



New York State
Office of
Children & Family
Services

**NEW YORK STATE
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN
FOR THE
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
FEDERAL REVIEW**

Approved April 14, 2003

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is to provide HHS/ACF and New York State with a blueprint for how NYS' ongoing continuous quality improvement of the administration of child welfare services and practices will further the goals of the CFSR. Through targeted strategies and action steps, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the fifty-eight local departments of social services, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, and the agencies with which they contract for services, will address the child welfare outcomes and performance indicators found not to be in substantial conformity with the 2001 Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Child and Family Services Review standards. New York is a state supervised, locally administered system and as such, it is presented with special challenges in responding to this new federal review. OCFS designed the CFSR PIP development and implementation process as an opportunity to join with local departments of social services ("districts"), New York City's Administration for Children's Services, voluntary agencies, the federally recognized tribes and other child welfare stakeholders in order to: assess the review findings; identify factors contributing to performance or to the report findings; identify current initiatives upon which to build; identify strategies and action steps to address the factors contributing to performance; to set goals for improved performance; and to shape strategies to assess the effectiveness of the PIP.

New York continues its view that the ACF CFSR Final Report does not accurately reflect the state of child welfare in the State and does not recognize the improvements that have recently occurred. OCFS, while disputing many of the findings in the Report and the validity and usefulness of the ACF created national standards, nonetheless approached the development of the CFSR PIP as an opportunity to further assess the areas of child welfare practice and programs that are in need of improvement, and to build on the many strengths present in OCFS and local district and agency practices and programs in designing a path for improvement. OCFS has embraced this opportunity for partnership in order to foster creative thinking and to forge a common focus on achieving improvements in child safety, permanency and well-being. It has done so in full cooperation with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Region II staff and in conformance with the federal regulations (45CFR 1355(a) (1) (i)) governing this process.

Process Used to Develop the CFSR Program Improvement Plan

The federal regulations require that the PIP "(B)e developed jointly by the State and Federal staff in consultation with the review team." OCFS recognized the need to be inclusive in its approach to formulating the PIP. OCFS used three tiers of teams to develop the Plan. The OCFS Management Team was formed to provide agency oversight of all activities related to the development and implementation of the PIP. The Management Team consisted of OCFS managers from various offices and units throughout New York State. The second tier was the Design and Implementation Team, who served as the principal architects of the PIP. In addition to designing the PIP, this team will continue to advise OCFS on the implementation of the PIP, review data as to the progress toward desired outcomes and recommend modifications to the PIP as needed. Members of the Design and Implementation Team consisted of OCFS staff, local district staff (including representatives from the three locations of the on-site review), voluntary

agency staff, a Family Court judge, an external CFSR on-site reviewer, and various other stakeholders. The third tier, the Design and Implementation Workgroups, consisted of members of the Design and Implementation Team, supplemented by the expertise of additional OCFS, local district, agency, university training partner staff and staff from the National Resource Centers.

The workgroups were organized to address the specific outcomes, case review items and systemic factors where the CFSR found OCFS not in substantial conformity with the federal standards. Their task was to: identify the underlying conditions and factors that may have contributed to the current level of performance and system functioning; identify strategies that could positively impact the underlying conditions and contributing factors; and suggest how to measure the proposed strategies to determine if the strategies are having the intended effects. The underlying conditions and contributing factors were analyzed to identify common themes among the workgroups. The workgroups were then charged with identifying and prioritizing strategies and action steps to address the issues related to performance on the national standards, the outcome areas and items, and the systemic factors.

OCFS selected strategies that are viewed as those most likely to have an impact on the issues contributing to performance, those that relate most directly to the outcomes and review areas found not to be in substantial conformity with the federal standards and those that can be accomplished within the constraints of time and resources. The strategies selected for this Plan represent only a portion of the broader OCFS long-term child welfare agenda.

Accomplishment of the training actions necessary to implement many of the strategies contained in the PIP will place an unfunded burden upon the State. To lessen this, the State intends to work cooperatively with ACF to explore the expanded use of Title IV-E training funds and other Federal funds for several of the key activities.

Organization of the Program Improvement Plan

The development of the CFSR PIP has been guided by the principles of the OCFS Operational Framework and its current Framework of Child Welfare Practice, in that it has a developmental and outcome focus and is strengths based. The PIP is based on strategies that are responsive to statewide strengths and needs and has, at its heart, family centered practice strategies to improve outcomes.

The CFSR PIP integrates, builds upon, and enhances current State and local department of social services initiatives. It also proposes new and exciting initiatives. New York, long a leader in child welfare, will seek to facilitate the exchange of ideas and expertise among its districts and agencies and build upon the wealth of talent and innovation that it has. In addition, OCFS is asking for assistance from the federally funded National Resource Centers, to the extent that ACF makes this resource available to the State at no expense to the State, to bring the expertise of the nation to bear on New York's challenges.

In order to be a truly functional and living plan, the PIP needed to be designed by and for its users. The work of the PIP Design and Implementation Team on the identification of the

conditions and factors that underlie or contribute to performance on the National Standards and the Review Items clearly showed recurrent themes. Therefore, the PIP is designed to address those core themes of system functioning. The PIP is organized into twelve (12) core strategies that target those cross cutting systemic factors most closely related to performance on the review.

While OCFS understands the rationale behind ACF's organization of the complex dimensions of the child welfare system and individual caseworker performance into the three areas of national standards, on-site case review items and systemic factors, it does not find that construct to be optimal for designing and formatting a PIP. Therefore, the PIP is organized into two sections. Part I is the full OCFS Program Improvement Plan containing the twelve strategies for improving our child welfare system. Part 2 is the appendices, including Appendix C that contains the ACF PIP Reporting Matrix. The ACF PIP Reporting Matrix is a subset of the full OCFS Program Improvement Plan, organized by discreet Action Steps that address specific National Standards and Case Review Items with which OCFS was found not to be in substantial conformity. This Matrix will be used by ACF to track progress on the implementation and impact of the action steps specified in the matrix during the two-year period following PIP approval by ACF. OCFS will provide quarterly reports to ACF regarding the progress toward achieving the action steps and goals included in the ACF PIP Reporting Matrix (Appendix C).

The OCFS strategies form a cohesive plan for improving performance to achieve the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being. In Part I of the PIP there are twelve (12) core strategies. One of the strategies – Strategy #10, Tribal Consultation – is a voluntary strategy pursuant to 45 CFR 1355.35(b). Within each core strategy is a series of action steps designed to achieve the intended impact of the strategy. The core strategies are targeted at achieving improvements in more than one review item, national standard or systemic factor. Some of the actions steps are directly linked to a specific performance area. Others are less directly related, but nevertheless will contribute to long-term improvement. The respective standards, items or systemic factors to be impacted are identified within each core strategy. Also, a chart in Section II of this document identifies the national standards and case review items that we plan to impact by each core strategy.

This PIP simultaneously targets the three areas wherein lie the heart of our strengths as a child welfare system and our most pressing needs. These areas are: 1) the strength and stability of the child welfare workforce; 2) the practice focus, the skills and the policy and operational environment of that workforce; and 3) the interface between, and collaboration among, the sectors of the child welfare community, including the courts, the service provider community and the system stakeholders. In order to support the safety of children and to achieve rapid permanency for those children, OCFS recognizes the need to have a workforce that is sufficiently available and skilled to perform the tremendously difficult tasks required of them. Therefore, several of our strategies target developing and stabilizing that workforce.

In order to speed the time for the achievement of permanence for children, a multi-pronged effort is needed. Therefore, a set of strategies has been designed to form an integrated force to reduce the length of time it takes to achieve permanency. This set of strategies includes strengthening the effectiveness of the courts and of child welfare agencies to achieve safety, permanency and well-being; integrating concurrent planning practice into strengths based, family focused, family

involved practice; and redoubling efforts to secure permanency for adolescents. Supporting those efforts are strategies for a strong case review process and a responsive case recording system. OCFS, local districts and voluntary agencies cannot accomplish the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being in isolation. Collaboration with other service systems is an integral part of an effective child welfare system. Therefore, strategies aimed at increasing the array of services available and accessible to families and breaking down jurisdictional and other barriers are essential components of our PIP.

The PIP, while seeking to address the broader underlying issues contributing to performance, maintains a clear focus on safety, permanency and well-being. The PIP prioritizes actions to achieve improvements on the national standards and items related to “safety.” The next areas of priority for performance improvements are those in which New York’s performance was most distant from the level set by the national standards: time to achieve reunification and time to achieve adoption finalization. The chart in Section II of this document identifies the national standards and case review items that are addressed by each core strategy.

**Listing of the CFSR Program Improvement Plan Core Strategies in This Plan
(Each strategy is described in detail in Section IV of this document)**

1. Support for Strengths Based, Family Focused Practice

New York will, through an integrated set of action steps, strengthen district and agency practice in promoting safety, permanency, and well being through: engaging parents, children and foster parents; enhancing family supports; strengthening case planning and case review processes; strengthening family visitation; promoting placement stability; and supporting the role of foster parents.

2. Concurrent Planning Implementation

New York will articulate a clear message to all participants and stakeholders in the Child Welfare system as to the role, values, philosophy and practice of concurrent planning in permanency focused child welfare practice. OCFS will support the development and integration into practice of the values and behaviors of concurrent planning.

3. Safety and Well-Being of Children in Congregate Care

New York will undertake a set of actions that will enhance the ability of residential programs to provide programming and supervision for children and youth, providing for their safety, development and treatment needs.

4. Permanency Options

New York will undertake a set of actions to review current permanency goals; the legislative and regulatory structure that supports them; assess their functionality in promoting the achievement of safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth; and advocate for the implementation of such changes as warranted by the results of the review. New York will support and expand the number of permanency mediation programs in the State.

5. Adolescent Services and Outcomes

New York will undertake an integrated set of actions to provide adolescents in foster care with the supports needed for their development into healthy, functional citizens with permanent attachments to supportive adults, families and communities.

6. Development and Piloting of a Differentiated Protective Services Response to Allegations of Child Maltreatment.

New York will explore the testing of a differentiated response to allegations of child maltreatment in order to better engage families who may be neglecting their children to enter service relationships in a non-adversarial manner and to improve community responsiveness to child protective services issues.

7. Workforce Development: Staff Recruitment, Retention and Development

New York will undertake a set of actions designed to increase the stability of the child welfare workforce and to support the continuous development of the ability of that workforce to achieve the child welfare outcomes.

8. Workload Management Support

New York will undertake a set of actions designed to increase the capacity of districts and agencies to manage workloads while supporting efficiencies in the current work processes.

9. Improving the Statewide Information Systems

New York will continue to improve the statewide information system through a two-pronged approach: the Data Warehouse and the full implementation of CONNECTIONS.

10. Tribal Consultation

OCFS will implement a set of actions to actively involve the Tribes in our planning and quality improvement efforts and to further enhance the development and provision of child welfare services available to Native American Tribes and their members.

11. Improve Relationships and Interface between the Family Court and the Child Welfare System

OCFS and OCA will undertake a set of actions to build on the improvements underway in the areas of communication and interface between the family court system and the child welfare system and the ability of each to be effective partners in the achievement of timely permanency for children.

12. Improve Cross-systems Collaboration and Increase Service Array and Access

New York will undertake a set of actions that will increase collaboration between the Child Welfare system and the agencies whose services and supports are needed by the children and families receiving child protective, preventive, foster care and adoption services. This improved collaboration will increase children and families access to those services.

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II. CFSR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES CHART

(This chart shows the strategies in the PIP that address federal national standards and case review items.)

	#1 Practice	#2 Concur. Planning	#3 Cong Care	#4 Perm. Options	#5 Adol. Services	#6 Dual Track	#7 Workforce Devel.	#8 Workload Managemt	#9 Information Systems	#10 Native American Tribes	#11 Family Court	#12 Cross-System
National Standards												
Repeat Maltreatment	X					X						
Maltreatment in Foster Care	X		X									
Time to Reunification	X	X		X				X			X	X
Time to Adoption	X	X		X				X			X	X
Stability of Placement	X							X				
Case Review Items												
#2:Repeat Maltreatment	X						X					
#6:Stability	X						X	X				
#7:Permanency Goal	X	X		X	X		X	X			X	
#8:Independent Living Services	X				X		X	X				
#9:Adoption	X	X		X				X			X	
#10:PPG of Other	X				X		X	X				
#13:Visitation	X				X		X	X				
#16: Relationship with Parents	X				X		X	X				
#17: Services parent, child, foster parent	X				X	X		X				
#18:Family involved in Planning	X				X	X	X	X		X		
#23:Mental Health of Child	X		X				X	X				X
#24:Information System	X							X	X	X		
#25:Plan Developed with Parents	X							X		X		
#27:Permanency Hearings	X			X			X	X			X	
#28:TPRs	X			X				X			X	
#33:Training										V		
#35:Array of Services												X
#36: Accessible Services	X											X
#37:Individualized Services	X											X
#39:Responsiveness to Community										V		
#44:Recruitment of Foster Families										V		

Key: V = Voluntarily addressed in the PIP

III. STRATEGY AND ACTION STEPS FOR MEASURING PERFORMANCE AND ASSESSING PROGRESS

The State is submitting this PIP notwithstanding that the Federal report fails to adequately portray the quality of care that is currently provided to children and families in New York. The report does not adequately recognize that New York, unlike most other states, is a state-supervised, locally administered child and family services delivery system. This report judges the State against “national standards.” These standards are based on the aspirational goals that all states meet the criterion that is currently not being met in 75% of cases nationwide. In addition, many states concede that the data submitted to support the standards is flawed. Our commitment to go forward with the PIP does not indicate our acceptance of the findings of the report, the 75th percentile of compliance as a reasonable measure, or acceptance of the national standards, which, in our view, were defectively computed. We also object to many of the conclusions that were made upon the opinions of a single stakeholder. We reserve our right to challenge the report and the underlying processes should ACF impose a financial sanction in the future. Finally, it must be stressed that this PIP is intended exclusively for the improvement of the administration of the child welfare system and that it does not create in any manner whatsoever any rights or remedies in favor of any person or groups of persons beyond those rights that otherwise exist under law.

For outcomes in the CFSR with data indicators where national standards are assigned, New York (and other states) are required to meet both the national standard for the statewide data indicator and substantially achieve the outcomes in 90 percent of the cases reviewed on-site to be considered in substantial conformity. There were six national standards used by ACF as part of the process of determining substantial conformity: recurrence of maltreatment; incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care; foster care reentries; stability of foster care placements; length of time to achieve reunification; and length of time to achieve adoption. Of these six national standards, New York met the national standard for foster care reentries but fell below the national standard in the other five areas.

In the development of the PIP, careful thought has been given to the strategies and action steps that can be taken in New York to produce improvements in the key areas of child welfare practice represented in the national standards. Listed below is each of the national standards that New York is required to address in the PIP and the performance target for each of the national standards. The performance targets for each of the national standards assume that the State will improve by at least the standard error of each indicator, as specified in ACF memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-01-07.

DATA SOURCES

Three primary data sources will be used for performance monitoring and outcome measurement: the OCFS data warehouse, case record reviews, and self-assessments. Case record review(s) using an instrument similar to the one used during the on-site portion of the CFSR are under consideration, as are data collection through focus groups and individual stakeholder interviews. These data will enable OCFS to: establish baseline data in areas for which data is not currently

available; analyze differences in outcome trends among counties, regions, and various subpopulations; monitor performance both statewide and in specific districts; and identify districts in need of training and technical assistance in specific areas of performance. This approach will enable OCFS to target efforts at locations or subpopulations where the needs are greatest and to identify best practices that should be considered for replication.

OCFS Data Warehouse

Please see Action Step 9.2 in Strategy #9 in this document for a description of the OCFS Data Warehouse and its functions.

