

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Alaska Child and Family Services Review
February 2009

INTRODUCTION

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

The Alaska CFSR was conducted the week of September 8, 2008. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2007, through September 12, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services (OCS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides Alaska's child welfare data for the CFSR target 12-month period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites, including 31 cases in Anchorage, 17 cases in Bethel, and 17 cases in Juneau, all of which were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review
- 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 on 23 items relevant to seven outcomes and 22 items pertaining to seven systemic factors. In Section A: Outcomes of the CSFR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement (ANI) is assigned to each of the 23 items reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The ratings for the items are used to determine the performance of a State on the seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. Depending on item ratings, an outcome can be Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved. For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed

must be rated as having Substantially Achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to 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.

In Section B: Systemic Factors, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an ANI based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements as specified for the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). Information relevant to each systemic factor comes primarily from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the Onsite Review. Depending on item ratings, a systemic factor can be either “in substantial conformity” or “not in substantial conformity.” The criteria for the rating for each systemic factor are shown in the table below.

Rating the Systemic Factor	
Not in Substantial Conformity	In Substantial Conformity
1	2
None of the CFSP or program requirements are in place.	Some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement.
3	4
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 (PIP) to address that outcome or systemic factor. Because the focus of the CFR process is on continuous quality improvement, standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being.

Many changes have been made between the first and second CFR review cycles. These changes were based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field. Consequently, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparison of percentages for performance on the outcomes and items. Key changes in the process that make comparing performance difficult 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 increase consistency and to ensure an assessment of critical areas, such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents

CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes

Alaska's 2008 CFSR identified the following areas of high performance with regard to achieving outcomes:

- Item 5, which pertains to foster care reentry, was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 11, which pertains to proximity of placements in foster care to parents and close relatives, was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 12, which pertains to placement of siblings together, was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of applicable cases.
- The State met the national standard for the data indicator of Permanency Composite 3—Achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.

Despite these areas of high performance, the State performance was at a low level for all case review outcomes. The highest performing outcome was Well-Being Outcome 2 (Children receive services to meet their educational needs), with 76.1 percent of cases found to have substantially achieved the outcome. Less than 50 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved four of the CFSR outcomes.

The most critical concerns identified with regard to outcomes for children and families pertained to Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect), Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate), Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), and Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs). Safety Outcome 1 was substantially achieved in only 47.1 percent of the cases. The primary concern for this outcome pertained to delays in initiating investigations of child abuse and neglect allegations. Although stakeholders suggested that delays occurred primarily with regard to allegations assigned as priority 2 or 3, there were four maltreatment allegations among the cases reviewed that were assigned as priority 1 reports (i.e., emergency situations) but were not investigated in the timeframe established by State policy.

Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) was found to be substantially achieved in only 38.5 percent of the cases. The primary concern in these cases centered on children being left at risk in their own homes because of a lack of service provision, safety and risk assessment, and monitoring.

Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was found to be substantially achieved in only 23.1 percent of the cases, with the primary concern being the lack of caseworker contact with parents and the lack of engagement of parents in case planning and services. However, it is important to note that there also was a lack of sufficient contact with children in the cases, particularly children in the in-home services cases, some of whom were never seen during the CFSR period under review. Also, although there was less contact with the fathers than with the mothers and less effort to engage the fathers than to engage the mothers, contact with the mothers and engagement of the mothers in case planning also was limited. The lack of contact

with parents and children and the lack of engagement of parents may explain in part the poor performance on Safety Outcome 2; that is, it is difficult to assess safety and risk and to monitor progress if children and parents are not being seen on a routine basis.

The lowest performance occurred for Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations). This outcome was substantially achieved in only 15 percent of the cases. Although, with the exception of item 5, performance on all items assessed for this outcome was low, the most critical concern that emerged was the lack of agency focus on achieving permanency in a timely manner. For example, item 8, which pertains to achieving reunification, guardianship, or placement with relatives in a timely manner, was rated as a Strength in only 33 percent of the applicable cases; item 9, which pertains to achieving adoptions in a timely manner, was rated as a Strength in only 18 percent of the applicable cases.

