

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Iowa Child and Family Services Review
January 2011

INTRODUCTION

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

The Iowa CFSR was conducted the week of August 23, 2010. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2009, through August 27, 2010. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides the State's child welfare data for the 12-month CFSR target period ending September 30, 2008
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 17 cases in Linn County, 31 cases in Polk County, and 17 cases in Webster County
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance with regard to its substantial conformity with seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. For the outcome assessments, each outcome incorporates one or more of the 23 items included in the review, and each item is rated as a Strength or Area Needing Improvement based on the results of the case reviews. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent or more of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The evaluation options for these outcomes are "substantially achieved," "partially achieved," or "not achieved." For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent or more of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national

data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met.

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

Overall performance on each systemic factor is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either “in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 3 or 4) or “not in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 1 or 2). Specific requirements for each rating are shown in the table below.

Rating the Systemic Factor

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

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

Because many changes were made in the CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round. Key changes in the process that make comparing performance difficult across reviews are the following:

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

The specific findings regarding the State’s performance on safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of this Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State’s performance with

regard to the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following sections, key findings are summarized for each outcome and systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each outcome and systemic factor during the Federal fiscal year 2003 CFSR.

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes

Iowa did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes during the 2010 CFSR. The State did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the following individual items:

- Proximity of placement (item 11)
- Physical health of the child (item 22)
- Mental/behavioral health of the child (item 23)

The State met the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff, timeliness of adoptions, and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.

Although the State's performance on Well-Being Outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs) and Well-Being Outcome 3 (Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs) did not meet the required 95-percent level for substantial conformity, performance on these outcomes was fairly high; the outcomes were substantially achieved in 93.0 percent and 88.1 percent of the cases, respectively. In addition, although the State's performance on the items pertaining to timeliness of investigations and repeat maltreatment did not reach the 90-percent level required for an overall rating of Strength, at least 85 percent and 89 percent, respectively, of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for these items.

In addition to these positive CFSR findings, HHS acknowledges the hard work and progress of Iowa in making positive changes in its child welfare practice and in enhancing services to children and families served by the child welfare system. DHS has strong leadership that has been instrumental in effecting change. The 2010 CFSR identified the following initiatives as foundations for continued improvement in Iowa's child welfare system:

- Family Team Meetings (FTMs)
- Community Partnerships to Protect Children (CPPC)
- Parent Partners' Program

Additionally, DHS and Iowa Children's Justice collaborated to develop and implement guidelines to support parent-child visitation and interaction for children in foster care. The changes in practice from the 2003 CFSR were evident, including the increased use of relatives as placement resources and the institutionalization of FTMs to engage families in case planning. Additionally, the State's approach to the Statewide Assessment, the CFSP, and the Program Improvement Plan clearly demonstrates the State's strong and continued commitment to strong collaboration with its stakeholders.

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

- Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was substantially achieved in 37.5 percent of the applicable cases.
- Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 17, pertaining to needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents, was rated as a Strength in 45 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 18, pertaining to child and family involvement in case planning, was rated as a Strength in 49 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 20, pertaining to caseworker visits with parents, was rated as a Strength in 43 percent of the applicable cases.
- Iowa did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence, timeliness and permanency of reunification, or placement stability.

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

- Safety and risk assessments were not comprehensive or consistently completed on an ongoing basis throughout the life of the case.
- Services provided to families did not address key safety concerns identified by the agency or the underlying needs of families.
- There was a lack of appropriate placement resources for foster children resulting in placement instability.
- There was inconsistent permanency planning practices, especially concurrent planning, for children in foster care.
- There was a lack of concerted efforts to achieve permanency for foster children in a timely manner.
- There was inconsistent practice in engaging parents in case planning, particularly fathers.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with both children and parents was insufficient to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

An additional concern noted in the CFSR pertained to the State's own quality assurance (QA) rating for the items as reported in the Statewide Assessment. For some items, these ratings were high and differed considerably from the 2010 CFSR case review findings. This discrepancy raises questions regarding the effectiveness of the State's QA case review system in identifying the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, and the capability of the QA system to evaluate program improvement measures accurately.

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors

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

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

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

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two items. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month time period (item 2). Safety Outcome 1 also incorporates two national data indicators for which national standards have been established. These data indicators measure the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 77.8 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 60 percent of applicable Linn County cases, 71 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 100 percent of applicable Webster County cases. In addition, Iowa did not meet the national standards for the data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence within 6 months. However, the State did meet the national standards for the data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found that in 23 of the 27 applicable cases, the investigation was initiated within the required timeframes. Additionally, in 2 of the 18 applicable cases, there were two substantiated maltreatment reports involving similar circumstances within a 6-month time period.

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistent in establishing timely face-to-face contact with children when maltreatment reports were classified as low risk.
- The State did not meet the national standard for maltreatment recurrence.

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

- Established performance standards and indicators for timeliness of investigations
- Implemented changes to the State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to capture timelines of initiating reports in conjunction with supervisory oversight
- Established expertise in the area of substance abuse in order to respond to methamphetamine abuse affecting children in the State
- Implemented Community Care services for families that are at low risk of abuse

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

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

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 63.1 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 82 percent of applicable Linn County cases, 52 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 65 percent of applicable Webster County cases.

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

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

Iowa was in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

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

Six items are incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all of the foster care cases reviewed. The items pertain to State efforts to prevent foster care reentry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner, as well as seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining items focus on an assessment of State efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure

that children who have a case goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) are in stable long-term placements and are adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 37.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in none of the applicable Linn County cases, 65 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 20 percent of applicable Webster County cases. In addition to case review findings, Iowa did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification and placement stability. However, Iowa met the national standards pertaining to timeliness of adoptions and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found the following:

- Although not rated a Strength, foster care reentry occurred in only 2 of the 10 applicable cases.
- ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 84 percent of 19 applicable cases.

However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The State was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- The child's permanency goal was either not appropriate or not established in a timely manner.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner.
- There were delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent with regard to ensuring that children with a goal of OPPLA had a permanent placement and/or were receiving services to ensure a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in preventing reentry into foster care.
- The State did not ensure children's placement stability while in foster care.
- The State did not consistently establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.
- The State did not make concerted efforts to finalize adoptions in a timely manner.

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

- Policy and practice procedures that promote discharge planning for reunification
- Performance standards and indicators for foster care reentries, stability of foster care placements, identification of an appropriate and timely permanency goal, and achieving finalized adoptions within 24 months of placement in foster care
- A functional assessment of the family, which includes informal and formal assessments to identify current strengths, needs, and risks of the child and family; and helps identify critical underlying issues to be resolved for the child to live safely with the family independent of outside supervision

- The Family Team Decision Making model for use in FTMs
- Partnering for Safety and Permanency: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP) training to better prepare foster parents and to increase stability of placements of children
- Diligent recruitment plans to assure adequate numbers of foster and adoptive homes to meet the needs of Iowa children
- Policy on permanency and training for DHS staff in the new policy
- Case reviews for all children age 17 for potential eligibility for Social Security Supplemental Security Income to ensure that the youth receive the supports they need to maintain their placements
- Training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and caseworkers based on the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment
- The education and training voucher program for independent living youth per Federal legislation
- Transition teams in each DHS service area to review youth transition plans to ensure they are adequate to meet the needs of the youth, as well as to approve transition plans for all foster children 16 years of age and older

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

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six items that assess State performance with regard to:

1. Placing children in foster care near their parents and close relatives (item 11)
2. Placing siblings together (item 12)
3. Ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13)
4. Preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14)
5. Seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15)
6. Promoting relationships between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16)

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 75.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 70 percent of the applicable Linn County cases, 80 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 70 percent of applicable Webster County cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found that the State was effective with regard to placing children in close proximity to their parents. Additionally, although not rated a Strength, in 19 of the 23 applicable cases reviewed, the State made concerted efforts to place siblings together or identified that placing siblings together was not in the best interests of at least one sibling.

However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

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

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State did not make concerted efforts to seek and assess relatives as placement resources.
- The State did not consistently support and strengthen the parent-child relationship of children in foster care.
- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families and to their racial and religious heritage.

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

- Established performance standards and indicators for preserving connections, relative placements, and promoting parent-child relationships
- Launched a demonstration project to preserve connections and maintain children of color in their homes to improve outcomes for children of color in the foster care system
- Contracted with the University of Iowa's Disproportionate Minority Resource Center for technical assistance to children of color demonstration project sites and statewide
- Partnered with Tribes within the State, as well as in bordering States, to implement the Iowa-Indian Child Welfare Act
- Established Tribal agreements to preserve connections of Native American children
- Initiated an information system to automate the tracking of relatives
- Established kinship care policy to define diligent search procedures and the assessment process for relatives
- Provided kinship care training to DHS child welfare staff, juvenile court officers, and child welfare private providers
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Developed and distributed a guide for caseworkers and child welfare private provider staff that includes suggestions on specific activities that encourage a positive relationship between the child in foster care and the child's parents
- Added a performance measure to child welfare private provider contracts related to contractors supporting contacts between the child in foster care and his or her parents, as well as other significant adults

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

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

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

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent of the applicable Linn County cases, 42 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 41 percent of applicable Webster County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 45 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 32 percent of the 25 in-home services cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found that, in general, the State was effective in assessing and meeting the service needs of children in both the foster care and the in-home cases.

However, the 2010 CFSR also identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The State was not consistent in assessing and meeting the needs of foster parents, mothers, and fathers.
- The State was not consistent in involving parents and children in the case planning process.
- Caseworker contacts with children and parents were not of sufficient quality or frequency to ensure the children's safety or well-being.

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in assessing needs and providing services to children, parents, and foster parents.
- Parents and children were not consistently included in the case planning process.

- Caseworker contacts with parents were not of sufficient quality or quantity to ensure the children’s safety or well-being or to promote goal attainment.
- There was a lack of adequate contact between caseworkers and children, which resulted in caseworkers being unaware of important information about the children and/or events in the children’s lives.

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

- Provided guidelines for Need-Based Service Planning in Child Welfare
- Established performance standards and indicators for needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents, parent and child involvement in case planning, caseworker visitation with child, and caseworker visitation with parents
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Implemented a functional assessment of the family that includes informal and formal assessments that identify the current strengths, needs, and risks of the child and family and helps identify the critical underlying issues that must be resolved for the child to live safely with the family independent of outside supervision
- Developed and implemented “One Family-One Plan”
- Reduced caseworker administrative duties to establish more for face-to-face contacts with children and families

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

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

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

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 93.0 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 100 percent of the applicable Linn County cases, 94 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 85 percent of applicable Webster County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 91 percent of the 34 applicable foster care cases and 100 percent of the 9 applicable in-home services cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found that in 3 of the 43 applicable cases, reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were not assessed or addressed.

Iowa was in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. However, as part of the Program Improvement Plan, DHS negotiated Memorandum of Agreements at the State level with the Department of Education to address service needs of children.

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

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

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 88.1 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. It should be noted that taken individually, the two indicators used to assess this outcome were rated as a Strength in more than 90 percent of the cases. However, taken together, the percentage of cases that substantially achieved this outcome did not meet the required 95 percent. The outcome was substantially achieved in 86 percent of the applicable Linn County cases, 89 percent of applicable Polk County cases, and 88 percent of applicable Webster County cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 87.5 percent of the foster care cases and 89 percent of the 19 applicable in-home services cases.

The 2010 CFSR case reviews found that, in general, the physical, dental, and mental health needs of children were appropriately assessed and adequately addressed.

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. In the 2003 CFSR, the individual items pertaining to this outcome were rated as a Strength; however, there were an insufficient number of cases in which both items were rated as a Strength. In some cases, the agency was consistently effective in addressing children's physical health issues, but not their mental health service needs, and in some cases, the opposite was true.

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

- Established a performance standard and indicator for cases in which both physical and mental health needs, including substance abuse, are appropriately assessed and services are provided
- Increased access to health care through Medicaid, Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa, and private insurance
- Strengthened expectations within the Iowa Plan contract, which is a contract for managed care service provision of Medicaid mental health services, Medicaid and Department of Public Health substance abuse treatment services, and services for mental health State cases, to improve assessment of mental health issues and access to mental services for children in child welfare and juvenile justice services
- Negotiated Memoranda of Agreement at the State level with the Department of Public Health to address service needs of children

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

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

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

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The 2010 CFSR determined that Iowa's SACWIS, which consists of two main components, the Family and Children's Services (FACS) and the Statewide Tracking and Reporting systems, can readily identify the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care.

However, the 2010 CFSR also identified concerns regarding that the FACS system is unavailable 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. while the system information is updated, and this can affect the caseworkers' abilities to access information.

The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Case Review System

Five items are included in the assessment of State performance for the systemic factor of Case Review System. The items examine development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established in ASFA (item 28), and notification of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers about case reviews and hearings to be held regarding the children in their care and about their right to be heard in those proceedings (item 29).

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- The State has a process for a periodic review of the status of each child at least every 6 months, with many reviews occurring every 3 months.
- Permanency hearings are held for each child in a timely manner and the hearings focus on issues relevant to children achieving permanency.
- TPR generally is filed in a timely manner and, if not filed, compelling reasons for not filing usually are documented in the case file.
- The court notifies foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers about hearings and that the caregivers generally have an opportunity to be heard either during the court proceedings or through a written report to the court.

However, the CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- Parents are not consistently involved in the development of the case plan.

- During the onsite CFSR, case reviewers determined that DHS made diligent efforts to involve mothers in case planning in 67 percent of the applicable cases and to involve fathers in 58 percent of the applicable cases.

Iowa was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State did not consistently involve parents in the development of children's case plans.
- There was no clear understanding of who was responsible for notifying foster parents of reviews or court hearings.

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

- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Developed and implemented "One Family-One Plan"
- Informed foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers that they are to be notified and given the opportunity to be heard in any review or court hearing

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

Quality Assurance System

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

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The 2010 CFSR determined that the State has established and implemented a variety of standards to ensure that there are quality services to protect children's safety and health. However, the 2010 CFSR also found that although the State has an identifiable QA system, it is unclear whether the system effectively addresses key practice areas, provides feedback on findings, or evaluates program improvement measures, due in part to the restructuring of DHS and the agency's QA system in early 2010.

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The primary concern identified during the 2003 review was that Iowa did not have a statewide QA system.

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

- Established a model of practice, performance standards, and indicators related to the CFSR outcomes
- Established an agency wide QA system into which child welfare QA activities and processes were incorporated
- Coordinated and shared QA activities with partners including private providers, judges, the Court Improvement Project, Juvenile Court Services, and the Child Protection Council

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

Staff and Provider Training

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

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- Iowa has training for new caseworkers that covers a 12-month period and is generally effective in preparing caseworkers for their job responsibilities.
- Although information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that ongoing training is required and available, many stakeholders reported that budget cuts and high caseloads make it difficult for DHS caseworkers and supervisors to attend the training.
- The State mandates PS-MAPP as the pre-service training for prospective foster and adoptive parents and requires ongoing training for current foster parents.

Iowa was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- Caseworkers were not able to participate in pre-service training in a timely manner.
- Ongoing training was not readily available to DHS staff.

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

- Enhanced the availability of initial training by utilizing a combination of web-based training, structured on-the-job training, skills-based classroom training, and Iowa Communication Network trainings
- Provided supervisors with training on coaching and mentoring caseworkers on FTM facilitation

- Collaborated with the University of Iowa to develop core supervisory training
- Used technical assistance from National Resource Centers to enhance ongoing training for caseworkers

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

Service Array and Resource Development

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

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development. The 2010 CFPSR determined that the State has an appropriate array of key services that addresses the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of children and families.

However, the 2010 CFPSR also identified the following concerns:

- Many of the services in the State's service array are not accessible to families and children in all jurisdictions.
- There is a lack of culturally sensitive services and providers and a lack of interpreters for non-English speaking populations, which affects the ability to individualize services for families and children.
- The absence of many services, budget cuts, and lack of services such as mental health treatment, and limitations on services by private insurers and Medicaid, also affect individualizing services for families and children.

Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFPSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The concerns identified in the 2003 review focused on cuts in the State budget for human services that resulted in the following:

- Significant reductions in the service array and services to meet the individualized and diverse needs of children and families
- The reduction, and in some cases, elimination, of culturally appropriate and bilingual services
- A lack of key services in all areas of the State, particularly in rural areas
- Long waiting lists to receive services

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

- Expanded the CPPC across the State
- Negotiated State-level Memoranda of Agreement with the Department of Education and Department of Public Health to address service needs

- Launched a demonstration project to preserve connections and maintain children of color in their homes in order to improve outcomes for children of color in the foster care system
- Contracted with the University of Iowa's Disproportionate Minority Resource Center for technical assistance to children of color demonstration project sites and statewide
- Implemented Community Care services for families that are at low risk of abuse
- Developed a summary of the CFSR findings related to Service Array to share with Decategorization Boards (community funding boards)
- Increased wraparound and flexible funds in order to provide individualized services to children and families
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs

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

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

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

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The 2010 CFSR determined that the following:

- DHS engages in ongoing consultation with a broad array of key stakeholders and is effective in soliciting their input with regard to the agency's overall goals and objectives.
- The State consults with a wide range of stakeholders when developing its APSRs.
- The State's services under the CFSP generally are coordinated with the services of other Federal and federally assisted programs for children and families.