Case Record Reviews

As OCFS explores its options for measuring improvements and assessing progress, consideration is being given to building upon the case review processes OCFS currently uses, including those conducted jointly with local districts. For example, OCFS and ACS are jointly conducting case record reviews of preventive services cases in New York City to establish baseline data regarding the delivery of preventive services within regulatory and practice standards. Further case record reviews may be conducted with local districts using a stratified random sample of foster care cases to establish a baseline of performance for many of the outcome areas for which data are not available from the OCFS Data Warehouse and to measure improvement in these areas at two years after implementation of the PIP.

If OCFS proceeds with additional large-scale case reviews, the sample would be selected using data available from the OCFS Data Warehouse. The same sampling criteria and data elements would be used to select the samples at baseline and at the two-year follow-up, to assure comparability of the samples. OCFS would develop a case review data collection instrument and train reviewers in its proper use.

Self-Assessments

OCFS will develop tools for districts and voluntary agencies to use in assessing their own performance. The tools will be structured so that the information can be fed back to OCFS to be used in measuring and monitoring performance for the outcome areas, as well as assessing the need for additional training and technical assistance. This will be especially important in areas for which data are not available from the OCFS Data Warehouse. An effort will be made to obtain participation in the self-assessments from large, medium and small counties as well as different geographical regions of the state.

A. NATIONAL STANDARD: RECURRENCE OF MALTREATMENT

A state meets the national standard for this indicator if, of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during the first six months of the period under review, 6.1% or fewer children had another substantiated or indicated report within six months. The finding of 13.47% in New York State (NYS) did not meet the national standard.

Anticipated Level of Progress:

New York will seek to improve the incidence rate of repeat maltreatment from 13.47% to 12.6% by FFY 2004.

Related Issues

From a policy perspective, states differ in several general factors, unrelated to casework practice, that affect the rate of all reports that are investigated, as well as some that affect the rate of recurrence. A notable general difference is that NYS has a higher rate of reports investigated per thousand children than the national figure, and has a broad statutory definition of maltreatment and an expansive definition of possible perpetrators, including babysitters, non-relatives and persons not living in the child's household.

Additionally, in NYS there may be multiple reports received on the same incident and if they have slightly different information and allegations, each report will be accepted and will require a complete investigation and a separate determination, even when, in reality, there was a single incident or set of issues. New York's policy is different than that of some states in this regard. OCFS staff informally checked with several other states and found that some states incorporate new allegations into an existing report.

A database factor related specifically to the rate of recurrence is the differing abilities of states to identify the children in a report, link up different reports, and identify the recurrence of maltreatment. NYS has a highly developed ability to link multiple reports to individual children while other states may have a lower rate of recurrence because of an inability to link reports

While NYS is not proposing that these policy and database considerations completely account for our performance above the national standard, our analysis suggests that it may account for some portion of that difference. In order to establish a firm and realistic baseline from which to measure improvement in the State's performance, we will attempt to discern their implications and impact on our recurrence rate.

Methods of Measuring Performance:

The NYS rate for the data element, recurrence of maltreatment, was 13.47% in 1999 and 13.86% in 1998. The recurrence data indicator, as defined for the Data Profile, is down .50% from 13.4% to 12.9% from 1999 to 2000. This rate is still considerably above the National Standard of 6.1%.

OCFS expects to continue this trend of improvement by assisting the local districts in identifying systemic and case level issues as they relate to recurrence. To that end, OCFS has created three reports that identify the recurrence rate for each district; provide a child specific list; and allegation data. Because these reports are available through the OCFS Data Warehouse, information is updated weekly so current benchmarks can be established.

Other data provide districts additional information on the potential recurrence population. These data are also available to districts via the OCFS Data Warehouse:

- Numbers and Percents of all CPS Report Determinations
- Numbers and Percents of Familial Reports Only
- Numbers and Percents of all Indicated Reports Closed or Open for Services plus Familial only

In addition, OCFS will continue to explore several policy and database considerations that may account for some portion of our performance above the National Standard.

B. NATIONAL STANDARD: INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT IN FOSTER CARE

A state meets the national standard for this indicator if, of all children in foster care in the State during the period under review, the percentage of children who were the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff is 0.57% or less. The finding of 1.14% in New York State did not meet the national standard.

Anticipated Level of Progress

New York will seek to reduce the percentage of children who are maltreated by a foster parent or facility staff from 1.14% to 1% by FFY 2004.

Related Issues and Data

The Child Safety Profile shows that New York's rate of incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care was 1.14% in FFY 1999, up from 0.71% in FFY 1998 while the national standard is 0.4% or less.

At the local district level there is variation in the rate of incidence of abuse and/or neglect in foster care. Changes in rates from 1998 to 1999 at the district level varied; about one-half of the districts' rates improved.

OCFS will provide access for districts to data, through the OCFS Data Warehouse, that will assist in identifying systemic and case level issues related to maltreatment in foster care. These data include:

- Numbers and Percents of Reports in Foster Care
- Numbers and Percents of Reports in Institutions
- Allegations for Foster Care and Day Care Reports
- Allegations for Institutional Abuse Reports

Methods of Measuring Performance:

OCFS will use the national standard data indicator, as defined for the Data Profile, to measure performance. To assist the districts in identifying systemic and case level issues as they relate to maltreatment in foster care, this data indicator will be calculated on a quarterly basis for each district, using data from the OCFS Data Warehouse. In addition, OCFS will provide access for districts to the following, through the OCFS Data Warehouse:

- Numbers and Percents of Reports in Foster Care
- Numbers and Percents of Reports in Institutions
- Allegations for Foster Care and Day Care Reports
- Allegations for Institutional Abuse Reports

C. NATIONAL STANDARD: STABILITY OF FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS

A state meets the national standard for this indicator if, of all children who have been in foster care less than twelve months from the time of the latest removal, 86.7% or more children had no more than two placement settings. New York did not submit data regarding stability of foster care placements and, therefore, did not meet the national standard.

Anticipated Level of Progress:

New York will seek to improve the stability of foster care placements by 1.9 percentage points by FFY 2004.

Related Issues and Data

States meet the national standard for this indicator if, of all children who have been in foster care less than twelve months from the time of the latest removal, 86.7% or more children had no more than two placement settings. New York State data is not available in the federal Data Profile. Up to this point the logic for counting moves from setting to setting during the current foster care episode had not been developed. Code now exists that identifies not only the child's move but also whether the new setting is a unique provider. This addition is part of the March 31, 2002 AFCARS submission. We are resubmitting FFY 2000 and FFY 2001 files with these data included.

New York does collect data regarding the number of moves for children in foster care. Based on these data it appears that New York meets the national standard for stability of placements for children in foster care. Using the same definition of "stability" that was used to compute the national standard, a special analysis of data collected during a review of 401 foster care cases in New York City during Spring, 2000 was completed. Of the children admitted into foster care in New York City on or after January 1, 1999 (and therefore not in foster care more than twelve months during the review period of calendar year 1999), 91.6% had no more than two placement settings during the 12 month period of calendar year 1999. An analysis was also made of the reasons for movement of children between placement settings. The most frequent reasons for

children's moves were: move to a kinship placement (25% of moves); the previous placement was an emergency placement (25% of moves); foster parent request (18% of moves); a child's special needs (18% of moves); the need for a different level of care (18%); and placement into an adoptive home (8% of moves).

In upstate districts, data regarding moves of children in foster care is collected during Safety and Permanency Assessment case reviews. This data includes children's moves over a two-year period rather than 12 months. The recent upstate review data show that 82.7% of children had no more than two placement settings during a two-year period. This total would be higher if an analysis of the number of moves during a 12-month period were possible, and therefore closer to, or even in excess of, the national standard.

1997 through 2000 Title IV-B data indicated improvements in Performance Targets related to permanency. For Goal #2 the target is: Reduce the percentage of foster care children with any placement changes within the first year of placement to no more than 36%. The rate has improved from 42.1% in 1997 to 32.9% in 2000.

Methods of Measuring Performance:

OCFS will develop a definition of moves congruent with the federal definition and will use the OCFS Data Warehouse to measure moves.

D. NATIONAL STANDARD: LENGTH OF TIME TO ACHIEVE REUNIFICATION

A state meets the national standard for this indicator if, of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, 76.2% or more children were reunified in less than twelve months from the time of the latest removal from home. The finding of 54.2% in New York State did not meet the national standard.

Anticipated Level of Progress:

New York will seek to improve the percentage of children reunified within twelve months from the time of the latest removal from 54.2% to 56.6% by FFY 2004

Methods of Measuring Performance:

See **Section F. ALTERNATIVE MEASURES TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR LENGTH OF TIME TO REUNIFICATION AND ADOPTION** below.

E. NATIONAL STANDARD: LENGTH OF TIME TO ACHIEVE ADOPTION

A state meets the national standard for this indicator if, of all children who exited foster care during the year under review to a finalized adoption, 32% or more children exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home. The finding of 2.95% in New York State did not meet the national standard.

Anticipated Level of Progress:

New York will seek to improve the percentage for this national indicator from 2.95% to 5.9% by FFY 2004.

Methods of Measuring Performance:

See Section F. ALTERNATIVE MEASURES TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR LENGTH OF TIME TO REUNIFICATION AND ADOPTION below.

F. ALTERNATIVE MEASURES TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR LENGTH OF TIME TO REUNIFICATION AND ADOPTION

Although OCFS is required to measure the level of progress in reducing time to permanency against the national standards, OCFS contends - and believes the research supports the contention - that length of stay among exit cohorts is a poor indicator of performance. It is likely that comparisons of length of stay among exit cohorts will fail to capture or accurately represent real changes in length of stay brought about by improvements in the State's policies and practices in the areas of reunification and adoption. Particularly in a state like New York, where more than 57% of children in foster care have been in care for more than two years, policy and programmatic changes intended to reduce a backlog of cases that have been in foster care for a long time can actually increase the length of time to reunification or adoption among discharge cohorts. This occurs because the cohorts exiting foster care after this programmatic shift takes place will contain a higher concentration of children who stay a long time. Thus, while the State is improving performance, it would appear that performance had gotten worse. Furthermore, the national standards create a disincentive to decrease length of stay for children who have been in foster care for more than a year or two. A more complete discussion of this issue is included in Appendix A of this document.

In addition, OCFS contends that evaluating system performance without accounting for changes in case mix also limits the utility of the national standards to accurately measure changes in performance. The volume and mix of children entering care can change over time for any number of reasons. One possible reason is that policies and program interventions work in such a way that certain types of cases are either screened into or diverted away from the system. This can happen when, for example, placement prevention efforts such as family preservation are increased, and as a result children who would have spent a short time in foster care are kept out of foster care. The children who are admitted may as a group have a longer expected length of

stay, in which case the average length of stay for all children in care can be expected to rise, not because children stay longer, but because there are more children who stay a long time among those who enter the system.

The OCFS objective during the next performance review period is to reduce the length of time children in New York State spend in foster care prior to being reunited with their parents, or discharged to a relative or adoptive family. To that end, OCFS has set baseline expectations and improvement targets for the 2-year performance period identified in the PIP to increase the number of children discharged to permanent families and decrease the total number of care days used by children in foster care. If length of stay is decreased for a given population, the number of care days used will go down. During the two year interval observed by the federal government, care days may be reduced by: increasing the number of children discharged during the two year interval (children who would otherwise have stayed in care longer than two years); by discharging children who would have gone home during the two year interval sooner than in the past, or; some combination. OCFS' goal is to do both. Since OCFS' goal is to decrease the time spent in out-of-home placement, OCFS will set one goal for permanency, rather than separate goals for reunification and adoption. This allows system administrators and caseworkers to choose the best permanency option for each child, rather than being constrained by historical proportions of children exiting to adoption and reunification with family or relatives.

SETTING THE BASELINES

OCFS has established baseline projections for the length of time to reunification and adoption based on past performance that it will use to judge progress toward better permanency for children. The methodology for estimating the baselines includes two components designed to increase the utility of the methodology and the accuracy of the projections. These are:

- Subpopulation-specific estimates to control for changes in case mix
- Length of stay measured by historical care day utilization and period-specific exit probabilities of reunification and adoption during the two-year period

Each of these components is described below.

Subpopulation-Specific Estimates

Like the current federal standards, the alternative methodology uses historical data to set an expectation for expected future performance. However, the methodology uses historical data for groups of children that share characteristics associated with different patterns of length of stay. As discussed earlier, changes in the composition of the foster care population from year to year can cause differences in observed length of stay that are unrelated to changes in the underlying system performance. For the purposes of estimation as well as tracking care day utilization during implementation, OCFS has divided the population of children in foster care into groups

that experienced different lengths of stay, as well as those that share clinically relevant characteristics. With separate estimates for these mutually exclusive groups, the methodology will accommodate changes in the case mix over time. These groups are also intended to focus each county's efforts on reducing length of stay in developmentally relevant ways.

To capture all children in a county's care, OCFS has first divided target populations into the group of children in foster care on the first day of the performance period identified in the PIP (the in-care population), and the population of children admitted during the years that follow the start of performance period (year 1 admission population and year two admission populations). Research shows that because the children in care when the performance period starts have been in foster care for some time already, the rate at which these children exit during the performance period will tend to be faster than the rate of exit for the children admitted during the performance period. As such, the performance targets have to be adjusted for these important differences. Since the amount of time available to reduce length of stay for the second year admission population is limited, OCFS is not proposing a performance target for this group at this time.

OCFS' analysis of the discharge rates for subpopulations of children reveals significant county level differences. For evaluating statewide performance, OCFS will track children placed in New York City separate from children placed in upstate counties.

Children in the in-care population have been in foster care for varying amounts of time. Some have only been in for a short time. Others have been in foster care for many years and may be nearing a completed adoption or reunification. To account for changes in the mix of children who have been in foster care for shorter or longer periods, children in the in-care population are divided into three groups: those who have been in care for less than two years, for two to three years, and four or more years.

A third characteristic distinguishing the patterns of length of stay as well as the type of exit (reunification or adoption) is the age of the child when placed in foster care. To account for these differences, children are divided into three age groups: under 1 years old, ages 1 to 13, and 14 and older.

Finally, children placed in kinship care as part of an admission group in New York City tended to stay in foster care longer than children placed in foster boarding homes. As a result, for New York City, a fourth admission stratum was created for this group if the child was placed in kinship care under the age of fourteen.

Combining these groups together resulted in the groups displayed on Table 1. These groups were used to set expectations for statewide performance.

Table 1 Subpopulations for Estimating Expected Performance and Tracking Progress

In-Care Population Groups for New York City and Upstate Counties

- Placed under 1 yrs old, in care for less than 2 yrs
- Placed under 1 yrs old, in care for 2-3 yrs
- Placed under 1 yrs old, in care for 4 or more yrs
- Placed ages 1 to 13, in care for less than 2 yrs
- Placed ages 1 to 13, in care for 2-3 yrs
- Placed ages 1 to 13, in care for 4 or more yrs
- Placed ages 14 to 20

Admission Population Groups for New York City

- Placed in FBH or congregate, under 1 yrs old
- Placed in FBH or congregate, ages 1 to 13
- Placed in kinship, under 1 and ages 1 to 13
- Placed ages 14 to 20

Admission Population Groups for Upstate Counties

- Placed under 1 yrs old
- Placed ages 1 to 13
- Placed ages 14 to 20

Evaluating Length Of Stay During Two-Year Performance Evaluation Period

Since some children will have been in care prior to the two-year evaluation period and some will still be in care at the end, more conventional measures of length of stay are not effective for tracking performance improvements during this time. Instead, the methodology for evaluating the length of time to adoption and reunification focuses on the number of care days of foster care used during the two-year period by different groups of children and the proportion of children who exit from each group to reunification or adoption by the end of the two-year period.

