

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Final Report: District of Columbia Child and Family Services Review**  
**January 2008**

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the District of Columbia. 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 United States Department of Health and Human Services 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 (ACF), within the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

The District of Columbia CFSR was conducted the week of June 25, 2007. The period under review for the case reviews was from 4/1/2006 to 6/25/2007. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA).
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal year (FY) 2003, FY 2004 and FY 2005.
- Reviews of 65 cases.
- Interviews or focus groups with stakeholders, including, but not limited to, children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel and attorneys.

Information from each resource is presented for all of the items reviewed.

**Background Information**

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items relevant to 7 outcomes and 22 items pertaining to 7 systemic factors. In the Systemic Factors section of the report, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement, based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements. Information relevant to each item comes from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the onsite CFSR. The overall rating for the systemic factors is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor a State is rated as being in substantial conformity with that factor (i.e., a score of 3 or 4), or not in substantial conformity with that factor (a score of 1 or 2).

Items relevant to the seven outcomes are discussed in the Outcomes Section of the report. An overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 items depending on the percentage of cases that receive a Strength rating for that time in the case review process. An item may be assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. Performance ratings for each of the seven outcomes are based on item ratings. A State may be rated as having Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved the outcome. The determination of whether a State is in substantial conformity with a particular outcome is based on the percentage of cases that were determined to have substantially

achieved the outcome. Specifically, for a State to be in substantial conformity with an outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. 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 associated with that outcome.

ACF has set very high standards of performance for the CFSR Review. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our country's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be acceptable. The focus of the CFSR process is on continuous quality improvement; high standards are set to ensure ongoing attention to the goal of achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency and well-being.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95 percent standard established for the CFSR onsite review at the end of their PIP implementation. CB, ACF, recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often are time-consuming 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 implement specified activities for their PIP. That is, for each outcome or item that is an area needing improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the CB) specifies how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the areas needing improvement, and determines 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 90 percent (for items) level as required by the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of functioning with regard to achieving desired child and family outcomes by once more applying high standards and a consistent, comprehensive case-review methodology. This is intended to serve as a basis for continued planning in areas in which the State still needs to improve. The goal is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the closing of the PIP.

Because many changes have been made in the onsite 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 their performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of percentages. Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews are the following:

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

## **Summary of CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes**

The 2007 CFSR identified several areas of high performance in the District of Columbia with regard to achieving outcomes for children. The United States Department of Health and Human Services acknowledges the hard work and progress of the District of Columbia to make positive changes in its practice, and to enhance services to children and families in the child welfare system. While the results of the 2007 CFSR show that the District of Columbia still needs to make improvements in each of the seven outcomes, it is important to note the significant progress in the District of Columbia's performance since the 2001 CFSR. In addition, the District of Columbia's performance related to children in foster care was greatly improved in many areas, although the review noted a need for attention to outcomes for children being served in their own homes. Finally, the 2007 CFSR found that the District of Columbia's failure to engage fathers had a significant impact on the ratings for items and outcomes in several areas.

The District of Columbia meets the National standards for the National data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and performed very close to the National standard for the data indicator pertaining to the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff members. In addition, although the District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes, it did achieve overall ratings of Strength for the following individual indicators:

- Maltreatment recurrence (item 2).
- Services to prevent the removal of children from their homes (item 3).
- Permanent placements for children with a permanency goal of Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (OPPLA) (item 10).
- Proximity of children's placements to parents (item 11).
- Placement with siblings (item 12).
- Preserving connections (item 14).
- Meeting children's physical health needs (item 22).