Iowa also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

The assessment of this systemic factor focuses on the State's standards for foster homes and child care institutions (items 41 and 42), the State's compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background checks for foster and adoptive parents (item 43), the State's efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents 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).

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The 2010 CFSR determined the following:

- The State has comprehensive standards for foster family and adoptive family homes and child care institutions that were established by State statute and are reflected in DHS policy and licensing procedures.
- Licensing standards are applied uniformly to all foster family homes, including licensed relative homes and to shelter and group care facilities.
- The State provides for background checks and fingerprinting as a component for all licensed foster and adoptive placements, including relatives and group care staff.
- The State has a process in place for using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements.

However, the 2010 CFSR also found that although each DHS service area has a recruitment plan, the State does not consistently focus on recruiting potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in foster care.

Iowa also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Table 1. Iowa 2010 CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	77.8	1 Yes, 1 No		
Item 1. Timeliness of investigations				ANI	85
Item 2. Repeat maltreatment				ANI	89
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	63.1			
Item 3. Services to protect children in home				ANI	77
Item 4. Risk of harm				ANI	65
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	37.5	2 Yes, 2 No		
Item 5. Foster care reentry				ANI	80
Item 6. Stability of foster care placements				ANI	62.5
Item 7. Permanency goal for child				ANI	64
Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	64
Item 9. Adoption				ANI	59
Item 10. Other planned living arrangement				ANI	50
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	75.0			
Item 11. Proximity of placement				Strength	96
Item 12. Placement with siblings				ANI	83
Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	66
Item 14. Preserving connections				ANI	82
Item 15. Relative placement				ANI	76
Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	67

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

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

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	Percent Strength
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	No	40.0		
Item 17. Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	45
Item 18. Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	49
Item 19. Caseworker visits with child			ANI	65
Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents			ANI	43
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	93.0		
Item 21. Educational needs of child			ANI	93
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	88.1		
Item 22. Physical health of child			Strength	94
Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of child			Strength	91

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

** Items may be rated as Strengths or as Areas 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. Iowa 2010 CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	Yes	4	
Item 24. The State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or, within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care			Strength
Case Review System	Yes	3	
Item 25. The State provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions			ANI
Item 26. The State provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review			Strength
Item 27. The State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter			Strength
Item 28. The State provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act			Strength
Item 29. The State provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child			Strength
Quality Assurance System	No	2	
Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children			Strength
Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented			ANI
Staff and Provider Training	Yes	3	
Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services			Strength
Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			ANI
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

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Service Array and Resource Development	No	2	
Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency			Strength
Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP			ANI
Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency			ANI
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, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP			Strength
Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, Annual Progress and Services Reports delivered pursuant to the CFSP			Strength
Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population			Strength
Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention	Yes	3	
Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards			Strength
Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds			Strength
Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children			Strength
Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed			ANI
Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

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

** Items may be rated as Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (ANI).

Final Report
Iowa Child and Family Services Review
February 2011

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

The Iowa CFSR was conducted the week of August 23, 2010. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2009, through August 27, 2010. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Department of Human Services (DHS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides the State's child welfare data for the 12-month CFSR target period ending September 30, 2008
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 17 cases in Linn County, 31 cases in Polk County, and 17 cases in Webster County
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

All 65 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the children in the cases reviewed are presented in the table at the end of this section. For this table, and for other tables in the report, figures displayed may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

The first section of the report (Section A: Outcomes) presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State's performance in achieving specified outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The second section of the report (Section B: Systemic Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Key Characteristics of Cases Reviewed

Case Characteristics	Foster Care	In-Home Services
Total Number of Cases	40	25
Date case was opened		
Opened prior to the period under review	36 (90%)	13 (52%)
Opened during the period under review	4 (10 %)	12 (48%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	10 (25%)	N/A
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than 10	19 (47.5%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	3 (7.5%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	13 (32.5%)	*
16 and older	5 (12.5 %)	*
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native Non-Hispanic	0	*
Asian Non-Hispanic	0	*
Black Non-Hispanic	10 (25%)	*
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic	0	*
Hispanic (of any race)	4 (10%)	*
White Non-Hispanic	24 (60%)	*
Unknown/Unable to Determine	0	*
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	2 (5%)	*
Primary reason for opening case		
Physical abuse	2 (5%)	6 (24%)
Sexual abuse	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Emotional maltreatment	0	1 (4%)
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	7 (17.5%)	7 (28%)
Medical neglect	0	0
Abandonment	0	0
Mental/physical health of parent	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Mental/physical health of child	3 (7.5%)	1 (4%)
Substance abuse by parent	17 (42.5%)	2 (8%)
Child's behavior	5 (12.5%)	1 (4%)
Domestic violence in child's home	3 (7.5%)	5 (20%)
Child in juvenile justice system	1 (2.5%)	0
Other	0	0

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

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

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

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

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95-percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review or the national standards for the six data indicators by the end of their Program Improvement Plan implementations. The Children’s Bureau recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often take time to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with the Children’s Bureau to establish a specified amount of improvement or to determine specified activities for their Program Improvement Plans. That is, for each outcome that is not in substantial conformity or item that is rated as an Area Needing Improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the Children’s Bureau) specifies the following: (1) how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the Areas Needing Improvement, and (2) the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of its Program Improvement Plan and still not perform at the 95-percent (for outcomes) or the 90-percent (for items) levels established for the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses 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

goals may have been achieved. The purpose is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the completion of a Program Improvement Plan.

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

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

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

For each outcome, there is a table presenting the data for the case review findings and national indicators (when relevant). The table is followed by a discussion of Iowa's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR report, which was held in fiscal year 2003, the State's status relevant to the current review, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Performance of individual sites included in the Onsite Review is presented in the tables. Variations in outcome and item ratings as a function of type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services) also are identified when appropriate.

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	3	10	8	21	77.8
Partially Achieved	2	3	0	5	18.5
Not Achieved	0	1	0	1	3.7
Total Applicable Cases	5	14	8	27	
Not Applicable Cases	12	17	9	38	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	60%	71%	100%		

Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards			
National Data Indicators	National Standard (%)	State's Percentage	Meets Standards?
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6+	91.9	No
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68+	99.71	Yes

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 77.8 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. In addition to the case review findings, the State did not meet the national standards for the national data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence. However, Iowa did meet the national standard for absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistent in establishing timely face-to-face contact with children when maltreatment reports were classified as low risk.
- The State did not meet the national standard for maltreatment recurrence.

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

- Established performance standards and indicators for timeliness of investigations
- Changed the Child Welfare Information System (CWIS) to capture timelines of initiating reports in conjunction with supervisory oversight
- Established expertise in the area of substance abuse in order to respond to methamphetamine abuse affecting children in the State
- Implemented Community Care services for families that are at low risk of abuse

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 27 (42 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency policy requirements.

If a report is accepted as a child abuse report, Iowa policy requires that the child protection caseworker must observe the child within the following timeframes:

- Within 1 hour from the time of receipt of the report when the report involves an immediate threat or high risk to the child's safety
- Within 24 hours from the time of receipt of the report when the report does not involve immediate threat or high risk to the child, no physical injury is alleged, and the person responsible is unknown or has access to the child
- Within 96 hours from the time of receipt of the report when the report does not involve an immediate threat or high risk to the child and the person responsible is known and has no access to the child, the child is safe, and no physical injuries are alleged

If a report is not accepted as a child abuse report but is accepted as a Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) report, the assigned assessment caseworker is required to initiate contact with the child and family within 5 business days of the intake date to assess the risk to the child and determine if there is a need for services.

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

Item 1 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	3	12	8	23	85
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	0	4	15
Total Applicable Cases	5	14	8	27	
Not Applicable	12	17	9	38	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	60%	86%	100%		

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 23 cases when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy. Item 1 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in four cases when the investigation was not initiated within the required timeframes. The four cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement each included one report that was not investigated in a timely manner. Of these four reports, two reports required a response within 24 hours, and two reports required a response within 96 hours.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 85 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 1 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS operates a child abuse hotline that receives and responds to child maltreatment reports 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. If a response time is assigned and if the child cannot be seen within the assigned response time, supervisory approval to extend the response time is required. The Statewide Assessment reports that delays in initiating a response to child maltreatment reports may be attributed to caseworker safety concerns, the inability of the caseworker to locate the child or family, a request from law enforcement to delay contact with the children, or the finding that safety concerns had already been addressed.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that if a report is classified as CINA instead of child abuse, an assessment caseworker will contact the family to determine if services are needed. If the family declines the assessment, the case is closed unless the caseworker has cause to seek court intervention. Similarly, if the assessment identifies a service need but the family refuses services, the case is either closed, or the caseworker may file a petition in juvenile court for an adjudication of the child.

Administrative data provided in the Statewide Assessment for the period from October 1, 2008, through September 30, 2009, indicates that contact was made within the assigned response time in 91.7 percent of the investigations. The Statewide Assessment reports the following key barriers to timely initiation of investigations:

- The lack of a sufficient number of caseworkers responsible for investigations
- The fact that some staff cover large geographical areas, which makes meeting the 1-hour response time challenging
- The difficulty in coordinating efforts with agency partners, particularly law enforcement, to ensure that timelines are met

The Statewide Assessment also reports that sometimes staff members are not documenting when there has been approval of an extended timeframe or when they have made reasonable efforts to contact the child, although documentation has improved in recent years.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally responds to reports of abuse and neglect in a timely manner. It was also confirmed that supervisors may waive the assigned response time when there is evidence that attempts had been made to locate the alleged child victim.

However, various stakeholders expressed the following concerns:

- The initiation of investigations sometimes is delayed because the referral is not received from intake in a timely manner.
- In Webster County, caseworkers struggle with meeting the 1-hour response requirement due to the large geographical area that the caseworkers cover.
- Sometimes it is difficult to meet timeframes when coordinating efforts with other agencies, particularly law enforcement.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 18 (28 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine if there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and, if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. The results of the assessment of item 2 are presented in the table below.

Item 2 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	5	5	6	16	89
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	0	2	11
Total Applicable Cases	5	7	6	18	
Not Applicable	12	24	11	47	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	100%	71%	100%		

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 16 cases when there was only one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in two cases when there were at least two substantiated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period.

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

- In 20 cases, there were fewer than three reports.
- In 26 cases, there were at least three reports but fewer than six reports.
- In 14 cases, there were between 6 and 11 reports.
- In five cases, there were 12 or more maltreatment reports, including one case with 27 reports.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 89 percent of the applicable cases, there was no recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month period. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 2 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the prevention of further maltreatment is addressed through the requirements that initial and ongoing risk assessments be conducted throughout the life of the case and that safe case closure cannot occur unless there has been an alleviation or mitigation of the conditions that resulted in the abuse of the child or of conditions that are potential risks to the child in the future. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that DHS staff utilizes the Safe Case Closure Checklist to ensure that all areas that would pose a foreseeable risk to the child have been addressed.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that when a new report of child maltreatment is received on a child and family that has an open service case, the report is treated in the same manner as any new report of child maltreatment with regard to the process of acceptance, the timeframes for initiating the investigation, the procedures for conducting the investigation, and the possible findings. In addition,

intake policy requires that intake staff notify the DHS caseworker and the caseworker’s supervisor of the circumstances of the new child maltreatment report.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive stakeholder comments on repeat maltreatment during the onsite CFSR.

Safety Outcome 2

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	14	16	11	41	63.1
Partially Achieved	0	5	2	7	10.8
Not Achieved	3	10	4	17	26.2
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	82%	52%	65%		

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 63.1 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Iowa was in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable for 43 (66 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home, or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For applicable cases,

reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families that would prevent placement of children in foster care and at the same time ensure their safety. The results of the assessment of item 3 are presented in the table below.

Item 3 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	10	14	9	33	77
Area Needing Improvement	2	6	2	10	23
Total Applicable Cases	12	20	11	43	
Not Applicable	5	11	6	22	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	83%	70%	82%		

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

- Although no services were provided when the child was removed from the home, the removal was necessary to ensure the safety of the child (two cases).
- Efforts were made to provide services; however, children were subsequently removed (one case).
- Services were provided to the family to ensure the safety of the child and prevent removal (25 cases).
- Services were provided after reunification to prevent reentry (five cases).

Case review information indicates that a range of services was offered or provided to families. This included (but was not limited to) the following: Safety Plan Services; Family Safety, Risk, and Permanency (FSRP) services; substance abuse assessment and treatment in-home services; counseling/therapy; domestic violence services; medication management; remedial mental health services; psychological evaluations; and psychiatric services.

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

- Services were not provided to the family, and the children remained at risk in the home (one case).
- Services were not provided to the family to prevent reentry into foster care (three cases).
- Services were provided, but they did not target the key safety concern in the family, leaving the children at risk in the home (three cases).
- Appropriate services were not provided to protect the children in the home, and the children were subsequently removed (three cases).

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 77 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 3 was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, unless a child is in immediate danger at home, DHS seeks removal only after reasonable efforts have been made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from the family. The Statewide Assessment reports that reasonable efforts include but are not limited to the following:

- Initiating community services such as public health visitor or visiting nurse services
- Initiating homemaker services or family-centered services
- Obtaining a court order requiring the person responsible for the abuse to leave the home and ensuring that other family members are willing and able to protect the child adequately
- Having the non-abusing caregiver move to a safe environment with the child
- Placing the child voluntarily with relatives or friends

The Statewide Assessment notes that Safety Plan Services and FSRP services are two key services available to families to help maintain children safely in their homes. Safety Plan Services are provided to families engaged in a child abuse or CINA assessment and provide a flexible array of strategies and interventions to monitor, evaluate, and intervene to ensure the child's safety and to evaluate and supplement the protective capacities of the child's caregivers. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, Safety Plan Services providers must be available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week; make daily face-to-face contact with the referred family, unless otherwise indicated; and respond within 2 hours to any family crisis during the service delivery period. FSRP services are provided to children and families after DHS has opened a child welfare case. FSRP services providers are expected to provide a flexible array of culturally sensitive, strengths-based, and family-focused interventions and supports, connect families to informal supports and community resources, and bolster the family's protective capacities.

Additionally, the Statewide Assessment notes that the following DHS initiatives also are designed to ensure that children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate:

- Convening family team meetings (FTMs) for family engagement in case planning
- Increasing the frequency of caseworker contacts with the families
- Supporting community-based prevention services such as child abuse prevention efforts
- Accessing Community Care services for families that are at low risk of abuse
- Implementing the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Children's Mental Health (CMH) waiver, which provides children who have behavioral needs with services in lieu of placement

The Statewide Assessment reports that in the State’s quality assurance (QA) reviews conducted from November 2008 through September 2009, this item was rated as a Strength in 99 percent to 100 percent of the cases reviewed.

The Statewide Assessment reports that stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process expressed the opinion that pre- and post-removal conferences, which some counties in the State use, are beneficial during the removal process. These conferences, which DHS conducts with the family, discuss placement procedure, family interaction, reunification, and reasonable efforts with the family. The conferences, according to the Statewide Assessment, also identify the need for any supports for relative caregivers including connection to a local support network for relatives.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DHS is effective in ensuring that families receive the necessary services to prevent children’s removal or reentry into foster care. Some stakeholders identified the following as primary resources used to prevent the removal of children from their homes:

- Family and community supports and resources
- Community Care services for low-risk families
- Safety Plan Services
- FSRP services
- Remedial Service Providers (RSP) (in-home mental health services)
- CMH waiver (has a waiting list for services)

Additionally, State-level and Polk County stakeholders reported that pre-removal conferences can be beneficial in preventing removal because the conferences explore options to removal.

Item 4. Risk assessment and safety management

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 4 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	14	17	11	42	65
Area Needing Improvement	3	14	6	23	35
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	82%	55%	65%		

Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 42 cases when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through the following: conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in children’s homes or in children’s foster homes and addressing all safety concerns identified in the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 23 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was no ongoing risk assessment (14 cases).
- There was no ongoing safety assessment (19 cases).
- There were safety concerns in the child’s home that were not addressed by the agency (12 cases).
- There were safety concerns regarding the child’s visitation with the parents (four cases).
- There were safety concerns regarding the child’s placement that were not addressed by the agency (three cases).
- A safety assessment was not completed when the child was discharged from foster care (five cases).
- There was no safety plan (one case).

