

Maine Office of Child and Family Services

Round 3 – Program Improvement Plan

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- Schedule: Maine will report progress on PIP activities to the Children’s Bureau at 6 month intervals.

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Executive Summary

In the Round 3 Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR), states were given the option to conduct their own review if the structure of the quality assurance process met the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) criteria. Maine was able to demonstrate that OCFS met the criteria and was granted approval to use its internal Quality Assurance Team for the review.

In the 2017 CFSR, Maine was found to be in substantial conformity with one of the seven outcomes:

- Wellbeing Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Maine was also found to be in substantial conformity with four of the seven systemic factors:

- Statewide Information System;
- Quality Assurance System;
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

Maine is now charged with creating a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) that addresses the outcomes and systemic factors in which Maine was not be in substantial conformity.

Within the year following the conclusion of the CFSR, Maine experienced two tragic deaths of young children whose families had been involved with the child welfare system. These high-profile deaths resulted in an increase in the collective awareness of Maine people regarding the child welfare system, as well as an awareness of our shared obligation to ensure children are safe. Across the country other states have experienced a similar increase in the number of reports when public awareness of child welfare has increased, therefore Maine's increase in the number of reports is not atypical. Despite the best efforts of our staff, this increase has taxed our system in a number of ways, including an increase in workload across the child welfare system.

During calendar year 2017, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) conducted an internal review of the child welfare system in Maine. In addition, the system has been reviewed by Maine's Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA), the investigative entity representing the State's Legislature. OCFS also contracted with the Public Consulting Group (PCG) to complete a Child Welfare Evaluation and Business Process Redesign. There were approximately 175 recommendations presented to OCFS leadership. The Maine Office of Child and Family Services partnered with Casey Family Programs to map the major initiatives and strategies currently underway in Maine. This mapping was designed to help executive leadership and regional staff evaluate which strategies were effective in achieving outcomes and identify areas where duplication of effort or inefficiencies might exist. In collaboration with internal and external

stakeholders, including OCFS staff and national experts, the recommendations were prioritized for implementation. Several of these strategies align with key activities in the Program Improvement Plan as the findings in the external reviews were consistent with that of the CFSR. Staff voice was a critical component that guided the development of key activities and on an ongoing basis, feedback from both internal and external partners will be a key component of evaluating implementation of these priorities.

During 2018, OCFS participated in legislative hearings regarding the child welfare system, including seeking legislative solutions to improve outcomes for children and families. As a result, several pieces of legislation were passed that have directly impacted OCFS, including:

- A modification to the expungement requirements contained in Maine law which lengthened the time the Department may retain unsubstantiated records from 18 months (if no new reports) to 5 years.
- A provision which authorizes OCFS to receive confidential criminal history from the Maine Department of Public Safety. Access to confidential criminal history provides staff information about pending criminal charges and criminal charges where the defendant plead to a lesser charge, the case was dismissed, or the defendant was acquitted. This is especially important due to the higher burden of proof required in criminal cases, which may result in the inability to obtain a criminal conviction even when there are facts or circumstances that might impact child safety.
- A modification to the family reunification language in Maine law which required reasonable efforts to reunify.
- A funding bill which included the following initiatives:
 - Funding to pilot a new family visitation model that will utilize visits as an opportunity to evaluate the parent's capacity to safely and appropriately parent their child.
 - Funding to expand clinical consultation services available to caseworkers that includes:
 - Case-specific consultation, individually and in groups, for staff and providers;
 - Trainings for OCFS staff regarding effective casework practice and decision making; and
 - Clinical consultation for staff to debrief child deaths, serious injuries, and other complex case situations in which staff may benefit from additional support.
 - Funds for the development of a new case management software system that will replace the Maine Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS).
 - An increase to the reimbursement rates for foster parents providing all levels of care.
 - Additional staff, including 8 administrative support positions (case aides), 16 caseworkers, 16 supervisors, and 2 regional associate directors.

- Funding for a \$5.00 per hour stipend to all staff who regularly make child safety related decisions (i.e. Caseworkers, Supervisors, Assistant Program Administrators and Program Administrators).
- Funding for a \$1.00 per hour stipend to all staff who hold a relevant master's degree and regularly make child safety related decisions.

During the 2019 129th Legislative Session, additional staff were authorized to include:

- 33 caseworkers, 6 supervisors and 4 case aides to support district operations;
- 11 caseworkers and 2 supervisors to support the Intake Unit; and
- 5 caseworkers and 1 case aide to support the Background Check Unit.

OCFS has worked cooperatively within the Executive and Legislative Branches to thoughtfully and expeditiously make the needed changes, many of which also correlate to and address the outcomes of the Maine OCFS 2017 CFSR.

Overarching goals and strategies

Historically OCFS has been proactive in seeking to improve the child welfare system in Maine. This includes improvements meant to respond to shifts in societal issues impacting child welfare (for example, a rise in the use of opioids), as well as ongoing improvements necessary to ensure that all children and families who come into contact with Maine's child welfare system experience an optimal outcome based on the circumstances surrounding the family.

Safety Outcome 1

OCFS identified two primary factors impacting Maine's performance in Safety Outcome 1. The first factor identified at the time of the CFSR was Maine's use of contracted Alternative Response Program (ARP) providers to conduct assessments on low-severity reports of child abuse and neglect. In the CFSR it was determined that these agencies were not always meeting contract performance expectations, including timeframes for initial contact with the alleged victim. Secondly, Maine, like many other states, has been challenged in maintaining a stable workforce. Staff turnover and the time necessary to train new staff on OCFS' policies and procedures impacted caseworker workload, supervisory workload and priorities, and the agency's ability to meet requirements for initial contact.

In addition, OCFS saw a significant increase in the volume of reports of maltreatment during calendar year 2018, which subsequently increased the number of appropriate reports assigned to OCFS staff for assessment. The Intake Unit within the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) manages Maine's child protection hotline. Intake is the first point of contact between the public and the child welfare system. The Intake Unit is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and receives approximately 6,000-7,000 phone calls per month, while also making approximately

3,500 outgoing calls each month. For calendar year 2019, the Intake telephone system is projected to receive 11% more calls. The overall increase in child abuse and neglect call volume has resulted in increased wait times for callers wanting to speak with Intake staff and there is potential for missed opportunities to protect children and support families. On June 18th, the Department rolled out an improved and modernized telephone solution. Some of the enhancements included: redesigned call flows to give child abuse- and neglect-related calls priority handling, “normal” work hour and “after hour” call flows to better align with the services offered during each timeframe, improved treatment of callers in-queue by offering an opt-out-to-voicemail option every 30 seconds, and a First-in-Line capability.

Goals 1, 2 and 3 include activities that were strategically designed to ensure expectations are met with regard to initial contact in all assessments. This included strengthening the contracts with ARP providers, as well as implementing and emphasizing recruitment and retention efforts to ensure the agency has an experienced, well trained, and healthy workforce. In addition, OCFS has implemented a number of changes to the child protection investigation process. Changes include streamlining work activities and providing district staff timely access to information and tools that aid in ensuring child safety.

Examples include access to more extensive criminal history information than was previously available, revision to the Child Protection Investigation (formerly Assessment) Policy, staff trainings that focuses on forensic and motivational interviewing, implementation of the SDM Safety Assessment and Risk Assessment Tools, and updates to the policy and procedures related to Family Team Meetings. The implementation of SDM will be finalized during the PIP period and is a key strategy within the PIP to support child safety, permanency, and wellbeing.

An additional component of this work is supervisory coaching to align practice with the tools. National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) will provide a leadership coaching overview for all supervisors and managers as well as a coaching institute and district coaching sessions. Coaching practices will be integrated into the overall strategies for child welfare supervision. Supervisors will be expected to utilize coaching during monthly individual and group supervisions. The OCFS Training Team is participating in these activities as a trainer-the-trainer and will provide this training to new supervisors as part of the Supervisory Academy.

