

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: South Carolina Child and Family Services Review
March 2010

INTRODUCTION

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

The South Carolina CFSR was conducted the week of July 27, 2009. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2008, through July 31, 2009. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS)
- 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, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 17 cases in Aiken County, 17 cases in Beaufort County, and 31 cases in Greenville 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 FY 2003 CFSR.

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes

South Carolina did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes. The State did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the following individual indicators:

- Repeat maltreatment (item 2)
- Proximity of foster care placement (item 11)

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

Although the State's performance on Well-Being Outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs) did not meet the required 95-percent level for substantial conformity, performance on this outcome was fairly high; the outcome was substantially achieved in 85.7 percent of the cases. In addition, although the State's performance on the items pertaining to timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment and addressing the educational needs children did not reach the 90-percent level required for an overall rating of Strength, at least 87.5 percent and 86 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 South Carolina in making positive changes in its practice and in enhancing services to children and families served by the child welfare system. SCDSS leadership has forged a new spirit of collaboration with key partners in the State and in individual communities to better coordinate and integrate key services and funding sources, for example, the No Wrong Door Project. In addition, SCDSS leadership has worked to strengthen the internal capacity to implement and sustain systemic change, such as appointing a county director for each county to engage the local community and, in spite of economic challenges, and it has reduced caseloads for child welfare staff providing a key foundation for enhancing best practice. The State also has continued to strengthen its quality assurance (QA) review process, including engaging county leadership and staff in the process in a supportive manner. SCDSS and the South Carolina Court Administration have forged a partnership to develop a case management application that will enhance the State's ability to track cases more accurately as they move through the child welfare system.

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

- The State was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) with the outcome substantially achieved in only 25 percent of the applicable cases.

- The State was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 (The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children) with the outcome substantially achieved in only 38.5 percent of the applicable cases.
- The State was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs) with the outcome substantially achieved in only 33.8 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 9, pertaining to adoption, was rated as a Strength in only 18 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 13, pertaining to visiting with parents and siblings in foster care, was rated as a Strength in 45 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 16, pertaining relationship of child in care with parents, was rated as a Strength in only 30 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 17, pertaining to needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents, was rated as a Strength in only 30 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 18, pertaining to child and family involvement in case planning, was rated as a Strength in 44 percent of the applicable cases.
- Item 20, pertaining to caseworker visits with parents, was rated as a Strength in only 35 percent of applicable cases.
- The State did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness of adoptions, permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods, or placement stability.

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

- Statewide budget cuts affect the availability and accessibility of services across the State, especially for families without Medicaid or other insurance coverage.
- The lack of a clearly defined family-centered practice model that contributes to engaging parents consistently in case planning, assessment of needs and services, and visitation with their children, affects safety, permanency, and well-being of families.
- There were casework practice differences between foster care cases and in-home services cases, as evidenced by higher item ratings for foster care cases compared to in-home services cases.
- The shortage of foster homes affects appropriate matching of children to foster parents and overuse of institutional placements, such as emergency shelters and group homes.
- Court system issues contribute to delays in hearings, notifications, scheduling problems, and the lack of adequate judicial reviews of cases.
- Policy and practice standards for new reports on open cases are not clearly defined, which results in inaccurate data on maltreatment recurrence and maltreatment in foster care and affects the State’s ability to make effective case decisions based on child and family history with SCDSS.

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors

With regard to systemic factors, South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Statewide Information System, QA System, Staff and Provider Training, Agency Responsiveness to the Community, and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing,

Recruitment, and Retention. The State is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors pertaining to Case Review System or 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.

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 83.3 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 100 percent of applicable Aiken County cases, 100 percent of applicable Beaufort County cases, and 71 percent of applicable Greenville County cases. However, the State met the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence within 6 months and to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

The case reviews found that, in the majority of cases, there was an absence of maltreatment recurrence within a 6-month period. However, the Case reviews also found that the agency was not consistent in initiating a response to a maltreatment report within the timeframes established by State policy.

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

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

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

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 58.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 53 percent of applicable Aiken County cases, 65 percent of applicable Beaufort County cases, and 58 percent of applicable Greenville County cases.

The 2009 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 initial and ongoing safety and risk assessments, or safety and risk assessments were conducted and services to address the concerns were not provided.

South Carolina 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 CFSR:

- The State did not consistently make sufficient efforts to ensure the safety of children when they remained in their homes.
- A lack of comprehensive assessments in some cases resulted in the underlying problems in the family not being identified or addressed.
- In some cases, children were removed from the home either because services were not provided or because services were not sufficient to address the family's underlying problems.

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

- Developed, implemented, and mandated a supervisory review process and trained staff on the review tool and requirements
- identified and implemented supervisory and technical assistance (TA) staff training targeted at enhancing mentoring, coaching, and clinical skills
- Reviewed, revised, and provided training to child welfare staff to enhance skills in conducting family assessments, specifically risk and safety assessments
- Reviewed and revised policy and provided training on diligent search, paternal engagement, relative placement support, targeted case management language, and timelines for reassessment
- Modified the Child and Adult Protective Services System (CAPSS) to enhance the State's ability to track in-home relative placements and monthly caseworker visits, and provided training on the modifications
- Involved the Children's Bureau-funded National Resource Centers (NRC) in a comprehensive review, revision, redesign, and training of assessment policies, tools, training, and practice

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

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

Six items are incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all of the foster care cases reviewed. The items pertain to State efforts to prevent foster care reentry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner, as well as seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 7). Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining items focus on an assessment of State efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have a case goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) are in stable long-term placements and are adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 25 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 40 percent of Aiken County cases, 40 percent of Beaufort County cases, and 10 percent of Greenville County cases. In addition to case review findings, South Carolina did not meet the national data indicators pertaining to timeliness of adoptions, permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods, and placement stability. However, the State met the national standard for the national data indicator pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification.

The 2009 CFSR identified the following concerns in many of the cases:

- The State was not consistently effective in preventing reentry into foster care.
- 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.
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA.
- 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.

South Carolina 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 CFSR:

- The State did not ensure children's placement stability while in foster care.
- Shelter care was used extensively, sometimes for prolonged periods of time.
- The State did not consistently establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.
- There was a lack of concurrent planning.
- Reunification remained the permanency goal for extended, unwarranted lengths of time.

- The State did not make diligent efforts to achieve children’s permanency goals in a timely manner, which in some cases resulted in OPPLA being applied by default.
- The State did not make concerted efforts to achieve reunification in a timely manner.
- There were extensive delays in SCDSS filing for TPR.
- There were court-related delays due to overcrowded court dockets and the granting of continuances for TPR hearings.

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

- Developed, with the assistance of an NRC, county-specific recruitment plans and targeted recruitment strategies to increase the number of foster homes
- Assessed foster parent’s needs through surveys and followed up on identified needs with enhanced support and targeted training
- Developed procedures to monitor key case activities, including caseworker home visits, appropriate placement matching, occurrence of family meetings, court-related functions, case planning, and assessments
- Revised policy and provided training for child welfare staff, foster parents, court staff, and attorneys regarding permanency and placement stability
- Developed procedures related to concurrent planning such as policy revisions, training of agency staff and court personnel on concurrent planning, and monitoring cases open for at least 6 months for concurrent planning
- Developed procedures to address deficits in judicial and legal staff training, court processes, legislative actions, and SCDSS practices related to permanency and placement stability

The State did not meet its goal of completing all action steps proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period. There were additional strategies that were proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan that were not implemented. Those strategies are not included in the Final Report.

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 placing children in foster care near their parents and close relatives (item 11); placing siblings together (item 12); ensuring frequent visitation among children, their parents, and their siblings in foster care (item 13); preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and promoting relationships between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 38.5 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 30 percent of Aiken County cases, 80 percent of Beaufort County cases, and 21 percent of Greenville County cases.

The 2009 CFSR found that the State was effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents. However, the 2009 CFSR also identified the following concerns in many of the cases:

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

South Carolina also was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 during its 2003 CFSR and was required to address this outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in promoting visitation between children in foster care with their parents, especially their fathers, or with their siblings in foster care.
- The State did not consistently seek relatives as placement resources.
- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families and to their culture and community.
- The State was not consistent in promoting the relationship between children and their parents, especially fathers.

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

- Developed and implemented monitoring procedures to track performance improvement related to family and foster parent involvement as team members, visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings, identification and assessment of relatives as potential placement resources, and involvement of noncustodial parents and other relatives
- Developed and implemented strategies to revise policy, procedures, and manuals specific to visitation
- Provided training to staff and foster parents using Family to Family principles to strengthen the engagement of foster parents as team members
- Provided cultural diversity training to child welfare staff and foster parents

The State did not meet its goal of completing all action steps proposed in the State's Program Improvement Plan for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period. There were additional strategies that were proposed in the State's Program Improvement Plan that were not implemented. Those strategies are not included in the Final Report.

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

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

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 38.5 percent of cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 29 percent of Aiken County cases, 41 percent of Beaufort County cases, and 32 percent of Greenville County cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 40 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 24 percent of the 25 in-home services cases.

The 2009 CSFR identified the following concerns in many of the cases reviewed:

- The State was generally effective in assessing and meeting the needs of children receiving foster care services. However, the State was not consistent in assessing and meeting the needs of children receiving in-home services, foster parents, mothers, and fathers.
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to involve children, mothers, and fathers in case planning in both the foster care and in-home services cases, although children in the foster care cases were more likely to be involved than children in the in-home services cases.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children were not sufficient to ensure the child's safety and well-being.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

South Carolina also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 during its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The following concerns were identified in the 2003 CFSR:

- The State was not consistent in assessing and addressing the service needs of children, parents, or foster parents.
- The State was not consistent in involving parents and children in the case planning process.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with children and parents was not of sufficient quality or quantity to ensure the children's safety or well-being.
- The lack of working with fathers in assessment, service delivery, engagement, case planning, and visitation was noted as a particular concern.

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

- Revised Child Protective Services policy related to assessment, case planning, and caseworker visits with parents and children, and provided training on the policy revisions

- Developed and implemented procedures to monitor performance improvement in key well-being areas including assessment; caseworker visits with parents and children; and parent, child, and foster parent involvement in case planning
- Modified reports to track visitation compliance
- Implemented supervisory and TA staff training targeted at enhancing mentoring, coaching, and clinical skills

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).

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85.7 percent of the 35 applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 78 percent of Aiken County cases, 75 percent of Beaufort County cases, and 94 percent of Greenville County cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 100 percent of the 27 applicable foster care cases and 37.5 percent of the 8 applicable in-home services cases.

The 2009 CFSR found that the educational needs of children in foster care were being assessed and addressed appropriately and adequately. However, in several of the applicable in-home services cases, educational needs were not assessed or addressed, although education-related concerns were apparent and a reason for agency contact.

South Carolina also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 during its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The key concern identified in the 2003 CFSR was that the State did not consistently make concerted efforts to ensure that educational needs were assessed and appropriate services provided. To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Reviewed and revised guidelines, policy, and procedures for educational assessment and implemented a protocol to monitor assessments
- Developed and implemented the Education Passport for children in foster care

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

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

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

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 74.6 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 77 percent of Aiken County cases, 69 percent of Beaufort County cases, and 77 percent of Greenville County cases. In addition, the outcome was substantially achieved in 82.5 percent of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 58 percent of the 19 applicable in-home services cases.

The 2009 CFSR found that in general, physical, dental, and mental health needs of children in foster care were appropriately assessed and adequately addressed. However, the 2009 CFSR also found that for several children in the in-home services cases, physical and mental health needs were not adequately assessed and/or addressed.

South Carolina also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 during its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan. The key concern identified in the 2003 CFSR was that although children often were being assessed for service needs, they were not receiving needed medical, dental, and mental health services. To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented training for child welfare staff related to assessing and monitoring the physical and mental health needs of children and established monitoring protocols
- Developed and implemented the Medical Passport for children in foster care
- Partnered with the South Carolina Dental Association to arrange for free dental care for children in foster care

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.

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System in the 2009 CFSR. The 2009 CFSR determined that South Carolina's information system, CAPSS, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care, including the placement location of children placed with a private agency.

South Carolina 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).

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The 2009 CFSR determined that the State provides for the periodic review for each child in foster care at least once every 6 months by the Foster Care Review Board. Additionally, courts in some jurisdictions conduct interim reviews routinely. However, the CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- Although the State provides a process to ensure that each child has a written case plan that is routinely reviewed and updated, parental involvement in case planning is inconsistent across the State.
- Permanency hearings are not consistently held in a timely manner in all areas of the State.
- The time allotted for permanency hearings is sometimes insufficient, and frequently "corridor agreements" are made between the parties without a thorough review by the court.
- Although the State has a process for filing a petition for TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA, filing for TPR is sometimes delayed due to insufficient legal resources and due to SCDSS and the court providing parents with extensions to continue to work toward reunification.
- Notification to caregivers about hearings and reviews involving the children in their care is not occurring consistently across the State.

South Carolina also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following key concerns were identified in the 2003 CFSR:

- The State was not consistent in involving parents in the case planning process.
- The State was not consistent in conducting timely permanency hearings for children in foster care.
- The State was not consistent in filing for TPR in a timely manner.

- The State was not consistent in notifying foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of hearings and providing them with an opportunity to have input into the hearings.

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

- Developed protocols to monitor performance related to parental involvement in case planning, timeliness of permanency hearings, counties with backlogged TPRs, and the extent to which caregivers were given opportunities to be heard
- Established a statewide baseline to track the timeliness of hearings in each county
- Developed guidelines regarding dual-track cases to prevent delays in holding permanency hearings
- Addressed statutory requirements, judicial education, and development of statewide protocols relating to notification to foster parents of hearings

The State did not meet its goal of completing all action steps proposed in the State's Program Improvement Plan for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period. There were additional strategies that were proposed in the State's Program Improvement Plan that were not implemented. Those strategies are not included in the Final Report.

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).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The 2009 CFSR determined that the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided with quality services that protect their health and safety and that the State has a functioning QA system that addresses key practice areas and provides feedback on key findings.

South Carolina 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.

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.

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. The 2009 CFSR determined that the State provides child welfare training to new caseworkers and ensures that caseworkers are trained on relevant issues prior to assuming a caseload. Additionally, the State requires ongoing training for all child welfare staff and provides initial and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents that are readily available across the State.

South Carolina 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.

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)?

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development. The 2009 CFSR determined that the State has an appropriate array of key services to meet the needs of children and families. However, the 2009 CFSR also identified the following concerns:

- Some key services are not available in all jurisdictions of the State.
- There is a scarcity of key services, such as psychological evaluations and mental health and substance abuse treatment services, which results in waiting lists for these services.

Individualizing services to meet the unique needs of children and families is hampered by the lack of adequate flexible funding resources, the absence of many services in various areas of the State, the need for parents to pay for basic services because of a lack of SCDSS funds, and a lack of language-specific and culturally responsive services for the Hispanic community.