Additionally, in four cases, only the child who was the focus of DHS involvement was assessed for risk and safety—other children living in the households were not assessed.

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 65 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to assess and address the risk of harm to the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 4 was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires that safety and risk assessments be conducted throughout the life of the case. The Statewide Assessment also reports that when safety or risk are a concern, DHS uses Safety Plan Services and FSRP services to ensure safety and protect children from risk of abuse.

With regard to safety assessment, the Statewide Assessment notes that agency policy specifies that a formalized safety assessment must be completed within 24 hours of first contact with the child during a child protective assessment, at the conclusion of a child protective assessment, whenever circumstances suggest the child is in an unsafe situation, prior to a decision to recommend unsupervised visitation, prior to the decision to recommend reunification, and prior to the decision to recommend closing protective services. The safety assessment tool is designed to guide the determination of whether a child is in present or immediate danger and to guide decision-making regarding the interventions needed to safeguard the child. The Statewide Assessment also notes that although there is no formal policy requiring that a safety assessment tool be used to assess safety of children in foster homes, policy does instruct caseworkers to conduct a formal safety assessment “whenever there is a need.” Additionally, the Statewide Assessment reports that the safety of children entering or residing in foster homes is assessed continually and informally.

With regard to risk assessment, the Statewide Assessment reports that DHS policy requires caseworkers to assess risk of maltreatment during a child protective assessment and to document their findings in the Summary of Safety/Risk section of the child abuse assessment. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the caseworker is expected to reassess risk informally throughout the life of the case and to conduct a formal reassessment of risk using a risk reassessment tool when updating the case plan and at case closure. However, the Statewide Assessment acknowledges that the risk reassessment tool is not used consistently across the State and that caseworkers have expressed concerns that the risk reassessment tool does not allow for a rating change when a family has made progress.

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 981 cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 579 cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 139 cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 99 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 165 cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DHS generally is effective in conducting safety and risk assessments and in assessing safety and risk. Stakeholders reported that the agency provides caseworkers with standardized formal tools to conduct the assessments, and that these are completed at required intervals throughout the life of the cases. Additionally, some stakeholders reported that Safety Plans are completed as needed.

However, a few stakeholders reported that when additional allegations come in during the initial assessment, some caseworkers do not assess and observe the child related to the new allegations.

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	0	13	2	15	37.5
Partially Achieved	8	6	6	20	50.0
Not Achieved	2	1	2	5	12.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Substantially Achieved by Site	0	65%	20%		

Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards			
National Data Indicators	National Standard (Scaled Score)	State Score (Scaled Score)	Meets Standards?
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6+	115.9	No
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4+	141.6	Yes
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7+	132.6	Yes
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5+	94.0	No

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 37.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. In addition to case review findings, Iowa did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification and placement stability but met the national standards pertaining to timeliness of adoptions and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in preventing reentry into foster care.
- The State did not ensure children's placement stability while in foster care.

The State did not consistently establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.

- The State did not make concerted efforts to finalize adoption in a timely manner.

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

- Developed and implemented policy and practice procedures that promote discharge planning for reunification.
- Established performance standards and indicators for foster care reentries and stability of foster care placements to identify appropriate, timely permanency goals, and achieve finalized adoptions within 24 months of placement in foster care
- Implemented a functional assessment of the family that includes informal and formal assessments to identify the strengths, needs, and risks of the child and family and helps identify critical, underlying issues that must be resolved for the child to live safely with the family independent of outside supervision
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Implemented Partnering for Safety and Permanency—Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP) in order to better prepare foster parents and to increase stability of placements of children
- Developed and implemented diligent recruitment plans to assure adequate numbers of foster and adoptive homes to meet the needs of Iowa children
- Implemented and promoted policy on permanency and provided training to DHS staff on the new policy
- Implemented case reviews for all children age 17 for potential eligibility for Social Security Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to ensure that the youth are receiving the supports they need to maintain their placements
- Implemented training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and caseworkers based on the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment
- Developed and implemented an education and training voucher program for independent living youth per Federal legislation
- Established transition teams in each DHS service area to review youth transition plans to assure they are adequate to meet the needs of the youth , as well as to approve the transition plans for all foster children 16 years of age and older

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

Item 5. Foster care reentries

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 10 (25 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of the assessment of item 5 are presented in the table below.

Item 5 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	1	4	3	8	80
Area Needing Improvement	1	1	0	2	20
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	5	3	10	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	15	7	30	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	50%	80%	100%		

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in eight cases when the child’s entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in two cases when the child’s entry into foster care occurred within 12 months of the date of discharge from a prior foster care placement episode. In one case, the child reentered foster care within 6 months, and in the other case, the child reentered foster care within 4 months.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. The item was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 5 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

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

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

Iowa’s performance on the individual measure of foster care reentry (measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was the following: In the 12 months prior to the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators, 13.6 percent of children exiting foster care to reunification reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is less than the national median of 15.0 percent but greater than the 25th percentile of 9.9 percent. (For this measure, a lower percentage reflects a higher level of performance.)

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the following practices have been implemented to ensure that children do not reenter foster care:

- Caseworkers must conduct FTMs at the time of case closure to ensure that there is a good support plan when a child exits care.
- Caseworkers must conduct a safety assessment and a family functioning assessment prior to reunification to identify any supports and resources the family may need.
- FSRP services must be provided to families prior to the child's return home to prepare the child and family for reunification and provided to families after the child's return home for up to 15 months to prevent reentry into foster care and to ensure that the child has a safe and permanent home.

In addition to these service requirements, the State has implemented the following programs to address issues relevant to foster care reentry:

- "Methamphetamine specialists" are assigned to each service area to identify and recommend practices related to substance abuse treatment and planning for relapse.
- Parent Partners are available to provide support to parents who are involved with DHS and are working toward reunification. Parent Partners are individuals who previously had children in foster care but have been reunified with their children for at least 1 year.

Stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process identified the following as barriers to preventing reentry:

- A lack of relapse planning to ensure there is a back-up plan in case of a parent's substance abuse relapse after reunification
- A lack of mental health and substance abuse resources
- Limited financial assistance available to poor families to help them receive the necessary services to address mental health and substance abuse issues

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 240 cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 88 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 160 cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 86 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 51 cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 69 cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State generally does not have a high percentage of reentries into foster care. Some stakeholders reported that when reentry occurs it frequently is due to substance

abuse relapse or domestic violence. Some stakeholders also noted that DHS provides after-care services to children and families that have been reunified to prevent reentry.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 6 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	6	14	5	25	62.5
Area Needing Improvement	4	6	5	15	37.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	60%	70%	50%		

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s current placement was stable and that the child either did not experience a placement change during the period under review (20 cases) or that the placement changes experienced were in the child’s best interests (i.e., they were intended to further achievement of the child’s permanency goal or to provide specialized services for the child) (5 cases).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 15 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review, and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to attain the child’s permanency goal (14 cases).
- The child’s placement setting at the time of the onsite CFSR was not stable (six cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 20 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 14 cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in six cases experienced 3 or more placements during the period under review, including one child with 9 and another child with 10 placements during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 62.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

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

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

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

- C4.1: 87.0 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 86.0 percent.
- C4.2: 61.0 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is greater than the national median of 59.9 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 65.4 percent.
- C4.3: 27.6 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 33.9 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, agency policy and procedures support placement stability through monitoring and supporting licensed foster homes, including conducting visits to the foster homes and ensuring that foster parents clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. The Statewide Assessment also identifies the following practices and services as promoting placement stability:

- Children and foster parents are encouraged to attend FTMs to discuss the child's placement and to identify and address any issues that may affect the stability of the child's placement.
- Noncustodial parents and relatives are explored as placement resources, and relative caregivers are provided with necessary services and supports to promote stability.
- Each foster family is assigned a support worker through the Iowa KidsNet (IKN) contract. The support worker has monthly contact with the family and is available as needed for consultation, crisis management, and individualized support. The support worker also develops a training plan with the family to enhance the foster parents' abilities to meet the needs of the children in their homes.
- Caseworkers refer children with behavioral issues to an RSP who addresses the child's behavioral needs and provides information and support to foster parents on dealing with the child's behavior.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State contracts with IKN for the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive homes, as well as to operate a call center that provides the names of potential foster home placements for children entering foster care.

The Statewide Assessment notes that although improvements have been made in the ability of DHS to match children effectively with appropriate foster parents, effective matching does not always occur. The caseworker may not have enough information to give IKN to make the first placement the best placement for the child due to the immediacy of the removal. In other cases, IKN may lack indepth knowledge of foster homes compared to DHS caseworkers who have had extensive experience working with particular foster parents. The Statewide Assessment reports that DHS and IKN continue to address these issues and identify strategies that will improve the process.

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process indicated that the Transitioning Youth Initiative (TYI)/Dream Teams promote placement stability through the active participation of older youth in making decisions regarding their placements and transitioning to adulthood. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that these stakeholders identified the following barriers to placement stability:

- There is a lack of quality services for seriously mentally ill children and older youth.
- There are not enough relative placements or foster family homes.
- There is a lack of foster homes that can accept sibling groups.
- There is a lack of resources for foster parents around parenting challenging children.
- Transportation is needed due to large distances between the foster care placement and the birth family's home.
- Older youth often move from a foster home to a group care facility.

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 437 cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 93 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 523 cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 93 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 78 cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 86 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 105 cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 83 percent were rated as a Strength

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed concern about the lack of stability of many foster care placements. Various stakeholders attributed placement instability to the following:

- There are not enough foster homes to accommodate the number of children in foster care.
- Foster parents are not trained to provide care for the children with complex needs.
- There is a lack of appropriate matching due to IKN not having relationships with or personal knowledge of foster parents.

- Initial placements sometimes are based on the availability of a bed and location of the foster home rather than on the skills and training of foster parents.
- Placement changes are made too quickly instead of providing services to prevent disruptions.
- There is a lack of support services to foster parents.
- Children are not placed in close proximity to their families and therefore often have to be moved when a closer placement is available.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 7 was applicable for 39 (97.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. One case was not applicable because the child was in foster care for less than 30 days. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. Reviewers also were to determine whether the agency had sought termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The results of the assessment of item 7 are presented in the table below.

Item 7 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	4	16	5	25	64
Area Needing Improvement	6	3	5	14	36
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	1	0	1	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	40%	84%	50%		

Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 25 cases when reviewers determined that the child’s permanency goal was appropriate, had been established in a timely manner, and, if relevant, that the agency had filed for TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA.

Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 14 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child’s permanency goal at the time of the onsite CFSR was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (seven cases).
- The child’s permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (nine cases).
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA, particularly with regard to documenting compelling reasons in the case file for not seeking TPR (three cases).

ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 84 percent of 19 applicable cases.

The following case goals were identified for the 39 applicable foster care cases:

- Adoption only (16 cases)
- Reunification with parents only (including reunification with relatives) (nine cases)
- Guardianship only (two cases)
- Other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) only (nine cases)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and adoption (one case)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and reunification with relatives (one case)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and OPPLA (one case)

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 64 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and had met ASFA requirements when relevant. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 7 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

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

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

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

- C3.1: 33.2 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the target period. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 29.1 percent.
- C3.2: 97.1 percent of the children exiting foster care during the target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage is greater than the national median of 96.8 percent but less than the 75th percentile of 98.0 percent.
- C3.3: 36.8 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percentage is less than the national 25th percentile of 37.5 percent. (For this measure, a lower percentage reflects a higher level of performance.)

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS is mandated to identify a permanency goal for every child in foster care within 60 days of the child's placement. The permanency goal is to be reviewed for appropriateness at least every 6 months thereafter, usually at the time of the case review. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Iowa's permanency goals are as follows:

- Remain in the home
- Return child to the home
- Transfer custody to the other parent
- Adoption
- Transfer custody or guardianship to relative
- Transfer custody and guardianship to suitable person
- Another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)

The Statewide Assessment notes that agency policy requires that clear steps and timeframes be established for achieving reunification or proceeding with an alternative permanent placement. Timelines for permanency are established through the judicial review process in accordance with applicable State and Federal statutes. The Statewide Assessment also notes that approval must be given by upper-level management before the goal of APPLA can be established for a child.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, two concurrent permanency goals may be established and identified in the case plan. The Statewide Assessment reports that concurrent planning is required when there is a poor prognosis for the child's return home within the first 6 months of placement.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 532 cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 85 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 304 cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 91 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 78 cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 104 cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 90 percent were rated as a Strength

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR addressed the issues of the timeliness and appropriateness of goals, the use of concurrent planning, and the filing for TPR in accordance with ASFA requirements. Stakeholders commenting on the timeliness and appropriateness of goals indicated that the State generally is effective in establishing timely, appropriate permanency goals and that the first goal generally is reunification. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the children's permanency goals are reviewed on an ongoing basis and that parents are aware of ASFA timelines through judicial reviews and FTMs. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that all other permanency options are ruled out before APPLA is chosen.

With regard to concurrent planning, several stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State establishes concurrent goals in some cases. Although several stakeholders also indicated that when concurrent goals are established, the goals tend to be pursued sequentially rather than simultaneously and are referred to as “plan A” and “plan B.” Other stakeholders expressed the opinion that concurrent goals are pursued simultaneously.

Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that DHS files for TPR when children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months or earlier if the case circumstances require it. Many stakeholders also noted that if DHS does not file for TPR, compelling reasons usually are documented and presented to the court and are frequently documented in court orders. Some stakeholders noted that if the parent is making minimal efforts on the case plan, the court sometimes delays the filing for TPR and provides parents with extensions to continue to work toward reunification.

Additional stakeholder information pertaining to the TPR process is provided under item 9 and item 28 of this report.

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 14 (35 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of the assessment of item 8 are presented in the table below.

Item 8 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	2	4	3	9	64
Area Needing Improvement	2	1	2	5	36
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	5	5	14	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	15	5	26	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	50%	80%	60%		

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

manner. Some of the concerns identified pertained to DHS not providing supportive services to assist in reunification, not engaging parents, and a general lack of effort to achieve reunifications.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 64 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 8 was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

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

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

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Iowa's performance on the individual timeliness measures included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was the following:

- C1.1: 67.1 percent of the reunifications occurred in at least 8 days but less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 69.9 percent.
- C1.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 7.9 months. This length of stay is greater than the national median of 6.5 months (For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.)
- C1.3: 46.0 percent of children entering foster care in the 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in more than 7 days but less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage is greater than the national median of 39.4 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 48.4 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, a goal of "reunification" is defined as a plan for the child to be discharged from foster care to his or her parents or primary caregiver. DHS policy requires that concerted efforts must be made to reunify the child safely with the parents or primary caregiver and reunification must occur at the earliest possible time or within 12 months of the child entering foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that FTMs and FSRP services help prepare the family for timely reunification, and if reunification is not achieved within 12 months, the reason for the delay must be documented in the case plan.

The Statewide Assessment reports that if reunification is not appropriate, concerted efforts must be made to place the child permanently with a guardian or relative at the earliest possible time or within 12 months of the child entering foster care.

Stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process identified the following as promoting timely reunification:

- The use of FTMs and engaging the family at the onset of the case
- DHS collaboration with parents and service providers, including substance abuse treatment service providers
- The Parent Partners program
- The availability of drug courts for parents with substance abuse problems
- The agency focus on increasing the interactions among foster parents and biological parents

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 354 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 219 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 95 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 53 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 98 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 68 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 100 percent were rated as a Strength

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in providing reunification services to families and that the State conducts formal reviews to address the barriers to reunification. Additionally, various stakeholders reported that pre-removal conferences in Polk County and FTMs in all sites provide parents with the information and the tools needed to achieved reunification, as well as an opportunity to request additional services. Some stakeholders noted that the courts occasionally allow families additional time past 12 months to complete their reunification case plans.

