

PA CFSR FINAL REPORT

The Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF), completed a review of key areas of Pennsylvania's child welfare policy and practice to ensure Pennsylvania is meeting federal requirements found in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process was initiated with an analysis of child welfare data and the submission of a statewide assessment to ACF of areas seen as critical to the effective functioning of the child welfare system. During the period of April – July 2017, Pennsylvania staff and trained volunteers completed a state-conducted review of 65 cases with secondary oversight conducted by federal staff. In addition, ACF conducted interviews with the state's stakeholders and partners.

Pennsylvania was found to meet the federal performance standards for five of the seven systemic factors assessed, including: Case Review System; Quality Assurance System; Staff and Provider Training; Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention. Pennsylvania did not meet the performance threshold set by ACF for the seven outcomes outlined below:

- ✚ Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- ✚ Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- ✚ Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- ✚ The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
- ✚ Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- ✚ Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- ✚ Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Pennsylvania did not meet the federal performance standard for the systemic factors of: Statewide Information System and Service Array and Resource Development.

A program improvement plan (PIP) is required to address each outcome and systemic factor for which the state did not meet federal standards. The PIP must be submitted to ACF by February 1, 2018.

KEY OBSERVATIONS FROM THE REPORT

Strengths

- Commitment to continuous quality improvement
- Commitment to collaborative relationships with stakeholders
- Willingness to share data and information with stakeholders
- Efforts to ensure placement of siblings together in foster care
- Ensuring children have appropriate services to meet their educational needs
- Stability of children's placements
- Increased use of relative and kinship care placements
- Assessing the needs of relative caregivers and the provision of services to meet those needs
- Frequency of permanency hearings
- Strong collaborative partnership between agency and courts

Areas for Improvement

- Addressing workforce concerns, including high caseloads and workforce turnover
- Enhancing safety assessment practices and the provision of services to address identified safety issues
- Strengthening practice related to the implementation and monitoring of safety plans
- Improving upon timely achievement of permanency for children/youth by establishing permanency goals that best meet their needs and implementing those goals through the use of concurrent planning
- Strengthening efforts to ensure parents, particularly non-custodial and fathers, are consistently and meaningfully engaged in case planning and services
- Improving upon the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with parents, quality assessment of parents' needs and provision of effective services to meet parents' needs
- Enhancing the current array of services available to families to improve availability and access to substance abuse services

THE CFSR WAS NOT ENVISIONED TO BE A PASS-FAIL REVIEW, BUT RATHER, A REVIEW TO HELP STATES UNDERSTAND THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND TO GUIDE CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES.

Jerry Milner

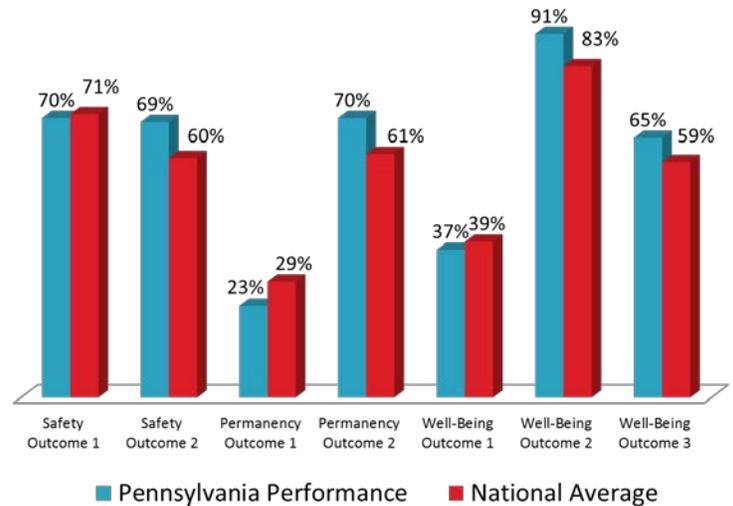
Associate Commissioner Children's Bureau

Things to Consider When Reviewing the CFSR Final Report

- ✚ “The CFSR was not envisioned to be a pass-fail review, but rather, a review to help states understand their strengths and weaknesses and to guide continuous quality improvement activities.” (Jerry Milner, 2017)
- ✚ The CFSR is a valuable tool in helping to raise the bar for outcomes for children and families.
- ✚ The federal threshold for demonstrating achievement of the outcomes and performance indicators in the CFSR are high, as they well should be, given the vulnerable population they are designed to address.
 - NOTE: The federal threshold is set at 95% for each outcome, meaning of the applicable cases reviewed, 95% must demonstrate that they achieved performance standards for that particular outcome.
 - NOTE: Overall performance on each outcome is often determined through assessing several individual measurement items that cover many different areas of case practice.
- ✚ The number of cases reviewed in each county and across the state is not a statistically representative sample; yet, it has been noted that the findings from the reviews seem to be reflective of other performance findings seen within counties in Pennsylvania during the period under review, as well as nationally.
- ✚ Items rated as areas needing improvement often have some strengths in case practice that occurred, which may not be outlined within the final report, but this is reflected in the written rationales provided by reviewers and in-depth practice performance reports that are made available to states by ACF.

Pennsylvania Outcomes vs. National Average*

*National average reflects findings from 24 states who conducted the CFSR in 2015 and 2016



Next Steps

A state determined not to meet federal performance standards for one or more of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors under review must develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) jointly with ACF that addresses identified areas where the standard was not achieved. The state then implements the approved PIP and ACF and the state monitor the plan's implementation and the state's progress toward plan-specified goals.

The PA Child Welfare Council and Subcommittees (Safety, Permanency, Well-Being and Resources/Cross-Categoricals) will serve as the stakeholder group who will support PIP development and statewide strategic planning. The Council will continue their review of the findings and analysis of data to support the identification of key strategies/interventions that will focus on practice-level and sustainable improvements to ensure positive outcomes are achieved for children and families across the Commonwealth.