OCFS has increased the focus on quality casework practice through enhanced supervisory training, the creation of a supervision tool within MACWIS and strengthening the QA Team. Additional staff resources are being added to the QA team which will provide support to each district and central office, as well as improve coordination of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) cycle with the Training and Policy Unit, Child Welfare management and district staff.

OCFS leadership values input from an array of stakeholders, staff being a key constituency. Historically, OCFS Leadership has engaged with the Child Welfare Caseworker Advisory Team as new policies, procedures and initiatives are being developed for their input. Recognizing the value of this advisory group, the Child Welfare Supervisor Advisory Team was created in 2019. It is anticipated that these groups will inform the OCFS Leadership Team on policy and practice.

Safety Outcome 2

OCFS identified several factors influencing Maine's performance in Safety Outcome 2, and those factors guided the creation of strategies to improve performance in this area. Internal focus groups were held and concerns regarding workload emerged as the largest perceived barrier to the timely completion of comprehensive investigations and engagement with families to ensure child safety. Through OCFS' work with external stakeholders, the agency identified that a lack of meaningful training opportunities for staff created barriers to attaining consistent and effective casework practice in all areas of the state. As highlighted previously, the Executive and Legislative branches, after hearing from internal and external stakeholder groups, recognized the challenges facing OCFS in relation to workforce retention and supported funding to both recruit and retain an effective workforce.

The following factors were found both during the CFSR and following the CFSR during consultation as well as through focus groups with managers throughout the state:

- The quality and timeliness of post-assessment involvement by contracted Alternative Response providers;
- Issues related to safety planning, including:
 - The development of safety plans that were unrealistically difficult or onerous for families to follow;
 - An inability to access all information necessary to create the safety plan, including information regarding key members of the plan;
 - Lack of consistency monitoring safety plans to ensure they were adhered to;
 - Lack of a consistent tool to evaluate the success of safety plans and to determine next steps for working with the family; and
 - Difficulty in ensuring that families engage in services to address the concerns that led to the need for a safety plan.
- Lack of assessment skills and tools necessary to fully assess families, particularly those that are struggling with domestic violence and/or substance abuse;
- Inconsistency in the transition between child welfare program areas (for example, when a case transfers from assessment to permanency); and
- Workload issues primarily related to an increase in the volume of reports of abuse and neglect and the rate of staff turnover.

Strategies developed within Goals 1-4 are meant to address these factors. Examples include a pilot program to incorporate the evaluation of parental capacity into the Family Coaching Visit program; clarification of expectations for supervisory practice; the creation of a Field Instruction Unit to provide real time and hands-on training for new caseworkers; revision to policy and practice regarding safety planning; salary stipends for all staff who regularly make child safety related decisions and an additional stipend for any of these staff that hold a relevant master's degree.

The agency identified and addressed challenges related to inadequate investigations and recognizes that training and an experienced workforce alone do not fully address the agency's challenges. As a result, OCFS sought opportunities to add clarity and support regarding policy expectations through a network of supervisors; administrative staff; and QA staff who monitor, provide recommendations, and hold the system accountable to quality standards of practice.

Permanency Outcome 1

OCFS identified several factors influencing Maine's performance in Permanency Outcome 1 and used those factors to develop strategies to improve performance in this area. The following factors were found during the CFSR, as well as through engagement with internal and external stakeholders:

- A disconnect in ensuring appropriate supports are available to foster parents;
- Resource issues related to children requiring a high level of care for which there is no appropriate placement readily available when needed;
- Inconsistency between the trainings available for foster parents and their stated and apparent desire to increase their knowledge of complex family systems and their role within the child welfare system as foster care providers;
- A lack of consistency in practice with regard to ensuring field staff engage meaningfully with both parents;
- Systemic factors related to court delays;
- Gaps in knowledge based on a lack of quality trainings available in the following areas:
 - Assessing situations to identify the best interests of children and continually updating that assessment during the life of the case;
 - Engagement of all critical case members;
 - Concurrent planning for permanency;
 - Timeframes to permanency and strategies to ensure those timeframes are met; and
 - Engagement of key players in the case planning process, including relatives, family supports, and foster parents; and
 - Staff retention.

Strategies are embedded in Goals 1-4 that will address these challenges. These include technical fixes, such as the development of the Family Plan and Child Plan, and creation of MACWIS modules that facilitate the development of these plans. Both the Family and Child Plan are meant

to address and document concurrent planning, reunification efforts, and engagement with families and their supports. Both plans provide guidance for creating child-specific action steps based on the child's developmental and behavioral needs in order to address the specific needs of the family and children through appropriate service provision. The development and implementation of the OCFS Family and Child Plans are a key strategy within the PIP meant to streamline casework and provide a single and consistent case planning document and process to encourage effective engagement with families. Within the PIP period, OCFS will implement additional training and coaching opportunities related to case planning, as well as oversight of practice in this area.

The key activities related to retention and training of the workforce will help support the adaptive challenges that have been identified as barriers to timely establishment and achievement of permanency goals.

OCFS has long benefitted from a robust collaborative relationship between the agency, the Attorney General's Office, and the Maine Judicial Branch. These three entities meet at least quarterly to address Court Improvement Project related matters, as well as engage in ongoing discussions regarding issues such as delays in the court process for child protective cases.

In response to the findings of the CFSR, OCFS identified the need for increased collaboration with the courts to improve on the areas of review, including the timeliness of periodic reviews. To this end, OCFS and the members of the Administrative Office of the Courts, including the court improvement coordinator, held a series of weekly meetings facilitated by the Children's Bureau to review and discuss the CFSR findings that pertained to court performance. Recognizing the need and benefit of improved collaboration, the strategies in the program improvement plan that involve the courts were developed with substantial input from both the courts and OFCS, including their respective leadership and will result in ongoing collaboration to achieve results.

Permanency Outcome 2

There were several factors identified as influencing Maine's performance in Permanency Outcome 2 which drove the development of strategies to improve performance. The following factors were found during the CFSR, as well as through engagement with internal and external stakeholders:

- Difficulty in coordinating meaningful visits between siblings in the care of the Department, particularly in cases where some or all the children did not share the same father;
- A need for improvement in the quality of visits between children and their parents;
- Difficulty in ensuring children can maintain a placement in their home community when doing so has been determined to be beneficial;
- Difficulty in establishing and exploring all potential maternal and paternal relatives, cultural practices, and religious connections.

OCFS has ensured that there are strategies embedded within Goals 1-4 that will address the challenges identified in Permanency Outcome 2. These include technical fixes, such as the Family and Child plans which contain components to ensure staff explore and address relative connections, visitation (both with parents and siblings), cultural connections and practices, and parental and familial engagement. Both plans provide guidance for determining the level of supervision required for visitation and the amount of contact with family, as well as encouraging contact whenever doing so is safe and appropriate for the child. There remain adaptive challenges, which will be addressed through training for staff and foster parents, including training specific to family engagement, support of children in maintaining connections with family members, and facilitating quality contacts between children and family members (including parents). In addition, implementation of the Family Visit Coaching model focuses on assessing and evaluating parental capacity as it relates to a parent's ability to safely care for the child. This intensive work will lead to timely and well supported decisions regarding the reunification of families.

Child Wellbeing Outcomes 1 and 3

OCFS has identified several factors influencing Maine's performance in Child Wellbeing Outcome 1 and 3. The following factors were found during the CFSR, as well as through engagement with internal and external stakeholders:

- Gaps in the assessment process for determining the needs of children, parents, and foster parents and lack of available appropriate services to address the needs when identified;
- Inconsistencies in the assessment of and response to children's medical, dental, and behavioral health needs;
- A lack of tools and strategies to effectively engage with parents, paramours, children, and foster parents in quality case planning;
- Challenges related to the array of services available to meet the needs of both children and parents;
- An inability to conduct regular and consistent ongoing assessments of how parents and children are progressing in the services as necessary to enable family rehabilitation and reunification;
- The quality of caseworker contacts with children in the Department's care;
- Specific to in-home service cases, inconsistency in the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with household members as necessary to meet the case circumstances;
- For children in care, inconsistency in the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with parents as necessary to meet the case circumstances;
- Challenges with workload for both caseworkers and supervisors; and
- Difficulty in addressing and managing secondary trauma for district staff.