OCFS used the average care day utilization and average discharge rates for five previous in-care and admission populations, observed for two years, to construct expectations for each six-month interval during the performance period. This method relied on the assumption that foster care utilization for groups of similar children (defined by each subpopulation) is consistent enough over time to provide the best available estimate of future foster care utilization. OCFS' examination of historical exit and care day utilization patterns indicates that historical patterns are consistent for these subpopulations. Table 2 displays the exit patterns for the populations used to set baseline expectations. Table 3 displays the average care day utilization during each two-year period by the population in care at the beginning of two years, and the population admitted during the first year. Since these patterns are associated with the particular case mix of each historical population, changes from year to year may not represent improvements in performance.

Table 2

Exit Patterns for Historical Populations Used to Estimate Discharge Rates

In-Care On...	Status as of two years after July 1 of each year		
	Percent Reunified	Percent Adopted	Total Permanent Family Exits
July 1, 1995	20%	17%	37%
July 1, 1996	20%	18%	38%
July 1, 1997	21%	18%	39%
July 1, 1998	23%	17%	40%
July 1, 1999	25%	16%	41%

Admitted During Year Beginning...	Status as of two years after July 1 of each year		
	Percent Reunified	Percent Adopted	Total Permanent Family Exits
July 1, 1995	38%	1%	39%
July 1, 1996	39%	0%	40%
July 1, 1997	40%	0%	40%
July 1, 1998	43%	1%	44%
July 1, 1999	44%	1%	45%

Table 3

Average Care Day Utilization for Historical Populations During Two-Year Period

In-Care On...	Average Care Days Used	Admitted During Year Beginning...	Average Care Days Used
July 1, 1995	535	July 1, 1995	340
July 1, 1996	530	July 1, 1996	346
July 1, 1997	526	July 1, 1997	340
July 1, 1998	517	July 1, 1998	337
July 1, 1999	499	July 1, 1999	327

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

To account for changes in case mix, similar sets of historical data were generated for each of the population groups shown in Table 1, and these figures were combined based on the current case mix of children in care on July 1, 2002. Given the mix of children in foster care on July 1, 2002 and historical length of stay performance, New York State would expect the following with this in-care population during the next two years:

- To keep this group of children in foster care for a total of 20,361,100 days during the next two years, an average of 508 days per child¹.
- To discharge a total of 38% of the in-care population to a permanent family during the next two years. (23% to reunification with family or relatives and 15% to adoption)

Given the mix of children expected to enter foster care from July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003 and historical length of stay performance, New York State would expect the following with this admission group:

- To keep this group of children in foster care for a total of 5,285,169 days during the next two years, an average of 335 days per child.
- To discharge a total of 42% of the admission population to a permanent family during the next two years. (41% to reunification and 1% to adoption)

For children in care on July 1, 2002, New York State will seek to increase the percentage of children that will exit foster care to reunification with family or relatives or to adoption within two years from 38% to 42% (a 10% increase), and to decrease the total number of days spent in foster care by at least 5%.

For children entering foster care from July 1, 2002-June 30, 2003, New York State will seek to increase the percentage of children that will exit foster care to reunification with family or relatives, or to adoption, from 42% to 46% (a 10% increase), and to decrease the total number of days spent in foster care by at least 5%.

To achieve the stated performance improvement goal, OCFS will use a similar performance model that uses county specific baselines that reflect each county's historical experience in moving children out of foster care and into permanent homes. These rates will be applied to a county's current caseload in each case mix group to generate estimates of what foster care utilization would be for each county during the performance period, assuming performance remains consistent with history. Some counties do not have enough children in some subgroups to generate a reliable estimate of the county's discharge performance. For these small counties, OCFS will use a system-wide baseline to provide some guidance for those counties to assess

¹ Because of the time it takes for New York State's foster care database to be updated, the number of children in care on July 1, 2002 will not be accurately recorded in CCRS until December 2002. For this reason, the care day figures are preliminary and will be updated during the next six months. However, the underlying performance expectations, based on past performance, will not change.

their performance. Once these data are assembled for individual counties, OCFS will work with each county to establish performance targets, adjusted for specific subpopulations.

OCFS will report statewide progress to the Federal government in six-month intervals, for a total of four reports during the evaluation period. Because OCFS' foster care information system is not current until six months after a given date, there will be a seven-month delay in reporting, allowing one month for OCFS to process the data. Thus, OCFS will make its first report for the period from July 1, 2002-December 31, 2002 by July 31, 2003. OCFS will make its final report on January 31, 2005. Each report will contain information on changes in care day utilization and changes in the proportion of children exiting to permanent families, as well as changes in the proportion exiting to reunification and adoption.

IV. NEW YORK'S STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES

Each of the twelve strategies contains a statement of its intended impact and a description of the key action steps that will be undertaken in order to achieve that impact. Benchmarks of progress are identified as are the methods that will be used to measure the achievement of those benchmarks. The geographic area targeted by the action steps is for the most part, statewide. This is not intended to indicate that all local departments of social services will engage in or benefit from every strategy, or engage in implementation at the same time or at the same level of intensity. Rather it is to denote that the steps have the potential to be undertaken or to benefit each district as is most appropriate to each district's performance and set of circumstances.

OCFS recognizes that it has the responsibility for PIP implementation and for reporting to ACF on progress made. Therefore, each Action Step identifies the organizations within OCFS who will be responsible for initiation and oversight of that step, although other offices within OCFS will of course contribute to each step's development and implementation. However, PIP implementation and program improvements will occur through a partnership with local departments of social services, the voluntary agencies with which they contract for services, state and local agencies who provide health, mental health, education and support services to our vulnerable children and families, the Native American tribes, the court system, foster and adoptive parents, families, youth and other child welfare stakeholders. Therefore, each Strategy denotes the partners that are most needed for successful implementation.

The following abbreviations will be used in this section of the PIP:

Division of Development and Prevention Services: DDPS
Strategic Planning and Policy Development: SPPD
Division of Legal Affairs: DLA
Division of Rehabilitative Services: DRS
New York City Regional Office: NYCRO
Bureau of Training: Bureau of Training
Office of Youth Development: Youth Development
Public Information Office: PIO
Division of Administration: DA

STRATEGY #1: SUPPORT FOR STRENGTHS BASED, FAMILY FOCUSED PRACTICE

New York will, through an integrated set of action steps, strengthen district and agency practice in promoting safety, permanency and well-being through: engaging parents, children and foster parents; enhancing family supports; strengthening the case planning and case review process; strengthening family visitation; promoting placement stability; and supporting the role of foster parents.

There are eight clusters of action steps that support this strategy: Enhancing Initial Engagement and Assessment; Family Conferencing and Early Engagement; Enhancing Family Supports; Strengthening Case Planning and Service Plan Review; Strengthening Family Visitation; Promoting Placement Stability and Child Well-Being; Supporting the Role of Foster Parents in Providing for Safety, Permanency and Well-Being; Enhancing Quality Assurance.

Implementation Partners: Local Departments of Social Services, Voluntary Agencies, Contract Training Providers, Office of Mental Health, Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Adoptive and Foster Parents, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

A. ENHANCING INITIAL ENGAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT FOR FAMILIES REPORTED TO THE STATE CENTRAL REGISTER TO REDUCE REPEAT INCIDENTS OF MALTREATMENT

Intended Impact: These action steps will reduce the incidence of repeat maltreatment by strengthening caseworkers' ability to initially engage families and identify the factors that cause a child to be unsafe or at risk of maltreatment, to make informed decisions as to whether to open a case for services, to identify services appropriate to control for safety or to reduce the risk of maltreatment and to determine if risk is sufficiently reduced to warrant case closing.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standard: Repeat Maltreatment

Case Review Items: 2 and 17

Action Step 1.1: OCFS will examine the definition that it uses to register calls to the State Central Register (SCR) as subsequent reports, i.e. reports of suspected recurrence of maltreatment, including court-ordered investigations. Areas such as profiles of families in which there is repeat maltreatment and alternative classifications will be examined with a focus on reducing unnecessary subsequent report processes and thereby enhancing the engagement and assessment processes with families in response to a CPS report.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Recommendations made by end of Quarter 3; decision as to a change in current classification by end of Quarter 3; change implementation plan developed

as warranted by decision recommendations – Quarter 4 and ongoing); timeframes and benchmarks TBD based on nature of recommendations.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA, CONNECTIONS

Action Step 1.2: In an effort to provide more effective and comprehensive assessments of risk, family strengths and family needs, and to support effective service planning, OCFS has initiated the process of developing a structured decision making model for child protective and child welfare cases. As a first step in this process, OCFS worked with the Children’s Research Center to develop the empirically based Risk Assessment Profile (RAP) that has recently been piloted in one upstate county and one NYC field office. The RAP structured decision making model will guide and support professional judgment during the risk assessment and service planning processes. .

- a) The evaluation report of the RAP pilot will be completed by Quarter 4.
- b) As a result of the evaluation, necessary modifications will be made to the risk assessment tool and additional sites for implementation of the RAP will be identified by Quarter 2. Regional meetings to introduce structured decision making models and the RAP will be conducted by the end of Quarter 4.
- c) An implementation and training plan to support expanded use of the RAP will be developed by Quarter 4.
- d) Additional structured decision making tools for assessment and service planning will be developed in conjunction with stakeholders via the development and implementation of our CONNECTIONS system – Quarters 4- 8.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See individual steps above.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, Bureau of Training, CONNECTIONS, DLA, NYCRO

Action Step 1.3: Provide training, in accordance with the OCFS 2002/2003 training plan, on the current risk and safety model to support staff’s accurate and thorough determinations of safety and risk until such time as RAP is implemented statewide.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Training is currently being delivered and will continue from Quarter 1 through statewide rollout of the RAP. Ten two-day sessions for CPS supervisors upstate will provide all upstate districts with a video on the fundamentals of safety and risk and with a guide for use of the video with staff. Training will also be provided to ACS CPS supervisors on the video and guide in accordance with a current training plan. The training contractor, on a quarterly basis, will supply measures of numbers of staff trained. The training contractor, on a quarterly basis, will supply the numbers of staff trained.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, DA, Bureau of Training

B. FAMILY CONFERENCING AND EARLY ENGAGEMENT

Intended Impact: This action step will result in an increase in the number of jurisdictions that use effective models of family group conferencing and in the institutionalization of successful models in jurisdictions currently initiating them. The increase in use of family group conferencing is intended to: increase the number of families who are actively involved in shaping their case plan; increase the involvement of family support systems in the implementation of the case plan; result in a greater investment by families in achieving the goals of the plan they established; all of which are geared towards a positive impact on permanency timeframes.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standards: Time to Reunification and Time to Adoption

Case Review Items: 16, 17, 18, 25, 23, 35, 36, and 37

Action Step 1.4: In order to increase the number of families who are engaged in a productive service relationship to meet the needs of their children, OCFS will review the effectiveness of various family group conferencing models and will promote utilization of the most effective models statewide.

- a. OCFS will review existing models of family group conferencing to evaluate their effectiveness, identify key components of effective models, identify the resources needed to implement these key components (Quarters 1-4) and develop a training and technical assistance plan to implement the successful components in targeted districts and agencies statewide (Quarters 5-8). Attention will be given to key times for conferencing – e.g. at initial placement, at the 30-day point, and the 6-month Service Plan Review.
- b. Continue to support the implementation and evaluation of Family Resolutions (FRP), and target to expand to 17, the number of FRP counties by Quarter 4.
- c. ACS will continue to support the 72-Hour Child Safety Conference process and the 30-Day Family Permanency Conference process as part of their efforts to establish a continuum of conferences at critical points throughout a family’s involvement with ACS (Quarters 1-8).

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

C. ENHANCING FAMILY SUPPORTS

Intended Impact: These action steps are designed to identify barriers that contribute to the current low rate of early paternal involvement in case planning and decision making; options for improving paternal involvement; and to determine the feasibility of developing a system of parent advisors. Greater parental involvement in case planning and implementation should improve permanency and well-being outcomes.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standards: Time to Reunification, Time to Adoption

Case Review Items: 9, 28, 16, 17, 18, and 25

Action Step 1.5: Provide additional assistance to districts and voluntary agencies regarding identifying fathers and putative fathers and involving them in plans to promote the permanency and well-being of their children. OCFS will work with local districts to identify what barriers preclude them from using services to locate fathers, including but not limited to, linking CCRS, CONNECTIONS and Parent Locator Service and Internet person searches. OCFS will also provide technical assistance to the local district to overcome the barriers. Policy and practice guidance regarding concurrent planning, including fathers, is being addressed in Action Step 2.1.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Assessment of barriers beginning Quarter 3 and ending Quarter 4; technical assistance in Quarters 5 and 6.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 1.6: OCFS will explore a broader and system-wide use of parent advisors who, through their experience as child welfare system consumers, provide additional support to birth families in identifying service needs and accessing appropriate services to meet their needs and the needs of their children.

- a. OCFS will establish a workgroup to explore the use of parent advisors. A number of agencies already have parent/advisor/peer counselors. OCFS will identify their key components and strategies, and then disseminate guidance to districts and agencies.
- b. OCFS will consult with the Office of Mental Health, which has already developed a fully realized system of recruiting, paying, training and supporting parent advisors and determine the feasibility of using portions of their model in the child welfare field.
- c. OCFS will develop a long-term agenda regarding parent advisors based on experience to date.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Workgroup established by Quarter 4; consultation with OMH by Quarter 5; determine the feasibility of replicating parent advisor model by Quarter 7.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

D. STRENGTHENING CASE PLANNING AND SERVICE PLAN REVIEW PROCESSES

Intended Impact: Effective, timely, parent-involved case plans and quality permanency reviews and decisions, leading to improved timeframes for the achievement of permanency and enhanced child well being.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standards: Time to Reunification, Time to Adoption, Stability of Placement

Case Review Items: 6 – 10, 27, 28, 13, 16, 17, 18, 25, and 23

Action Step 1.7: OCFS will undertake an interrelated set of action steps to reinforce the purpose of, and to improve the conduct of and effectiveness of the case planning and service plan review processes.

- a. Establish a work group to review the process and expected outcomes of case planning and service plan reviews. (Quarter 1)
- b. Secure technical assistance days for assistance from the National Association of Foster Care Reviewers to help workgroup assess current practices and clarify intent of case planning and service plan review processes. (Quarter 1)
- c. Identify best practices regarding the role of workers, supervisors, family members, and other key participants in the case planning process. (Quarters 2 and 3)
- d. OCFS will review its current policy and, as appropriate, disseminate clarifying practice guidance on this process. (Quarters 4 and 5)
- e. OCFS will provide technical assistance to districts and agencies regarding the policy and practice guidelines developed in Action Step 1.7d, including training on facilitation skills for targeted individuals within selected districts (as available through the OCFS Training Plan). (Quarter 5 and ongoing)
- f. OCFS will monitor implementation of the practice guidelines. (Quarter 5 and ongoing)
- g. OCFS will identify necessary supports in the CONNECTIONS system for a strengthened Case Planning/Service Plan Review process. Complete initial design requests by (Quarter 1); implementation April 2003; based on the practice paper developed in Action Step 1.7d above, make recommendations for design changes. (Quarter 5 and ongoing)

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, and Bureau of Training

E. STRENGTHENING FAMILY VISITATION (WITH PARENTS AND SIBLINGS IN CARE)

Intended Impact: Caseworkers, Supervisors and Managers will have a clearer understanding of the relationship between visitation and the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being, the opportunity to conduct self-assessments of current practice against best practice standards and models, and to be supported in making changes as warranted.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standards: Time to Reunification

Case Review Items: 13, 16

Action Step 1.8: With input from stakeholders, OCFS will identify effective visitation practices and a preferred visitation model. OCFS will ascertain barriers to visitation, lessons learned from district, agency and national visitation models, and strategies for successfully implementing a model to improve visitation practices.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Identify fully-implemented models in New York State and nationally, and lessons learned (Quarter 1 and 2); Identify successful implementation strategies (end of Quarter 3); Develop Practice Guidance paper (end of Quarter 4); Implement visitation model in select counties (end of Quarter 5) **OCFS Responsible**

Entities: DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 1.9: OCFS will develop a self-assessment tool (in conjunction with Action Step 1.20) that will be available to local districts to help in identifying steps to improve visitation practices, areas needing technical assistance, and successful practices for replication and sharing.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Development and distribution of self-assessment instrument during Quarter 4.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

Action Step 1.10: Identify necessary supports in the CONNECTIONS system for a strengthened visitation component in the Case Plan and make appropriate design change requests.

