

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

Final Report
Delaware Child and Family Services Review
July, 2007

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Introduction

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Delaware. The CFSR was conducted the week of March 5, 2007. The period under review was from 10/1/05 to 3/5/07. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Delaware Division of Family Services (DFS).
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 2003, 2004, and 2005.
- Reviews of 65 cases at three sites throughout the State; 31 cases in New Castle County, 17 cases in Kent County, and 17 cases in Sussex County.
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

All 65 cases were open cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 65 cases reviewed are presented in the table on the following page.

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

TABLE OF CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Cases
	N = 42	N = 23
When case was opened/child entered foster care		
Open prior to the period under review	31 (74%)	8 (35%)
Open during the period under review	11 (26%)	15 (65%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	16 (38%)	NA
Child's age at start of period under review		NA*
Younger than age 10	23 (55%)	
At least 10 but younger than 13	2 (5%)	
At least 13 but younger than 16	12 (29%)	
16 and older	5 (12%)	
Child's gender		NA*
Male	22 (52%)	
Female	20 (48%)	
Race/Ethnicity		By case**
African American (Non-Hispanic)	19 (45%)	10 (43%)
White (Non-Hispanic)	17 (40%)	12 (52%)
Hispanic (of all races)	1 (2%)	1 (4%)
Two or more races	5 (12%)	
Primary Reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	13 (31%)	10 (43)
Physical abuse	8 (19%)	2 (9%)
Sexual abuse		1 (4%)
Medical neglect	1 (2%)	0
Child's Behavior/Juvenile Justice	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
Substance abuse by parent	3 (7%)	1 (4%)
Domestic violence in child's home	1 (2%)	1 (4%)
Emotional maltreatment	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
Abandonment	1 (2%)	0
Mental physical health of child	1 (2%)	2 (9%)
No one available to care for child (due to death, illness, or incarceration)	5 (12%)	0
Mental/physical health of parent	4(9%)	2 (9%)
Other ("Dependency")	1 (2%)	2 (9%)

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

**Data are provided by case for a total of 59 children

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes Section of the report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 indicators (items) reviewed. An item may be assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. In addition to the item ratings, States are evaluated with regard to performance on seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for the outcomes are Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Achieved. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern within that outcome.

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

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to achieve these standards through their PIP. ACF recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to improve outcomes are complex to implement and are not likely to have immediate results. Instead, States establish their own goals for their PIP. That is, for each outcome or item that is an area needing improvement, each State specifies how much improvement they will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the areas needing improvement, and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the extent of improvement specified and the procedures for establishing improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of their PIP and still not meet the 95 or 90 percent requirements of the onsite CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR is intended to address the issue of State's current level of functioning with regard to child outcomes by once more applying the high standards and consistent, comprehensive, case review methodology. This is intended to serve as a basis for continued Program Improvement Plans addressing areas where the State still needs to improve, even though specific Program Improvement Plan requirements may have been achieved. The goal is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the closing of the PIP.

In the following sections, for each Outcome assessed, there is a discussion of how the State performed on that Outcome in the first round. If a State was not in substantial conformity with an outcome for its first CFSR, the key concerns relevant to the outcome are noted in this report as well as the key strategies implemented in the State's PIP to address those issues. The focus of the assessment will be on whether the same issues that emerged as concerns in the first CFSR, still remain as concerns, or whether those particular concerns were resolved, but others have emerged as salient.

Because many changes have been made in the onsite CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to their performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of percentages. Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews are the following:

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

The issue of sample size is particularly relevant to Delaware, because in Delaware’s first CFSR in 2001, only 39 cases were reviewed, compared to 65 cases in the 2007 review.

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	8	6	7	21	65.6
Partially Achieved:	2	1	2	5	15.6
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	1	0	6	18.8
Not Applicable:	16	9	8	33	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)		State’s Percentage		Meets Standard
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6		97.1		YES
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68		99.88		YES

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 65.6 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a

rating of substantial conformity. However, Delaware did meet the national standards for the data indicators pertaining to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. Performance on Safety Outcome 1 varied across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 87.5 percent of applicable Sussex County Cases, compared to 75 percent of Kent County cases, and 53 percent of New Castle County cases.

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001. During that review, item 1 pertaining to timeliness of initiating investigations was rated as a Strength and, therefore, was not addressed in the State's PIP. Item 2, which pertains to repeat maltreatment, was rated as an Area Needing Improvement and was addressed in the State's PIP. The following concerns were identified relevant to this item:

- Incidents of new child abuse or neglect allegations on open cases were not consistently treated as new reports.
- There was a lack of documentation that multiple reports were appropriately processed per State policy.

To address these concerns, Delaware implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- The Quality Assurance (QA) instrument was revised to capture information on the receipt of new reports of child abuse and neglect.
- The New Worker Training implemented during the PIP period included elements on the identification of new reports of maltreatment in open cases and intervention strategies in these situations and included training on use of historical information in decision-making. Training also was provided to supervisors on integrating historical information into case decisions.

The State met its target goals for this outcome.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR

Although it was rated as a Strength in the 2001 CFSR, in the 2007 CFSR, item 1 - timeliness of initiating investigations was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because an investigation of a maltreatment report was initiated in accordance with State policy in only 69 percent of the cases. Performance with regard to timeliness of investigations was higher in Sussex County than in the other two counties.

In addition, despite the efforts implemented during the PIP, the 2007 CFSR continued to find a lack of consistency with regard to conducting formal investigations of maltreatment allegations received on open cases or during ongoing investigation. In the 2007 CFSR, however, item 2 was rated as a Strength because this issue is no longer considered in the rating of item 2. Instead, this item addresses only repeat incidents of substantiated or indicated maltreatment. The issue of whether a maltreatment incident is sufficiently addressed is considered under items 3 and 4.

Although it is not considered in the rating for item 2, the issue of agency response to allegations on open cases remains a concern because it raises questions about the State’s data pertaining to the national measure of maltreatment recurrence. Delaware’s policy (as reported in their State Policy Submission) is clear regarding allegations of maltreatment involving families that are already either under investigation or being served by the agency. The policy states that the “...following situations are to be processed as new reports regardless of case activity in the Division, i.e., family unknown to the system, family was previously opened, or the family currently has a case opened in Investigation or Treatment.” The policy also is clear that a “new incident of abuse and neglect includes any incident that is different from what was previously investigated or currently being investigated,” even if the incidents were of the same type.

Although policy is clear on these situations, the onsite review found that in three cases, additional maltreatment reports on the family were not handled in accordance with policy. In these cases, however, the CFSR case reviewers were told by the caseworkers on the case that the actions they took were in accordance with agency policy. The following are descriptions of these case situations:

- In one case, (Sussex County) there was only one investigation, and therefore only one substantiation, of three separate hotline reports occurring over a 2-month period that were for three different incidents. Instead, when each new report came in, it was “rolled up” into the existing investigation, because that investigation was still ongoing.
- In another case, (Sussex County) there was a hotline report accepted by DFS, but when the case was transferred to the county, the investigation was “abridged” (i.e., referred to the ongoing treatment worker rather than for a new investigation) because there was already an ongoing treatment worker assigned to the case. (Note that the term “abridged” was provided by State staff as the term used in these situations.)
- In another case (Wilmington), there were three reports made to the hotline, two of which were investigated. The third report (which was the last one) concerned a newborn, with the mother testing positive for drugs. Since there was already an open case on this family, this report was “abridged” and the individual report on the newborn child was never investigated.

These cases indicate that there are maltreatment reports in the State that are not being formally investigated.

Despite the case review findings regarding timeliness of initiating investigations, most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the agency is effective in responding to maltreatment reports in a timely manner. Stakeholders’ opinions were more varied with regard to agency effectiveness in preventing maltreatment recurrence.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Review Findings: The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 32 (49 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency requirements. Delaware’s policies with regard to initiating investigations are the following:

- For all cases assigned an “urgent” response time, the caseworker will make face-to-face contact with the primary victim(s) and at least one parent/caretaker within 24 hours.
- For all cases assigned a “routine” response time, the caseworker will make face-to-face contact with the primary victim(s) and at least one parent/caretaker within 10 calendar days.

Information regarding the ratings for this item is provided below.

Item 1	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	8	6	8	22	69
Area Needing Improvement	7	2	1	10	31
Not applicable	16	9	8	33	
Total	31	17	17	65	

As shown in the table, performance on this measure varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of applicable Sussex County cases and 75 percent of applicable Kent County, compared to only 53 percent of applicable New Castle County cases.

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when face-to-face contact was established with the child within the time frames required by State policy or law. It was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when face-to-face contact was not established within the required time frames.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item in the CFSR review expressed the opinion that the agency is effective in responding to maltreatment reports in a timely manner. They suggested that DFS and law enforcement work well together in responding to allegations that may require the intervention of police.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 69 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with the required time frames. This percent is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. For the State’s first CFSR, conducted in 2001, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

Information provided in the Statewide Assessment is not consistent with the CFSR onsite case review findings. For example, the Statewide Assessment reports that in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2006, a total of 5,568 reports were accepted for investigation and 5,364 (96.34 percent) of the initial contacts were made on time. In SFY 2005, a total of 5,449 reports were accepted for investigation and 5,281 (96.92 percent) of the initial contacts were made on time. These statistics include both urgent and routine reports. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that nearly all participants in the focus groups convened by the State indicated that the agency responds to maltreatment allegations in a timely manner.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 21 (32 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine whether there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

Item 2	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	8	7	5	20	95
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	5
Not applicable	23	10	11	44	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 20 cases when there was no indication of two or more substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period, or when there were two or more substantiated reports, but they did not involve the same perpetrator or circumstances or the time separation between them was greater than 6 months.

Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in only 1 case when it was determined that there were two substantiated maltreatment reports within a 6-month period that involved the same general circumstances.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the agency is effective in prevention maltreatment recurrence. This was attributed to agency policy and practices designed to prevent recurrence, specifically the agency's requirements for the frequency and quality of family and child contact. However, other stakeholders voiced concern that maltreatment recurrence is a

fairly frequent problem. Most of the stakeholders who expressed concern about maltreatment recurrence attributed the problem to parental substance-abuse relapse or to families not being receptive to services. They noted that children are experiencing maltreatment recurrence because the initial problems that brought the family to the attention of DFS still exist.

A few stakeholders expressed concern that often there are multiple reports of maltreatment involving a family before there is sufficient evidence for a substantiation of the allegation.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 95 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percent exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement and the State was required to address it in a Program Improvement Plan. The Statewide Assessment notes that concerted efforts were made to increase the contact between caseworkers and children and parents to address child safety. In the State Fiscal Year 2006, for example, it was noted that DFS invoked legislative authority to add two case managers. This was done to maintain the caseload standards and support frequent caseworker contacts with children and families.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders queried about the incidence of maltreatment for the Statewide Assessment expressed mixed opinions. The Statewide Assessment notes that some DFS workers and supervisors said that DFS does not do enough to prevent the recurrence of maltreatment, while others said that DFS is doing “a good job in this area.” The Statewide Assessment also notes that participants from the Review Bodies focus group, the Adoptive Parents focus group, and the Foster Parents focus group all felt that DFS did a good job of reducing the recurrence of maltreatment. Many focus group participants suggested that the reason for maltreatment recurrence is that many of the families with whom DFS works have chronic, multigenerational abuse and neglect histories.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	21	14	16	51	78.5
Partially Achieved:	6	3	1	10	15.4
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	0	0	4	6.1
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Delaware was not found to be in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 78.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Performance with regard to this outcome varied across counties. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 94 percent of Sussex County cases, compared to 82 percent of Kent County cases, and 68 percent of New Castle County cases.

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during its first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001. This first CFSR resulted in a rating of Strength for item 3—Services to Prevent Removal, but a rating of Area Needing Improvement for item 4—Risk of harm to children. The key concerns identified with regard to item 4 were the following:

- Some cases were closed prematurely – that is, before risk factors were adequately resolved.
- Domestic violence issues were not appropriately addressed in some cases.
- The assessments conducted of risk of harm were not always adequate.
- There was insufficient monitoring of out-of-State placements.

Delaware implemented the following PIP strategies to address these concerns:

- Domestic violence liaisons were hired to work with DFS caseworkers to assist families with support, referral and information. A domestic violence training plan was developed and all staff completed core training. Domestic violence risk factors were included in new worker and refresher training. The QA instrument was modified to address domestic violence issues.
- A treatment Case Review questionnaire was developed and implemented. The safety assessment and safety plan process were modified with additional decision-making points and integrated into treatment case management. Comprehensive safety model training was provided to all direct service staff. DFS replaced its risk management tool with the Family Assessment Form (FAF), developed by the Children’s Bureau of Southern California (CBSC). A new outcome-based Family Service Plan (FSP) process was implemented; FAF scores determine which items must be addressed in the FSP.
- Delaware’s supervisory process—Directed Case Conferencing (DCC)—which focuses supervision on ongoing safety and the quality of caseworker process with the family, was modified to improve clinical intervention with uncooperative parents and cases involving domestic violence.
- DFS initiated legislation to allow the Family Court to be petitioned to compel a family to cooperate with services without removal of the child. This initiative was not successful, however, and a new approach was developed using existing statutes with the Family Court.

- The State redesigned the Office of Prevention and Early Intervention (OPEI) to develop a “more effective bridge” between mandatory CPS services and voluntary services.
- The State implemented a YRS Critical Incident Protocol to address critical incident reporting and response for children in specialized out-of-state placements. Training on this protocol was provided to all YRS and contract staff.