Alaska's performance with regard to the outcomes experienced by children and families served by the State's child welfare system may be attributed in part to concerns about some of the systemic aspects of the State's system. Although Alaska was found to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System, the State is not in substantial conformity with any of the other systemic factors. The systemic factors of Case Review System, Training, and Service Array, in particular, may have critical implications for the State's performance with regard to ensuring the safety of children who remain in their own homes and achieving permanency in a timely manner.

Specific information about the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes is presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings pertaining to performance on the well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents a summary of 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 2002 CFSR.

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

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

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 47.1 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 56 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 50 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 30 percent of

applicable Juneau cases. Both item 1 (timeliness of investigations) and item 2 (repeat maltreatment) were rated as ANIs. Alaska also did not meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Additional findings for this outcome were the following:

- There were 22 maltreatment reports that occurred during the period under review for which an investigation was not initiated in the timeframes required by State policy. Of these, 11 were priority 3 reports, 5 were priority 2 reports, and 4 were priority 1 reports. One report was never screened or assigned, and one report was assigned to the differential response program, but the children who were the subject of the report were never seen.
- In addition to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment in a number of cases, case reviewers expressed concern about the many cases involving multiple reports (both substantiated and not substantiated) on the family during the life of the case. For example, in 12 cases there were 15 or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case, with 4 of these cases having more than 20 reports.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during its first CFSR conducted in fiscal year 2002 and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. Both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs in the 2002 CFSR. Key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- The State did not meet the national standards for the measure of maltreatment recurrence or the measure of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.
- Although the agency initiated investigations of reports involving imminent risk (priority 1 reports) within the required timeframes, the initiation of investigations of maltreatment reports not involving imminent risk (i.e., reports assigned a priority 2 or 3 level) did not consistently meet required timeframes.

To address these concerns, Alaska included the following key strategies in its PIP:

- Revised policies relating to the investigative process, including specifying definitions for “face-to-face contact” and “initiation of investigation,” and trained supervisors and caseworkers on the policies
- Established a protocol to review cases that involve a recurrence of maltreatment
- Developed a new safety assessment model (training of staff on the model did not begin until the spring of 2006)

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

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

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the issue of child welfare agency efforts to prevent children’s removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children’s safety while

they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children.

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 38.5 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 52 percent of Anchorage cases, 18 percent of Bethel cases, and 35 percent of Juneau cases. Items 3 and 4 were both rated as ANIs.

Key findings relevant to this outcome were the following:

- Insufficient services were provided to ensure the safety of the child while the child remained in the home.
- There was a lack of ongoing safety and risk assessments in the children's homes during the period under review.
- 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.

Alaska also did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2 in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. Both items assessed for this outcome were rated as an ANI in the 2002 CFSR. The following key concerns were identified at that time:

- The services offered to families often were not adequate to ensure children's safety and reduce risk of harm and did not address underlying issues contributing to the maltreatment.
- Frequently, when services were offered to families, there was insufficient monitoring on the part of the agency to assess whether services were actually provided, whether parents were fully participating in services, and/or whether children were safe.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following key strategies as part of its PIP:

- Issued new policies regarding in-home cases focusing on the use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools for assessments and case planning
- Provided training on reassessment and review of in-home case plans using the Future Risk of Harm form
- Implemented data collection through the Quality Assurance (QA) process to evaluate the use and effectiveness of SDM tools

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

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

There are six indicators incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the child welfare agency efforts to prevent foster care reentry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (item 7).

Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the child welfare agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 15 percent of the 40 foster care cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 20 percent of Anchorage cases and 10 percent of Bethel and Juneau cases.
- The State did not meet the national standards for the national data indicators pertaining to the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Composite 1), the timeliness of adoptions (Composite 2), and placement stability (Composite 4).