South Carolina also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan. The following key concerns were identified in the 2003 CFSR:

- The State had service gaps in key areas (particularly substance abuse and quality mental health services) that affected the achievement of safety and permanency for children.
- Existing services were not consistently available throughout the State.

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

- Conducted a needs assessment survey of available services and potential service gaps, including the availability of foster homes, for all counties and made the findings available to constituents

- Worked with the South Carolina Dental Association to arrange for free dental care for children in foster care
- Created a statewide directory of dental providers accepting Medicaid
- Worked with the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to expand services statewide

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 (APSR) (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).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The 2009 CFSR determined the following:

- There are multiple organizations and stakeholders that provide consultation to the State with regard to the goals and objectives of CFSPs and in preparing APSRs.
- The State's child welfare agency services are coordinated with the services and benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs.

South Carolina 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).

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The 2009 CFSR determined that the State has standards for foster family homes, group homes, and child care institutions and that the State applies the same standards to all licensed residential facilities and foster and adoptive homes, including relative homes. Additionally, the State provides for background checks and fingerprinting as a component for all licensed foster and adoptive placements, including relatives and child care institution staff, and effectively uses cross-jurisdictional adoption exchanges to support

permanent placements for children. However, the 2009 CFSR also identified that although the State has a recruitment plan that operates at local, regional, and State levels and is monitored by the State, the plan does not focus on recruiting foster and adoptive families who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children in State custody or in recruiting foster and adoptive families to meet particular needs, such as homes for older youth.

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

Table 1. South Carolina 2009 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	83.3	2 Yes		
Item 1. Timeliness of investigations				ANI	87.5
Item 2. Repeat maltreatment				Strength	94
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	58.5			
Item 3. Services to protect children in home				ANI	72
Item 4. Risk of harm				ANI	58
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	25	1 Yes, 3 No		
Item 5. Foster care reentry				ANI	80
Item 6. Stability of foster care placements				ANI	57.5
Item 7. Permanency goal for child				ANI	67.5
Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	63
Item 9. Adoption				ANI	18
Item 10. Other planned living arrangement				ANI	50
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	38.5			
Item 11. Proximity of placement				Strength	100
Item 12. Placement with siblings				ANI	72
Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	45
Item 14. Preserving connections				ANI	55
Item 15. Relative placement				ANI	50
Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	30

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

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

Table 2. South Carolina 2009 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	33.8		
Item 17. Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	42
Item 18. Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	44
Item 19. Caseworker visits with child			ANI	69
Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents			ANI	35
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	85.7		
Item 21. Educational needs of child			ANI	86
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	74.6		
Item 22. Physical health of child			ANI	82
Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of child			ANI	77.5

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

** Items may be rated as Strengths or as Areas Needing Improvement (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. South Carolina 2009 CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	Yes	3	
Item 24. The State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or, within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care			Strength
Case Review System	No	2	
Item 25. The State provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions			ANI
Item 26. The State provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review			Strength
Item 27. The State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter			ANI
Item 28. The State provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act			ANI
Item 29. The State provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child			ANI
Quality Assurance System	Yes	4	
Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of 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			Strength
Staff and Provider Training	Yes	4	
Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services			Strength
Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			Strength
Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children			Strength

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
South Carolina Child and Family Services Review
March 2010

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 South Carolina. 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 South Carolina CFSR was conducted the week of July 27, 2009. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2008, through July 31, 2009. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS)
- 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, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 17 cases in Aiken County, 17 cases in Beaufort County, and 31 cases in Greenville 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		
Open prior to the period under review	32 (80%)	16 (64%)
Open during the period under review	8 (20%)	9 (36%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	10 (25%)	NA
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than 10	24 (60%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	1 (2.5%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	5 (12.5%)	*
16 and older	10 (25%)	*
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native Non-Hispanic	0	*
Asian Non-Hispanic	0	*
Black Non-Hispanic	16 (40%)	*
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic	0	*
Hispanic (of any race)	3 (7.5%)	*
White Non-Hispanic	15 (37.5%)	*
Unknown/Unable to Determine	0	*
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	6 (15%)	*
Primary reason for opening case		
Physical abuse	7 (17.5%)	4 (16%)
Sexual abuse	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Emotional maltreatment	0	0
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	18 (45%)	7 (28%)
Medical neglect	0	2 (8%)
Abandonment	2 (5%)	0
Mental/physical health of parent	0	0
Substance abuse by parent	10 (25%)	5 (20%)
Child's behavior	1 (2.5%)	0
Domestic violence in child's home	0	6 (24%)
Child in juvenile justice system	0	0
Other	1 (2.5%)	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 South Carolina 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 South Carolina’s status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State’s first CFSR report, which was held in fiscal year (FY) 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	6	4	10	20	83.3
Partially Achieved	0	0	4	4	16.7
Not Achieved	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Cases	6	4	14	24	
Not Applicable Cases	11	13	17	41	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	100%	100%	71%		

Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards			
National Data Indicators	National Standard (%)	State's Percentage	Meets Standards?
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6+	97.2	Yes
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68+	99.81	Yes

Status of Safety Outcome 1

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 83.3 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. However, the State met the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. 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.

Key Findings of the 2009 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 **Area Needing Improvement**

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 24 (37 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no 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.

South Carolina law requires that all investigations of alleged child maltreatment be initiated within 24 hours of the agency accepting a report. Agency policy requires that a response priority be given to each case accepted for investigation. If the allegation suggests that a child might be in immediate danger, the investigation must be initiated within 2 hours. If the allegation suggests that a child is not in immediate danger, the investigation must be initiated within 24 hours. State policy requires that, if at all possible, the investigation be initiated with a face-to-face contact with the child. If that is not possible, the investigation may be initiated with a face-to-face contact with the parent or caregiver or with someone who has knowledge of the child's situation and condition.

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

Item 1 Ratings	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	6	4	11	21	87.5
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	3	3	12.5
Total Applicable Cases	6	4	14	24	
Not Applicable	11	13	17	41	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	100%	100%	79%		

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 21 cases when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy. It was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in three cases when the investigation was not initiated within the required timeframes. In the three cases rated as Area Needing Improvement, all reports had been assigned as a 24-hour priority.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 87.5 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 was rated as a Strength in South Carolina 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS has two ways of measuring its performance: the Dashboard Report, which allows counties to review their statuses in relation to other counties and to the State average; and the SCDSS quality assurance (QA) process, the county Child Welfare Services Reviews (CWSR). CWSR percentages are based on the 18 reviews that usually are completed each calendar year (CY) and the approximately 360 cases reviewed each year.

The following data relevant to the timeliness of investigations were reported in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSRs, the item pertaining to timeliness of investigations was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 98 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, 97.28 percent of investigations were initiated in a timely manner.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that SCDSS generally responds to referrals of child abuse and neglect in a timely manner.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 18 (28 percent) of the 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	5	4	8	17	94
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	6
Total Applicable Cases	5	4	9	18	
Not Applicable	12	13	22	47	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	100%	100%	89%		

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 17 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 one case when there were two substantiated maltreatment reports on the family within a 4-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 38 cases, there were fewer than three reports.
- In 20 cases, there were at least three reports but fewer than eight reports.
- In four cases, there were at least 8 reports but fewer than 11 reports.
- In three cases, there were at least 11 reports, with one case having 22 reports.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 94 percent of the applicable cases, there was no recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month period. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 2 also was rated as a Strength in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

The following data relevant to maltreatment recurrence were reported in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSRs, the item pertaining to the recurrence of maltreatment while the child was under the agency’s protective custody was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 92 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, 88.28 percent of treatment cases did not have a new, “founded” intake during the 12-month reporting period.

According to the Statewide Assessment, when a report is received alleging abuse or neglect of a child already involved in an open case, the caseworker and supervisor determine whether the information received should be dealt with as part of the current investigation and service plan, or if a separate investigation is required. According to SCDSS policy, if the new information is consistent with the original report or does not allege a new incident, the information may be used to assist in the current investigation/assessment or in the delivery of treatment services. If the information is different from that which has been investigated or is a new incident, policy requires that an investigation be completed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that they have seen cases with maltreatment recurrence. Additionally, a few stakeholders reported that in some situations, reports alleging child abuse or neglect are not being formally investigated if there is an open case on the family, particularly if the allegation is similar in type to the allegation that resulted in the case being opened. Instead, the caseworker managing the case is informed about the allegation. Because of this practice, the incidence of maltreatment reported to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System may not reflect the actual incidence.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	9	11	18	38	58.5
Partially Achieved	3	2	6	11	16.9
Not Achieved	5	4	7	16	24.6
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	53%	65%	58%		

Status of Safety Outcome 2

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 58.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The State 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 consistently make sufficient efforts to ensure the safety of children who remained in their homes.
- There was a lack of comprehensive assessments in some cases that resulted in the underlying problems in the family not being identified or addressed.
- In some cases, children were removed from the home either because services were not provided or because services were not sufficient to address the family's underlying problems.

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

- Developed, implemented, and mandated a supervisory review process and trained staff on the review tool and requirements
- Identified and implemented supervisory and technical assistance (TA) staff training targeted at enhancing mentoring, coaching, and clinical skills
- Reviewed, revised, and provided training to child welfare staff to enhance skills in conducting family assessments, specifically risk and safety assessments
- Reviewed and revised policy and provided training regarding diligent search, paternal engagement, relative placement support, Targeted Case Management language, and timelines for reassessment
- Modified the Child and Adult Protective Services System (CAPSS) to enhance the State's ability to track in-home relative placements and monthly caseworker's visits and provided training on the modifications
- Involved the Children's Bureau-funded National Resource Centers in a comprehensive review, revision, redesign, and training of assessment policies, tools, training, and practice

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

Key Findings of the 2009 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 Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 39 (60 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	7	6	15	28	72
Area Needing Improvement	3	3	5	11	28
Total Applicable Cases	10	9	20	39	
Not Applicable	7	8	11	26	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	70%	67%	75%		

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

- Although no services were provided when the child was removed from the home, the removal was necessary to ensure the safety of the child (four cases).
- Services were provided to the family to ensure the safety of the child and prevent removal (18 cases).
- Services were provided after reunification (two cases).
- Efforts were made to provide services prior to removal and/or reentry (four 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: day care services, domestic violence services, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, aftercare services, anger management services, parenting classes, financial assistance, vocational rehabilitation, translator services, and in-home nursing.

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 (four cases).
- Services were provided, but they did not target the key safety concern in the family, leaving the children at risk in the home (two cases).
- Services were not provided after reunification to ensure children’s ongoing safety and to prevent reentry (one case).
- Services were not provided to protect the children in the home and the children were subsequently removed (four cases).

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 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 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, policy requires that caseworkers make reasonable efforts to maintain children in their homes when possible. When the risks in the home prevent children from remaining in their home, policy requires that caseworkers assess maternal and paternal relatives to determine if any of them are willing and able to care for the children while SCDSS works to reduce risks in the children's home.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to the provision (or arrangement) of services to the family to protect the child in his or her home and to prevent removal was rated as a Strength in 77 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 80 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that most of the cases rated as Area Needing Improvement were in-home treatment cases, and that the treatment plans in these cases often referred parents and children to services that were unavailable, inaccessible, and/or of poor quality. The Statewide Assessment also notes that safety plans sometimes involved placing children with temporary caregivers without doing background checks or other types of assessment to determine the caregiver's suitability.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, in January 2009, the University of South Carolina (USC) conducted a survey of county SCDSS staff to determine their perceptions of service availability across the State. The survey found the following:

- The highest category of perceived need statewide was in the area of in-home services, particularly family group conferencing, non-DSS homemaker services, respite care for parents, flexible funds, and wraparound services.
- The second highest category of need was residential treatment services, including residential treatment for children, adolescents, and adults; inpatient substance abuse treatment; and inpatient mental health treatment.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in the current economic climate it is a challenge to provide services from providers such as homemakers or parent aides. Additionally, the series of budget reductions that the Agency is currently experiencing is causing SCDSS to reduce or terminate service contracts and freeze hiring.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Various stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the following opinions regarding the State's effectiveness in protecting children in their homes and preventing removal or reentry into foster care:

- SCDSS provides services to families, but once the case is closed and the services cease, recurrence of maltreatment or reentry into foster care may occur.
- Although SCDSS attempts to put services in place, the needed services are not always available due to budget cuts.
- Relative caregivers are not always provided the services needed, including financial assistance.

In addition, a few stakeholders reported that the State addresses the issues of risk in the home by placing children temporarily with relatives instead of placing children in foster care.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	9	11	18	38	58
Area Needing Improvement	8	6	13	27	42
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	53%	65%	58%		

Item 4 was rated as a Strength 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 the children’s home or in the children’s foster home and addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

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

- There was no initial safety or risk assessment (three cases).
- There was no ongoing safety and risk assessment in the child’s home during the period under review (15 cases).
- There was no ongoing safety and risk assessment in the foster home during the period under review (two cases).
- There were continued risk concerns in the home that were not addressed and/or monitored by the agency, and the children were at risk in the home (five cases).
- The case was closed, or the child was reunified without a safety and risk assessment (six cases).
- There was no ongoing safety plan (three cases).
- There was risk of harm or safety issues during visitation with parents and other relatives, and the agency did not address those issues (one case).
- There were no ongoing safety and risk assessments of children remaining in the home after one or more of the children were removed (one case).
- Safety and risk were assessed but services were not provided to address the concerns (four cases).
- Although a new incident of child maltreatment occurred while the case was open, a formal report was not made (three cases).

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 58 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 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, when SCDSS decides that children can be cared for safely either in their homes or in the home of relatives, a safety plan is developed with the parents and caregivers. The safety plan must describe the safety concerns and the specific actions or services that will be used to modify the concerns. The safety plan remains in effect throughout the investigation period (up to 45 days) and as long as there are concerns about the child's safety.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that SCDSS policy requires that caseworkers must conduct ongoing risk assessments for all children in the family, including the siblings of children in foster care who continue to reside in the home with the parents. When a child in an in-home treatment case is placed with a relative, policy requires that all members of that relative's household be assessed to ensure the safety of the children placed with them. The Statewide Assessment indicates that assessing for risk and safety is a primary function of the monthly caseworker's visits with children in both in-home and foster care cases.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to the identification of risk of harm in the child's home and efforts to remove risk of harm was rated as a Strength in 69 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 78 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers found that the risk to children in the home often is not reduced because of the agency's failure to assess the needs of paramours who live in the home or who spend a lot of time in the home.