The State’s PIP goals with regard to these issues were achieved.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, in the 2007 CFSR item 3—Services to prevent removal—was found to be a Strength for the State. Also, similar to the 2001 CFSR, item 4 was found to be an Area Needing Improvement. However, the concerns relevant to this item that emerged during the first CFSR were not found for the 2007 CFSR. In the 2007 CFSR, there were no concerns relevant to domestic violence and no concerns relevant to monitoring YRS out-of-State placements. In addition, the problems of premature case closure and inadequate documentation were each found in only one of the cases reviewed. Despite the success in addressing these concerns, item 4 continued to be rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of a finding that the agency was not consistent in providing services to address the safety and risk factors identified in the safety and risk assessments.

Stakeholder interview information obtained during the 2007 CFSR indicates that many stakeholders perceive DFS as effective with regard to conducting safety and risk assessments, both initially and on an ongoing basis. However, stakeholders had some concerns about the effectiveness of risk and safety assessments in the foster homes, and about the availability of services to address the safety needs of children while they remain in their own homes.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 39 (60 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded from this assessment if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home (24 cases) or if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or identified risk of harm to the children in the home during the period under review (2 cases). For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent placement of children in foster care while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 3	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	14	11	11	36	92
Area Needing Improvement	2	1	0	3	8
Not applicable	15	5	6	26	
Total Cases	31	17	27	65	

Item 3 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- Services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal (21 cases).
- The child was placed with relatives and services were provided to the relatives, parents, and children (5 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home because the removal was necessary to ensure the child’s safety (10 cases).

Case review information indicates that a wide range of services was offered or provided to families. These included (but were not limited to) the following: parent aide services, individual counseling for the children and parents, family counseling, parenting classes, substance abuse assessment and counseling, referrals for financial aid, referrals for parenting support groups, referrals for day care and housing assistance, assistance with budgeting and employment, economic services through TANF and WIC, food baskets, Head Start, domestic violence-related services, mental health services, and the Strong Families Program.

Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The child’s placement in foster care may have been prevented if services had been provided (1 case).
- Services were provided but they did not adequately address the safety issues in the family (2 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item during the CFSR onsite review expressed the opinion that DFS is effective in providing services to children and families in the home to prevent placement of children in foster care. Many stakeholders, in particular, praised the availability of the Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse Liaisons that assess and provide services to DFS cases in which these issues may be a concern. However, a few stakeholders expressed concern that there often were multiple referrals for child maltreatment before a case is opened for services. As a result, cases sometimes are not opened until the family reaches the point where removal is necessary.

Stakeholders also expressed concern about the limited availability of some of the services necessary to address the safety needs of children while they remain in their own homes.

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 92 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percent exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to information in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants expressed different opinions regarding DFS' effectiveness in providing services to prevent children's removal from the home. The family and youth focus group participants said that DFS removes children from the home too quickly and without sufficient prevention efforts. However, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, when the same question was posed to focus groups comprised of review bodies, educators, and foster parents, "most felt that DFS consistently made reasonable efforts to prevent placement."

The Statewide Assessment also notes that the majority of participants in focus groups comprising DFS social workers said that DFS is very effective in providing services to prevent removal from the home. However, these focus group participants also suggested that different supervisors within DFS have different thresholds as to when DFS should remove a child from the home. They said that some units will do everything possible to prevent removing a child from the home, while others feel it is too risky to leave a child in the home if there are any safety concerns.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, DFS workers have access to an Emergency Placement Prevention fund to provide specific basic necessities for children or families to prevent children's removal, including furniture; basic appliances; household necessities; clothing; security deposits; one time rent payments; or heat, water, electric, or gas services. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that "this fund must be used as a last resort and the caseworker must plan with the family to prevent the problem from occurring in the future." In addition, there is a fund available to DFS workers to provide families with emergency food supplies, prescription medications, necessary over-the-counter medications, diapers, formula and baby food. It is noted in the Statewide Assessment that both avenues of special funding were created to ensure the safety and well-being of children, to prevent the need to remove children from the home, or to facilitate reunification.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for 64 (98 percent) of the 65 cases. The one case that was not applicable for this item involved an Office of Prevention and Early Intervention case in which there were no risks of harm to the child in the home. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to address the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 4	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	22	15	16	53	83
Area Needing Improvement	9	1	1	11	17
Not applicable	0	1	0	1	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

As shown in the table, performance on this item differed across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 94.1 percent of Sussex County cases and 94 percent of Kent County cases, compared to only 71 percent of New Castle County cases.

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

Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement primarily when reviewers determined the following:

- There was risk of harm to the child when they were in the home and the services necessary to reduce that risk were not provided (5 cases).
- There was risk of harm to the child in the foster care setting and the services necessary to reduce that risk were not provided (3 cases).
- There was no documentation of ongoing risk assessment in the foster home (1 case).
- The case was closed prematurely before safety issues were fully addressed (1 case).
- One of the children was not seen during an investigation of a maltreatment report, and therefore no safety assessment was conducted on the child (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite review had different opinions regarding the effectiveness of DFS in reducing the risk of harm to children. Several stakeholders suggested that the agency is effective in this area. They noted that safety is continually assessed throughout the life of the case, and that safety planning usually is comprehensive and effective. Stakeholders also reported that abuse in foster care in Delaware is very low. Other stakeholders, however, suggested that the agency is less effective than it should be in addressing the safety and risk issues for children in foster care.

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 83 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

In the State's first CFSR, conducted in 2001, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement and the State was required to address the item in a Program Improvement Plan. The Statewide Assessment reports that during Round 1 of the CFSR, a concern was noted that DFS workers were prematurely closing cases before risk was assessed. The State determined that this issue was relevant to in-home cases which were voluntary and in which clients were uncooperative. As a result of that finding, DFS developed a new protocol for addressing cases in which the client is uncooperative. In addition, DFS modified their case closure guidelines so that cases are not closed prematurely.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that Quality Assurance case reviews for SFY 2006 indicated that safety is being assessed on an ongoing basis. In responding to the question "Did safety continue to be assessed throughout the life of the case?" QA case reviewers reported this to be true in 88 percent of the cases. When asked "Was a safety review completed on the particular foster child being reviewed as well as the foster home they were in?" QA case reviewers indicated that safety had been assessed 99 percent of the time.

However, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, QA case reviews for SFY 2006 found that only 64 percent of the cases are compliant with completing a safety assessment prior to returning children home. The Statewide Assessment reports that this statistic refers to the completion of the formal Safety Assessment Form and does not reflect the informal assessment that DFS workers conduct on an ongoing basis. It was noted that DFS "must make an effort to improve on the number of [formal] safety assessments workers are completing prior to reunification." The Statewide Assessment suggests that DFS workers do an excellent job of assessing the safety of children during every face-to-face contact; the problem is in the completion of a form not in the actual assessment of safety.

Information in the Statewide Assessment also suggests that many youth do not feel comfortable or safe in their foster homes. Youth participating in the focus groups convened by the State reported that, although DFS reduces the risk of harm by removing children from their homes, they then expose the children to additional mental and emotional abuse in the foster home. The youth said that they were often exposed to inappropriate adult conversations regarding their parents or families, or were talked about as if they were not

there, resulting in feelings of isolation and separation. The youth also felt that when they were placed in foster care they were forced to hold their feelings inside and that they could not discuss their feelings or concerns about safety.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	9	4	5	18	42.9
Partially Achieved:	7	6	5	18	42.9
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	1	0	6	14.2
Not Applicable:	10	6	7		
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (Scaled Score)		State's Composite Score		Meets Standard (Yes/No)
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6		128.6		Yes
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4		100.5		No
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7		137.1		Yes
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5		121.4		Yes

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.8 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for Federal fiscal year 2006, the State did not meet the national standard for Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions.

The State did meet the national standard for composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunifications; Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods; and Composite 4: Placement stability. Performance on the individual measures included in these composites is presented in the discussion of the related items.

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001. In this review, item 7 (pertaining to establishing permanency goals for children in a timely manner), and item 9 (achieving adoptions in a timely manner) were each rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Key concerns identified during the 2001 CFSR with regard to these items were the following:

- Delays in achieving termination of parental rights (TPR).
- Insufficient attention to permanency for children in YRS placements
- Insufficient numbers of adoptive families
- Delays in referrals for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC).

The State also identified three additional factors that they believed had an impact on timely permanency. These were:

- Delays in finalizing adoptions due to Court processes and backlogs.
- Concerns regarding DFS' process for approving and training foster families to be adoptive families.
- Insufficient attention to permanency in YRS cases due to a focus on criminal proceedings and public safety.

Delaware implemented the following strategies in its PIP to address these concerns:

- A process was developed to screen children when they enter care to determine whether reunification services should be provided and/or to seek immediate court approval of a decision not to make reasonable efforts to reunite.
- New permanency tracking points were developed for the State's management information system—FACTS.
- Joint trainings and meetings were initiated with Family Court judges, CASAs, attorneys, and foster parents.
- New timeframes for TPR appeals were developed by the courts with regard to submitting briefs and rendering decisions.
- Foster parent training was modified to include FOSTADOPT training for both foster and adoptive parenting. This process has been fully implemented and a new application was developed to combine foster and adoptive parents.
- Adoption contracts were awarded to four private agencies to develop recruitment strategies for older children, special needs children and sibling groups.
- DFS sought to initiate action to change the Delaware Code to establish jurisdiction for dependency/neglect and TPR at the initial dependency hearing. This was not successful, however DFS worked with the Family Court to create an ad hoc task force to study the issue. Functions of the Permanency Planning Committee resulted from this task force.
- YRS training on new procedures for revised bail was completed. Training on adjudicatory order language on reasonable efforts and contrary to the welfare determinations was also completed for YRS staff.

The State's PIP goals with regard to these issues were achieved.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

In contrast to the 2001 CFSR, five of the six items relevant to Permanency Outcome 1 were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Only the item pertaining to re-entry into foster care was rated as a Strength.

However, a key finding of the 2007 CFSR is that the PIP efforts to address timeliness of adoptions were successful with regard to the percent of adoptions occurring within 24 months of a child's entry into foster care. One of the PIP goals pertaining to adoption was that by the end of the PIP, 15 percent of adoptions would take place in less than 24 months from the child's entry into foster care. This goal was exceeded: by the end of the PIP 32.4 percent of adoptions were achieved in less than 24 months of the child's entry into foster care, and by 2005, 32.4 percent of adoptions occurred in this time frame. Despite this improvement, the State did not meet the national standard for the data composite pertaining to adoption in the 2007 review. This is primarily due to performance on the measure assessing attainment of finalized adoptions for children who are already legally free for adoption (i.e., there is termination of parental rights for both parents). This suggests that not having an adequate pool of adoptive families may still be a concern for the State.

Despite this success, the following key concerns were identified through case review findings:

- Inconsistencies in establishing permanency goals in a timely manner,
- Inconsistencies with regard to concerted efforts to achieve goals in a timely manner,
- The establishment of a goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) for children under the age of 16,
- Questions regarding the "permanency" of APPLA placements and the lack of formal agreements with foster parents regarding the permanency of the placement, and
- A lack of services to prepare children with a goal of APPLA for independent living.

Stakeholder interview information generally supported these concerns. However, stakeholders generally perceived the agency as establishing permanency goals in a timely manner.

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

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 16 of the 42 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for assessment if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 5	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	6	6	3	15	94
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	1	1	6
Not applicable	15	5	6	26	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

State performance in 2005 on the individual measure of foster care reentry included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was as follows: 22.8 percent of the children exiting foster care in 2004 reentered foster care in less than 12 months. For the data set used to establish the national standards for the data composites, the median performance on this measure was 15.0 percent, and the 25th percentile was 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength when the entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of the child’s discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed different opinions. Most stakeholders said that the agency is effective in preventing reentry into foster care, although they noted that there are some cases of reentry that may be attributed in large part to parental substance abuse. However, a few stakeholders voiced concern that reentry is probably higher than it should be and attributed this to: (1) the fact that many services often are not continued after reunification, and (2) some children are being reunified prematurely.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 94 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the entry into foster care during the period under review did not occur within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. This percent meets the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, which was conducted in 2001, this item also was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to information provided in the Statewide Assessment, most participants of focus groups convened by the State generally expressed the opinion that DFS is effective in preventing multiple entries of children into foster care. They identified the use of transitional reunification plans and increased visitation as the family moved toward reunification as two strategies that contributed to success with regard to reentry.

The Statewide Assessment also notes the following concerns voiced by various focus group participants:

- There are challenges in preventing reentry when the issues concern neglect.

- The primary issues resulting in replacement are lack of housing and substance abuse relapse.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, there is a discrepancy between the opinions expressed by focus group members and the data for the Federal measure of foster care reentry, which is quite high. The Statewide Assessment indicated that this warrants further study. The Statewide Assessment also noted that “further analysis will include looking at the role Family Court has played in the various counties regarding the decision to reunify families.” Additionally, the Division must evaluate the factors social workers and supervisors consider before reunification occurs. The Treatment Program Manager will initiate the analysis by July 2007.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

All 42 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of Item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. Reviewers also assessed the stability of the child's current placement setting. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 6	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	13	7	9	29	69
Area Needing Improvement	8	4	1	13	31
Not applicable	0	0	0	0	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Performance on this item varied considerably across counties. The item was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of Sussex County cases, compared to 64 percent Kent County cases, and 62 percent New Castle County cases.

Delaware's performance in 2005 on the individual measures of placement stability included in Composite 4: Placement Stability, indicate that the State is among the top 25 percent of States for all measures. The percentages were the following:

- 96.3 percent of the children in foster care for less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings,
- 82.6 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings, and
- 52.6 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings.

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (21 cases).