Geographic Area: Statewide.

Benchmarks and Measures: Complete initial design requests (by Quarter 1); implementation April 2003; based on the practice paper developed in Action Step 1.8, make recommendations for design changes (Quarter 5 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: CONNECTIONS Case Management Workgroup

F. PROMOTING PLACEMENT STABILITY AND CHILD WELL-BEING THROUGH IMPROVED ASSESSMENTS OF CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Intended Impact: New tools will be available for caseworkers and foster parents to increase awareness of children's health and mental health needs, support more accurate and timely assessments and referrals to appropriate services, thus promoting children's well-being, the safety and stability of their placements and permanency outcome achievement.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standards: Maltreatment in Foster Care, Time to Reunification, Time to Adoption, Stability of Placement

Case Review Items: 6, 9, 16, 17, and 23

Action Step 1.11: Build upon current processes to assess each child upon entering foster care for behavioral and mental health needs.

- a. Continue the work of the Foster Care/Medicaid Workgroup. Evaluate the recommendations of the workgroup and develop an implementation plan for the approved recommendations.
- b. Complete the design of the child-specific assessment including behavioral and mental health needs for the family assessment component of CONNECTIONS. Enhance and increase the focus and attention to the assessment of behavioral and mental health needs.
- c. Develop a training plan, including training modalities, for teaching the practice dimensions of the new family assessment component and provision of training to the field based on the plan, to precede the rollout of the new CONNECTIONS functionality.
- d. Support dissemination of screening/assessment tools for foster parents to assist them in identifying behaviors that might require a mental or physical health evaluation.
- e. Continue the collaboration of OCFS with the State Department of Health Early Intervention (EI) Program. Cross-training for local districts and local EI providers was conducted during 2001. OCFS/DOH will continue to develop a protocol for referring cases of children in the child welfare system aged 0-3 years to the EI program for developmental assessments and appropriate services. The finalized protocol will be disseminated to local agencies, and a joint training teleconference will be broadcast.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures:

Step a:

Workgroup meetings, evaluation of priorities and activities, analysis of Medicaid/Foster Care data, and development of recommendations for new mental health service provision (Quarter 1).

Review of MA eligibility process for children in foster care (Quarter 2)

Development of health procedures manual for children in foster care (Quarter 4)

Step b:

CONNECTIONS design completed (by Quarter 1); planning regional meetings and holding regional meeting (Quarters 2-3); pilot of new assessment and service planning – (Quarters 4-5); statewide implementation of assessment and service planning (Quarter 5 and ongoing).

Step c:

Training Plan, including selected modalities – (Quarter 1); Curriculum development (Quarters 2-3); curriculum review (Quarters 3-4); curriculum revisions and training pilot (Quarters 4-5); statewide training (Quarter 5 and ongoing); technical assistance (Quarter 5 and ongoing).

Step d:

Review of tools and distribution to date (Quarter 2); disseminate tools as appropriate and as funds are identified (Quarter 4).

Step e:

Completion of EI protocol and training by (Quarter 4).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, Bureau of Training, CONNECTIONS, DLA

G. SUPPORTING THE ROLE OF FOSTER PARENTS IN PROMOTING SAFETY, PERMANENCY AND WELL-BEING

Intended Impact: A set of supports will be identified that will enhance the ability of foster parents, including kinship foster parents, to provide safe, stable, permanency focused placements.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps:

National Standards: Time to Reunification, Time to Adoption, Maltreatment in Foster Care, Stability of Placement

Case Review Items: 6, 23

Action Step 1.12: Before the number of moves children experience while in foster care can be reduced, an enhanced understanding of the reasons for these moves is needed. An understanding of the reasons foster parents request that children in their homes be replaced is needed so that strategies to reduce these requests can be developed. To enhance the understanding of the reasons for moves in placement, OCFS will develop a definition of moves congruent with the federal definition and a data source to measure moves and determine whether New York State data adequately reflects actual moves. The reasons for moves will be analyzed and, depending upon the findings, next steps will be determined and submitted as an amendment to the PIP.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Definition of moves (by Quarter 1); analyze reasons for moves and make any needed amendments to the PIP (Quarters 2-3).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 1.13: The role of foster parents is important in helping children achieve timely permanency. Foster parents need support from caseworkers and others to be partners in these efforts and to meet the developmental needs of the children in their care. OCFS will assess the regulatory and practice structure that establishes the current casework contact requirements with children in foster care, birth parents, and foster parents to determine if this structure should be modified to better support foster parents in helping to achieve permanency outcomes.

- a. OCFS will review its policy and regulations to identify whether there is a need for revisions in the area of casework contacts. Based on the outcome of this review, policies and/or regulations will be revised as appropriate. If revisions are made, OCFS will develop and disseminate practice guidance regarding casework contacts with children in foster care, birth parents and foster care providers to assist caseworkers to maintain ongoing quality supervision, to provide needed timely supports, and to identify the risk of placement disruptions for children and their caregivers.
- b. OCFS will continue to monitor compliance with casework contact standards through ongoing monitoring activities.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Assess the regulatory structure and policies by the end of (Quarter 2); develop and disseminate practice guidelines (Quarters 3-4); monitor compliance (Quarter 5 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA

Action Step 1.14: Working with university training partners and New York Associations of Foster Parents and Adoptive Parents, OCFS will assess the unmet needs of foster parents through a data collection process to be determined. Data will be gathered and analyzed. Recommendations will be made for next steps with attention paid to ways to reduce barriers to foster parents accessing needed services, and helping foster parents advocate for their own needs.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Data collection process identified (during Quarter 3); data collected (during Quarters 4-5); data analyzed and recommendations made (by end of Quarters 6-7).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

Action Step 1.15: OCFS will continue to develop and distribute a model foster parent manual to local districts and voluntary agencies, which will clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Clarity of role, information on rights, responsibilities and resources should support foster parent retention, placement stability, and foster parents' ability to support the achievement of permanency outcomes. Consultation will be sought from foster parents, foster parent trainers and agency staff regarding the development of the manual.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Complete (by end of Quarter 2); Distribute Manual (by Quarter 3).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training, DLA

Action Step 1.16: OCFS, in conjunction with its university training partners, will develop a foster parent training and support needs assessment instrument to be distributed to districts and agencies. This self-assessment instrument will examine agency and foster parent strengths and needs in the following areas: providing for stability in placement, minimizing the incidences of abuse and maltreatment in care, and supporting foster parents and caseworkers in working in a concurrent planning model. The completed needs assessment will be reviewed by the university trainers. They will provide training and technical assistance, within the resources available through the OCFS Training Plan, to districts and agencies to address the needs identified.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Initial meeting with training partners (in Quarter 1); gather input from foster parents, local districts and foster care agencies (by Quarter 2); development and testing of instrument (during Quarters 3-4); distribute instrument (in Quarter 5); follow up technical assistance (Quarter 5 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training

Action Step 1.17: OCFS will continue to support shared parenting models that promote relationships between foster and birth parents. Support will be provided through the following efforts (subject to the availability of funds in SFYs 02-04):

- a. Through release of a RFP, OCFS will seek to support selected agencies in implementing shared parenting models; and
- b. Continue support for ACS' Family-to-Family Model through training on shared parenting.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Release RFP (by end of Quarter 2); select agencies to follow; continue support for ACS's shared parenting training (through Quarter 4); reevaluate the appropriateness of continued training support to ACS (in Quarter 5).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, NYCRO, SPPD

H. ENHANCING QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENTS IN PRACTICE

Intended Impact: OCFS, districts and agencies will have a set of data and tools that will assist them in assessing performance in the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of practice against best practice standards.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Set of Action Steps: All National Standards and Items

Action Step 1.18: OCFS will develop district specific data profiles on performance on the National Standards and other PIP-related outcome areas for districts with the largest number of children in foster care, along with technical assistance on the use of this data for charting performance. Annual updates will be provided.

Geographic Area: Basic profiles will be distributed statewide. Data packages and TA will be provided to districts that reach a threshold of foster care population size that is to be determined.

Benchmarks and Measures: Data profiles developed, (Quarter 1). Data packages developed, distributed to large districts, (Quarter 2). Technical assistance provided, (Quarter 2 and ongoing) as needed. Semi-annual updates provided (between Quarters 5-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: SPPD, DDPS, NYCRO

Action Step 1.19: OCFS will continue to review and revise current instruments to capture qualitative dimensions around assessment, engagement and strengths-based, family focused practice. These revised instruments and recommended processes, which may include Quality Service Review (QSR) and ACS's multi-level case review of CPS investigations and assessments, may be used both by OCFS for monitoring purposes and by districts and agencies for self-assessment.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Review of current tools and processes (Quarters 1-2); revisions as necessary (by end of Quarter 3); tools pilot tested and re-revised (by end of Quarter 4). ACS will provide data quarterly on numbers of cases reviewed through its multi-level review process, themes identified, and steps taken to address areas needing improvement(in Quarter 1 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, NYCRO

Action Step 1.20: Distribute revised tool(s) to districts and agencies for use in self-assessment. OCFS will collaborate with voluntary agencies and local districts on their

implementation of the instruments, their ability to compile results and analyze findings. OCFS will provide additional technical assistance as needed.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: OCFS will distribute revised tool(s) (in Quarter 5); the remainder of the activities will begin (in Quarter 5 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, NYCRO

STRATEGY #2: CONCURRENT PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION

New York will articulate a clear message to all participants and stakeholders in the child welfare system as to the role, values, philosophy and practice of concurrent planning in permanency focused child welfare practice. OCFS will support the development and integration into practice of the values and behaviors of concurrent planning.

Intended Impact: Local districts, voluntary agencies, and stakeholders, including the Family Court, will utilize concurrent planning as an effective and valid strategy for the achievement of timely permanency for many children. Implementation of this strategy and actions steps will build commitment to the implementation of concurrent planning and build the capacity of individual participants in the child welfare system to engage in concurrent planning and thereby shorten the time children spend in foster care. In addition, effective use of concurrent planning enhances a child's sense of emotional security and well-being.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy:

National Standards: Time to Reunification and Time to Adoption

Case Review Items: 7 and 9.

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, Contract Training Providers, Office of Court Administration, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 2.1: OCFS will review its current regulations and written materials regarding concurrent planning. In consultation with experts and districts with concurrent planning initiatives, OCFS will conduct a statewide readiness assessment regarding the implementation of concurrent planning. A tool will be developed with which to conduct the assessment, and it will be used by Regional Offices with a sample of local districts. The results of the assessment will be analyzed and used to develop practice guidelines and related tools, as stated in action step 2.2 below.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Review current policies (Quarters 1 – 2); develop readiness assessment tool, conduct a readiness assessment in selected districts and analyze the results of the readiness assessment (Quarters 3 – 4);

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 2.2: OCFS will compare the results of the readiness assessment with current policies and practices and modify the policies and practice guidelines as appropriate to support more widespread implementation of concurrent planning. These modified policies and practices will be distributed to the field and tools will be developed to support districts and agencies in the implementation of concurrent planning.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Review, update and distribute policy and practice guidelines (during Quarters 3 – 5); develop tools to support implementation of concurrent planning (Quarters 3 – 5); **OCFS Responsible Entities:** DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 2.3: Work with training contractors to revise child welfare training curricula to increase local district, voluntary agency, foster parent and stakeholder understanding of, and ability to implement and promote, concurrent planning.

- a. Work with OCFS training providers to review current outcome based training curricula and revise as needed to support the practice guidelines developed in Action Step 2.2. (Quarters 2 and 3)
- b. Work with training contractors to modify other training curricula, as appropriate, to include concurrent planning (Quarters 3 – 8).
- c. Provide training on concurrent planning to Family Court judges, court attorneys and law guardians in accordance with the plan developed in Action Step 2.2c. (Quarters 3-4)
- d. Develop and distribute quality assurance tools that will allow OCFS, local districts and voluntary agency staff to review cases to assess the effectiveness of concurrent planning and to provide feedback to staff and follow up technical assistance; assess the use and effectiveness of the tools(Quarters 3 - 8)

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA, NYCRO

Action Step 2.4: OCFS will continue to strengthen the Case Plan to support concurrent planning, through support for decision-making, documentation of concurrent planning activities, and supervisory oversight.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: CONNECTIONS Case Management Phase 1 development will support concurrent planning using structured decision making tools, and supervisory approvals (in Quarter 1); measure is completion and sign off of requirements document by Policy and Program (Quarter 1). Based on the practice paper developed in Action Step 2.1, identify necessary supports in the CONNECTIONS system for a strengthened Case Plan that supports concurrent planning and make appropriate design change requests (Quarter 3).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD CONNECTIONS Case Management Design, Bureau of Training

Action Step 2.5: OCFS will continue to support local concurrent planning initiatives, using the knowledge gained from these initiatives to inform statewide efforts to promote its use. OCFS will collect information from OCFS Regional Offices regarding concurrent planning initiatives to identify areas of success and make this information available to other localities

developing concurrent planning initiatives. Such initiatives may include, but not be limited to the following:

- ACS has a concurrent planning initiative that is in the early stages of development. Their plan is to meet with the Court to discuss concurrent planning as it relates to CFSR issues. They intend to develop protocols in this regard and are considering beginning with a focus on infants.
- Continuation of the Concurrent Planning Project funded by a grant from HHS. The project is primarily to work with OCFS Regional Office to implement concurrent planning in Onondaga County and the rest of the counties in Region 3. This work will inform our statewide implementation efforts as we learn what training and technical assistance models are most effective, as well as identify policy and procedure issues to be addressed on both the state and local level. Consultants are working with the OCFS Regional Office in Region 3 to continue implementation in one district and begin implementation in two others. This implementation includes the completion of a readiness assessment, processing the results with the district, and then development of a workplan. Possible outcome measures for this project include: number of moves, length of stay, and time to adoption.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Continue to support concurrent planning initiatives (Quarters 1-8); collect information on concurrent planning initiatives (Quarters 5-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, NYCRO

STRATEGY #3: SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN CONGREGATE CARE

New York will undertake a set of actions that will enhance the ability of residential programs to provide programming and supervision for children and youth, providing for their safety, development and treatment needs.

Intended Impact: The actions below will improve the well-being of children in congregate care, and are also intended to reduce the incidence of maltreatment of children in congregate care. The goal of improving quality and numbers of staff in agencies is to provide better supervision and staff interactions with youth, leading to fewer instances of crisis intervention and physical restraint. Better programming will better engage youth in care and decrease behaviors that are likely to lead to physical intervention.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy:

National Standards: Maltreatment in Foster Care

Case Review Item: 23

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, Contract Training Providers, Administration for Children and Families, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 3.1: OCFS will, in cooperation with local districts, agencies and stakeholders, work to improve the quality of child care staff in congregate care.