Alaska met the national standards for the data indicator pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods (Composite 3).

For this outcome, item 5 was rated as a Strength, but all other items assessed for the outcome were rated as ANIs. Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- Alaska had a very low percentage of reentries into foster care (7.5 percent) compared to the performance of all States nationally.
- Many children in the cases reviewed were in multiple placement settings during the period under review. In nine cases, the children had three or more placements during the period under review, with three of these children having five or more placements.
- The child's permanency goal frequently was not established in a timely manner.
- There was a general lack of sufficient effort to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner.
- Agency practice was inconsistent with regard to filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements.
- There were frequent and considerable delays associated with the home study process for adoption—either completing or approving the home studies, resulting in considerable delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2002 CFSR. At that time, all relevant items except item 5 (foster care reentry) were rated as ANIs. The following key concerns were identified:

- The agency was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- Case goals often were not changed even when there were indications that the goal was not likely to be achieved.
- The goals of guardianship and reunification were not achieved in a timely manner in many cases.
- There were many agency-related delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner, including lack of timely decision-making and lack of follow-up with the child and pre-adoptive family.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Standardized practice for setting and changing permanency goals when concurrent planning occurs
- Improved the structure of administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences, with enhanced focus on permanency goals and concurrent planning
- Developed the continuous QA review system to monitor cases
- Established Regional Adoption Specialists who participate in administrative and permanency planning reviews to ensure that goals are established in a timely manner and are documented
- Implemented a statewide contract for post-adoption services

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

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance in (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation among children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of Anchorage cases, 60 percent of Bethel cases, and 60 percent of Juneau cases. Although items 11 and 12 were rated as Strengths, all other items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

Key findings for this outcome in the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- In most of the applicable cases, the child was placed in close proximity to parents or, if placed far away, the placement was determined to be necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the child's permanency goal.
- In most of the applicable cases, the child was placed with other siblings in foster care when appropriate.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to ensure visitation between children in foster care and their mothers, fathers, and siblings.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to maintain the child's connections with extended family, particularly with siblings who were not in foster care.
- Relatives were not consistently sought as placement resources for children in foster care.

- There was a lack of concerted effort to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children through activities such as encouraging parent participation in school activities and/or doctor's appointments or providing therapy to the family to address their relationship issues.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 in its 2002 CFSR. At that time, items 11 and 12 were rated as Strengths, but all other relevant items were rated as ANIs. During the 2002 CFSR, the agency was found to be inconsistent with respect to facilitating and supporting visits between children and their parents and siblings, preserving children's connections, seeking relatives as potential placement resources, and promoting or maintaining the parent-child bond.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Developed policies and guidelines to clarify supervised and unsupervised visitation requirements to enhance visitation opportunities
- Made paternity testing available statewide to ensure identification of the fathers
- Improved policy and training regarding maintaining connections between children in foster care and their families and communities

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

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

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 23.1 percent of the 65 cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent of Anchorage cases, 6 percent of Bethel cases, and 18 percent of Juneau cases. Also, the outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent of the foster care cases compared to 4 percent of the in-home services cases (only one in-home services case was determined to have substantially achieved this outcome). All four items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

Key findings with regard to this outcome in the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- For the foster care cases, the agency was considerably less consistent in assessing and meeting service needs of mothers and fathers than it was in assessing and meeting the needs of the children. However, even for children, needs were adequately assessed

and met in only 73 percent of the foster care cases and 44 percent of the in-home services cases. The agency was least consistent in assessing and meeting needs of the fathers in both types of cases, although the percentage was particularly low (13 percent) in the in-home services cases.