Also, the District of Columbia performed at a relatively high level (although they did not meet the 95 percent required for substantial conformity) on the CFSR outcomes pertaining to the provision of services to meet children's educational needs (88.0 percent in Substantial Conformity) and physical and mental health needs (87.3 percent of cases in Substantial Conformity), and maintaining children safely in their homes when possible and appropriate (81.5 percent of cases in Substantial Conformity). The generally high level of performance on these outcomes may be attributed in part to the District of Columbia's use of the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives (the Collaboratives) as the primary agent for the delivery of community-based child abuse and neglect prevention services. As indicated in the District of Columbia's "Statewide Assessment," CFSA contracts with the Collaboratives, located in seven neighborhoods in the District of Columbia with high concentrations of families who enter the child welfare system. The Collaboratives provide a range of services and access to resources for the families in their communities, including prevention services, community case management, information and referral, intervention services, supportive case management, foster parent and caregiver support, aftercare services for children and families whose cases have been closed with CFSA, community sites for visitation for children with their parents and siblings, and family group decision-making services.

In addition, both the case review findings and the stakeholder interviews indicated that the District of Columbia has exceptional services for youth, to assist them in making the transition from foster care to independent living. A particular focus of these services is on ensuring that youth's educational needs are met at all levels, including college attendance.

The CFSR also identified areas where improvements are needed to better achieve desired outcomes for children and families. One key area of concern was the District of Columbia's performance on Permanency Outcome 1—Children have permanency and stability in their living situations. This outcome was rated as substantially achieved in only 41.0 percent of the cases reviewed. In addition, the District of Columbia did not meet the National standards for the data indicators associated with Permanency Outcome 1. These are: (1) timeliness and permanency of reunification, (2) timeliness of adoption, (3) achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time, and (4) placement stability. Within Permanency Outcome 1, the District's lowest ratings were for item 7, which pertains to establishing permanency goals in a timely manner, and item 9, which pertains to achieving adoptions in a timely manner. Performance on these items may be attributed, at least in part, to what stakeholders described as a difference in focus between the courts and CFSA. Some stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR suggested that while the agency focuses on achieving permanency for children, the main concern of the courts is that children receive the services they need. According to these stakeholders, the courts often take the position that children have a higher probability of receiving services if they remain in foster care. As a result, they are less likely to move a child quickly toward permanency if they believe the child has existing services needs that can be better met in foster care, particularly if the services needed are intensive mental and physical health services.

Concerns also were raised with regard to Permanency Outcome 1 regarding the somewhat different standards of training and practice between CFSA caseworkers and caseworkers for the private agencies. These differences exist even though the caseworkers in the private agencies are given full case management responsibilities for the children in their caseloads. One example of the difference is that, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, the private agency network does not operate under the same policy requirements concerning placement stability as does CFSA. In addition, although private agency staff are expected to participate in an initial training program that is similar to, but not identical to, that offered to CFSA caseworkers, many of them do not participate in this training and participation is not enforced. The primary sanction for not completing training is that the private agency caseworker cannot access FACES. However, this results in a situation in which the private agency worker must ask another caseworker who has completed training to enter the information, which can contribute to delays and potential errors in data reporting.

Another area of concern pertained to the District of Columbia's performance on Well-Being Outcome 1—Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs. This outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 49.2 percent of the cases. Although the District of Columbia was relatively effective in maintaining sufficient contact between caseworkers and the children in their caseloads (item 19), performance for the other items included in Well-Being Outcome 1 ranged from 39 percent Strength ratings for item 20, to 51 percent Strength ratings for item 17. The case review findings suggest that the lower levels of performance on these items in Well-Being Outcome 1 may be attributed in large part to the lack of concerted effort on the part of caseworkers to engage the fathers of the children in case planning, to assess the service needs of the fathers, and to have sufficient frequency of caseworker visits with the fathers. In contrast, in many cases, the level of contact with the mothers of the children and the involvement of mothers in the case planning process was exceptional.

### **Summary of CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors**

With regard to systemic factors, the District of Columbia was found to be in substantial conformity with all 7 factors: Statewide Information System; Case Review System; Quality Assurance System; Service Array; Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Although there were some items within these systemic factors that were rated as areas needing improvement, for the most part, these systemic factors were highly praised by the stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR.

The specific findings with regard to the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance with regard to the 7 (seven) systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following section, key findings are summarized for each outcome and systemic factor.