Within Goals 1-4 strategies have been tailored to begin to address the identified factors and improve OCFS' performance in these outcomes. These include technical fixes, such as the Family

and Child Plans which include specific methods to address concerns related to case planning, including documentation of effort to provide services, and engagement of families to create solutions to address barriers to ensuring child safety and wellbeing. Templates for face-to-face contact with parents, children, and other case participants have been revised and expectations around their use has been incorporated into OCFS policy and procedures. These templates reflect elements that encourage quality contact with parents, children, and resource parents.

Family team meetings have been a key strategy to improve engagement with families. In response to information obtained in the internal, OPEGA and PCG reviews changes were made to improve teaming practices. Guidance was issued to staff to ensure that meetings are focused on the best interest of the child and promote engagement with parents/caregivers to address child safety and risk. It also included the expectation that child safety decisions are made with the input of the entire team to ensure that all relevant information is available and considered. Required trainings for staff now focus on skill development for more effective engagement, including facilitation, motivational interviewing, action planning, principles of teaming and crucial conversations.

Systemic Factors

As evidenced in the CFSR Final Report, Maine was in substantial conformity in four of the seven systemic factors. Maine has developed strategies designed to improve outcomes of the systemic factors that did not reach substantial conformity, in summary these include strategies within three high-level categories:

- **Case Review:** Strategies that address the concerns related to Maine's case review system include: collaboration on the Court Improvement Project; development of the Family Plan and Child Plan; clarification regarding Family Team Meetings; the implementation of SDM Safety and Risk Assessment and permanency related tools; and increase in supervisory skill and oversight, and CFSRs completed by the Quality Assurance Unit.

While Maine received a rating of substantial conformity for its Quality Assurance System, OCFS also recognizes that to evaluate and maximize progress in all areas of practice the QA Team is an integral part of the information and feedback loop that will be utilized in the process of evaluating and improving the child welfare system. Maine will strengthen its quality assurance system through the addition of four QA Specialists and increased coordination with the Training and Policy Unit and Child Welfare management.

- **Staff and Provider Training:** Strategies developed will address concerns related to Maine's array of trainings available to both staff and external providers, such as resource parents. OCFS is procuring a Cooperative Agreement with the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service. Services include an expediated policy review and revision of policy and the creation of a policy making process and a child welfare procedural manual. In addition, a robust training system will be designed for caseworker preservice training, resource family preservice training and a field instruction unit.

Specific activities include reviewing and updating the contract for the agency’s resource parent support service; increased access to training opportunities for foster, adoptive and kinship parents; trainings targeted to the identified needs of resource parents; the development of a Field Instruction Unit to provide training to new staff in real time; training regarding the implementation of SDM tools, motivational interviewing and forensic interviewing techniques, and additional supervisory oversight and guidance. In addition, Maine will develop a statewide training database that will track participation in trainings and the dates of social worker licensure and renewal.

- **Service Array and Resource Development:** OCFS recognizes that it does not always have direct control over the array of services and resources available to assist parents and families in rehabilitating and reunifying, but there are strategies OCFS plans to utilize to ensure access wherever possible. A robust and geographically diverse array of services is a key component to ensure that families can reunify whenever it is possible to do so safely. Maine will review current data sources to identify gaps which can then be used to advocate for additional funding and/or direct resources to develop and fund needed services.

Part One: Goals, Strategies, and Key Activities

Goal 1: Ensure safety for children through timely response to reports of child maltreatment and thoroughly assessing and addressing identified risks and safety issues.

(CFSR Outcomes Covered: Safety Outcome 1, Safety Outcome 2)

Strategy 1: Strengthen safety by ensuring all alleged victims of maltreatment are seen within OCFS policy defined timelines.

Root cause analysis: OCFS has historically been challenged in ensuring that all reports of child abuse and neglect are responded to within an appropriate timeframe to meet the needs of the alleged victims of abuse. This was evidenced in the 2017 CFSR data as well as the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME-QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
1 Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of maltreatment	73.1% Strength	60.3% Strength

OCFS identified two factors impacting Maine’s performance in Safety Outcome 1, the strategies identified to improve performance on Safety Outcome 1 address those factors.

The factors include:

- Delays in reports being reviewed and assigned to districts and/or ARP through the Centralized Intake Unit. In May 2017, Maine implemented the Structured Decision Making (SDM) model in the Central Intake Program. The purpose of the screening and response priority tool is to assess whether a referral meets the statutory threshold for an in-person OCFS response and if so, the response timeframe (within 24 or 72 hours of receipt of the report). In 2018, OCFS changed the intake approval process to decrease the timeframe for assignment of appropriate reports. Appropriate reports are sent directly to the district supervisors for review and assignment. Intake supervisors review all reports deemed inappropriate and any child death/serious injury reports. The PCG report included recommendations to ensure every report receives second level review and approval by a supervisor within 24 hours to ensure accurate decision-making and timely response.
- Maine utilizes contracted Alternative Response providers to conduct assessments on low-severity reports of child abuse and neglect. In the CFSR, it was determined that these agencies do not always meet contract performance expectations, including timeframes for initial contact with the alleged victim. The PCG report included recommendations to reassess the ARP program to align expectations with best practice and further define the referral process.

Key activities to ensure all alleged victims of maltreatment are seen within OCFS policy defined timeframes:

1. Update the Structured Decision-Making Intake Tool and Intake Policy for full implementation by Intake staff which guides decision making regarding the appropriateness of assignment to OCFS or ARP and the response timeframe (up to 24 or 72 hours). With the ARP redesign it is anticipated that there will be a change to Intake making the final decision on all reports.
Projected completion date: Quarter 2
Status Update: n/a
2. Coaching to Intake supervisors and caseworkers by NCCD to build increased consistency and fidelity in the use of the SDM Intake Tool.
Projected completion date: Quarter 1 and ongoing
 Status Update: n/a
3. Implement use of the new call center software in the OCFS Intake Program to increase the number of live calls answered.
Projected completion date: Quarter 4
Status Update: n/a
4. Complete redesign of the Alternative Response Service based on the analysis of caseload, workload and available staff resources. This will include an evaluation of the current

services provided as compared to the needs of the population served and a review of performance outcomes. Feedback from stakeholders will be an important component of the redesign.

Projected completion date: Quarter 4

Status Update: n/a

5. Monitor implementation of assessment timeframes as defined in the Child Welfare Investigation Policy based on QA reviews, feedback from stakeholders and data reports.

Projected completion date: Quarter 1

Status Update: n/a

6. The Office of Child and Family Services will provide a training at the 2020 Child Protective Conference on *Casework 101*. The conference is attended by approximately 400 participants, including judges, tribal judges and caseworkers, assistant attorney generals, parent attorneys, guardian's ad litem, and caseworkers. The session on *Casework 101* will include information about the child welfare case flow, use of Structured Decision-Making tools and best practices for engaging with child welfare staff. A survey will be provided to participants requesting that they rate the training and inviting them to comment on the training.

Projected completion date: Quarter 2

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: OCFS policy specifies that district staff have up to 72 hours, from the time a report is received, to initiate contact with critical case members. When there are delays in the assignment of reports, alleged victims of child maltreatment are not seen within a reasonable timeframe to meet their needs. All reports to OCFS are entered through the Centralized Intake Unit and then sent to OCFS districts who may, based on the severity level of the report, refer the family to the district ARP. One identified need was to provide Intake staff with a tool that assisted in determining the appropriate response to the reported information (DHHS or ARP) and the timeframe for response, 24-hour or 72 hours, that would be consistently applied in each report of child abuse and neglect. The state implemented SDM in Intake to address this need. In addition, redesigning the Alternative Response service to better meet the needs of families and children will maximize the overall use of resources to ensure that alleged victims are seen timely and risk factors for abuse and neglect are addressed.