- There was a general lack of involvement of mothers, fathers, and children (when appropriate) in case planning in both the foster care and in-home services cases. However, in both types of cases, mothers were more likely to be involved in case planning than were fathers or children. In addition, mothers, fathers, and children were more likely to be involved in case planning in the foster care cases than in the in-home services cases.
- In many cases, 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. Caseworkers were more likely to visit children in foster care at least once a month than they were to visit children in the in-home services cases. In five in-home services cases, the children were never seen by the caseworker during the CFSR period under review.
- The frequency of visits with mothers and fathers was not sufficient and, if visits did occur, the quality was not sufficient to meet the needs of the children or further achievement of case goals.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR, with all items rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- In many cases, the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents were neither assessed nor addressed.
- The child welfare agency did not consistently involve parents and children in the case planning process.
- In the majority of cases reviewed, the frequency and quality of visitation with both children and parents was not adequate to meet the needs of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

To address the concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR, the State developed and implemented the following strategies:

- Enhanced and revised policy and procedure for administrative review feedback to the administration in July 2005
- Developed case planning protocols to identify required services
- Strengthened caseworker training in conducting initial assessments
- Developed the expectation that supervisors are to work with their staff regarding the assessment of child and family needs and the incorporation of these needs into a strengths-based case and service planning process
- Implemented statewide tracking of caseworker visits

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

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

Well-Being Outcome 2 pertains to the agency efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2, which includes only one item—item 21: Educational needs of the child. Reviewers determined that the outcome was substantially achieved in 76.1 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 90 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 42 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 85 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 78 percent of the 37 applicable foster care cases and 67 percent of the 9 applicable in-home services cases. A key finding was a lack of consistency with regard to both assessing children’s educational needs and providing services when educational needs were identified.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. A key concern of that review was that children in the in-home services cases had education-related issues to which the agency was not responding. To address this concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Amended court orders to authorize OCS to gather educational information about children in out-of-home care
- Established an interdepartmental work group to ensure enhanced relationships between the agency and school administrators at the local level
- Provided training regarding a new policy requiring workers to assess, address, and document the educational needs of children in the cases in which children remain in their homes

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

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

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 52.5 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 70 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 12.5 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 62.5 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Also, the outcome was substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases compared to 32 percent of the 19 applicable in-home services cases. Both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were that children’s physical and mental health service needs were not consistently assessed nor addressed.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 in its 2002 CFSR, with both relevant items rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- Agency performance was inconsistent with regard to providing health screenings for children at entry into foster care and providing foster parents with children's health records.
- Agency performance was inconsistent with regard to assessing children's mental health needs and providing the necessary mental health services.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Training was provided to caseworkers regarding completing the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment screenings of children within State guidelines and using the health-care provider's recommendations as a guide for all health treatment decisions.
- Physical and mental health issues were added as a topic of discussion in the administrative review process.
- Policy was established to ensure that all children in foster care received mental health evaluations.

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

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating a information system that can inform users immediately with the status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

Alaska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The key finding of the 2008 CFSR is that Alaska's statewide information system—Online Resources for Children in Alaska—can readily identify the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for each child in foster care. The State also was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during its 2002 CFSR and therefore was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Case Review System

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance for the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators 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 and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Because the Alaska Statewide Assessment did not provide data on any of the key items associated with this systemic factor, the CFSR determinations were based on anecdotal information in the Statewide Assessment and on stakeholder interviews conducted during the onsite CFSR. Using this information, items 26 and 27 were rated as Strengths, and items 25, 28, and 29 were rated as ANIs. In general, the 2008 CFSR determined that periodic reviews and permanency hearings were being held in a timely manner and that they addressed the issues that are relevant to moving a child toward permanency. However, the 2008 CFSR also determined the following:

- Parents are not consistently involved in the development of their case plans.
- TPR petitions are not being filed in a timely manner on a consistent basis.
- Notification of caregivers regarding hearings and reviews involving the children in their care and the caregivers' right to be heard in these proceedings is inconsistent across the State.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this factor during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. In the 2002 review, items 26 and 28 were rated as Strengths. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR with regard to items 25, 27, and 29:

- There was a lack of goal-oriented case plans.
- The system did not consistently involve parents and children (when appropriate) in case planning.
- Permanency hearings were not consistently held in a timely manner.
- Foster parents and other caregivers were not consistently notified regarding permanency hearings nor were they provided with an opportunity to be heard at the hearings.