## **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).

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 80.8 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The District of Columbia met one of the National standards for the data indicator pertaining to Safety Outcome 1—the absence of maltreatment recurrence. However, it did not meet the National standard for the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff, although its percentage was very close to the standard. The District of Columbia was in substantial conformity with this outcome during the 2001 CFSR and, therefore, did not address it in its PIP.

A key concern identified for this outcome was that the District of Columbia was not consistent with regard to responding to maltreatment reports within the timeframes established by agency policy. However, all of the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item involved “priority 2” maltreatment allegations, which are those in which the child is determined to not have immediate protection needs. The District of Columbia has a very high standard for responding to allegations in which the child's safety is a concern (priority level 1 reports), requiring that a response be initiated within 30 minutes of receipt of the report.

### **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.

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 81.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The District of Columbia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR, and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. Both items incorporated in the outcome were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. The District met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- In the majority of cases, reviewers determined that CFSA made concerted efforts to address the factors that brought the family to the attention of the agency. There were multiple cases with referrals and follow-up for domestic violence services and substance abuse assessment and treatment services. However, reviewers identified some cases in the 2007 review in which the safety and risk assessments were not sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the potential safety factors in the family.
- For all cases in the 2007 CFSR in which the child was removed from the home without provision of services, reviewers determined that this decision was necessary for the safety of the child and that provision of in-home services would not have been appropriate.
- For the most part, reviewers determined that the agency was effective in providing services to prevent removal or re-entry into foster care and in conducting risk assessments both initially and on an ongoing basis.

**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's efforts to prevent foster care re-entry (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 and permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have "other planned living arrangements" as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 41.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The District of Columbia's Data Profile indicates that for the CFSR 12-month target period (FY 2005), it did not meet the National standards for any of the four Permanency Composites.

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the 2001 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The District of Columbia met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

The case reviews during the 2007 CFSR indicated the following concerns:

- Some children tended to be in foster care for long periods of time before their permanency goals were achieved.
- Although many of the children in the cases reviewed experienced placement stability, the agency was not consistently effective in placing children in stable homes.
- Permanency goals were not established in a timely manner on a consistent basis, particularly when the goal was changed from reunification to adoption.
- There was a general lack of concurrent planning. Only two cases in the sample had concurrent goals.

In addition, the District of Columbia's data demonstrated that a relatively high percentage of children exiting foster care re-enter within 12 months of the time of discharge, and that timeliness of permanency and placement stability are clear challenges for the District of Columbia

Although there were many concerns associated with this outcome, both the case review findings and the stakeholder interviews indicated that the District of Columbia makes concerted efforts to ensure long-term placements for children, with a permanency goal of Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, and that the District of Columbia is effective in providing the necessary services to prepare children for making the transition from foster care to independent living, when appropriate.

**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 with regard to (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 between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 71.8 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. During the 2001 review, item 13 (Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care) and item 16 (Relationship of child in foster care with parents) were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. The District of Columbia met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

During the 2007 CFSR, items 13, 15 and 16 were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. A key concern identified for these items was the lack of diligent efforts to locate parents (particularly fathers) and the lack of effort to connect children in foster care with their fathers. Additional findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- Children in the cases reviewed were placed in close proximity to their biological parents, whenever possible and appropriate.

- Children in the cases reviewed were placed with siblings when that was appropriate.
- The agency was effective in ensuring that children in foster care maintained their connections to their extended family, culture, neighborhood, schools, etc.
- The agency was effective in ensuring frequent visitation between siblings in foster care who were placed apart. However, the agency was less effective in ensuring adequate visitation between parents, particularly fathers, and their children. Both stakeholders and the Statewide Assessment note that the agency makes concerted efforts to promote visitation with the parent with whom the child is expected to be reunified. If there is no expectation that a child will be reunified with a particular parent, then less effort is made to promote visitation with that parent.
- For the most part, the agency made concerted efforts to place children with relatives although, in a few cases, the agency did not search for either maternal or paternal relatives when considering placement.
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to strengthen or maintain the parent-child bond in many of the cases. Although there was an agency focus on visitation between parents and children, there were few efforts to involve parents in school-related activities, medical appointments and other aspects of the child's day-to-day life.