The Statewide Assessment notes that SCDSS has an Out of Home Abuse and Neglect (OHAN) unit that investigates all alleged incidents of abuse and neglect in foster homes and child care facilities. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, more than 90 percent of OHAN investigations conclude that no abuse or neglect occurred but that regulatory issues exist.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed different opinions about the effectiveness of SCDSS in assessing risk and managing safety, and on the effectiveness of the assessment tool. Some stakeholders noted that the agency often engages families in developing a safety plan that keeps the child safe. Additionally, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that the recently revised assessment tool is beneficial in determining the needs of and services needed by families. However, several stakeholders expressed concern that the assessment tool does not thoroughly address the issues in the family. Additionally, some stakeholders expressed concern about children's safety because referrals to SCDSS sometimes are screened out inappropriately, and numerous referrals must be made on a family before one is accepted for investigation. A few stakeholders also reported that, in some situations, reports alleging child abuse or neglect are not being formally investigated if there is an open case on the family, particularly if the allegation is similar in type to

the allegation that resulted in the case being opened. Instead, the caseworker managing the case is informed about the allegation. Additionally, mandated reporters do not consistently receive notification if referrals they made are accepted for investigation.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	4	4	2	10	25
Partially Achieved	6	6	16	28	70
Not Achieved	0	0	2	2	5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Substantially Achieved by Site	40%	40%	10%		

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+	140.4	Yes
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4+	91.2	No
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7+	77.0	No
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5+	74.2	No

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 25 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. In addition to case review findings, although South Carolina met the national standard for timeliness and permanency of reunification, the State did not meet the national standards for the other three national data indicators pertaining to permanency, as shown in the table above. The State 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 ensure children’s placement stability while in foster care.
- Shelter care was used extensively, sometimes for prolonged periods of time.
- The State did not consistently establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.
- There was a lack of concurrent planning.
- Reunification remained the permanency goal for extended, unwarranted lengths of time.
- The State did not make diligent efforts to achieve children’s permanency goals in a timely manner, which in some cases resulted in the permanency plan of other planned permanency living arrangement (OPPLA) being applied by default.
- The State did not make concerted efforts to achieve reunification in a timely manner.
- There were extensive delays in SCDSS filing for termination of parental rights (TPR).
- There were court-related delays due to overcrowded court dockets and the granting of continuances for TPR hearings.

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

- Developed, with the assistance of a National Resource Center, county-specific recruitment plans and targeted recruitment strategies to increase the number of foster homes
- Assessed foster parents’ needs through surveys and followed up on identified needs with enhanced support and targeted training
- Developed procedures to monitor key case activities, including caseworker home visits, appropriate placement matching, occurrence of family meetings, court related functions, case planning, and assessments
- Revised policy and provided training for child welfare staff, foster parents, court staff, and attorneys regarding permanency and placement stability
- Developed strategies related to concurrent planning including policy revisions, training of agency staff and court personnel on concurrent planning, and monitoring cases open for at least 6 months for concurrent planning
- Developed strategies to address deficits in judicial and legal staff training, court processes, legislative actions, and SCDSS practices related to permanency and placement stability

The State did not meet its goal of completing all action steps proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period. There were additional strategies that were proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan that were not implemented. Those strategies are not included in this final report.

Key Findings of the 2009 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	2	3	3	8	80
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	2	2	20
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	3	5	10	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	7	15	30	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	100%	100%	60%		

Item 5 was rated as a Strength 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 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 11 months; in the other case the child reentered foster care within 6 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 a Strength in South Carolina'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.

South Carolina'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, 9.5 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 25th percentile of 9.9 percent. (For this measure, lower percentages reflect higher levels of performance.)

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, policy requires that prior to making a decision to reunify a child with his or her family, the following must occur:

- The caseworker reassesses for safety and risk.
- The caseworker reviews the decision with the supervisor and the child's guardian *ad litem* (GAL).
- A Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting or Total Service Planning meeting is held with the parents.

If a decision is made to reunify a child, a plan is developed to prepare the child and family for termination of the foster care placement, plans are made for post-placement services, and timeframes are established for delivering the services. The child is not reunified until a court hearing is held for approval and a signed court order is provided to SCDSS. If a decision is made to grant custody or guardianship of a child to a relative or non-relative, policy requires that a home study must be completed prior to custody transfer.

The following data relevant to foster care reentry were reported in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSRs, the item pertaining to foster care reentry was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 93 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that as of December 31, 2008, 92.29 percent of children discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the reporting period did not reenter foster care less than 12 months from the date of discharge from the prior foster care episode.
- The Foster Care Review Board (FCRB), which conducts administrative periodic reviews on children in foster care, reported data for CY 2007 indicating that 20 percent of children in foster care during CY 2007 experienced multiple entries into foster care during their lifetime, with the majority of reentries due to disrupted relative placements.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive comments from stakeholders on foster care reentries during the Onsite Review.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 6 Ratings	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	6	7	10	23	57.5
Area Needing Improvement	4	3	10	17	42.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	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) (three cases).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement 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 (15 cases).
- The child’s placement setting at the time of the onsite CFSR was not stable (three cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 22 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 10 cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in eight cases experienced three to six placements during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the State’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, South Carolina’s performance on the individual measures included in Composite 4: Placement stability was the following:

- C4.1: 74.5 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 83.3 percent.

- C4.2: 44.4 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 59.9 percent.
- C4.3: 19.2 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 33.9 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports the following practices and policies as implemented to promote placement stability:

- Agency policy requires that caseworkers must maintain a minimum of monthly contact with foster parents to identify the supports and services necessary to care for the children in their home.
- A section in the child's case plan specifies the supports that must be provided to foster parents to support the placement.
- Specialized foster care placements are identified for children with medical and behavioral problems.

The Statewide Assessment also reports, however, that foster care providers who were included in focus groups and surveys during the Statewide Assessment process expressed the opinion that foster parents need more support from, and better communication with, caseworkers. Some foster parents reported that caseworkers are not responsive to them.

According to the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina ranks as having one of the largest number of children in the nation under the age of 12 placed in institutional care.

The following data relevant to placement stability were provided in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSR, the item pertaining to placement stability was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007 and 88 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, 75.43 percent of children who had been in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months had no more than two placement settings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

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

- There are not enough foster homes to accommodate the number of children in foster care.
- There is a lack of appropriate matching.
- Initial placements are sometimes based on the availability of a bed rather than on the skills and training of foster parents.

However, some stakeholders also expressed the opinion that SCDSS generally attempts to provide support services to foster families to try to prevent placement disruptions.

Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State utilizes institutional placements (including group homes and emergency shelters) when foster home placements or relatives are not available. Additionally, one key, State-level stakeholder reported that institutional placements are sometimes used to maintain children in their current educational setting, and to keep siblings together. A few stakeholders expressed the opinion that emergency shelters were beneficial to youth as the shelter stabilized the youth and prepared them for the move into a foster home.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. Reviewers also were to determine whether the agency had sought 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	9	5	13	27	67.5
Area Needing Improvement	1	5	7	13	32.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	90%	50%	65%		

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s permanency goal was appropriate, had been established in a timely manner, and, 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 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). In four of these cases, the goal of OPPLA was established without the agency thoroughly exploring other options.
- The child’s permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (five cases). In one of the five cases, the initial goal was not established within 60 days. In the remaining four cases, the goal was not changed timely.
- 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 (four cases).

ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 80 percent of 20 applicable cases.

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

- Adoption only (nine cases)
- Reunification only (including reunification with relatives) (nine cases)
- OPPLA only (10 cases)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and reunification with relatives (two cases)
- Concurrent goals of adoption and reunification with parents (six cases)
- Concurrent goals of adoption and reunification with relatives (one case)
- Concurrent goals of adoption and OPPLA (two cases)
- Concurrent goals of reunification with parents and guardianship (one case)

In one case, the concurrent goal of reunification was achieved within 12 months; therefore, item 9, which pertains to the concurrent goal of adoption, was not rated.

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 67.5 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. 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 South Carolina'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, South Carolina'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: 20.2 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 less than the national median of 25.0 percent.
- C3.2: 87.4 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 less than the national median of 96.8 percent.
- C3.3: 55.1 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 greater than the national median of 47.8. (For this measure, lower percentages reflect higher levels of performance.)

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, policy requires that the initial permanency goal for the child be developed prior to the Removal Hearing (35-day hearing). If appropriate, a concurrent goal also may be developed at the time the initial permanency goal is established. The Statewide Assessment reports that if no progress has been made in resolving the issues that brought the child into foster care with 6 months of the child entering foster care, the agency must consider a change to the permanency goal or develop a concurrent goal for the child. The Statewide Assessment also reports that decisions to change a child's permanency plan or to develop a concurrent goal may occur as the result of an FCRB review, during the 6-month staffing of case, or during the 6-month case evaluation. The Statewide Assessment notes that, although concurrent planning is ongoing in the State, implementation is inconsistent across the State.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the CWSR assesses the following issues related to establishing the child's permanency goal in a timely manner:

- The timeliness of identification of a primary and/or concurrent permanent plan
- Whether or not the primary and/or concurrent permanent plans identified are appropriate and in the child's best interests
- Whether diligent efforts were made to achieve the primary and concurrent permanent plans

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to permanency goals was rated as a Strength in 76 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 87 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The FCRB, which conducts administrative periodic reviews on children in foster care, reported data for CY 2007 indicating that in 22 percent of the 5,342 cases reviewed, there was a "lack of progress on the permanent plan."

The Statewide Assessment notes that program TA and QA staff indicated that implementation of concurrent planning is inconsistent across the State and that some caseworkers are reluctant to implement a concurrent plan or change to a new plan when the family is making progress toward reunification. Additionally, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, the agency frequently delays changing the permanency goal from reunification to adoption even when the parents have a long-established history of noncompliance with their case plans, including noncompliance with their Child Protective Services (CPS) case plans.

Additionally, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, a State statute requires that if TPR and adoption are ordered at a permanency planning hearing, the agency must file for TPR within 60 days of the hearing. The Statewide Assessment reports, however, that caseworkers may be reluctant to move toward TPR and adoption when they perceive that the parents are making progress.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The key issues addressed by stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were whether a goal was appropriate to the needs of the child, whether concurrent goals were established for children, and whether a petition for TPR was filed in a timely manner.

With regard to appropriateness of goals, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in establishing an appropriate goal for each child in foster care.

With regard to concurrent planning, stakeholders expressed different opinions about the use of concurrent planning in the State. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State generally establishes concurrent goals for cases. Other stakeholders, however, indicated that establishing concurrent goals is not a consistent practice in the State and that when concurrent goals are established, they tend to be pursued sequentially rather than simultaneously.

With regard to the timeliness of filing for TPR, stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State generally is filing for TPR in a timely manner. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that compelling reasons are documented and presented to the court when TPR is not filed.

Additional stakeholder information pertaining to filing for TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA is provided under item 9 below and item 28 in the Systemic Factors section of this report.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 19 (47.5 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	3	4	5	12	63
Area Needing Improvement	2	1	4	7	37
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	5	9	19	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	5	11	21	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	60%	80%	56%		

Item 8 was rated as a Strength 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 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 in the seven cases rated as Area Needing Improvement pertained to a general lack of effort to provide services to

achieve reunifications, lost legal paperwork, failure to process Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) information in a timely manner, and extensions granted by the court.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 63 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 8 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina'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, South Carolina's performance on the individual timeliness measures included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was the following:

- C1.1: 77.6 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 greater than the 75th percentile of 75.2 percent.
- C1.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 4.7 months. This length of stay is less than the national 25th percentile of 5.4 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.)
- C1.3: 54.4 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 25th percentile of 48.4 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy requires that a family meeting be held within the first 3 days of foster care placement to assist in determining if early reunification is likely and/or to discuss the potential for temporary or permanent placement with relatives. Relatives known to the agency are assessed for potential placement. Progress of the reunification case plan is monitored during monthly contacts with parents and the permanency plan is reviewed by the agency within 6 months of a child's placement into foster care.

The following data relevant to achieving reunifications in a timely manner were reported in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSR, the item pertaining to timeliness of reunifications and effectiveness of efforts to finalize a reunification plan was rated as a Strength in 33 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 65 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.

- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, 76.31 percent of children who were reunified with their parents or caregivers and had been in foster care for 8 days or more were reunified in less than 12 months from the date of their latest removal from home.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive comments from stakeholders on the permanency goal of reunification during the Onsite Review.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	1	1	1	3	18
Area Needing Improvement	3	3	8	14	82
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	4	9	17*	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	6	11	23	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	25%	25%	11%		

*Note: Although 18 cases had children with the permanency goal of adoption, only 17 cases were rated for this time because the concurrent goal of reunification was achieved within 12 months.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers identified one or more of the following:

- Delays in filing for TPR (five cases)
- Delays in the TPR process after filing (five cases)
- Delays in completing the home study (one case)
- Delays in the adoption process due to lack of concerted efforts by agency (one case)
- Delays in the ICPC process (one case)
- Adoption being the concurrent goal but not pursued (three cases)

Additional findings relevant to this item were the following:

- Of the 18 children with a goal of adoption, 4 achieved the goal during the period under review.
- Of the four children who had a finalized adoption during the period under review, two had been in foster care for less than 24 months. One of the children was in foster care for 11 months; the other child was in foster care for 16 months.
- Of the 14 children with a goal of adoption who were not adopted during the period under review, 5 had been in foster care for at least 24 months.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 18 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 South Carolina'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, South Carolina's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions was the following:

- C2.1: 15.6 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 lower than the national median of 26.8 percent.
- C2.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 38.7 months. This median length of stay is greater than the national median of 32.4 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflect a higher level of performance.)
- C2.3: 16.9 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 less than the national median of 20.0 percent.
- C2.4: 11.8 percent of children who were in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percentage is greater than the national 75 percentile of 10.0 percent.
- C2.5: 41.7 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is less than the national median of 45.8 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the goal of adoption can be established at entry into foster care under two circumstances: at the time of the concurrent planning staffing, which is conducted within 60 days of a child's entry into foster care; or at the 6-month review period, if it appears that progress toward reunification is not occurring. The goal may be established as a single goal or a concurrent goal. The Statewide Assessment reports that the adoption goal is reassessed every 12 months if an adoptive family is not

located, and a quarterly meeting is held between foster care and adoptions staff to review progress and discuss strategies to reduce barriers to permanency for each child with the permanency goal of adoption. Once a TPR complaint is filed, a child can be considered for a pre-adoption placement. The Statewide Assessment notes that court approval is not needed to change a permanency goal to adoption.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following information obtained from a survey of Family Court judges, agency legal staff, GALs, members of the Greenville County FCRB, and members of the bar which took place February-April 2009:

- Some survey respondents said that they would not file or order a TPR unless an adoptive family had been identified.
- Some respondents said that TPR hearings generally are not held within a reasonable time of filing the TPR complaint.
- Some respondents said that filing for TPR and continuances of TPR hearings delay the finalization of adoptions.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the State does not have sufficient legal resources (attorneys or paralegals) to address the TPR issues on a consistent basis.

