

Final Report
Alaska Child and Family Services Review
February 2009

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
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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 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, to 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 (DHSS), 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: 31 cases in Anchorage, 17 cases in Bethel, and 17 cases in Juneau
 - Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

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

The first section of the report (Section A: Outcomes) presents the CFSR findings relevant to Alaska's performance in achieving specified outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting the data for the case review findings and national indicators (when relevant). The table is followed by a discussion of Alaska's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR review, which was held in fiscal year (FY) 2002; the State's status relevant to the current review; and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Differences in findings across the sites included in the Onsite Review are described. Variations in outcome and item ratings as a function of type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services) also are identified when appropriate. The second section of the report (Section B: Systemic Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Table of Key Characteristics

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Cases
Total Cases	40	25
When case was opened		
Case was opened prior to the period under review	34 (85%)	13 (52%)
Case was opened during the period under review	6 (15%)	12 (48%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	11 (27.5%)	NA
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	22 (55%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	4 (10%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	6 (15%)	*
16 and older	8 (20%)	*
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	24 (60%)	*
Black (Non-Hispanic)	1 (2.5%)	*
White (Non-Hispanic)	9 (22.5%)	*
Hispanic (of any race)	2 (5%)	*
Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic)	4 (10%)	*
Primary reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	15 (37.5%)	9 (36%)
Substance abuse by parent	15 (37.5%)	5 (20%)
Physical abuse	3 (7.5%)	2 (8%)
Sexual abuse	2 (5%)	3 (12%)
Medical neglect	0	2 (8%)
Mental/physical health of parent	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Mental/physical health of child	2 (5%)	0
Domestic violence in child's home	0	2 (8%)
Emotional maltreatment	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Abandonment	1 (2.5%)	0

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

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

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

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

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

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of performance by once more applying the high standards and a consistent, comprehensive case review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued PIPs addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, even though prior PIP goals may have been achieved. The purpose is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the completion of a PIP.

In the following sections, information is provided pertaining to how the State performed on each outcome in the first round of the CFSR. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round, the key concerns observed at that time are identified as well as the strategies implemented in the PIP to address those concerns.

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

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

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	9	4	3	16	47.1
Partially Achieved	6	2	3	11	32.4
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	2	4	7	20.6
Total Applicable Cases	16	8	10	34	
Not Applicable Cases	15	9	7	31	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	
Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards					
Data Indicators	National Standard (%)			State's Percentage	Meets Standard?
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6 or higher			90.7	No
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68 or higher			99.57	No

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 47.1 percent of 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. In addition, as shown in the table, Alaska does not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant to Safety Outcome 1. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during its first CFSR conducted in FY 2002 and was required to address this outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs. Key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- The State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period or (2) the percentage of children experiencing maltreatment from caregivers while in foster care.
- 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 as priority 2 or 3) 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 the definitions for “face-to-face contact” and “initiation of investigation”
- Provided training to supervisors and caseworkers regarding new policy
- Established a protocol to review repeat maltreatment cases
- Developed a new safety assessment model (training of staff on the model in spring 2006)

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

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings for Alaska’s 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

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

____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 34 (52 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency policy requirements.

According to the Statewide Assessment:

“The Alaska Office of Children’s Services policy defines the following timeframes:

“Priority 1 [P1] reports mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 24 hours of the initial report to OCS. P1 reports are defined as reports that indicate a present danger to the child and require an immediate response.

“Priority 2 [P2] reports mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 72 hours of the initial report to OCS. P2 reports are defined as reports where the situation is serious; however, information available does not indicate the child is in immediate danger.

“Priority 3 [P3] reports mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 7 calendar days of the initial report to OCS. P3 reports are defined as reports in which a delay in assessing the situation will not result in significant additional harm to the child.”

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that some areas of the State have a differential response program. According to the policy document, staff responding to maltreatment reports that are assigned to the differential response program are expected to meet the same timeframe requirements as P3 reports—i.e., a response must be initiated within 7 calendar days of the initial report to OCS. Anchorage is the only site included in the onsite CFSR that has a differential response program.