**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 child welfare 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 the child welfare agency's 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's contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 49.2 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied based on the type of case. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 62 percent (24 cases) of the 39 foster care cases compared to 31 percent (8 cases) of the 26 in-home services cases. The District of Columbia also did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during its 2001 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The District of Columbia met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

In both the 2001 and the 2007 CFSR, all four items incorporated in the outcome were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. A key concern identified in the 2007 CFSR was that the agency did not consistently conduct diligent searches for absent parents (usually fathers) or make concerted efforts to reach out to non-custodial parents even when they were accessible. An additional finding of the 2007 CFSR, with regard to this outcome, was that foster care cases were more likely than in-home services cases to be rated as a Strength with regard to assessing and meeting the service needs of children and parents and involving parents and children in case planning.

Specific findings of the 2007 CFSR include the following:

- CFSA was highly effective in assessing and meeting the needs of children and foster parents, and somewhat less effective in assessing and meeting the needs of the biological mothers. The agency was not at all effective in assessing and meeting the needs of the biological fathers.
- Case plans were found in all cases reviewed and they had been developed in a timely manner.
- Reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to involve mothers in case planning, although the agency continued to lack efforts to involve fathers in case planning.
- In most cases, there was frequent contact between caseworkers and their children in their caseloads.

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

There is only one indicator for Well-Being Outcome 2. The indicator pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. Reviewers determined that 88.0 percent of the cases reviewed substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 100 percent of the 32 applicable foster care cases compared to 67 percent of the 18 applicable in-home services cases. The District of Columbia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR and addressed the outcome in its PIP. The District of Columbia did not meet its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

A key finding of the 2007 CFSR was that in the majority of cases, the agency was effective in assessing and meeting children's educational needs, particularly children in foster care. In a small number of cases, however, education-related needs were identified in the case file, but the agency did not make any efforts to address those needs, either by attempting to obtain services or by advocating for the child with the school system.

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

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

The District of Columbia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 87.3 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied base on the type of case. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 97 percent (38 cases) of the 39 applicable foster care cases compared to 62.5 percent (10 cases) of the 16 applicable in-home services cases.

The District of Columbia also did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The District of Columbia met its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

In contrast to the findings during the 2001 CFSR, item 22 (physical health of child) was rated as a Strength in the 2007 CFSR. Concerns pertaining to dental health services and lack of provision of medical records to foster parents were not found to be relevant in the 2007 CFSR. Although item 23 pertaining to children's mental health needs continued to be rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR, the percentage of Strengths was very close to the 90 percent needed for an overall rating of Strength. A key finding for both items was that the items were rated as a Strength in almost all of the foster care cases. Only one foster care case received a rating of Area Needing Improvement for item 23.

## **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 Statewide information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for children in foster care.

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The District of Columbia was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR and the factor was addressed in the State's PIP. The District of Columbia met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

The systemic factor was rated as being in substantial conformity because the District of Columbia has designed and implemented an information system that can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

### **Case Review System**

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine the 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), the implementation of procedures to seek termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. The District of Columbia was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. The District of Columbia met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- Case plans were consistently established for children.
- Cases were consistently reviewed at least every 6 months and permanency hearings were held in a timely manner.

- Foster parents, relative caretakers and pre-adoptive parents were consistently notified of reviews or hearings pertaining to the children in their care and had the opportunity to provide their input during the hearings and reviews, either in person or through written communications.
- Parents, particularly fathers, were not consistently involved in the case planning process.
- There is some reluctance on the part of judges to terminate parental rights unless an adoptive family had been found for the child.
- There is policy and a process in place for filing for the TPR, in accordance with the requirements of the ASFA.