The following data relevant to achieving adoptions in a timely manner were reported in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSRs, the item pertaining to timeliness of adoptions was rated as a Strength in 27 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 29 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, 21.75 percent of children who left foster care due to a finalized adoption during the reporting year left foster care in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that CWSR reviewers identified the following barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner:

- Not using concurrent planning
- Not changing the permanency plan to adoption when it was warranted by the case circumstances
- Granting frequent extensions to parents during permanency hearings before eventually changing the permanency plan to adoption
- Granting frequent continuances for TPR hearings

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State has made improvements in achieving adoptions in a timely manner. However, in general, stakeholders identified the following barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner:

- The courts provide parents with frequent opportunities to continue to work toward reunification.
- There is a lack of adoptive family resources available for children.
- Some judges will not grant TPR if there is not an adoptive resource.
- There are delays in hearing TPR petitions due to overcrowded court dockets.

- Some foster parents believe (erroneously) that all services, including medical coverage, will cease for a child when an adoption is finalized.
- Adoption subsidies are not always discussed with potential pre-adoptive parents.

Some stakeholders noted that when a child refuses to be adopted, the caseworker and/or therapist continue to discuss adoption with the child in an attempt to resolve the issues with the child and establish permanency.

Item 10. Other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 12 (30 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	3	2	1	6	50
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	5	6	50
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	3	6	12	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	7	7	14	28	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	100%	67%	17%		

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

- The agency had not established a permanent placement for the youth (three cases). In two cases the youth were 16 years old, and in the third case the youth was 17 years old.
- The agency had not provided adequate services to the youth to prepare for independent living (three cases). In one case the youth was 15 years old, in another case the youth was 16 years old, and in the third case the youth was 17 years old.

The information below provides data regarding the ages of the children at the time the goal of OPPLA was established.

- Ages 0-12: 0 cases
- Ages 13-15: 8 cases
- Ages 16 and older: 4 cases

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 was rated as a Strength South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State policy requires that all other permanency options be ruled out for the child prior to selecting OPPLA as the permanency goal. The permanency goal of OPPLA must be reassessed annually for consideration of a change to reunification, adoption, custody/guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative.

The Statewide Assessment reports that SCDSS policy requires that independent living (IL) services be initiated at 13 years of age for youth in foster care to assist the youth in transitioning to adulthood. The Statewide Assessment provides the following information about IL services in the State:

- SCDSS received \$1 million from the South Carolina State Housing and Finance Authority to provide current and former foster care youth with housing assistance.
- The South Carolina Department of Commerce agreed to a statewide policy and initiative to make providing job training and employment services a priority for youth aging out of foster care.
- Go Out and Live Life is a long-standing committee comprising current and former foster care youths who review and have input into foster care policy and program initiatives.
- The South Carolina Foster Parent Association (SCFPA) provides dorm or household “showers” and computers to youth foster care.
- On the Road Again is a program through SCFPA that solicits for donated cars for youth in foster care.
- The State requested assistance from the National Resource Center for Youth Development to review the State's IL programs and service delivery and provide additional training.
- Youth have the option of signing a yearly Voluntary Placement Agreement until age 21 to remain in foster care placement while obtaining higher education, working on job skills, or due to an inability to care for themselves.
- Youth who emancipate at age 18 may continue to receive supportive services until age 21 through the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.
- Youth who are enrolled in school at age 21 and are receiving the Education and Training Voucher for post secondary education continue to be eligible for the voucher until age 23.
- Youth in foster care on their 18th birthdays are now eligible for Medicaid until their 21st birthdays whether they continue in foster care placement or emancipate from foster care

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to OPPLA was rated as a Strength in 93 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 95 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers found that staff are using the plan of OPPLA appropriately, identifying a permanent adult connection for youth, and implementing IL

services for youth. Additionally, IL services were adequately documented in the case file in 93 percent of the CY 2007 CWSR applicable cases and in 95 percent of the CY 2008 CWSR applicable cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were no substantive comments from stakeholders on the permanency goal of OPPLA or the provision of IL services during the Onsite Review. However, most stakeholders commenting on IL services expressed the opinion that the IL services identified in the Statewide Assessment are available across the State.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	3	8	4	15	38.5
Partially Achieved	7	2	14	23	59.0
Not Achieved	0	0	1	1	2.6
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	0	0	1	1*	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Substantially Achieved by Site	30%	80%	21%		

*One foster care case was not applicable for this outcome because the child was abandoned under the State’s Safe Haven law, Daniel’s Law, and the identity of the parents is unknown.

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 38.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The State 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 promoting visitation between children in foster care with their parents, especially their fathers, or with their siblings in foster care.
- The State did not consistently seek relatives as placement resources.

- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families or to their cultures and communities.
- The State was not consistent in promoting the relationship between children and their parents, especially fathers.

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

- Developed and implemented monitoring procedures to track performance improvement related to family and foster parent involvement as team members, visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings, identification and assessment of relatives as potential placement resources, and involvement of noncustodial parents and other relatives
- Developed and implemented strategies to revise policy, procedures, and manuals specific to visitation
- Provided training to staff and foster parents using Family to Family principles to strengthen the engagement of foster parents as team members
- Provided cultural diversity training to child welfare staff and foster parents

The State did not meet its goal of completing all action steps proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period. There were additional strategies that were proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan that were not implemented. Those strategies are not included in this final report.

Key Findings of the 2009 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 32 (80 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if TPR was attained prior to the period under review, contact with parents was not considered to be in the child’s best interests, and/or parents were deceased or their whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child’s most current foster care setting was near the child’s parents or close relatives. The results of the assessment of item 11 are presented in the table below.

Item 11 Ratings	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	9	7	16	32	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	7	16	32	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	3	4	8	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	100%	100%	100%		

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed either in the same community as the parents or near the parents' community. The item also was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that even though the child was placed out of his or her community, the placement was necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the permanency goal.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 100 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed children in locations close to their parents or relatives when appropriate. Item 11 also was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy requires that, when possible and if it is in the children's best interests, they should be placed in close proximity to their parents. The following data relevant to placement of children close to their parents were provided in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSRs, the item pertaining to placement of children close to their parents was rated as a Strength in 94 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 95 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, 67.49 percent of children were placed in their county of case management and jurisdiction.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the Dashboard data do not take into account children who are placed in a therapeutic placement that is determined to be appropriate and in the child's best interests, but that CWSR reviews do take this into consideration in the ratings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive comments from stakeholders on placement proximity during the Onsite Review.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 25 (62.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not have a sibling in foster care at any time during the period under review. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	5	6	7	18	72
Area Needing Improvement	2	0	5	7	28
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	6	12	25	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	4	8	15	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	71%	100%	58%		

Item 12 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed with siblings (nine cases), 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 (nine cases). Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in seven cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together. In one of the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement, there were two siblings, in three cases there were three siblings, in two cases there were four siblings, and in one case there were seven siblings.

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 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 South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy requires that siblings be placed together whenever possible. If siblings are placed separately, a staffing must be held within 30 days to develop a plan for reunification of the siblings if it is in the siblings' best interests. The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that the State does not have adequate placements to accommodate sibling groups but that a new statewide recruitment effort has been implemented to increase the number of placements for sibling groups.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, in CWSRs, the item pertaining to sibling placements was rated as a Strength in 87 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 85 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that youth participating in focus groups in preparation for the CFSR indicated that they feel isolated from and desire more contact with their siblings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that, although the State attempts to place siblings together in foster care, this is not always possible due to the lack of placement resources. One key, State-level stakeholder expressed the opinion that sibling groups are sometimes placed in institutional settings to keep the siblings together. Additionally, stakeholders say, some facilities will accept sibling groups, but often the children cannot be placed together due to their ages or the level of care they require.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 13 was applicable for 33 (82.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item if the child had no siblings in foster care and if one of the following conditions was met with regard to the parents: 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	4	6	5	15	45
Area Needing Improvement	5	1	12	18	55
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	7	17	33	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	3	3	7	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	44%	86%	29%		

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children. Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 18 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother (12 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the father (12 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings in foster care (three 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	5 (17%)	4 (20%)	2 (12.5%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	7 (24%)	3 (15%)	7 (44%)
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	7 (24%)	2 (10%)	5 (31%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	5 (17%)	4 (20%)	1 (6%)
There were no visits during the period under review	5 (17%)	7 (35%)	1 (6%)
Total Applicable Cases	29	20	16

Visits with mothers occurred at least once a month in 66 percent of applicable cases, visits with fathers occurred at least once a month in 45 percent of applicable cases, and visits with siblings occurred at least once a month in 87.5 percent of applicable cases.

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 45 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency and/or quality to meet the needs of the family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 13 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute and SCDSS policy require that a TDM meeting be held within 3 days of the child entering foster care. At this meeting, the agency must develop a plan for parent–child contact. The Statewide Assessment reports that policy states that visitation between parents and children should occur at a minimum of twice a month. Furthermore, SCDSS policy requires that an initial visit between the parent and the child be arranged within 5 days of the child’s entry into foster care. If the child remains in foster care subsequent to the removal hearing (35 days), the court approves the visitation plan that is part of the Child and Family Assessment and Service Plan (CFASP). Also included in the CFASP is a visitation plan for the child with siblings (if separated), extended family, and other individuals with whom the child has significant relationships.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that visitation with parents and siblings was rated as a Strength in 58 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 68 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that

CWSR reviewers found sufficient visitation between mothers and their children generally meets the minimum standard of twice per month, but that fathers and noncustodial parents are not routinely included in the visitation plan, and there is little to no planning for sibling visits.

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. A few stakeholders expressed the opinion that visitation is occurring with parents and siblings in foster care; however, these stakeholders did not comment on the frequency of the visitation. Other stakeholders expressed the opinion that visitation is not occurring with adequate frequency, and often a court order is necessary to ensure that the agency complies with visitation policy. Additionally, many stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers do not diligently search for absent parents, primarily fathers, and do not generally assess and address fathers’ needs. A few stakeholders also reported that youth in residential placements frequently are denied visitation with parents and siblings as a consequence of negative behavior.

Item 14. Preserving connections

 Strength **X** Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for 38 (95 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. One foster care case was not applicable because the child was abandoned under the State’s Safe Haven law. Another case was not applicable due to the child being on runaway status for the majority of 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	6	8	7	21	55
Area Needing Improvement	3	2	12	17	45
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	10	19	38	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	0	1	2	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	67%	80%	37%		

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

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to extended family (12 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain any connections for the child (two cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to community or neighborhood (three cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to his or her cultural heritage (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 55 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 South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy requires that caseworkers utilize the CFASP to assess a child's significant attachments for the purpose of possible permanent homes or continuing relationships. Additionally, policy states that when the agency learns a child is of Native American heritage, the agency is to identify the Tribal affiliation and make contact with the Tribal office, in compliance with ICWA.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that policy requires that efforts are to be made to maintain children in the same school, provided this decision is in their best interests and transportation is reasonably available. In addition, the caseworker is to begin the Life Book for all children who remain in foster care subsequent to the removal hearing.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to maintaining connections was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 75 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers found that caseworkers often do not assist children in preserving or establishing connections with individuals other than their parents and that there is a general lack of engagement and involvement with fathers and paternal relatives.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the SCFPA survey completed by 153 foster parents at their conference in March 2008 states that 59.37 percent of the respondents indicated that SCDSS does not assist children in foster care in maintaining connections to their neighborhood, community, school, Tribe, or friends. However, respondents also noted that foster parents are maintaining some of these connections on behalf of the children in foster care, but these efforts are not always documented in the case record.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that some of the youth participating in focus groups as part of the Statewide Assessment process expressed the opinion that they are not placed close enough to their communities to maintain friendships and other connections.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed differing opinions on contact between children in foster care and their siblings who are not in foster care. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that children are able to maintain contact with siblings not placed in foster care. However, a few stakeholders indicated that the agency does not assist the child in maintaining contact with these siblings. Additionally, a few stakeholders reported that the State is more effective in searching for maternal relatives than paternal relatives as people who can be connections for the child.

Item 15. Relative placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 36 (90 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	4	6	8	18	50
Area Needing Improvement	5	3	10	18	50
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	9	18	36	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	1	1	2	4	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	44%	67%	44%		

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

- The child was placed with relatives (eight 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 when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency had not made efforts to search for maternal relatives (14 cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to search for paternal relatives (13 cases).

Rating Determination

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 50 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 15 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS requires that placement of the child with relatives be pursued immediately upon a child's entry into foster care and that placement preference be given to relatives or other persons known to the child who are appropriate and have a constructive and caring relationship with the child. The Statewide Assessment reports that the initial family meeting, which is held within 3 days of the child's entry into foster care, is an opportunity to identify potential relative placements. The Statewide Assessment also reports that every SCDSS office has access to the Westlaw search engine, which can quickly and effectively locate a relative with only nominal information about that relative.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to placement with relatives was rated as a Strength in 59 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 55 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers found that in searching for relatives, caseworkers generally focus on maternal relatives rather than on paternal relatives.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The few stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in attempting to place children with relatives whenever possible. A few stakeholders reported that the State is more effective in searching for maternal relatives than for paternal relatives.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 30 (75 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	1	4	4	9	30
Area Needing Improvement	7	2	12	21	70
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	6	16	30	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	4	4	10	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	12.5%	67%	25%		

Item 16 was rated as a Strength 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 when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the mother (17 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the father (13 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	5	4
Providing transportation so that parents can participate in these events, activities, or appointments	3	1
Providing opportunities for family therapeutic situations	5	2
Encouraging foster parents to mentor biological parents and serve as parenting role models for them	4	2
Encouraging and facilitating contact with incarcerated parents (when appropriate) or with parents living far away from the child	0	1
Total Applicable Cases	12	7

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 30 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 South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute and agency policy require that caseworkers and parents develop a plan for parent–child contact at the initial family meeting held within 3 days of the child entering foster care. This plan includes not only visitation, but also an agreement about how the parents will participate in the care and activities of the child while the child is in foster care.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to the relationship of the child in foster care with the parents was rated as a Strength in 46 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 64 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers found that the mothers generally are included in activities to promote the parent–child relationship, but the fathers are not routinely included in activities.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The few stakeholders commenting on preserving connections during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that parents are invited to attend doctors’ appointments with their children, particularly with younger children. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers do not diligently search for absent parents, primarily fathers, and do not generally assess and address fathers’ needs even when the fathers’ whereabouts are known. Two key, State-level stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers are not using due diligence to identify and notify noncustodial parents due to the lack of a written protocol on how to locate absent parents. These stakeholders reported that, although sister agencies know the location of fathers, SCDSS child welfare staff do not routinely collaborate with them to locate and engage fathers. These stakeholders also expressed the opinion that even when fathers are succeeding in programs outside of SCDSS and desirous of involvement with their children in State care, the system does not involve them.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	5	7	10	22	33.8
Partially Achieved	9	4	13	26	40
Not Achieved	3	6	8	17	26.2
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	29%	41%	32%		

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 33.8 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 40 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 24 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. The State 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 assessing and addressing the service needs of children, parents, or foster parents.
- The State was not consistent in involving parents and children in the case planning process.
- The frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with children and parents was not of sufficient quality or quantity to ensure the children's safety or well-being.
- Working with fathers in assessment, service delivery, engagement, case planning, and visitation was noted as a particular concern.