Various stakeholders, however, identified the following potential barriers to timely reunifications:

- The lack of service availability or accessibility
- The length of some substance abuse treatment programs
- The parents' relapse into substance abuse

Item 9. Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 9 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	1	7	2	10	59
Area Needing Improvement	3	2	2	7	41
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	9	4	17	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	11	6	23	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	25%	78%	50%		

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 10 cases 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 in seven cases when reviewers identified one or more of the following:

- Delays in filing for TPR (two cases)
- Delays in the identification of an adoptive home (two cases)
- Delays in finalizing adoptive placement (three cases)
- Delays in the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) process (one case)
- Delays in the adoption process due to a lack of concerted effort by the agency (two cases)

Additional findings relevant to this item were the following:

- Of the 17 children with a goal of adoption, 8 achieved the goal during the period under review.
- Of the eight children who had a finalized adoption during the period under review, four had been in foster care for less than 24 months.
- Of the nine children with a goal of adoption who were not adopted during the period under review, four had been in foster care for more than 24 months.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 59 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 9 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

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

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

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Iowa's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions was the following:

- C2.1: 55.0 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 36.6 percent.
- C2.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 22.8 months. This median length of stay is less than the national 25th percentile of 27.3 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.)
- C2.3: 25.0 percent of children who were in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the year. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 22.7 percent.
- C2.4: 8.3 percent of children who were in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR filed for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percentage is less than the national median of 8.8 percent.
- C2.5: 71.9 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 53.7 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when a child has been in foster care for 15 of 22 months, concerted efforts must be made to achieve the goal of adoption at the earliest possible time. The Statewide Assessment notes that concurrent planning usually is necessary to expedite the adoption process.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that although agency policy requires that a child's case be transferred to an adoption caseworker within 45 days of TPR, evidence-based practice suggests that adoption caseworkers should be involved earlier in the case if the adoption is to be finalized in a timely manner.

The Statewide Assessment identified several court-related barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner:

- The lengthy appeals process
- The difficulty in some areas of the State of scheduling contested TPR cases on the docket
- The furlough of the courts for 10 days, which makes it difficult to schedule all hearings in a timely manner

Despite these court-related concerns, some stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process reported that within 60 days of the TPR hearing the final TPR order must be issued, and if the order is not issued within this timeframe, the judge must report to the State Court Administrator why the order was not completed. Additionally, some stakeholders noted that Iowa has also expedited appeals process in place for TPR.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following additional barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner that were identified by stakeholders:

- There is a lack of recruitment for adoptive homes for older youth and minorities.
- DHS caseworkers have little knowledge about post adoption services to assist potential adoptive parents in making decisions about adoption.
- Some older youth and foster/adoptive parents may not want adoption due to a perception of lost benefits and assistance.

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 120 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 82 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 64 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 91 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 20 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 90 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 20 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 87 percent were rated as a Strength

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is filing for TPR in a timely manner and that generally TPR hearings are conducted within 90 days of filing the petition. Additionally, stakeholders reported that although biological parents appeal TPR decisions, the appeal process for TPR occurs expeditiously.

However, stakeholders expressed different opinions regarding the State's effectiveness in achieving timely adoptions. A few stakeholders said that the State has made improvements in achieving timely adoptions. Various other stakeholders, however, identified the following barriers to finalizing adoptions in a timely manner:

- In some cases, the judge will provide parents with opportunities to continue to work toward reunification instead of changing the child's goal to adoption after the child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- Some judges take several months to issue the TPR court order.
- There are delays in completing the required adoption paperwork and adoption subsidy paperwork.
- There are delays in transferring cases to the adoption unit.
- Adoption caseworkers have very high caseloads.
- Children must reside in the pre-adoptive home at least 6 months before the adoption can be finalized.
- There is a large gap of time between TPR and the adoption finalization.
- Services to support adoptive placements are not always offered or are not available.

Item 10. Other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 10 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	0	5	0	5	50
Area Needing Improvement	2	1	2	5	50
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	6	2	10	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	8	14	8	30	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	0	83%	0		

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in five cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement for the child and/or to provide the necessary service to prepare the child for independent living. Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in five cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was not in a permanent placement (four cases).
- The child was not receiving adequate services to prepare for independent living (three cases).

The table below provides the ages of the children when the goal of OPPLA was established.

Age of Child When OPPLA Was Established	Number of Children
8 to 12 years of age	3
13 to 15 years of age	4
16 years of age or older	3
Total	10

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 50 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 10 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OPPLA, or APPLA as it is called in Iowa, means that the child, even though remaining in foster care, is in a permanent living arrangement with a foster parent, relative caregiver, or a long-term care facility and that there is

commitment on the part of all parties involved that the child will remain in that placement until the child reaches the age of majority. In establishing OPPLA, a Long-Term Permanency Placement Agreement may be utilized; this is an agreement between DHS or juvenile court services and the caregivers that pertains to the permanent placement of a child in foster care. Additionally, a “written agreement” or court order documents the long-term commitment of the substitute parents or relatives to continue a family relationship with the child until and beyond the child’s age of majority. DHS is also required to document efforts to ensure that the child has long-term stability until the child reaches adulthood.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the following services are available to youth who are in the process of transitioning out of foster care or who left foster care at the age of 18 years:

- TYI: This initiative focuses on building collaborative efforts, increasing partnerships, and integrating services and resources to improve outcomes for youth over 16 years old.
- Iowa Youth Dream Team: This is a youth-centered planning and practice model in which supportive adults and peers create a team to help a youth make connections to resources, education, employment, health care, housing, and supportive personal and community relationships.
- Preparation for Adult Living: PAL provides ongoing support for youth who left foster care at age 18 and are working or in post-secondary education.
- Medicaid for Young Adults: This program provides Medicaid coverage for youth who left foster care at age 18.
- All Iowa Opportunity Foster Care Grants: These grants provide financial assistance for youth who left foster care at age 18 or were adopted at age 16 or older and who are attending post-secondary education.
- Iowa After Care Services Network: The Aftercare Network provides case management, emergency financial assistance, self-sufficiency advocates, support for employment, crisis intervention, and the PAL monthly stipend to youth who have aged out of foster care. These services are intended to stabilize and support permanency.

Supplemental information amending the Statewide Assessment indicates that the State has expanded foster care for youth past 18 years of age, if certain criteria are met, in order for them to obtain their high school diplomas or to complete the General Education Development test. The supplemental information also noted that DHS provides birth certificates and assistance in accessing Social Security cards to all youth aging out of foster care.

The Statewide Assessment notes that stakeholders reported the following concerns with regard to foster children transitioning to independence:

- The transition plan that is embedded in the case permanency plan should be reviewed every 6 months, but this may not be happening consistently across the State.
- Some residential care facilities and foster families do not view preparing children for adulthood as their responsibility.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 110 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 56 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 98 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 11 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 100 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 23 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 100 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The few stakeholders commenting on the permanency goal of OPPLA during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State uses the OPPLA goal only when options that are more permanent have been deemed unsuitable for the youth.

Stakeholders expressed different opinions regarding the State’s effectiveness in providing Independent Living (IL) services to youth. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State is effective in providing services to youth to prepare them for the transition to independence. A few stakeholders identified Iowa Dream Teams and Transition Planning Specialists (TPS) as particularly useful in preparing youth for independence.

Other stakeholders, however, reported that services to prepare youth for independent living are not provided on a consistent basis and various stakeholders identified the following concerns:

- Not all youth are referred for IL services.
- The quality of the services available varies considerably across the State.
- Although the TPS provide important assistance to transitioning youth, they generally cover a large geographic area and their caseloads are very high; both of these factors often prevent them from being able to provide individual attention to each youth.

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	7	16	7	30	75.0
Partially Achieved	3	4	2	9	22.5
Not Achieved	0	0	1	1	2.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Substantially Achieved by Site	70%	80%	70%		

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 75.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State did not make concerted efforts to seek and assess relatives as placement resources.
- The State did not consistently support and strengthen parent-child relationships of children in foster care.
- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families and to their racial and religious heritage.

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

- Established performance standards and indicators for preserving connections, relative placements, and promoting parent-child relationships
- Launched a demonstration project to preserve connections and maintain children of color in their homes in order to improve outcomes for children of color in the foster care system
- Contracted with the University of Iowa's Disproportionate Minority Resource Center for technical assistance to children of color demonstration project sites and statewide
- Partnered with Tribes within the State, as well as in bordering States, to implement the Iowa Indian Child Welfare Act (Iowa ICWA)
- Established Tribal agreements to preserve connections of Native American children
- Initiated an information system in order to automate tracking of relatives
- Established kinship care policies to define diligent search procedures and the assessment process for relatives
- Provided kinship care training to DHS child welfare staff, juvenile court officers, and child welfare private providers
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Developed and distributed a guide for caseworkers and child welfare private provider staff, which includes suggestions on specific activities that encourage a positive relationship between the child in foster care and the child's parents
- Added a performance measure to child welfare private provider contracts related to contractors supporting contact between the child in foster care and their parents, as well as other significant adults

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 28 (70 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if TPR was attained prior to the period under review, contact with parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interests, and/or parents were deceased or their whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child’s most current foster care setting was near the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of the assessment of item 11 are presented in the table below.

Item 11 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	7	13	7	27	96
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	4
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	13	8	28	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	7	2	12	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	100%	100%	87.5%		

Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 21 cases when reviewers determined that the child was placed either in the same community or county as the parents. The item was rated as a Strength in six cases when reviewers determined that even though the child was placed out of his or her community or county, the placement was necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the permanency goal. Item 11 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when reviewers determined that the child’s placement was not sufficiently close to the parents’ location, and there was no justification for the distance.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 96 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed children in locations close to their parents or relatives when appropriate. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 11 also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedure requires that children be placed in close proximity to their homes. When a child with a plan of reunification is not placed close to his or her home because of special needs, the caseworker is required to document why this placement is best for the child and must facilitate visits between the parents and the child. The Statewide Assessment reports that DHS published a practice bulletin on placement proximity that supervisors reviewed with caseworkers to ensure that staff understand the importance and expectations of placing children in close proximity to their families and communities.

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 387 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 229 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 67 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 99 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 83 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 93 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the State's effectiveness in placing children in close proximity to their families. Although most stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in placing children in close proximity to their families, a few stakeholders suggested that children sometimes are not placed in close proximity to their families.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 23 (57.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not have a sibling in foster care at any time during the period under review. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were currently, or had been, placed together, and if separated, whether the separation was necessary to meet the service or safety needs of one or more of the children. The results of the assessment of item 12 are presented in the table below.

Item 12 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	7	8	4	19	83
Area Needing Improvement	1	2	1	4	17
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	10	5	23	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	10	5	17	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	87.5%	80%	80%		

Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 19 cases when reviewers determined that the child was placed with siblings, or that the separation of siblings was necessary because one of the siblings had special placement needs or because placement with siblings was not in the child’s best interests. Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in four cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together.

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 83 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever appropriate. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 12 was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa State law and DHS policy and procedure require that siblings be placed together. The Statewide Assessment also notes that when members of a sibling group are placed separately, the caseworker must document efforts to place them together, the reasons they are placed separately, and how contact between the siblings will be accomplished. Additionally, the law requires the court to review any decision not to place siblings together.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following barriers to placing siblings together:

- There is a lack of sufficient number of foster homes that are willing and able to take large siblings groups.
- When siblings have different fathers, it can be difficult to place them together and still ensure placement with relatives.
- Some sibling groups are too large to be accommodated by one foster home.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that Meskwaki Tribe representatives and judicial stakeholders expressed the opinion that DHS is effective in placing siblings together.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 332 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 98 percent were rated as a Strength.

- Of the 184 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 51 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 100 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 74 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally makes concerted efforts to keep siblings together in foster care. Some stakeholders reported that if siblings are separated, DHS makes concerted efforts to place the siblings in the same community to ensure frequent contact.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 13 was applicable for 35 (87.5 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: TPR was established prior to the period under review, and parents were no longer involved in the child’s life or were deceased; or visitation with a parent was not considered in the best interests of the child. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate sufficient visitation between children in foster care and their parents and between children in foster care and their siblings also in foster care and whether the visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The results of the assessment of item 13 are presented in the table below.

Item 13 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	7	12	4	23	66
Area Needing Improvement	3	4	5	12	34
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	16	9	35	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	4	1	5	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	70%	75%	44%		

Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 23 cases when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children. Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 12 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to ensure sufficient visitation with the mother (eight cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to ensure sufficient visitation with the father (seven cases).

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to ensure sufficient visitation with siblings in foster care (four cases).

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

Typical Frequency of Child’s Visits During the Period Under Review	With Mother	With Father	With Siblings in Foster Care
Visits occurred at least once a week	9 (32%)	4 (18%)	3 (25%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	6 (21%)	4 (18%)	2 (17%)
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	0	2 (9%)	2 (17%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	9 (32%)	8 (36%)	5 (42%)
There were no visits during the period under review	4 (14%)	4 (18%)	0
Total Applicable Cases	28	22	12

The data indicate that children visited at least once per month with their mothers in 54 percent of the 28 applicable cases, with their fathers in 45 percent of the 22 applicable cases, and with their siblings in 58 percent of the 12 applicable cases.

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 66 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 13 was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedure require DHS to arrange for visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care based on the child’s safety and best interests. A visitation plan must be created to include when and where visits will occur. Additionally, when it is determined that visitation is not possible, the reason must be well documented and presented to the court for review. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHS makes diligent efforts to ensure that visitation increases as the family moves toward reunification.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following resources and procedures as beneficial to ensuring visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings:

- FTMs explore informal supports and family members who would be able to assist with the facilitation of visitation and in the development of a visitation plan.

- FSRP services expand the capacity for ensuring that visits occur because the contract for FSRP services allows for subcontractors to be employed to facilitate monthly visits for parents and children, and for siblings.
- Relative placements help increase the likelihood and frequency of visits between parents and their children.

The Statewide Assessment notes that lack of transportation and length of travel time for some parents and children often are barriers to frequent visitation. Additionally, incarcerated parents pose a challenge in that few institutions allow physical contact or have visiting hours for children.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 415 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 89 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 250 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 90 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 69 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 86 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 91 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 92 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed different opinions on the State’s efforts to ensure adequate visitation with parents and siblings in foster care. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that visitation is occurring with parents and siblings in foster care. Some stakeholders reported that FSRP services ensure that visits occur between children in foster care and their parents. However, other stakeholders expressed the opinion that visitation between siblings is not occurring with adequate frequency. Additionally, a few stakeholders reported that budget cuts and caseworker turnover has affected the frequency of parent and child visitation.

Item 14. Preserving connections

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

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for 39 (97.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. One case was not applicable for item 14 because the child was an infant whose parental rights were terminated prior to the period under review. 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, extended family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. This item is not rated on the basis of visits or contacts with parents or siblings in foster care. The results of the assessment of item 14 are presented in the table below.

Item 14 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	9	15	8	32	82
Area Needing Improvement	1	4	2	7	18
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	19	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	0	1	0	1	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	90%	79%	80%		

Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 32 cases when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members, religious or cultural heritage, schools, community, and friends. Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to extended family (five cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections to his or her cultural heritage (one case).
- The agency did not make concerted to efforts to maintain any connections for the child (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain the child’s connections with extended family, culture, religion, community, and school. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 14 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedure require that efforts be made to maintain important connections for children and that the requirements of ICWA with regard to notification of Tribes and placement preferences must be followed. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process indicated that Iowa Dream Teams, relative placements, and DHS training and policy with regard to ICWA are useful in maintaining children’s connections.

However, the Statewide Assessment also identified the following barriers to maintaining connections for children in foster care:

- There is a lack of placement resources to ensure close placement to community and other connections.
- It is challenging to recruit foster homes that match the cultural diversity of the children in foster care.
- There is a lack of transportation to address the problem of children being placed at some distance from their communities, neighborhoods, and extended families.
- Many schools are unable to pay for transportation to the home school when the child is placed out of the community.

In addition to these concerns, Meskwaki Tribe representatives noted that DHS caseworkers need to be more diligent in inquiring about Native American heritage and that it is difficult to find foster homes that are near the Tribal settlement.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 513 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 299 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 78 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 104 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 89 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that DHS makes concerted efforts to preserve connections for children in foster care. Some stakeholders reported that DHS attempts to maintain children in the same school. Some stakeholders indicated maintaining connections for Native American children varies by caseworker.

Item 15. Relative placement

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 29 (72.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if relative placement was not an option during the period under review because the child was in an adoptive placement at the start of the time period, or the child entered foster care needing specialized services that could not be provided in a relative placement. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency made diligent efforts to locate and assess both maternal and paternal relatives as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of the assessment of item 15 are presented in the table below.

Item 15 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	6	11	5	22	76
Area Needing Improvement	2	3	2	7	24
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	14	7	29	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	2	6	3	11	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	75%	79%	71%		

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

- The child was placed with relatives (12 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives, but the agency made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives when applicable (10 cases).

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

- The agency had not made efforts to search for maternal relatives (five cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to search for paternal relatives (six cases).
- Although the child is currently placed with a relative, the placement is not stable (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 76 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 15 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedures require that placement preference is given to an adult relative over a non-relative caregiver if the relative meets licensing or safety standards. The Statewide Assessment reports that for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2009, 308 children in foster care were placed in licensed relative foster family homes, which represents 5 percent of all children in foster family home placements. Additionally, 2,126 children in foster care were placed in unlicensed relative foster family homes, which represents 33 percent of all children in foster family home placements.