- The placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest in that they were intended to promote achieving the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (7 cases). For example, placement changes were made to move the child to a relative home, to an adoptive home, from a shelter to a foster home, and from a foster home to a treatment facility based on the recommendation of a psychiatrist.
- The child reentered foster care during the period under review and the agency tried to place the child with former foster parents (1 case).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The child experienced multiple placements, and at least one placement change was not part of a planned placement change to further attainment of the child's permanency goal (11 cases). In most of these cases, children were moved either due to their behavior problems or due to personal problems experienced by the foster parents.
- The child's current placement was not stable (2 cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 20 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review.
- Children in 12 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 10 cases experienced 3 or more placements during the period under review.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of Stakeholders commenting on this topic noted that there are problems with placement stability in the State. They differed, however, with regard to the causes of this problem. Some stakeholders suggested that the main reason why placements disrupt is the child's behavior. These stakeholders suggested that some foster parents are expected to care for children who belong in mental health treatment facilities. Other stakeholders attributed problems with placement stability to an insufficient number of foster care placements, which results in placements based on availability rather than appropriateness. A few stakeholders said that there was a lack of support for foster parents experiencing difficulties with a foster child's behavior.

Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that there is a lack of appropriate placements for youth, noting that there are only two group homes in the State. It was noted that many youth end up in a shelter rather than a home, and, although a shelter stay is supposed to be limited to 120 days, most children are there longer.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 69 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in their best interests. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Delaware has worked to improve the stability of children in foster care. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that because of limited placement resources, children experience frequent changes in placements. DFS case managers participating in focus groups convened by the State expressed the opinion that the agency could improve in this area by adding more foster homes, increasing training skills, and adding supports for foster parents. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, a key challenge is reducing multiple placements of older children in care. The youth in the focus groups convened by the State viewed placement stability as connected to their emotional stability and said that the relationships and commitment of foster parents and case managers were important to them.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

____ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

All 42 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	13	6	8	27	64
Area Needing Improvement	8	5	2	15	36
Not applicable	0	0	0	0	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10		

Delaware's performance in 2005 with regard to the individual measures incorporated in Permanency Composite 3: Achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time, was the following:

- 25.2 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the fiscal year were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the fiscal year. This percent is about equivalent to the national median for this measure (25.0 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards
- 95.1 percent of the children exiting foster care in 2005 who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percent is less than the national median for this measure (96.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- 22.1 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care in 2005 with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percent makes Delaware one of the highest

performing States (top 25 percent) on this measure (note that lower percentages mean higher performance) based on the data set used to establish the national standards.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. The case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's goal is APPLA, but there is no indication that alternative permanency options were explored prior to establishing this goal (2 cases).
- The goal of reunification was maintained for too long a period of time (3 cases).
- The child was in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, but the agency did not file or join a TPR petition or file or document a compelling reason for not filing for TPR (8 cases).
- After a lengthy period of time, the goal of adoption was changed by the court because the court determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to assist the mother in achieving her case plan objectives (1 case).
- The goal of reunification was changed to guardianship without exploring the father as a reunification option (1 case).
- There was a lack of concurrent planning (1 case).
- The goal was appropriate but was not established in a timely manner (1 case).

Case review findings pertaining to case goals were as follows:

- 10 children had a goal of adoption only.
- 15 children had a goal of APPLA only.
- 9 children had a goal of reunification only.
- 2 children had a goal of guardianship only.
- 3 children had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification.
- 1 child had a concurrent goal of adoption and guardianship.
- 1 child had a concurrent goal of reunification and guardianship.

Case review findings pertaining to termination of parental rights (TPR) were as follows:

- At the time of the on-site review, 28 of the 42 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- TPR had been filed in 13 (46 percent) of the 28 cases (it was achieved in 6 cases).
- A reason for not filing for TPR was noted in 7 of the 15 cases for which TPR had not been filed despite the 15-month criterion being met.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders reported that DFS is effective at establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner. Stakeholders, however, expressed different opinions about the goal of APPLA. Many stakeholders said that they believe it is being used appropriately, while many others voiced concern about the agency's use of this goal and suggested that it is being misused. These latter stakeholders were particularly concerned that APPLA is beginning to be used for younger children as well as adolescents. As one of them noted, 10 to 12 year olds are now being called "older children." Several stakeholders also were concerned about the general assumption of the agency and the courts that any child older than 12 cannot be adopted, and the general lack of concerted efforts around adoptions for adolescents. Stakeholders in general also indicated that once APPLA is established as the goal, it is rarely reassessed and there is no systematic process for reassessment.

Stakeholders also expressed different opinions regarding use of concurrent planning. All stakeholders agreed that there is little documentation regarding concurrent planning because FACTS, the State information system, does not support it. However, several stakeholders, particularly those in Sussex County, indicated that caseworkers routinely engage in concurrent planning on an informal basis, although this cannot be formalized in FACTS. Several stakeholders reported that it is agency policy that reunification is the only goal for 6 to 9 months, then, if desired, the permanency planning committee can change the goal and the worker can focus on concurrent goals. However, according to Delaware's State Policy Submission form: "Concurrent planning begins from the time of placement into foster care until permanency has been sanctioned by the court." As noted in the Policy Submission Form, "Once placement occurs, concurrent planning is used to explore other permanency options for children if they cannot return home." This suggests that there is some confusion among stakeholders regarding agency policies pertaining to concurrent planning, which was reflected in some of the cases reviewed.

Several stakeholders also expressed the opinion that in many situations, reunification is being maintained as the goal for too long when there is no evidence that the parents are actively working the case plan, or when there is support for putting the case on a fast track toward adoption.

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 64 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, which was conducted in 2001, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports the following information from the SFY 2006 QA reviews.

- Reviewers found that 100 percent of the children reviewed had a permanency goal and 84 (38.5 percent) of the 218 children had a goal of "planned permanent living arrangement" (APPLA).
- Reviewers believed that 94 percent of the established goals were appropriate to the child.

- Reviewers believed that DFS was making reasonable efforts to achieve those goals in 98 percent of the cases.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, State policy for children in foster care is that permanency goals are established within 30 days of entering out of home care and that goals are reviewed at least every 6 months. Participants in focus groups convened by the State generally agreed that permanency goals are established in a timely manner for children entering foster care. The Statewide Assessment also notes that it is agency policy that concurrent planning begins from the time of placement into foster care until permanency has been sanctioned by the court. Once placement occurs, concurrent planning is used to explore other permanency options for children if they cannot return home.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that DFS has instituted a policy that requires all workers to complete an “Early Screening Tool” for all children birth through 12 that enter foster care within one month of placement. The intent of the Early Screening Tool is to serve as a prognostic indicator of how successful reunification efforts are likely to be. If the social worker identifies items on the tool that indicate reunification is unlikely, the case is immediately referred to the Permanency Planning Committee for review. In those instances, termination of parental rights is pursued expeditiously after consultation with the Deputy Attorney General and in accordance with ASFA deadlines.

Also noted in the Statewide Assessment is that Department Policy #209, Department Services Coordination, was implemented in October 2003. This policy placed the responsibility for dependent children in the Department with the Office of Children’s Services. This has increased the number of older foster youth with special needs. These youth are more likely than other children entering foster care to have limited permanency options.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 8 was applicable for 17 of the 42 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals.

The results of this assessment are shown in the table below.

Item 8	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	5	3	3	11	65

Area Needing Improvement	3	2	1	6	35
Not applicable	13	6	6	25	
Total	21	11	10	42	

It is difficult to assess variation in performance across sites because of the small numbers of applicable cases for each item.

Delaware’s performance in 2005 with regard to the timeliness of reunification measures included in Permanency Composite 1—Timeliness and permanency of reunification—were as follows:

- 88.5 percent of the reunifications occurred in less than 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile (75.2 percent) for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 3.0 months. This median is lower than the 25th percentile for State performance on this measure (5.4 months) for the data set used to establish the national standards for composite 1. (Note that lower number of months means higher performance.)
- 59.7 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months of 2004, were discharged from foster care to reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile (48.4 percent) for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards.

The applicable cases for this item include nine with a goal of reunification, two with a goal of guardianship, three with concurrent goals of adoption and reunification, one with concurrent goals of reunification and guardianship, and one with concurrent goals of adoption and guardianship.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner.

Additional case review findings are as follows:

- For the 9 cases with a single goal of reunification, the goal was achieved in 2 cases; for both of those cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months.
- For the two cases with a single goal of guardianship, the goal was achieved in both cases in less than 12 months.
- For the 1 case in which the goal was permanent placement with relatives, the goal was achieved in less than 12 months.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this issue suggested that DFS has effective policies and procedures in place to support reunification with parents or other relatives. A few stakeholders, however, expressed concern that guardianship is being used as a case goal when adoption should be the goal, because adoption is more permanent.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 65 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, there was no comparable item. At that time, item 8 pertained to independent living services.

According to the Statewide Assessment, reunification is, by policy, the priority permanency goal. It was noted that the Family Court, Child Placement Review Board, Office of the Child Advocate, Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) all play important roles with DFS in identifying and achieving the goal of reunification.

Item 9: Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 9 was applicable for 14 of the 42 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below.

Item 9	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	3	2	1	6	43
Area Needing Improvement	4	1	3	8	57
Not Applicable	14	8	6	28	
Total	21	11	10	42	

The following information describes Delaware’s performance on the individual measures included in the CFSR Data Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions:

- 42.7 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile for this measure (36.6 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards for the composite.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 27.9 months. This length of stay is about equivalent to the 25th percentile for this measure (27.3 months) for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite. It is one of the higher performing States. (Note that the lower the number of months, the higher the performance).
- 20.2 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the year. This percent is equal to the national median for this measure (20.2 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.
- 9.7 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percent is slightly higher than the median for this measure (8.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.
- 38.9 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percent is less than the national median for this measure (45.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the State had not made diligent efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. In 3 of these 8 cases, key concerns were attributed to court delays in scheduling hearings, particularly TPR hearings.

For the 14 cases with a goal of adoption, the reviews indicated that adoption was finalized in 3 cases with only 1 of the finalizations occurring within 24 months of the child’s entry into foster care. Of the 11 remaining children, only 3 were identified as being in adoptive placements. For one case, it was not clear whether the current placement was an adoptive placement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the agency is very timely in achieving adoptions in “fast track” cases (cases that are referred to the Permanency Planning Committee during the first month of placement based on the findings of the

Early Screening Tool), but is not as good for other types of cases. They also were in general agreement that the agency files for TPR in a timely manner. However, many noted that the TPR process often is slowed in the courts, due primarily to court scheduling, but also to the tendency of some judges to give parents a number of “second chances” to accomplish the objectives of their reunification plan. Although some stakeholders noted that there are frequent continuances in the courts, other stakeholders suggested that continuances are rare.

One of the key barriers to timely adoptions was noted to be the lack of adoption resources. Stakeholders reported that when foster parents decide to adopt, things go rather quickly and smoothly, but other adoptions take a lot longer. However, stakeholders also noted that many foster parents do not want to adopt because of a belief that they will lose their subsidies and the services they need for the children. Another barrier noted was the high caseloads of adoption workers. Also, several stakeholders reported that some adoption workers begin looking for adoptive placements as soon as TPR is filed, but other adoption workers will wait until the TPR is granted.

Additional information on stakeholder perceptions of the adoption process is provided under items 25, 26, 27, and 28 in the Systemic Factors section of the report.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 43 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSSR, which was conducted in 2001, this item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. The State was required to address this item in a Program Improvement Plan.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment notes that improvements have been made in achieving adoptions in a timely manner and describes several factors that the State feels contributed to this improvement:

- Through 2002 legislation, the period of supervision for an adoptive placement was reduced from 1 year to 6 months.
- TPR petitions are filed in a timely manner.
- All children entering care are reviewed by the permanency committee at 10 months to review the progress in the case or to make a goal change.
- Children entering foster care are screened for permanency decisions early on in the case.
- There has been an improvement in the partnership among DFS, the Family Court, adoption agencies, and child advocates.
- There is a dual application for foster and adoptive parents (adopted in January 2004). This expedites adoptions because about 60 percent of adoptions in the State are by foster parents.

The Statewide Assessment notes that there were 240 adoption cases as of November 2006. Of that number, Delaware was recruiting for adoptive families for 112 children. The remaining 128 children were noted to be in a pre-adoptive placement.

The Statewide Assessment reports that focus group participants agree that there has been significant improvement in getting children adopted in a timely manner. However, some barriers to timely adoptions were identified by case managers, adoptive parents, policy managers and administrators, and review bodies, including court scheduling delays and lengthy litigations.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 10 was applicable for 15 (36 percent) of the 42 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results are presented in the table below:

Item 10	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	3	3	3	9	60
Area Needing Improvement	5	1	0	6	40
Not applicable	13	7	7	27	
Total	21	11	10	42	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child was receiving the necessary services and supports to promote a successful transition from foster care to independent living once the child reached the age of emancipation (8 cases).
- The child had long-term special needs that were being adequately addressed in a specialized setting and the State was planning on transitioning the child to a supervised living arrangement at the age of majority (3 cases).

Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency was not and had not been providing the child with sufficient services to assist in transitioning to independent living (4 cases).
- The child’s current placement was not long term and was unstable (2 cases).
- There was no formal agreement from current foster parents that they will provide a permanent home for the child until age of majority (5 cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- 5 of the cases assessed for this item involved children who were 16 or older.
- 10 of the cases assessed for this item involved children for whom this goal was established when they were younger than age 16.
- In one case, the child was younger than age 13 when the goal of APPLA was established.

Stakeholder Interview Information

All stakeholders commenting on this item noted that there are insufficient services to assist children in transitioning from foster care to independent living, although some suggested that the situation has improved over the past 5 years. While several stakeholders noted that existing services are effective, the general consensus was that there are not enough of these services and that they are not able to reach the “hard-to-engage” youth. It was noted that Independent Living (IL) Services contractors need to be creative with respect to engaging youth in services. Not all stakeholders, however, viewed existing services as effective. Several suggested that they are not very useful and that the critical services such as transitional housing and mentoring are not available. One stakeholder reported that the State budget for Independent Living Services is not sufficient to meet the needs of the foster care youth in Delaware. In addition, IL contractors were reported to carry three times the caseloads of DFS workers.