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

- Revised CPS policy related to assessment, case planning, and caseworker visits with parents and children and provided training on the policy revisions
- Developed and implemented procedures to monitor performance improvement in key well-being areas including assessment; caseworker visits with parents and children; and parent, child, and foster parent involvement in case planning
- Modified reports to track visitation compliance
- Implemented supervisory and TA staff training targeted at enhancing mentoring, coaching, and clinical skills

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

Key Findings of the 2009 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	6	8	13	27	42
Area Needing Improvement	11	9	18	38	58
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	55%	47%	42%		

Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 50 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 28 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. Item 17 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met. Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was an inadequate assessment of children’s needs (12 cases).
- There was an inadequate assessment of mothers’ needs (21 cases).
- There was an inadequate assessment of fathers’ needs (21 cases).
- There was an inadequate assessment of the needs of foster parents (nine cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address the needs of children (11 cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address the needs of mothers (25 cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address the needs of fathers (23 cases).
- The agency did not provide appropriate services to address the needs of foster parents (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	13 (48%)	27	14 (56%)	25
Father’s needs assessed and met	8 (47%)	17	8 (36%)	22
Foster parents’ needs assessed and met	24 (73%)	33	N/A	N/A
Child’s needs assessed and met	34 (85%)	40	19 (76%)	25

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 42 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 South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for in-home services cases (CPS cases) a family assessment must be completed to determine the needs of the family and identify necessary services. The family assessment must be completed even if the child is living with a relative as part of the safety plan. For foster care cases, policy requires that a comprehensive family assessment be completed prior to the removal (35-day) hearing. The Statewide Assessment also reports that ongoing family and child assessments are to be conducted in both program areas on a monthly basis and are to assess child safety, monitor progress toward goals, and/or identify possible changes to the case plan to better address the family's needs.

With regard to meeting the service needs of children and parents, the Statewide Assessment reports that the State has limited flexible funding available for individualized service intervention. These funds are used to provide temporary support and needed services to families to help maintain children in their homes or to return home from foster care. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the agency has a specialized foster care unit that provides case management to foster children with emotional and behavioral problems, and strengthens the agency's ability to support foster children who have special needs.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to assessing and addressing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents was rated as a Strength in 53 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 69 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers did not find evidence of thorough assessments or engagement of fathers and paramours in case planning.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that the agency does not consistently provide supportive services to alternative caregivers. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, only 50 percent of the respondents to the March 2008 Foster Parent Survey reported that SCDS is effective at responding to their calls for assistance or asking about their needs or the foster children's needs.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the State's effectiveness in both assessing and addressing the needs of children and parents. A few stakeholders expressed the opinion that family needs are assessed appropriately and that services are provided according to family needs. Some stakeholders noted that TDM meetings are used to identify and coordinate appropriate services for families. However, other stakeholders reported that due to the current shortage of agency funding, families are being asked to pay for services that they are unable to afford; therefore, the families are unable to access those services. Some stakeholders reported that economic constraints negatively impact the ability of relatives to maintain children in

their care, particularly in in-home services cases. Additionally, many stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers do not diligently search for absent parents, primarily fathers, and do not generally assess and address fathers' needs even when the fathers' whereabouts are known.

With regard to assessing and meeting the needs of foster parents, some stakeholders indicated that caseworkers generally are responsive to the needs of foster parents, but others expressed the opinion that caseworkers do not address the needs of foster parents.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 63 (97 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	5	7	16	28	44
Area Needing Improvement	12	9	14	35	56
Total Applicable Cases	17	16	30	63	
Not Applicable Cases	0	1	1	2	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	29%	44%	53%		

Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 50 percent of the 38 applicable foster care cases and 36 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. Item 18 was rated as a Strength 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. Item 18 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement 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. In nine of these cases, reviewers documented that the case plan was completed by the agency and then mailed to or presented to the parent for a signature.

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?	15 (52%)	29	15 (60%)	25
Father involved in case planning?	12 (60%)	20	9 (41%)	22
Children involved in case planning?	18 (75%)	24	7 (50%)	14

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 44 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 18 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy requires that the CFASP be used in both CPS treatment cases and foster care cases to engage the family in the case planning process. Policy requires that the case plan be developed jointly with the parents in both CPS and foster care cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that for foster care cases, the family meeting that is held within 3 days of the child entering foster care allows for input and planning with the family. The Statewide Assessment also notes that for both in-home and foster care cases, policy requires that the case plan be discussed during the monthly face-to-face contact with the parents and child. The parents and age-appropriate foster children must receive copies of the case plan, and the plan must be presented to the court for approval in foster care and in-home treatment cases requiring court intervention.

Despite these policy requirements, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, many caseworkers continue to impose case plans on clients rather than involve clients in the case planning process. For example, the Statewide Assessment reports that youth participating in focus groups conducted as part of the Statewide Assessment process indicated that they were not sufficiently involved in their case plan or permanency planning nor did they fully understand a case plan or a permanent plan.

Also, CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to involving parents and children in case planning was rated as a Strength in 46 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 52 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that CWSR reviewers found that caseworkers are less likely to involve fathers in case planning than they are to involve mothers.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed different opinions regarding the State’s effectiveness in engaging parents in case planning. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that family conferencing and family group decision-making meetings, when held, facilitate meaningful engagement of parents in case planning. Additionally, some stakeholders reported that CPS caseworkers go to the home and work with the family in creating the case plan. Also, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that age-appropriate children generally are involved in case planning.

However, other stakeholders maintained that case plans are developed with minimal or no involvement of the parents, especially the fathers. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers do not search diligently for absent parents, primarily fathers, and do not generally assess and address a father’s needs even when a father’s whereabouts are known. Additionally, two key State-level stakeholders reported that although sister agencies know the location of many of the fathers, SCDSS child welfare staff do not routinely collaborate with them to locate and engage fathers. A few stakeholders reported that case plans frequently are not signed by the parents and expressed the opinion that case plans are not individualized to meet the specific needs of each family. A few stakeholders also reported that case plans are difficult to individualize because there are not enough services available for families. According to some stakeholders, youth rarely attend court hearings or other case planning meetings.

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

Item 19. Caseworker visits with child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 19 was applicable for all 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	14	10	21	45	69
Area Needing Improvement	3	7	10	20	31
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	82%	59%	68%		

Item was rated as a Strength in 77.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 56 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength 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 (four 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 (three 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 (12 cases).
- There were no visits with the child during the period under review (one case)

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 once a week but at least twice a month	9 (22.5%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	27 (67.5%)	20 (80%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	2 (5%)	4 (16%)
There were no visits during the period under review	1 (2.5%)	0
Total Cases	40	25

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 69 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 South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, CPS caseworkers are required to conduct at least one face-to-face interview per month with the victim child, siblings, and any other children who reside in the home. Additional contacts must be held when warranted by safety concerns. The Statewide Assessment reports that the majority of visits should be conducted in the family home to assess the child and caregivers’ interaction and the overall safety of the home environment. Foster care caseworkers are required by State statute to conduct at least one monthly face-to-face contact with children in a foster care or adoptive placement. The exception is a foster youth over age 18 residing on a college campus; in those cases the required contact may be made by telephone.

The following data relevant to the caseworker visits with children were reported in the Statewide Assessment:

- In CWSRs, the item pertaining to caseworker visits with children was rated as a Strength in 68 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 75 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.
- The Dashboard Report indicated that, as of December 31, 2008, caseworker contacts with children occurred at least monthly with foster children in 86.17 percent of the cases, and with children in the in-home treatment cases in 59.58 percent of the cases.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the CWSR takes into account the quality of the caseworker’s contact, and the Dashboard Report reflects the frequency of contact.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the caseworkers have monthly contacts with the children on their caseloads. A few stakeholders reported that youth are comfortable calling their caseworkers if necessary. Stakeholders did not comment on the quality of caseworker visits with children.

Item 20. Caseworker visits with parent(s)

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 55 (85 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 caseworkers’ face-to-face contacts 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	4	3	12	19	35
Area Needing Improvement	12	9	15	36	65
Total Applicable Cases	16	12	27	55	
Not Applicable Cases	1	5	4	10	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	25%	25%	44%		

Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 37 percent of the 30 applicable foster care cases and 32 percent of the 25 in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children and that visits were of sufficient quality, i.e., they focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Visits with the mother were neither of sufficient frequency nor quality (17 cases).
- Visits with the father were neither of sufficient frequency nor quality (13 cases).
- Visits with the mother were of sufficient frequency but were not of sufficient quality (five cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency, although when they did occur they were of sufficient quality (one case).
- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency, although when they did occur they were of sufficient quality (one case).

- Visits with the father were of sufficient frequency but were not of sufficient quality (one case)
- There were no visits with the mother (four cases).
- There were no visits with the father (11 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%)	1 (5%)	1 (4%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	5 (18%)	4 (19%)	0	0
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	9 (32%)	2 (10%)	16 (67%)	8 (36%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	10 (36%)	9 (43%)	6 (25%)	8 (36%)
There were no visits during the period under review	3 (11%)	5 (24%)	1 (4%)	6 (27%)
Total Applicable Cases	28	21	24	22

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 35 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 and 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 South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for in-home treatment cases, CPS policy requires that caseworkers conduct at least one monthly face-to-face interview with the parents, protective adult, and/or other caregiver during the time a case is open for in-home services. Contacts should increase if warranted by the case circumstances. As with contacts with children, the majority of visits should be conducted in the family home in order to assess the child and caregivers’ interactions and the overall safety of the home environment. The Statewide Assessment reports that for foster care cases, policy requires a monthly contact with parents when reunification is the permanency goal. Monthly contact with parents also is required after reunification unless otherwise ordered by the court. When reunification is not the plan, face-to-face contact occurs as appropriate for each case situation, unless the parent’s rights are terminated.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that although most counties are attempting to have face-to-face visits with mothers each month, the quality of the visits often is poor because caseworkers do not understand the significance of caseworker–parent visitations. In addition, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers generally do not attempt to see fathers or engage the fathers during contacts. The Statewide Assessment notes that to address this concern, a daylong best practices conference was held in February 2008.

It focused on the significance of visitation, caseworker safety during visits, and engagement with fathers; all caseworkers were mandated to attend.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to caseworker contacts with parents was rated as a Strength in 87 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 85 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Two key State-level stakeholders reported that although sister agencies know the location of many of the fathers, SCDSS staff does not routinely collaborate with them to locate and engage fathers.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	7	6	17	30	85.7
Partially Achieved	0	1	0	1	2.9
Not Achieved	2	1	1	4	11.4
Total Applicable Cases	9	8	18	35	
Not Applicable Cases	8	9	13	30	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	78%	75%	94%		

Status of Well-Being Outcome 2

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 85.7 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 27 applicable foster care cases and 37.5 percent of the 8 applicable in-home services cases. The State 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 key concern identified in the 2003 CFSR was that the State did not make consistent, concerted efforts to ensure that educational needs were assessed and appropriate services were provided.

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

- Reviewed and revised guidelines, policy, and procedures for educational assessment and implemented a protocol to monitor assessments
- Developed and implemented the Education Passport for children in foster care

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

Key Findings of the 2009 CFSR

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

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 35 (54 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	7	6	17	30	86
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	1	5	14
Total Applicable Cases	9	8	18	35	
Not Applicable	8	9	13	30	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	78%	75%	94%		

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

- The child’s educational needs were neither assessed nor addressed (four cases).
- The child had identified educational needs that were not addressed (one cases).

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 86 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percentage is less than the 95 percent 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 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for in-home treatment cases, CPS policy requires that the educational needs of the children, their school performance, their school attendance, and their behaviors while in school be assessed as part of the CFASP. Additionally, caseworkers are to assess how abuse and neglect affects the child's school performance or attendance. The Statewide Assessment reports that SCDSS policy requires that when education needs are identified, the service plan must include specific services to address those needs. Policy also requires that the child's educational records be maintained in the case record.

For foster care cases, the Statewide Assessment reports that policy requires caseworkers to implement the following procedures:

- Request from the child's school copies of report cards, results of standardized tests, or documentation of the student's performance
- Conduct conferences with teachers and/or guidance counselors to help identify areas needing additional assistance
- Document educational needs in the case file
- Include educational needs and goals in the case plan
- Maintain an updated Education Passport for all foster children and provide the passport to foster parents.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that foster parents are expected to assist caseworkers in updating educational information.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy requires that children be allowed to remain in their school, if this decision is in the child's best interests and if transportation is reasonably available. If a child is unable to remain in the same school, arrangements must be made for the child's school enrollment and the transfer of the school records within 2 working days.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to meeting children's educational needs was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 88 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that reviewers found that children in foster care are more likely to have their educational needs assessed and addressed than are children receiving in-home services.

SCDSS policy requires that educational support services be included in the array of IL services for youth ages 13 through 21. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, almost 400 youth, 13 years old and older, received 592 educational services in SFY 2007 through the State's IL program.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the agency's effectiveness in meeting children's educational needs. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers, foster parents, and schools work together to ensure that children are enrolled promptly and are receiving the needed services. Stakeholders reported that caseworkers and foster parents attend school conferences and Individual Education Plan meetings. However, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that SCDSS is not working with the schools to ensure that children receive the appropriate educational services. Additionally, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that SCDSS does not make concerted efforts to maintain children in their same schools.

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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	10	11	23	44	74.6
Partially Achieved	2	2	4	8	13.6
Not Achieved	1	3	3	7	11.9
Total Applicable Cases	13	16	30	59	
Not Applicable Cases	4	1	1	6	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	77%	69%	77%		

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 74.6 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 82.5 percent of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 58 percent of the 19 applicable in-home services cases. The State 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 key concern identified in the 2003 CFSR was that although children often were assessed for service needs, they were not receiving needed medical, dental, and mental health services.

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

- Training for child welfare staff related to assessing and monitoring the physical and mental health needs of children and established monitoring protocols

- The Medical Passport for children in foster care
- A partnership with the South Carolina Dental Association to arrange free dental care for children in foster care

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

Key Findings of the 2009 CFSR

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

Item 22. Physical health of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 50 (77 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	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	9	9	23	41	82
Area Needing Improvement	2	4	3	9	18
Total Applicable Cases	11	13	26	50	
Not Applicable Cases	6	4	5	15	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	82%	69%	88%		

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of the 40 foster care cases and 50 percent of the 10 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength 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 when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child’s physical health needs were not adequately assessed or addressed (six cases).
- The child’s dental health needs were not adequately assessed or addressed (two cases).
- The child’s physical health needs were not adequately addressed (two cases).
- The child’s dental health needs were not adequately addressed (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was effective in assessing and meeting children’s physical health needs. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 22 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for in-home treatment cases, CPS policy requires that an assessment of the child’s physical health and medical needs be conducted as a component of the family assessment. The caseworker must interview the attending physicians and review medical records. For foster care cases, the Statewide Assessment notes that policy requires that an initial comprehensive medical assessment be completed within 5 working days of the child’s entry into foster care and that arrangements must be made for followup services to meet the needs identified in the initial comprehensive assessment.