### **Quality Assurance System**

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

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. The District of Columbia also was in substantial conformity with this factor during the 2001 CFSR. Key findings of the 2007 CFSR are the following:

- CFSA has implemented several procedures for ensuring standards for delivery of quality services that protect the health and safety of children, including performance-based contracting that establishes standards for service providers and an agency-wide practice model that focuses on children's safety, as well as permanency and well being.
- CFSA has implemented several mechanisms to ensure the quality of practice and services, including semi-annual case reviews through the Quality Services Reviews and has instituted a philosophy of accountability and transparency in monitoring for practice and outcomes.

### **Training**

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

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of training. The District of Columbia was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2001 CFSR and addressed the factor in its PIP.

A key concern of the 2007 CFSR was that although CFSA has instituted a strong staff development and training program that mandates both classroom and on-the-job training for new CFSA caseworkers and training for new supervisors, private agency caseworkers who have full case management responsibilities are not subject to the same requirements. Although a special training was designed for the private agency caseworkers, both the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews indicate that private agency caseworkers do not routinely access the CFSA new caseworker training, and sometimes assume caseloads before training is completed. This is a concern because private agency caseworkers are given full case management responsibilities for the cases that

are assigned to them but have not been adequately trained to do the work. Therefore, they are acting on behalf of the agency and their caseworkers should be subject to the same requirements as CFSA caseworkers.

Despite this concern, the District of Columbia's provision of ongoing training for agency caseworkers and its initial and ongoing training for foster parents was considered to be a Strength.

### **Service Array**

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses three questions: (1) Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The District of Columbia was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2001 CFSR and was not required to address it in its PIP.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- Although the District of Columbia has a wide array of services available to meet the needs of children and families, significant gaps are still noted in the areas of substance abuse treatment (for both parents and youth), housing and mental health. However, CFSA conducts a bi-annual needs assessment of services available and addresses identified gaps through the Resource Development Plan.
- The District of Columbia has implemented strategies to ensure accessibility of services, including locating the Collaboratives in different neighborhoods, and providing tokens for buses and the Metro to assist families with transportation issues.
- CFSA makes concerted efforts to implement strategies to individualize services to meet the needs of children and families. CFSA established the Office of Clinical Practice (OCP) to assist caseworkers in assessing the needs of families and matching appropriate services for education and physical and mental health. OCP specialists have been able to work with other agencies to be creative in meeting individual needs of children and families. In addition, flexible funds are available to assist families in various ways.

### **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 Child and Family Services Plan (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).

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The District of Columbia also was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2001 CFSR. The general finding in the 2007 CFSR was that the District of Columbia engages in ongoing consultation with key stakeholders to obtain their input regarding the goals and objectives of

the CFSP. The State also includes the input of stakeholders in the development of annual reports of progress and services. In addition, the CFSR found that there was coordination between CFSA and other Federal and Federally assisted programs to meet the service needs of the children and families served by the agency.

### **Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention**

The assessment of this systemic factor focuses on the State's standards for foster homes and child care institutions (items 41 and 42), the State's compliance with Federal requirements for criminal background checks for foster and adoptive parents (item 43), the State's efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of foster children (item 44), and the State's activities with regard to using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate permanent placements for waiting children (item 45).

The District of Columbia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention. Key findings of the 2007 CFSR were the following:

- The District of Columbia has implemented standards for licensing foster family homes and child care institutions. In addition, CFSA has reduced the number of foster children residing in unlicensed homes.
- The District of Columbia applies the same licensing standards to all licensed foster family homes and child care institutions.
- The District of Columbia requires local and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) criminal background checks and child protection background checks for all foster and adoptive parents for initial licensure and renewal.
- CFSA has an extensive recruitment plan for both general foster and adoptive homes, and child-specific adoptive homes.
- CFSA uses cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive and permanency placements for waiting children.