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

Item 1 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	11	5	3	19	56
Area Needing Improvement	5	3	7	15	44
Total Applicable Cases	16	8	10	34	
Not Applicable	15	9	7	31	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 69 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 62.5 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 30 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy or law.

Item 1 was rated as an ANI in 15 cases in which the investigation of at least one maltreatment report on the family was not initiated and/or face-to-face contact was not made within the required timeframes. For the 15 cases rated as ANIs, there were 22 maltreatment reports that did not meet the timeframes required by State policy. Of these, 11 were P3 reports, 5 were P2 reports, and 4 were P1 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.

Rating Determination

Item 1 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 56 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall item rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in Alaska's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Quality Assurance (QA) reviews found that P1 referrals are consistently responded to and investigated in a timely manner. However, the QA reviews also found that there are challenges in meeting the response timeframes for P2 and P3 reports. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that these challenges affect the State's overall results regarding compliance with item 1.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that for the P2 and P3 reports, when initial efforts to locate the child or family are not successful, the case "can fall between the cracks and a follow-up effort does not take place until the required timelines have been exceeded." In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that although Alaska faces many geographically related challenges, the QA team reported that in the cases reviewed, weather and/or remoteness was seldom the reason that an investigation was not initiated in a timely manner.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that investigations of P1 reports generally are initiated within the required timeframes. However, they also noted that because of staff shortages of caseworkers who conduct investigations, when P1 reports are received, P2 and P3 reports tend to get pushed back and may be delayed. Anchorage stakeholders indicated that there are no limits on the number of cases that can be assigned to an investigations caseworker and as a result, the Anchorage office experiences a backlog in investigations. However, Anchorage stakeholders also noted that concerted efforts have been made to clear up the backlog, and it is not as large as it used to be.

Several stakeholders also indicated that although State policy as written specifies that the timeframe for initiating an investigation is to begin with the actual referral call to OCS, many agency caseworkers and supervisors believe that the timeframe for initiating an investigation does not actually begin until the screening decision is made by the intake supervisor, and the report is then assigned to the investigator. As a result, sometimes it is difficult to determine how long cases sit at the desk of the supervisor prior to the screening decision. A few stakeholders indicated that it can be difficult to gather all of the information necessary to make a screening decision in a timely manner.

Bethel and Juneau stakeholders said they were concerned about the lack of standardized criteria for accepting (i.e., screening in) referrals. Stakeholders at these sites expressed the opinion that the lack of standardized criteria can result in children with serious

problems not getting the attention they need because the screener does not accept the report. Several stakeholders suggested that this is a particular problem with sexual abuse reports, chronic neglect reports, and reports involving adolescents; they noted that such reports often are screened out without a clear reason.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 26 (40 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine if there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. The results of the assessment of item 2 are presented in the table below.

Item 2 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	11	4	5	21	81
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	1	5	19
Total Applicable Cases	13	6	7	26	
Not Applicable	18	11	10	39	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 85 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 67 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 86 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was only one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an ANI in five cases when there were at least two substantiated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period.

In addition to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment reports, reviewers expressed concern about the many cases involving multiple reports on the family during the life of the case. The "life of the case" refers to the time span from the date of the first allegation of abuse or neglect to the time of the Onsite Review. The following are key findings with regard to this concern:

- In 18 cases, there were at least 5 reports during the life of the case but fewer than 10 reports.
- In 9 cases, there were between 10 and 14 reports during the life of the case.
- In 12 cases, there were 15 or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case, with 4 cases having more than 20 reports.

Rating Determination

Item 2 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 81 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's QA team reported that when repeat maltreatment is identified in the QA review, it generally occurs in cases in which an investigation took place but services were not provided and the case was eventually closed. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, lack of ongoing monitoring and follow-up post-investigation appears to contribute to the repeat maltreatment incidents that occur in these cases. The Statewide Assessment did not provide QA data for this item.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Anchorage stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that repeat maltreatment is a problem at that site and that it may be attributed in part to a lack of follow through by the assigned caseworker after the initial contact. These stakeholders suggested that OCS is closing cases prematurely or letting cases remain open without efforts to work with the family.