OCFS will know it has successfully implemented SDM at intake and effectively manage contracted resources as well as agency staff resources through improved outcomes related to timely responses to reports. Sources of this information may include results of the quality assurance reviews and data reports.

Strategy 2: Strengthen safety through statewide implementation of Structured Decision Making (SDM) in assessment and permanency casework practice to build consistency in practice and improve critical thinking and decision making at key child welfare decision points.

Root cause analysis: Maine has historically been challenged in adequately assessing risk and safety throughout a family’s involvement with child welfare services. Maine also struggled to provide services to families to prevent removal of children, however performed well in the national standard related to re-entry into foster care. The most recent Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Data Profile (August 2019) reflects that Maine’s performance is statistically no different than national performance 9.5%, although there was a decrease in performance from the prior profile (16A16B). Maine’s challenges in assessing risk and safety and providing services to prevent removal was evidenced in the 2017 CFSR data and the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME- QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
2 Services to family to protect children in the home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care	50% Strength	35.6% Strength
3 Risk and safety assessment and management	40% Strength	36.9% Strength

The following factors were found both during the CFSR and following the CFSR during consultation and focus groups with managers throughout the state:

- The quality and timeliness of post-assessment involvement by contracted Alternative Response providers was inadequate;
- Issues related to safety planning, including:
 - The development of safety plans that were unrealistically difficult or onerous for families to follow;
 - An inability to access all information necessary to create the safety plan, including information regarding key members of the plan;
 - Lack of consistency in monitoring safety plans to ensure they were adhered to;
 - Lack of a consistent tool to evaluate the success of safety plans and determine next steps for working with the family; and
 - Difficulty in ensuring that families engage in services to address the concerns that led to the need for a safety plan.

- Lack of assessment skills and tools necessary to fully assess families, particularly those that are struggling with domestic violence and/or substance abuse;
- Inconsistency in the transition between child welfare program areas (for example, when a case transfers from assessment to permanency); and
- Workload issues primarily related to an increase in the volume of reports of abuse and neglect and the rate of staff turnover.

A key project to improve child welfare practice related to comprehensively addressing the concerns listed above is the utilization of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety and Risk Assessment and Permanency Tools. The purpose of the SDM Safety Assessment Tool is to guide decision-making related to whether a child is in immediate danger that may require a protective intervention and to determine what intervention should be initiated or maintained increase child safety. The SDM Risk Assessment Tool assesses the likelihood of future maltreatment and system involvement. While the SDM Permanency Tools determine what interventions could address child and family needs; if a child can safely return home and when a case can be closed.

Through the implementation of SDM, Maine has transitioned to safety planning only when a child can remain in the home with their parent/caregivers. This is a significant change in that the default had become safety planning children out of the home. It will be necessary for staff to consider the safety threats, actions of protection and potential safety interventions that promote child safety and allow the child to remain in the home. Safety interventions can include activities by the caseworker or a family's support network or legal actions such as filing a Protection from Abuse Order. The tools are a framework for improving decision making, strengthening the assessment of safety and risk and better serving families that require ongoing child welfare intervention. Through utilization of these tools, it is expected that OCFS will also see improvements in the recurrence of maltreatment for children as a result of improved service delivery to families.

Key activities of successfully implementing SDM in assessment and permanency includes:

1. Provide training for all staff in the utilization of the SDM Permanency tools and develop guidance tools to support staff in this work.
Projected completion date: Quarter 1 and ongoing
Status Update: n/a
2. Monitor implementation of the SDM Safety, Risk Assessment, and Permanency tools based on QA reviews, feedback from stakeholders and data reports.
Projected completion date: Quarter 2
Status Update: n/a

3. Revise the OCFS Permanency Policy to provide practice guidance and incorporation of SDM tools and procedures which, through the ongoing reassessment of risk, will enhance the safety of children involved in the child welfare system.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

4. Coordinate coaching support for supervisors in partnership with NCCD on the SDM Assessment and Permanency tools to ensure fidelity and sustainability. This work will occur concurrent with the implementation of the SDM tools.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: Utilizing the SDM Safety and Risk Assessment and Permanency tools will create statewide consistency in decision making related to if/when a child should be removed from the home due to imminent safety threats; reassessment of family circumstances due to changes in the home to assist staff in determining when a case should be opened, and services provided to the family. These tools will also be utilized to determine when a case should be closed and are intended to support decision-making and guide district staff in ensuring that risk and safety factors have been considered at each stage of the case continuum.

OCFS will know it has successfully implemented the SDM Safety and Risk Assessment and Permanency tools through improved outcomes related to safety. Sources of this information may include results of the quality assurance reviews and data reports.

Goal 2: Strengthen child welfare practice through improving engagement with families and children involved in the child welfare system.

(CFSR and Systemic Factor Outcomes Covered: Permanency Outcome 2; Well Being Outcome 1; Well Being Outcome 3)

Strategy 1: Full implementation of strategies to increase family engagement through the completion of collaborative case planning and a focus on the wellbeing and best interest of children involved with the child welfare system.

Root cause analysis: OCFS has struggled to build and sustain engagement and partnership with the families involved with the child welfare system and their formal and informal supports. This was evidenced in the 2017 CFSR data as well as the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME-QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
4 Stability of Placement	75% Strength	71.3% Strength
5 Performance goal for child	80% Strength	53.8% Strength
6 Achieving Reunification, PG, ADO, OPPLA	55% Strength	31.3 Strength
12 Needs of services of child, parents and foster parents	38% Strength	32.3% Strength
12A Needs assessment and services to children	69% Strength	57.7% Strength
12B Needs assessment and services to children	33% Strength	25.7% Strength
12C Needs assessment and services to foster parents	63% Strength	65.4% Strength
13 Child and family involvement in case planning	40% Strength	32.5% Strength
14 Caseworker visits with child	63% Strength	54.6% Strength
15 Caseworker visits with parents	35% Strength	20.0% Strength

The ACF Data Profile (August 2019) does reflect a higher level of performance in three of the Permanency Outcome 1 data points evidenced below:

- Placement Stability: RSP 3.71- Statistically better than the national performance;
- Permanency in 12-23 months: RSP 55%- Statistically better than the national performance;
- Permanency in 24+ months: RSP 37%- Statistically better than the national performance.

Since the 2017 CFSR, the agency worked with consultants to complete an organizational assessment that included focus groups with central office and district staff; observations of current family team meeting practice; review of policy and data and the convening of a workgroup of agency staff, parents and community partners to assess the barriers to effectively engage with families. Some of the findings included:

- Differences in the value placed on family engagement, kinship care and the inclusion of children in the family team meeting process;
- Inconsistency in practice amongst those facilitating the meetings;
- Lack of a formal training curriculum; and
- Challenges maintaining fidelity to the family team meeting model.

Stakeholders described a lack of inclusion in decision-making and case planning, as well as role confusion as to how they were part of the solutions to ensure child safety. This often resulted in a lack of continued participation in the family team meeting process. Internal focus groups were held and concerns regarding workload emerged as the largest perceived barrier to quality engagement with families. Thus, it was decided that a key activity to improve engagement with families and their supports is the review and implementation of effective family team meeting practices.

Key activities to develop the framework and successfully implement family team meetings include:

1. Revise the OCFS Family Team Meeting Policy to provide practice guidance for staff to utilize in their work with families. Revisions will be made to outline practice expectations for family engagement prior to family team meetings, the critical decision points when meetings will be convened, including supporting placement stability, required team members to be invited, and requirements for documentation of these activities.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

2. Provide training for all staff through JPMA, the web-based training portal, in the revised Family Team Meeting Policy. Staff are required to complete a test as part of the training and demonstrate 100% competency. Supervisors monitor completion and provide additional support to staff when necessary.

Projected completion date: Quarter 4 and ongoing

Status Update: n/a

3. Monitor implementation of the Family Team Meeting policy based on QA reviews, feedback from stakeholders and data reports.

