilities. Licensing staff are reportedly attentive to the training and service needs of the families with whom they work.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in four stakeholder interviews involving multiple participants. Stakeholders were in agreement that the State has standards for foster family homes and residential institutions. According to stakeholders, licensing is handled from central office, but district offices screen families, do the initial paper work, and make placement recommendations. The Licensing Unit and private adoption agencies conduct background checks, and a process for conducting FBI clearances is forthcoming. It takes 2-3 months to issue licenses, and at minimum, a desk review must be performed to renew a license every 3 years. When changes occur in a home during the prior licensing period (e.g., there are new family members living in the home), an onsite inspection and background check must be performed before reissuing the license. Kin placements are approved for the relative child for one year once background checks are completed, and after one year, licensing staff conduct an interview with the family before issuing a 3-year license.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength because the standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

The Statewide Assessment indicates that all foster parent and kinship care providers must be licensed caregivers and that the same licensing standards are applied to all foster homes, including kinship homes. Private providers must, at minimum, ensure that their foster homes meet the standards of Vermont foster family care regulations, and child placing agencies must be reviewed annually by the Residential Licensing Unit in order to maintain licensure. FSD's finance system requires that licensing requirements must be met in order for payment to be generated for any licensed provider. The Statewide Assessment also points out that Vermont has completed its secondary IV-E Review with no identified problems.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in seven stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Information from stakeholder interviews indicates that standards are applied equally across IV-E and IV-B funded homes and institutions. While kin care and regular foster homes may be subject to different licensing processes (e.g. kin care expedited licenses), both care providers must meet the same licensing requirements. There also are waivers available for circumstantial categories related to "sleeping space," "age of children sharing room," and "medical conditions of foster parents."

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because the State has a clear process for criminal background clearances. This item was rated as a Strength in Vermont's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the FSD Residential Care Licensing Unit has responsibility for ensuring that criminal background checks are performed for foster and adoptive caregivers during the licensing and approval process. Licensing can not proceed without the completion of checks with the Vermont Crime Information Center, the Child Abuse Registry, the Department of Motor Vehicles, Relief from Abuse (domestic violence protection orders), the Vermont Adult Abuse Registry, the Department of Corrections, and the Vermont Courts. The Statewide Assessment also points out that while pre-adoptive parents are awaiting adoption finalization, they must remain current with annual criminal background checks.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was the topic of discussion in 6 stakeholder interviews, some of which involved multiple participants. There was general consensus among stakeholders that the State is effective in conducting criminal background checks on

all prospective foster and adoptive parents. Stakeholders noted that all background checks are completed before children are approved for placement, and that the checks include information from state, family and criminal courts.

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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although there is a State level process in place to recruit potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State, a general finding of the CFSR was that there was an insufficient number of foster homes to meet the needs of the foster care population, particularly adolescents and children needing specialized foster care services. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, FSD has partnered with the Lund Family Center to establish “Project Family.” “Project Family has included two major efforts: 1) the development of strategies to find homes for legally freed children awaiting families for long periods of time and 2) the development of a marketing recruitment campaign. FSD conducted market research in 2004 which helped the agency determine the following, as quoted in the Statewide Assessment:

- foster parents do not feel as valued or rewarded as adoptive parents on a cultural or community level
- there is a perceived lack of support once a child is adopted versus remaining in the foster care system
- the education and income levels of our foster and adoptive parents are above average for Vermont
- 25 percent of our current foster and adoptive households are non-traditional households (e.g. civil union, life partner, or single)
- and there is a surprising lack of knowledge about the need for more foster and adoptive parents among both the general public and those involved in the foster care system

The Statewide Assessment indicates that FSD used these findings to develop a central message: “You can help a Vermont Child, from a day to a lifetime”. The targeted recruitment campaign focuses on foster care, adoption of older children, respite care and mentoring. The Statewide Assessment notes that more recently the State is focusing on early identification of kin and fictive kin. Quarterly reports that measure outcomes in foster home licensing indicate an increase of 192 active licensed homes from 2002 - 2006.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 17 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Stakeholders generally agreed that there are insufficient homes to meet the needs of the foster care population, particularly for adolescents and children with a need for therapeutic and other types of specialized care. Stakeholders also agreed that there is a process in place for recruitment of foster homes. Stakeholder opinion diverged, however, on the efficacy of recruitment

efforts. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that FSD has broadened its recruitment target audience since the 2001 CFSR to include foster and adoptive parents interested in private, international and public adoptions and that FSD is doing a better job of employing the use of posters, PSA's, and adoption exchanges to publicize the message.

Despite these efforts, other stakeholders suggested that recruitment efforts are not visible or are lacking at the local level. While stakeholders pointed out that adoption exchanges such as Vermont's Project Family and AdoptUSKids are promoted and used, they have not resulted in many adoptions, and some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State could be doing more with AdoptUSKids. Stakeholders also said that some districts will seek foster homes from the pool of homes available in another district. Stakeholders cited additional barriers to effective recruitment of homes. In addition, one Burlington stakeholder noted that the availability of foster and adoptive homes is so limited that it is not uncommon for caseworkers to call their own friends and family to find placements for the children they serve.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because the State has a process for using cross jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children and improvements have been made in both the utilization and timeliness of the process since the 2001 CFSR. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Vermont's first CFSR. Program Improvement Plan activity included, among other efforts, identification of needs which would support district use of cross-jurisdictional placements of children free for adoption, Agency and Court staff trainings based on the needs assessment, and a revised policy providing direction on consideration of cross-jurisdictional placement

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, since 2003 all relative home study requests received through ICPC are completed by FSD's Residential Licensing Unit. FSD has decreased the home study turn-around time from 87 days in 2002 to 57 days in 2005. The Statewide Assessment also notes that Vermont has taken steps to address some cross-jurisdictional barriers to achieving timely adoptive and permanent placements for waiting foster children. As part of the Project Family Initiative, FSD conducted routine solicitation of home studies from families living out-of-state. Project Family staff also are teaming with district area caseworkers, encouraging them to consider safe, cross-jurisdictional placements in addition to local options. In addition, the State has issued policy clarifications on cross-jurisdictional resources, made written materials on cross-jurisdictional placement available to all district offices, conducted training for Court Improvement Personnel and conducted training for FSD Supervisors on ICPC. In 2005, the State began collecting data on cross-jurisdictional placements initiated both by Vermont and by other States.

The Statewide Assessment mentions that Policy No. 125 identifies AdoptUSKids as a strategy for achieving timely permanency for children freed for adoption, but when compared to other States, Vermont posts very few children on AdoptUSKids. FSD would like to work with AdoptUSKids technical assistance staff to increase this number.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in eight stakeholder interviews, some of which involved multiple participants. There was general consensus among stakeholders that the State has a process for using cross-jurisdictional resources effectively and that improvements have been made in both the utilization and timeliness of the process since the 2001 CFSR. Stakeholders cited that an increased focus on kinship care and other family connections for children has contributed to these improvements. This kind of focus has lead staff to reach out to families located in other States. Stakeholders reported that the agency's ICPC process has improved since October 2006 when new guidelines were established, but delays remain for Vermont when making ICPC requests of other States.