- a. The Maximum State Aid Rate Workgroup will continue to examine New York State's current rate-setting methodology and its impact on staffing levels in congregate care facilities. Based on this examination, the Workgroup will make recommendations for changes to the rate-setting methodology, some of which may impact on the resources available for child care staff salaries as well as staffing levels.
- b. Work through a contractor to deliver training in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) (designed to teach crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques) to voluntary agency child care staff and local district group home staff. Ten 5-day train-the-trainer sessions (with a maximum of 17 trainees per session) and 16 two-day training update sessions (with a maximum of 20 trainees per session) will be held during calendar year 2003. (Quarters 1-4)
- c. A new 1-day training on single-person restraint techniques will be developed and delivered during calendar year 2003. This will be a train-the-trainer curriculum with a minimum of five offerings (maximum of 20 trainees per session) during 2003. (Curriculum development Quarters 1-2; deliver the training Quarters 3-4)
- d. Work through a contractor to design and implement an Institutional Abuse Prevention Training curriculum and technical assistance plan targeted for executive directors and administrative levels of staff in congregate care facilities, including their role in prevention. This Violence Prevention/Abuse Reduction Training project will provide a total of 100 days to be divided between formal training sessions and on-site technical assistance days for specific agencies/districts. There will be approximately 600 trainees/recipients of technical assistance through this project during calendar year 2003. (Deliver training Quarters 2-4)

- e. Training will be provided for State Institutional Abuse staff during calendar year 2003, on topics relevant to the prevention and investigation of institutional abuse. Twenty-five days of training with approximately 18 State staff per session will be delivered. (Deliver training Quarters 2-4)

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks: a. MSAR workgroup will send final recommendations (Quarter 1), and if approved, a budget initiative for SFY 2003-04 will be developed; implementation dependent on SFY 2003/2004 budget (Quarter 2); **b – e. See above.** .

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA, DA, NYCRO

Action Step 3.2: OCFS will consult with experts, ACS and current effective programs in New York State to identify effective models of programming for youth in congregate care, including recreation and effective models of crisis management and behavioral management for staff. Identified models, or components of effective models, will be shared with the field.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks: Models will be identified (Quarters 1-4); develop plan for sharing models with field (Quarter 5); plan implementation (Quarters 5-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA, NYCRO, Youth Development, DRS

Action Step 3.3: OCFS will work to identify ways to better support with funding the critical components of successful Independent Living programs for youth in congregate care, including education/employment, housing, living skills and services, and mentoring. In addition to the very limited federal funding available through the Independent Living program, OCFS will explore federal funding options.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks: Meetings to begin (in Quarter 3 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DA, DLA, NYCRO

STRATEGY #4: PERMANENCY OPTIONS

New York will undertake a set of actions to review current permanency goals; the legislative and regulatory structure that supports them; assess their functionality in promoting the achievement of safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth; and advocate for the implementation of such changes as warranted by the results of the review. New York will support and expand the number of permanency mediation programs in the State.

Intended Impact: OCFS will propose changes in the legislative and regulatory structure that will shorten the time children spend in foster care, whether the children’s goals are return to their parents, or to find permanency through adoption. Permanency mediation projects will be expanded to additional sites in the State to shorten lengths of stay for children in foster care and resolve issues among family members, caseworkers, and other relevant parties outside of the formal court process.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy:

National Standards: Time to Reunification and Time to Adoption

Case Review Items: 7, 9, 27 and 28

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, Office of Court Administration, Legislature, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 4.1: OCFS will prepare and submit legislation to:

- a) Establish a new Child Welfare Financing system to promote a reduction in the use of foster care placements by providing financing that encourages the provision of preventive, independent living, adoption and aftercare services. This legislation was enacted in the 2002 legislative season.
- b) Amend appropriate laws to provide the family court with continuing jurisdiction over children placed in foster care in Article 10 Child Protective proceedings or voluntarily placed in foster care. This will shorten court process time since personal jurisdiction over the respondents would be established at the onset of the proceedings and would not need to be repeatedly re-established for the court to review progress toward permanency. This proposal would also allow the court to more closely monitor the family’s progress toward return home, the local district’s provision of services, and if appropriate, progress toward termination of parental rights and adoption through the recommended increase in the frequency of permanency hearings.
- c) Expand the definition of “Aggravated Circumstances” from its current limited application to where a child has been severely or repeatedly abused to include application to a child returned home following placement in foster care in a child protective proceeding and subsequently abused; where a child is placed in foster care more than two times under Article 10; or where the parent of a child has repeatedly refused appropriate services necessary to prepare for the return home of the child in foster care offered or arranged by

a local district or ordered by a court; or where a court has determined an infant under the age of twelve months was abandoned by the parent.

- d) Amend termination of parental rights law to allow the court to immediately go forward with a proceeding to terminate parental rights after a finding of aggravated circumstances.
- e) Where termination of parental rights is not an option in an Article 10 proceeding due to the reluctance of a kinship caretaker to pursue adoption, allow kinship guardianship to be a more permanent option.
- f) For abandoned infants under the age of one year, reduce the time the infant must spend in foster care before a petition to terminate parental rights may be filed from 6 months to 60 days.
- g) Amend appropriate laws to provide limited, explicit enforcement procedures regarding conditional surrenders and open adoption agreements to increase the use of these means to facilitate the adoption of children.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: OCFS will continue to promote, support and work with the Legislature to achieve passage. The legislative session generally ends in early summer. Those bills that do not pass in this session will be considered for resubmission in future sessions.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DLA

Action Step 4.2: For those initiatives that were enacted in the 2002 legislative season, or become law in the 2003 legislative session, OCFS will work with the local districts, voluntary agencies, and the Office of Court Administration to take steps necessary to implement the provisions of the laws. These steps will include development of regulatory amendments, creation of good practice guidelines, identification of funding issues, creation and provision of training to districts and agencies, and creation of necessary forms.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Actual time frames will be dependent on effective date of laws and complexity of implementation (Quarters 2-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA, NYCRO

Action Step 4.3: OCFS will recommend modification of regulatory language to:

- a. Implement provisions to improve independent living services. (With consultation from providers, local districts and other experts, develop proposed regulatory amendments for informal review by stakeholders, (Quarter 1). Finalize proposed regulations and submit for publication, (Quarter 3). File regulations (in Quarter 4 at the earliest.)

- b. Revise the regulatory standards for when a person, who has adopted a child with subsidy, would be referred to the child support enforcement unit of a social services district if the child requires placement into foster care. The revisions would eliminate referral where the parent is working towards reunification of the child with the parent and the parent either agrees to transfer the full amount of the subsidy to the social services district which is providing foster care or agrees to a reduction of the subsidy amount in lieu of payment towards the cost of foster care. (Draft regulation – completed. Complete internal review and submit for publication in Quarter 2. File regulations in Quarter 4.)
- c. Enable an otherwise eligible child to qualify for adoption subsidy if the child has been in care with the same foster parents for 12 months or more prior to the signing of the adoption placement agreement, and has developed a strong attachment to the foster parent. (Submit for publication – **completed**. File regulation in Quarter 3.)
- d. Reference concurrent planning as an acceptable practice to be used by local districts. (Develop regulation at the appropriate time based on status of the action steps in the Concurrent Planning strategy in this Plan; by the end of Quarter 4.)

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA

Action Step 4.4: Permanency Mediation: Working with the Office of Court Administration, local districts, and other key stakeholders, New York will support and expand the number of localities with permanency mediation initiatives. The relatively new use of mediation in child welfare is a promising practice that supports family involvement in planning for their children and has been shown to reduce lengths of stay for children in foster care.

- a) New York will research existing mediation models and help inform the field about these models. (end of Quarter 1)
- b) New York will identify first year funding for new mediation initiatives and support a minimum of three permanency mediation pilot sites in the first year of the PIP. Additional sites are dependent upon availability of funding and readiness of districts and courts. (Work to begin Quarter 1; three sites identified by Quarter 2 and operational by the end of Quarter 4)
- c) New York will participate in the evaluation of the pilot sites to assess the effectiveness of the mediation initiatives in achieving CFSR-related outcomes. (Quarters 4-8)

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA

STRATEGY #5: ADOLESCENT SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

New York will undertake an integrated set of actions to provide adolescents in foster care with the supports needed to enable their development into healthy, functional citizens with permanent attachments to supportive adults, families and communities.

As described in our Statewide Assessment, major efforts in 2000-2001 were made to fully implement the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (CFCIP). In preparation for implementing the provisions of the CFCIP into the program design, the Office reviewed the program requirements for needed revisions. In addition, through a combination of written surveys and focus groups, the Office sought input from stakeholders. The results of this input were documented in the Statewide Assessment, and were used to develop this strategy and the action steps listed below.

Intended Impact: Through the review of regulations, policies, current practices and alternative program models, OCFS will provide guidance to local districts and agencies on effective, permanency focused service strategies for adolescents. Accompanied by enhanced monitoring and assessment of service provision, this policy and practice guidance will result in an increase in the number of adolescents in care that receive Independent Living (IL) services, an increase in the number of youth and their families participating in case planning, and an increase in the number of youth for whom the option of adoption is explored and, as appropriate, re-explored over time.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy:

Case Review Items: 7, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17, and 18

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, Foster Care Youth, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 5.1: OCFS will establish a workgroup including local districts, voluntary agencies and possibly foster care youth to: identify family centered strategies for adolescents; review model programs, policy and practice frameworks; and review the current regulatory and practice framework for supporting adolescents to independence.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Formation of workgroup and meetings with held (during Quarter 1); completed review of current policies, practices and model programs (during Quarters 2 and 3); recommendations on future actions, based on the outcome of Action Step 3.3, (during Quarters 4-5).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, Bureau of Training, DLA, NYCRO

Action Step 5.2: OCFS will explore possible regulatory changes so that all youth in foster care age 14 and older would receive required independent living services, regardless of

their permanency goal. OCFS will explore the possibility for regulatory changes so that in situations where a youth age 14 or older does not initially consent to adoption, the district or agency continues to pursue permanency for that youth. The continued pursuit of permanency for these youth would likely include continued exploration of the option of adoption, and/or promotion of communication and strengthened relationships between the youth, his or her family, extended family and support network.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Completion of regulatory review (by Quarter 1); recommendations for changes in Independent Living Goal (During Quarters 4-5); next steps dependent upon recommendations (Quarters 3-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA

Action Step 5.3: OCFS, with input from stakeholders, will develop a policy paper and set of practice guidelines that will assist districts and agencies in strengthening services to adolescents and improving their achievement of permanency. OCFS will disseminate the policy and practice guidelines, incorporate those expectations and practice strategies in its training curricula and provide follow up technical assistance through its regional offices and training providers as needed.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Paper developed (Quarters 4-5); disseminate (Quarter 6); follow-up training and technical assistance (Quarters 7 – 8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, Bureau of Training, DLA

Action Step 5.4: Develop a strategy to monitor Independent Living services and outcomes. As part of this action step, assess current monitoring tools and develop new ones, if needed, in order to monitor the amount and quality of Independent Living services provided to all adolescents; the level of youth involvement in the development, implementation and evaluation of their case plan; and the level of involvement of the youths, parents, extended family or other supportive adult in plan development, implementation and evaluation. The achievement of the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being will be assessed and data collected through these assessments will be used to establish a baseline against which to measure improvement in these areas.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Review of current tools completed (Quarter 3); development and piloting of new tools completed (Quarters 4-5).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

Action Step 5.5: Monitor the provision of Independent Living Services to all adolescents and the status of their outcome achievement according to the strategy and tools developed in Step # 5.4.

Geographic area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: The findings to be produced by the tools will determine what type of data will be used to measure the improvements in IL practice and to track improvements. Some data will be reported in terms of the percentage of cases where elements of practice were found to be satisfactory. Data provided by contract agencies to ACS in NYC provides measures on youth involvement and the provision of services. Monitoring (Quarters 7-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

STRATEGY #6: DEVELOPMENT AND PILOTING OF A DIFFERENTIATED PROTECTIVE SERVICES RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD MALTREATMENT

New York will explore the testing of a differentiated response to allegations of child maltreatment in order to better engage families who may be neglecting their children to enter service relationships in a non-adversarial manner and to improve community responsiveness to child protective services issues.

Intended Impact: As a result of this strategy, families who may be neglecting their children will be more likely to engage in needed services.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Strategy:

National Standards: Reduce Repeat Maltreatment

Case Review Items: 17 and 18

Implementation Partners: Local District, Legislature, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 6.1: OCFS will provide technical assistance to local districts interested in implementing the components of a dual track, “family friendly” CPS system that will improve community responsiveness to child protective services issues and can be put in place without legislative changes.

Geographic Area: In self-selected local districts

Benchmarks and Measures: OCFS will identify those districts interested in implementing a non-legislative dual track system through ongoing monitoring and technical assistance efforts. (Quarters 1-8) Technical assistance will be provided as appropriate to the individual district’s needs (Quarters 1-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: SPPD, DDPS, DLA

STRATEGY #7: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT-STAFF RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND DEVELOPMENT

New York will undertake a set of actions designed to increase the stability of the child welfare workforce and to support the continuous development of the ability of that workforce to achieve child welfare outcomes.

Intended Impact: To provide districts and agencies with information and strategies to assist them to: reduce the rate of staff turnover, assist in the recruitment of qualified staff, and to have a variety of methods in place to support caseworker and supervisor development, especially in the voluntary agency workforce. A stable and skilled workforce is a prerequisite to the accurate assessment of family functioning and needs, the development and implementation of targeted service plans that support safety, the achievement of rapid permanency, and child well-being.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy:

Case Review Items: 2, 6, 7, 8, 10,13, 16, 18, 23, and 27

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, NY’s Schools of Social Work, COFCCA, Contract Training Providers, Department of Labor, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 7.1: Continue to contract with a consortium of New York’s Schools of Social Work, pending availability of funding and the willingness of New York’s Schools of Social Work, to have them:

- a) Conduct Regional Initiatives, which may include:
 - Offer of tuition for workers to attend MSW or BSW courses.
 - Establishment of curriculum Partnerships with local graduate and undergraduate schools to offer courses to enhance workers’ skills and positive client outcomes.
 - Increase in public sector field placements and internships to introduce graduate and undergraduate social work students to public sector practice opportunities.
 - Funding of MSW field instructors to support field internships in districts that are attempting to build a professional workforce.
- b) Conduct Distance Learning
 - Offer two courses using distance technologies to facilitate access for rural districts.
- c) Conduct research initiatives to determine if higher educational opportunities improve social work practice in local districts as follows:
 - Identify current evidence based child welfare practices, which student units can implement during internships.
 - Host a conference for student interns, task supervisors from local districts, and MSW supervisors to present evidence based child welfare practice.

- Share evidence based practice strategies in child welfare units and evaluate their effectiveness with families and children.
 - Identify and evaluate pathways from social work curriculum to practice behaviors in child welfare.
 - Follow up evaluation of workers who complete their MSW and return to public sector practice. Identify current and desired career paths, and models to be considered by unions and local districts.
- d) Caseworker Video
- Produce a short video, illustrating the rewards, tasks and challenges of the caseworker role to use in recruitment of casework staff and as an educational public information tool.
- e) Workforce Retention Study: Staff from the consortium will conduct a workforce retention study.
- 14 local districts have agreed to participate in the workforce retention study to focus on the factors that influence workers and supervisors in child welfare to stay in public sector practice.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks & Measure:

a) and b): Activities occur in Quarter 1, and ongoing, in accordance with regional plans to be developed. Quarterly reports on activities will be submitted to OCFS.

c): Quarterly reports in accordance with a work plan to be developed with participating Schools; (Quarter 1).

d): Video production work plan; (beginning Quarter 1).

e): A pilot study was completed on January 4, 2002. The project is currently in the data gathering stage. Final summary report is scheduled for July 2002 after the data is analyzed. Develop responses to implement recommendations from the turnover study; (Quarters 1-8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training

Action Step 7.2: The Maximum State Aid Rate Workgroup will continue to research current methodologies for reimbursing staffing costs in voluntary child care agencies in order to support enhanced funding for voluntary agency childcare and social work staff. Workgroup will make final recommendations to relevant parties (i.e. Legislature, the Governor's Office, Division of the Budget) regarding changes to the maximum state aid rate.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Send final recommendations (Quarter 1); if approved, a budget initiative will be developed for SFY 2003/2004. Recommendations will be implemented (by the end of Quarter 2).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS SPPD, DLA, DA

Action Step 7.3: OCFS will develop strategies to better understand workforce issues such as recruitment, managing and minimizing turnover, creating a supportive work environment, increasing caseworker satisfaction and to address those issues. Focus will be on county-administered states with a large contract provider sector.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: (Quarters 1-8); by end of Quarter 2 receive information from Centers on best practice models regarding recruitment and retention.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training

Action Step 7.4: Increase the accessibility of child welfare training to staff who, due to location or job demands, cannot participate in traditional classroom training.