Projected completion date: Establish baseline and ongoing

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: Teaming begins upon initial contact with children, parents and other critical case members and is used to identify services and supports a family may benefit from, as well as address barriers that could impact overall outcomes for children and families. Through the implementation of effective family team meetings, the agency will increase engagement with families in the child welfare case process, which will eventually lead to more effective individualized family and child case planning and decision-making. Risk and safety will be managed through utilizing a family's natural support network to develop shared responsibility for child safety and the solutions to reduce barriers to service delivery. Regularly convening a family's support network, allows for early identification of any placement challenges and the opportunity to provide supports needed to maintain placement stability. Children will achieve permanency

more quickly as there will be increased transparency and collaboration within the team to address safety, permanency and wellbeing concerns. Through training and coaching staff will develop skills to effectively engage with families. Staff will increase their understanding of the value of fully engaging with families to include them as partners in identifying the child safety issues and developing strategies for change that they can then implement. This will require reflection about their own values, beliefs and experiences that impact their practice through individual and group supervision with peers. Staff are provided opportunities to provide feedback through district meetings with management, the OCFS Suggestion Box and the Caseworker and Supervisory Advisory Teams. As OCFS implements strategic plan priorities the voices of staff and stakeholders are an important component of developing action steps and monitoring outcomes.

OCFS will know it has successfully implemented effective teaming practices through improved outcomes related to permanency and wellbeing. Sources of this information may include results of the quality assurance reviews and data reports.

Strategy 2: Full implementation of the OCFS Family and Child Plan to increase the engagement of family in the child welfare process leading to more effective family and child case planning and decision making.

Root cause analysis: In 2016, OCFS undertook efforts to streamline the planning process for families and children involved with the child welfare system. The agency had multiple plan documents for different case types and a lack of clear practice expectations related to case planning. The result of these challenges was evident in the data from the 2017 data as well as the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME-QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
13 Child and family involvement in case planning	40% Strength	32.5% Strength

An analysis of the 2017 CFSR data found the following:

- challenges in involving parents and youth in case planning;
- a lack of clarity for parents regarding what needs to happen to resolve the child safety concerns and to close the case;
- parents' voices not being heard and valued and a lack of focus on case planning outside of formal team meetings.
- A small number of stakeholders felt that TPRs were filed timely; however, other stakeholders said that the TPR was not filed timely and that delays in paternity testing, the

need for publication for parents, crowded court dockets, and caseworker workloads were barriers to timely filing.” (*CFSR Maine Final Report 2017*)

- Parents given extended periods of time to reunify despite little demonstration of progress being made in services to alleviate jeopardy issues; and

In-depth surveys were conducted between late-June and early-November 2016 of youth between the ages of 14-25 who were in or had recently transitioned out of foster care in Maine. The majority (74%) were between 16 and 20 years of age. Survey respondents were asked if they felt included in the overall decision making during their time in foster care. Of the 117 respondents, 48% indicated they ‘always’ felt included; 46% indicated they ‘sometimes’ felt included, and 6% indicated they ‘never’ felt included. Youth were asked who they thought had listened to their voice, or opinions during their time in care (with the option to check as many as they wanted), three quarters of youth checked that their caseworker listened to them. A high percentage of respondents also indicated that their relatives, foster parents, staff (73%), and GAL (51%) listened. Among the lower percentages of groups that respondents felt listened to them were attorneys (14%), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) (3%), and 5% of respondents checked that they felt no one listened to them.

Over many years, OCFS has gathered feedback from stakeholders and staff related to the functionality of the agency's case planning tools. The themes have remained similar and the agency has responded by developing and implementing the OCFS Family and Child Plan tools. These new plans were initially implemented in paper format statewide while the data team built the modules in the MACWIS system. Although considered a technical fix, the Family and Child Plan include specific documentation requirements that address concerns related to case planning. Two examples are reasonable efforts to prevent removal and the engagement of families to create solutions which address child safety and wellbeing. Subsequent feedback from stakeholders has been that the plan is lengthy and doesn't provide clear guidance for families about what it would take to demonstrate resolution of child welfare concerns.

Key activities to successfully implement the OCFS Child and Family Plans include:

1. In collaboration with the AAGs Office, revise the OCFS Family Plan in response to feedback from stakeholders.

Projected completion date: Quarter 1

Status Update: n/a

2. Provide staff with training in the completion of the OCFS Family and Child Plans.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

3. Monitor implementation of the OCFS Family and Child Plans based on QA reviews, feedback from stakeholders and data reports.

Projected completion date: Establish baseline and ongoing

Status Update: n/a

4. Convene a statewide Supervisor Advisory Team to review and make recommendations for revisions of the MACWIS Supervisory Tool.

Projected completion date: Quarter 2

Status Update: n/a

5. The Child Welfare Management Team will determine which recommendations to implement to increase the effectiveness of the MACWIS Supervisory Tool as a strategy for coaching staff on the development of Family and Child Plans.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: Case planning is used to identify individualized services and supports a family may benefit from, as well as address barriers that may impact the successful achievement of Family and Child Plan goals. Case planning begins at initial contact with a family and when effective will lead to timely permanency decisions and achievement of permanency outcomes. Through the implementation and consistent utilization of the OCFS Family and Child Plans, the agency will increase the engagement of families in the child welfare case process, which will include and eventually lead to more effective family and child case planning and decision-making. Risk and safety management will be increased through utilizing a family's natural support network to enhance assessment practice and shared responsibility for child safety. The MACWIS Supervisory Tool is used in supervision to help train, coach and guide staff in policy and practice expectations. Embedded throughout the tool are practice prompts that support engagement with children and families by focusing on quality family team meetings, monthly contacts and inclusion of youth and family voice in the case process. The practice prompts are specific to the stage of the case and align with both state and federal child welfare measures to increase focus on areas of practice that Maine has been challenged on.

OCFS will know it has successfully implemented quality Family and Child Plans through improved outcomes related to safety, permanency and wellbeing outcomes. Sources of this information may include results of the quality assurance reviews and data reports.

Goal 3: Improve timeliness to permanency through improved engagement of and communication with all families, family supports, Court and community partners.

(CFSR and System Factor Outcomes Covered: Permanency Outcome 1, Case Review Systemic Factor, Service Array and Resource Development Systemic Factor, Staff and Provider Training)

Strategy 1: Increase timeliness to permanency through improved engagement of and communication with parents and resource caregivers.

Root Cause Analysis: The CFSR found that Maine established appropriate permanency goals for children in a timely manner in 80% of the 40 reviewed cases. It was also found that Maine was challenged in achieving timely permanency for children in foster care, meeting the standard in 55% of the 40 reviewed cases. Maine continues to challenge in this area as evidenced by the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME-QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
5 Permanency goal for child	80% Strength	53.8% Strength
6 Achieving Reunification, PG, ADO, OPPLA	55% Strength	31.3% Strength

The CFSR findings regarding Maine’s case review system generally point to the need for enhanced engagement of parents and resource caregivers, both outside and inside the courtroom, as a necessary step towards improving the timeliness to permanency.

First, regarding engagement outside of the courtroom, the CFSR found that Maine has experienced challenges in jointly developing written case plans with parents. Stakeholders said that “plans were usually written by caseworkers and presented to parents” and noted “challenges with actively involving parents in case planning, including parents not understanding the process.”

Second, the statewide assessment also highlighted the need to improve engagement of parents and caregivers inside the courtroom at judicial reviews. Stakeholders interviewed as part of the CFSR reported that “the agency drafts and circulates an order, if all parties agree, the judge signs the order, but this process does not provide an opportunity for a thorough review.” Regarding resource caregiver engagement, two barriers to engagement were identified. First, the Children’s Bureau found that a lack of proper notice to resource caregivers created a barrier to their engagement. Second, caregivers identified the need for more date certainty of court proceedings to enable them to plan in advance and thereby improve their ability to attend.