Also for foster care cases, ongoing medical and dental screenings are to be completed according to Early and Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Treatment guidelines. The caseworker must assess and monitor the child’s medical needs and ongoing services during the monthly contact with the child and with the foster care provider. The child’s medical issues and medical needs are to be addressed in the case assessment and case plan. Foster care policy requires that the Medical Passport be given to the foster parent subsequent to the removal (35-day) hearing, and foster parents are expected to assist in keeping the Medical Passport up to date.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to meeting children’s physical and dental health needs was rated as a Strength in 71 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 79 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that reviewers found that although the physical health and medical needs of children are generally assessed and followed, caseworkers do not always document that the assessments and treatments have occurred.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, youth who are in foster care on their 18th birthday are eligible for Medicaid until they turn 21 years old, whether they continue in foster care or emancipate from foster care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State is using Medical Passports for children in foster care. Additionally, stakeholders suggested that the frequency of dental exams for children in foster care has improved in recent years.

Item 23. Mental/behavioral health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 40 (62 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 appropriately assessed and appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The results of the assessment of item 23 are presented in the table below.

Item 23 Ratings	Aiken County	Beaufort County	Greenville County	Total	Percent
Strength	7	8	16	31	77.5
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	5	9	22.5
Total Applicable Cases	9	10	21	40	
Not Applicable Cases	8	7	10	25	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	78%	80%	76%		

Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of the 25 applicable foster care cases and 60 percent of the 15 applicable in-home services cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children’s mental health needs were appropriately assessed and the identified mental health needs were addressed. Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Mental health needs were not assessed or addressed (seven cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed, but services were not provided to address identified needs (two cases).

Rating Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 77.5 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 23 also was rated as a Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, for in-home treatment cases, CPS policy requires that an assessment of the child’s mental health needs be conducted as a component of the family assessment. The caseworker is to assess the mental health needs of children through interviews with the attending physicians and a review of mental health records. For foster care cases, the Statewide Assessment reports that policy requires that an initial mental health assessment be completed within the first 24 to 48 hours that a child is in foster care. Also, any mental health issues, needs, or treatments, including the use of psychotropic medication, must be included in the case plan. The Statewide Assessment also reports that SCDSS has a contractual arrangement with the State Department of Mental Health (DMH) for the co-location of mental health workers in 11 SCDSS county offices to make mental health services more accessible to SCDSS clients.

CWSR data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the item pertaining to meeting children's mental and behavioral health needs was rated as a Strength in 66 percent of applicable cases in CY 2007, and 79 percent of applicable cases in CY 2008. The Statewide Assessment notes that reviewers found that although the mental health needs of children generally are assessed, caseworkers do not always document in the case file that the assessment has occurred.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the recent economic situation within the State has led to mid-year budget cuts of approximately 20 percent of the State funds allocated to DMH, which has resulted in a reduction in the frequency, intensity, and availability of mental health assessments and counseling services. SCDSS also has experienced budget cuts that have reduced the funds available for the agency to purchase mental health services from the private sector. Additionally, changes to service descriptions and standards by State Medicaid are increasing the costs to SCDSS and further restricting the availability of mental health services for SCDSS clients.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions on the State's effectiveness in assessing and addressing the mental health needs of children. Some stakeholders reported that the co-location of DMH providers has made mental health services more accessible for children in foster care. A few stakeholders, however, voiced concern that children are not thoroughly assessed for mental health needs and that appropriate services are not available to meet the needs of children.

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	3X	4

Status of Statewide Information System

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The State 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 2009 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the items 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 because CAPSS can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for every child in foster care, including the placement location of children placed with a private agency. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the CAPSS database can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals of past and current foster children. Additionally, CAPSS captures demographics of CPS treatment cases. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CAPSS records all required data elements for the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System and generates reports for the Federal National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, as well as a number of monthly reports for the field and the annual accountability report for the governor and Legislature.

Additionally, SCDSS staff are able to create various caseload reports from CAPSS data. Beginning in December 2007, the Dashboard Report was released. This report allows counties to review their status in relation to one another and to the State average.

The Dashboard Report also provides SCDSS staff with the capacity to view individual cases that might need corrections.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that CAPSS is effective in identifying the legal status, demographics, location, and goals of children in foster care and that the system can identify the placement location of the child even if the child is placed from a private agency. However, some stakeholders noted, the effectiveness of the system relies on caseworkers entering the required data. Some stakeholders also indicated that data generally are current and reliable. Additionally, many stakeholders indicated that various reports are available in CAPSS to assist in monitoring caseloads and the completion of case-related tasks. According to stakeholders, the Dashboard Report created from CAPSS data is issued monthly to county and State-level administrators and is used to measure performance, improvement, and practice.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

Status of Case Review System

South Carolina is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. 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 CFSR:

- The State was not consistent in involving parents in the case planning process.
- The State was not consistent in conducting timely permanency hearings for children in foster care.
- The State was not consistent in filing for TPR in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent in notifying foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of hearings and providing them with opportunities to have input into the hearings.

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

- Protocols to monitor performance related to parental involvement in case planning, timeliness of permanency hearings, counties with backlogged TPRs, and the extent to which caregivers were given opportunities to be heard
- A statewide baseline to track the timeliness of hearings in each county
- Guidelines regarding dual-track cases to prevent delays in holding permanency hearings
- Statutory requirements, judicial education, and development of statewide protocols relating to notification to foster parents of hearings

The State did not meet its goal of completing all action steps proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period. Additional strategies were proposed in the State’s Program Improvement Plan that were not implemented and are not included in this Final Report.

Key Findings of the 2009 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. Although the State provides a process to ensure that each child has a written case plan that is reviewed and updated routinely, information provided in the Statewide Assessment indicates that parental involvement in case planning is inconsistent across the State. In addition, during the onsite CFSR, case reviewers determined that SCDS made diligent efforts to involve mothers in case planning in 56 percent of the applicable cases and to involve fathers in 50 percent of the applicable cases. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State policy requires that a family meeting occur within the first 3 days of a child entering out-of-home care. The meeting is intended to ensure that families have an opportunity to provide input into case planning. State policy also requires that the case plan for the parent and child be developed jointly with the child and parent prior to the 35-day hearing, also referred to as the initial removal hearing. Additionally, policy requires that case reevaluations be completed at least every 6 months. However, case plans can be updated and revised with input from the parents at any time if case circumstances warrant. The Statewide Assessment reports that the agency provides a copy of the case plan to the parents and presents the case plan to the court for approval.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, information from the CWSR findings indicates that parental involvement in case planning remains inconsistent across the State. Additionally, the FCRB collects data related to the timeliness and appropriateness of written case plans on each case it reviews. It provided the following findings based on case reviews of 5,342 children in 2007:

- A current case plan was not made available to the FCRB for 13 percent (692) of the children reviewed.
- The case plan was incomplete or inappropriate or the agency presented conflicting permanent plans for the child in 33 percent (1,785) of the children reviewed.
- The initial placement plan was not implemented within 60 days of the child entering foster care for 1 percent (47) of the children reviewed.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS conducted a legal system stakeholder survey from February 27 through April 16, 2009. The participants in the survey included Family Court judges, agency legal staff, GAL attorneys, members of the Greenville County FRCB, and members of the Bench-Bar Committee. The majority of the respondents expressed the opinion that the court-ordered placement plans provide an understandable plan for families and that the agency and family responsibilities are defined clearly. However, some respondents expressed the opinion that that the plans need to be individualized to address the unique issues of each family.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that case plans are routinely prepared in a timely manner for families receiving in-homes services and those receiving out-of-home services. Additionally, many stakeholders expressed the opinion that case plans are reviewed and updated at regular intervals.

Stakeholders expressed different opinions regarding the State's effectiveness in engaging parents in case planning. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that family conferencing and family group decision-making meetings, when held, facilitate meaningful engagement of parents in case planning. However, other stakeholders maintained that case plans are developed with minimal or no involvement of parents, especially fathers. Additionally, a few stakeholders reported that case plans frequently are not signed by the parents, and some stakeholders expressed the opinion that case plans are not individualized to meet the specific needs of each family.

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 because the State provides a periodic review for each child in foster care at least once every 6 months by the FCRB. Additionally, courts in some jurisdictions routinely conduct interim reviews. Information from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that periodic reviews generally are held in a timely manner. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the FCRB of the Office of the Governor is the entity designated by State statute to conduct the administrative review for children in foster care. The FCRB reviews 100 percent of the children who have been in foster care for 4 months or longer and who are younger than 18 years of age. Subsequent reviews occur every 6 months thereafter throughout the child's placement in out-of-home care. The Statewide Assessment notes that the caseworker completes a standardized packet of information for each review and provides this to the FCRB prior to the review. The FCRB submits copies of the recommendations made during the review to the court.

In addition to the FCRB reviews, the Statewide Assessment reports that State statute provides that a party to the case, the child's GAL, or the local FCRB, can file a motion at any time for a judicial review of a case. In addition, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, counties may require judicial reviews as well as FCRB reviews (Aiken County was the only county included in the CFSR that had this requirement). Aiken County, for example, requires that every foster child have a judicial review, with the first review held 3 months after the removal hearing. The date for this hearing is indicated in the Order for Removal. Review dates are set well in advance and county staff are notified of the schedules.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, CAPSS tracks the timeliness of periodic reviews in a management report that is made available to State and county staff. Monthly CAPSS reports also are available online for county staff to review case-specific issues related to periodic reviews. These monthly reports identify the date of the next review and indicate whether the most recent review data were entered into CAPSS.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally ensures that a periodic review of the status of each child is held at least every 6 months. They noted that in some counties, the periodic reviews are conducted by the FCRB, and in other counties (including Aiken County) the cases are reviewed by both the court and the FCRB. Stakeholders also indicated that cases may be reviewed by the court as explained in the Statewide Assessment. Some stakeholders at each site included in the CFSR reported that sometimes there are difficulties with scheduling judicial reviews due to crowded court dockets.

Stakeholders expressed different opinions on the quality of the periodic reviews conducted by the FCRB and whether these reviews expedite permanency for the child. Some stakeholders indicated that the FCRB reviews are helpful and that the reviews help children achieve permanency faster. Other stakeholders, however, expressed the opinion that the FCRB review is not effective, does not help move a child to permanency, and the recommendations are not always reviewed by the court.

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

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the percentage of past due permanency hearings has decreased since 2008, as shown in the Statewide Assessment, other data in the Statewide Assessment indicate that late permanency hearings continued to be a concern as of April 2009. In addition, information from stakeholder interviews suggests that permanency hearings are not held consistently or in a timely manner in all areas of the State, that the time allotted for hearings is sometimes insufficient, and that frequently “corridor agreements” are made between the parties without a thorough review by the court. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statute and policy require that a permanency planning hearing be conducted annually in Family Court for children placed in out-of-home care who are younger than 18 years old. A supplemental report containing required information must be presented to the court at the hearing. Caseworkers are required to file completed court packets in advance of the scheduled hearings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, in the legal system survey conducted by SCDSS, agency attorneys expressed the opinion that permanency hearings currently are held in a timely manner. The Statewide Assessment also reports data from CAPSS that indicate that the percentage of past due permanency hearings decreased from 12.5 percent in May 2008 to 9.8 percent in April 2009.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following factors as potential barriers to achieving timely permanency planning hearings:

- There is a need for more paralegal and administrative staff for county attorneys.
- Additional Family Court judges and docket time are needed in some jurisdictions.
- Continuances remain an issue across the State.

The Statewide Assessment notes that in 1,484 cases of the 5,342 reviewed by the FCRB in 2007, timeliness of the permanency hearing was identified as an area of concern.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders at the State level and in Aiken and Beaufort counties commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that permanency is reviewed within 12 months of the child entering foster care and that permanency hearings generally are held timely. However, some Greenville County stakeholders expressed the opinion that permanency hearings in that county are not always held timely. A few stakeholders expressed concern that agreements are reached outside the courtroom without the benefit of a permanency hearing or the information read into the record or documented through a court order. Additionally, some stakeholders expressed concern about whether the court allots adequate time to thoroughly address the permanency plans of children.

A few stakeholders across the sites suggested that the permanency hearings are effective and focus on what is needed for the child to achieve permanency.

A few stakeholders expressed concerns that Family Courts are not sufficiently funded or staffed, which frequently results in overcrowded court dockets and other significant delays. One State-level stakeholder expressed the opinion that the State Legislature historically has not responded favorably to funding requests to alleviate these concerns.

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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although, according to the Statewide Assessment, the State has a process for filing a petition for TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA, the State did not provide any data on filing for TPR. Information from the stakeholder interviews suggests that filing for TPR is sometimes delayed due to insufficient legal resources, and SCDSS and the court providing parents with extensions to continue to work toward reunification. Additionally, during the onsite CFSR, reviewers determined in item 7 that ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 80 percent of the 20 applicable cases. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the statutory basis for foregoing reasonable efforts and the grounds for TPR are based on ASFA and are specified in SCDSS procedures. The order from the removal hearing includes notice to the parents that failure to substantially accomplish the objectives in the case plan within the timeframe provided may result in TPR, subject to notice and a hearing. This notice also is included in the parent's case plan document.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, State statute also provides that if TPR and adoption are ordered at a permanency planning hearing, the agency is to file the TPR complaint within 60 days. However, the Statewide Assessment indicates that caseworkers may be reluctant to move toward TPR and adoption when they perceive that the parents are making progress.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that SCDSS generally files for TPR timely. However, a few Greenville County stakeholders expressed the opinion that filing for TPR is sometimes delayed due to inadequate staffing in the legal department. Most stakeholders also indicated that compelling reasons are documented and presented to the court when TPR is not filed. However, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that if the parents are working diligently toward reunification but will not complete the case plan within the required 15-month timeframe, the courts often will give the parents more time in which to complete the case plan, thus delaying the filing for TPR.

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although stakeholders reported that notification is occurring, according to data provided by the State in the Statewide Assessment, only 86.33 percent of the foster parents responding to a survey indicated they had received notice for FCRB reviews, and only 63.7 percent indicated that they had received notice of court hearings. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

With regard to notification of the FCRB reviews, the Statewide Assessment reports that caseworkers are required to send a standardized letter of notice to the foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers at least 3 weeks prior to the review. A copy of a progress report form is included with the notification, and the caregiver is asked to complete this report before the review if he or she is unable to participate in the review.

With regard to notification of court hearings, the Statewide Assessment notes that SCDSS developed a protocol that sets out uniform processes and procedures for counties, requiring that each county assign responsibility of ensuring that notices are sent on a timely basis. The protocol also requires counties to report on whether foster parents have an opportunity to be heard. Caseworkers are required to keep the county attorney informed of the address of the caregiver so notice of court hearings can be provided to the caregiver. Additionally, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, the State instituted the monthly monitoring report that allows the State to monitor each county's effectiveness in the timely notification of caregivers and whether caregivers are given an opportunity to be heard. The monthly county data is consolidated into a State report that indicates the State's overall compliance. However, it should be noted that the Statewide Assessment did not provide any data collected from the monthly monitoring reports.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the opportunity to be heard depends on the presiding judge. It was noted that SCDSS attorneys are trained to advise the judge on the record that the caregivers are present and to ask that the caregivers be given an opportunity to be heard. Although relevant data was not provided in the Statewide Assessment, the State reports that the results of the monitoring tool over a 2-year period indicated that opportunities to be heard generally were provided. When the caregiver was not provided the opportunity to be heard, the reasons noted were the following:

- The foster parents did not wish to speak in court.
- The court would not allow foster parents in the courtroom out of concern for the foster parent's safety from the parent.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, an SCFPA survey, which was completed by 153 foster parents at the March 2008 foster parent conference, resulted in the following findings:

- 96.37 percent of foster parents indicated they are aware they are able to attend FCRB reviews and court hearings.
- 86.33 percent of foster parents indicated they had received notices for FCRB reviews.
- 63.7 percent of foster parents indicated they had received notices of recent court hearings.
- 75.53 percent of foster parents indicated they had participated in FCRB reviews.
- 25.95 percent of foster parents indicated that they had participated in court hearings.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that SCDSS is responsible for ensuring that caregivers are notified of FCRB reviews and that the county attorney is responsible for ensuring that caregivers are notified of court hearings. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that caregivers receive written notice of reviews and hearings involving children in their care. Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that caregivers are allowed to participate in FCRB reviews and are provided opportunities to be heard in court; although some stakeholders reported that some caregivers choose not to participate in court hearings.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

Status of Quality Assurance System

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The State 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 2009 CFSR

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

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

 X Strength ___ Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength. The State has standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has policies in place to assess safety and health for children in foster care. This includes policies for the following:

- Caseworker and child visitation
- Physical and mental health assessment requirements
- Monitoring ongoing medical and mental health treatments
- Caseworker and foster parent contacts

Additionally, foster children are required to be placed in licensed homes. Foster family applicants must meet requirements established in State regulations in order to receive a standard license. If a child is court-ordered into an emergency, unlicensed placement, the caseworker must conduct an emergency home visit and study that includes background checks. The agency may move the child if negative results are obtained.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the OHAN unit investigates all alleged incidents of abuse and neglect in foster homes and child care facilities. It was noted that more than 90 percent of OHAN investigations conclude that no abuse or neglect occurred but that regulatory issues exist. Cases with regulatory violations are referred to units within SCDSS that license and oversee foster homes and day care facilities. This level of internal coordination helps reduce risks of harm to children.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State has effective standards in place to address the quality of services provided to children in foster care. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that standards regarding quality of care and qualifications of staff are applied to contracted services. However, a few stakeholders expressed concerns about the quality of foster homes.

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

Strength **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 31 is rated as a Strength. The State has a functioning QA system that addresses key practice areas and provides feedback on key findings. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QA process in the State, the CWSR, is modeled after the CFSR process. The CWSR determines if services are provided in compliance with Federal and State laws and policy and assesses the outcomes for children and families engaged in the child welfare system. The Statewide Assessment reports that State law requires that each county be reviewed at least once every 5 years. The Statewide Assessment also reports that due to a lack of resources, SCDSS does not conduct case-specific interviews as part of the CWSR; however, individual and group stakeholder interviews are conducted for each county or Regional Office review to determine the effectiveness of the local service array and to evaluate the effect of systemic issues on child welfare service delivery.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the CWSR is quantitative, in that it begins with an analysis of county agency data for the period under review, and qualitative in that it includes an analysis of information obtained from agency stakeholders and from a review of client records. In addition, the sample of 45 cases includes both open cases and cases closed during the period under review, which is the 12-month period 1 year before the Onsite Review. The Statewide Assessment reports that the CWSR sample includes the following:

- 10 foster home cases
- 10 foster care case
- 10 CPS treatment cases
- 10 screened-out reports to Intakes
- Five investigations that resulted in a finding of “unfounded”

The Statewide Assessment notes that review teams are composed of supervisors from county offices, Intensive Foster Care and Clinical Services offices, and Adoption offices, as well as program child welfare TA staff. Additionally, two QA team coordinators are present for each review to conduct secondary reviews of the reviewer’s case results, to field questions and ensure reliability of ratings, to conduct interviews, and to handle any other issues that arise. According to the Statewide Assessment, on completion of the review, the county office is required to develop a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) to address the findings of the CWSR, and quarterly updates on progress with the plan are required for 1 year.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, performance data from all counties are used to develop reports that identify statewide areas of strength and areas needing improvement. The State uses these data to track trends and to identify counties where practices can and should be modeled by others. CWSR performance data reports are presented and discussed at county director meetings, the statewide CFSR Kickoff, Continuing Legal Education conferences, and other venues. Additionally, results from the CWSR are used to identify training needs for SCDSS staff and to identify curriculum needs for the newly established consortium program. CWSR final reports are published on the SCDSS website and distributed to members of the General Assembly.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review provided information about the CWSR process and the use of CWSR results that is consistent with the information provided in the Statewide Assessment. Most stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the CWSR process is effective, constructive, and recognizes the strengths and the challenges within the South Carolina child welfare system. Several stakeholders reported that the CWSR assesses practice issues as well as systemic factors. Some stakeholders reported that State office staff, including the SCDSS director, meet with the counties and assist them implement their CIPs.

IV. STAFF AND PROVIDER TRAINING

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

Status of Staff and Provider Training

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

Key Findings of the 2009 CFSR

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

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength. The State provides child welfare training to new caseworkers and ensures that caseworkers are trained in relevant issues prior to assuming a caseload. Caseworkers are required to pass a knowledge test at the completion of phase 2 of training. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, new caseworker training is provided through the Division of Professional Development and Leadership (PD&L) either by SCDSS staff or through a contract by staff at the USC College of Social Work's Center for Child and Family Studies (CCFS). SCDSS policy requires that all new caseworkers successfully complete two training phases prior to providing child welfare services. A third phase of training must be completed during the caseworker's probationary period. According to a survey conducted of 150 training participants, at least 90 percent of the participants were satisfied with the training saying it was good, very good, or excellent.

The Statewide Assessment reports the following in regard to training new caseworkers:

- Phase 1: On Boarding provides an orientation to SCDSS, State, and Federal policies and procedures and an introduction to the operation of the child welfare system at the local level. During this phase, new caseworkers shadow veteran caseworkers.
- Phase 2: Core Training is designed to ensure that all new caseworkers have a common and basic understanding of child welfare practice and policy. The course consists of 95 contact hours over a 3-week period, and on the final day of class caseworkers take a knowledge acquisition test and must achieve a score of 75 or higher to advance to phase 3.
- During phases 1 and 2, caseworkers are supervised closely by certified program management staff and may provide case support services such as transportation for clients, arranging and observing parent-child visitations, making referrals, and following up on medical reports.
- Phase 3: Post Core is an array of specialized courses that allows caseworkers to develop competency in particular program areas. This includes a course on preparation for court and 10 hours of elective workshops in the caseworker's specific area of practice.

The Statewide Assessment notes that on average, 98 percent of trainees complete the core requirements for certification (phases 1 and 2) and are eligible to be assigned cases immediately. If a caseworker does not pass the examination or does not complete the requirements, a notification system reenrolls the new employee in an additional round of Child Welfare Core Training. If a caseworker fails to pass on the second try, he or she is released from the child welfare workforce. Additionally, "post-post" tests are given 6 months after participants complete the training.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, new supervisors are required to attend Leadership for Today and Tomorrow to develop basic skills and knowledge needed for supervision. This course is followed by the Art of Supervision in Human Services, which is a blended learning program of online assignments, a webinar, and four classroom sessions held over a period of 2 months.

All staff training records are tracked and maintained in the SCDSS Automated Registration and Training system (DART). DART lists both SCDSS and CCFS courses.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review offered opinions on the quality of pre-service training for new caseworkers. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the training for new caseworkers provides a general foundation for child welfare practice. Various stakeholders identified the following strengths of the State’s pre-service training program:

- CCFS provides the training.
- New caseworkers shadow tenured caseworkers as part of the training process.
- New caseworkers generally cannot assume a caseload until the successful completion of pre-service training.
- Specialized trainings offered in phase 3 prepare new caseworkers for their specific areas of practice.

Despite these strengths, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that pre-service training is too generic and broad, and does not adequately prepare new caseworkers for their job responsibilities. Some stakeholders also indicated that more extensive training on CAPSS is needed during the pre-service training period. Additionally, some stakeholders reported that due to the State’s current hiring freeze and fiscal constraints, the State does not have a set schedule for pre-service training but offers the training as needed.

Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that the required supervisor trainings are beneficial for new supervisors. Several stakeholders also reported that as a part of new supervisor training, supervisors are instructed on how to read management data reports.

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

 X Strength ___ Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as a Strength because the State requires ongoing training for all child welfare staff that addresses the necessary skills and knowledge base. Ongoing training is provided by CCFS and other resources and is tracked in DART. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS policy mandates that all staff assigned to human services obtain an annual minimum of 20 hours of additional professional education for recertification. The Statewide Assessment reports that it is the supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that each caseworker has completed this requirement, although all staff training records are tracked and maintained in DART. Caseworkers and supervisors can select training from courses that are offered by the CCFS, Children’s Law Center, and the Division of PD&L. Some courses are advanced workshops that are available to consultants, supervisors, and experienced caseworkers. In addition a variety of conferences and continuing education opportunities may be used to meet this requirement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that ongoing training is available across the State through the various venues reported in the Statewide Assessment as well as others, and that CCFS issues a newsletter that contains a calendar of ongoing training opportunities. Although many stakeholders reported that 20 hours of ongoing training are required annually for all child welfare staff to maintain their certification, a few stakeholders reported that there are no repercussions if staff do not complete the required training. Some stakeholders also indicated that supervisors are supportive of staff attending ongoing training.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State provides initial and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents that is readily available across the State. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, foster parents and adoptive parents must receive pre-service and in-service training to obtain and maintain licensure. The State offers 14 hours of Foundations for Care training for pre-service training. This training is provided by SCDSS staff and contractors and offers simultaneous selection and preparation for prospective foster and adoptive parents. Following licensure, foster parents must complete 28 hours of training every 2 years for relicensure. The Statewide Assessment reports that information collected from foster home care providers during a focus group at the October 2008 CFSR Kickoff (and subsequent focus groups) indicated an overall favorable response to the foster and adoptive parent training.

The Statewide Assessment notes that SCDSS contracts with SCFPA for the coordination of the local ongoing trainings for foster parents. Generally, the courses for foster and adoptive parents are offered locally on evenings and Saturdays and include access to child care. In addition, there is an annual SCFPA conference for foster parents, which was attended by more than 600 participants in 2008.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State provides initial training for foster and adoptive parents through a 14-hour curriculum, Foundation for Care, which is operated by local SCDSS staff and contractors. Some stakeholders reported that additional pre-service training hours are required for specialized and treatment foster homes. Also, if a foster family decides to adopt, additional training is required.

Opinions about the quality of the initial training varied among stakeholders. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the training is adequate and prepares prospective foster parents for parenting. Other stakeholders expressed the opinion the initial training does not prepare foster parents adequately for the realities of foster parenting.

Most stakeholders commenting on ongoing training for foster parents expressed the opinion that it is readily available to foster parents through local FPAs and that child care is provided during sessions. Stakeholders also noted that foster parents can complete training hours online and during medical appointments when they receive training on providing care for a child placed in their home. Additionally, stakeholders reported that training is available through an annual conference for foster parents led by SCFPA.

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

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

Key Concerns From the 2003 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2003 CFSR:

- The State had service gaps in key areas (particularly substance abuse and quality mental health services) that affected the achievement of safety and permanency for children.
- Existing services were not consistently available throughout the State.

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

- Conducted a needs assessment survey of available services and potential service gaps, including the availability of foster homes, for all counties, and made the findings available to constituents
- Worked with the South Carolina Dental Association to arrange for free dental care for children in foster care.

- Created a statewide directory of dental providers accepting Medicaid
- Worked with the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) to expand services statewide

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

Key Findings of the 2009 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. South Carolina has an array of services that addresses the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of children and families. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS delivers a variety of services directly or through contracts managed by the agency. Many critical resources such as food and shelter services, mental health and drug abuse services, parenting services, and educational services are delivered in the counties by a range of government, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that major services provided by community and other State agencies—such as domestic violence shelters and/or offender programs, GAL programs, employment services, and the departments of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN), Health and Environmental Control, Juvenile Justice, DMH, and Vocational Rehabilitation—exist in all counties. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that all State agencies have experienced large budget cuts recently that have resulted in cuts to contracts, cuts in services, hiring freezes, and some reductions in staff.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed different opinions about the adequacy of the array of services available to assess and address the needs of children and families in the State. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that services are not available to meet the needs of families and children. Some of these stakeholders indicated that services and service contracts have been reduced due to budget cuts resulting from the current economic situation, and that has greatly affected service delivery to families and children for

both in-home and foster care cases. Other stakeholders expressed the opinion that services are available but accessibility is sometimes a problem (see item 36).

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

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because services provided by the State are not accessible to families and children in all jurisdictions. In addition, there are waiting lists for such key services as psychological evaluations, substance abuse treatment, and mental health treatment. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, some contracted services are not available in all areas of the State, and sometimes families have to drive more than 50 miles to access the services included in their treatment plans. The Statewide Assessment also reports that when clients cannot provide their own transportation, SCDSS caseworkers often spend an entire day transporting a client to and from a required service. In addition, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, some required services, such as forensic interviews and examinations for sexual abuse victims, are available only in a few counties in the State, and caseworkers often are required to transport victim children and their parents to those services. The Statewide Assessment also notes that services related to parenting classes or support groups, fatherhood initiatives, youth programs, mentoring, and respite are not available in all counties.

In addition, the quality of services is a concern. CWSR reviewers have noted that sometimes caseworkers refer clients to service providers whom they know are not high quality because there are no other providers for that service in the area. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that the lack of appropriate or quality services can affect timeliness of reunification or case closure.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, in January 2009 USC conducted a survey of county SCDSS staff to determine their perceptions of service availability across the State. The survey found the following:

- The highest category of perceived need statewide was in in-home services, particularly family group conferencing, non-DSS homemaker services, respite care for parents, flexible funds, and wraparound services.
- The second highest category of need was residential treatment services, including residential treatment for children, adolescents, and adults; inpatient substance abuse treatment; and inpatient mental health treatment.
- A third area of high need was IL services, including additional supervised apartments, dormitory services, job coaches for youth aging out of care, and a post-secondary education tuition waiver program.