The following key strategies were implemented in Alaska's PIP to address these concerns:

- Policy and procedure changes were developed and implemented to strengthen and enhance the use of case plans, ensure that case plans are developed in conjunction with parents and children (when appropriate), and incorporate case planning for in-home services cases.
- In collaboration with the Court Improvement Project, a data system called Court View was implemented to enable the court to track court hearings (operates in only a few jurisdictions).
- In collaboration with the Attorney General's office, a new protocol was developed for notifying foster parents of court hearings. In 2005, Alaska statutes were changed to require that notification of all court hearings in a child's case be provided to the child, each parent, the Tribe, foster parent or other out-of-home care provider, guardian, and guardian *ad litem*. In some circumstances, written notice of all court hearings in a child's case must be provided to a grandparent of the child.

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

Quality Assurance (QA) 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 ANIs (item 31).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. Both items assessed for this factor were rated as ANIs.

Key findings were the following:

- Although the State has developed standards to ensure quality services to protect the safety and health of children, many of the standards are not being implemented on a consistent basis and, at the time of the onsite CFSR, many were not fully operational.
- Although the State has a QA system in place, it does not incorporate a process for following up on QA findings with the field offices to determine whether program improvements have been implemented in response to findings and to assess the effectiveness of program improvement efforts that have been implemented.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. In the 2002 CFSR, item 30 was rated as a Strength, but item 31 was rated as an ANI. The key concern identified in the 2002 CFSR was that Alaska did not have a statewide QA process and had no formal process for clients or stakeholders to evaluate agency performance.

To address this concern through its PIP, the State developed and implemented a comprehensive QA system that incorporates both case reviews and interviews with case-related stakeholders. In addition, the PIP focused on ongoing improvement of supervisory case reviews and administrative reviews.

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

Training

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. All three items assessed for this systemic factor were rated as ANIs. The key findings were the following:

- Initial training provided to staff is not sufficient to prepare them to carry out their responsibilities.
- The State does not require caseworkers or supervisors to receive ongoing training as part of their jobs. In addition, training opportunities that are available for caseworkers and supervisors are limited, particularly outside of Anchorage, and agency staff

often cannot access ongoing training either because of workload responsibilities or constraints related to the cost and time needed for travel.

- Foster parents are not receiving sufficient training to carry out their responsibilities. Although initial training for foster parents is available, it is not required. In addition, although there is a requirement for annual training for foster parents (10 to 15 hours), the Statewide Assessment reports that in 2008, 23 percent of foster parents did not complete this requirement.

Alaska was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and therefore was not required to address the factor in its PIP.

Service Array

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses 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 families served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. All three items assessed for this systemic factor were rated as ANIs. Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- Substance abuse and mental health services, in-home family preservation services, and foster family homes (particularly Native foster homes) are four key service gaps in the State.
- The Children's Services offices are not effective in ensuring that resources are available in all political jurisdictions. Although the Statewide Assessment attributes this to the remoteness of some of Alaska's communities and the resultant transportation difficulties, stakeholders indicated that there is a lack of necessary resources to ensure that people who reside in the more remote areas can access services. They noted that even basic child protective and case management services are limited in these areas because staffing plans for the agencies that serve these communities do not take into account the length of time required to travel to the more remote communities.
- Although there are flexible funding resources and culturally appropriate services in the State, they are not sufficient to meet the needs of the children and families for whom individualized services are critical.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- Key services were not available in sufficient quantity in either rural or urban communities.
- Many critical services were not available in all communities in the State.
- In many situations, the types of services provided to children and families were more likely to be influenced by what was available rather than by what was needed to meet their particular needs.