In addition to the findings on engagement, the CFSR found that the timeliness of quality of periodic reviews by the courts needed improvement. This finding was based on file reviews, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups to collect the data. The file review data for the CFSR was pulled strictly from the MACWIS, and neither a Maine Judicial Information System (MEJIS) analysis of

data nor an in-person review of the court files was completed. In response to the findings of the CFSR, OCFS identified the need for increased collaboration with the courts to improve on the areas of review, including the timeliness of periodic reviews. To this end, OCFS and the members of the Administrative Office of the Courts, including the court improvement coordinator, held a series of weekly meetings facilitated by the Children’s Bureau to review and discuss the CFSR findings that pertained to court performance. As part of that collaborative review process, representatives from the courts conducted a manual file review and analyzed data from MEJIS for the cases that were selected for the CFSR. This manual data analysis showed that the courts are performing much better on timeliness measures than was reported in the CFSR. A total of 37 cases were hand reviewed by judicial branch employees who are attorneys and experts in child protective law. Data collection indicated the following about periodic reviews:

- The statewide average for days between judicial reviews in Maine was 119 days. This average is far less than the statutorily required 6-month, approximately 180-day, timeframe;
- Of the 37 cases reviewed, there were 256 judicial reviews held and only 8.2% of the judicial reviews were outside of the required timeframe.

Based on the judicial analysis of the cases reviewed, 91.8% of the judicial reviews held were timely. Because this in-depth manual data review demonstrated that the timeliness of quality for period reviews does not need improvement in Maine, the key activities below do not address this item. However, the discrepancy between the data gathered from the in-person review of the court files and the data in MACWIS underscored the need for improved communication and collaboration between the judicial branch and OCFS, particularly on data provided to the Children’s Bureau for its reviews. Recognizing the need and benefit of improved collaboration, all of the strategies in this program improvement plan that involve the courts were developed with substantial input from both the courts and the OFCS, including their respective leadership.

Key Activities to enhance parent engagement in case planning:

To enhance parent engagement in case planning, Maine will provide training on the best practices to improve engagement of parents at family team meetings prior to court.

1. Parent Engagement at Family Team Meetings: The Maine Judicial Branch will provide a training at its 2019 Child Protective Conference on *Effective Family Team Meetings and Writing Individualized Reunification Plans*. The conference is attended by approximately 400 participants, including judges, tribal judges and caseworkers, assistant attorney generals, parent attorneys, guardian’s ad litem, and caseworkers. The session on family team meetings will feature a parent attorney, guardian ad litem, assistant attorney general, and caseworker. Panelists will explain how engagement enhances outcomes and will discuss best practices for parent

engagement at the family team meeting for each role. A separate session at the conference will be entirely dedicated to former youth in care and parent partners who will share their recommendations on engagement based on their experiences with the child welfare system. A survey will be provided to participants requesting that they rate the training and inviting them to comment on the training.

Projected Completion Date: Quarter 1

Status Update: Completed

Key activity to enhance parent and caregiver engagement in Court at Judicial Reviews and Permanency Hearings:

To enhance parent and caregiver engagement at judicial reviews and permanency hearings, Maine will implement a three-part process to address the following: (1) judicial officer engagement of parents and caregivers in court, (2) notice to resource caregivers of judicial reviews and permanency hearings, and (3) use of predictive data analysis to ensure sufficient court resources to accommodate the child protection caseload as a way to improve date certainty for court proceedings.

1. As set forth below in subsections a through d, the Maine Judicial Branch will select a court for a two-year transformation zone (i.e. pilot project) for child protective cases involving children who have entered foster care, in which the judicial officer will engage each parent at the judicial review to discuss the reunification and rehabilitation plan and break it down into easily understood concrete action steps the parents are expected to complete prior to the next judicial review. Outcomes will measure whether structured engagement around action steps shortens the time to permanency for children who have entered foster care.
 - a. The trial chiefs of the district court will designate the judge and court for the two-year transformation zone.
 - b. The court improvement program will work closely with the judge and clerks in the designated court to develop a process and evaluation plan for the transformation zone. No later than 2 months after PIP approval, the process and evaluation plan will be presented to the district court trial chiefs for review and approval detailing the following: scheduling protocol, guidelines for engagement, data points for evaluation, and method of capturing identified data points. The evaluation plan will be finalized within 3 months of PIP approval.

- c. The transformation zone will then be implemented for a total of 24 months. The court improvement program will communicate with the presiding judge on a quarterly basis to check in on the progress of the transformation zone.
- d. For interim data collection, the court improvement program will measure how many cases in the transformation zone have reached permanency at the 6-month and 12-month marks. Cases will be grouped by the filing month and will be evaluated for permanency six and twelve months after the filing month. Based on the findings, Maine may consider expansion to another court(s) at 18 months from the start of the transformation zone.
- e. Every six months, the court improvement program will verify that the engagement guidelines for the transformation zone are being implemented with fidelity. This will be done through court observations or review of transcripts for a randomized sample.
- f. Upon completion of the 24-month transformation zone period, the court improvement program will collect data measuring outcomes pursuant to the approved evaluation plan. The court improvement program will provide a report on the outcomes of the transformation zone and provide said report to the trial chiefs and Supreme Judicial Court no later than two months after conclusion of the 24-month project period.

Projected Completion Date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

Key activities for providing notice to caregivers of Judicial Reviews and Permanency Hearings:

1. OCFS will review the current process for providing proper written notification of court dates and continuances to caregivers and develop strategies to improve this process.

Projected Completion Date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

2. OCFS will file a copy of the written notification provided to caregivers with the court. OCFS will review a sample of Judicial Review Orders on which the Judicial officers will indicate if notice to caregivers was filed with the court. This data will be reviewed at the *OCFS/MJB/AAG Collaborative* meetings for oversight on compliance related to notification.

Projected Completion Date: Quarter 4 and ongoing

Status Update: n/a

3. When resource caregivers better understand the court process and what to expect, they are more likely to attend court proceedings. Thus, the Maine Judicial Branch will develop a business-sized card with the link to the judicial branch child protective webpage, which provides information and resources regarding the child protective court process. OCFS will include a card with each notice it sends to caregivers. The card will provide recipients an option to request that printed or translated materials be mailed to them. The Maine Judicial Branch will update all informational materials as needed to reflect any changes in the law or court procedure.

Projected Completion Date: Quarter 2

Status Update: n/a

Key activity to improve date certainty using predictive data analysis:

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the CFSR statewide assessment indicated that the “trailing docket” used in many courts made it difficult for participants to be available. In some courts in Maine, the “trailing docket” model for scheduling is used for final contested hearings in child protection cases. Under this model, the court places all the cases that are ready for a final contested hearing on a list and then assigns the cases to the available trial dates giving priority to those with upcoming statutory deadlines. If the court does not have sufficient trial time to accommodate all the cases, the cases are scheduled as back-ups, or if necessary, set on the trailing docket for the next month. Because cases often settle at the last minute, the trailing docket and back-up method of scheduling ensures trial time will not be wasted. However, when there is an unexpected increase in case filings and the trial time designated for each trailing docket does not similarly expand, cases can be delayed. The key to the success of the trailing docket is for the court to effectively predict case surges to expand court trial time accordingly and thereby improve date certainty for litigants.

1. In order to improve the date certainty of child protection contested hearings, the judicial branch will generate quarterly reports for each district court showing the total child protection filings as compared to the previous year. By providing a point of comparison, the information gathered from these quarterly reports will allow regional scheduling judges to predict surges in protective custody filings and adjust court resources to ensure there is sufficient trial time to accommodate the caseload. Because court schedules are set 6 months in advance in Maine, the data on the number of initial filings gives the court sufficient notice to plan ahead and adjust future trial time so that by the time the cases proceed to a final contested hearing, the trial schedules have expanded appropriately.