Additional information from the USC survey found the following with regard to important services that either are not available in a particular area, or are available but perceived as being of poor quality:

- 48 percent of the counties reported that emergency mental health services were either not available or available but poor quality.

- 37 percent of the counties reported that intensive family preservation services were either not available or available but poor quality.
- 35 percent of the counties reported that family group conferencing and non-DSS homemaker services were either not available or available but poor quality.
- 35 percent of the counties reported that post-prison transition services were not available.

The following important services were reported to be either not available or available but poor quality by 33 percent of the counties:

- Residential adolescent substance abuse services
- Residential substance abuse treatment for women with dependent children
- Independent living supervised apartments
- Respite care for parents
- Flexible funds
- A post-secondary educational tuition waiver program
- Fatherhood initiatives
- Outpatient mental health services

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the recent economic situation within the State has led to mid-year budget cuts of about 20 percent of State funds allocated to DMH, which has resulted in a reduction in the frequency, intensity, and availability of mental health assessments and counseling services. SCDSS also has experienced budget cuts that have reduced the funds available for the agency to purchase mental health services from the private sector. Additionally, changes to service descriptions and standards by the State Medicaid agency are increasing the costs to SCDSS and further restricting the availability of mental health services for SCDSS clients.

Despite the concerns regarding availability and accessibility of some services, the Statewide Assessment also reports that SCDSS has a contractual arrangement with DMH for the co-location of mental health workers in 11 SCDSS county offices to make mental health services more accessible to SCDSS clients.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the accessibility of services is better in urban areas than it is in rural areas. They noted that families living in rural areas frequently have to drive long distances to access needed services and that lack of transportation can restrict access to services. According to some stakeholders, it is very difficult for families without Medicaid or other insurance coverage to obtain services such as mental health services and substance abuse treatment. Additionally, a few stakeholders indicated that parents are unable to obtain services such as parenting classes and day care because they are required to pay for the service due to the lack of funding available through SCDSS.

Various stakeholders across the three sites indicated that many services available in the State frequently have a waiting list of several months, including the following:

- Mental health assessments and treatment
- Substance abuse treatment
- Section 8 housing
- Psychological evaluations
- Psychosexual assessments
- Speech therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Intensive foster care and clinical services

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

- Intensive parenting classes
- Foster homes
- Mental health services for adults and children
- Substance abuse evaluation and treatment
- Evaluation and treatment for sexual abuse victims and offenders
- Contracted family preservation services
- Domestic violence services
- Respite care
- Wraparound services
- Anger management classes
- Psychologists
- Transportation services, especially if the parent does not receive Medicaid
- Affordable housing
- Community-based 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. Information in the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicates that individualizing services to meet the unique needs of children and families is hampered by the lack of adequate flexible funding resources, the absence of many services in areas of the State, the need for parents to pay for basic services such as parenting classes

because of a lack of SCDSS funds, and a lack of language-specific and culturally responsive services for the Hispanic community. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency’s assessment tool and policies encourage and promote the individualization of services. However, budget cuts and contract limitations have affected the ability of SCDSS, other State agencies, and community partners to provide individualized services.

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. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in individualizing services. However, other stakeholders expressed the opinion that individualizing services is difficult due to the lack of services or the lack of available appropriate services in certain areas. Various stakeholders across the sites expressed the following concerns in reference to individualizing services:

- There are a limited number of culturally responsive services.
- Limited flexible funding is available to meet the concrete needs of families.
- Language-specific services are not available for the growing Hispanic community.
- Interpretation services are not readily available across the State.
- If a family does not have Medicaid, private insurance, or other means of payment, certain services are restricted.
- Families are required to pay for certain basic services, such as parenting classes.

Additionally, some stakeholders in Beaufort County reported that all parents and children involved in out-of-home service are required to obtain a psychological evaluation which, according to these stakeholders, is not necessary and can delay the progress of the case due to a waiting list for psychological evaluations.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community

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

Key Findings of the 2009 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. There are multiple organizations and stakeholders that provide consultation to the State with regard to the goals and objectives of the CFSP. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS established the Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC) in 2003 to provide a broad-based community perspective on how to best achieve the outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families and to provide input into the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, and effective child and family service delivery system. The CWAC, which consists of external stakeholders and SCDSS managers from State and local levels, provides input into the development of the CFSP, Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), Statewide Assessment for the CFSR, and Program Improvement Plan.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that SCDSS maintains ongoing collaboration with many community and faith-based organizations, advisory boards, State agencies, and citizen groups around the State that have roles or interest in child welfare. This State- and local-level collaboration allows for the exchange of ideas and concerns that influence agency planning and operation. The feedback gained from these and other sources helps SCDSS evaluate community needs and service delivery. The Statewide Assessment identified the following stakeholders as providing consultation to the agency on an ongoing basis:

- Foster and adoptive services providers
- Child abuse prevention agencies
- Child advocacy agencies
- DMH

- DDSN
- Treatment facilities
- The Catawba Indian Nation
- SCFPA
- Independent Living Advisory group
- South Carolina Court Administration
- Children’s Law Center
- Children’s Justice Act Task Force
- Child fatality review teams/children’s health and safety councils
- Citizen review panels
- SCCADVASA
- FCRB
- Faith communities
- CCFS

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that SCDSS has made efforts to engage their providers, other State agencies, the courts, the Catawba Indian Nation, foster and adoptive parents, and youth with the functioning of the child welfare agency and its goals and objectives. According to some stakeholders, CWAC has been a primary driver of engagement. A few stakeholders noted that engagement occurs more often at the State level than at the local levels.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength. According to stakeholders and the Statewide Assessment, the APSR is completed with input from various stakeholders. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS routinely solicits and uses information from partners to develop the APSR. Primary external partners providing information for the APSRs include the following:

- CWAC
- Community-based child abuse prevention organizations (includes South Carolina’s Children’s Trust)
- Children’s Law Center

- CCFS
- Citizen review panels
- SCFPA
- The Catawba Indian Nation
- Youth Independent Living Advisory groups

Partners are provided copies of the APSR when it is approved.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State seeks input into the APSR through CWAC and other internal and external partners.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength. The State coordinates services with other Federal and Federally-assisted programs. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS routinely collaborates with other departments and agencies to coordinate services related to Federal funding streams. Coordination of services among SCDSS programs, family assistance (which includes Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), and child support is discussed during weekly executive management meetings with the State director. An internal work group, the Child Welfare Council, includes the SCDSS director, the Human Services Division, the Community Services Division, and the Program Development and Program Improvement Division, and was established in 2008. The council meets weekly to discuss ongoing and proposed initiatives, new or proposed State and Federal legislation, and practice or policy changes. Members of this group also report about other collaborative groups, contracts, and grant meetings they may be involved in and bring issues and recommendations from those other sources.

According to the Statewide Assessment, SCDSS collaborates with a number of programs that serve the same population, including, but not limited to, the CCFS, Department of Education, DHHS, Catawba Indian Nation, and South Carolina’s Children’s Trust.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State is generally effective in coordination services of Federal and Federally-assisted programs for children and families. However, according to a few stakeholders, collaborative relationships are generally stronger at the State level than at the local level.

Additionally, a few State-level stakeholders provided information about No Wrong Door, a new statewide initiative that includes all the major child-serving agencies. The goal of the initiative is to improve the system of care and service array for families, which would allow adolescents and their families to go to one agency and be referred to the appropriate agency/services without duplicative paperwork and redundant assessments. If a youth fails to show for services, the referring agency will be notified.

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

South Carolina is in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2003 CFSR and was not required to address this factor in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2009 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. The State has standards for foster family homes, group homes, and child care institutions that were established by State statute and are reflected in SCDSS policy and licensing procedures. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State regulations are in place that govern the standards for foster family homes, group homes, and child care institutions. The Statewide Assessment reports that the current regulations were enacted on March 28, 2003, and are very comprehensive. The Statewide Assessment also reports that SCDSS has a specific policy and procedural manual devoted to foster home licensing that is to be used by both agency and external child placing agency (CPA) staff. Policy requires that county and Regional Offices and CPAs conduct initial and ongoing licensure processes for foster and adoptive parents. The title IV-E licensing and CPA licensing units review the foster home information prior to issuing a license or a relicense. A separate unit handles group and child care institution licensing.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, State licensing standards and policy require the following:

- Multiple initial and ongoing site visits
- Individual interviews
- Background checks on all adults
- Initial health inspections (annual for group or institutional settings)
- Annual fire inspections
- Medical reports on household members or staff
- Fire escape plans and disaster plans
- Training prior to placement of a child in the home and ongoing training for recertification
- Written assessment studies

The Statewide Assessment reports that there is at least one caseworker in each county to recruit and support foster homes and to ensure that homes remain in compliance with State and Federal requirements. SCDSS policy requires ongoing monitoring of foster homes, including quarterly home visits, regular face-to-face contact with foster parents, and monthly face-to-face visits with foster children.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, regulations for the licensing and relicensing of group care facilities include the above-mentioned requirements, as well as QA onsite visits and record reviews by CPA licensing and group home staff. The Statewide Assessment did not provide the timeframes for relicensing of these types of placements. Additionally, all group homes and child care institutions must be in compliance with all licensing regulations in order for children to be placed in the facility.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, policies and procedures address emergency situations in which a child in SCDSS custody is court-ordered into an unlicensed placement. The State does not issue temporary or provisional licenses for any type of placement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State’s standards for safety in foster homes are in place and are reflected in licensing procedures. Some stakeholders also reported that relicensing for foster homes, CPAs, and group placements occurs every 2 years.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength because the State applies the same standards to all licensed residential facilities and foster and adoptive homes, including relative homes. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina’s 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all resource families, relative and nonrelative, are required to meet the same licensing standards and to receive full licensure prior to placement in the home of a child who is in State custody. However, regulations for foster homes allow waivers in certain situations to maintain a child in a current placement or to allow siblings to be placed together. In addition, SCDSS will waive non-safety-related licensing standards for relatives on a case-by-case basis. The waivers on all foster parents are monitored and tracked by IV-E licensing staff. Additionally, Federal funds are claimed only for homes or facilities that meet the approval process for a standard license.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State’s standards for foster homes and residential facilities are generally applied equally to all placements. Several stakeholders noted that at the time of the onsite CFSR, both foster and adoptive families must comply with the same set of standards and that relative foster families must also comply with the same set of licensing standards, including training requirements. However, if a relative does not wish to be licensed, the placement must be ordered by the court, as SCDSS will only place children in licensed homes.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength. The State provides for background checks and fingerprinting as a component for all licensed foster and adoptive placements, including relatives and child care institution staff. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all foster and adoptive families and adult household members must submit to a complete safety background check as part of the licensing process. Background checks for foster and adoptive parents and adult household members include fingerprinting, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) checks, child abuse and neglect and central registries checks, and Sex Offender Registry checks. Additionally, State regulations require that potential foster parents have an FBI check prior to initial licensure and a SLED check every 2 years as part of the relicensing process. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, digital fingerprinting was implemented in February 2008 and produces criminal record results within 2 to 5 days.

The Statewide Assessment notes that during the CWSR, reviewers check for ongoing compliance with criminal records background checks and other licensing requirements. QA onsite visits and record reviews also are made to CPAs and group homes by CPA licensing and group home staff to ensure compliance with regulations on background checks. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, South Carolina passed the IV-E audit in August 2006, which included a review of criminal history background checks.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State requires background checks and fingerprinting for all adults older than age 18 in any resource family home or residential facility.

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 Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State operates and monitors a recruitment plan that operates at local, regional, and State levels, the plan does not focus on recruiting foster and adoptive families who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in State custody or in recruiting foster and adoptive families to meet particular needs, such as homes for older youth. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has developed and implemented a comprehensive three-tiered marketing plan for the recruitment of foster and adoptive families; the three tiers include local, regional, and State plans. Each county office has created an individual recruitment and retention plan and submits a quarterly report on successes, barriers, and progress toward obtaining the

goals. In each of the four regions, county offices, regional adoption offices, and Specialized Foster Home Services regional offices have combined their resources and also are required to submit a report on their progress to the marketing liaison.

The State plan involves partnerships with statewide entities, including faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, and nonprofit agencies. A monthly monitoring system is used to track intake and inquiry source. The marketing liaison receives a monthly tracking report from each county and regional office, and they are compiled into a State monthly report. Quarterly regional meetings with county and regional licensing and recruitment staff are facilitated by the State marketing liaison and the IV-E supervisor. The regional meetings assist in maintaining structure and coordination for the statewide program. The State has also adopted a recruitment logo, developed an informational brochure, and produced a commercial for statewide airing. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the agency's foster care and adoption recruitment program has been recognized by the Federal Government for its innovative marketing campaign.

In addition to the three-tiered marketing plan, SCDSS also contracts with SCFPA for recruitment. The association has a web-based information page that incorporates the SCDSS foster/adopt commercial. SCFPA refer inquiries to the counties and provides a detailed quarterly report to the marketing liaison on inquiries to foster and adopt. The State has also partnered with Simpsonville First Baptist Church and implemented "A Home for Me," a ministry for recruitment purposes.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State's recruitment plan is as described in the Statewide Assessment. However, many stakeholders reported that the State still needs foster homes, especially for older youth and sibling groups. Stakeholders did not comment on recruitment efforts that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care.

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

Strength **Area Needing Improvement**

Item 45 is rated as a Strength. The State effectively uses cross-jurisdictional adoption exchanges including **AdoptUsKids** and the ICPC to support permanent placements for children. This item was rated as a Strength in South Carolina's 2003 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, once adoption becomes the child's permanency goal, an initial search for a placement resource is completed. If a family is not identified within 90 days, the child's picture and profile information are entered into the South Carolina Seedlings photo-listing directory managed by the Council on Adoptable Children and posted on **AdoptUsKids**. Additionally,

the child's profile and photos are submitted to designated staff in the State office to coordinate child-specific recruitment activities locally and regionally. Activities include newspaper profiles, newsletters, adoption fairs, and TV tapings.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State also uses the South Carolina Heart Gallery, which features professional quality photographs of children waiting for adoption at venues around the State and maintains a website so that children are featured for recruitment statewide and for out-of-State families that are interested in adopting. In addition, Children Unlimited, an adoption agency with a Wendy's Wonderful Kids grant, is recruiting adoptive families for 31 children in foster care in South Carolina. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the State also uses the ICPC to place children out of State.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in its use of cross-jurisdictional resources on behalf of children awaiting permanency. Many stakeholders noted that the use of the ICPC to facilitate out of State placements. Additionally, various stakeholders across the sites noted that the State uses **AdoptUsKids**, the Heart Gallery, Wednesday's Child, and Seedlings to locate cross-jurisdictional placements for children free for adoption.