- a. Convene the Outcome-based Training Advisory Training Work Group.
- b. Continue our work with ACS to build their capacity to deliver common-core training to voluntary agencies serving New York City.
- c. Continue discussions with Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), upstate voluntary agencies, and all local districts excluding New York City regarding developing an alternative method to deliver outcome-based training.
- d. Explore the use of IV-E funds to support training for casework staff and provide salaried support during traineeship.

Geographic: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures:

- a): Held (Quarter 1); minutes of advisory group
- b): Development of an implementation plan and quarterly assessments (Quarters 1 – 8)
- c): Meeting minutes and the 2003 training plan (Quarter 1 and on-going)
- d): Obtain approval or non-approval (Quarter 1 until resolved)

OCFS Responsible Entities: Bureau of Training, DDPS (a.-c.); DLA, DA (d)

Action Step 7.5: Explore OCFS' capacity to use the Intranet and Internet to exchange information on effective program and practice models, disseminate research findings, use of the Intranet and Internet to deliver information and training to local districts and agencies.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Begin in 3rd Quarter and decide feasibility by end of first year; pilot (by end of 5th Quarter).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training, IT

Action Step 7.6: The OCFS annual training plan will be designed to provide the knowledge and skills to staff to enable them to successfully implement the strategies contained in this PIP subject to available funding.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Measure is OCFS MOUs and training plan for 2003 and 2004 (Quarters 1 and 5).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training

Action Step 7.7: OCFS will support an increase in the number of child care staff available to participate in the workforce of congregate care facilities.

- a. OCFS will work closely with Department of Labor (DOL) Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIB) and “One-Stop” centers to match people who need jobs with voluntary agencies that need to hire residential child care workers. This will be accomplished by requiring that proposals submitted in response to the RFP described below include the ways in which applicants will work closely with DOL.
- b. OCFS will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) seeking proposals to recruit, train, employ and retain TANF-eligible/recipient individuals as residential child care workers of voluntary agencies. Projects funded under this Request for Proposals are intended to serve recipients of benefits under the TANF program, or New York’s Safety Net program (who meet the requirements of 00-LCM-20 and will be eligible for TANF reimbursements), and/or persons whose income falls below 200 percent of the federally determined poverty level who reside with their own or relatives’ children or are non-custodial parents. Awardees will document participant performance milestones indicating the targeted number of participants entering the program (recruitment), the number of participants completing the (training), the number of participants who complete initial placement (employment), and the number of participants retained in existing jobs (retention).

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Activities will begin by Quarter 1 and be ongoing.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, DLA

STRATEGY #8: WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

New York will undertake a set of actions designed to increase the capacity of districts and agencies to manage workloads while supporting efficiencies in the current work processes.

Intended Impact: The activities included in this strategy will result in: the identification of inefficient and unnecessary steps that have been built into work processes over time; reduce duplication of the information caseworkers are required to enter into the CONNECTIONS system; and more effective quality assurance by supervisors while maintaining a focus on outcome and family focused case practice.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Strategy:

National Standards: Time to Reunification, Time to Adoption, Stability of Placement

Case Review Items: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 27, and 28

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 8.1: Continue and expand support for case process reviews in local districts through an appropriate contractor. Process reviews are a tool for use by organizations to review current work processes and procedures for the purpose of simplifying or streamlining unnecessary or inefficient steps. These have been initiated in three local districts in their Child Welfare/Services Division. The initiative is currently underway and being supported by staff from OCFS regional offices. At each site, the local district establishes teams of workers (clerical, casework, supervisor). These teams meet regularly (at least twice per month) over a significant period of time (six months or longer). The teams start by reviewing their current operation and identifying processes and procedures where improvements are needed and can be made. The role of the contractor in support of these initiatives is to facilitate team process, to provide ongoing support to the teams, to promote effective communication with and from management, and to facilitate implementation of identified opportunities for improvement.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Up to 5 additional sites, as resources permit, will be identified (by Quarter 3).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Bureau of Training

Action Step 8.2: OCFS will automate and provide efficiencies for the Case Plan and related documentation through the design and implementation phases of the CONNECTIONS case management systems. This process will include providing practice guidelines on the completion of progress notes to help caseworkers and supervisors in focusing on complete but succinct documentation of casework activities. While the initial implementation of the system will affect workload management, the resulting system should result in long-term efficiencies for the worker.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Completion and sign off of requirements document by Policy and Program by end April 2002. By April 2003, practice guidelines and Case Plan structure will be available for caseworkers in CONNECTIONS.

OCFS Responsible Entities: CONNECTIONS Case Management Team

Action Step 8.3: OCFS will develop a small work group to identify the needed supports for casework supervisors in local districts and voluntary agencies to effectively implement and manage caseworker practice changes as well as streamlining efforts. The practice changes may include those described in this Plan as well as others that may be identified by local districts. The group will issue recommendations regarding appropriate supports so that supervisors are able to provide effective support for staff and quality assurance, while maintaining a focus on outcome and family focused case practice.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Workgroup formed (in Quarter 2); recommendations issued (by Quarter 5); next steps dependent upon recommendations made.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS

STRATEGY #9: IMPROVING THE STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

New York will use a two-pronged approach to substantially improve the performance of statewide information systems in New York State. ACF has approved an advance planning document update for this activity. The main focus is on CONNECTIONS to improve existing CPS functionality, and to expand the system in areas of Case and Financial Management to meet the SACWIS requirements. The other focus is on improving existing data systems to meet the current and future data information needs in New York with the development and expansion of the OCFS Data Warehouse.

Intended Impact: As a result of the implementation of this strategy, New York's SACWIS system will be operational and compliant with federal standards and OCFS and the NYS child welfare workforce will have the information systems they need to conduct and to manage core business process.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy.

Case Review Item: 24

The following action steps provide a description of how the continued development of CONNECTIONS and the OCFS Data Warehouse will address the issues identified in the report and the requirements of item 24.

Action Step 9.1: CONNECTIONS

The CONNECTIONS Project is a statewide effort to provide OCFS, local districts, and voluntary agencies with an automated tool that will provide a uniform system to improve the quality and consistency of efforts on behalf of children and their families.

The CONNECTIONS application has been implemented statewide for Child Protective Services from intake through the investigation process, as well as for the licensing and certification of congregate care facilities and foster boarding homes. When fully implemented, the system will provide case management support for direct caseworkers in areas of assessment and placement, decision-making support tools for managers, and appropriate access to client information across the state. Through the statewide computer network, CONNECTIONS will link child welfare caseworkers, supervisors, and other management and administrative staff.

In 1998, OCFS Commissioner Johnson suspended the CONNECTIONS full implementation because he believed the system did not meet the needs of the users. In January of 1999, Governor Pataki convened a special Panel to review the issues and to make recommendations for the future of CONNECTIONS. The Governor's Panel recommended that an independent contractor conduct an analysis and reassessment. The CONNECTIONS Reassessment Report (3-9-01) presented the findings and recommendations of MAXIMUS resulting from the review and analysis of CONNECTIONS.

Although MAXIMUS determined that CONNECTIONS did *not* meet a significant number of users' needs *nor* all SACWIS requirements, they found that the State could leverage the investments that have been made in CONNECTIONS to build a more responsive SACWIS system for New York State. Based upon these findings, the report recommended that the State move forward with the development of critically needed family-focused Case Management and Financial Management functionality using new application architecture.

New York State currently has an approved APDU for the remaining CONNECTIONS development work and the project submits annual APDUs to the ACF to keep them apprised of the progress being made on CONNECTIONS. The next annual submission is scheduled for June 2003. As discussed on February 25, 2002 with our Federal PIP liaisons, in order not to duplicate the CONNECTIONS APDU reporting, we will summarize, at a high level, the remaining development work and schedule for completion of the CONNECTIONS project in this PIP response.

The completion of the CONNECTIONS includes three main components:

- **Child Welfare Case Management Functionality**
 - **Phases 1A & 1B: scheduled for 2003;** These development phases will allow for Child Protective cases currently in CONNECTIONS to be completed as Family Services Stages. This stage will include all assessment and service planning activity currently encompassed in the New York State Uniform Case Record (UCR). It will also provide a Family Services Intake component for families requesting voluntary services, including the determination of programmatic eligibility for Preventive Services. The system will provide for structured case recording and tracking of data to support decision-making at the individual and case level. Additionally, this phase will also provide a comprehensive, accessible, electronic case record for Child Welfare cases. It will also provide aggregate case management information for agency management and monitoring.
 - **Phase 2 – scheduled for June 2004;** This development phase will support the recording of all required information related to the placement and movement of a child in a foster or pre-adoptive home. The demographic data, medical data and information concerning legal authority for the placement required for AFCARS reporting will be captured by the system. . The level of difficulty (LOD), any modifiers to the LOD and any emergency situations will be supported by the system in order to identify proper payment levels.
 - **Financial Management – scheduled for June 2004;** This development phase will support the automated payment and claiming of child welfare services including foster care and adoption subsidies through an interface to the New York State Department Of Family Assistance's statewide payment system, Benefit Issuance and Control System (BICS). Additionally, the system will provide aggregate financial management information for Office of Children and Family Services management and monitoring.

Action Step 9.2: OCFS Data Warehouse

The Data Warehouse initiative is a focused effort to improve management and operations reporting capabilities for the OCFS services systems. Users, including local district staff, contract agency staff, regional, and State OCFS staff, require access to management reports and ad hoc reporting on data in the CONNECTIONS and legacy systems. Reports are needed to provide summary information at the worker, caseload, local district, regional, and state levels.

Another key purpose of the OCFS Data Warehouse is to provide information on an entire case or family even when the data are in separate services systems. The goal is to provide a pre-defined report that is called the Comprehensive Case Detail Report. This report contains data from CONNECTIONS, CCRS (Child Care Review Service), WMS (Welfare Management System), and the KID system (Rehabilitative Services juvenile justice population). To accomplish this, the CIN (Client Identification Number) has been identified as the common identifier to use among these systems. The CIN is already present in CCRS, WMS and for many youth in the KID system. The OCFS Data Warehouse is supporting a special project called the CIN/PID Project that will allow participating districts to add CINs to CONNECTIONS. Lists of individuals who need to have a CIN added to CONNECTIONS are provided. Nightly batch programs update CONNECTIONS accordingly and produce reports sent to the individuals who entered the information. With more individuals having CINs in the multiple systems, true case level data can be presented to the users. In addition to the pre-defined report, users will have the usual ad hoc capability as well. Linkages to WRTS (Welfare Reform Tracking System) to retrieve fiscal data on the services cases already in the OCFS Data Warehouse environment are also planned.

Through the phased process, the “Warehouse” has begun to provide end-user access to CONNECTIONS data and information from legacy systems in a manner suitable for strategic decision support and operational support. Both Standard reports and “Ad Hoc” reporting is now available to participating districts on child protective investigations, allegations of abuse/maltreatment, foster care placement, facility certification information and legal status of children in foster care. Data are extracted from CONNECTIONS and legacy systems and linked to key performance standards. The result is information to help managers meet program standards. When fully implemented, the OCFS Data Warehouse will present information needed by managers to monitor workload, and track compliance with State and federal standards.

Participating districts and voluntary child care agencies have the ability to access standard reports as follows:

- Allegation Demographics
- CPS Reports Current Status
- CPS Reports Determinations
- CPS Reports Assignments
- Placement Summary (Point in Time)

Placement Detail Report

Admission Summary

Discharge Summary

Legal Status Detail

Legal Status Summary

Foster Home Closed Report

Foster Home License Reauthorization – Coming Due

Foster Home and Member Roster

The phased rollout of the Data Warehouse is increasing the standardization of service definitions by users across the State. This translates into increasingly uniform work and language reflected in case records. This makes the transfer of cases across jurisdictions easier as language and format become more standardized and consistent and therefore more readily usable by workers.

Data Warehouse activities over the upcoming reporting period will focus on new development, enhancements, improved performance and supporting the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) related to the Children and Family Service Review. Details for new development efforts appear below:

New Development

- New Data Warehouse functionality will allow the cross referencing of children with a Case Identification Number in CCRS with those children entered into CONNECTIONS. If there is a match, five years of history can be accessed, including valuable placement data to inform case planning. Ad hoc capability will exist to access total history if needed. The requirements and analysis phases will be completed (by Quarter 1), the design, development and testing phases will be completed (by Quarter 2), and training and implementation will be completed (by Quarter 3).
- Finger Print Report Group Marts will be added so that as changes in foster home status occur (such as closures and movement, both of staff and facilities), updated finger printing records stay consistent with these changes. These functions serve as an additional support to the certification process. Pre-defined report changes to accommodate additional fields will be implemented (by the end of Quarter 1). Requirements, analysis and design will be completed for the data marts (in Quarter 1). Implementation will occur (in Quarter 2).

NYS Program Improvement Plan

- AFCARS/NCANDS data elements will be color coded in the CONNECTIONS application to assist in staff recognition of the importance of a data field. Edits for AFCARS and NCANDS will be explored for cases that are closed. A summary screen will be built to display AFCARS elements for each child placed out-of-home in a case.
- Management Reports will be made available from the Data Warehouse. The purpose of these reports is to identify AFCARS and NCANDS compliance on an aggregate level for each local district, including exception reports for individual cases or children or cases that have missing information. These reports will be made available on an on-going basis to allow local management to identify problem cases and correct cases in advance of the AFCARS submission date. Complete implementation will occur in the first quarter after Phase 2 of the CONNECTIONS plan that is scheduled for June 2004.

Reports on Repeat Maltreatment are currently available. Reports on Maltreatment in Foster Care will be completed (by Quarter 1); the remaining Federal data indicators will be phased in over the next two Quarters. AFCARS and NCANDS child specific records from the existing legacy system will be available (by the end of Quarter 4).

A solution will be developed to extract AFCARS elements from the State's KIDs system-a database for juvenile delinquents - for submission to the Federal government so that all eligible IV-E children are reported. Requirements and analysis will begin in Quarter 3 with a design recommendation available (by the end of Quarter 4).

Children and Family Service Review

The OCFS Data Warehouse was used to produce 85-90% of data provided to workgroups established to develop the New York State PIP response to the June 2001 Children and Family Services Review. In addition, districts will have the ability to view child level data for each submitted measure.

Using the federal recurrence measure as a model, a Data Warehouse report was designed that provides child specific detail to districts on the children that compose both parts of the recurrence measure (the numerator and the denominator.) This summary report also permits the ability to 'drill down' to the individual child involved in an additional report (as defined by the measure) with the result being detail such as "case id" and individual substantiated allegations. The use of these three reports by staff will help to initiate discussions on patterns of reporting that may lead to better understanding of recurrence in New York State.

As measurable benchmarks are identified through the action steps described elsewhere in this PIP, the Data Warehouse will build reports to satisfy those measures, to the extent possible.