Projected Completion Date: Quarter 1

Status Update: Ongoing. The Maine Judicial Branch has been generating and reviewing these reports on a monthly basis since May 2019. The reports have successfully alerted regional scheduling judges of case surges that will increase the

demand for trial time before the demand materializes. This has allowed regional scheduling judges to move judges in their region from dockets that do not involve child protection matters to the child protection docket as needed to accommodate the child protection caseload and comply with all statutory timeframes. To the extent the regional judges do not have sufficient judges in their region to accommodate the anticipated increased demand in trial time, they have been contacting the chief judge of the district court for assistance. The chief judge then analyzes resources at a statewide level to identify judges from regionals with more capacity who are then temporarily assigned to the region in need to cover non-child protection dockets so that the regional judges can dedicate more time to the child protection dockets. Thanks to these reports, this regional and statewide resource reallocation has been able to take place with sufficient advance notice to ensure child protection matters continue to comply with all statutory timeframes.

Theory of Change: Recognizing the importance of engagement at all levels, these key activities not only promote engagement, but are the product of engagement at the policy level. The key activities described respond to feedback in the CFSR Final Report specific to the case review systemic factor. This work was entirely developed through the engagement and collaboration of both OCFS and the Maine Judicial Branch. OCFS and the members of the Administrative Office of the Courts, including the court improvement program coordinator, held a series of weekly meetings facilitated by the Children's Bureau to discuss the CFSR findings that pertain to the case review system and develop solutions. The proposals of this work group were presented to leadership for review and approval, which included for the first time in Maine's PIP development, the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Supreme Judicial Court, and the District Court trial chiefs. Because all key activities have the buy-in of leadership, they are primed for successful implementation.

These key activities seek to enhance parent and caregiver engagement, both in case planning and court proceedings, thereby improving permanency outcomes in two ways. First, parent engagement in case planning will help stakeholders identify the services and supports that best address the family's needs. Encouraging the voice of the parent in case planning will also build relationships of trust and respect between OCFS and the family. Because parent engagement also enhances buy-in, the engaged parent will be more likely to participate in services and complete the case plan and attend court scheduled appearances. Second, more parent and resource caregiver engagement in court will enhance the perception of judicial fairness and confidence in the process, which will increase the chances for timely reunification or other appropriate permanency options.

OCFS and the Maine Judicial Branch will know they have successfully implemented these key activities through improved permanency outcomes. Sources of this information may include

results of the quality assurance reviews and data reports from OCFS and the Maine Judicial Branch.

Strategy 2: Improve the frequency and quality of caseworker visit with parents.

Root cause analysis: OCFS has historically been challenged in meeting expectations around frequency and quality of contact with parents. The result of these challenges was evident in the data from the 2017 CFSR as well as the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME-QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
15 Caseworker visit with parent(s)	35% Strength	20.0% Strength

The following factors were found during the CFSR, as well as through engagement with internal and external stakeholders:

- An inability to conduct regular and consistent ongoing assessments of how parents and children are progressing in the services as necessary to enable family rehabilitation and reunification;
- Lack of quality caseworker contacts with children in the Department’s care;
- Specific to in-home service cases, inconsistency in the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with household members as necessary to meet the case circumstances;
- For children in care, inconsistency in the frequency and quality of caseworker contact with parents as necessary to meet the case circumstances;
- A lack of tools and strategies to effectively engage with parent and paramours in quality case planning;
- Frequent changes in the caseworker assigned to a family;
- Challenges with workload for both caseworkers and supervisors; and
- Difficulty in addressing secondary trauma for district staff which impacts their ability to provide frequent and quality contacts with parents.

The recent PCG report included recommendations related to increasing compliance with statutory timeframes that reflects the importance of quality interactions with parents in child welfare cases. The recommendation indicated that caseworkers, in consultation with the Assistant Attorney Generals (AAGs), need to communicate honestly and openly about the trajectory of a case and likelihood of reunification with family parents.

Two OCFS initiatives that support strengthening the quality of contact with parent(s) are implementation of the OCFS Family Plan and Family Team Meetings which guide and promote quality interactions between caseworkers and parents.

Additional key activities for improving the frequency and quality of contact with parent(s) include:

1. As part of implementation, create a feedback loop for staff to evaluate progress in addressing technical and adaptive challenges related to quality face-to-face contacts with parents, including documentation of contacts.

Projected completion date: Quarter 2

Status Update: n/a

2. Analyze feedback and implement solutions to improve the quality and documentation of contacts with parents.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

3. Utilize a workload analytic tool to inform staff resource allocations and case assignments based on workload factors to support efficient time management and improve quality face-to-face contacts and documentation.

Projected completion date: Quarter 2 and ongoing

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: Face-to-Face contact templates were developed based on best practices in child welfare that would promote casework activities to improve safety, permanency and wellbeing outcomes. Feedback from staff, supported by findings in case review, indicate that the created templates are not meeting the needs for staff. Conducting District Feedback groups with district staff to identify the specific barriers to use of the templates will inform decision making and assist in creating solutions that will allow the work with families be accurately documented to demonstrate the quality of the work being completed as well as done timely. In addition, District Feedback groups will help leadership identify and address any adaptive challenges that may be impeding this work. The skills that staff will learn in the Goal 2, Strategy 1, Key Activity 3 will enhance caseworker's ability to more effectively engage with parents during these key contacts. The workload analytic tool will enhance the ability of supervisors to allocate staff resources more efficiently.

OCFS will know it has improved the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents through improved outcomes related to face-to-face contacts. Sources of this information may include results of the quality assurance reviews and data reports.

Strategy 3: Improve the recruitment, retention and training of the child welfare workforce.

Root cause analysis: OCFS has historically been challenged in recruiting and retaining experienced staff and PCG cited some of the challenges as unmanageable caseloads, forced overtime and inadequate training. These factors have resulted in significantly high turnover rates. Between 2016-2018, the vacancy rate has varied from 21.8% in 2016 to 18.7% in 2017 to 37.2% in 2018. PCG recommended that OCFS should align new caseworker trainings and training techniques with national best practices and develop an ongoing training management plan for future implementations. Another source of information regarding workforce is the OCFS Recruitment and Retention Specialist who, in addition to onboarding new staff, also sends exit surveys and conducts exit interviews with staff upon their request. OCFS recognizes the need to formalize the data collection process and collect data related to other key staff involved in child welfare operations.

Focus groups held during the CFSR and subsequently, found that Maine remains challenged in ensuring that trainings for child welfare staff and resource parents are sufficient to ensure that both groups have the opportunity to sharpen their skills related to child welfare practice. Specifically, the CFSR found that there is a lack of training for experienced child welfare workers, OCFS does not have a tracking system for participation in trainings and trainings are not evaluated for their relevance to the learning objectives. In addition, stakeholders reported that the initial training does not prepare resource families to perform their role as caregivers. Stakeholders also reported that while resource parents must complete 18 hours of training every 2 years to renew their licenses, relevant training is often not available and that the same trainings are offered year after year. Resource parents could benefit from training related to working collaboratively with birth parents.

In addition, the 2017 CFSR found that, at that time, Maine didn't have a statewide recruitment plan. Maine has since contracted with an agency to recruit and provide trainings for resource families.

Key activities to increase the effectiveness of the child welfare workforce and resource parents, and improve successful recruitment and retention of child welfare staff include:

1. Conduct district feedback meetings of current staff, convened by length of service, to identify recruitment and retention strategies.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

2. Evaluate the current exit interview process and identify strategies to more effectively retain staff based on the information gathered in that process.

Projected completion date: Quarter 4

Status Update: n/a

3. Explore alternative caseworker recruitment activities to strengthen the pool of qualified applicants.

Projected completion date: Quarter 4

Status Update: n/a

4. In collaboration with the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Services, develop and implement Field Instruction Units statewide for child welfare interns.

Projected completion date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

5. In collaboration with the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Services, review and revise the pre-service training process for new caseworkers.