In addition, some stakeholders indicated that maltreatment reports on open cases may be passed directly to the existing caseworker on the case. Sometimes, in these instances, the maltreatment allegation is not reported to intake and there is no full investigation of the new allegation or formal finding regarding substantiation of the allegation. Some Anchorage stakeholders indicated that often when contracted service providers working on an open case need to make a maltreatment report, they will call the ongoing caseworker rather than make a report through the intake process. Stakeholders suggested that at that point, the ongoing caseworker may or may not inform intake of the report so that it can be formally investigated.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate

Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	16	3	6	25	38.5
Partially Achieved	4	4	4	12	18.5
Not Achieved or Addressed	11	10	7	28	43.1
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 38.5 percent of the cases reviewed, 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. 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.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

- In the 2002 CFSR, both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs. 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 the children were safe.

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

- Issued new policies regarding in-home cases focusing on using 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 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.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings for the 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal

___ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable for 47 (72 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent placement of children in foster care while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 3 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	10	6	8	24	51
Area Needing Improvement	11	8	4	23	49
Total Applicable Cases	21	14	12	47	
Not Applicable	10	3	5	18	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 48 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 43 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 67 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 24 cases when reviewers determined that services were provided to the parents and children to prevent removal or that children were appropriately removed from the home without service provision because the removal was necessary to ensure the child's safety. Item 3 was rated as an ANI in 23 cases when reviewers determined the following:

- The services provided were insufficient to ensure the safety of the child while the child remained in the home (18 cases).
- The child was removed from the home, and the agency did not make concerted efforts to provide services to prevent the removal (three cases).
- No efforts were made to identify services that would ensure the safety of children residing with a relative (two cases). (In these cases, the child was not in foster care.)

Rating Determination

Item 3 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 51 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, high caseloads for investigators across the State make it difficult to provide in-home services to ensure safety. The Statewide Assessment also reports that accessing services that meet the complex needs of families also tends to be a challenge. Data provided in the Statewide Assessment indicate that in the State's 2008 QA review, approximately 68 percent of Anchorage cases, 28 percent of Bethel cases, and 78 percent of Juneau cases were found to have had services provided to prevent removal. (The actual percentages are estimates based on the charts provided in the Statewide Assessment. The sites specified in the Statewide Assessment data as Anchorage, Bethel, and Juneau pertain to the same geographic areas as those sites reviewed in the Onsite Review.)

Stakeholder Interview

Some stakeholders in Anchorage and Bethel expressed the opinion that children may not be maintained safely in their homes because of a lack of in-home services and follow up by the caseworker to monitor the family and ensure that services are being provided. The lack of caseworker follow-up was attributed to their high caseloads. A few Anchorage stakeholders also indicated that children may be removed from their homes because there are waiting lists for substance abuse treatment services for the parents and concern that the children cannot be left in the home if parents are not accessing these services.

Some Anchorage stakeholders reported that the caseworkers responsible for case management of in-home services also are responsible for investigations and, as a result, they do not have the time to follow up on these cases. One Anchorage stakeholder indicated that a specific in-home services unit was created recently to work with these families, but that there was no statewide guidance on working with these cases since they are mostly voluntary cases.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 4 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	16	3	6	25	38
Area Needing Improvement	15	14	11	40	62
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 52 percent of Anchorage cases, 18 percent of Bethel cases, and 35 percent of Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through the following: (1) conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children's home or in the children's foster home, and (2) addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as an ANI in 40 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was a lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the home prior to case closure or prior to a trial home visit (nine cases).
- There was a lack of ongoing safety and risk assessments in the children's home during the period under review (23 cases).
- There were continued risk concerns in the home that were not addressed and/or monitored by the agency and the children were at risk in the home (17 cases).
- The case was closed without the child welfare agency ever having had any contact with the children in the home and without an initial risk assessment (one case).
- There was a lack of risk and safety assessments of the foster home (four cases).