**Table 1. District of Columbia CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items**

| Outcomes and Indicators  | Outcome Ratings                   |  |                                | Item Rating     |                         |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|  | <i>In Substantial Conformity?</i> | <i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i> | <i>Met National Standards?</i> | <i>Rating**</i> | <i>Percent Strength</i> |
| Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect             | NO                                | 80.8                                   | Met 1<br>Did not meet 1        |                 |                         |
| Item 1: Timeliness of investigations   |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 81                      |
| Item 2: Repeat maltreatment  |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 96                      |
| Safety Outcome 2 – Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate | NO                                | 81.5                                   |                                |                 |                         |
| Item 3: Services to prevent removal  |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 91                      |
| Item 4: Risk of harm   |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 83                      |
| Permanency Outcome 1- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations        | NO                                | 41.0                                   | Did not meet any of the four   |                 |                         |
| Item 5: Foster care re-entry   |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 100                     |
| Item 6: Stability of foster care placements  |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 77                      |
| Item 7: Permanency goal for child  |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 56                      |
| Item 8: Reunification, guardianship and placement with relatives                               |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 71                      |
| Item 9: Adoption   |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 55                      |
| Item 10: Other planned living arrangement  |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 91                      |
| Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved     | NO                                | 71.8                                   |                                |                 |                         |
| Item 11: Proximity of placement  |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 100                     |
| Item 12: Placement with siblings   |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 91                      |
| Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care                                     |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 65                      |
| Item 14: Preserving connections  |                                   |  |                                | Strength        | 92                      |
| Item 15: Relative placement  |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 86                      |
| Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents  |                                   |  |                                | ANI             | 54                      |

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

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

**Table 2. District of Columbia CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well Being Outcomes and Items**

| <b>Outcomes and Indicators</b>  | <b>Outcome Ratings</b>                   |  | <b>Rating**</b> | <b>Percent Strength</b> |
|---|--|--|-----------------|-------------------------|
|   | <b><i>In Substantial Conformity?</i></b> | <b><i>Percent Substantially Achieved</i></b> |                 |                         |
| Well Being Outcome 1 - Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs          | NO                                       | 49.2   |                 |                         |
| Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents                                   |  |  | ANI             | 51                      |
| Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning  |  |  | ANI             | 48                      |
| Item 19: Worker visits with child   |  |  | ANI             | 86                      |
| Item 20: Worker visits with parents   |  |  | ANI             | 39                      |
| Well Being Outcome 2 - Children receive services to meet their educational needs                | NO                                       | 88.0   |                 |                         |
| Item 21: Educational needs of child   |  |  | ANI             | 88.0                    |
| Well Being Outcome 3 - Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs | NO                                       | 87.3   |                 |                         |
| Item 22: Physical health of child   |  |  | Strength        | 94                      |
| Item 23: Mental health of child   |  |  | ANI             | 86                      |

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

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of strength, 90 percent of the cases reviewed for the item (with the exception of item 21) must be rated as a Strength. Because item 21 is the only item for Well Being Outcome 2, the requirement of a 95 percent strength rating applies.

**Table 3. District of Columbia CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items**

| <b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>  | <b>Substantial Conformity?</b> | <b>Score*</b> | <b>Item Rating**</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| <b>STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM</b>  | YES                            | 3             |                      |
| Item 24: State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| <b>CASE REVIEW SYSTEM</b>  | YES                            | 3             |                      |
| Item 25: 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.   |                                |               | ANI                  |
| Item 26: Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 27: 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.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 28: Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| <b>QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM</b>  | YES                            | 4             |                      |
| Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the 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.          |                                |               | Strength             |
| <b>TRAINING</b>  | YES                            | 3             |                      |
| Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.   |                                |               | ANI                  |
| Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 34: The States provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children. |                                |               | Strength             |
|  |                                |               |                      |

| Table 3: (Continued)   |                                |               |                      |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| <b>Systemic Factors and Items</b>  | <b>Substantial Conformity?</b> | <b>Score*</b> | <b>Item Rating**</b> |
| <b>SERVICE ARRAY</b>   | YES                            | 3             |                      |
| Item 35: The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency. |                                |               | ANI                  |
| Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| <b>AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY</b>  | YES                            | 4             |                      |
| Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, services providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 40: The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| <b>FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION</b>  | YES                            | 4             |                      |
| Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.   |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom adoptive homes are needed.  |                                |               | Strength             |
| Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.  |                                |               | Strength             |

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

\*\*Items may be rated as a Strength or as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI)