

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Child and Family Services Review Final Assessment

Florida

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Region IV

I. SAFETY

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:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 49			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	11	8	23	42	• 85.7%
Partially Achieved:	1	4	2	7	14.3%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	0	0	1	1	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1%	6.19% (CY-1999)		X	
Maltreatment of children in foster care	.57%	.87% (CY-1999)		X	

Status of Safety Outcome S1-Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the 49 applicable cases reviewed, 85.7% were rated as “substantially achieved” for Safety Outcome S1. Of the cases reviewed, one case was not applicable for an assessment of this outcome. In addition, 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(I) requires the State to meet the national standards for each statewide data indicator associated with the outcome in order to be in substantial conformity. The State did not meet the national standard for repeat maltreatment or maltreatment of children in foster care.

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

Strength X Area Needing Improvement

24 (85.7%) Strength
4 (14.3%) Area Needing Improvement
22 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida has witnessed an increase in the number of alleged child abuse calls received by the Abuse Hotline, as a result, the number of child abuse investigations has increased substantially. In 1998-99 and 1999-2000, the number of child related calls increased by 29.08% and the number of new protective investigations conducted increased by 28.63%. The increase in this calls was attributed in large part to the awareness of and willingness to report child abuse and neglect resulting from the high profile Kayla McKean case, and ensuing departmental and legislative changes, including appropriations for additional staff. “ Six year-old Kayla McKean was beaten to death by her father in 1998 after several reported incidents of child abuse and neglect.”

These laws were aimed at making the system more responsive to at-risk children. “For example, certain additional types of reports of child abuse and neglect must now be referred to child protection teams (CPTs) for medical evaluation and available support services. The department must utilize an administrative review process to ensure that all required investigation activities are completed and reviewed in a timely manner.”

- In accordance with Florida law, planning for appropriate service provision commences with the initial protective investigation response. This response must occur, either immediately or within 24 hours of a referral to the central abuse Hotline. Since the safety of the child is of paramount concern to the State, districts have been requested to prioritize open cases based on five priority groups, from the highest to lowest risk for children. Priority is determined by applying a point system to various criteria related to child safety, such as; age of the youngest victim, existence of prior abuse reports, victims seen, maltreatment type, response priority (immediate or 24-hour) and the type of report.

- Florida is in the process of releasing the second version of its “HomeSafenet”, which when fully developed and deployed, will provide protective investigators, whether they are department or Sheriff’s Office employees, with powerful tools and management reports to reduce the backlog and ensure the timely and appropriate completion of investigations. “The department’s tracking system indicates that 74.5% of high risk reports statewide are connected within three hours, although, Florida law requires protective investigation staff to commence investigations immediately if the alleged victim is or appears to be in imminent danger of being harmed. Other investigations are required to commence within 24 hours.”

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- There were 28 applicable case records that involved reports of suspected abuse or neglect during the time-period under review (April 1, 2000 to August 6-10, 2001). In 24 of these 28 cases (85.7%), investigations, including face to -face contacts, were initiated in accordance with state timeframes and priorities. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, five out of six applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)
- In another site, six (6) of seven (7) applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews indicated that the State point rating system (which identifies higher risk cases that needs immediate attention) helps provide the most vulnerable children with the prompt attention they need in 24 of the 28 applicable cases. (source: case reviews)
- Various interviews with stakeholders noted that the statewide central abuse hotline system is effective in receiving incoming reports and quickly communicating information to child protection workers throughout the state. (source: stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

The area of timeliness of initiating investigations was rated as needing improvement for the following reasons:

- In 4 of the 28 applicable cases reviewed, the investigations of maltreatment during the period under review were not initiated in accordance with State timeframes and priorities. (source: case reviews)
- In 4 of the 28 applicable cases, face-to-face contacts with children were not made in a timely manner. (source: case reviews)

- Record reviews revealed cases in which the initiation of the investigation did not occur in accordance with State time frames, prior to the period under review. (source: case reviews)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders suggested that in some instances, failure to respond in a timely manner to investigations of reports of child maltreatment reports was due to excessive worker case loads and a high level of worker turnover. They cited instances where workers are leaving and vacancies exist resulting in remaining workers having excessively high caseloads, which creates backlog/completion of investigations. (source: stakeholders interview)

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

45 (91.8%) Strength
4 (8.2%) Area Needing Improvement
1 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

This information obtained from the safety data profile shows a steadily decreasing percentage of maltreatment recurrence as follows:

1997: 9.21%
1998: 8.16%
1999: 6.19%
2000: 5.6%

The above percentages do not meet the 6.1% national standard in 1997-1999, however, Florida attributed this to the method in which it utilizes two categories to determine abuse and neglect. The first category includes 'verified' cases, where the preponderance of credible evidence results in a determination that the specific injury, harm or threatened harm was a result of abuse and (or?) neglect. The second category includes investigations that reported some indications of abuse/neglect but not a preponderance of credible evidence. From the State's point of view, the department reports on both categories when counting re-abuse, which results in more cases being counted as 're-abused' or 're-neglected'. Florida stated that when determining the state's abuse recurrence rate, it's different method of reporting re-abuse should be taken into consideration.

This information obtained from the safety data profile shows a steadily decreasing percentage of maltreatment recurrence as follows:

1997: 9.21%
1998: 8.16%
1999: 6.19%
2000: 5.6%

Basis: On-Site Review

Strengths:

- There were 47 case records that involved an assessment of repeat maltreatment during the time-period under review (April 1, 2000 to August 6-10 2001). In 43 of the 47 applicable cases (91.5 %), there were no reports of repeat maltreatment during the period under review. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews in 43 of the 47 applicable cases, indicated that agency's prompt intervention have led to both reduction in the level of subsequent maltreatment and the prevention of another maltreatment from occurring. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the review sites, 11 out of 12 records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- The area of repeat maltreatment was rated as needing improvement because the State did not meet the national standard of 6.1% (although it came very close to the standard). (source: statewide assessment)

- There was a discrepancy in the findings for Florida in that the State's performance indicator for repeat maltreatment (6.19%) did not meet the national standard (6.1%), but the case record reviews found that 91.8% of the cases were rated as strengths for this item. In order to resolve this discrepancy, the State would have had to submit additional data to show that the State meets the national standard of 6.1%. ACF Regional office informed the State of this discrepancy. The State submitted additional data that after review by the ACF central office, which included discussions with the State, was found to be incomplete and not meeting the National Standard for Repeat Maltreatment. Therefore, this item is categorized, as an Area Needing Improvement.
- In 3 of the cases reviewed, the repeat maltreatment occurred at the hands of the same perpetrator. (source: case reviews)
- In 3 of the records reviewed, there were indications that the initial investigations of child maltreatment reports did not address the potentially causal issues. (source: case reviews)
- Case record reviews identified repeat maltreatment prior to review period. (source: case reviews)
- Interviews with most of the stakeholders revealed that family assessments being conducted by the child welfare agency workers are not sufficiently thorough in detecting problems, such as; domestic violence and substance abuse at an early stage. The importance of this issue is reflected in the finding that in 36% of the applicable cases, there was evidence of parental substance abuse that appears to be a contributing factor to the maltreatment. (source: case reviews and stakeholders interview)

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:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 50			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	11	10	18	39	78%
Partially Achieved:	1	2	5	8	16%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	3	3	6%
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

Status of Safety Outcome S2-Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. The State was assessed as not in substantial conformity for Safety Outcome S2 because 39 of the 50 applicable cases (78%), were rated as “substantially achieved” for Safety Outcome S2. The national data standard does not apply in this outcome, therefore, only the cases reviewed were used to determine substantial conformity.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

28 (90.3%) Strength

3 (9.7%) Area Needing Improvement

19 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

In order to determine the safety of the child in home, all relevant family dynamics are considered through initial protective assessment. The protective investigator is able to resolve a family's problems in most cases, either by interceding with landlord to avoid eviction; arranging for appropriate child care; or referring the family to a community agency so that the report can be closed within 30 days.

A protective investigator must consider offering other interventions such as homemaker services, protective services supervision, intensive crisis counseling and removal of the alleged perpetrator, rather than removal of the child.

Florida Family Preservation services goal is to help families alleviate crises that might lead to out of home placement of children; maintain the safety of children in their homes; support families preparing to reunify or adopt; and assist families in obtaining services and other support necessary to address their multiple needs; in a culturally sensitive manner. Those services typically referred to as family preservation services include: Voluntary Family Services (VFS), Protection Supervision (PS); Intensive Crisis Counseling Programs (ICCP), Family Builders, and Housekeeper/Homemaker Services.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The area of services to families to protect children in home and prevent removal was rated as a strength in 28 of the 31 applicable cases reviewed, there was evidence that services were in place to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews in 28 of the 31 applicable records indicated that in situation when risk is present, caseworkers makes concerted efforts to provide support and services needed by children. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, all eight (8) applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)
- In 28 of the 31 applicable cases, intensive and targeted services were provided to parents and children to stabilize children's living situations and/or prevent risk of harm to children remaining in their homes. (source: case reviews)
- Interviews with stakeholders in all the three sites reported that strong level of community collaboration has had a positive impact on the delivery of services to families. (source: stakeholders interview)
- Some stakeholders provided examples of services offered by collaborating community agencies such as house repairs , provided by the Christian Coalition in Okaloosa, and parenting classes provided by Lutheran Services. (source: stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Case reviews in 3 of the 31 applicable records revealed a need for more consistent monitoring of in-home cases; in terms of assessing risk and putting appropriate services in place. (source: case reviews)
- Some of the stakeholders interviewed expressed the opinion that there are an insufficient number of alcohol and drug treatment programs in the State to address this problem. (source: stakeholders interview)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders indicated that services to meet the unique needs of adolescents are not always available and appeared to be based on what was available rather than on what was needed. (source: stakeholders interview)

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

39 (78%) Strength

11 (22%) Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida conducts a risk assessment at the initial stage of the investigation (within 24 hours of the initial contact) of child abuse/neglects report in order to determine risk assessment and make a decision as to whether or not to remove a child from the home.

In situations that home services, such as; Family Builders’ or Intensive Crisis Counseling, is determined to be appropriate, the staff in collaboration with family providers must ensure that the child’s safety is the main concern, otherwise, removal of the child rather than a referral for family preservation services are, in most situations, the only appropriate immediate course of action.

Florida also conducts a background check on all family members, other adults and children over the age of 12 residing in the home.

The background check includes an investigation of current and prior services provided to any family member as well as their criminal records check.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

Although the area of risk of harm to child was rated as needing improvement, several strengths were identified in the onsite review process. These included the following:

- In 39 of the 50 cases reviewed, risk of harm to child(ren) were prevented either through placement in foster care or providing services to the family. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, eleven (11) out of twelve (12) applicable records reviewed, were rated as strengths.
- In situations where there was a determination of continued and imminent risk to the child(ren), workers were prompt in removing them from their homes through specific interventions.
- In 39 of the 50 cases reviewed, there were indications that case decisions and planning were based on concerns about the child(ren)' s health and safety. (source: case reviews)
- Stakeholders interviewed in one of the sites indicated that the risk of harm to children is reduced by a collaborative system of community-based care. They revealed that staff visits families from various agencies and organizations, including service providers and child advocates. The stakeholders also reported that the frequency of the visits allows greater monitoring of the child's safety. (source: stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

The area of risk of harm to child was rated as needing improvement based on the following observations and information:

- In eleven (11) of the fifty (50) cases rated under this item, risk of harm was rated, as needing improvement. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews indicated that there were some services, (such as; Domestic Violence victims services), offered to the father to maintain the children at home, without any ongoing assessment of risk factors. This lack of ongoing assessment of risk factors was attributed to lack of worker contacts and visits with the family. (source: case reviews)
- Some of the stakeholders interviewed raised concern about workers not re-assessing risk of harm to children over time, particularly those children remaining in their homes or placed with relatives. (source: stakeholders interview)
- In some cases, workers did not conduct an adequate risk assessment or provided adequate monitoring to determine parental compliance with service requirements. (source: case reviews)
- Stakeholder interviews revealed lack of consistency in visits by agency caseworkers in situations where monitoring of the family's situation regarding the safety of a child(ren) is required. (source: stakeholders interview)

II. PERMANENCY

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	7	6	9	22	75.9%
Partially Achieved:	1	0	6	7	24.1%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	0%
Not Applicable:	4	6	11	21	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Foster care re-entries**	8.6%	5.37%	X		
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2%	44.6%		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption**	32%	43.4%	X		
Stability of foster care placements	86.7%	20.52%		X	
Length of stay in foster care*	N/A	N/A	N/A		

*Not used to determine substantial conformity.

** These figures were obtained from the Permanency Portion of the State Data Profile

Status of Permanency Outcome P1-Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the 29 applicable cases reviewed, 75.9% were rated as “substantially achieved” for Permanency Outcome P1. There were 21 cases reviewed that were not applicable for an assessment of this outcome. In addition, 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(I) requires the State to meet the national standards for each statewide data indicator associated with the outcome in order to be in substantial conformity. The State did not meet the national standard for either length of time to achieve reunification or stability of foster care placements.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

27 (96.4%) Strength

1 (3.6%) Area Needing Improvement

22 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Review of the State Data Element II.XII. shows that the State met the national standard (8.6% or fewer re-entries) for 1997-1999:

1997: 5.84%

1998: 4.67%

1999: 5.37%

Florida also indicated that review of Data Element V shows consistency in that the percentage of children experiencing one removal episode constituted the overriding majority during the three years:

1997: 86.1%

1998: 87.2%

1999: 87.6%

The state identified four (4) critical factors which affects whether a child re-enter out-of-home care. They are:

- (1) Thorough family assessment at the time of investigation of first report
- (2) Thorough supervisory reviews to ensure follow-up on information gaps and needed referrals
- (3) District review and approval of any recommendation to the court for reunification
- (4) Frequent contact with the family during post-placement supervision

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

- The area of foster care re-entries was rated as a strength for the State because the State’s incidence of re-entries was less than the national standard. In 27 (96.4%) of the 28 applicable cases reviewed, there were no multiple re-entries of children into foster care during the period under review. (source: case reviews)
- There were indications that in 27 out of the 28 applicable cases reviewed the children were in foster care during the entire period under review. (source: case reviews)
- In two of the sites, all applicable records (14) reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement :

- Despite the general positive findings with respect to the area of foster care re-entries, there were indications in some of the cases reviewed that children experienced multiple entries into foster care prior to the period under review. (source: case reviews)

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

26(89.7%) Strength

3(10.3%) Area Needing Improvement

21 Not Applicable

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State did not meet the national standard for stability of foster care placements. The stability standard reflects the percentage of children who experience more than 2 placements during their first 12 months of placement. The weighted mean average (WMA) for districts reviewed were 80.3%. The department identified the following reasons for placement change:

- (1) Transfer from an over-capacity home to one that is not over-capacity
- (2) Transfer to a home that more appropriately matches the child's need and the foster parents' skills
- (3) Transfer due to a disruption that cannot be resolved with additional wrap-around services or supports
- (4) Transfer due to the decision of foster parents to cease fostering
- (5) Transfer in order to place the child with siblings in another home
- (6) Transfer to a relative placement, which has priority over the licensed foster placement

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

The onsite review process identified the following strengths.

- In 26 of the 29 applicable cases reviewed, the children had stability in their foster care placements. (source: case reviews)
- In 26 of the 29 applicable cases, out-of-home placements had been selected in accordance with the children's needs. (source: case reviews)
- In 26 of the 29 applicable cases, supportive services were provided when there was a risk of a placement disruption. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Florida did not meet the national standard for stability of foster care placements. In 3 (10.3%) of the 29 cases reviewed, stability of foster care placement was rated as needs improvement. (source: case reviews)
- There was a discrepancy in the findings for Florida in that the State's performance indicator for Stability of Foster Care Placement (20.52%) did not meet the national standard (86.7%), but the case record reviews found that 90% of the cases were rated as strengths for this item. In order to resolve this discrepancy, the State would have had to submit additional data to show that the State meets the national standard of 86.7%. ACF Regional office informed the State of this discrepancy. The State submitted additional data that after review by the ACF Central office, which included discussions with the State, was found to be not appropriate and not meeting the National Standard for Stability in Foster Care Placement. Therefore, this item is categorized, as an Area Needing Improvement.
- Some of the stakeholders interviewed reported that lack of sufficient placement facilities for youth contributes to placement instability. (source: Stakeholders interview)

- Stakeholders also commented on the difficulties encountered by the caseworkers in finding adequate placements and services for adolescents. (source: Stakeholders interview)

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

17 (58.6%) Strength

12 (41.4%) Area Needing Improvement

21 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Permanency is being addressed in conformity with State and Federal requirements. Florida law requires that permanency be addressed for each child who has remained in out-of-home care for twelve (12) consecutive months, beginning from the time of removal of the child from the home. Florida’s detailed statutory requirements for six months judicial reviews, has enabled workers to monitor the achievement of the stated permanency goal for the child to be reviewed bi-annually. “Moreover, under Florida law, twelve (12) months is an outside time limit for permanency unless there are extraordinary circumstances.”

Basis: Onsite review**Strengths:**

Although the area of permanency goal for children was rated as “needing improvement,” the following strengths were observed in 17 (58.6%) of the 29 applicable cases reviewed:

- In 17 of the 29 applicable records reviewed, permanency goal for child was rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)
- In 17 of the 29 applicable cases, permanency hearings and TPR’s (Termination of Parental Rights) were held or scheduled in accordance with Federal requirements. (source: case reviews)
- There were examples of the agency-seeking relatives as potential permanency options when the bio-parents were found to have serious substance abuse problems. (source: case reviews)
- Most of the stakeholders interviewed reported that TPRs are given priority on the court’s calendar. This judicial process helps to ensure that TPR petitions were held in a timely manner. (source: Stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

The area of permanency goals for children was rated as “needing improvement” for the State based on the following observations and information:

- In 12 of the 29 applicable records reviewed, permanency goal for child was rated, as needing improvement. (source: case reviews)
- In 12 of the 29 applicable cases, the following issues were identified; the case plan identified several goals for the child without documenting the primary goal.
- The goals were not established in a timely fashion and in some situations not appropriate; or all the parties were not aware of the goals. (source: case reviews)
- Stakeholders interviews revealed that lack of mental health services for children was a barrier to reunification. (source: Stakeholders interview)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders revealed that due to lack of involvement of all parties in case plan, families do sometimes not know what goals are. (source: Stakeholders interview)

Item 8. Independent living services

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

2 (50%) Strength
2 (50%) Area Needing Improvement
46 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida’s Independent Living Program is designed to prepare older children for the transition to adulthood. Children were able to learn skills that prepare them for employment. They are encouraged to finish high school and attend college. All youth in out-of-home care who are age 15 and older receive independent living skills training, which includes but is not limited to training in financial management, job interviewing skills, and basic household skills. The 2000 legislature, in chapter 2000-139, Laws of Florida, established independent living as a permanency option for children age 16 and older, provided that statutorily required conditions are met. The ACF Regional Office has advised the department that this is not an acceptable permanency option under federal requirements.

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

- Although the area of independent living was rated as needing improvement, in 2 (50%) out of the 4 applicable cases, the item was rated as a strength in 2 cases because independent living plans were in place for the children and services were provided in accordance with the proposed plans. (source: case reviews)
- In one case, independent living services were provided through a special school for teen mothers. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- This area was rated, as needing improvement in 2 of the 4 applicable cases. (source: case reviews)
- Stakeholders interview revealed a need for more transitional services for youths with mental health problems, who cannot hold a steady job. (source: Stakeholders interview)
- Most of the stakeholders interviewed reported a need for independent living services in the State that can be easily accessible for youths. (Stakeholders interview)

Item 9. Adoption

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

7 (70%) Strength
3 (30%) Area Needing Improvement
40 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

In FY 1999, 43.5% of children, who exited foster care to a legalized adoption in the State of Florida, exited within 24 months of removal from their homes. This meets the National standard of 32%.

The Adoptions and Related Services (ARS) is responsible for the following activities:

- Providing legal services to terminate parental rights.
- Recruiting, screening, and preparing adoptive families.
- Supervising adoptive placements while the court finalizes adoption proceedings.
- Paying court costs.
- Providing health services for children adopted.
- Paying monthly cash subsidies for eligible children.

- The ARS program focuses its efforts on finding adoptive families for special needs children, who are in the following categories:
- Difficult to place because they are older
- Belong to a minority group or sibling group
- Physically, developmentally, or emotionally handicapped.
- A child who doesn't fall in the special need category is usually referred to private adoption agencies. "During FY 1998-99, parental rights were terminated for 1,851 children and adoptions were finalized for 1,400 children." The department uses a variety of initiatives and activities to recruit adoptive families for children awaiting adoption in Florida. These include state and national adoption exchanges; newspapers, television and radio informational releases; the Internet; and intensive searches for relatives both in and out of the State. Over 60% of adoptions in the State are foster parent adoptions.

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

The area of adoption was cited as a strength in 7 (70%) out of the 10 applicable cases reviewed. Other strong points identified in the onsite review process included the following.

- In 7 of the 10 applicable cases there was evidence that efforts had been made to identify prospective adoptive families for children who were legally free for adoption or who had a goal of adoption but were not yet legally free. (source: case reviews)
- In 7 of the 10 applicable case records, TPR petitions and hearings were filed and scheduled in a timely manner. (source: case reviews)
- In 7 of the 10 applicable case records, there was evidence that adoptive home studies were done in a timely manner. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Although the area of adoption was rated as a strength, the following areas of concern were noted:

- In 3 of the 10 applicable cases, adoption cases were not completed in a timely manner. (source: case reviews).
- In 3 of the 10 applicable cases, TPR was not initiated in a timely manner. (source: case reviews)

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

2 (33.3%) Strength

4 (66.7%) Area Needing Improvement

44 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

In Florida, adoption is the primary statutorily established permanency determination for a child. However, the court recognizes the placement of a child placed with a relative or with a relative of the child’s half-brother or half sister as a permanency option, without requiring the relative to adopt the child. “Other than this relative exception, adoption must first be ruled out prior to consideration of the other statutorily established permanency options.” The options are:

Guardianship allows the dependency court to exercise general and equitable jurisdiction over guardianship proceedings pursuant to chapter 744, F.S., for a child under the court’s jurisdiction. Long-term custody is determined at a judicial review hearing, or at an adjudication hearing, if the specified statutory conditions are met. The court determines long-term licensed custody, when all the required conditions are met for placement of the child in long-term licensed custody. The long-term custody option is utilized primarily for relative custodians who are, for the most part, covered under the State’s Relative Caregiver Program, funded under TANF.

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

In this area, 2 (33.3%) of the 6 applicable records were rated as strength during the onsite review process based on the following observations:

- In 2 of the 6 applicable cases, there was evidence that efforts were made to implement other planned permanent living arrangements, such as; long term relative care with grandparents. (source: case reviews)
- In 2 of the 6 applicable cases, there were examples of services being provided to help the child attain the goal of another planned living arrangement, such as; life skills. (source: case reviews)
- In 2 of the 6 applicable cases, the permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement was based on the best interests of the child. Factors that were considered are not limited to; safety and child's input. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

This area was rated as “needing improvement” based on the fact that 4 (66.7%) of the 6 applicable cases were assessed as “needing improvement.” These are the specific concerns encountered in the case record reviews and expressed by stakeholders:

- In 4 of the 6 applicable cases, record reviews identified a need to coordinate permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement, such as emancipation, with the child involved. (source: case reviews)
- In 4 of the 6 applicable cases, it appeared that the permanency goal of long-term foster care had been established without re-evaluation of other permanency options. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews noted instances in which other planned permanent living arrangement was ruled out, once the goal was changed to Long Term Foster Care. (source: case reviews)

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	8	5	13	26	89.7% or 90%
Partially Achieved:	0	1	1	2	6.9%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	1	1	3.4%
Not Applicable:	4	6	11	21	

Status of Permanency Outcome P2-Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 89.7% or 90% were rated as having substantially achieved for Permanency Outcome P2. There were 21 cases reviewed that were not applicable for an assessment of this outcome. The State was assessed as in substantial conformity for Permanency Outcome P2 because 26 of the 29 applicable cases (89.7% or 90%), were rated as “substantially achieved” for Permanency Outcome P2. The national data standard does not apply in this outcome, therefore, only the cases reviewed were used to determine substantial conformity.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

28 (96.6%) Strength

1(3.4%) Area Needing Improvement

21 Not Applicable

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

The area of proximity of foster care placements was rated as a strength in 28 of the 29 applicable cases (96.6%), based on the following observations:

- In 28 of the 29 applicable cases, placement decisions were based on where the child resided before removal in making placement decisions. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the counties, the agency made efforts to ease transportation problem by making it available in situations where a child's placement is not within parent's proximity. (source: case reviews)
- Reviewers noted that concerted efforts were made to facilitate placements of children in the same community they were living prior to their placements. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, record reviews indicated that children were able to attend the same school. (source: case reviews)
- In two of the sites, all applicable cases reviewed were rated as strengths in the proximity of foster care placement. Stakeholders attributed this success to the extensive use of relatives for placement by caseworkers (source: case reviews and stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Although the area of proximity of foster care placements was rated as a strength, some of the stakeholders suggested that the child welfare agency is not doing enough recruitment of foster parents from the same neighborhoods which many of the children were initially removed. (source: Stakeholders)

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

21 (95.5%) Strength

1(4.5%) Area Needing Improvement

28 Not Applicable

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

The area of placement with siblings was rated as a strength in 21 (95.5%) of the 22 applicable cases based on the following observations:

- In 21 of the 22 applicable case records, there was evidence that the agency made efforts to place siblings together, where applicable. (source: case reviews)
- In two of the sites, all applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths in placement with siblings. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews indicated that separation situations were a result of meeting the needs of one or more of the siblings. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Although the area of placement with siblings was considered a strength for the State, some of the stakeholders interviewed reported a need for foster families that are willing to provide care for large sibling groups. (source: stakeholders interview)

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

20 (80%) Strength
5(20%) Area Needing Improvement
25 Not Applicable

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The department’s administrative rule requires monthly face-to-face contact with the parent’s when reunification is the goal. Frequency of contacts with the child and family has been identified as a critical ASFA-related factor influencing length of stay in foster care by the workgroup commissioned by the Governor and the department to study the issue and develop a course of action. A mandated corrective action plan for all districts on this rule is required.

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

- In 20 of the 25 applicable cases (80%), this item was rated as a strength. The reasons for the strength ratings were as follows:
- Record reviews indicate evidence of frequent visits between children in foster care and their parents. (source: case reviews)
- In two of the sites, 12 out of 14 applicable records reviewed were rated as strength. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the counties, there was evidence that foster parents encouraged and supported visiting between the children in their care, their siblings and parents. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

The area of visiting with parents and siblings was rated as needing improvement based on the following observations and information:

- In 5 of the 21 applicable cases, record reviews indicated that visitation plans were not established early in the case. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews indicated that in situations where children were placed in a different county, the agency did not appear to make any attempts to support visits with parents and siblings. (source: case reviews)
- In one site, reviewers noted a need for case managers to make efforts at the beginning of the case to determine risk of having a parent visit with the child and make individualized visitation plans. (source: case reviews)

Item 14. Preserving connections

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

25 (96.2%) Strength

1(3.8%) Area Needing Improvement

24 Not Applicable

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

The area of preserving connections was rated as a strength in 25 (96.2%) of the 26 applicable cases based on the following observations:

- In 25 of the applicable 26 cases reviewed, the agency made concerted efforts to assist the children in maintaining connections with the child's neighborhood, community, family, friends, and school. (source: case reviews)
- In one site, foster parents are reimbursed for mileage costs when they transport children to their parent's homes for visits. (source: case reviews)
- In 25 of the applicable 26 cases reviewed, the agency recognized the importance of other family and siblings in a child's life by encouraging visits. (source: case reviews)
- In two of the sites, all 15 applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- In 1 of the 26 applicable cases, the child experienced multiple moves in foster care resulting in multiple school changes.

Item 15. Relative placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

28 (96.6%) Strength
1(3.4%) Area Needing Improvement
21 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida’s relative Caregiver Program is designed to support extended family assumption of responsibility for a minor relative entering the child’s protection system. This program offers financial assistance for a child placed with a relative who would be unable to serve as a caregiver without such support, thus exposing the child to the trauma of placement in licensed out-of-home care. “The review of Point-in-Time Data Element II.II. shows that the department significantly increased the number of relative placements in 1999 as compared with the previous two (2) years of the review period.”

<u>Point-in-Time Data:</u>	<u>First-Time Entry</u>
1997: 11,085	2,879
1998: 11,646	3,642
1999: 16,395	4,579

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

- The area of relative placements was rated as a strength in 28 of the 29 applicable cases because the agency made diligent efforts to seek and evaluate relatives as potential placement options for children removed from their homes. (source: case reviews)
- In two of the sites, all 14 applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)
- Most of the stakeholders interviewed credited the new Relative Caregiver Program (for the success of relative placement), which provides relatives with cash assistance and Medicaid coverage for children in their care. (source: Stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

20 (87%) Strength

3 (13%) Area Needing Improvement

27 Not Applicable

Basis: Onsite review

Strengths:

- Although the area of relationship of child in care with parents was rated as “needing improvement,” the following strengths were identified during the onsite review process:
- Record reviews indicated that in cases in which face-to-face visits were not possible, the agency encouraged the use of telephone contacts between parents and children in care. (source: case reviews)
- Case records reviewed and interviews with stakeholders, indicated that parent-child relationships were supported by placing the child with relatives, so that the parents were able to maintain frequent contacts with their children in care. (source: case reviews and stakeholders interview)
- In 20 of the 23 applicable cases, the agency facilitated frequent visits between children and their parents. This observation was supported by similar comments from most of the stakeholders interviewed. (source: case reviews and stakeholders interview)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- The area of parent-child relationships was rated as needing improvement primarily because in 3 of the 23 applicable cases, there did not appear to be any efforts to maintain the relationships between teenagers in foster care and their parents. (source: case reviews)
- Record reviews indicated that in situations when parents are in jail, efforts were not made by the worker to help children maintain relationships with parents. (source: case reviews)

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Number of Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 50			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	12	7	12	31	62%
Partially Achieved:	0	4	10	14	28%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	1	4	5	10%
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

Status of Child Well Being Outcome: Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 62% were rated as “substantially achieved” for Well-Being Outcome WB1. The State was assessed as not in substantial conformity for Well-Being Outcome WB1 because 31 of the 50 applicable cases (62%), were rated as “substantially achieved” for Well-Being Outcome WB1. The national data standard does not apply in this outcome, therefore, only the cases reviewed were used to determine substantial conformity.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

36 (72%) Strength

14 (28%) Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The state is able to meet the needs and services of child, parents and foster parents, by providing the following services: Homemaker services, protective services supervision, intensive crisis counseling. The investigative Response section provides: Referral for Family Preservation Services, Voluntary Family Services (VFS), Protective Supervision (PS), Intensive Crisis Counseling Programs (ICCP), Family Builders, and Housekeeper/Homemaker Services. Response section provides: Referral for Family Preservation Services, Voluntary Family Services (VFS), Protective Supervision (PS), Intensive Crisis Counseling Programs (ICCP), Family Builders, and Housekeeper/Homemaker Services.

Healthy Families of Florida is a community-based voluntary primary prevention program that offers services to Pregnant women and Families of newborns up to three months of age. There is a domestic violence program that is housed within the Domestic Violence Unit which is a component of the Family Safety Program Office. The program office is responsible for the certification of Florida's domestic violence centers, as well as the administration of State and Federal funds.

The State has established, by statute, an effective foster and adoptive home licensing system, carried out in each district through a Family Safety licensing unit and a Family Safety adoptions and related services unit, with legal support through the District legal office, training support from the Professional Development Centers, and technical support from the Central headquarters Family Safety Program Office. The following needs have been identified:

- Continuing need to recruit and retain qualified foster homes
- Continuing need to expand specialized training and support programs to help foster parents care for children with physical, emotional and behavioral problems
- Additional dependency judges in order to alleviate current limitations on court docket time completion
- Completion of Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), which is called "HomeSafenet"
- Additional certified Medicaid providers to perform child health check-ups (EPSDT)

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths :

Although this area was rated as needing improvement for the State, the following strengths were identified during the onsite review process:

- Needs and services of child, parents and foster parents, as they relate to safety, permanency, and well-being were assessed and identified in 36 of 50 records reviewed. Examples of needs and services identified are: parenting skills, day care services substance abuse program, and tutorial services. (source: case reviews)
- Services for child and family were properly matched to the identified needs, and were appropriate in meeting the needs of the family in 36 of 50 records reviewed. Examples of needs and services matched are: Section 8 housing, clothing, furniture and play therapy. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, eleven (11) of the twelve (12) applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths (source: case reviews)
- Services of “Family Builders” were provided to the family to address areas, such as: parenting education and psychological assessment for the biological parents in some of the records reviewed. (source: case reviews)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders revealed that some of the services provided by the agency usually are individualized and designed to meet the needs of families and children. (source: Stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Despite the strengths noted above, the areas of needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents, as they relate to safety, permanency, and well being was rated as “needing improvement” based on the following observations and information.

- Absence of adequate assessments in some of the in-home cases reviewed were identified. (source: case reviews)
- In some of the records reviewed, there were no documentation that child receives individual therapy as recommended. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, relative caregivers and biological fathers were not referred for any supportive services. (source: case reviews)
- Assessment and documentation of child and family’s need were not done timely. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases involving children placed out of the county or state, there was no evidence of follow up or communication regarding service provision. (source: case reviews)
- Family used outside support to help meet needs, rather than services being provided through referrals and service-matching process. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- The worker on an on-going basis did not assess families, even when needs were identified; the offered services did not match the needs of the individual family. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders revealed that there were delays in service provision because the providers had long waiting lists, and in certain situation, inappropriate services were substituted for the recommended services due to long waiting lists. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- There was a need for further assessment of relatives. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

18. Child and family involvement in case planning

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

26 (53.1%) Strength

23 (46.9%) Area Needing Improvement

1 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State's statute regarding case planning for children in out-of-home care requires that a written case plans (that include visitation plans) be developed for each child in foster care within sixty (60) days of removal. Florida law further requires that the case plan be filed with and approved by the court either at the time of the dependency disposition hearing or within 30 days of such hearing. Progress under the case plan is documented in the Judicial Review Social Study Report/Case Plan Update, which is submitted to the court at each six-month judicial review.

Florida law requires that the parent(s) participate in case planning if they are available, willing, and capable of doing so. The State also requires the department to draft a case plan and submit it to the court for approval within the statutory time frames, if parent(s) is/are unavailable, unwilling or incapable of participating.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

Although the area of child and family involvement in case planning was rated as “needing improvement,” the following strengths were identified during the onsite review process:

- In all the records rated as strengths, families and children were involved in service plan. (source: case reviews)
- There were examples of workers making efforts to schedule parents for case plan visits. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, eleven (11) of the twelve (12) applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Inappropriate use of interpreters, (due to language barriers) during case conference has impacted on the ability of the workers to fully engage parents in case planning activities. (source: case reviews)
- In cases that involves teenagers, record reviews indicated that they were left out of case plan activities. (source: case reviews)
- There was lack of engagement of biological fathers in some of the case planning conferences. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, comprehensive assessment of family was not done on a consistent basis. (source: case reviews)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders revealed instances when parents signed the case plans without engaging in the development of the case plan. (source: stakeholders interview)
- Stakeholder interviews revealed the negative impact of workers turnover and high caseload on attendance at case plan conferences. (source: stakeholders interview)

Item 19. Worker visits with child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

37 (75.5%) Strength

12 (24.5%) Area Needing Improvement

1(Not Applicable)

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The requirement for monthly face-to-face contacts with the child in the home, by the assigned counselor, is currently established by the administrative rule of the department. (Rule 65-13.010(5)(g), F.A.C. The department also required as a rule, multiple face-to-face contacts with the child during the month by other department staff or providers (e.g., day care staff, housekeeper/homemaker staff, medical providers, therapist) who communicated regularly with the assigned counselor.

Florida indicated that large caseloads and high rates of staff turnover impact the ability of caseworkers to maintain frequent face-to-face contact with children and families. “The turnover rate for family service counselors in FY 1999-2000 was 24.2%, compared to a turnover rate of 8.3% for all state employees”.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The area of worker visits with child was rated as a strength due to evidence of visits occurring in compliance with the agency policy requirements regarding the frequency of face-to-face contacts with children. (source: case reviews)
- Visits were documented and detailed, with purpose of visits, who was seen and where visits occurred. (source: case reviews)
- In applicable cases, there was documentation of contacts by other service providers. (source: case reviews)
- There were examples of workers maintaining good relationship with children without compromising his/her official role. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the counties, there was evidence of visits occurring more than the required policy requirements. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, all twelve (12) applicable records reviewed were rated as strengths.

Areas Needing Improvement:

- In cases rated as needing improvement, there were less than monthly contacts by workers or service providers to the child. (source: case reviews)
- Documentation of visits to child were missing in some of the records (e. g., reports were not dated or signed). (source: case reviews)
- Stakeholders interview revealed the negative impact of staff turnover on worker visits with child (source: stakeholders interview)

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

29 (69.0%) Strength

13 (31%) Area Needing Improvement

8 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida reported that large caseloads and high rates of staff turnover significantly affect the ability of caseworkers to maintain frequent face-to-face contact with children and families. The turnover rate for family service counselors in FY 1999-2000 was 24.2%, compared to a turnover rate of 8.3% for all state employees. The Florida Legislature and the department have begun implementing several initiatives that are intended to reduce turnover among family service counselors. The department is considering and may seek authority and resources for a number of recruitment and retention initiatives.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- Although this area was rated as needing improvement, there was evidence of workers visits with parents in 11 of 12 records reviewed, in one of the counties managed by community-based contractors. (source: case reviews)
- In applicable cases rated as a strength, there was documentation of contacts by the caseworker to the parents. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, family resource providers maintained on going face to face contacts with parents in 11 of 12 records reviewed. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- In 13 of 42 applicable cases, workers did not visit parents as stipulated by agency policies. (source: case reviews)
- Language barriers, coupled with inappropriate use of family members as translators, limited workers ability to communicate effectively with parents. (source: case reviews)

- Progress notes documentation of workers visits to parents was either not maintained, or lack specific detailed information in some of the records reviewed. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, evidence of other service provider’s visits to the parents was not documented. (source: case reviews)

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Number of Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 38			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	9	6	15	30	78.9%
Partially Achieved:	2	1	3	6	15.8%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	2	2	5.3%
Not Applicable:	1	5	6	12	

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2-Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 78.9% were rated as “substantially achieved” for Well-Being Outcome WB2. There were 12 cases reviewed that were not applicable for an assessment of this outcome. The State was assessed as not in substantial conformity for Well-Being Outcome WB2 because 30 of the 38 applicable cases (78.9%), were rated as “substantially achieved” for Well-Being Outcome WB2. The national data standard does not apply in this outcome, therefore, only the cases reviewed were used to determine substantial conformity.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

30 (78.9%) Strength

8 (21.1%) Area Needing Improvement

12 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The department's control over assessment and provision of appropriate educational services to children under its care and supervision is, to a great extent, limited by the resources available to local school districts. The department's primary role must be one of advocacy, and counselors, licensed foster parents, and relative caregivers are trained in asserting the rights of children under their care and supervision to appropriate educational services under State and Federal law. When necessary, the department facilitates appointment of an educational surrogate for the child.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- In applicable cases, tutorial needs were provided to some of the children. (source: case reviews)
- In some records, IEPs and specialized education services were incorporated into the case plan. (source: case reviews)
- Foster parents and relatives caretakers acted as advocates for children in having their educational needs met. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- In one of the sites, 6 out of 7 records reviewed were rated as strengths. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- In some records, educational needs of children were not addressed or identified in case plan. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, there was no follow up to the recommended psychosocial–educational assessment. (source: case reviews)
- In some records, educational needs of children were not appropriately matched with schools or services to meet the needs. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, there were communication gaps between the caseworkers and the school. (source: case reviews)
- Interviews with Stakeholders revealed that caseworkers do not take an active role in advocating for the educational needs of the children. (source: stakeholders interview)

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Number of Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 50			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	10	10	17	37	74%
Partially Achieved:	2	2	7	11	22%
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	2	2	4%
Not Applicable:	0	0	0		

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB3-Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as “substantially achieved” during a State’s initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 74% were rated as “substantially achieved” for Well-Being Outcome WB3. The State was assessed as not in substantial conformity for Well-Being Outcome WB3 because 37 of the 50 applicable cases (74%), were rated as “substantially achieved” for Well-Being Outcome WB3. The national data standard does not apply in this outcome, therefore, only the cases reviewed were used to determine substantial conformity.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

40 (85.1%) Strength

7 (14.9%) Area Needing Improvement

13 Not Applicable

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State reported that lack of available certified Medicaid providers is a continuing problem in terms of the department's ability to provide timely preventive medical care and preventive and identified dental services to children under the care and supervision of the department.

The State has implemented four major initiatives to expand availability of health care to all of Florida's children in need of such services: The initiatives are:

- KidCare Medicaid: This is a benefits-rich package for eligible children, ages 0 through 18, whose family income is within certain limits.
- MediKids: This program offers the same benefits-rich package as KidCare Medicaid but is not an entitlement program. It is for children ages 1 through 4 who are not Medicaid-eligible.
- Florida Healthy Kids: This program is a public/private partnership that provides comprehensive health insurance for school-age children (ages 5 through 18).
- Children's Medical Services Network: This program is a healthy plan for children under age 19 with special on going health care needs, such as; spina bifida, leukemia, diabetes and behavioral problems.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- In all applicable cases rated as a strength, case managers gave adequate attention to children's physical health. (source: case reviews)
- In some records, child's routine medical and dental needs are being met. (source: case reviews)
- In all applicable cases rated as a strength, medical services were provided to the child on a timely basis. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, all twelve (12) applicable records were rated as strengths in the area of physical health of child. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Agency workers did not document contacts with health care providers in some of the records reviewed. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, there was no documentation in the records that child received follow up treatments. (source: case reviews)
- In some records, health screening were not provided within the mandated timeframes. (source: case reviews)

- Dental preventive care was not addressed, and documentation that the child received dental care is missing in some of the records reviewed. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the sites, there was no documentation that child’s preventive health care and treatment for identified needs were met in some of the cases reviewed. (source: case reviews)
- Dental care follow-up was not documented in some of the cases reviewed. (source: case reviews)

Item 23. Mental health of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

29 (76.3%) Strength
 9 (23.7%) Area Needing Improvement
 12 Not Applicable

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Title XXI (KidCare) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) are two major department initiatives that began during FY 1998-1999. The TANF program provides alcohol, drug abuse, and mental health services. The ‘KidCare’ program enables children of parents without health coverage to receive medical and mental health care at a minimum cost. Florida’s legislature requires the department’s mental health program to serve at risk children and children who are emotionally disturbed.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

Although the area of children’s mental health needs was rated as “needing improvement” for the State, the following strengths were observed during the onsite review process:

- In one of the sites, 5 of 6 records were rated as a strength in some of the cases reviewed. (source: case reviews)
- In some of the cases reviewed, initial mental health screenings were provided to the child. (source: case reviews)
- In some records, there was documentation that children received psychological evaluation. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, psychiatric evaluations were completed on all family members and appropriate services provided when needed. (source: case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

The area of mental health needs of children was rated as needing improvement based on the following observations and information:

- In some cases, there was no indication that mental health needs assessment had been conducted. (source: case reviews)
- In some records, there was no documentation to confirm that children are receiving recommended therapy. (source: case reviews)
- Stakeholder interviews in one of the sites, revealed that recommended psychological evaluation and therapy was not provided because service providers do not accept Medicaid. (source: stakeholders interview)
- In one of the sites, stakeholder interviews indicated that shortage of mental health providers have had a negative impact on the services received by children. (source: stakeholders interview)
- Interviews with some of the stakeholders’ revealed the negative impact that long waiting list of mental health providers has had on children referred for services. (source: stakeholders interview)
- Some stakeholders indicated that mental health services for adolescents are not readily available. (source: stakeholders interview)

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

X Strength _____ Area Needing Improvement

Item 24. State is operating a statewide information system that at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The statewide information system that the State has historically used to track all children in foster care is the Client Information System (CIS). The Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) CIS was implemented in 1978. The system serves the following programs: Family Safety (Child Welfare), Adult Services, Developmental Services and the Mental Health Hospital Program. It also services the Department of Health and its Division of Children’s Medical Services. It also included information from the Department of Juvenile Justice, but the information has not been updated since 1998 after that department obtained a new system.

Since CIS serves multiple programs, it provides users with access to information across multiple programs. All children in foster care are included in this system which provides demographic information, 24-hour access, service directory, client linkage to programs and providers, placement information, legal status, case goal, and funding eligibility.

Florida is in the process of developing and implementing its Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System(SACWIS) which is called HomeSafenet. The first release of HomeSafenet was placed into production validation on November 13, 2000 in Alachua County.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The current systems in place have the capacity to determine status, demographics, location and goals for children in foster care. (source: stakeholders)
- Phase I of HomeSafenet (SACWIS) is operational statewide except at the Community Based Care Providers in the Sun Coast Region. This system is designed to capture the required elements of a statewide information system in accordance with federal guidelines. (source: stakeholders)
- The State plans to automatically submit AFCARS data through HomeSafenet in November 2001. (source: stakeholders)
- HomeSafenet is designed to be web-based. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Although HomeSafenet is designed for data entry case notes by all workers, the private provider prefers to limit that activity to their data unit. The private provider will utilize HomeSafenet to the extent necessary but plans to also maintain a separate internal system as well to ensure availability of needed data. (source: stakeholders)

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child’s parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State has detailed statutory requirements regarding case planning for children in out-of-home care. A written case plan must be developed for each child within 60 days of removal. In addition, the State law requires that the case plan be filed with and approved by the court either at the time of the dependency disposition hearing or within 30 days of such hearing. The case plan is designed to comply with both federal and state requirements.

Florida law requires that the parent(s) participate in case planning if they are available, willing and capable. If the parent is unavailable, unwilling or incapable of participating, the state law requires the Department to draft a case plan and submit it to the court for approval within the statutory time frames. The State central office quality assurance team monitoring of district case files during 1999-2000 established a statewide average compliance rate of 64.3% for parental participation in the development of the case plan.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- All cases reviewed had written case plans. (source: case reviews)

- In one county, Family Group Conferencing in Model Court promotes family involvement in case plans. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Parents and children are not consistently involved in developing the case plan. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, there is a lack of provider coordination in regards to case planning. (source: stakeholders)
- In two counties, use of the case plan as a tool to achieve outcomes with children and families was inconsistent. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

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 Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida law requires that each child in out-of-home care receive a judicial review at least every 6 months starting from the date of the removal of the child from the home. Review by a citizen review panel in lieu of full judicial review is permitted by state law, however, the panels may not conduct more than two consecutive reviews without the child and the parties coming before the court for a judicial review. In addition, general masters may be appointed by the Chief Judge of the judicial circuit to act as fact-finders and to submit a recommended order for approval by the assigned judge in dependency proceedings, including judicial reviews.

Docket time continues to be severely limited especially in lower central and south Florida. The twenty judicial circuits and the Office of the State Courts Administrator have made efforts to secure legislative appropriations for additional dependency judges to address this issue to no avail.

District-by-district percentages for the 1999-2000 monitoring by the State quality assurance team for “Judicial review held every six months” shows the divergence between Northern and upper Central Florida districts and lower Central and South Florida districts. Manatee and Sarasota are community based care (privatized) counties and were rated separately from the districts. District 15 did not

have any data to report because it was one of the first districts reviewed in the initial monitoring cycle (December 1999) and the monitoring instrument did not include specific findings on timeliness of judicial reviews. The percentages ranged from as high as 100% in Manatee and Sarasota, 97% in district 8 to as low as 38% in district 14 with a statewide weighted mean average of 64.8%.

Ten years ago, Miami/Dade County instituted a system whereby volunteer citizen panels conduct the majority of mandated dependency reviews. This process was initiated to address the high volume of cases coming before the juvenile judges, which prevented a thorough and comprehensive case status review and impeded permanency. There are currently 18 volunteer citizen foster care review panels in Miami/Dade County which conduct individual case reviews and make reports and recommend findings to the dependency judges assigned to the cases. Citizen review panel reviews are held at five and ten month intervals. The assigned dependency judges conduct the twelve-month permanency hearings. During FY 2000, volunteer citizen conducted 1,897 dependency review hearings, involving total 3,061 children.

The Dade County Juvenile Court has three full time dependency judges and a general master whose primary role is to handle protective supervision cases. In addition, a judicial pool of back-up judges is assigned by the juvenile court administrative judge with approval of the chief judge of the circuit to meet special needs of the dependency system. The back-up judges are used for termination of parental rights hearings, cases that have been inadvertently omitted from the schedule, and twelve-month permanency hearings.

Basis: On Site Review

Strengths:

- The six-month reviews are being held at the required intervals. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- In one site, the Citizen Review Panels conduct six month reviews every five months. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- In one county, there is limited docket time and many continuances and delays in court hearings by the judge.

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

X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida law requires that permanency be addressed for each child who has remained in out-of-home care for 12 months from the date the child entered foster care. In addition, the 12 months is an outside time limit for permanency unless there are “extraordinary circumstances.” If, during any judicial review, the court finds that the parent has failed to substantially comply with the case plan to the degree that further reunification efforts are without merit and not in the best interest of the child, Florida law allows the court to authorize the filing of a petition for termination of parental rights.

Monitoring of the districts for 1999-2000 by the State quality assurance team for “documentation in the file that a 12-month permanency hearing was held” shows a compliance level of 55.3% statewide weighted mean average.

During the summer of 2000, Governor Jeb Bush and the department identified a need to address a quality issue related to permanency for Florida’s dependent children. The team was charged with completing a project called the “Quality Improvement and Control (QIC) Story” to address this critical problem. For comparison, the team also selected the four districts with the best statewide performance in length of stay (Districts 1, 8, 12 and Sarasota community-based care project) and looked at their performance in areas critical to ASFA such as case planning, service related/families, judicial review/case plan, service related/child related, placement and permanency/TPR/adoption. The comparative analysis revealed that the higher a district’s compliance to ASFA, the lower the average length of stay in foster care and higher documentation in files that a permanency hearing was held. The districts with lower performance rates have been provided extensive district-specific technical assistance to facilitate greater consistency in ASFA compliance.

In Miami, the monitoring review in February 2000 established that permanency hearings were conducted in 48% of the cases. Of these only 30% were held within 12 months. The district has entered a program improvement plan (PIP) to address this issue. The PIP includes following: 1. the foster care supervisor to ensure that the child welfare attorney is requested to schedule a permanency hearing no later than the twelfth month and if not the reasons must be documented in the case file; 2. agreement with the citizen review panels and judiciary that at the time of the ten month citizen panel review, the panel is to set on the court calendar a permanency hearing before the judge prior to the end of the twelfth month; and 3. that an additional judge has been assigned to conduct hearing effective 2001 and the district has implemented a computerized utilization management process which is currently being piloted in one judicial division.

Basis: On Site Review

Strengths:

- The State has made a major effort to ensure permanency hearings are completed in the 12-month timeframe. Permanency hearings were held within the required timeframe in all the cases reviewed. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Due to a shortage of Guardian ad Litem (GAL), all children are not routinely assigned a GAL, as is required by CAPTA of 1996 (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act).

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida has implemented TPR provisions within ASFA’s specified timeframes. Florida had a two-phase approach to implementing ASFA- the first phase applied to children who entered foster care prior to 11/19/97 and consisted of a review of all these children to track the required 15/22 months under ASFA. This first phase review was completed in October 1999. The second phase applied to children who entered care subsequent to 11/19/97. The method used by the State to apply Section 475(5)(E) once the fifteen-month limit is reached involves a review of the case by the counselor to determine, with the assistance of the supervisor, whether the current permanency goal for the child remains appropriate. If the goal does not appear to be appropriate, the counselor, with the approval of the supervisor must immediately schedule a permanency staffing to establish a more appropriate permanency plan. Once the new permanency plan is established, the counselor must immediately request the child welfare attorney to schedule a permanency hearing within 30 days or as soon as possible.

There is computerized central office tracking of 15/22 month permanency requirements with monthly district reporting.

Basis: On Site Review

Strengths:

- Record reviews and stakeholders revealed that there appear to be concerted efforts to attain TPRs in accordance with ASFA timeframes. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- In one site, there is an excellent judicial process in place to ensure timely TPR's. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Stakeholders reported that there are delays in filing TPR's for older children and children with special needs. (source: stakeholders)
- In one site, one of the courts have frequent delays and continuances. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders reported that there are issues in identifying absent parents early in the process which causes the filing of TPR's to be delayed.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive 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 Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida law requires that foster parents and relative caregivers be provided notice and opportunity to be heard in hearings relating to the child. The monitoring of this item is done by the central office quality assurance team. The quality assurance team documentation revealed that all parties were notified of all hearings during 1999-2000 at an 87.6% (weighted mean average) statewide compliance rate.

Basis: On Site Review

Strengths:

- In general, foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers are receiving notice of the court hearings. Some of the foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers that receive these notices are electing to participate in the hearings. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Stakeholders reported that there is no standard procedure for notifying all parties of the hearings. Sometimes the parties are given a hand written notice of the next hearing as they leave court, other times the parties receive phone calls. (source: stakeholders)
- In the larger site, concerns were raised regarding foster parents not being encouraged to participate in the hearing process. In one of the smaller sites, foster parents are not allowed in the courtroom. (source: stakeholders)

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

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

X Strength ___ Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida has developed and implemented a three-tiered system of federal and state health and safety standards for children in out-of-home care. One, Florida law provides minimum standards for medical and psychological care and treatment, licensing of foster homes, child care institutions, child placing agencies, protective investigations, case planning and judicial reviews. Second, these minimum standards have been promulgated in administrative rules. Third, operating procedures regulate internal department staff Procedures in accordance with statutory and administrative rule requirements.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- Licensing standards are in place to help protect the safety and health of children. (source: stakeholders)
- The State is working towards accreditation of the Florida Department of Children and Families. (source: stakeholders)
- In the larger site, there are thirteen quality improvement teams that meet regularly and track agency performance in areas such as education, visitation, case planning, and length of stay in foster care. (source: stakeholders)
- In one site, the quality assurance system ensures that services are provided to children and families that are consistent with the contract and service delivery model, and comply with State and Federal law, administrative rules and the operating procedures of the Florida Department of Children and Families. (source: stakeholders)

- In one site, 13 audits/monitoring reviews were conducted between July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001 for purposes including the compliance with licensing, title IV-And ASFA requirements. After the results were analyzed, operations modifications were implemented including creating or updating forms to effectively document case management requirements and strengthen policy directives. (source: stakeholders)

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, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in each of the 15 districts. The State's central office quality assurance monitoring team is responsible for reviews that include evaluating the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports and evaluates program improvement measures implemented. The review process includes extensive program evaluation by a team of experienced, professional staff. After the case record review, the review team discusses and analyzes findings and compiles a written report with recommendations. This report provides detailed information about the safety of children, a summary of the action taken, and policy violations. Each agency has a responsibility for developing a formal program improvement plan.

In addition to this monitoring, other quality assurance staff are located in Ft. Lauderdale and Tampa. There are 13 staff members assigned to specific districts to provide technical assistance, track and analyze child deaths, respond to client complaints, and assist the Office of the Inspector General in special Family Safety case file reviews.

To assist each district in conducting its own internal review and self-assessments, the central office published a handbook in 1997 entitled "Excellence in Child Protection". The handbook contains detailed instructions and tools on effective internal district review as it relates to child safety, permanency and well-being, and guidance on how to perform self-assessments. This handbook has been distributed statewide.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The State has established the Office of Mission Support and Performance comprised of four bureaus, including: Community-Based Care; Quality Improvement; Evaluation and Measurement; and Quality Assurance and Accreditation. (source: stakeholders)
- The State has taken efforts to establish quality assurance measures that are consistent with ASFA. (source: stakeholders)
- The State has a performance-based budget with measurable outcomes. (source: stakeholders)
- The quality assurance teams review foster care, protective investigation, protective supervision, the CBC, Sheriffs and ASFA compliance in the counties and provide feedback on each case and request immediate corrective action. Quarterly reports are also provided on the QA activities. (source: stakeholders)
- The larger site has monthly situation reports that include CFSR indicators and management tools that track key dates and QA efforts. This site also has an internal record review system. (source: stakeholders)
- One site has a strong internal quality improvement process. There is monthly desk reviews of outcome performance data. In addition, the local agency and all providers use customer surveys to improve service delivery. This agency recently received accreditation. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- In one of the smaller counties, there is only a limited internal case review system. (source: stakeholders)

VII. TRAINING

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

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State funded Professional Development Centers (PDC), a collaboration with Florida International University, provides all pre-service training and most in-service training for child welfare staff. All new staff must participate in mandatory training in order to fulfill probationary status requirements. The training takes ten and one-half months to complete and is conducted in two phases. The first phase consists of a six-week period of classroom training, mentoring, and close supervision. The courses include legal issues, maltreatment indicators, assessment, decision-making, interviewing, staffings, documentation, removal and placement, case planning and compliance with Federal requirements.

Phase two consists of up to nine months of classroom and field training, mentoring, and close supervision. The courses include Concurrent Case Planning, Domestic Violence, Neglect, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Substance Abuse.

To determine the effectiveness of the training, pre- and post-tests are given. Of the 1,594 new staff trained for the period FY 1999-2000 the average pre-test score was 72 and the average post-test score was 90. Only 20% of the staff passed the pre-test, whereas 95% passed the post-test.

In 1998 and 1999 case reviews were conducted to determine the effectiveness of the new competency-based training which was implemented in 1997. The reviews showed some improvement in the areas of child safety and assessment from 1998 to 1999.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- County staff stated that the pre-service training was adequate in meeting their needs. (source: stakeholders)
- Joint training, involving staff from DCF, foster parents, service providers, Guardians Ad Litem, and in some cases, law enforcement personnel, is encouraged and arranged by the court at the Dependency Court Summit in which about 1600 people are trained yearly. (source: stakeholders)
- The training for new employees is skills-based in an effort to meet customer needs. (source: stakeholders)
- In the larger site, the agency implemented a mentoring program in which inexperienced staff shadow experienced staff. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- The turnover rate has a major effect on stable trained workforce. (source: stakeholders)

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 Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Forty-eight (48) hours of in-service instructions are required for re-certification every three years. This includes a minimum of 24 hours of instruction on casework practice skills, ASFA, foster care licensing, MAPP (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting), 6 hours in legal, and 4 hours in ethics and conduct. Staff members are encouraged to participate in more than 48 hours of training during each three-year period.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The cross training provided at the Dependency Court Summit sponsored by the court has been very helpful. (source: stakeholders)
- The 48 hours in-service is required every three years for re-certification of workers and supervisors. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- County staff described the available in-service training as repetitious, out-of-date, and/or irrelevant for experienced staff. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders reported that there is insufficient training on services availability in the community, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and how to conduct family conferences and joint planning meetings with families. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders reported concerns about insufficient opportunity for agency workers to take advantage of national training symposiums or other distance learning. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders noted that the agency has not been successful in retaining experienced workers and that a tuition assistance program or work-study program for staff pursuing advanced education might rectify this situation. (source: stakeholders)

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State uses the MAPP curriculum to train prospective foster and adoptive parents. The PDC provides train-the trainer sessions for district and provider (including institutions) staff. In addition, PDC provides a standardized behavior management curriculum. The course is a 15-hour competency based training program called Essential Parenting Tools.

New foster/adoptive parents must attend an annual foster parent conference sponsored by the PDC and receive 8 hours of in-service training. In addition, foster parent liaisons located in each district provide training along with state staff during state foster parent association meetings, which are held quarterly.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- Stakeholders reported that the joint training involving case workers and foster parents in the MAPP training classes is a positive experience for both groups. The addition of a module dealing with behavior and discipline issues in foster care was viewed as much needed and helpful. (source: stakeholders)
- “Promoting Positive Parenting Skills” is additional training that is offered to foster parents. (source: stakeholder)
- Eight hours of in-service training is required per year for foster parents. (source: stakeholder)

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

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

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Maintaining children with their own families and family reunification are the preferred permanency planning options for all children in Florida state custody when children can safely remain at home. Florida has an array of family preservation services that are designed to (1) help families alleviate crises that may lead to out-of-home placement, (2) maintain the safety of children in their own homes, (3) support families preparing to reunify or adopt, and (4) assist families in obtaining services and other supports necessary to address their multiple needs in a culturally sensitive manner. The services include: Voluntary Family Services (VFS), Protective Supervision (PS); Intensive Crisis Counseling Programs (ICCP), Family Builders, and Housekeeper/Homemaker Services.

Additional State-supported prevention services include: Domestic Violence Program; Healthy Families Florida; Local Service Program (employment services); Neighborhood Partnership for Child Protection (Jacksonville project funded with help from the McConnell Clark Foundation); subsidized childcare and related services and Project safety Net (case management and transportation services).

Time-limited reunification services are provided to children and families to promote safe, timely and appropriate reunification and provide in-home follow-up support to families whose children have been returned from foster care. These services are funded through programs implemented under Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF).

Basis: On Site Review

Strengths:

- Stakeholders provided examples of unique and exemplary service interventions that are available for families and children in the State. Some examples they noted were: the use of Telemedicine to evaluate child abuse, Child Advocacy Centers, Drug Court, Domestic Violence Centers, and Healthy Families. (source: stakeholders)
- Drug Court makes substance abuse services available in the larger site. (source: stakeholders)
- In one site, there is good coordination with the local agency and the use of military services. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Stakeholders reported that there are too few foster homes in the State and the agency often has to place children in shelters because they have no alternative placements. Older children experience longer stays in temporary shelter. (source: stakeholders)
- There are long waiting lists for mental health services for children. (source: stakeholders)
- The lack of integration/coordination of mental health and child welfare is fragmented and leads problems in obtaining mental health services. (source: stakeholders)
- ILP and transitional living services are needed for older youth in care and the Juvenile Justice youth with dual adjudication. (source: stakeholders)
- There is a lack of services for sexually abused children, their families and child perpetrators of sexual abuse. (source: stakeholders)
- Substance abuse treatment is difficult to access especially residential treatment. (source: stakeholders)
- There is a lack of respite services for parents, foster and adoptive parents. (source: stakeholders)
- There is a need to strengthen cultural responsiveness, especially for the Creole, Hispanic and Russian populations. (source: stakeholders)
- There is a need for an increase in the mix, duration, and intensity of preventive services and adoptive services. (source: stakeholders)
- There are waiting lists to get into specialized therapeutic foster homes. (source: stakeholders)
- There appears to be no specific recruitment of adolescent, medical or therapeutic homes in one smaller site. (source: stakeholders)

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The services are accessible to all families and children as needed in all 15 districts.

Basis: On Site Review

- Stakeholders reported that there are 38 Domestic Violence Centers that are co-located with Family Safety to complete child assessments when domestic violence is involved. (source: Stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Transportation was a problem in accessing available services, especially in the rural areas. (source: stakeholders)
- In the larger site, there were long waiting lists for many of the services. (source: stakeholders)

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Florida law requires that the parent participate in case planning. In the case plan, the needs and services of the parent are identified base on individual need.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- Case record review revealed the individualization of services to meet the needs of families and children when Family Group Conferencing occurs. (source: case records)
- DCF stakeholders stated that workers use flex dollars to purchase individualized services outside of the standard package of services. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- The frequent use of shelter care does not individualize children’s needs for appropriate out-of-home care. (source: stakeholders)

- Case record reviews revealed that there are instances when the same services are offered regardless of the specific needs of children and families. (source: case records)
- In the larger site, there were some examples that services were not always provided to children and families of Spanish and Creole background. (source: case record and stakeholders)

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Florida DCF conducts an annual mail survey of about 1,700 community partners including representatives from law enforcement, the judiciary, education, local government business, churches, charities and other agencies. The survey assesses the effectiveness of the partnership and the quality of the working relationship, and is designed to identify both positive practices and problems. The most recent survey focused on the areas of foster care and adoption; 271 community partners responded to the foster care questions and 72 responded to the adoption-related questions. The survey found low satisfaction among partners with respect to case monitoring and timeliness for both adoption and foster care programs. The court system respondents were particularly negative in their ratings of these areas and plans are underway to ascertain the causes of these perceptions so that corrective action can be initiated.

The major tribes with which the department is involved are the Seminoles, Micosukees, Muscogees and Creeks. The department utilizes operating procedures, which establishes uniform statewide procedures for cases involving Indian children.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The model court system in one local site was viewed as bringing about greater collaboration and coordination among DCF and service providing agencies than had existed prior to the model court. Stakeholders suggested that the model court approach should be expanded to other jurisdictions. (source: stakeholders)
- There is strong collaboration in the community such as regular meetings between DCF and the court, Child Protection Teams, Child Advocacy Center, and Citizen Review Panels. (source: stakeholders)
- There is collaboration with the tribes through the representative of the Governor's Counsel on Indian Affairs and on the local level. (source: stakeholders)
- The 1998 Legislative session mandated the state to privatize protective services, adoption and foster care by 2003. Currently four counties have privatized – Sarasota, Manatee, Pinellas and Pasco. (source: stakeholders)
- There are Community Alliances in every district, which are addressing community-based care issues. The Alliances have been established to help with the transition to community-based care (privatization). The Alliances consist of local Sheriff, Chief Judge, Superintendent of the school board, director of United Way, Guardian ad Litem, Health Care and District Administrators. The Alliances meet and develop by-laws and address child welfare issues such as permanency and well-being in the local community. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders report that the Department is engaging the community over the last three years in a more proactive manner. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders report the Department is utilizing information obtained from the Community Alliances to develop legislative budget plans and strategic planning. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Stakeholders generally have limited involvement in State planning or policy development for child and family services. While the State conducts annual surveys of local stakeholders, stakeholders noted that there is no feedback mechanism to inform local stakeholders about what will be done in response to survey findings. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, some service providers and foster parents reported difficulties in communicating with caseworkers. For example, they noted that often their telephone calls were not returned, or caseworkers did not have voice mail so they could leave messages. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholder interviews indicated that Tribes should be included earlier in the planning process and this could strengthen the relationship at the State planning level with the recognized tribes. (source: stakeholders)

- There needs to be more coordination of services on individual cases when there are multiple providers. (source: stakeholders)

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State partners are involved in the development of the State’s Child and Family Services Plan.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- One site sought consumer feedback through the use of an annual questionnaire to families served. The results of the survey were then taken into account in planning for future policy and procedures modification. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders report a recent focus on strategic planning within the Department, which has resulted in the sharing of information with stakeholders such as the Community Alliances. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement:

- Stakeholder comments regarding not feeling a part of a statewide strategic planning or assessment process indicates that State needs to ensure annual progress and services reports are developed in consultation with all appropriate representatives pursuant to 45 CFR 1357.15 and 1357.16. (source: Stakeholders)

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 Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Department's services are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population. Services are coordinated with public and private agencies such as law enforcement, Medicaid, State IV-D agency, Social Security Administration, Veterans Administration, Railroad, Department of Health, Department of Juvenile Justice, Family HOPE (for severely emotionally disturbed children and their families sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]), Department of Legal Affairs (Attorney General) and State Attorney Office and Community Based Care (privatization project).

Basis: Onsite Review**Strengths:**

- DCF operated programs generally made greater use of federally funded or federally assisted service programs. One site reviewed generally made greater use of local service agencies and their services. Stakeholders felt that increased emphasis on joint training, and by extension, joint planning, would bring about greater collaboration and utilization of available resources at all levels. (source: stakeholders)
- There is collaboration between Family Safety, Mental Health and Medicaid around mental health issues for children in foster care and the Juvenile Justice system. The two agencies meet to develop policies and guidelines on how to provide wraparound services and deep end care for children. (source: stakeholders)
- Stakeholders identified the annual Summit sponsored by the Court Improvement Project as positively impacting collaborative efforts between the Department and other state agencies as well as the private sector. (source: stakeholders)

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

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

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State minimum standards for licensing of foster homes, childcare institutions and child placing agencies are in the Florida statute. Additional requirements for approval of adoptive applicants are also a part of the Florida statute. Operating procedures regulating internal staff procedures include Adoption Subsidies and Non-Recurring Expenses, Evaluation of Adoption Applicants, Adoptive Applicant’s Review Committee, Relicensing Child Placing Agencies, Relicensing of Family Foster Homes and Emergency Shelter Care Homes, Waivers to Exceed the Maximum Number of Children in a Substitute Care Home, Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Subsidy and The Prevention and Placement of Child Victims and Aggressors.

Each district Family Safety program office has a licensing unit, which is responsible for reviewing initial and renewal applications, ensuring that required local, state and national criminal background and abuse history checks are completed. In addition the district Family Safety program is responsible for coordinating facility safety inspections through the county, conducting home studies and initiating necessary enforcement procedures through the district legal office. All licensed homes and facilities are reviewed yearly.

- The district Family Safety adoptions and related services unit is responsible for the review and approval of adoptive homes.
- Licensed child placing agencies are authorized by statute to conduct their own licensing studies for foster homes used by the agency. The completed studies (including documentation that local, state, national criminal background checks and abuse history checks) are reviewed by district departmental licensing staff and, if approved certified and issued a state license by the department.

- Relative caregivers under the Relative Caregiver Program are not required to be licensed. However, the caregiver must undergo local, state and national criminal background checks, abuse history checks and a detailed home study. This program is funded under TANF.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- Licensing standards are applied to all foster homes. (source: stakeholders)
- Licensed child-placing agencies (LCPA's) use the same standards as the State. (source: stakeholders)
- Foster homes are reapproved annually and require criminal records check and fire and health inspections. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement:

- In one site, it was reported that there are community concerns about the quality of many foster homes. However, they expressed the opinion that the State is moving to close many sub-standard homes. (source: stakeholders)

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State licensing standards apply all foster homes, child caring and child placing agencies and institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- The State has implemented one set of standards for all foster homes. (source: stakeholders)

- The LCPA's use the state's licensing standards. The State issues the license after LCPA does the home study and training. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement:

- Waivers are given for capacity in order to accommodate siblings groups, teen mothers with babies and children returning to care that were in that home previously. This results in overcrowding which is an issue in some foster homes. (source: stakeholders)

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Criminal records checks are required to be completed on all prospective foster and adoptive parents, including those being studied and recommended for licensure by private agencies.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- DCF workers and other stakeholders confirmed that criminal background checks are completed on all foster and adoptive parents. (source: stakeholders)
- DCF workers verified that the fingerprint clearance are completed at the beginning of the 10 week MAPP training due to long delays in getting clearances back from the FBI. (source: stakeholders)

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Child specific recruitment in Florida is the responsibility of the Department. The Department maintains a vigorous foster and adoptive parent recruitment program with One Church, One Child to provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children needing homes.

The recruitment/retention unit (which focuses primarily on foster parents) and Homefinders (which focuses primarily on adoptive parents) recruit from all races/ethnicities. There were 73 recruitment and retention positions funded by 1999 Legislature. Some districts have units that are dedicated exclusively to licensing, training, recruitment and retention. Each district has a Homefinder to recruit adoptive homes.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths:

- There are many recruitment efforts (movie, television, radio, civic organizations, metro ads, billboards, and flyers). (source: stakeholders)
- In one site, it was noted that respite services are offered to help retain foster parents. (source: stakeholders)
- DCF stakeholders stated that each district has staff designated for recruitment and retention activities. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- Interviews revealed that in spite of recruitment efforts, the State appears to be losing as many foster homes as it gains. (source: stakeholders)

The following concerns were reported:

- the focus of the State needs to be on retention of foster families. In the two sites, foster parents expressed frustration because they often are unable to contact their workers and their phone calls often are not returned.
- Many homes are overcrowded with adolescents due to few placement resources.
- There are not enough therapeutic, foster homes, and group homes for older children.

- In one site there are 113 licensed foster homes, but only 35 actively serve as foster parent. In addition, there is a growing population of Hispanics and Russians. More emphasis should be placed on aggressively recruiting foster/adoptive homes for these populations (source: stakeholders)

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.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Department utilizes all available resources to focus on children awaiting adoption in Florida which include state and national adoption exchanges, newspaper, television and radio informational releases, the Internet and vigorous search for interested relatives whether in or out of State. Over 60% of the adoptions in Florida are foster parent adoptions. A significant number of adoptions result from an initial placement with out-of-state relative of the child. In addition, adoption services contract is designed to include interstate adoption placement services for children. In 1999, 260 children and in 2000, 272 children were placed out-of-state for adoption.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strength:

- The children are registered with the appropriate exchanges for cross-jurisdictional placement. (source: stakeholders)
- In one of the sites, it was reported that child specific recruitment occurs. (source: stakeholders)

Areas Needing Improvement:

- DCF stakeholders in two of the sites expressed concern about ICPC compliance. They expressed the opinion that the ICPC process is inefficient and requires excessive paperwork and time. (source: stakeholders)

XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place a check beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

Safety

N Outcome S1
 Item 1
 Item 2
 N Outcome S2
 Item 3
 Item 4

Permanency

N Outcome P1
 Item 5
 Item 6
 Item 7
 Item 8
 Item 9
 Item 10
 Y Outcome P2
 Item 11
 Item 12
 Item 13
 Item 14
 Item 15
 Item 16

Child and Family Well-Being

N Outcome WB1
 Item 17
 Item 18
 Item 19
 Item 20
 N Outcome WB2
 Item 21

N Outcome WB3
 Item 22
 Item 23

Systemic Factors

Y Statewide Information System
 Item 24
 N Case Review System
 Item 25
 Item 26
 Item 27
 Item 28
 Item 29

Y Quality Assurance System

Item 30
 Item 31

Y Training

Item 32
 Item 33
 Item 34

N Service Array

Item 35
 Item 36
 Item 37

Y Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Item 38
 Item 39
 Item 40

Y Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Item 41
 Item 42
 Item 43
 Item 44
 Item 45