The Statewide Assessment notes that in July 2009, the Iowa General Assembly passed legislation requiring DHS to notify relatives within 30 days of a child being removed from the home. As a result of this legislation, DHS staff sends written notification to all identified relatives that a child has been placed in foster care and offers each relative an opportunity to be involved with the child as a support or as a placement resource. However, the Statewide Assessment indicates that some relatives are not willing to accept placement of relative children and are not supportive of the plan for the child and that in some cases parents are unwilling to have their children placed with a relative. Additionally, the Statewide Assessment notes that when relatives who are not licensed serve as a placement resource for a child, the financial support they receive often is inadequate to cover the cost of caring for the child.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 417 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 96 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 247 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.

- Of the 61 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 98 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 83 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 94 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in searching for relatives when children enter foster care and in placing children with relatives whenever possible. A few stakeholders reported that caseworkers continue to search for potential relative caregivers on an ongoing basis.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 16 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	3	12	5	20	67
Area Needing Improvement	4	3	3	10	33
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	15	8	30	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	5	2	10	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Strength by Site	43%	80%	62.5%		

Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 20 cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children through various activities. Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 10 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

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

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

Efforts Made	With Mother (Number of Cases)	With Father (Number of Cases)
Encouraging the parent’s participation in school or after-school activities and attendance at medical appointments and special events	16	6
Providing transportation so that parents can participate in these events, activities, or appointments	11	4
Providing opportunities for family therapeutic situations	14	9
Encouraging foster parents to mentor biological parents and serve as parenting role models for them	8	5
Encouraging and facilitating contact with incarcerated parents (when appropriate) or with parents living far away from the child	2	5
Total Applicable Cases	20	17

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 67 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 16 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedure emphasize the importance of ongoing contact and involvement of the parents with their children in foster care. Supplemental information amending the Statewide Assessment reports that foster parents who have attended the current pre-service training (PS-MAPP) are more willing than foster parents who participated in a previous training program (NOVA) to have the parent involved in the child’s care. The Statewide Assessment notes that key barriers to maintaining the parent-child relationship are a lack of transportation for parents and children and that foster parents are unwilling to work with biological parents.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that FTMs have resulted in an increased ability of the agency to identify individuals who can assist with parent/child interaction through providing transportation and supervision. Additionally, FSRP services allow for greater flexibility in service delivery, which includes supervision and visitation/interaction.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- Of the 408 applicable cases reviewed from February 2009 through April 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 234 applicable cases reviewed during May and June 2009, 99 percent were rated as a Strength.

- Of the 69 applicable cases reviewed from July 2009 through September 2009, 86 percent were rated as a Strength.
- Of the 86 applicable cases reviewed from October 2009 through December 2009, 97 percent were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that parents have the right to attend doctors' appointments, educational meetings, and extracurricular events with their children. However, some stakeholders indicated that whether birth parents are informed of these activities or events tends to vary across caseworkers, and whether parents participate in these events tends to vary across foster parents, with some foster parents making efforts to engage birth parents in their children's activities and other foster parents not making this effort. A few stakeholders also suggested that the lack of transportation is a barrier to birth parents being able to attend children's appointments or activities. Some stakeholders reported that DHS and the Department of Education have collaborated to create a form that allows birth parents to authorize foster caregivers to sign permission forms for school activities such as field trips and extracurricular activities.

Some stakeholders noted that in Iowa birth parents maintain guardianship of their children when the children are in foster care. Therefore, biological parents must generally provide permission for most activities from field trips to medical procedures.

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	6	13	7	26	40.0
Partially Achieved	6	11	5	22	33.8
Not Achieved	5	7	5	17	26.2
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	35%	42%	41%		

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 40.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 45 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 32 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. Iowa

also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in assessing needs and providing services to children, parents, and foster parents.
- Parents and children were not consistently included in the case planning process.
- Caseworker contacts with parents were not of sufficient quality or quantity to ensure the children’s safety or well-being, or to promote goal attainment.
- There was a lack of adequate contact between caseworkers and children, which resulted in caseworkers being unaware of important information about the children and/or events in the children’s lives.

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

- Provided guidelines for Need-Based Service Planning in Child Welfare
- Established performance standards and indicators for needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents, parent and child involvement in case planning, caseworker visitation with child, and caseworker visitation with parents
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Implemented a functional assessment of the family that includes informal and formal assessments that identify the current strengths, needs, and risks of the child and family and helps identify the critical underlying issues that must be resolved for the child to live safely with the family independent of outside supervision
- Developed and implemented “one family-one plan”
- Reduced caseworker administrative duties in order to establish more time for face-to-face contact with children and families

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 17 was applicable for all 65 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents and provided the services necessary to meet those needs. This item excludes the assessment of children’s (but not parents’) needs pertaining to education, physical health, and mental health. These areas are addressed in later items. The results of the assessment of item 17 are presented in the table below.

Item 17 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	7	14	8	29	45
Area Needing Improvement	10	17	9	36	55
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	41%	45%	47%		

Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 45 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 44 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 29 cases when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met. Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 36 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was an inadequate assessment of children’s needs (five cases: four foster care, one in-home).
- There was an inadequate assessment of mothers’ needs (15 cases: 10 foster care, 5 in-home).
- There was an inadequate assessment of fathers’ needs (18 cases: 12 foster care, 6 in-home).
- There was an inadequate assessment of foster parents’ needs (eight cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address children’s needs (five cases: four foster care, one in-home).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address mothers’ needs (18 cases: 10 foster care, 8 in-home).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address fathers’ needs (22 cases: 12 foster care, 10 in-home).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address foster parents’ needs (nine cases).

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

Target Person for Needs Assessment and Services	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Yes	Applicable	Yes	Applicable
Mother’s needs assessed and met	17 (63%)	27	17 (68%)	25
Father’s needs assessed and met	15 (56%)	27	13 (57%)	23
Foster parents’ needs assessed and met	22 (71%)	31	N/A	N/A
Child’s needs assessed and met	36 (90%)	40	24 (96%)	25

The data indicate that the children, especially the children in the in-home cases, were far more likely to have their needs assessed and met than the mothers, fathers, or foster parents. Foster parents were more likely to have their needs assessed and met than mothers and particularly fathers. Mothers were more likely to have their needs assessed than fathers.

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 45 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 17 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedure require that information about the needs of the child and family must be gathered at the beginning of case assessment and treatment planning. This information may be gathered through the following activities:

- Family interviews and FTMs
- Observations of the child and family members at home and in the community
- Contacts with other agencies involved with the family
- Interviews with extended family members and noncustodial parents
- Reviews of written materials such as school, medical, psychiatric, and psychological reports and case records

The Statewide Assessment reports that the information gathered is used to identify the family's strengths and needs and to guide planning for services and for safe case closure. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, child and family assessments are required to address the educational, physical, psychological, social, family living, and recreational needs of children and the family's ability to meet those needs. The assessment is done on an ongoing basis to determine whether changes are needed in services or placement settings.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 94 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From July 2009 through September 2009, 88 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 87 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

The Statewide Assessment notes that service areas with high performance on this item were usually those in which FTMs or pre-removal conferences occurred frequently and caseworkers visited at least monthly with parents and children to conduct ongoing assessments.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed different opinions on the State’s effectiveness in assessing and meeting the needs of children and parents. Some stakeholders suggested that the State is effective in assessing and meeting the needs of children and parents, with various stakeholders identifying the following as facilitating this process:

- FTMs are used to identify and coordinate appropriate services for families.
- Child Action Team (CAT) meetings, which are conducted for older youth in foster care, are beneficial to identifying and meeting the needs of these youth.
- FSRP services are helpful in meeting families’ needs.

In contrast, other stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State is not consistently effective in assessing and meeting the needs of children and parents, with various stakeholders raising the following concerns:

- Assessing the needs of the family depends on the skills of the caseworker.
- High caseloads are a barrier to caseworkers being able to assess the needs of families and provide appropriate services.
- High caseloads of parent attorneys and guardians *ad litem* make it difficult for them to provide quality legal representation to parents who have children in foster care and to children in foster care.

Additionally, some stakeholders reported that all children in foster care are appointed a guardian *ad litem*. However, these stakeholders indicated that children generally only have contact with the guardian *ad litem* at court hearings.

Some stakeholders indicated that caseworkers generally address the needs of foster parents and that support services to foster parents have improved in recent years. Support services identified by stakeholders include the following:

- Iowa Foster Parent and Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA) peer liaisons: licensed foster parents who provide support and advocacy to other foster parents and facilitate foster parent support groups
- IKN Peer Support Providers: IKN staff, some of whom are licensed foster parents, who provide support to foster parents through monthly contacts
- DHS licensing caseworker

Other stakeholders, however, expressed the opinion that caseworkers are not responsive to the needs of foster parents. Stakeholders indicated that a lack of communication with caseworkers is a barrier to meeting the needs of foster parents.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 61 (94 percent) of the 65 cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review, parents were not involved with the child in any way, and/or the child was too young or had cognitive delays or other conditions that were barriers to participation in case planning. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (when appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and, if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child’s best interests. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. The results of the assessment of item 18 are presented in the table below.

Item 18 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	6	15	9	30	49
Area Needing Improvement	9	14	8	31	51
Total Applicable Cases	15	29	17	61	
Not Applicable Cases	2	2	0	4	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	40%	52%	53%		

Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 56 percent of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 40 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 30 cases when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process or that the agency had made concerted efforts to involve them in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 31 cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to involve the mother, father, and/or child (when age appropriate) in the case planning process. Specific information about involving mothers, fathers, and children in case planning is shown in the table below.

Person Involved in Case Planning	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Yes	Applicable Cases	Yes	Applicable Cases
Mother involved in case planning?	19 (70%)	27	16 (64%)	25
Father involved in case planning?	16 (59%)	27	13 (57%)	23
Children involved in case planning?	21 (78%)	27	14 (74%)	19

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 49 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 18 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, policy requires that the caseworker involve the family and child, when appropriate, in case planning and promotes the use of FTMs to engage families in case planning. According to the Statewide Assessment, noncustodial parent involvement begins as soon as the child is a part of the child protective assessment, and efforts to include the noncustodial parent continue throughout the case to ensure extended parental involvement. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that despite some improvements, there is still a lack of engagement with noncustodial parents, absent parents, incarcerated parents, and/or uninvolved parents. Continued improvement is needed in the initial search for and engagement of the noncustodial parent, as well as periodic efforts to locate and engage the noncustodial parent during the life of the case. In cases where the noncustodial parent declines involvement, more consistency is needed in documenting efforts that were taken and following the protocol for periodic efforts to re-engage the parent.

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 93 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 93 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From July 2009 through September 2009, 86 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 85 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that DHS engages parents and age-appropriate children in the case planning process. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that FTMs facilitate meaningful engagement of families in case planning, and that meaningful engagement results in individualized plans that guide families and DHS in achieving case goals. However, a few stakeholders indicated that FTMs are not held in all cases. Many stakeholders also reported that DHS has improved in locating and involving noncustodial parents in case planning.

Some stakeholders reported that age-appropriate children are involved in case planning through their facilitation of the CATs and their participation in the FTMs.

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

Item 19. Caseworker visits with child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 19 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	10	20	12	42	65
Area Needing Improvement	7	11	5	23	35
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	59%	65%	71%		

Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 62.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 68 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 42 cases when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between the caseworkers and children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child’s well-being and promote attainment of case goals. Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

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

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

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits With Child During the Period Under Review	Foster Care Cases (Number and Percent)	In-Home Services Cases (Number and Percent)
Visits occurred at least once a week	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	29 (72.5%)	21 (84%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	10 (25%)	3 (12%)
There were no visits during the period under review	0	0
Total Cases	40	25

The data indicate that caseworkers visited with children at least once per month in 75 percent of the foster care cases and 88 percent of the in-home services cases.

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 65 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and quality. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 19 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires caseworkers to visit children at least monthly and provides guidelines to promote quality visits. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the emphasis on caseworker visits with children over the past 2 years has resulted in caseworkers having a better knowledge of their cases, an improved ability to assess needs on an ongoing basis, and an enhanced awareness of the impact of services.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the agency established a protocol to track caseworker visits with children, and each month caseworkers must enter into the CWIS whether they completed a visit. The documentation fields in CWIS also require caseworkers to indicate the location of the visit and the questions asked, whether the case plan was reviewed, whether the child was seen alone, and whether the child was considered to be safe. If a monthly visitation is not conducted, caseworkers are required to document in the case file the reason for the missed contact.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following barriers to caseworkers conducting monthly visits with the children on their caseloads:

- Inclement weather
- Families not being home for scheduled visits
- Travel distance (in rural areas and when children are placed outside of their communities)
- Not all children being home when visits occur
- Caseload size

The Statewide Assessment also notes that youth from Elevate, a youth-driven leadership program for foster and adoptive youth, who were interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process, reported the following information:

- Some caseworkers do not visit youth monthly or visit only around court hearings.
- Some caseworkers spend a minimal amount of time visiting with youth.
- Some caseworkers do not answer their phones and fail to return phone calls to youth.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 87 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From July 2009 through September 2009, 94 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 88 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding whether the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with children are sufficient to meet the needs of children. While some stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers visit regularly with children and spend time alone with the children, others suggested that caseworker visits with children are not occurring with sufficient frequency and regularity. Some stakeholders suggested that the quality of visits varies across caseworkers. Additionally, some stakeholders indicated that foster children are not always seen in their foster homes, which raises concerns about the caseworker’s ability to assess safety.

Item 20. Caseworker visits with parent(s)

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 54 (83 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review, and parents were no longer involved in the lives of their children. All cases that were not applicable are foster care cases. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and ensure the children’s safety and well-being. The results of the assessment of item 20 are presented in the table below.

Item 20 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	5	12	6	23	43
Area Needing Improvement	9	13	9	31	57
Total Applicable Cases	14	25	15	54	
Not Applicable Cases	3	6	2	11	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	36%	48%	40%		

Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 48 percent of the 29 applicable foster care cases and 36 percent of the in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 23 cases when reviewers determined that visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children and that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 31 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency or quality (11 cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency or quality (15 cases).
- Visits with the mother were of sufficient frequency but did not focus on issues pertaining to case planning or service delivery (one case).
- Visits with the father were of sufficient frequency but did not focus on issues pertaining to case planning or service delivery (one case).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency, although when they did occur they were of sufficient quality (six cases).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency, although when they did occur they were of sufficient quality (two cases).
- There were no visits with the mother (four cases).
- There were no visits with the father (10 cases).

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

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits With Parents During the Period Under Review	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred at least once a week	1 (4%)	0	1 (4%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	3 (11%)	0	0	0
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	8 (30%)	5 (22%)	15 (60%)	7 (32%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	14 (52%)	12 (52%)	6 (24%)	11 (50%)
There were no visits during the period under review	1 (4%)	6 (26%)	3 (12%)	4 (18%)
Total Applicable Cases	27	23	25	22

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 43 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 20 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires regular caseworker visits with parents at least monthly to review progress on the case plan. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the emphasis on caseworker visits with parents over the past 2 years has resulted in caseworkers having a better knowledge of their cases, an improved ability to assess needs on an ongoing basis, and an enhanced awareness of the impact of the services.

Similar to caseworker visits with children, the Statewide Assessment notes that a protocol was established to track caseworkers' visits with parents. The Statewide Assessment notes that the protocol helps to ensure that visits are occurring to both custodial and noncustodial parents.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, participants in Parent Partner groups who were interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process reported the following strengths relevant to this item:

- Some caseworkers meet with the client monthly or more frequently as needed, return phone calls, and communicate well with the parent (e.g., trying to get to know the parent and answering questions).
- Some caseworkers show compassion.

These same participants reported the following areas needing improvement:

- Some caseworkers are inconsistent in their communication.
- Some caseworkers do not visit monthly and only schedule their visits around court hearings.
- Some caseworkers do not visit in the parent's home.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 60 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 67 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From July 2009 through September 2009, 64 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 71 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that Iowa's relatively low performance on this item can be attributed to insufficient visits with noncustodial parents. The Statewide Assessment reports that to improve practice regarding the noncustodial/absent parents, DHS published practice bulletins to educate child welfare staff on identifying, locating, and engaging noncustodial/absent parents, and provided training regarding examining caseworker bias against noncustodial parents and the importance of father involvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that caseworkers do not consistently visit with parents on a monthly basis as required by policy. However, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that when caseworkers do visit parents, they address issues pertinent to case planning.

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	13	16	11	40	93.0
Not Achieved	0	1	2	3	7.0
Total Applicable Cases	13	17	13	43	
Not Applicable Cases	4	14	4	22	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	100%	94%	85%		

Status of Well-Being Outcome 2

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 93.0 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 91 percent of the 34 applicable foster care cases and 100 percent of the 9 applicable in-home services cases. The State was in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. However, as part of the Program Improvement Plan, DHS negotiated Memoranda of Agreement at the State level with the Department of Education to address educational needs of children.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 43 (66 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if either of the following applied: Children were not of school age, or children in the in-home services cases did not have service needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of the assessment of item 21 are presented in the table below.

Item 21 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	13	16	11	40	93
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	2	3	7
Total Applicable Cases	13	17	13	43	
Not Applicable	4	14	4	22	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	100%	94%	85%		

Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 40 cases when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary. Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in three cases when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were not assessed or addressed.

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 93 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for this item to be rated as a Strength. A 95-percent standard is established for this item because it is the only item assessed for this outcome. Item 21 was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires that the case plan for a child in foster care include the child’s most recent education records and that caseworkers conduct assessments to address the educational needs of the child and the family’s ability to meet those needs. The Statewide Assessment provides the following information relevant to meeting children’s educational needs:

- The DHS caseworker is responsible for ensuring that the child in foster care is in the appropriate educational setting, including the physical location of his or her school, and whether the child’s educational needs are met.
- DHS policy requires that the child should remain in his or her home school unless it is not in the child’s best interests and the reason for this decision is documented.
- When a child in foster care changes schools, Iowa law requires that his or her school records must be transferred within 5 school days.

- Ninety days before a child's 18th birthday and 90 days before the child exits foster care, a transition plan, which includes an educational plan, must be developed or updated.

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process reported that pre- and post-removal conferences, FTMs, Dream Teams, transition staffing, and caseworker/family interaction support the identification of educational needs and provide a means to address issues within a collaborative environment.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following barriers to meeting children's educational needs:

- Problems in coordinating education services for children in residential facilities or group care
- Children sometimes losing credits when transferring to different school districts because of variations in school system operations and requirements

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 97 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 97 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From July 2009 through September 2009, 100 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that DHS generally is effective in ensuring that children's educational needs are assessed and met. A few stakeholders also noted that foster parents make efforts to ensure that educational needs are met. Some stakeholders indicated that DHS attempts to maintain children in the same school; however, transportation to the school sometimes is an issue.

A few reported that children transferring to different school districts because of placement changes often lose credits and therefore end up falling behind in their education.

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					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	12	25	15	52	88.1
Partially Achieved	1	2	1	4	6.8
Not Achieved	1	1	1	3	5.1
Total Applicable Cases	14	28	17	59	
Not Applicable Cases	3	3	0	6	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	86%	89%	88%		

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 88.1 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. It should be noted that taken individually, the two indicators used to assess this outcome were rated as a Strength in more than 90 percent of the cases. However, taken together, the percentage of cases that substantially achieved this outcome did not meet the required 95 percent. The outcome was substantially achieved in 87.5 percent of the foster care cases and 89 percent of the 19 applicable in-home services cases. Iowa also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

In the 2003 CFSR, the individual items pertaining to this outcome were rated as a Strength; however, there was an insufficient number of cases in which both items were rated as a Strength. In some cases, the agency was consistently effective in addressing children's physical health issues but not their mental health service needs, and in some other cases, the opposite was true.

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

- Established a performance standard and indicator for cases in which both physical and mental health needs, including substance abuse, are appropriately assessed and services are provided
- Increased access to health care through Medicaid, Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa (HAWK-I), or private insurance

- Strengthened expectations within the Iowa Plan contract, a contract for managed care service provision of Medicaid mental health services, Medicaid and Department of Public Health (DPH) substance abuse treatment services, and services for State mental health cases, to improve assessment of mental health issues and access to mental services for children in child welfare and juvenile justice services
- Negotiated Memoranda of Agreement at the State level with DPH to address service needs of children

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

Item 22. Physical health of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 48 (74 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children’s physical health needs (including dental needs) had been appropriately assessed, and the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of the assessment of item 22 are presented in the table below.

Item 22 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	12	20	13	45	94
Area Needing Improvement	1	2	0	3	6
Total Applicable Cases	13	22	13	48	
Not Applicable Cases	4	9	4	17	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	92%	91%	100%		

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 92.5 percent of the foster care cases and 100 percent of the eight applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 45 cases when reviewers determined that children’s medical and dental needs were routinely assessed and necessary services were provided.

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

- The child's physical health needs were not assessed and addressed adequately (one case).
- The child's dental health needs were not assessed and addressed adequately (three cases).

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 94 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was effective in assessing and meeting children's physical health needs. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 22 also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires that the case plan for a child in foster care includes the most recent information available concerning the child's health and assessments conducted on the physical health needs of the child and the family's ability to meet those needs. Supplemental information amending the Statewide Assessment indicates that if a child is placed in foster care, a physical health screening is required before the initial placement or within 14 calendar days of placement. The Statewide Assessment reports that caseworkers use health checklists at the time of a child's removal from his or her home and throughout the case to ensure that physical health needs are met.

The Statewide Assessment reports that IFAPA published a resource book for kinship caregivers that provides information on resources to ensure that the health-care and dental health needs of children in their care are assessed and addressed. Relative caregivers can apply for the Family Investment Program (FIP) to assist them in meeting the medical needs of the child in their care.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process provided the following information relevant to this item:

- Group care and residential provider contracts require the assessment and provision of medical and dental health care.
- Parents have the opportunity to be involved in the child's medical and dental care appointments.
- Iowa's reimbursement rate is low for Medicaid providers, which deters medical and dental professionals from accepting Medicaid patients.
- It is difficult to obtain orthodontia services for children in foster care.
- Although there is a Pediatric Symptom Checklist, it does not contain enough questions to determine possible medical and/or mental health issues.

Case review data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 78 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 82 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

- From July 2009 through September 2009, 82 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 88 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in routinely assessing and addressing the medical and dental needs of children. However, a few stakeholders indicated that it is difficult to find dental care providers who accept Medicaid and difficult to obtain orthodontia services for children in foster care.

Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 46 (71 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs or if there were no mental health concerns. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether mental health needs had been assessed appropriately and that services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The results of the assessment of item 23 are presented in the table below.

Item 23 Ratings	Linn	Polk	Webster	Total	Percent
Strength	10	22	10	42	91
Area Needing Improvement	1	1	2	4	9
Total Applicable Cases	11	23	12	46	
Not Applicable Cases	6	8	5	19	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Strength by Site	91%	96%	83%		

Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of the 31 applicable foster care cases and 87 percent of the 15 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 42 cases when reviewers determined that children’s mental health needs were appropriately assessed and the identified mental health needs were addressed. Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Mental health needs were neither assessed nor addressed (three cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed but services were not provided to address identified needs (one case).

Rating Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 91 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 23 also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, children's mental health needs are to be addressed in the case plan, and initial and ongoing mental health assessments are required to address the psychological needs of children and the family's ability to meet those needs and to identify whether changes in services are needed. Supplemental information amending the Statewide Assessment indicates that for children referred for family foster care services, the caseworker completes a formal foster child behavioral assessment, which includes the emotional, behavioral, physical, and personal care needs of the child. Additionally, the supplemental information notes that the assessments are to be completed within 30 days of entry into foster care, when there is significant behavioral change, and when there is a placement change. These assessments also may be completed when TPR has been achieved to negotiate an adoption subsidy or a guardianship subsidy

Case reading data provided in the Statewide Assessment relevant to this item indicate the following:

- From February 2009 through April 2009, 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- During May and June 2009, 96 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From July 2009 through September 2009, 99 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.
- From October 2009 through December 2009, 97 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DHS caseworkers refer children with behavioral and mental health issues to an RSP so that the child's behavioral and mental health needs can be met, including support to foster parents on how to deal with the child's behavior. However, stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process reported that mental health providers do not attend case staffings or appear in court hearings because their time for these activities is not reimbursable.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The few stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in assessing and addressing children's mental health needs. Some stakeholders indicated that if a mental health need is identified for a child, services are available.

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

This section of the CFSR Final Report provides information regarding the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors examined during the CFSR. Information on the items included under each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. Additional information may come from other Federal reports or assessments.

Each item included in a systemic factor reflects a key Federal program requirement relevant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for that systemic factor. The overall rating for each systemic factor is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either “in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 3 or 4) or “not in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 1 or 2). Specific requirements for each rating are shown in the table below.

Rating the Systemic Factor

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

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

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

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

Status of Statewide Information System

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

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

Item 24 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State is operating a statewide information system that can readily identify the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa’s State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) has been in operation statewide since 1995. Iowa’s SACWIS consists of two main components: the Family and Children’s Services (FACS) system and the Statewide Tracking and Reporting (STAR) system. FACS is the child welfare case management and payment system pertaining to children in foster care, and collects demographic data, current legal status, location, permanency goals, and other relevant case information. Additionally, FACS operates as a case management system and serves as the data source for information used by field budget staff. STAR captures information pertaining to Child Protective Services (CPS) intakes, assessments, and case dispositions.

The Statewide Assessment notes that internal and external stakeholders interviewed as part of the State’s 2008 CFSR provided the following information:

- FACS is available statewide and has the capacity to maintain and track information pertaining to the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care.
- The whereabouts of all children under the care of DHS is in the information system.

The Statewide Assessment reports that only DHS staff have access to SACWIS; therefore, information provided by external agencies such as Juvenile Court Services (JCS) must be entered into SACWIS by the DHS caseworker.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders addressing this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that FACS generally can readily identify the demographic characteristics, legal status, permanency goals, and location of every child in foster care.

Although a few stakeholders suggested that there may be delays in entering some case-relevant information into FACS, most stakeholders indicated that information pertaining placement location generally is entered in a timely manner.

Some stakeholders in Polk and Webster Counties reported the FACS system is unavailable from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. while the system information is updated, and this can affect the caseworkers’ abilities to access information.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

Status of Case Review System

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Iowa was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State did not consistently involve parents in the development of children’s case plans.
- There was no clear understanding of who was responsible for notifying foster parents of reviews or court hearings.

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

- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs
- Developed and implemented “One Family-One Plan”
- Informed foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers that they are to be notified and given the opportunity to be heard in any review or court hearing

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that although the State has developed the FTM as a process for engaging parents in the development of the case plan, FTMs do not occur on a consistent basis. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, case reviewers determined that DHS made diligent efforts to involve mothers in case planning in 67 percent of the applicable cases and to involve fathers in 58 percent of the applicable cases. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires that the caseworker, in partnership with the parents, develop a case plan for each child in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that DHS policy promotes the use of the FTM as a means for engaging families in case plan development. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that FTMs are not being used in all areas of the State.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the case plan is required to include the following:

- A delineation of the changes required by the family
- A description that provides a long-term view of what it takes for the family to live together safely and successfully, independent of external supervision
- A specification of the necessary behavior patterns that the caregiver must demonstrate consistently to reunify the family and conclude supervision by the court and DHS
- A description of the sustainable conditions and supports necessary to reunify the family and conclude external supervision

The Statewide Assessment provides the following opinions about case planning expressed by internal and external stakeholders interviewed during the State's 2008 CFSR:

- The FTM is an excellent way to engage parents in the case planning process.
- The FTM has not been standardized across the State, particularly in regard to frequency.
- The case plan is difficult to read.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review addressed the issues of the timeliness of case plans and the involvement of parents in case planning.

With regard to timeliness, many stakeholders expressed the opinion that case plans are routinely prepared in a timely manner. However, stakeholders offered differing opinions on whether case plans are updated at the required intervals. Some stakeholders reported that through the FTM process, case plans are updated every 6 months. A few stakeholders, however, reported that caseworkers will submit outdated case plans to the court without making any revisions to the case plan, such as identifying the progress made by the parents.

Most stakeholders suggested that FTMs facilitate meaningful engagement of parents in case planning and are held throughout the life of the case at designated times or when case decisions need to be made. Additionally, a few Polk County stakeholders reported that pre-removal conferences facilitate meaningful engagement with parents in the case planning process. However, various stakeholders raised the following concerns:

- An FTM is not held in all cases.
- Even when an FTM is held, the effectiveness in engaging parents in the case planning process varies depending on the skills of the facilitator.
- Engaging parents in case planning during the FTM sometimes is more successful if the facilitator is not a DHS staff member.

A few stakeholders reported that DHS caseworkers generally try to engage parents in case planning even when an FTM is not conducted. A few stakeholders also expressed the opinion that, in the last several years, improvements have been made in engaging noncustodial parents, particularly fathers, in developing the case plan.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State has a process for a periodic review of the status of each child at least every 6 months, with many reviews occurring every 3 months. Additionally, information from stakeholder interviews indicates that periodic reviews generally are substantive. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires that the status of each child will be reviewed periodically but no less frequently than every 6 months by a court or by administrative review to determine the following:

- The safety of the child
- The continuing necessity for and appropriateness of placement
- The extent of compliance with the case plan
- The extent of progress that has been made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating services

The Statewide Assessment also reports that 3-month reviews are the standard practice among 11 associate juvenile judges and considered best practice for other judges. Stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process reported that some courts conduct periodic reviews every 3 months, and that these frequent hearings result in achieving permanency more quickly.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, in addition to periodic court reviews, in 62 of the 99 counties in Iowa, the cases of children in foster care also are reviewed by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board’s Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) every 6 months and the FCRB review findings and recommendations are provided to DHS and the courts.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR addressed the issues of the timeliness of periodic reviews and the usefulness of the reviews in moving a case forward. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that judicial periodic reviews are held at least every 6 months, but that it is more common for periodic reviews to be held every 3 months. Most stakeholders also indicated that

the judicial periodic reviews help to move cases forward. Various stakeholders reported that the periodic reviews address the following issues:

- Services for parents and parents' participation in services
- Progress toward achieving the goals of the case plan
- Children's status with regard to their safety, their placements, and their permanency

Some stakeholders also noted that the court engages the parents and children during the periodic review hearings.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment indicates that State policy requires permanency hearings to be held within 12 months of the date of removal and at least once every 12 months thereafter. Information from stakeholder interviews indicates that permanency hearings are conducted in a timely manner and that the hearings focus on issues relevant to children achieving permanency. In addition, the Iowa Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review conducted in 2007 did not find any cases out of compliance with the Federal timeframes for permanency hearings. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa law requires that unless the court has waived reasonable efforts, a permanency hearing will be held within 12 months of the date the child was removed from the home. If the court has waived reasonable efforts, the permanency hearing will be held within 30 days of the date that the requirements were waived. Iowa law further specifies that following an initial permanency hearing and the issuance of a permanency order that places a child in the custody or guardianship of another person or agency, the court retains jurisdiction and annually reviews the order to ensure that the best interests of the child are served.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the goal of the initial permanency hearing is to establish or affirm the permanency goal. Each subsequent permanency hearing must review the goal and determine if it is the most appropriate goal for the child and is in the child's best interests.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that permanency hearings are held in a timely manner and that the hearings are effective and focus on issues relevant to achieving permanency for the child. Some

stakeholders reported that permanency hearings sometimes occur earlier than every 12 months and that some courts conduct permanency hearings every 6 months.

Some Webster County stakeholders expressed the opinion that recent furlough days required of court personnel, including judges, may contribute to delays in permanency hearings when hearings are contested.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State has a process for filing for TPR in accordance with the timeframes established by ASFA. When the decision is made not to file for TPR, compelling reasons are documented in the case file, reviewed by the court, and frequently incorporated into the court order. CFSR case reviews found that TPR was filed within ASFA timeframes, including documentation for not filing for TPR, in 84 percent of the applicable cases. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy requires that the assigned caseworker file or join in a petition for TPR when the child has been in foster care for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the case file must include evidence of the petition for TPR or, if a petition is not filed, the reason for not filing. The Statewide Assessment notes that compelling reasons not to file a termination petition must be based on the individual circumstances of the child and family.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that DHS files for TPR when children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, or earlier if case circumstances require it. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that when DHS does not file for TPR, compelling reasons usually are documented and presented to the court and are frequently documented in court orders. Various stakeholders identified the following as frequent reasons for not filing for TPR:

- The child is placed with a relative.
- The child has a relationship with his or her biological family and does not wish to be adopted.
- There is evidence that parents are working toward reunification but will not complete the case plan requirements within the required timeframe.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the court notifies foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers about hearings and that the caregivers generally have an opportunity to be heard either during the court proceedings or through a written report to the court. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa law requires that a foster parent, relative caregiver, or other individual providing pre-adoptive care to the child must receive notification of reviews and hearings and must have the opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing. The Statewide Assessment reports that, effective February 16, 2010, Iowa’s Clerk of Courts began sending electronic notices of hearings to foster parents and relative caregivers of children involved in juvenile court using a standardized form. The system was tested to ensure the accuracy of addresses on the notices sent to each child’s current foster caregiver and was accurate 98 percent of the time. Additionally, the FCRB sends notices to foster parents regarding FCRB reviews.