STRATEGY #10: TRIBAL CONSULTATION

New York will implement a set of actions to actively involve the Tribes in planning and quality improvement efforts and to further enhance the development and provision of child welfare services available to and accessed by Native American Tribes and their members. These actions will include the development of culturally competent tools for use by local department of social services caseworkers and voluntary agency staff in the provision of services to Native American children and families, increased public awareness regarding the provisions of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and a process for ongoing consultation with Native American Tribes relative to the ongoing development of the OCFS plan for child welfare services. **It is important to note that the action steps included in this strategy are voluntary and not required based on the findings of the CFSR.**

The CFSR process began in February of 2001 with three OCFS sponsored Tribal focus groups. Additionally, two Tribal Stakeholders were involved in the on-site review interviews held in June of 2001. On March 7, 2002, a Tribal Consultation meeting was held with representatives of the seven Federally recognized Tribes. The feedback of the Tribal leaders and Child Welfare representatives who participated on March 7th has been included in the development of this strategy for inclusion in the development of the New York State PIP.

Improved performance with regard to ICWA is currently an identified outcome in the IV-B Plan. New York State is working to improve the percentage of Native American children in foster care placements who are placed in Native American homes.

Intended Impact: The intended impact of this strategy is to increase communication with Tribal leaders, and to increase both awareness of and compliance with the principles of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act by both local districts and voluntary agencies. Successful implementation of this strategy will simultaneously increase respect for the cultural heritage of Native Americans, and increase efforts to preserve the integrity of the Tribal affiliation for each Native American child.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by This Strategy:

Case Review Items: 18, 24, 25, 33, (although rated a strength, improvement is targeted in the area of Indian Child Welfare), 39, (although rated a strength, improvement is targeted toward outreach and inclusion efforts with respect to all of the federally recognized Tribes), and 44 (although rated a strength, improvement is being targeted in the area of recruitment of culturally diverse foster families).

Implementation Partners: Native American Tribes, Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, Contract Training Providers and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 10.1 (Voluntary Action Step): Development of a formal schedule for regular and ongoing dialog and consultation with Tribal leaders. This protocol would become the vehicle for an ongoing dialog between OCFS and Tribal leaders concerning the status and direction of child welfare services to Native American children and families in New York State.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures:

- a. Development of a formal schedule for semi-annual meetings to occur between OCFS and Tribal leaders during Quarter 1. Implementation will be considered successful at the end of one full year of such meetings, with an opportunity for review and revision of the process (at the end of Quarter 4).
- b. Implementation of quarterly meetings with Tribal representatives and other stakeholders in a consortium format designed to address training topics and to work cooperatively toward the goal of improved service provision (by Quarter 1 and then ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Native American Services, SPPD, PIO.

Action Step 10.2 (Voluntary Action Step): Development of a broad based distribution of relevant materials to all local district and voluntary agency staff to increase awareness of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act and to provide practical tools for use as aids to compliance. Efforts began on this immediately following the stakeholder interviews that were conducted as a part of the Statewide Assessment process.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Measure and Benchmark:

- a. Release of OCFS document Pub. #4757 (completed in June of 2001). This document is entitled *A Guide to Compliance with the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act in New York State*. The release of this publication was announced through 01 OCFS INF-5. Through this policy distribution mechanism, every local district and voluntary agency received copies of the document as well as referrals to the appropriate Regional Office and Native American Services for additional technical assistance and guidance in this area.
- b. Ongoing distribution of the newly revised OCFS document Pub. #4629 (Rev. 6/01). This document is entitled *A Proud Heritage*. The publication has recently been reproduced and is being made available in a variety of forums, including at the OCFS booth at the semi annual New York Public Welfare Association conferences.
- c. Provision of copies of both publications to each local district attorney. Multiple copies of the publications will also be made available to all local districts and to voluntary agencies. It is expected that increased awareness of the provisions of the ICWA will lead to earlier identification of a child's possible Tribal affiliation and more timely notice to that Tribe. (Start date is Quarter 1 and completion date is the end of Quarter 2 or December 2002).

- d. Issuance of an INF by 3/31/03 informing local districts and voluntary agencies of the names and contact information of all of the Tribal designees to whom notice of the placement needs of Native American children should be provided (by the end of Quarter 4.)

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Native American Services, PIO.

Action Step 10.3 (Voluntary Action Step): Provide training on the Indian Child Welfare Act through use of the teleconference medium. As with Action Step 10-2, efforts began immediately following the stakeholder interviews that were conducted in conjunction with the Statewide Assessment process. Again, the objective is earlier identification of a child's possible Tribal affiliation and faster notice to the appropriate Tribe. These will, in turn, lead to more coordinated planning efforts and increased access to a wider variety of potential services for the child and family.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Development and delivery of one teleconference per year relative to Native American child welfare services. The first was completed in December 2001 with the successful delivery of the first videoconference entitled *Improving Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act*. Copies of the teleconference are available for viewing by local districts and voluntary agencies. Additional dates and topics for teleconference training will be identified (in Quarter 1 and delivered by Quarter 8).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Native American Services, Bureau of Training
Native American Services will also take the lead on accessing the National Indian Child Welfare Association for additional consultation and technical assistance on training needs.

Action Step 10.4 (Voluntary Action Step): Review the OCFS Common Core and CPS Training Curriculums to identify opportunities to add culturally relevant content to the curriculums.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures:

- a. Addition of the Indian Child Welfare Act Brochure and videotape of the December, 2001 teleconference to the materials for review prior to attendance at any of the OBT Core trainings and the inclusion of culturally appropriate revisions and case scenarios to the CPS Curriculum. Anticipated completion date is Quarter 1.
- b. Review of the larger core curriculum (to begin in Quarter 1. Completion date by Quarter 4).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Native American Services, Bureau of Training

Action Step 10.5 (Voluntary Action Step): Establishment of an internal OCFS Native American Services Committee. This would be accomplished by the identification of OCFS staff with Tribal affiliations or significant ongoing work with NYS Tribes who would be available for participation or assistance with Tribal consultation or training initiatives.

Geographic Area: statewide, with increased emphasis on those local districts that encompass or are adjacent to Tribal reservations or territories.

Benchmarks and Measures: Production of a mailing list of OCFS staff available to participate in, or to assist with Tribal consultation activities, including but not limited to focus groups, forums and other meetings. Start date for development of the committee is Quarter 1. Full identification of committee members will be accomplished (Quarter 2).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, Native American Services in cooperation with other OCFS Divisions, Offices and Bureaus.

STRATEGY #11: IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERFACE BETWEEN THE FAMILY COURT AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

OCFS and OCA have undertaken a set of actions to build on the improvements underway in the areas of communication and interface between the court system and the child welfare system. By building on these actions, the ability has improved for each to be effective partners in the achievement of timely permanency for children.

Intended Impact: Local districts (administrative, casework and legal staff) and family courts will work collaboratively with the child welfare legal community to shorten the time children spend in foster care, whether a child’s goal is to return to his or her parents, or to find permanency through adoption. These actions will result in the replication of “best practices” existing in various NYS family courts and local districts.

Federal Outcomes Addressed by this Strategy:

National Standards: Time to Reunification and Time to Adoption

Case Review Items: 7, 9, 27, and 28

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Voluntary Agencies, Office of Court Administration, Family Courts, Appeals Courts, NYS Court Improvement Program, Model Courts, Treatment Courts, Contract Training Providers and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Action Step 11.1: OCFS will convene a Statewide Team with representation from OCFS Home Office; representatives of NYS Court Improvement Program, county court improvement projects and other county “best practice” family courts; representatives of other local districts; staff from the Office of Court Administration and representatives of law guardians and respondents’ attorneys.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: The Statewide Team will be convened in Quarter 3.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, DLA, NYCRO, DRS

Action Step 11.2: OCFS will use current data to identify the steps in the process that appear to be a barrier to permanence, and whether there are “model” districts which have shorter time frames for these steps. County specific profiles will be developed and distributed to local districts and family courts. Legal and adoption activities from CCRS will be used to count the children and the lengths of time between adoption-related events, particularly the total time between admission to foster care and discharge to adoption, as well as the time between admission to foster care and return home. Also to be calculated are the times for the steps between:

- admission to foster care and TPR petition filed;
- TPR petition filed and child freed for adoption. OCFS will explore its ability to provide the following data elements:

- ✓ the number and type of hearings;
- ✓ the number of adjournments;
- ✓ the reason for adjournments; and
- ✓ the time attributed to appeals;
- child ‘totally’ freed to be placed in an adoptive home;
- child placed in an adoptive home and discharged to adoption.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: The first of these district profiles will be produced (by Quarter 3). They will be compiled semi-annually to track progress in reducing time to permanence.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, CONNECTIONS (Data Warehouse), NYCRO

Action Step 11.3: OCFS will work with the NYS Office of Court Administration (OCA) and individual family courts, where appropriate, to determine what data the court system can provide and how it might be used to identify local districts and/or courts which might benefit most from changes. In addition, the joint work will result in identification of models for improvement. New York State has been testing several approaches to improving relationships between local districts and their family courts, including the New York State Court Improvement Project (CIP, in Erie County and New York City), Family Treatment Courts, out stationing local district staff in the courts, and others which have evolved to address local family courts and local district concerns.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: The format and contents of data reports, criteria for identifying and targeting local districts and family courts for change and cataloging of potential changes will result from Action Step 11.2 (by the end of Quarter 2). Quarterly production of county profiles will then be ongoing and will allow for tracking of the impact of changes to the courts.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, NYCRO

Action Step 11.4: Data from OCFS and OCA will be analyzed and presented to individual counties and the Statewide Team. The Statewide Team will identify both model counties and those in need of improvement. Counties with the largest foster care populations will be targeted first. For counties with long foster care stays and prolonged court activity, a workflow analysis for both DSS and family court will be developed to facilitate determination of process changes. The strategies identified in Action Step 11.3 will provide a guide for selecting models on which to fashion these process changes.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Using the criteria identified in Action Step 11.3, identification of large districts and areas most in need of improvement will be identified (by Quarter 3).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, NYCRO

Action Step 11.5: Identify strategies for the expansion of promising court programs already underway in New York State. New York has systematically invested in innovative strategies for effectively engaging families in the decision-making forum offered by family courts. For example, Model Courts, Family Treatment Courts and Mediation have involved families early in shaping the permanency decisions for their children. Programs like “Babies Can’t Wait”, and Adoption Saturdays offer models for expediting the adoption of children once freed. Unfortunately, the lack of federal funding for the courts requires some creative efforts to identify constant funding for these and other beneficial programs. A key to this action step necessarily involves identifying funding for replication of successful strategies.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: A federally funded evaluation of court improvement projects is slated to be conducted in some states in 2003/2004. To the extent that the results of these evaluation(s) are relevant to New York’s efforts, they will be used to help inform the development of an expansion plan with OCA, pending the availability of funding. In the short term, OCFS and OCA will: draw on current, available evaluations to guide decisions about expanded use of Family Treatment Courts, mediation and other models; seek feedback from Project participants; and use data currently available to assess the impact on timeframes to adoption and permanency milestones. The combination of empirical evidence of success and available funding will inform the expansion and replication of these models.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, NYCRO

Action Step 11.6: OCFS Regional Offices will work with the Statewide Team to continue efforts already underway to provide cross training and maximize its potential for improving the judicial, legal, and social services systems. Model protocols and forms will be disseminated to all jurisdictions, accompanied by training, e.g. teleconference or regional sessions, on how they can be used to shorten time in care and improve delivery of services to children and families. Training for Family Treatment Courts is scheduled for three sites and approximately fifteen local teams to include, but not be limited to court personnel, substance abuse treatment providers and local district staff.

Regional Offices will encourage all local district commissioners and their staff to attend regional presentations on strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective. The commissioners will be encouraged to provide the leadership to solicit family court and legal participation in adopting new ways of doing business. The Regional Offices will provide follow-up technical assistance to assist districts in utilizing strategies presented, prioritizing those districts with large foster care populations that are identified as “needing improvement”. Regional trainings also provide an opportunity for participants from each county to meet together during the training and strategize on individual plans for improvement and next steps. Potential trainers will be drawn from the New York State Court Improvement Project and from other sources of expertise within the

state's innovative programs, OCFS training contractors and consultants, the National Resource Centers, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

OCFS already has or is conducting training in many of the areas identified below using a variety of resources. Assuming that resources are available to do so, cross disciplinary training in such topics as those listed below promise to provide a common framework to family court personnel, local districts and others involved with families with children in foster care:

- Concurrent Planning
- Child Permanency Mediation
- Medical and Pharmacological Basis for Addiction
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Childhood Attachment and Bonding
- Permanency Hearings and Testimony Skills
- Early Identification of Putative Fathers
- Shortening Steps in the Adoption Process
- Successful Recruitment of Families for Adolescents

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: “Live” regional training will be offered during the two years of the PIP; training on two additional topic(s) will take place by teleconference. At least half of the counties will have cross-discipline representation at each training. (By the end of Quarter 8), at least two large and five other counties will have created an ongoing mechanism for cross-jurisdictional “stakeholder” groups to meet periodically and identify county-specific strategies to shorten time in care and improve the process (Quarter 2 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, NYCRO

There will be best practices conference(s) Statewide for cross-jurisdictional teams, using training resources from the New York State Court Improvement Project, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and National Resource Centers.

Action Step 11.7: OCFS and OCA, with the input of local districts and courts that handle appeals, will determine what steps have proven effective in expediting appeals in termination of parental rights cases. OCFS will facilitate other counties’ efforts to replicate those approaches. Steps can include:

- a. Creation of local task forces of staff who deal with appeals and DSS and agency attorneys, with law guardians and attorneys for respondents invited to participate to identify causes for delays in appeals and to recommend ways to avoid or expedite appeals;
- b. Agreement on a central person to track each appeal of a TPR in the county and report monthly to all parties on status of each appeal;
- c. Further steps as appropriate for each county.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Efforts are already underway in the court system to address this issue. When coupled with individual counties' focus on improving the tracking and response to TPR appeals, time frames for completing TPR appeals across the state will be reduced within the two-year PIP time frame. Data to demonstrate this improvement may come from the individual counties, working collaboratively between the courts and the districts (Quarter 1 and ongoing).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD, NYCRO, DLA

Action Step 11.8: OCFS will add questions regarding permanency hearing timeframes to the IV-E survey. The results of this survey will provide information on current practice regarding permanency hearings, including the areas of strength and those in need of improvement. In addition, the survey results will serve as a baseline against which future improvements in Permanency Hearing timeframes will be measured. Steps include:

- a. Work with OCFS IV-E staff to add questions on Permanency Hearing timeframes to the IV-E survey. This survey will be completed (during Quarter 1). The results of this survey will provide baseline information against which future improvements in Permanency Hearing timeframes will be measured.
- b. Continue to work with IV-E PIP activities to include a focus on Permanency Hearing timeframes. (This will be ongoing after Quarter 1). Depending on the future activities developed for IV-E improvement, follow-up surveys that include information on Permanency Hearing timeframes will be conducted.
- c. OCFS will encourage local districts to use the information on Permanency Hearings that is available in the Data Warehouse.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, CONNECTIONS (Data Warehouse), DA, NYCRO

STRATEGY #12: IMPROVE CROSS-SYSTEMS COLLABORATION AND INCREASE SERVICE ARRAY AND ACCESS

New York will undertake a set of actions that will increase collaboration between the Child Welfare system and the agencies whose services and supports are needed by the children and families receiving child protective, preventive, foster care and adoption services. This improved collaboration will increase children and families' access to those services.

Intended Impact: As a result of the implementation of these action steps, children's mental health needs will be met through a more accessible set of services, there will be an increased service array available to meet children's needs for safety in their home environment and more districts will have the array of services available that reflect their communities' needs. In addition, there will be fewer barriers to timely adoptions or other permanent out-of-state placement due to delays in the Interstate Compact process.