Rating Determination

Item 4 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children in only 38 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA reviews have found that children in foster care receive quality care and that abuse in foster care is rare. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that QA reviews also have found that OCS struggles with effectively

reducing risk of harm to children who remain in their own homes. The Statewide Assessment notes that QA case reviews reveal that often families who are receiving in-home services are seen only once in several months and that there is a lack of consistent ongoing monitoring that weakens OCS's ability to ensure the safety of children in their own home. However, no QA data were provided for this item in the Statewide Assessment.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several State-level, Anchorage, and Juneau stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the new safety model, although well-liked, is requiring more time and training than initially anticipated because it involves moving from an incidence-driven system to a more comprehensive holistic decision-based system. However, they also noted that because almost all in-home cases are voluntary, there can be some problems with the family but are not sufficient to keep a case open. Some Juneau stakeholders indicated that there is a lack of clear instruction or policy regarding reassessing the family prior to closing a case. They suggested that although assessments often are conducted, they are not being documented.

Several stakeholders also expressed concern about the safety of children who are being placed in nonlicensed homes because background checks are not completed on these homes prior to the placement and often not until the child has been in the home for several months.

A few stakeholders noted that in some differential response cases the children may need placement services while the contracted agencies are working with the families. However, these stakeholders suggested that OCS often does not address the placement concerns for these children because the case has been assigned to the differential response program.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations					
Number of cases reviewed by site according to degree of outcome achievement					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	4	1	1	6	15.0
Partially Achieved	15	8	6	29	72.5
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	1	3	5	12.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	
Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards					
Data Indicators	National Standard (Scaled Score)			State's Composite Score	Meets Standard?
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +			122.4	No
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +			81.1	No
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +			125.4	Yes
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +			73.1	No

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in only 15 percent of the 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).

The State met the national standards for the data indicator pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods (Composite 3). Alaska's performance on the individual measures included in each composite data indicator is presented in the discussion of the items related to the measure.

Alaska was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

During the 2002 CFSR, 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, which was attributed primarily to a lack of effort to match children and foster parents.
- Case goals often were in place for extended periods of time even when there were indications that the goal was not likely to be achieved.
- Appropriate case goals often were not established in a timely manner.
- The goals of guardianship and reunification were not achieved in a timely manner.
- 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.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings of the 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care reentries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 11 (27.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for assessment if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 5 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	5	3	2	10	91
Area Needing Improvement	1	0	0	1	9
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	3	2	11	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	14	7	8	29	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 10 cases in which the child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. The item was rated as an ANI in one case in which the child reentered foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. In this case the child was on a trial home visit that lasted longer than 6 months and was re-removed from the home due to the mother's continued substance abuse problem, which had not been adequately treated.

Rating Determination

Item 5 is assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 91 percent of the applicable cases, the child had not reentered foster care in less than 12 months. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on Composite 1: Measure relevant to the permanency of reunification

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

The following is the State's performance for the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators. The CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators was from April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007. With regard to the individual measure of foster care reentry (measure C1.4) included in the Composite 1 data indicator—Timeliness and permanency of reunification, 7.5 percent of the children exiting foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the CFSR 12-month target period reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is lower than the 25th percentile of 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, efforts to prevent reentries into foster care are a strength for OCS. The Statewide Assessment attributes this positive performance in part to the fact that caseworkers mitigate the safety threats for children and determine that needed changes have taken place before the child is returned home. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that stakeholders expressed concern that the strength noted in this area may be gained at the cost of "length of time in care."

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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

Item 6 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	16	7	6	29	72.5
Area Needing Improvement	4	3	4	11	27.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of Anchorage cases, 70 percent of Bethel cases, and 60 percent of Juneau cases. Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's current placement was stable and that the child either did not experience a placement change during the period under review or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best

interests (i.e., they were intended to further achievement of the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child).

Item 6 was rated as an ANI in 11 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to further attainment of the child's permanency goal (11 cases).
- The child's current placement setting (at the time of the onsite CFSR) was not stable (two cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Seventeen children had one placement during the period under review.
- Fourteen children had two placements during the period under review.
- Nine children had three or more placements during the period under review, with three of these children having five or more placements.

Rating Determination

Item 6 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 72.5 percent of the foster care cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interests of the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on Composite 4: Measures of placement stability

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

Alaska's performance for the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators on the individual measures included in Composite 4: Placement stability is as follows:

- 65.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 83.3 percent.
- 50.7 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 59.9 percent.
- 25.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 33.9 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS and stakeholders agree that placement stability is an ANI for the State. The Statewide Assessment notes that placement stability can be affected by the age of foster children, the lack of therapeutic resource families to meet the needs of the child, the lack of consistent and available support resources for families, and the turnover in OCS caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment also notes that there is a lack of foster homes in the State, particularly those homes willing to care for adolescents. In addition, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, there are not enough therapeutic foster homes for youth with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) or significant mental health issues.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that ensuring placement stability for children in foster care is a challenge for OCS. Various stakeholders attributed this problem to the following:

- A lack of foster families that are willing to foster children with complex needs and problems
- A lack of support for foster families, particularly respite services
- A lack of support for relative caregivers who are not licensed and whose needs often are ignored
- An insufficient pool of foster families, including Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) placement families, to ensure appropriate matching between children and foster parents
- Too frequent use of emergency placements and shelters, even for children younger than age 12
- A lack of training of caseworkers on how and when to support foster parents

A few stakeholders also indicated that foster parents are not always provided with complete information on the child placed in their home and this often “sets them up for failure.”

Some Anchorage stakeholders indicated that Team Decision Meetings (TDMs) often are used to prevent placement changes and that some caseworkers are very skilled in this process. However, these stakeholders also reported that TDMs are available only in Anchorage and are not available to all families in that location.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

___ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was

appropriate. Reviewers also were to determine whether the agency had sought termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	11	5	2	18	45
Area Needing Improvement	9	5	8	22	55
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 55 percent of Anchorage cases, 50 percent of Bethel cases, and 20 percent of Juneau cases. Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. The item was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's current permanency goal (at the time of the onsite CFSR) was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (four cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (15 cases).
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA, particularly with regard to documenting in the case file compelling reasons for not seeking TPR (seven cases).

Case review findings pertaining to the case goals were as follows:

- Ten children had a goal of reunification with parents or relatives only.
- Nineteen children had a goal of adoption only.
- Three children had a goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) only. (OPPLA is a living arrangement other than adoption, reunification, living with other relatives, or guardianship that involves the child remaining in State custody until reaching the age of majority.)
- Two children had a goal of guardianship only.
- Three children had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification with parents.
- Two children had concurrent goals of guardianship and OPPLA.
- One child had concurrent goals of guardianship and reunification with parents.

Case review findings pertaining to meeting ASFA requirements for TPR were as follows:

- At the time of the onsite CFSR, 30 of the 40 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. ASFA requirements with regard to seeking TPR and documenting compelling reasons when TPR was not sought were

applicable for 29 of these foster care cases. In one case, ASFA requirements were not applicable because the child was in a foster care placement with a relative during the child's entire time in foster care.

- ASFA requirements were not met in 7 (24 percent) of the 29 cases for which the requirements were applicable.

Rating Determination

Item 7 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and acted in accordance with the requirements of ASFA in only 45 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on Composite 3: Measures pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods

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

- Alaska's performance for the CFSR target 12-month period on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 3 (achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods) is as follows:
- 20.6 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the target period were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the target period (measure C3-1). This percentage is less than the national median of 25 percent.
 - 99.4 percent of the children exiting foster care during the target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home (measure C3-2). This percentage exceeds the 75th percentile of 98 percent.
 - 35.7 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation (or who turned age 18 while still in foster care) had been in foster care for 3 years or longer (measure C3.3). This percentage is less than the 25th percentile of 37.5 percent. For this measure, lower percentages indicate higher performance levels.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State QA reviews show an improvement in the establishment of permanency goals. However, no data were provided in the Statewide Assessment with regard to State QA findings for this item. In addition, although the Statewide Assessment notes that the incorporation of Regional Adoptions Specialists in administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences has increased the timeliness of goal establishment for children in out-of-home care, no evaluation data were provided to support this statement.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process expressed concern that OCS caseworkers do not understand the purpose of concurrent plans and that concurrent plans are not being developed as early as they could be in some cases. These stakeholders suggested that additional OCS staff training is needed in the development, use, and purpose of concurrent planning.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed opinions regarding concurrent planning. Some stakeholders indicated that concurrent planning is occurring and that caseworkers are working toward concurrent goals simultaneously. However, a few stakeholders also noted that although the State's automated child welfare information system can accommodate concurrent goals, many caseworkers are not entering concurrent goals into the system, particularly when there is a goal of adoption.

Other stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers generally are not implementing concurrent planning early on in a case and when there are concurrent goals, caseworkers are not working both goals simultaneously. Some Bethel stakeholders, for example, noted that concurrent planning is not considered at all until the 9-month permanency hearing.

A few stakeholders also indicated that sometimes permanency goals other than reunification may not be established in a timely manner because of the extensive turnover in both the caseworker and supervisor positions. These stakeholders said that new caseworkers and supervisors usually want to start over again with the family regardless of how long the child has been in foster care. Other stakeholders suggested that permanency goals may not be changed from reunification because the required services for the parents have not been available and the court will rule that reasonable efforts were not made.

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

___ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 18 (45 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner, or if the goals had not been achieved, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 8 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	3	1	2	6	33
Area Needing Improvement	4	6	2	12	67
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	7	4	18	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	13	3	6	22	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 8 is rated as a Strength in 43 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 14 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 50 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner. Some of the concerns identified in the cases pertained to problems or delays in completing paperwork, particularly for guardianships, and to a lack of visitation opportunities for parents and children.

Rating Determination

Item 8 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner in only 33 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Composite 1: Measures pertaining to timeliness of reunification

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

- Alaska's performance for the 12-month CFSR target period on the three "timeliness" measures included in Permanency Composite 1: (timeliness and permanency of reunification) is presented below.
- 67.3 percent of the reunifications occurred in at least 8 days but less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 69.9 percent.
 - The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 7 months. This median length of stay is more than the national median length of stay of 6.5 months. For this measure, a lower number of months equates to a higher level of performance.

- 32.2 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 39.4 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QA review team indicated that there are challenges in moving cases to permanency, and they reported that this may be due in part to the fact that some treatment processes take longer than expected. The Statewide Assessment notes that drug and alcohol treatment, in particular, may be delayed because of the lack of available inpatient treatment, which results in waiting lists. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the achievement of permanency goals, such as timely reunification, is thwarted by the lack of consistent caseworker practice due to high staff turnover.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there are barriers to achieving reunification in a timely manner and that one key barrier is a lack of adequate services for the parents. Stakeholders noted that this is a problem in the urban areas as well as in the bush. In particular, many stakeholders identified mental health and substance abuse treatment services for adults and supervised visitation as services that were not readily available to families and therefore resulted in delays in reunification.

Item 9. Adoption

___ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 22 (55 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to finalize adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below.

Item 9 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	3	0	1	4	18
Area Needing Improvement	10	4	4	18	82
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	13	4	5	22	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	6	5	18	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 23 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, none of the applicable Bethel cases, and 20 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an ANI in 18 cases due to one or more of the following concerns:

- Delays in filing for TPR (nine cases)
- Delays in the TPR process after filing (two cases)
- Delays in completing or approving home studies (six cases)
- Delays in searching for absent parents (four cases)
- Delays due to the Tribe wanting to ensure that there are no available relatives before they agree to adoption by a nonrelative foster parent (one case)
- Delays due to not addressing key service needs of child (two cases)

In six of the 18 cases rated as ANIs for this item, the child had been in foster care for longer than 3 years at the time of the onsite CFSR or at the time of adoption finalization. During the period under review, adoption was finalized in only 5 of the 22 cases with a case goal of adoption. There was no case in which finalization occurred in less than 24 months of the child's entry into foster care.