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process reported that foster parents have an opportunity to be heard in juvenile court hearings. However, stakeholders expressed the opinion that some foster parents may not attend court hearings due to the possibility of being called as a witness and cross-examined on the stand. The stakeholders also noted that the court and DHS provide notification of hearings to the relative caregivers of the child.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that foster caregivers receive written notice of reviews and hearings from the court 2 weeks prior to the court proceeding. In addition to the written notification from the court, some stakeholders reported that foster caregivers also receive verbal notification from the children’s caseworkers.

Many stakeholders reported that foster caregivers are provided the opportunity to speak in the court proceedings, and in some TPR hearings, are called as witnesses. Some stakeholders noted that if a foster parent cannot be present at the hearing, he or she may provide written reports that are presented to the court. A few Webster County stakeholders, however, reported that foster caregivers are not allowed into the court proceedings.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

Status of Quality Assurance System

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. The State also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The primary concern identified during the 2003 review was that Iowa did not have a statewide QA system.

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

- Established a model of practice, performance standards, and indicators related to the CFSR outcomes
- Established an agencywide QA system into which child welfare QA activities and processes were incorporated
- Coordinated and shared QA activities with partners including private providers, judges, the Court Improvement Project, JCS, and the Child Protection Council

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Quality Assurance System are presented and discussed below.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State has established and implemented a variety of standards to ensure that there are quality services to protect children’s safety and health. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy includes standards that support quality in all work performed regarding children’s health and safety. This includes standards that pertain to placement resources including both foster families and group care facilities; standards for ensuring that physical, dental, and mental health needs are met; and standards for assessment of safety and risk throughout the life of the case. The Statewide Assessment reports that QA efforts focus on ensuring that there is consistency between the policy or required procedure and actual practice. The Statewide Assessment also reports that supervisors have an important role in ensuring quality services for children through routine clinical supervision and case consultation with caseworkers.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State has implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services. Various stakeholders indicated that quality services pertaining to children’s safety and health are addressed through the following:

- DHS policy and procedural requirements for meeting children’s physical, dental, and mental health needs
- A DHS requirement that caseworkers visit children in their out-of-home placements at least monthly and have private conversations with the children
- State licensing standards, which include training and background checks for foster caregivers and child care facility staff
- A DHS requirement that licensing caseworkers make quarterly visits to foster homes
- Provision of support services to foster caregivers
- Establishment of performance-based contracts with private providers that are monitored by DHS contract monitors
- Evaluation of services to children in foster care through clinical supervision and case reviews conducted by supervisors

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicate that the State has an identifiable QA system, it is unclear whether the system addresses key practice areas effectively, provides feedback on

findings, or evaluates program improvement measures, in part due to the recent restructuring of DHS and its QA system in early 2010. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, as an aspect of the 2003 CFSR Program Improvement Plan, Iowa implemented and has continuously operated an identifiable, statewide Quality Assurance and Improvement (QA&I) system. The QA&I system evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and addresses prioritized need areas of the service delivery system, and provides relevant analysis and reporting of the performance of the child welfare system. The Statewide Assessment reports that a significant improvement since the 2003 CFSR is the availability and accessibility of data used to assess performance and improvement.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, data from case reviews as well as administrative data regarding CFSR measures and best practices are incorporated into daily operations, which have resulted in a better understanding of priorities and informed decision-making. Additionally, DHS implemented a digital dashboard that provides performance data to caseworkers, managers, and the public.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the QA&I system incorporates the following procedures:

- Establishment of desired outcomes and expected standards of performance
- Monitoring of performance and outcomes to determine comparability to expectations
- Analyzing potential reasons for discrepancies between desired and actual performance
- Identifying and prioritizing goals for improvement
- Implementing strategies to improve performance and monitoring results to identify areas where strategies may need to be adjusted

Additionally, the QA&I process includes the following:

- Strategic focus: DHS leadership identifies key performance areas for the State that are based on CFSR measures and are determined by review and analysis of performance reports.
- Case reviews: Supervisors are required to review two cases per month for each caseworker they supervise using the Federal CFSR case reading instructions to collect data on the seven outcomes and 23 items. The supervisors provide feedback through clinical consultation with each caseworker. QA&I coordinators and local management routinely review and evaluate the data and identify areas where practice can be strengthened and devise strategies to improve practice. The data from the case reviews are compiled quarterly on a statewide basis for analysis of performance and identification of trends. Additionally, the data are used to determine focus areas both statewide and at a service-area level.
- Satisfaction surveys: Stakeholder surveys are used to collect information regarding a variety of issues such as FTMs, Safety Plan Services, FSRP, and foster parent services. Participants in these surveys include but are not limited to families involved in services, foster parents, DHS caseworkers, and guardians *ad litem*.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there is a strong feedback loop among trainers, supervisors, and QA staff. QA&I has a strong representation on the training committee, and QA&I coordinators meet with social work administrators quarterly to provide a continual feedback loop focused on practice and results. The Statewide Assessment reports that QA&I staff are members of the training committee.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review reported that, as a result of the recent DHS restructuring, QA&I staff have been moved from the local service areas to the Central Office, which provides more of a statewide perspective. Some stakeholders noted that the QA case review results generally are discussed with the assigned caseworker to improve practice.

Some stakeholders indicated that various reports are available from multiple data systems and the digital dashboard to assist in monitoring caseloads and the completion of case-related tasks. However, a few stakeholders reported that hard copies of reports sent from the Central Office generally contain data that are several months old and not helpful to supervisors.

IV. STAFF AND PROVIDER TRAINING

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

Status of Staff and Provider Training

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. The State was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- Caseworkers were not able to participate in pre-service training in a timely manner.
- Ongoing training was not readily available to DHS staff.

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

- Enhanced the availability of initial training by providing a combination of web-based training, structured on-the-job (OTJ) training, skills-based classroom training, and Iowa Communication Network trainings
- Provided supervisors with training on coaching and mentoring caseworkers on FTM facilitation
- Collaborated with the University of Iowa to develop core supervisory training
- Used technical assistance from National Resource Centers to enhance ongoing training for caseworkers

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that Iowa has training for new caseworkers that covers a 12-month period and generally is effective in preparing caseworkers for their job responsibilities. New caseworkers can begin to carry cases after the completion of a 5-day basic foundation training. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS contracts with Iowa State University (ISU) to act as the lead institution in a consortium of public and private organizations located in Iowa to develop and provide training to DHS staff. The staff development and training plan established by ISU supports the goals and objectives addressed in the title IV-B and IV-E programs covered by the CFSP.

The Training Plan describes the training required for new DHS caseworkers. Initial training combines classroom training with OTJ modules and ongoing mentoring over a 12-month period. The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that new caseworkers can begin to carry cases after the completion of a 5-day basic foundation training. To ensure consistency across the State, the OTJ training modules have standardized checklists and incorporate shadowing exercises and a journaling component using a report format that new caseworkers must complete and discuss with their supervisors. Feedback from the trainer is sent to the new caseworker and his or her supervisor after the training is completed. Participation in training is documented and monitored through the Iowa Interagency Training System. After initial training, participants complete an anonymous web-based survey used to refine the training as needed.

The Statewide Assessment notes that stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process reported that there is a feedback loop from trainers to supervisors on each staff coming through initial training.

The Coalition for Family and Children’s Services in Iowa (the Coalition) is under contract with DHS to manage child welfare private provider training. The Coalition developed a training plan that includes online training and 45 days of face-to-face sessions focused on the following topics: de-escalation, substance abuse and chemical dependency, engaging youth and families, safety planning and risk assessment, child development, clinical supervision, and the supervisor’s role in addressing caseworker stress. In March 2009, the Coalition launched the Child Welfare Provider Training Academy website (<http://iatrainingsource.org>). All details of upcoming training for child welfare provider frontline staff and supervisors are available on the website, which is updated periodically to include new training opportunities. The website accepts online registration and provides an immediate confirmation of registration.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in providing comprehensive training for new caseworkers. A few stakeholders reported that the training prepares new caseworkers, to the extent possible, for their positions in child welfare. Some stakeholders reported that the training includes classroom and online training as well as shadowing veteran caseworkers. Some stakeholders reported that new caseworkers generally do not assume a caseload until the completion of required initial training courses. A few stakeholders expressed concern that new caseworkers may have to wait a period of time before attending new caseworker classroom training.

Private provider caseworkers are contractually required to attend training that addresses the same components as DHS new caseworker training.

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that ongoing training is required and available, many stakeholders reported that budget cuts and high caseloads make it difficult for DHS caseworkers and supervisors to attend trainings. The Information Management System is able to track participation and training needs for staff. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to complete a minimum of 24 hours of child welfare training annually after completion of the initial 12 months. Ongoing training opportunities include the following:

- Local training
- Distance learning delivered via the Iowa Communications Network
- Classroom training on topics such as ICWA and assessments
- Technology and online training modules via the New Worker Guidebook

Additionally, the Statewide Assessment reports that many joint, ongoing training opportunities are available to DHS caseworkers, private provider staff, and social workers working with the Native-American population. Learning needs surveys are conducted with experienced DHS staff to determine what kinds of courses would best meet the needs of these staff. After each ongoing training course, participants complete an anonymous web-based survey that is used to refine the training as needed.

The Statewide Assessment reports that supervisors monitor caseworkers' participation in training and include comments on training in the caseworker's annual performance review. Further, the Information Management System is able to track participation and training needs for staff.

The Statewide Assessment notes that service supervisors are required to complete a minimum of 24 hours of child welfare/supervisory training annually. Supervisory training includes participating in the Recruitment and Retention grant's curriculum of Committed to Excellence Through Supervision and Supervisory Transition Training modules. Both of these trainings are funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau and are conducted through a collaboration between the University of Iowa Department of Social Work and DHS.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Although most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review reported that ongoing training is required for caseworkers and supervisors, many stakeholders indicated that budget cuts and high caseloads make it difficult to attend ongoing training. Additionally, some stakeholders reported that finding training that is relevant to the needs of DHS staff is sometimes difficult and that more ongoing training is needed for those who work with substance-abusing parents, and with parents and children with mental health issues.

Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that there are multiple training opportunities across the State available through venues reported in the Statewide Assessment and others. A key State-level stakeholder reported that ongoing training for DHS staff is tracked through the learning management system, and that if a caseworker does not complete the required 24 hours of ongoing training, this is reflected in his or her annual performance evaluation.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State mandates pre-service and ongoing training for current and prospective foster and adoptive parents. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, foster parent pre-service training is required by law as a condition of initial licensure. All adults in the household who will be co-parenting the foster child are expected to complete 30 hours of the approved, pre-service PS-MAPP training and the 1-hour individual study module, Universal Precautions in Foster and Adoptive Homes.

The PS-MAPP courses, which are offered by IKN under contract with DHS, are conducted over a period of 10 weeks. The curriculum addresses a variety of topics including basic foster care information, reasons for foster care placement, the cycle of needs and how that relates to trust and healthy attachment, the need of a resource parent to be a “loss expert,” helping children form attachments, managing behaviors, helping children maintain birth family connections, helping children leave foster care, understanding the impact of foster or adoptive care for a child, teamwork and partnership, and endings and beginnings.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders interviewed in 2009 identified the following concerns about foster parent training:

- The curriculum of PS-MAPP is of high quality, but standardized to the point of inhibiting exploration of issues that are unique to the group being taught.
- There is a lack of specific training for relatives because the PS-MAPP curriculum is geared toward non-relative caregivers.
- It can be difficult for families to find child care while they attend PS-MAPP and challenging for them to commit to the lengthy training process.
- Families in rural settings sometimes have to travel long distances to access onsite trainings.

In addition to PS-MAPP, the Statewide Assessment notes that every foster parent must complete 6 hours of training annually, 3 hours of which must be group training. Completion of these training hours is required for annual relicensure, and verification is submitted with the annual relicensure packet submitted to DHS by IKN. Foster parents receive an annual stipend for training to cover enrollment

and child care costs. The Statewide Assessment notes that foster parents can receive training from a variety of resources, but there is little guidance provided for developing a training plan to ensure that foster parents are getting the training they need.

Also indicated in the Statewide Assessment, DHS has entered into a contract with IFAPA for the provision of ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents. The Statewide Assessment notes that every service area in the State has an IFAPA liaison who is a licensed foster parent and who provides peer support and outreach to foster and adoptive parents. Although not an official trainer, the liaison provides information to foster and adoptive parents on a variety of topics, with an emphasis on navigating the DHS systems and licensing requirements. Additionally, IFAPA maintains a database of all of the registrations and attendance at each training. IFAPA trainings are offered to adoptive and unlicensed kin caregivers, although these caregivers are not required to complete the 6-hour annual training program.

The Statewide Assessment reports that IKN, IFAPA, and DHS systems track participation in foster parent training; however, they are separate systems.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State provides initial training for foster and adoptive parents through the PS-MAPP curriculum. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that the information provided in the initial training is beneficial; although, in the opinion of a few stakeholders, nothing can actually prepare someone for the reality of being a foster parent.

Most stakeholders commenting on ongoing training for foster parents expressed the opinion that ongoing training is readily available to foster parents through various forums. However, a few stakeholders raised the concern that 6 hours of ongoing training is not sufficient and a few stakeholders also suggested that ongoing training opportunities are not as readily available in rural communities as they are in more urban areas. A few stakeholders reported that foster parents who do not complete the required number of ongoing training hours are placed on a corrective action plan until they complete the required training.

A key State-level stakeholder reported that foster parents are responsible for providing IKN with verifications of training taken through sources other than IKN. Information provided by stakeholders about tracking participation in training was consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment.

V. SERVICE ARRAY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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

Status of Service Array and Resource Development

Iowa is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development. The State also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The concerns identified in the 2003 review focused on cuts in the State budget for human services that resulted in the following:

- Significant reductions in the service array and services to meet the individualized and diverse needs of children and families
- The reduction, and in some cases, elimination, of culturally appropriate and bilingual services
- A lack of key services in all areas of the State, particularly in rural areas
- Long waiting lists to receive services

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

- Expanded the Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children (CPPC) across the State
- Negotiated State-level Memoranda of Agreement with the Department of Education and DPH to address service needs
- Launched a demonstration project to preserve connections for children of color and to maintain them in their homes in order to improve their outcomes in the foster care system
- Contracted with the University of Iowa's Disproportionate Minority Resource Center for technical assistance to children of color at demonstration project sites and statewide
- Implemented Community Care services for families at low risk of abuse
- Developed a summary of the CFSR findings related to Service Array to share with Decategorization Boards (community funding boards)

- Increased wraparound and flexible funds in order to provide individualized services to children and families
- Implemented and promoted the Family Team Decision Making model to be used in FTMs

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

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that Iowa has an array of services that addresses the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families, although, as noted under item 36, this array is not consistently accessible to children and families across the State. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa has a multitude and variety of services to meet the complex needs of the children and families. DHS has strengthened the array of services for children and families through the following two methods: implementing community-based supports for families, and making changes in formal child welfare services. The Statewide Assessment reports that the service array is intended to be responsive to child and family cultural considerations and identities, connect families to informal support systems, bolster families’ protective capacities, and maintain and strengthen family connections to neighborhoods and communities.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following as being available statewide:

- Safety Plan Services
- FSRP services
- Community Care services

- The Family Development and Self-Sufficiency program, which provides in-home case management to families at risk of long-term dependency on welfare payments and FIP
- Medicaid Remedial Services Program, which provides services for Medicaid eligible children with behavioral health needs
- Court-appointed special advocates (CASAs)

The Statewide Assessment reports that Iowa instituted in 2006 and then expanded in 2007 the CMH Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services waiver. The intent of this program is to avoid placement in foster care by allowing children with behavioral health needs to be served in the community using services and supports unavailable from other mental health programs. These services can be used with traditional services to develop a comprehensive support system for children with serious emotional disturbance.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the service array is adequate to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare system, but that there are concerns about the accessibility of services due to various factors such as transportation and insufficient services in rural areas. These concerns are discussed further under item 36.

A few stakeholders also expressed the opinion that although mental health services to children are available to some degree across the State, the State does not have a child-specific mental health system that provides case management services for children, and that the lack of this system makes it difficult to obtain the appropriate mental health services for children and youth.

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that many of the services in the State’s service array are not accessible to families and children in all jurisdictions. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State is working to improve services in all communities through the CPPC approach, which is designed to ensure that children are safe from abuse and neglect and to support families. Each partnership creates a network of agencies, neighborhood groups, and families to support the overall mission of community child protection. Core members of these networks include schools, faith institutions, mental health professionals, health-care providers, substance abuse and domestic violence programs, police, child care providers, parents groups, and DHS. The Statewide Assessment reports that since the 2003 CFSR, 60 counties have established CPPCs.