Federal Outcomes Addressed By This Strategy:

National Standards: Time to Reunification and Time to Adoption

Case Review Items: 23, 35, 36, and 37

Implementation Partners: Local Districts, Legislature, Youth Bureaus, Representatives from CCSI, Office of Mental Health, Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

OCFS will continue to support the many collaborative efforts delineated in our Child and Family Services (Title IV-B) Plan. In addition, we will enhance two of those efforts as described in the action steps described below.

Action Step 12.1: Integrated County Planning: OCFS will continue to support the project through the Steering Committee and the Interagency Workgroup. Specific activities for the ICP Project include:

- a. Expand the number of counties participating. Expand training and technical assistance to all other counties to support their engaging in increased collaborative planning, using the lessons learned from the current ICP counties. (Calendar year 2003)
- b. Legislation has been proposed that will require all counties to conduct collaborative planning processes, and require Youth Bureaus and local districts to join together and submit to OCFS a single strategic county plan for children and youth. Counties will incrementally implement these requirements, beginning with the participating counties. (September 2002.)
- c. Finish development of a Technical Assistance manual on outcomes and share the manual with counties through training. (June 2002.)

NYS Program Improvement Plan

- d. Conduct Essentials of Asset Building – Training of Trainers on three core workshops from the Search Institute on developmental assets and community mobilization. (June 2003.)
- e. Hold two training events each year. The June 2002 and September 2002 events highlighted county successes, strengthening collaborations, best practice/research based practice, and data base development.
- f. Continue work with counties to develop new plan guidelines reflective of ICP Key Concepts. (Interim Guidelines in Quarter 1; final guidelines by June, 2003)
- g. Continue to support development of child and youth indicators and resource databases in counties. (Quarter 1 and ongoing)
- h. Continue Using Data Effectively Training for all county agencies. (Quarter 1 and ongoing)
- i. Continue to set the expectation that participating districts conduct comprehensive needs assessments and service inventories as part of their planning process so that emerging needs and/or gaps in the local service array are identified and addressed through the planning process. (Quarter 1 and ongoing)
- j. Continue the formal, independent evaluation of the ICP project. Final report will be submitted after the final year of the project. (Quarter 5 – Spring 2004)

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See individual steps above.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 12.2: Coordinated Children’s Services Initiative (CCSI): The executive level representatives of the sponsoring State agencies, who comprise the "Tier III" management structure over CCSI, will continue to address barriers to interagency collaboration that are identified by the CCSI counties and will continue to explore ways to pool funding from their discrete agencies to finance interagency initiatives, like CCSI, without regard to unique, categorical rules and requirements

- a. Through an RFP process, several field-initiated ideas from participating Integrated County Planning counties were funded by Tier III. These \$5,000 grants were awarded to reinforce CCSI principles being applied in counties. (Completed prior to Quarter 1)
- b. Continue training for CCSI. Training stipends of \$1,000-\$1,500 are awarded to counties with established CCSI projects. In November 2001, the biannual statewide CCSI conference was held involving over 300 persons. Workshops reinforced strength-based principles, family partnership, and collaboration. The newsletter continues to be issued quarterly. Regional technical assistance teams of State agency staff have been supportive. (Quarter 1 and ongoing)

A survey of all CCSI counties was conducted by the Center for Governmental Research. This survey is to help identify the level of CCSI implementation and to inform future State support and training.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: See above

OCFS Responsible Entities: DPPS, SPPD

Action Step 12.3: Enhancements to CCSI

Background: A group of concerned providers, local districts and the Regional Offices of OCFS, State Office of Mental Health and Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities in the Rochester region presented a paper entitled, “Cross-systems Kids, A Call to Action” to Commissioner John A. Johnson of OCFS. He in turn called upon the commissioners of the other key state agencies to join him in addressing the multiple needs of these children and families. The agency heads agreed, and gave the existing interagency CCSI workgroup structure the charge of taking up this call to action. **The issues to be addressed include:**

- Each service system has separate and clearly defined criteria for service eligibility. For children who require services from multiple systems, the entry requirements are complicated and block access. In some cases, regulation blocks children in one service system from receiving services in another service system.
- Families are particularly frustrated by our separate service systems. They want to be provided with family support/advocacy by trained parents who will assist the family in working with the service system professionals.
- The existing service array does not contain sufficient specialty services to directly meet the needs of cross-systems children and their families. Mixing complicated populations of youth into generic programs not only places children at risk, it also does not offer the specific treatment that many of these children and families require.
- Educational issues present substantial concerns, as each school district is individually responsible for each of their children. Particularly when an out-of-home placement is involved, the sheer number of school districts makes cross-systems planning a challenge.
- In attempting to address systemic issues one child and family at a time, considerable professional hours are expended on frequently fruitless efforts to figure out how to make our complicated service system respond to the cross-systems needs of our children and youth.
- Children and youth frequently receive costly services that are not helpful. A yearlong placement in a 30-day emergency bed is not good for the child, and is a poor use of fiscal resources.

- Rapid response to crises is often essential with cross-system children to prevent them from regressing or from being victimized, however, a lack of cooperative resources often forces placement of children into inadequate situations.
- Cross-systems needs frequently emerge when a crisis occurs and a placement is requested immediately. Cross-systems work needs to be done far earlier to prevent the crisis from developing. Early identification of cross-systems children should result in the provision of a cross-systems assessment and service response in order for children and their families to be effectively helped.

- **Geographic Area:** Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures:

- a. Hire project director to develop position paper – **completed**
- b. CCSI Subcommittee will set forth the outline and contents of the paper – **completed**.

The subcommittee agreed that the cross-systems paper would:

- Describe the current placement systems as well as be guided by the principles of CCSI and other effective collaborations.
 - Describe misunderstandings, barriers and problem along with data; successes Tier III has achieved over the past 10 years.
 - Showcase best practices within and out of New York State, including principles, practices and programs.
 - Articulate a listing of options/opportunities for action by the agencies.
 - Completion of paper (end of Quarter 3)
- c. The CCSI participants will determine appropriate next steps based on the paper.

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, SPPD

Action Step 12.4: Child Welfare Financing Legislation. This legislation establishes a new Child Welfare Financing System, effective for claims that otherwise would be reimbursable on or after April 1, 2002, that promotes a reduction in the use of foster care placements and compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act with the following three components:

- a. 65%/35% State/local shares for all child welfare services except foster care services after applying available federal funds;
- b. a foster care block grant capping State reimbursement to local districts for foster care services to the annual amounts appropriated; and
- c. a quality enhancement fund administered by the Office of Children and Family Services to increase the availability and quality of children and family services programs.

It requires local districts to establish service delivery systems that are designed to reduce the use of out-of-home placements, and to document their efforts in their multi-year child welfare services plans; provides districts with the ability to seek statutory or regulatory waivers to implement managed care or other innovative delivery systems. This proposal should assist

districts to develop and manage the service array most in tune with the needs of their client family needs.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Proposal submitted to the Legislature (completed).

Legislation was passed in Spring, 2002. Implementation of the legislation, including: two teleconferences held for local districts (Quarters 1 and 2); regional forums held for local districts (Quarter 2); changes to forms and procedures as appropriate (Quarters 1 – 8). Obligation of the Quality Enhancement money associated with the child welfare finance legislation to increase the availability of services to children and families and/or improve CFSR outcomes (Quarters 1 – 4) .

OCFS Responsible Entities: DPPS, SPPD, DLA

Action Step 12.5: Interstate Compact: OCFS will review its Interstate Compact Process and identify barriers to the timely and effective completion of this process. OCFS will form a small workgroup that includes key local district stakeholders, to review barriers to the timely and effective completion of the adoption and transfer of custody processes and implement appropriate action steps.

Geographic Area: Statewide

Benchmarks and Measures: Form workgroup (during Quarter 3). Review barriers and make recommendations for overcoming barriers (by Quarter 5).

OCFS Responsible Entities: DDPS, DLA, NYCRO

APPENDIX A

ISSUES REGARDING MEASURING TRENDS IN TIME TO PERMANENCY

APPENDIX A: ISSUES REGARDING MEASURING TRENDS IN TIME TO PERMANENCY

It is likely that the national standards, which rely on an exit cohort approach to track progress, will fail to capture or accurately represent real changes in length of stay brought about by improvements in the State's policies and practices in the areas of reunification and adoption. In order to illustrate the distorted picture of trends in time to permanency that may emerge from an exit cohort approach, we analyzed adoption data for New York City. Table 1 presents the number of children exiting by way of adoption and the average length of time in care for yearly exit cohorts of children successfully placed in adoptive families. As this table shows, the number of adoptions increased dramatically over the ten years between 1988 and 1997. From just 917 completed adoptions in 1988, New York City adoptions increased by more than 340 percent to 4,071 in 1997. However, over the same period, the time to completed adoption observed among exit cohorts also increased. In 1988, among children leaving foster care after completing the adoption process, the average time in care was 4.7 years. By 1997, the average time to adoption was 6.3 years, an increase of about 33 percent.

**Table 1: Average Duration in Care for Children
Exiting to Adoption, by Exit Cohort**

Exit year	Number of children adopted	Average duration in care (years)
1988	917	4.7
1989	1,042	4.6
1990	1,252	4.5
1991	1,537	4.6
1992	2,107	4.8
1993	2,228	5.0
1994	2,743	5.3
1995	3,931	5.7
1996	3,207	6.1
1997	4,071	6.3

While these data could be construed to mean that the adoption process in New York City slowed down even as the number of adoptions increased, the statistics are misleading in that they may actually reflect trends in the number of children entering substitute care, rather than changes in the underlying adoption processes. Specifically, in the mid- to late-1980s, New York City experienced a surge in entrants to care. As these relatively large cohorts of children moved through the placement system, the average duration for exit cohorts increased.

In order to assess trends in adoption performance more accurately, it is necessary to analyze the experiences of successive cohorts of children as they first enter care and then eventually exit to adoption, rather than relying on duration to adoption seen among exiters. The data in table 2 depict a distinctly different story from that suggested by the exit cohort data reported in table 1. First, the large number of admissions recorded in 1988 and 1989 stand out. Compared to 1997, there were nearly 6,000 more admissions in 1988, while admissions in 1989 (19,482) were nearly double the number in 1997 (10,385). Of the children admitted in 1988, 3,807 had been discharged to adoption as of May 31, 1999.

Table 2 shows the estimated median duration between entry and adoption for each entry cohort, calculated using the Kaplan-Meier method. The results show that for children entering in 1988 whose permanency goal was changed to adoption, one-half had been adopted within 7 years, while one-half of the adoptions took more than 7 years. Following 1989, first admissions to foster care in New York City began to decline, to a low of 7,265 in 1995. Over this same period the estimated median duration in foster care prior to adoption also declined steadily. As of 1994, the last year for which a median duration could be calculated, one-half of the completed adoptions occurred within 5.3 years, as compared to 7.1 years in 1988.

Table 2: Admissions to Foster Care and Exits to Adoption by Entry Cohort

Admission cohort	Number entering care	Number with last goal of adoption ²	Number exiting to adoption	Number remaining in care	Median duration to adoption (years) ¹
1988	16,144	4,644	3,807	755	7.1
1989	19,482	5,128	4,064	965	6.8
1990	14,160	3,634	2,766	788	6.3
1991	11,577	3,161	2,265	843	5.9
1992	9,798	2,717	1,824	858	5.5
1993	9,321	2,437	1,378	1,044	5.3
1994	8,500	2,130	904	1,214	5.3
1995	7,265	1,734	534	1,190	NA
1996	9,807	1,736	203	1,532	NA
1997	10,395	956	28	926	NA

Another way to determine whether the adoption process is moving faster is to consider the likelihood of adoption relative to the passage of time. Efforts to improve the adoption process should translate into a greater likelihood or probability of adoption. Table 3 shows the cumulative probability of adoption, again for the 1988 to 1997 entry cohorts. The cumulative probability of adoption increases across cohorts. Thus, a child who entered care in 1994 had a .30 probability of adoption before the end of the fourth year in care, an increase of 100 percent compared to the 1988 cohort. Similarly, the probability of adoption during or before the fifth year of care was .25 for a child entering in 1988 and .47 for a child entering in 1993.

**Table 3: Cumulative Probability of Adoption,
by Entry Cohort**

Admission cohort	Years in care since admission						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1988	0.00	0.01	0.06	0.15	0.25	0.36	0.48
1989	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.14	0.25	0.39	0.52
1990	0.00	0.01	0.06	0.17	0.32	0.46	0.57
1991	0.00	0.01	0.07	0.20	0.37	0.51	0.64
1992	0.00	0.01	0.08	0.23	0.41	0.58	0.71
1993	0.00	0.02	0.09	0.25	0.45	0.61	NA
1994	0.00	0.01	0.11	0.30	0.47	NA	NA
1995	0.00	0.03	0.16	0.37	NA	NA	NA
1996	0.00	0.03	0.15	NA	NA	NA	NA
1997	0.00	0.02	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

The declining median duration in care and increasing probability of adoption across entry cohorts suggest improved performance in the processes that lead to children being adopted. In order to place this hypothesis on firmer ground, it is necessary to investigate the possibility that these changes over time are due to the characteristics of the children that compose each entry cohort. To do so, a Cox proportional hazards regression model was utilized to study the probability of adoption. The Cox model evaluates the probability an event such as adoption will occur per unit time given that it has not yet occurred while controlling for a set of independent variables. In the model developed here, the independent variables are child’s age at admission, year of admission, race or ethnicity, gender, and type of care

Table 4 shows the results from the Cox model. As for child characteristics, children who entered care prior to their first birthday reached adoption faster than older children. Children of color moved to adoption much more slowly than white children. Placement history also influenced length stay in that children in kinship homes and congregate care facilities were adopted at slower rates than children in foster family homes.

The results also suggest that compared to the 1988 cohort, each subsequent cohort had a relative risk ratio greater than one, indicating that the time to adoption was falling. For example, the 1994 cohort has a relative risk ratio of 1.82, indicating that children who entered in this cohort were 82 percent more likely to be adopted per unit time than children who entered in 1988. Significantly, each subsequent cohort from 1989 to 1997 shows a relative risk ratio higher than the previous cohort, a finding that is entirely consistent with the results discussed earlier. Since

the results from the Cox model take characteristics of children into account, the possibility that case mix variation accounts for the observed changes is diminished.

Table 4: Relative Risk of Adoption, Cox Proportional Hazards Model

Characteristic	Relative risk ratio ¹	Characteristic	Relative risk ratio ¹
Age at entry		Care type	
< 1 year	Base group	Foster care	Base group
1 to 2 years	0.6,0	Kinship care	0.57
3 to 5 years	0.49	Congregate care	0.59
6 to 8 years	0.42	Mixed-type care	N/A
9 to 11 years	0.30		
12 to 14 years ³	0.21	Admission cohort	
15 to 17 years ³	0.21	1988	Base group
		1989	1.10
		1990	1.15
Race/ethnicity		1991	1.28
White	Base group	1992	1.51
African American	0.51	1993	1.62
Hispanic	0.53	1994	1.82
Other	0.53	1995 ²	2.48
		1996 ²	2.83
Gender		1997 ²	3.20
Male	Base group		
Female	0.96		

The data suggest quite strongly that the time to completed adoption dropped substantially in New York City, especially when the experiences of children admitted to foster care in the early and mid-1990s are compared with those of the children admitted in 1988 and 1989. The data also suggest why exit cohort data, reported in table 1, portray a trend moving in what is essentially the opposite direction, toward longer time to adoption. The large surge in admissions in 1988 and 1989 accounted for the apparent increase in time to adoption as measured at the time of exit.

The exit cohort samples provide a measure of the average length of stay that blends the experiences of the contributing entry cohorts. Depending on the dynamics of the population, the natural mixing of entry cohorts can obscure the true average length of stay. Only under very restrictive assumptions will an exit cohort provide a reliable estimate of the average length of stay for the typical foster child.

Appendix B - New York State PIP Reporting Matrix