Rating Determination

Item 9 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner in only 18 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Composite 2: Measures pertaining to the timeliness of adoptions

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

Alaska's performance during the CFSR 12-month target period on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 2 (timeliness of adoptions) is as follows:

- 22 percent of adoptions occurred in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care (measure C2-1). This percentage is less than the national median of 26.8 percent.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 31.5 months (measure C2-2). This median length of stay is less than the national median of 32.4 months but higher than the 25th percentile of 27.3 months. For this measure, a lower number of months equates to a higher level of performance.

- 16.4 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged to a finalized adoption by the last day of the target period (measure C2-3). This percentage is less than the national median of 20.2 percent.
- 8.5 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the CFSR 12-month target period became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within 6 months (measure C2-4). This percentage is less than the national median of 8.8 percent.
- 40.8 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free (C2-5). This percentage is less than the national median of 45.8 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Alaska statutes and OCS policy outline processes for improving timeliness to adoption by addressing timeframes for TPR. Statutes and policy require that when a child has been placed out-of-home for 15 of the last 22 months, a petition for TPR must be filed unless there are compelling reasons for not filing a petition. Additionally, Alaska's statutes and policy address the consent to adoption by parent, which provides expedited achievement of timely adoptions particularly in cases of Alaska Native children. This process offers parents the opportunity to consent to adoption without a relinquishment or TPR.

The Statewide Assessment reports that there is agreement between OCS and stakeholders that delays in adoption may be attributed to insufficient staff training on this issue and that newly assigned caseworkers may resist moving toward TPR. Instead, new caseworkers sometimes want to give parents additional chances to reunify with their child. This is especially problematic when cases move from one worker to another due to staff turnover. Newly assigned caseworkers can be hesitant to move forward with TPR on unfamiliar cases and therefore delays often occur.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that a lack of available mental health and substance abuse services for OCS families is an obstacle for timely TPR. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the State QA review team observed that there are a number of factors that may affect the timeliness of adoptions. For example, concurrent planning often is not considered early in a case even when there is little hope of successful reunification, and some courts will not accept concurrent plans until 15 months of placement has passed even in poor prognosis cases. Finally, a limited number of cases get lost in the system when cases are transferred from one caseworker to another. These cases may appear stable to the new caseworker and therefore do not get the attention needed to finalize an adoption.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that, although there are challenges in achieving adoptions in a timely manner, the hiring of Regional Adoption Specialists has greatly improved the situation. However, there was a consensus among stakeholders that adoptions are taking too long to complete and that the most significant barrier to achieving adoptions in a timely manner is the home study process. Many stakeholders indicated that home studies, most of which are done by private contractors, take an extremely

long time to complete and can delay an adoption anywhere from 6 to 12 months. They noted that although the State has adopted stricter time requirements for the home study, it remains a significant cause of adoption delays.

Various stakeholders identified the following as additional barriers to timely adoptions:

- An insufficient number of adoptive homes, particularly ICWA adoptive homes and homes for children with behavior problems
- Delays in achieving TPR, including the need in some areas of the State for the caseworker to prepare a full case summary as part of the petition process
- Delays in scheduling TPR hearings because other types of cases have priority
- High staff caseloads that result in a lack of services to the biological family and, therefore, findings of no reasonable efforts in case
- Delays due to lengthy subsidy negotiations, which cannot take place until after the home study is completed
- The belief of some agency staff that there is an OCS policy requiring that a child be in a home for 3 months before a home study can be requested and 6 months before an adoption can be finalized

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 5 (12.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to OPPIAs. The results are presented in the table below.

Item 10 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	2	1	0	3	60
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	2	2	40
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	1	2	5	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	18	9	8	35	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in three cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement for the child and to provide the necessary service to prepare the child for independent living. Item 10 was rated as an ANI in two cases when reviewers determined that the child was not in a permanent placement and there were delays in providing the child with Independent Living (IL) services.