The Statewide Assessment reports that transportation may be a barrier to accessing services for some families, particularly in rural areas. According to the Statewide Assessment, there are many rural areas of the State where service resources are limited. Stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process indicated that rural counties have limited services to prevent children's removal from their homes and a lack of mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

The Statewide Assessment notes that 54 of Iowa's 99 counties have been designated as Primary Care Professional Health Shortage Areas (PHSAs). Additionally, 89 of 99 counties have been designated as Mental Health PHSAs. Additionally, stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process reported numerous concerns relevant to meeting children's mental health needs, including waiting lists for mental health services, an inadequate number of inpatient beds, and a shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals who serve children.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that many services are not accessible to children and families in all jurisdictions in the State, and that transportation is not available consistently to assist families and children in accessing services. Additionally, according to some stakeholders, it is very difficult for families without Medicaid or other insurance coverage to obtain mental health and substance abuse treatment services. A few stakeholders, however, expressed the opinion that in recent years, community-based services have increased, which is an ongoing effort by DHS and communities across the State.

Various stakeholders across the three sites indicated that the following services frequently have waiting lists:

- The CMH waiver program
- Mental health evaluations
- Developmental disability services
- Substance abuse treatment

Stakeholders also identified the following services as insufficient to meet the need:

- Respite care for foster parents
- Services for fathers/men
- Dental services
- Prevention services for non-child welfare families
- Affordable housing
- Domestic violence services
- Services and interpreters for non-English speaking populations
- Foster homes, including homes for older youth and children with behavioral and other special needs
- Psychiatric services
- Behavioral/mental health services
- Support services for foster parents and relative caregivers
- Pediatricians
- IL services

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has a variety of methods for individualizing services and service planning to meet the unique needs of children and families, such as FTMs and the Child Welfare Decategorization Program (decategorization), there is a lack of culturally sensitive services and providers and a lack of interpreters for non-English speaking populations. Budget cuts, the absence and lack of many services such as mental health treatment, and limitations on services from private insurers and Medicaid, also affect individualizing services for families and children. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS caseworkers, in partnership with the family, conduct an individualized assessment of each child and family's strengths and needs and select the most appropriate available services to address concerns about the child and family and promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child. The Statewide Assessment notes that family-centered services are designed to deliver a flexible array of strategies and interventions to promote achievement of the goals of the child and family. The provider, according to the Statewide Assessment, is responsible for meeting identified needs of referred children and families. The goal is to deliver services with sufficient intensity to maintain the child's safety and restore the functioning of the child and family.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that decategorization is another process by which flexible, more individualized services can be provided at the local level. The intention of decategorization of child welfare and juvenile justice funding is to help communities achieve a system in which services are driven by client strengths and needs, rather than by the diverse eligibility requirements and service definitions of categorical programs and funding streams. Decategorization is designed to redirect child welfare and juvenile justice funding to services that are preventive, family-centered, and community-based in order to reduce the use of restrictive approaches that rely on institutional, out-of-home, and out-of-community care. The legislation requires participation by DHS, JCS, and the county.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process reported that there are a limited number of effective outpatient mental health services and that the quality of mental health services varies across the State.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed varying opinions on the State's effectiveness in individualizing services to meet the needs of children and families. Various stakeholders expressed the following concerns about the State's ability to individualize services:

- There is a lack of available appropriate services in certain areas due to budget cuts and the rural nature of some communities.
- There is a lack of culturally sensitive services to meet the needs of African-American and Native-American children and families.
- There is a lack of interpreters for non-English speaking populations.
- There is a lack of African-American service providers.
- When children enter foster care, mothers are no longer eligible for Medicaid and consequently have limited access to services, particularly mental health services, because they cannot afford to pay for them even when there is a sliding fee scale.
- Families with private insurance have difficulty obtaining mental health services due to the limitations private insurers place on these services.

Some services that may be accessible are time- or visit-limited by Medicaid or private insurance, which can result in a decrease in the effectiveness of the service.

Despite these concerns, other stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State has the capacity to individualize services to meet the needs of children and families through practices and resources including the following:

- FTMs
- Community-based services
- CPPC
- FSRP
- Pre-removal conferences
- Safety Plan Services
- Decategorization funds

Additionally, some stakeholders reported that although decategorization funds help meet the needs of the families, funding for decategorization has been reduced.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Agency Responsiveness to the Community are presented and discussed below.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that DHS engages in ongoing consultation with a broad array of key stakeholders and is effective in soliciting their input with regard to the agency's overall goals and objectives. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the following stakeholder groups provide consultation to DHS:

- The Child Welfare Advisory Committee, created in 2007 by the Iowa General Assembly to advise DHS on program and budget matters related to the provision or purchase of child welfare services
- The Child Welfare Partners Committee (CWPC), a committee of public and private agencies established because both public and private agencies recognized the need for a strong partnership
- The Child Welfare Stakeholder Panel, created in 2006 by DHS and the Children's Justice Division of the Court Administrator's Office to engage stakeholders in the CFSR and in developing the State's CFSP

The Statewide Assessment reports that the CFSP and the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) typically are presented to internal and external stakeholders for review and feedback.

The Statewide Assessment further reports that DHS has a contract with a Native-American organization that employs Native-American staff to provide technical assistance, consultation, and training to State staff on ICWA cases, issues, and best practices.

DHS, according to the Statewide Assessment, also requests input on child welfare policy and practice from the following stakeholders:

- Juvenile Court personnel
- Parents' and county attorneys
- Substance abuse treatment providers
- School personnel, including teachers
- The Education Collaborative
- Domestic violence agencies
- Mental health providers
- Medical community
- FCRB members
- Guardians *ad litem* and CASAs
- Elevate, the youth advisory board
- IFAPA
- Native-American Tribes
- CPPC
- Law enforcement

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DHS regularly seeks consultation from the courts, CPPC, other State and private agencies, and various stakeholder groups. Some stakeholders reported that the CWPC, the Coalition, the FCRB, local-level child welfare management, and the Child Welfare Stakeholder Panel participated in the development of the CFSP or provided feedback on the CFSP.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State consults with a wide range of stakeholders when developing its APSRs. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, information relevant to stakeholder input with regard to developing the CFSP (item 38) also is relevant to stakeholder input regarding the development of the APSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders reported that the CWPC and the Child Welfare Stakeholder Panel provide consultation to DHS on many issues and participate in the development of the APSR or provide feedback to DHS regarding the APSR.

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

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

Item 40 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State’s services under the CFSP generally are coordinated with the services of other Federal and Federally-assisted programs for children and families. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS coordinates its services with the following agencies:

- Department of Education, Children’s Justice Initiative, and other key community stakeholders that make up the Education Collaborative, to address issues related to the education of Iowa’s foster care youth
- DPH, which, with other health-care agencies and organizations, implements health provisions of the Fostering Connections Act and collaborates with DPH’s Division of Substance Abuse on developing substance-abuse testing protocols and services
- The Department of Human Rights, Division of Children’s Juvenile Justice Program

The Statewide Assessment also reports that coordination of services across Federal and Federally-assisted programs is facilitated by the fact that DHS is the parent agency for a range of programs serving children and families, in addition to the Division of Adult, Children and Family Services, which includes child welfare and community services. For example, DHS also includes the Bureau of Financial, Health and Work Supports, which provides FIP cash assistance, food assistance, and Medicaid for children and families, including those involved in the child welfare system; and the Division of Mental Health and Disability Services, which includes mental health institutes and the Iowa Juvenile Home.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in coordinating child welfare services with services provided by other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

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

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

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

Iowa is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The State also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

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

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State has comprehensive standards for foster family and adoptive family homes and child care institutions that were established by State statute and are reflected in DHS policy and licensing procedures. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa law and DHS policy maintain comprehensive standards for foster family and adoptive family homes and for shelter and group facilities that care for children. The Statewide Assessment reports that although DHS governs licensing decisions for shelter and group facilities, and issues the licenses and Notices of Decision, DHS contracts with the Department of Inspections and Appeals for the initial licensure, annual onsite visits, unannounced visits, and relicensure of these facilities. Additionally, DHS contracts with IKN to license and relicensure foster homes and to approve and renew adoptive homes. The Statewide Assessment reports that foster/adoptive parents are required to meet the following requirements prior to being licensed or approved:

- Completion of PS-MAPP training
- Completion of a physician's report
- An approved floor plan of the home/living space
- Names and addresses of three references
- Passing a criminal and child abuse records check

Foster home licenses are reviewed annually and certain criteria must be met prior to being relicensed by DHS, including completion of ongoing training and an annual record check. The Statewide Assessment notes that relatives are subject to the same licensing

requirements as non-relatives to receive foster care payment. Non-licensed relative placements are subject to child protection standards including the completion of criminal and child abuse record checks.

According to the Statewide Assessment, adoptive home studies are valid for 1 year and updated annually as long as the individual or family remains interested in adopting.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State has standards for family foster homes and child care facilities that are effective and comprehensive. Additionally, stakeholders reported that now there are more standards than in the past. They noted that the standards the State has established include training, health checks, fingerprint checks, criminal history checks, and CPS checks. Stakeholders noted that reviews for relicensure are conducted on foster homes and child care facilities annually.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that licensing standards are applied uniformly to all foster family homes, including licensed relative homes and to shelter and group care facilities. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS policy and procedure require that standards for foster homes and facilities be applied equally and objectively. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that DHS has administrative rules that allow the agency director to make exceptions in individual cases. Exceptions are granted at the complete discretion of the director after consideration of all relevant factors, including an assessment of whether the exception would affect the safety or health of the child. The Statewide Assessment notes that, for example, if the bedroom in the home does not allow 40 square feet per child as required by policy, but two siblings are to share the bedroom, it is likely that the director would approve an exception to policy to maintain the siblings in the placement. The Statewide Assessment also notes that there is a standardized set of criteria used when granting variances and exceptions.

Additionally, the Statewide Assessment reports that all or part of the PS-MAPP training can be waived by DHS for foster parents in accordance with State law if any of the following applies:

- The applicant has relevant training or has a combination of relevant training and experience that is an acceptable equivalent to all or a portion of the required pre-service training.
- There is good cause for the waiver based on the circumstances of the child and the applicant.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that completion of all or part of the PS-MAPP training can be waived by DHS for adoptive parent applicants if either of the following conditions is met:

- The prospective adoptive parents are foster parents who were licensed prior to December 31, 2002, and who have been caring for a foster child in their home for more than 6 months.
- The prospective adoptive parents are relatives who have cared for a related child for at least 6 months.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DHS has developed a title IV-E checklist that is used to ensure compliance for claiming IV-E funds. In addition, DHS has a title IV-E unit and several staff around the State who are responsible for case reviews to ensure compliance.

Most stakeholders interviewed during the Statewide Assessment process indicated that the State’s procedures for ensuring that title IV-E and IV-B funds are provided only to children placed in homes or child care institutions that meet full licensure standards are “very effective.” These stakeholders also reported that the procedures are applied consistently to all homes and facilities.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that standards are applied equally to all licensed foster parents and shelter and group care facilities. A few stakeholders reported that waivers and variances are issued only in certain circumstances, and the examples provided by the stakeholders were consistent with the information provided in the Statewide Assessment.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State provides for background checks and fingerprinting as a component for all licensed foster and adoptive placements, including relatives and group care staff. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS submits record checks for each person who is age 14 or older and living in the home of the foster or adoptive applicant. The record checks are done to determine whether any person in the home has a founded child abuse report or criminal conviction, or has been placed on the sex offender registry. Supplemental information amending the Statewide Assessment notes that the foster parent applicant must be fingerprinted for a national criminal history check and other individuals age 18 and older living in the home with the applicant may be fingerprinted for a national criminal history check. The Statewide Assessment reports that if the applicant or anyone living in the home has a record of founded child abuse or a criminal conviction, or has been placed on the sex offender registry, DHS will not license the applicant as a foster parent or approve that applicant as an adoptive parent unless an evaluation determines that the abuse or criminal conviction does not warrant prohibition of license. The evaluation of the finding considers the nature and seriousness of the founded child abuse or crime in relation to the position sought or held, the time elapsed since the circumstances under which the abuse or crime was committed, the degree of rehabilitation, the likelihood that the person will commit the abuse or crime again, and the number of abuses or crimes committed by the person.

The Statewide Assessment also reports the following information relevant to this item:

- Adoptive families that have an approved study have annual criminal and child abuse record checks.
- There is a standardized process in place for record check evaluations.
- Criminal records checks are part of title IV-E compliance requirements.
- The establishment of staff dedicated to title IV-E compliance has bolstered efforts to ensure that criminal records checks are completed on foster and adoptive parents.
- Although DHS policy requires annual checks for foster parents, current law does not require annual records checks for foster parents and facility staff.
- Stakeholders reported that the State has a “very effective” process in place for conducting criminal background clearances on prospective foster and adoptive parents before licensing or approving them to care for children, and applies the process consistently and in a timely manner to foster and adoptive caregivers statewide.
- Staff of shelters and group care facilities are required to undergo criminal and child abuse background checks and DHS is responsible for evaluating negative record check findings for facility staff.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review reported that criminal record, CPS, sexual offender registry and fingerprint checks are required for all people 14 years of age and older residing in the prospective foster home.

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

Strength

 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that although each service area has a recruitment plan, the State does not consistently focus on recruiting potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in foster care. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, IKN is contractually responsible for establishing foster and adoptive family recruitment plans for each service area. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the recruitment plans are to be based on a needs assessment of each service area, including a review of data relevant to each area that is provided to IKN by DHS. The Statewide Assessment reports that at a minimum, IKN's area-based recruitment plans should meet the following requirements:

- Recruitment targets must reflect the child population and child demographics.
- Strategies must be developed to recruit resource families from minority populations, with specific emphasis on recruiting African-American, Hispanic, and Native-American resource families.
- Strategies must be developed to recruit families for specific populations such as adolescents, large sibling groups, and children with mental and physical challenges.

The Statewide Assessment notes that IKN and service area recruitment teams meet monthly to review strategies, discuss the effectiveness of strategies, and make necessary adjustments to area plans. Strategies that demonstrate effectiveness in one service area are shared across the State.

The Statewide Assessment reports that recruitment plans developed in the service areas established numerical goals for increasing the number of families in each area. Some areas established numerical goals for targeted recruitment categories as defined by the area recruitment and retention teams. The Statewide Assessment notes that in Sioux City, which has a large population of Native-American and Hispanic families, there are two additional specialized units within the Sioux City Area Recruitment team to serve those families.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process rated the State as only "sometimes" effective with regard to a comprehensive recruitment plan, and that funding for recruitment historically has been inadequate. The Statewide Assessment also acknowledges that although improvements have been made in the area of recruitment, further improvements are needed.

According to the Statewide Assessment, IKN also works in collaboration with DHS and IFAPA to retain foster and adoptive families. Retention efforts include activities such as holding special local and statewide events, recognizing foster and adoptive families in local media outlets, and engaging licensed foster families and approved adoptive families in recruitment activities.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that recruitment plans are established by service areas and are based on the needs of each service area. Additionally, goals also are established for recruiting homes for minorities and children with special needs. A key State-level stakeholder reported that all recruitment goals have been met through the contract with IKN except for the goal of recruiting more minority foster homes.

According to some stakeholders, although there are some recruitment efforts targeting families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care, this is not a widespread practice, and there is a need for more foster homes for African-American and Native-American children. Additionally, some stakeholders reported that the State needs foster homes for older youth, sibling groups, and children with high-end special needs.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that the State has a process in place for using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements. This item also was rated as a Strength in Iowa's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DHS has a statewide process in place to expedite adoptive placements across counties within the State. Iowa law requires that if an adoptive home has not been located, a child must be placed on the Iowa Adoption Exchange System (IAES) 60 days after TPR and assignment of guardianship to the State. If a placement is not found 90 days after the child is registered on IAES, Iowa law requires that the child must be registered on a national electronic exchange and electronic photo listing system. Additionally, the Statewide Assessment reports that the State has a Wendy's Wonderful Kids adoption program that recruits adoptive families for children and also registers children free for adoption with the State's Heart Gallery and on the IKN website.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, IKN completes the foster and adoptive home studies referred through ICPC and the State abides by the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006. Through an established process, the Compact Administrator and local DHS offices ensure that IKN receives the requests in a timely manner. IKN also has a 60-day timeframe for processing relative home studies. According to the Statewide Assessment, IKN has implemented text and e-mail alerts to potential adoptive parents.

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process determined that the State usually is effective in seeking homes across jurisdictional boundaries for children in need of placement, by listing them in appropriate exchanges or other means, and placing children in appropriate homes when identified.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in the use of cross-jurisdictional resources on behalf of children awaiting permanency. However, some stakeholders noted that using the ICPC is a time-consuming process.