- In many situations, the types of services provided to children and families were more likely to be influenced by what was available rather than by what was needed to meet their particular needs. To address these concerns in its PIP, OCS implemented the following strategies:
- Conducted an assessment of strengths and service gaps using a collaborative approach with community providers and stakeholders
- Collaborated with other State agencies and departments to ensure the efficient use of available resources for shared populations
- Used Tribal, paraprofessional, and village-based resources to assist in case planning
- Developed grant programs to expand services and worked with grantees to develop a baseline of current services and identify changes that are needed to evaluate services (including post-adoption services)

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

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Items 38 and 39 were rated as ANIs, although item 40 was rated as a Strength. The State was found to be effective in coordinating with other Federal or Federally-funded agencies in providing services. However, OCS does not have a formal process to consistently seek input from and engage stakeholders, including local child welfare agency staff, in the development of its goals and objectives for the State child and family services programs or in the development of its Annual Progress and Services Report.

The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, did not address this factor in its PIP. Findings from the 2008 CFSR are presented below.

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 who 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).

- Alaska claims title IV-E funds only for children placed in foster homes that are fully licensed.
- Alaska complies with Federal requirements and completes criminal records checks on all fully licensed foster homes, adoptive homes, and relative placement homes.
- Alaska is effective in using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.
- While there are licensing standards established, many licensed homes with ongoing placements do not meet the full licensing standards.
- Alaska does not have a statewide process in place to recruit foster homes despite significant shortages of all types of foster homes; local offices do not have recruitment plans, recruitment resources are limited, and efforts to recruit foster homes are not sufficient.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and therefore was required to address the factor in its PIP. The 2002 CFSR identified the following key concerns in regard to this factor:

- The State granted variances to the licensing standards with the result that full licensing standards are not equally applied to all foster homes.
- The State did not have an effective recruitment plan for recruiting foster and adoptive parents who meet the needs of the children in foster care.

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

- Implemented efforts to improve the licensing process, particularly with regard to the use of variances
- Developed a statewide foster care recruitment plan with the assistance of the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency
- Increased recruitment of Native Alaskan foster parents through increased collaboration with Tribes

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

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

Outcomes and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Outcome Ratings		Met National Standards?	Item Ratings	
		Percent Substantially Achieved**			Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	47.1		No	ANI	56
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations					ANI	81
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment						
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	38.5			ANI	51
Item 3: Services to prevent removal					ANI	39
Item 4: Risk of harm						
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	15.0		Met C3; did not meet C1, C2, or C4		
Item 5: Foster care reentry					Strength	91
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements					ANI	72.5
Item 7: Permanency goal for child					ANI	45
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives					ANI	33
Item 9: Adoption					ANI	18
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement					ANI	60
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	62.5				
Item 11: Proximity of placement					Strength	90
Item 12: Placement with siblings					Strength	91
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care					ANI	62
Item 14: Preserving connections					ANI	77.5
Item 15: Relative placement					ANI	83
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents					ANI	47

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

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

Table 2. Alaska 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	23.1		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	32
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	37
Item 19: Caseworker visits with child			ANI	26
Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents			ANI	20
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	76.1		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	76
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	52.5		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	71
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	55

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

** Items may be rated as a Strength or an 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: Alaska CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
<p>Statewide Information System</p> <p>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</p>	Yes	3	Strength
<p>Case Review System</p> <p>Item 25: The State provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parents that includes the required provisions</p> <p>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</p> <p>Item 27: The State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the States has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter</p>	No	2	ANI
<p>Item 28: The State provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)</p> <p>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</p>	No	2	ANI
<p>Quality Assurance System</p> <p>Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children</p> <p>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, identified Strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluations program improvement measures implemented</p>	No	2	ANI
<p>Training</p> <p>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</p> <p>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</p> <p>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</p>	No	2	ANI