Projected completion date: Quarter 6

Status Update: n/a

6. Provide staff with training to assist in the development of skills required to effectively engage with families and provide quality child welfare services:

- a. Forensic Interviewing;
- b. Motivational Interviewing;
- c. Principles of Teaming;
- d. Action Planning;
- e. Conflict Management; and
- f. Facilitation.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3 and ongoing

Status Update: n/a

7. Procure a Learning Management System that will track required trainings, other trainings available, and allow an individual to log in to track completed trainings, including OCFS, SETU and community-based trainings; track social work licensure and renewal dates; and serve as a place to store and print training certificates.

Projected completion date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

8. In collaboration with the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Services, review and revise the Resource Family Introductory Training (RFIT) process for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship parents.

Projected completion date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

9. Collaborate with Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine to increase training opportunities that meet the needs of resource parents.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

Theory of Change: The OCFS Recruitment and Retention Specialist has played a key role in addressing workforce availability and development issues, which are occurring on both a statewide and national level. Some of the activities to increase the pool of available caseworker candidates include participation in job fairs and presentations to college classes. This position also does outreach to new caseworkers in their first three months of hire, collates the results of the exit surveys and conducts exit interview. This data will help OCFS to analyze trends, understand factors resulting in staff resignations and allow OCFS to be responsive to the needs of the workforce. Field Instruction Units will provide new hires with on-the-job experience prior to beginning formal employment with the agency. This experience should result in better matching of candidates to the positions and lead to higher retention rates. By tracking similar data for other key staff involved in child welfare operations OCFS will be better able to address workforce challenges.

By developing an overall training management plan for workforce development and ongoing implementation of new initiatives, OCFS will have a formalized process for engaging staff in identifying training needs and providing feedback about the effectiveness of implementation activities. Through the Learning Management System workers will have access to web-based training and tracking of those trainings for workers. Through partnership with the university system, staff and resource parent trainings will be updated to incorporate national best practice standards. Ongoing staff training will be targeted to the needs and level of experience of workers. By transitioning the responsibility of pre-service training to the Muskie School of Public Service, the OCFS Training Unit will have capacity to provide training to meet the needs of experienced staff. These activities will strengthen the skill sets of department staff and resource parents.

OCFS will know it has successfully addressed recruitment, retention and training for the child welfare force through a decrease in child welfare staff and increased placement stability. Sources of this information may include QA reviews and data reports.

Strategy 4: Collaborate with other state agencies and community partners to improve access, availability, and efficacy of services to support children and families.

Root cause analysis: The CFSR focus groups found that Maine remains challenged in that there are wait lists for core services and gaps in services in rural areas of the state. Distance and a lack of transportation prevent clients from accessing services in rural areas. In addition, OCFS relies on clients having access to MaineCare to receive many services. In 2018, OCFS contracted with

PCG to evaluate the behavioral healthcare service array. Based on findings in this report, a workplan is being developed to address system gaps. In 2019 Maine expanded access to MaineCare which will allow many parents, who would otherwise lose their MaineCare eligibility once a child enters foster care, to maintain this insurance coverage, increasing access to services.

Key activities to improve access, availability, and efficacy of community services to support children and families:

1. Utilize current data sources to identify resource gaps statewide. Utilize this information to advocate for additional funding and provide direction to current providers regarding future program development.

Projected completion date: Quarter 6

Status Update: n/a

2. Align service planning with Families First Prevention and Services Act (FFPSA).

Projected completion date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

3. Develop a coordinated, comprehensive transportation system to assure access to services statewide.

Projected completion date: Quarter 4

Status Update: n/a

4. Child welfare will coordinate activities with Children's Developmental and Behavioral Health Services increase access to and availability of quality services.

Projected completion date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

5. Monitor the implementation of the Family Visit Coaching Pilot to develop best practices for parent child contact in reunification cases.

Projected completion date: Quarter 8

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: The implementation of the key activities highlighted under this strategy should improve the timeliness to permanency. A common concern raised in child welfare is the lack of appropriate resources that will allow parents to address their identified needs. Cross-system collaboration is an important component in improving the service array, advocating for funding, and increasing accessibility to services. FFPSA is an essential component of increasing accessibility to Evidence Based Practices and prevention services that address risk factors for child abuse and neglect. A key factor in successful reunification is quality visitation. The implementation of the Family Visit Coaching model focuses on assessing and evaluating parental

capacity as it relates to parent’s ability to safely care for the child. This intensive work will lead to timely and well supported decisions regarding reunification of families.

OCFS will know it has successfully collaborated with other state agencies to improve access, availability, and efficacy of community services to support children and families through improved timeframes to permanency and utilization of services that address risk factors for child abuse and neglect. Sources of this information may include QA reviews and data reports.

Goal 4: Increase the wellbeing of children involved with child welfare through identification of the individual needs of each child and successful engagement of the child with formal and informal supports to address these needs.

(CFSR Factor Covered: Well Being Outcome 1)

Strategy 1: Improve the frequency and quality of caseworker visit with children/youth.

Root cause analysis: OCFS has historically been challenged with ensuring that wellbeing needs of children are consistently met. The result of these challenges was evident in the data from the 2017 CFSR as well as the ongoing CFSR reviews conducted by the OCFS ME-QA CFSR team:

Item	State Performance CFSR 2017	State Performance ME CFSR Period 10/1/18 -9/30/19
12A Needs Assessment of Children	69% Strength	57.7% Strength
13 Child and family involvement in case planning	55% Strength	32.5% Strength
14 Caseworker visit with child	63% Strength	54.6% Strength
17 Physical health of child	64% Strength	64.4% Strength
18 Mental/behavioral health of child	67% Strength	48.1% Strength

The following factors were found during the CFSR, as well as through engagement with internal and external stakeholders:

- Gaps in the assessment process for determining the needs of children and a lack of available appropriate services to address the needs when identified;
- Inconsistencies in the assessment of and response to children’s medical, dental, and behavioral health needs;
- A lack of tools and strategies to effectively engage with children in quality case planning;

- Challenges related to the array of services available to meet the needs of children;
- An inability to conduct regular and consistent ongoing assessments of how children are progressing in the services as necessary to enable family rehabilitation and reunification;
- Frequent changes in the caseworker assigned to a family;
- The quality of caseworker contacts with children in the Department’s care; and
- Challenges with workload for both caseworkers and supervisors.

Two OCFS initiatives that support strengthening the quality of contact with children are implementation of the Child Plan and Family Team meetings which guide and promote quality interactions between caseworkers and children. Successful implementation of key activities related to workforce recruitment and retention is important as having multiple caseworkers assigned to cases impact the consistency of the child welfare case process and, more importantly, the relationship between caseworkers and children. In addition, key activities related to the development of improved interviewing skills for caseworkers will assist them in having crucial conversations with children on their caseload.

Additional key activities for improving the frequency and quality of contact with children include:

1. As part of implementation, create a feedback loop for staff to evaluate progress in addressing technical and adaptive challenges related to quality face-to-face contacts with children, including documentation of contacts.

Projected completion date: Quarter 2

Status Update: n/a

2. Analyze feedback and implement solutions to improve the quality and documentation of contacts with children.

Projected completion date: Quarter 3

Status Update: n/a

Theory of change: Frequency and quality contact with children will ensure that caseworkers are having continuous conversations with children to assess how well their wellbeing are being addressed. Caseworkers, with supervisory oversight, will utilize the face-to-face templates to guide their interviews/contacts with children. The templates were developed with a focus on providing staff with clear guidance on what is needed to fully assess safety, permanency and wellbeing needs. Quality contacts will naturally inform the case planning process resulting in the right services being matched to meet the child’s needs improving the outcomes for child’s wellbeing. Teaming is a key activity in this context as having the child’s support network involved in the discussions and planning process will lead to a solid plan that benefits the child and improves all outcomes for the child.

OCFS will know it has successfully implemented the strategies/key activities related to improving children's wellbeing and successful engaging with children and their formal and informal supports to address he needs through improved wellbeing outcomes.

[The measurement plan has been deleted in its entirety at the request of the Children's Bureau.]