Stakeholders also noted that the State policy requiring that formal contracted independent living services can be provided only to children age 16 and older is a clear barrier to preparing children for independent living. Because of the shortage of services, children at age 16 often are put on waiting lists and are close to 18 before they ever receive IL services.

A few stakeholders also questioned whether the goal of APPLA is ever actually achieved, since these placements can be very unstable and in many situations are not permanent.

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 60 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the goal of other planned living arrangement was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State policy indicates that for youth with a goal of APPLA, all youth 14 years of age and older are provided with Independent Living (IL) services. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that from 14 to 15 years of age, the IL services are provided by the caseworker and the foster placement, and are informal, focusing on daily hygiene and interpersonal relationships. For youth 16 and older, formal IL services are coordinated and provided by community-based contractors.

While this is written in policy, there is some indication in the Statewide Assessment that the policies are not being implemented as intended. For example, the Statewide Assessment reports that “practically all” focus group participants agreed that DFS is not doing enough to prepare youth to become successfully independent and that independent living services for older youth is an area that needs

improvement. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that review bodies and stakeholders see this as the State’s problem, not DFS’s. Current independent living services are effective but are limited in scope and budget. Youth aging out of care need better choices for medical care, mental health, and housing and support services.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	13	7	7	27	65.8
Partially Achieved:	7	4	3	14	34.2
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	1	0	0		

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 65.8 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome did not differ substantially across the counties

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001. Specifically, item 13 (pertaining to visits with parents and siblings in foster care) was rated as an Area Needing Improvement due primarily to the finding in the case reviews of a lack of planning for sibling visits in many cases. To address this concern, the State implemented the following PIP strategies:

- The DCC process was modified to include discussion about sibling and parent visitation. Supervisors are now directed to inquire about the planning and completion of sibling visits during regular conferencing with caseworkers.
- A new placement/permanency case review tool was finalized that addressed visitation and ensured that information about the frequency of sibling visits is available to managers to monitor whether such visits are regularly scheduled.

The State’s PIP goals with regard to this issue were achieved.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Although the PIP goals pertaining to improving visitation were achieved, the 2007 CFSR found that there continues to be a lack of consistency in ensuring sufficient visitation between children and parents, and particularly, between siblings who are placed apart. Consequently, item 13 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR. Other key findings pertaining to this outcome were the following:

- The agency is generally effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents (item 11), when relevant.
- The agency is not consistent in its efforts to support the bond between parents and children (item 16).
- There is a lack of consistency with regard to seeking and evaluating relatives as placement options (item 15) and maintaining connections between the children and their extended families, communities, and religious/cultural heritage (item 14).

Although many stakeholders suggested that DFS makes concerted efforts to preserve the continuity of family relationships and connections for children in foster care, they also noted that there often are insufficient resources to ensure that these efforts are successful.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 11 was applicable for 29 of the 42 foster care cases. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 11	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	13	7	7	27	93
Area Needing Improvement	2	0	0	2	7
Not applicable	6	4	3	13	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child was placed in the same community or county as the parents or that the child's placement was not in the same community or county, but was still in close proximity to the parents. Item 11 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in two cases when reviewers determined that the child was placed in another county because of a lack of adequate resources in the county where the child's family resided.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that, although DFS tries to keep children in their same communities when considering placements, children often are not placed in their communities or counties because of scarce placement options. Stakeholders noted that the older the child, the more difficult it is to place them in proximity to their families. One example of this problem provided by stakeholders was the lack of group homes (there are only 2) in the State.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 93 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State agency had made diligent efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives, or that were necessary to meet special needs. This percent exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS makes concerted efforts to place children in close proximity to their parents. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that this is not always feasible because of the scarcity of placement options.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 12 was applicable for 20 (48 percent) of the 42 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not have a sibling in foster care at any time during the period under review. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 12	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	10	3	3	16	80
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	0	4	20
Not applicable	9	6	7		
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Although there was some variation in performance on this item across sites, it is difficult to interpret because of the small number of applicable cases in Kent and Sussex Counties.

Item 12 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was in a placement with all siblings (5 cases).
- The child was in a placement with some siblings, and the separation from other siblings was determined to be in the best interests of one of the siblings (5 cases).
- The child was not placed with any siblings, but the siblings were separated due to the special needs of one of the siblings (3 cases).
- The child was not placed with any siblings, but placement with siblings was not in the child's best interest (3 cases).

Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a shortage of placement resources for sibling groups (four or fewer children) (3 cases).
- Children were not placed with siblings and the separation was not deemed to be in the best interests of one of the siblings (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that DFS tries to place siblings together whenever possible and appropriate. However, they also noted that these efforts often are hampered by a lack of resources, particularly for large sibling groups.

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 80 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that agency placed siblings together in foster care unless a separation was necessary to meet the child's special needs. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to information provided in the Statewide Assessment, the 15 percent growth in foster care has strained the available resource capacity and additional placement resources are needed. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the State's quality assurance (QA) review resulted in the following findings: The question asked during the review was the following: During the period under review, if the child was removed from home and placed in foster care, were there efforts to place the child with siblings in the same home? QA reviewers reported that appropriate efforts were made to place siblings together in 78.6 percent of the cases reviewed in Calendar Year (CY) 2005, and 91.38 percent of cases reviewed in SFY 2006.

The Statewide Assessment notes that policy is in place to support sibling placements when it is in the children's best interest, but there are limited placement resources.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 13 was applicable for 33 (79 percent) of the 42 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item if the child had no siblings in foster care and if one of the following conditions was met with regard to the parents: (1) TPR was established prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the child’s life (or parents were deceased), or (2) visitation with a parent was considered to not be in the best interests of the child. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care, and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 13	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	8	3	6	17	52
Area Needing Improvement	9	4	3	16	48
Not applicable	4	4	1	9	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 67 percent of Sussex County cases, compared to 47 percent of New Castle County cases and 43 percent of Kent County cases.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of visitation met the needs of the child (14 cases).
- The frequency of visitation did not meet the needs of the child but the agency made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation (3 cases).

Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother (5 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings (7 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to locate or contact an absent father to involve him in visitation (5 cases).

The frequency of visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings is presented in the table below:

Visitation Frequency (During the period under review)	Mother (Number of cases)	Father (Number of cases)	Siblings (Number of Cases)
Visits occurred at least on a weekly basis	8	3	6
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	0	2	0
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	6	3	2
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	15	9	11
There were no visits during the period under review	1	7	2

Total cases for which item 13 was applicable	30	24	21

Additional findings were the following:

- In 9 of the 16 cases in which visits with the mother occurred less frequently than once a month or not at all, reviewers determined that this frequency was sufficient and/or the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.
- In 7 of the 16 cases in which visits with the father occurred less frequently than once a month or there were no visits, reviewers determined that the frequency was sufficient and/or the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.
- In 7 of the 13 cases in which sibling visits occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the frequency was sufficient to meet the child’s needs.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that DFS makes concerted efforts to promote visits between children and their parents when reunification is the goal. However, they noted that when the goal is APPLA, visits between parents and children are not given a high priority and some of these children do not have contact with their parents for long periods of time. Caseworkers interviewed during the case reviews reported that if a child’s goal is APPLA, they are no longer required to work with the parents. Stakeholders also reported that DFS is less diligent in ensuring visitation between siblings than it is in ensuring visits between children and parents. Stakeholders noted that the biggest barrier to visitation is transportation, although one stakeholder said that the agency provides the necessary transportation.

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 52 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the family. This percent is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. The State was required to address this item in a Program Improvement Plan.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, State policy and the Family Court specify regular visitation schedules for foster children. The findings of a State quality assurance review reported in the Statewide Assessment were the following:

- For SFY 2006, QA reviewers saw appropriate visitation between foster children and siblings in 86 percent of cases
- For SFY 2006, QA reviewers saw appropriate visitation between foster children and their parents in 81 percent of cases.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFS has set an internal goal of 95 percent compliance for this item.

Item 14. Preserving connections

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 14 was applicable for 41 of the 42 foster care cases. For the one case rated as not applicable for this item, the child was adopted in infancy and had no prior ties to community or family. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The results of the assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 14	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	17	10	7	34	83
Area Needing Improvement	3	1	3	7	17
Not applicable	1	0	0	1	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of Kent County cases and 85 percent of New Castle County cases, compared to 70 percent of Sussex County cases.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child's connections with extended family members and friends (e.g., through phone contact and visits) (26 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child's connections with the child's religious or cultural heritage (9 cases).
- The agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child's connections with the school and community (e.g. selecting placements that do not require a change of school, jobs, friends, etc.) (12 cases).

Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to extended family (6 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to community (i.e., school and friends) (1 case).

None of the cases reviewed involved a child who was a member of a Native American Tribe.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency does not usually consider maintaining primary connections for the child as an important objective. They noted that, although foster parents often try to do this, agency workers rarely do. A few stakeholders reported that many of the youth in the Sussex county group home go to visit family or other connections on weekends.

Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 83 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment notes that the application of the "McKinney-Vento" protections to all foster children has increased the ability of the agency to maintain children's connections to their schools while in foster care. Under this law, the State must provide transportation to a foster child who moves to a new school district so that the child, if he or she wishes, can continue attending the old school.

Item 15. Relative placement

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 15 was applicable for 38 (90 percent) of the 42 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if relative placement was not an option during the period under review because: (1) the child was in an adoptive placement at the start of the period, or (2) the child entered foster care needing specialized services that could not be provided in a relative placement. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 15	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	14	10	8	32	84
Area Needing Improvement	4	1	1	6	16
Not applicable	3	0	1	4	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Performance on this measure varied somewhat across Sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of Kent County cases and 89 percent of Sussex County cases, compared to 78 percent of New Castle County cases.

Item 15 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed with relatives (10 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives but the agency had made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (22 cases). In these cases, children were not placed with relatives either because a relative could not be found or

because the relatives that were located were unable or unwilling to care for the children, lived too far from the parents, and/or had a criminal record or history of substantiated child maltreatment.

Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency had not made diligent efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives (2 cases).
- The agency had made efforts to search for maternal relatives but not paternal relatives (3 cases).
- The agency had made efforts to search for paternal relatives but not maternal (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic were in general agreement that DFS usually attempts to find relatives as placement resources for children in foster care, and sometimes will assess a long time family friend (i.e. “fictive kin) as a “relative” placement. However, stakeholders also noted that DFS is not as consistent as it needs to be in establishing paternity, seeking fathers, and seeking paternal relatives. A few stakeholders noted that it is difficult to find relatives who are willing to assume care for the children on a permanent basis because there is no kinship care program or subsidized relative guardianship to support relatives who assume the care of the children.

Rating Determination

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to information in the Statewide Assessment, agency policy requires that relatives be sought and assessed as placement resources prior to children entering care and when permanency decisions are reviewed. Whenever DFS removes a child from the home it is the policy of the Division to ask the parents for any relatives that may be placement options for the child. The worker is then responsible for contacting the relatives, conducting criminal background and FACTS checks, and completing home assessments, if it is determined that the relatives are suitable placement options and they express an interest in caring for the child.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 16 was applicable for 33 (79 percent) of the 42 foster care cases. A case was not applicable if (1) parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, or (2) a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child’s best interests throughout the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to

determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below:

Item 16	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	10	3	6	19	58
Area Needing Improvement	7	4	3	14	42
Not applicable	4	4	1	9	
Total Foster Care Cases	21	11	10	42	

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- There was a strong bond between the parent and the child and the agency made concerted efforts to support it (6 cases).
- There was not a strong bond between the parent and the child, but the agency made concerted efforts to promote bonding (13 cases).

Examples of DFS efforts to promote bonding included the following:

- Encouraging parents to attend their child’s medical appointments and school meetings.
- Encouraging parents to participate in the child’s activities.
- Arranging family counseling/therapy.
- Facilitating visits to incarcerated parents.

Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child’s relationship with the father (6 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child’s relationship with the mother (5 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the child’s relationship with the mother or father (3 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not have comments relevant to this item.

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 58 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment does not comment on this item except in terms of visitation between children and parents, which is addressed in item 13.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	10	12	10	32	49.2
Partially Achieved:	16	5	7	28	43.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	0	0	5	7.7
Not Applicable:					
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 47.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of Kent County cases and 59 percent of Sussex County cases, compared to 32 percent of New Castle County cases. There also was a slight difference in performance based on type of case. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 19 (45 percent) of the 42 foster care cases, and in 12 (52 percent) of the 23 in home cases.

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001. During this review, item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. This item pertains to assessing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents and providing services to meet the needs. Key concerns identified through the case reviews were the following:

- Comprehensive assessments for children and families were not being conducted in a consistent manner.
- Services were not being provided to meet identified needs of children and parents.
- There was a lack of assessment of maltreatment and safety in YRS cases.

Delaware implemented the following PIP strategies to address these concerns:

- A Service Entry Needs and Strengths Screen (SENSS) was developed for FACTS and required that information from SENSS be included in developing the Family Service Plan.
- A Uniform Intake and Assessment process was implemented across the State.
- Regular meetings were initiated with CMH staff to discuss appropriate referral procedures for services.
- Foster parent satisfaction surveys were implemented and continue to be completed every two years.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

A key finding of the 2007 CFSR is that item 17 continues to be an Area Needing Improvement. However, the agency was found to be effective in assessing and meeting the needs of children. The areas of concern pertained to assessing and meeting the needs of parents, particularly non-custodial parents, and foster parents.

Another key finding was that all of the other items incorporated in Well-Being Outcome 1 were rated as Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 review. The findings pertaining to these other items are the following:

- DFS was generally effective with regard to caseworker visits with children occurring with sufficient frequency and quality to meet the needs of the child (item 19), although the percent of strength ratings for this item was not high enough for an overall rating of Strength for the State.
- There was inconsistency with regard to DFS efforts to engage parents and children in the case planning process (item 18).
- The agency was not consistent with regard to ensuring that caseworker visits with parents are of sufficient frequency and quality to further attainment of the child's goals (item 20).

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 17 was applicable for all 65 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. This item excludes the assessment of children's (but not parents') needs pertaining to educational needs and physical and mental health needs. These are addressed in later items. The case review results were the following:

Item 17	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	12	12	11	35	54
Area Needing Improvement	19	5	6	30	46
Not applicable	0	0	0		
Total	31	17	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 71 percent of the Kent County cases and 65 percent of Sussex County cases, compared to only 39 percent of New Castle County cases. For the 42 foster care cases, 22 (52 percent) were rated as a Strength. For the 23 in-home services cases, 13 (56 percent) were rated as a Strength.

Item 17 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met. Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that there was either inadequate assessment of needs or inadequate services to meet identified needs.

Specific case review findings for item 17 shown in the table below suggest that the agency is more likely to assess and meet the needs of children than it is to assess and meet the needs of mothers, fathers, and foster parents. The agency also appears to be more likely to assess and meet the needs of mothers and foster parents, than it is to assess and meet the needs of fathers.

Needs Assessment and Services Evaluations	Evaluation Results		No. of Applicable Cases
	No	Yes	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	15 (29%)	37	52
Father's needs assessed and met	15 (62.5%)	24	39
Foster parent's needs assessed and met	7 (24%)	29	36
Child's needs assessed and met	5 (9%)	58	63

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that DFS conducts assessments of the needs of children and parent both initially and on an ongoing basis throughout the case. Stakeholders also noted that foster parents are usually well supported by the agency with services such as respite care and day care. They noted that foster home coordinators generally do an excellent job supporting foster parents. A key concern voiced by stakeholders pertained to a lack of services to youth to assist them in transitioning to independent living.

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 54 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children and parents. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFS has clear needs assessment and case-planning policies and procedures that address many dimensions of family and child functioning. In addition, DFS has made a concerted effort to ensure that each regional office has access to appropriate services for their families. If transportation is an issue, workers have access to transportation providers that will get clients to their various appointments. If language is a barrier, workers have access to interpretation contracts that can help provide services. DFS has contracted with a Spanish-speaking agency in New Castle County and agencies in Kent and Sussex Counties have access to Spanish speaking workers in contracted agencies. In the event that the worker or family identifies a service that is needed but that the State does not have a contract for, workers can present the service to the Service Integration Committee for payment authorization.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that review bodies included in focus groups cited the following concerns with the assessment and subsequent provision of services, including:

- Timeliness to access services
- Quality of services
- Children waiting too long to receive mental health services
- Waiting for parenting classes to begin, and available slots
- Flexibility of services – available times should be convenient to parents' schedules
- Too few adult mental health screenings
- Utilization of family insurance may impact getting services
- Need services to address separation and loss
- Providers should have the capacity to acknowledge and provide services based on parent's functioning, motivation, circumstances

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, several youth in focus groups convened by the State expressed the opinion that youth in foster care are provided with the same services, regardless of their circumstances. They felt that planning and practices were very generic. However, the majority of youth acknowledged that they were asked about the types of services they wanted or needed.

The Statewide Assessment reports that, when other Divisions are involved with the child, the Interdivisional Service Plan was completed 58 percent of the time for SFY06. Completion of ISPs in a timely manner has been a major focus of the current administration. Reports are provided on a monthly basis showing which cases are in need of an ISP. Completion of ISPs in a timely manner has also been included in Performance Plans for all social workers and supervisors. Finally, the Office of Case Management

reviews completed ISPs for the entire Department to ensure that they are completed in a timely manner and that they are thoroughly completed.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 18 was applicable for 61 (94 percent) of the 65 cases. A case was not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were not involved with the child in any way **and** the child was too young or had cognitive delays or other conditions that were barriers to participation in case planning. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

Item 18	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	10	13	9	32	52
Area Needing Improvement	20	3	6	29	48
Not applicable	1	1	2	4	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of Kent County cases, compared to 60 percent of Sussex County cases, and only 33 percent of New Castle County cases.

There was no variation in performance based on the type of case. Of the 42 foster care cases, 21 (50 percent) were rated as a Strength. Of the 23 in-home services cases, 11 (48 percent) were rated as a Strength.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- No attempts were made to locate fathers or to involve fathers in the case planning process (15 cases).
- Mothers were not involved in case planning and a reason for their lack of involvement was not provided in the case file (11 cases).
- Children who were deemed old enough to have been involved were not involved (7 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Comments

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite review expressed differing opinions. The general consensus, however, was that the extent of engagement of parents in case planning varies depending on the skills and efforts of the caseworkers. Several

stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that some caseworkers make concerted efforts to engage parents in case planning. Other stakeholders noted that some caseworkers develop the case plan using the FACTS format, and then share it with the family and ask the family to sign it. In addition, while some stakeholders expressed the opinion that children, when age appropriate, usually are involved in developing and updating their case plans, other stakeholders reported that some youth do not even know what is in their case plan or what their case plan goal is.

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 52 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy is clear and detailed regarding inclusion of youth and families in case planning activities. The Statewide Assessment notes that the QA case reviewers found documentation in 87 percent of the cases reviewed that efforts were made to include the parent or caretaker in the development of the case plan. However, for the Plan for Child in Care, QA reviewers found documentation of efforts to include all significant parties in the development of the plan in only 56 percent of the cases. The Statewide Assessment also notes that focus group participants generally indicated that the case plan and plan for child in care is not developed with the client. Instead, both plans are developed by the social worker in the office and then presented to the client for review and signature. Workers noted that it is difficult, if not impossible; to develop the plans with the clients due to the fact that the parent attorneys will not let the client sign anything until after the attorney has reviewed it. Participants in the review body focus group confirmed this issue as well. Workers also mentioned that it is difficult to develop the case plan and plan for a child in care with the clients because both forms are FACTS documents and are not conducive to a mutual process. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, “clearly this is an area that DFS must continue to address.”

The Statewide Assessment reports that, beginning in 2007, the Office of Case Management will begin reviewing cases to ensure that workers are internalizing the System of Care principles when working with families. This includes completing thorough assessments of all family members, viewing the parents as equal team members, and making the entire family feel empowered and supported. This will be an area of focus for the Treatment Program Manager. This issue will be put on the Treatment Workgroup agenda for discussion and recommendations regarding how to improve upon our efforts to truly collaborate with families in the development of service plans. Additionally, collaboration will become part of the routine audits that the Treatment Program Manager conducts on contracted in-home treatment services.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 19 was applicable for 64 cases. The case that was not applicable for this item was one in which the child welfare agency did not have case management responsibilities because the case was receiving services through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. In conducting this assessment, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 19	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	23	16	16	55	86
Area Needing Improvement	8	1	0	9	14
Not applicable	0	0	1	1	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Sussex County cases and 94 percent of Kent County cases, compared to 74 percent of New Castle County Cases.

Ratings for the item did not vary across type of case; 36 (86 percent) of the 42 foster care cases were rated as a Strength, and 19 (86 percent) of the 22 applicable in home cases were rated as a Strength.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals. Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (3 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, although when visits did occur, they were substantive (2 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (4 cases).

Specific information from the case reviews is presented in the table below.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Child	Foster Care Cases (Number and Percent)	In-Home Services Cases (Number and Percent)
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	7 (17%)	4 (17%)
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	8 (19%)	4 (17%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	22 (53%)	10 (43%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	4 (12%)	3 (13%)
There were no visits during the period under review	0	2 (9%)
Total cases	42	23

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits varies across caseworkers and that high caseloads often are a barrier to keeping the required visitation schedule. However, the general opinion voiced by stakeholders is that most caseworkers are compliant with the policy of at least one visit per month for children in both foster care and in-home cases, and, for foster children, at least one visit quarterly must be in the foster parent’s home. They noted that some caseworkers see the children even more often than required. One stakeholder reported that DFS has access to “over hires.” These are caseworkers who do not carry a full case load so they are available to help workers keep to their visitation schedules. All stakeholders agreed that the key issue in visits with children is face-to-face contact with the child.

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 86 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires monthly contact with foster children with one visit per quarter in the residence. Monthly contact with any member of the family is the current policy for intact families (i.e., in-home cases). Participants in focus groups were noted to believe that foster children are seen more frequently than children at home. The Statewide Assessment reports that a QA case review for SFY 2006 found that 88 percent of initial treatment contacts occurred on time, and 94 percent of ongoing treatment contacts occurred on time. When contacts were required by workers with a child, QA reviewers believed the focus of those contacts (focus on issues of case planning, services and goal attainment) was appropriate 96 percent of the time for children in intact families and 99 percent of the time for foster children.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that focus groups were asked how effective DFS is in conducting face-to-face visits with children. Case workers in the focus groups convened for the Statewide Assessment reported that they see children in foster care far more regularly than they see children residing in their own home. Some of the biological families reported that they had almost no contact with their worker unless the worker needed something from them (i.e., signature). However, one family reported that she saw her worker frequently. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, participants of focus groups composed of Review bodies, adoptive parents, and policy managers and administrators expressed the opinion that “good efforts” are made to visit children monthly. Foster parents and youth participating in the focus groups said that they would like to see more contact with children by DFS staff. The Statewide Assessment reports that stakeholders participating in focus groups believe that private child placing agencies see children more frequently than DFS case managers. DFS caseworkers reported that they are less likely to have contacts with children and parents when the families are resistant.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 20 was applicable for 52 (80 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this assessment if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. Two cases were rated as Not Applicable because they were being served through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program and DFS did not have case management responsibilities for the cases. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children’s safety and well being. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 20	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	9	10	7	26	50
Area Needing Improvement	16	2	8	26	50
Not applicable	6	5	2	13	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 83 percent of Kent County cases, compared to 47 percent of Sussex County and 36 percent of New Castle County cases. There also was a slight variation in performance as a function of the type of case. In 31 of the applicable foster care cases, 14 (45 percent) were rated as a Strength. In 21 of the applicable in-home cases, 12 (57 percent) were rated as a Strength.

Item 20 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children **and** that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Visits with mother were not of sufficient frequency or quality (18 cases)
- Visits with mother were not of sufficient frequency, although the quality was good (2 cases)
- Visits with father were not of sufficient frequency or quality (12 cases)

Additional information from the case reviews is provided below.

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Parents	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred on a weekly basis	3	1	3	1
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	7	3	2	1
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	2	5	13	4
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	14	7	1	4
There were no visits during the period under review	2	8	1	6
Total Applicable Cases	28	14	20	16

Additional findings were the following:

- For the 28 foster care cases and the 20 in-home cases for which caseworker visits with mothers were applicable, there were 18 (37 percent) cases (37 percent) in which these visits occurred less than once a month or not at all.
- For the 24 foster care cases, and 16 in-home case for which caseworker visits with fathers were applicable, there were 25 cases (62 percent) in which these visits occurred less than once a month or not at all (62%).

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 50 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, supervisors determine the frequency of contact with parents based on the issues with the family, the result of the assessments, and the risk in the home. Contact for intact families is generally once per month unless the supervisor or worker feels that it should be more frequent. The Statewide Assessment notes the following: “QA reviews use a composite of questions to address the effectiveness of contact with parents. Questions include meeting the minimal contact schedules and engaging the parent in the treatment process and specific family issues. The outcome for this measure was 86.58 percent for SFY

2006. In addition the QA reviews address the overall ‘quality’ of the documented contacts when they occur, with an outcome of 96 percent.”

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	20	6	12	38	90.5
Not Achieved:	3	1	0	4	9.5
Not Applicable	8	10	5	23	
Total	31	17	17	65	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 90.5 percent of the cases reviewed were determined to have substantially achieved this outcome. This percentage is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this item was high for all sites. Only 9 (39 percent) of the 23 in-home cases were considered applicable for this outcome. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 7 (78 percent) of the 9 cases. The item was considered applicable for 33 of the 42 foster care cases. It was rated as substantially achieved in 31 of those cases (94 percent).

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR. Case reviewers found that educational information was not consistently gathered for in-home cases unless an education matter was a presenting issue. The State addressed this issue through the following PIP strategies.

- DFS conducted research regarding promising practices in other States pertaining to education issues.
- After this research, the Service Entry Needs and Strengths Screen (SENSS), which includes information on the educational needs of children, was implemented in FACTS. This information is used in developing the Family Services Plan.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR

Case review findings for 2007 indicate that the efforts implemented by the State in its PIP were somewhat successful. A key finding was that the educational needs of children in foster care and in the in-home cases generally are being routinely assessed and met. Under the standards for the first round of the CFSR, this outcome would have been substantially achieved. However, because of the

higher standard for the 2007 CFSR, this will continue to be a focus of program improvement for the State. In fact, the finding that there were four cases in which the children’s needs were not met, suggests that there is some room for improvement in this arena.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 21 was applicable for 42 of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if any of the following applied: (1) children were not of school age; or (2) children did not have service needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below.

Item 21	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	20	6	12	38	90
Area Needing Improvement	3	1	0	4	10
Not applicable	8	10	5	23	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary. Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was discharged from custody at the age of 18 having only completed 8th grade.
- The child did not receive necessary assistance in attaining a GED.
- The child is in first grade, and there is no documentation of school performance or that educational needs were ever assessed.
- The school aged child missed a lot of school and there is no indication that the agency made any efforts to address this problem.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that DFS usually is effective in addressing children’s educational needs. They noted that there is a lot of coordination and collaboration between DFS and educational services, and that even judges are asking about educational services as a result of the CIP program. Stakeholders also commented that IEPs are being done quickly and effectively. Several stakeholders indicated that the authorization of McKinney-Vento (legislation applicable for homeless children that has been extended to cover children in foster care) services for foster children has meant that children who change placements do not necessarily have to change schools because they now must be transported to their old schools, if they wish to be. However, they

noted that sometimes the placement is so far away that the child can spend 2 hours on the bus each way. Stakeholders also noted that when placements change, it can take 2 weeks to enroll the child in a new school.

Despite the generally positive views of stakeholders concerning this area, several Stakeholders suggested that DFS does not do enough to address the educational needs of older children in foster care who are in shelter placements because there is nowhere else to put them, or who have been suspended from school. These children often are out of school for months, and may even miss a whole year of school. Stakeholders noted that there is a very good alternative school, but that it does not meet the need in terms of the number of children that can be served. The general opinion of these stakeholders is that DFS is not effective in advocating for more educational options for older children in foster care who may need specialized education services.

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 90 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. Although this percent meets the 90 percent required for other items to be rated as a Strength, the requirements for this item are different because there is only one item assessed under the outcome. For the other outcomes, an item rating of 90 is considered sufficient for a strength rating because there are multiple items within the outcome and they involve fewer cases than those incorporated in the overall outcome rating. This is not the case for this item. Therefore, for this item, the rating of Strength is based on the same criteria as the rating of substantial conformity. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA reviews cover three program areas for educational needs and services. The QA asks (1) if enough information was gathered to address risk, and (2) were service needs addressed with caregivers and schools. The findings of the QA were the following: In investigation, 87 percent of cases were compliant; for treatment, 88 percent of cases were compliant, and for children in placement, 96 percent of cases were compliant. Combined, the compliance rate is 90 percent.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	22	11	14	47	82.4
Partially Achieved:	3	1	1	5	8.8
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	1	0	5	8.8
Not Applicable:	2	4	2		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Delaware did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 82.4 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome did not differ substantially across sites or between types of cases.

Delaware was found to be in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2001 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key findings of the 2007 CFSR

The following are the key findings pertaining to this outcome:

- Case reviews indicated that for the most part children’s physical health needs were being assessed and addressed. However, in several cases, it was noted that children’s dental health needs were not being met (item 22).
- Although many children in the cases are appropriately assessed for mental health service needs and are receiving the necessary mental health services, there was some inconsistency in this area (item 23).
- Stakeholders indicated that the agency was generally effective in meeting children’s physical health needs, but that there is considerable difficulty in the State in general with regard to availability of and access to mental health services.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 22 was applicable for 48 of the 65 cases reviewed. Most cases that were not applicable were in-home services cases in which physical health concerns were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical health needs (including dental needs) had been appropriately assessed, and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 22	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	15	11	13	39	81
Area Needing Improvement	7	1	1	9	19
Not applicable	9	5	3	17	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 93 percent of applicable Sussex County cases and 92 percent of Kent County cases, compared to only 68 percent of New Castle County Cases.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's health needs (medical and dental) were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Dental care services were not being appropriately provided (6 cases).
- Vision care was not appropriately provided (1 case).
- A foster care provider was not give sufficient information about the child’s health history to ensure that the child’s needs could be appropriately addressed (1 case).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that DFS is generally effective in ensuring that the physical health needs of children in foster care are met, but that the agency experiences more difficulty addressing the health needs of children in the in-home cases because DFS cannot pay for those services. Stakeholders, however, suggested that DFS is less effective in meeting children’s dental health needs than they are in meeting other physical health needs. Stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of dental providers, which results in long waits for services. They noted, however, that foster parents generally do a good job keeping up with children’s medical and dental needs.

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 81 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, responses from participants in all focus groups convened by the State were positive when asked if DFS was effective in assessing and addressing the physical health needs of children. However, DFS case managers did acknowledge that they are better at assessing the needs of youth in foster care than youth residing in their own homes. The Statewide Assessment notes that the lack of health insurance is a barrier to addressing the physical health needs of children in the in-home cases.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

___ Strength __X_ Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Information

Item 23 was applicable for 44 (68 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. Cases were not applicable if the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, or if there were no mental health concerns. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 23	New Castle	Kent	Sussex	Total N	Percent
Strength	22	6	11	39	89
Area Needing Improvement	3	2	0	5	11
Not applicable	6	9	6	21	
Total	31	17	17	65	

Performance on this item varied across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of applicable Sussex County cases, compared to 88 percent of New Castle County cases and 75 percent of Kent County Cases. There were no differences in performance based on the type of case.

Item 23 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children’s mental health needs were appropriately assessed and the identified mental health needs were addressed.

Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Needs were not assessed (3 cases).
- Needs were assessed but not appropriately addressed (2 cases).

Stakeholder Interview Information

Agency stakeholders commenting on this topic noted that the agency recently implemented a policy that for any child entering foster care between age 4 and 17, a mental health assessment screening is conducted and a determination is made as to whether or not mental health service are needed. It was noted that this has resulted in children being connected to services much more quickly.

Although all stakeholders agree that mental health assessments are readily available, they suggest that intensive mental health services are difficult to access for children in foster care. There are indications from stakeholder interviews that children’s behavioral problems might not meet CMH’s criteria for receiving mental health services. Some stakeholders suggested that the behavioral issues

reflect underlying mental health concerns that should be addressed through appropriate mental health services, however all children are not able to access these services. In the case reviews, when mental health services were accessed, it often was due to diligent efforts on the part of caseworkers, which may not be available to all children needing services, such as children in intact families.

Rating Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 89 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA reviewers determined compliance with assessing and addressing mental health needs with caregivers and service providers for treatment and placement program areas. The overall composite compliance is 91.55 percent for SFY 2006. In investigation, the score is 87 percent; in treatment, the score is 86.6 percent and in placement, the score is 96.5 percent.

The Statewide Assessment notes that State QA data supports focus group comments that foster children receive better services than children at home. The Statewide Assessment notes that DFS must do a better job assessing, addressing and documenting the mental health needs of children in their own home. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, although mental/behavioral health needs are assessed for children residing in their own home, the challenge has been to incorporate that information into the Family Service Plan and the Integrated Service Plan (if required). The Statewide Assessment also noted that supervisors must be more cognizant of the mental/behavioral health needs of children residing in their own home and must take actions to ensure that those needs are adequately addressed. The QA tool utilized by DFS has all reviewers evaluating whether the mental/behavioral health needs of all youth have been adequately assessed and addressed.

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Delaware is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. Delaware was found to be in substantial conformity with this item during its first CFSR. Findings for the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because the State’s information system can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of all children in foster care. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has maintained an automated case management system since 1994. The current system, which is called FACTS, “provides electronic sources for building automated reports” that are of value for internal and external partners. The State Division of Family Services (DFS) uses FACTS as its data source for its quality assurance system. The Statewide Assessment notes that FACTS is capable of reporting demographics, location, and other characteristics of foster children on a statewide basis and provides historical information on children and families. It also is linked to the fiscal division to facilitate automated payments to foster parents. Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that FACTS is enhanced on an ongoing basis with new modules and new functions over the years. Currently, DFS is working on enhancements that will result in FACTS II, which will be the next level of the State’s automated case management system.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 25 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders expressed the opinion that FACTS provides all necessary information about children in foster care and is generally a useful tool for administrators, managers, and supervisors. Most stakeholders also reported that the system is fairly “user-friendly.”

Despite the general approval of FACTS, several stakeholders expressed the opinion that the information in FACTS is not always current. Stakeholders in Kent County indicated that FACTS does not always have updated information about a child’s placement location. They noted that, although DFS requires caseworkers to enter information in FACTS within 48 hours, not all caseworkers adhere to this timeframe. Stakeholders generally attributed this problem to caseworker caseloads and the time-consuming process of having to take notes in the field and then come back to the office to enter information. Other concerns expressed by stakeholders were the following:

- FACTS does not allow for the entry of concurrent planning goals into the system, which hinders caseworker’s concurrent planning process.
- The reports generated by FACTS are very valuable, but are not always used effectively by supervisors and managers.
- FACTS is not linked to the court system, although DFS and the courts share data with one another.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Delaware is not in substantial conformity with the factor of the Case Review System. The areas identified as needing improvement pertained to item 25 (development of the case plan) and item 27 (timely permanency hearings). Delaware was rated as being in substantial conformity with this factor during its first CFSR. The difference in ratings for the two reviews is due to the assessment of item 25 as an Area Needing Improvement. This item was rated as a Strength in the first review. The change in the item rating may be due to the fact that after the initial Delaware review, which was the first CFSR review in round 1, greater emphasis in rating of this systemic factor was placed on ensuring that both mothers and fathers were involved in the development of the case plan, and that this involvement included the parents’ input into the goals and services of the plan throughout the initial and ongoing case plan development. Specific findings for each item assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although each child has a written case plan, there is insufficient involvement of parents and children (when age appropriate) in the case planning process.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS has clear and detailed policy and procedure for case planning and case plans are developed for each child in a timely manner. Case plans are due within 60 days of case opening and must be reviewed every 3 months. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that 76 percent of the cases reviewed in State fiscal year 2006 had a completed case plan for the child. The Statewide Assessment also notes that parents and children are not sufficiently involved in the case planning process on a consistent basis. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus groups comprised of parents and foster parents reported that case plans are not developed jointly by parents and DFS. Instead, case plans are developed by the DFS caseworker and presented to the parents for their signature. Most youth included in focus groups reported that they had seen their plans, but only about one-half of them had participated in plan development. The Statewide Assessment states further that: "Caseworkers report that their workload simply does not afford them the luxury of being able to meet with all families individually to develop the Family Case Plan or the Plan for Child in Care." An additional problem, also reported in the Statewide Assessment, is that case plans are computer-generated documents that do not easily lend themselves to being completed with the family. As stated in the Statewide Assessment, "DFS recognizes that improvements need to be made in this particular area" and that the focus of improvement will be on efforts to collaborate with families in the development of service plans.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was the topic of discussion in 41 stakeholder interviews, most of which involved multiple participants. The general consensus among stakeholders was that DFS is effective in completing case plans for children in a timely manner. They noted that FACTS prompts caseworkers when a case plan is due and when it must be reviewed. Stakeholders indicated that the timeliness of case plans is critical because services cannot be initiated until the case plan is authorized.

Stakeholder opinions differed with regard to whether parents and/or children (if age appropriate) are involved in the case planning process. Some stakeholders suggested that DFS frequently involves parents and children in the case planning process. Other stakeholders reported, however, that although DFS often will review the case plan with parents and children and request their signature, parents and age-appropriate children are not adequately included in the process of developing the case plan and have little input into its content. Specific concerns with regard to this issue were the following:

- Several Sussex County stakeholders commented that they believe the case planning process has become "court driven" and this has resulted in barriers to caseworkers engaging parents due to the strong role parents' attorneys and other

attorneys are playing in the process. This is consistent with reports from Kent County stakeholders that often parents will not sign the case plan until it is reviewed by their attorney. However, this does not preclude involving parents in the development of the plan.

- Stakeholders at the State level and in New Castle County expressed concern about the lack of involvement of youth in case planning. Stakeholders indicated that some youth do not know what their case plan goal is or any particulars regarding their case plans.
- Some Kent County stakeholders commented that the child's case plan often does not address the child's or family's problems in an adequate manner.

The findings of the onsite case review with regard to child and family involvement in case planning (item 18) are consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder opinions. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 48 percent of the cases. The rating was due to the lack of involvement of fathers (15 cases), mothers (11 cases), and age-appropriate children (7 cases).

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because there is a clear process for the periodic review of the status of each child. Reviews are conducted at least every 6 months, and usually more often. In addition, reviews are conducted by both the Child Placement Review Board and the Courts. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Delaware has provisions, policy and procedures to ensure timely periodic case reviews for children in foster care. The Court reviews a case every 3 months from the date of the Dispositional Hearing and there is strong collaboration between Family Court, the Child Placement Review Board (CPRB), and DFS to implement the provisions of both State and Federal statutes. If a youth is active in more than one division within the Department, an Integrated Service Plan (ISP) must be developed. The ISP must be completed within 6 weeks of the second division opening their case, and must be reviewed every 90 days thereafter. The Statewide Assessment notes that feedback from surveys and focus groups with caseworkers, families, adoptive parents, stakeholders and policy managers and administrators indicates that there are provisions and procedures in place for periodic reviews and that they are being held in a timely manner.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 39 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. Stakeholders were in agreement that periodic case reviews are being held at least every 3 months and that the reviews are

substantive and of good quality. Many stakeholders attributed the timeliness of reviews to the efforts of the Court Improvement Program, which has enforced the 90-day reviews of cases. A few stakeholders noted, however, that court reviews may be delayed when criminal charges are pending against parents and parent attorneys do not want parents to stipulate to anything until these charges are heard.

Key concerns expressed by Stakeholders regarding the review process were the following:

- New Castle County stakeholders expressed concern that the CPRB and the periodic Court reviews may be duplicative and thus create an excessive burden for the caseworkers.
- Kent county stakeholders expressed concern that although DFS and the CPRB usually agreed regarding recommendations, there is no process in place to address differences of opinion when they do occur.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because (1) there are frequent delays in scheduling and completing permanency hearings, and (2) there are concerns about whether the permanency hearings adequately address permanency goals on an ongoing basis for children with case goals of APPLA. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Delaware’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Delaware has provisions, policy and procedures to ensure timely permanency hearings. Collaboration between Family Court and DFS, assisted by the Court Improvement Program, has facilitated the implementation of these provisions. The Statewide Assessment provides the following information:

- A Permanency Hearing is held before the 12th month from the date the child entered foster care, and annually thereafter.
- The Child Placement Review Board reviews cases at 10 months and at the 6 month mark between the scheduled Permanency Hearings until the child exits foster care.
- The court can at any time request a court hearing to review permanency or new issues brought to the court’s attention.
- The permanency coordinator and permanency supervisor monitor children entering foster care for review by the permanency committee at the 10th month of the foster care placement. They notify the caseworkers that it is time to schedule the child for a review by the permanency committee. Children are screened at the time of placement and may be referred to the PPC directly (“Fast Track”) if reunification appears unlikely.
- Youth in YRS facilities for 10 months are tracked and reviewed by the DFS permanency committee.
- When DFS plans to recommend a goal change at the permanency hearing, a motion is filed with Family Court within 30 days of the next scheduled court hearing.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants expressed the opinion that permanency hearings are held in a timely manner. In addition, the Statewide Assessment cites the findings of a Federal IV-E review, which was conducted in August, 2006, that permanency hearings are generally being held more frequently than once every 12 months. Also reported in the Statewide Assessment is the finding of a Court Improvement Program evaluation of the timeliness of hearings. According to the Statewide Assessment, this evaluation found that 71.1 percent of hearings were held within 365 days of the adjudicatory hearing.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 35 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Almost all stakeholders expressed the opinion that permanency hearings are thorough and substantive. However, stakeholders differed in their opinions regarding the timeliness of permanency hearings. While some stakeholders reported that a permanency hearing is conducted by the courts at least every 12 months for all children in foster care, many stakeholders expressed concern that permanency hearings are not routinely held in a timely manner.

Those stakeholders who expressed concern about the timeliness of permanency hearings generally agreed that DFS generally is timely in its efforts to schedule the hearings, and that delays are due to the courts rather than the agency. The key issues identified as contributing to delays were the following:

- Scheduling is a particular problem in Kent and Sussex County because the judges in those counties have only a few days set aside to hear dependency cases.
- Scheduling is a problem in Sussex County because there are only a few parent and child attorneys and the judge will grant a continuance to the attorneys.
- Judges in all counties often grant continuances or extensions because of the length and complexity of the hearings.
- In all counties, the thoroughness of the permanency hearings often results in a hearing spanning several days before completion, which further exacerbates the scheduling problem.
- Permanency hearings operate like “mini Termination of Parental Rights Hearings,” and thus involve multiple attorneys and multiple issues. This often creates a situation in which the court will grant a continuance at the request of one of the attorneys, which further delays the onset or completion of the hearing.
- Permanency decisions often are delayed for months after the court hearing.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as a Strength because a process for termination of parental rights proceedings is in place and appears to be effective for many children. This is reflected in the increase from the first round of the CFSR in the percentage of adoptions occurring in less than 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Delaware has provisions, policy and procedures to ensure that the State is in compliance with the requirements of the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) with regard to termination of parental rights (TPR). TPR proceedings begin with a case review and recommendation by local Permanency Committees or by court directive. Procedures require petitions to be filed within 3 months of the Permanency Committee meeting or as ordered by the court. A TPR petition must be filed for a child in foster care for 15 out of the last 22 months, absent compelling reasons not to file. The Statewide Assessment notes that the absence of an adoptive resource is not considered a compelling reason.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants generally agreed that there are DFS provisions for ASFA compliance with the requirements pertaining to TPR, but that the TPR proceedings frequently do not occur in accordance with the ASFA guidelines. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, petitions are filed in court, but there can be 3-6 month delays in scheduling the TPR hearing and the hearings can span long periods of time. The Statewide Assessment reports that "there is a need for more legal resources to make improvements in timeliness."

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 28 stakeholder interviews, many with multiple participants. Stakeholders were in general agreement that DFS files for TPR in a timely manner and adheres to the "15 of 22 months" timeframe. They also agreed that both the agency and the courts are effective in pursuing TPR for what may be referred to as "fast track" cases, that is, cases in which there are no perceived impediments to either the TPR or the adoption. However, most stakeholders expressed the opinion that there are many cases in which court-related issues prevent adherence to ASFA timelines. In some of these cases, the court will not sanction the TPR petition, often because the child "has a bond" with the parent, or because the parents are progressing in their treatment and the court wants to give them more time. Additional concerns voiced by stakeholders were the following:

- In some cases, the courts are unwilling to pursue TPR because of the belief of some judges (and also caseworkers) that older children generally are "not adoptable." The court believes that it is in the best interest of the child not to pursue the TPR petition.
- The court often will not pursue TPR if a child indicates that they do not want to be adopted, particularly if the child is 14 or older. However, the potential benefits of adoption are never fully explored with the child and the possibility of adoption is not revisited at a later time.
- Some judges will not pursue TPR if the child does not have an identified adoptive placement. At the same time, there is a perception in the agency that foster parents are not interested in adoption because they would lose necessary supports for the children.

- A significant percent of children are not represented during court hearings by either a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). It was noted that this included about 28 percent of the children in foster care in Sussex County and about 17 percent of the foster care children in Kent County.

Several stakeholders suggested that because a case goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) is seen by the agency and the courts as an acceptable case goal for many children, the agency and courts find it more acceptable not to pursue TPR when reunification appears unlikely, particularly for older children, because they can change the child’s goal to APPLA. As one stakeholder noted, “APPLA is being used more and more to the detriment of real permanency.”

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as a Strength because foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers are notified about reviews and hearings, and are given full opportunity to be heard in reviews and court hearings. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, by policy and agreement with Family Court, DFS gives notice of the hearing or review to the foster parents or caregiver through a written letter or phone call. The Statewide Assessment also notes that most focus group participants said that caregivers receive timely notice to attend hearings and reviews. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, foster parents from Kent and Sussex were more likely than foster parents from New Castle to say that they received timely notice of hearings and reviews.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 23 interviews, many with multiple participants. Stakeholders were in general agreement that most foster parents are notified about reviews and hearings, although there were differences of opinion regarding the timeliness of the notifications. Stakeholders also had different opinions about who is responsible for notification of foster parents.

Stakeholders at the State level stated the CRPB sends notices to caretakers for reviews conducted by the CPRB. Some stakeholders said that the court is responsible for notifying biological parents and the agency is responsible for notifying foster parents (resource parents). Other stakeholders said that the courts send out written notices to foster parents for judicial hearings, but that caseworkers are supposed to remind foster parents verbally 30 days prior to the hearing. Because the stakeholders with these divergent opinions usually were either DFS or court staff, their lack of agreement suggests an absence of clarity about the notification process.

All stakeholders agreed that when foster parents attend court hearings, they are free to testify and speak about issues that concern them. Although some stakeholders said that caseworkers sometimes discourage foster parents from attending, the general perception of stakeholders was that, if a foster parent wants to attend and it is important for them to attend, they will attend and their views will be heard. Stakeholders noted that often foster parents believe that it is not important for them to attend because their views will be represented by the caseworker or the CASA.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Delaware is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. During the first round of the CFSR, Delaware was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the State has developed and implemented both licensing standards and other provisions to ensure the safety and health of children in foster care. This item was rated as a Strength during the first round of the CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS has standards for quality services for children in foster care that are directed by DFS policy and procedure and by Delacare (a State agency). The Statewide Assessment reports that focus group participants acknowledged that standards exist, but expressed doubt that the standards are met for foster care services. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that the source of this doubt is not known and it may be that focus group participants were unaware of the training requirements, curriculum, supervision, and support services offered to foster parents. The Statewide Assessment indicates that further information is needed to better understand the perceptions of focus group participants.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 14 stakeholder interviews, most of which involved multiple participants. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that standards are in place to ensure quality services and the safety and health of children in foster care, including standards to regulate behavior management (i.e., physical restraints) policies, practices, incidents, and complaints (for institutional workers). In addition, there are requirements that placement caseworkers and foster care coordinators meet quarterly to compare information on the placement.

Stakeholders noted that standards are monitored and maintained through the following visitation requirements:

- A visit to the foster home within 5 days of a new placement
- A visit to the foster home when there is a change in the household
- Quarterly visits to foster homes for safety assessments
- One unannounced visit annually
- Annual reviews of all foster homes

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the State operates a quality assurance system that is well-established, used at the State level for ongoing monitoring and feedback, and functions effectively, although there are opportunities to strengthen its usefulness at the local level. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the flagship for DFS' Continuous Quality Improvement efforts is the Quality Assurance Case Review system. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Quality Assurance Case Review is a valid method for monitoring outcomes for children and families active in Delaware's child welfare system. The results of the QA system are used to inform staff regarding both overall performance and case-specific issues, and to provide Program Managers with information that may be used to guide enhancements to DFS policy and procedures. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, QA results are disseminated through quarterly reports and annual QA outcomes reports and are used in a variety of management reports, most notably providing supporting data in the PIP, the Children and Family Services Plan, and the second round CFSR Statewide Assessment.

The Statewide Assessment reports that a fairly new feature of the QA system is the supervisory review process. Supervisors in each region review cases from other regions and provide their feedback to the Assistant Regional Administrators. This review is in addition to reviews by trainers and administrators. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, at present, the QA system uses only FACTS

information on cases. Additional documents are not reviewed and no interviews are conducted with caseworkers, supervisors, families, foster parents, or other service providers. The State currently is considering revising the QA system to allow a more comprehensive assessment of a smaller sample of cases, which will include interviews with case-related stakeholders. This is consistent with the CFSR case review model.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants reported that agency employees are aware of and receive QA findings. Although currently, QA results are not formally shared with external partners, DFS is open to discussing this with external partners to determine the appropriate format and forum.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, the Quality Assurance System was a topic of discussion in 11 interviews, most of which included multiple participants. Stakeholders had disparate opinions about the QA system, with differences attributable to job position. In general, most stakeholders agreed that the QA system was an effective tool for agency administrators and managers with regard to planning and decision-making pertaining to the CFSP, services needs, and training needs. Stakeholders noted that, ideally, reports are circulated to Regional Administrator, managers, and supervisors, and that supervisors are expected to discuss the reports with caseworkers. One unique aspect of the QA system reported by stakeholders is that hotline reports are recorded and reviewed by the QA team.

Even though the QA system is effective for State level purposes, such as program monitoring and identification of training needs, comments from stakeholders indicated that it is not as useful to front-line caseworkers in providing them with feedback on actual practice in the field. Many stakeholders reported that caseworkers rarely receive feedback on the cases that are reviewed, and some caseworkers are unaware of the QA process. In addition, while some stakeholders said that supervisors learn from each other when they QA each other's cases, other stakeholders reported that supervisors do not get feedback on their cases unless there is a safety issue to resolve. Several stakeholders also expressed the opinion that there is no clear follow up system to ensure that the needs identified through the QA system are addressed. A few stakeholders also reported that they would be interested in seeing the results of the QA reviews.

IV. TRAINING

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

STATUS OF TRAINING

Delaware is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. The State was rated as being in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the first CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength because the State has a well-established, comprehensive, competency-based, pre-service training program for all staff. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS has a strong competency-based training curriculum for new caseworker staff. DFS provides 147.5 hours of new caseworker training focusing on child safety, permanency and well being. The training is based on the Institute for Human Services (IHS) Training Curriculum that is carefully researched, field tested, and endorsed by the Child Welfare League of America. The IHS Curriculum is competency-based and was adapted to meet the needs of the State.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are required to complete month 1 (Orientation, Abuse and Neglect, Risk Management, FACTS) and month 2 (Legal, Interviewing, Domestic Violence and Field Safety) training sessions before receiving cases. During training months 3 to 6, new caseworkers participate in additional training in domestic violence, child development as it relates to abuse and neglect, field safety, alcohol and substance abuse, separation-placement-reunification, and treatment.

The Statewide Assessment reports that core training stresses Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) elements for safety, permanency and well-being. The curriculum is flexible and changes as policy, practice and requirements change. In addition, the training classes

are open to community child welfare parties and required for some family support contracted employees. Classroom learning is supported by assigning peer mentors once caseworkers are assigned cases. New Castle County uses coaching supervisors with new caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment reports that new caseworkers are required to complete training before caseload assignment and that registration and attendance are tracked.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants identified the core training program as a strong program in the State. It was noted that improvements could be made with legal components to better prepare caseworkers. Caseworkers and supervisors participating in the focus groups stated that much information is provided in initial training, but that the real learning takes place through field experience and the “shadowing” of experienced workers. The State believes that this “mentor” link is vital to the transfer of learning from classroom to field.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 22 stakeholder interviews, most of which involved multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders expressed general approval of the core training for caseworkers. They noted that training is mandated and caseworkers do not carry cases until after they have completed the modules for month 2. At that time, the caseworkers can get up to 5 cases assigned with the supervisor having the discretion to move toward a full caseload. The expectation is that at this point, caseworkers will have a mentor that they can shadow. Only one stakeholder mentioned knowing about one caseworker who had received cases prior to completion of this module and that was due to the availability of the module at the time the caseworker was hired. Stakeholders also expressed approval of the use of QA reports to identify training needs as well as other types of needs assessments, and of the availability of cross training with the Justice Department and the Courts. They noted that because trainers are involved in the QA case review process, information learned from the reviews is incorporated in the training curriculum.

Despite the overall favorable perceptions of the core training, several stakeholders identified areas where they thought improvements were needed. This included the following:

- There is no identifiable process for staff to self-identify training needs and for these to be integrated into the training curriculum.
- Training is too geared to investigation, with only a short time spent on treatment (1 day) and adoption (1 day). As a result, caseworkers are prepared to conduct safety/risk assessments, but are not adequately prepared to do treatment work or case planning and decision-making regarding permanency.
- Although caseworkers are supposed to receive regular mentoring, this does not always happen, often because there are not enough experienced caseworkers to serve as mentors.
- There is insufficient training on FACTS (although the State seems to be offering that independent of the regular core training).

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as a Strength because the State has clear requirements for ongoing staff training and staff appear to be receiving the training. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s 2001 CFSR. Although this was not addressed directly in Delaware’s PIP, some of the requirements were noted to be an outgrowth of the PIP.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS staff is required to complete 18 hours of annual ongoing training. This requirement was first published in 1999 and was updated on September 14, 2006. The annual “refresher training” is a direct outgrowth of the 2001 PIP. The Statewide Assessment notes that specific training topics include the following: Assessment and Planning for Child Safety, History Training, Comprehensive Decision Making Training, Domestic Violence Refresher Training, Engagement Training, Treatment Plan Refresher Training and Case Documentation Training. Trainings also have been offered in recent years in system of care principles, Integrated Service Planning, documentation, decision making, child sexual abuse, mentoring, and treatment planning. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the State has the capacity to evaluate training effectiveness. The results of these evaluations have generally been positive and a survey regarding transfer of learning survey indicated that caseworkers are using training skills in the field. The Statewide Assessment notes that the main challenges in training and transfer of learning is the complexity of child welfare work. DFS believes that at least 2 years of training and experience, coupled with skilled supervision, is necessary for proficiency.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 24 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. All stakeholders were aware of the mandated 18 hours of annual ongoing training for DSF caseworkers. It appears from interviews with stakeholders that DFS caseworkers meet their 18 hours in two ways. One way is through the “refresher training” offered by DSF. The other way appears to be through “external” training options that caseworkers may access to complete their 18 hours. Although stakeholders were generally positive about the “refresher training,” some stakeholders in New Castle and Kent County expressed concerns about the external training opportunities. The key issue was that the available external training options are not always of high quality and there are too few options. New Castle County and Kent County stakeholders noted that there were problems accessing external training because caseworkers are not informed about the training in a timely manner so that they can register and access funding early on. These views regarding external training opportunities were not expressed by Sussex County stakeholders. Only two stakeholders suggested that caseworkers did not have time to participate in training opportunities because of caseload demands.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State has a well-established training program for caregivers that appears functional and effective, despite some opportunities for improving ongoing training for foster parents. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS requires 27 hours of pre-service training for foster parents. DFS foster parents receive pre-service training using a competency based curriculum called Foster PRIDE. Delaware was one of the 13 states that developed this curriculum with the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). In addition to the pre-service training, DFS requires that foster care and adoptive parents complete a designated minimum number of supplemental training hours (ranging from 5 to 20) each year based on their "level" of service.

The Statewide Assessment also reports the following: "DFS implemented foster parent levels as recommended by the 2001 Governor's Task Force on Foster Care." Five levels are defined, each with its own skill, experience and training requirements. Higher levels require more annual training hours, experience and specific training sessions focused on challenging children. Foster care board payments are based on the child and foster parent's level. The Governor's Task Force recommendations included "leveling" foster parents based on experience and skills. Children in foster care are "leveled" based on needs and behaviors with levels 4 and 5 presenting the most challenges. All new foster parents are "leveled" as zero. After the first year of parenting and completion of required training, they receive level 1. After the first year there are additional training requirements to move up as high as level 5. Achieving level 5 foster parent status is most difficult due to the required experience, training and skill requirements. Level 5 foster parents are required to participate in monthly team meetings, possibly change household routines and attend counseling with the child. Children who are level 4 and 5 have drug and alcohol problems, aggressive behavior towards peers and adults, mental health issues, sexually inappropriate behavior and conduct disorders. Children and foster families can move up or down in levels."

The Statewide Assessment notes that training requirements are tracked and reviewed with foster and adoptive parents on at least an annual basis. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Division of Child Mental Health Services now provides in-service trainings to foster parents on mental health issues. Training topics are: Psychotropic Medications; Caring for the Sexual Abused Child; Caring for a Child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; and Mental Health Issues in Children and Youth, Part 1 & 2.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 15 stakeholder interviews, many of which included multiple participants. There was general consensus among stakeholders that the initial training for foster parents was generally effective and many stakeholders were positive about the fact that caseworkers and foster parents co-facilitate the training. A few stakeholders, however, suggested that the PRIDE curriculum does not prepare families for dealing with the kinds of child behavior problems that often confront them.

Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State did not place children in a home until the initial training was completed, although a few said that they knew of instances when that had happened. Stakeholders also noted that the same training is required for relative foster parents as well as non-relative foster parents. (In Delaware, in order to receive payment as a caregiver, individuals must be approved by the State even if they are related to the child.)

According to some stakeholders, the initial training is provided to individuals who want to be foster parents as well as potential adoptive parents. If a foster parent decides to adopt the children in their care, they must receive 12 hours of additional adoption-specific training to be approved as an adoptive home.

With regard to ongoing training, stakeholders noted that the agency has a newsletter for foster parents that is issued twice a year and that lists ongoing training opportunities. However, stakeholders in Sussex County reported that not enough ongoing training is offered, and what is available, is offered on the same day, so foster parents can only take one class. Stakeholders in Kent County expressed concern that ongoing trainings are only available during the day and that no allowance is offered for child care so that foster parents can attend the training. This is a hardship for foster parents who work and/or who have children at home who are not school-aged. Multiple stakeholders expressed the opinion that a key problem is that trainers do not want to drive from Wilmington to Sussex county to conduct the training locally.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

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

STATUS OF SERVICE ARRAY

Delaware is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in the 2001 CFSR. However, for this review, the general array of services (item 35) and the availability of services in

all areas of the State (item 36) were determined to be areas needing improvement. One of the reasons for the difference in substantial conformity ratings may be the focus of the second round of the CFSR on meeting the needs of youth in foster care. While there were many concerns emerging from the onsite review regarding both the array and the accessibility of services, the clearest service gap was in the area of providing services to prepare youth for independent living. This also was noted as a service gap in the Statewide Assessment.

Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the array of services is not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families. A particular concern pertains to the lack of independent living services for youth. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's 2001 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, although a wide array of services is available in the State, there are multiple services gaps that need to be addressed. The Statewide Assessment reports the following information with regard to service gaps obtained from focus groups and surveys:

- Insufficient services and resources to offer relative families to help them if they decide to assume care of a child.
- Insufficient services for adoptive parents, including post-adoption services, respite care, and even doctors, dentists, and therapists.
- Insufficient number of mental health professionals at all levels (especially in Sussex county).
- Insufficient number of service providers who speak Spanish.
- Insufficient Independent Living services, particularly transitional living services.
- Insufficient number of specialized foster placements.
- Insufficient affordable housing for families.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 71 stakeholder interviews, many involving multiple participants. Most stakeholders echoed the information reported in the Statewide Assessment. That is, there is a wide array of services, but there also are multiple service gaps and shortages. In addition, almost all stakeholders were in agreement that one of the most critical service gaps in the State is the scarcity of services to assist children in making the transition from foster care to independent living.

Since many of the children in Delaware have a case goal of APPLA, and therefore are likely to “age out” of foster care when they are 18 years old, the lack of services to prepare them for assuming the considerable responsibilities of independent living at such a young age is a critical concern.

The list of additional service gaps identified by stakeholders during the onsite review includes all of those reported in the Statewide Assessment. Other service gaps noted by multiple stakeholders included the following:

- Family counseling
- Dental services
- Child mental health assessments
- Specialized treatment homes and residential facilities (including lock-down facilities)
- Group home placements
- Emergency evaluations
- Services for teen mothers
- Services for older children and teenagers, with regard to placements and just general services (age 11 and older)
- Developmental delays and special education services
- Affordable child care or day care subsidies
- Therapists who are skilled at working with children under age 6, especially regarding post-traumatic stress disorder and sexual abuse and attachment disorders
- Transportation
- Pediatric dental services (Sussex County stakeholders reported services are only available in Maryland)
- Services to children who are the victims of serious physical abuse (e.g., infants with “shaken baby” syndrome have to be sent to Baltimore)

A key service-related issue identified by several stakeholders is that caseworkers often find it very difficult to access “high-end” mental health services for those children who they believe need this level of services. This was attributed to differences in assessments between DFS and CMH regarding the kinds of issues that warrant high level mental health services.

Despite these concerns, almost all stakeholders expressed very positive opinions regarding the availability and use of parent aide services, the availability of substance abuse assessment and treatment services, the accessibility of emergency funds for needs such as housing and heating, and the array of services for pre-adoptive placements (but not post-adoption services). They also praised the primary prevention services offered through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program and key school-based interventions.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because accessibility of some services, particularly independent living services, varies considerably across counties. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all services offered by the State are available to clients regardless of race, ethnicity, or income. DFS has tried to ensure that providers are able to provide services that are culturally competent. However, contractors have a difficult time attracting Spanish-speaking applicants. The Statewide Assessment also notes that focus group respondents reported poor access to services in Sussex County.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 42 stakeholder interviews, many with multiple participants. Stakeholders commenting on this item were in general agreement that substance abuse services and parent aide services are available statewide and are accessible in a timely manner. They also noted that prevention services through family preservation services provided through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program are available statewide and there are no waiting lists for services. Additional services that were noted to be in place statewide and that were praised by stakeholders were the Family Crisis Therapists (FCT) in the public schools and the Educational Surrogate Parents (ESP).

However, stakeholders also were in general agreement that most other services were either lacking in one of the State's geographic areas, had very long waiting lists, or were accessible from 9 to 5 only, making it difficult for both parents who work or children who are in school to access the services.

Most stakeholders reported that access to the very limited array of Independent Living services varies considerably across counties. Although a few stakeholders identified some excellent independent living services, there was general agreement that there are simply not enough services for the youth who need them. Stakeholders repeatedly mentioned that independent living services are not available to youth until they are 16 years old. Even then, because of the lack of services throughout the State, there are long waiting lists so that youth often are not able to access the services until they are close to 18, and many youth are not even aware that services are available. Stakeholders noted that there is only one transitional living program in the State. One stakeholder attributed the problem to the low budget for independent living services.

Most stakeholders identified waiting lists for mental health services as a typical problem throughout the State. Although this was not found to be a problem in most of the 44 cases reviewed for the outcome area concerning mental health needs of the child (item 23), caseworkers indicated that attaining sufficient services for the children in their caseloads often required extensive efforts on their part. Stakeholders reported that there are no inpatient mental health services outside of New Castle County. Other stakeholders noted that services provided by Spanish speaking providers were rare, although the Statewide Assessment notes concerted efforts on the part of the agency to recruit Spanish speaking providers.

The consensus of stakeholders was that because not every service is available in every county, it often is necessary to move clients to another county to get a needed service. For example, not every level of foster home is available in every county, so that a child in one county who needs a higher level of foster care than is available in that county would need to be moved to another county for foster care. Stakeholders reported that, in general, services are more likely to be available in New Castle County, than in Sussex or Kent Counties.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as a Strength because the State has the capacity to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families served by DFS. A particular strength is access of DFS caseworkers to various funding streams that are not contracted for but that are needed by families. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Department’s system of care approach is designed to ensure the individualization of services. For example, in addition to the DFS-contracted services that are available for families, DFS caseworkers have access to various funding streams to pay for services that are not contracted but that are needed by families. One example given of this type of service was tutoring for children experiencing education-related difficulties.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants expressed differing views regarding the effectiveness of DFS in individualizing services for children and families. Some focus group participants suggested that individualizing services depends on the experience of the case managers, with new case managers more likely to take a “cookie cutter” approach to services, and more experienced case managers likely to tailor services to meet child and family needs. Other focus group participants said that caseworkers were effective in individualizing services, particularly considering the availability of services. Participants of youth focus group convened by the State were reported in the Statewide Assessment as expressing the opinion that the services they received were not individualized.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that DFS’s Professional Development Unit strives to individualize treatment planning and assigns experienced peer mentors to new case managers to model and teach individualized planning. In addition, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, individualized treatment planning is a strong component of the Department’s Integrated Service Plan training and DFS is in the process of developing a Service Manual so that all workers are aware of services provided by all of the divisions within DFS.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was a topic of discussion in 32 stakeholder interviews. The general consensus of stakeholders was that many agency caseworkers make concerted efforts to individualize services, despite the limited range of services. They noted that there are many caseworkers who try very hard to ensure that the service needs of the children and families they work with are identified and that they receive the services they need. Several stakeholders mentioned the System of Care training, which focuses on individualized case planning, and the parent aide program as examples of how DFS supports individualizing services.

Most stakeholders acknowledged, however, that the level of effort taken to individualize and tailor services to children and families varies across caseworkers and that the practice is not built in to the system. Stakeholders noted that there are many instances of “cookie cutter” services and case plans. Stakeholders also expressed deep concern that case plans and services are not being routinely tailored to meet the needs of youth who will eventually emancipate from foster care. However, a few stakeholders mentioned that the individualization of services is enhanced by the availability of funds for services that are not part of the general array of services provided under contract.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

STATUS OF AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Delaware is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. The State was found to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor for its first CFSR. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because the agency routinely engages stakeholders in forums around the State where particular issues relevant to the CFSP are discussed, although it is not specified to stakeholders participating in the forums that the issues under discussion are part of the CFSP. One of the key groups engaged in this process is the Child Protection Accountability Commission (CPAC).

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS managers have primary responsibility for the development of the CFSP and most collaboration occurs at the State planning level and with caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment notes that caseworkers included in the State’s focus groups indicated that they were familiar with the CFSP, although, knowledge of specific items in the CFSP varied among participants included in focus groups. This was attributed to the fact that specific CFSP items and strategies are discussed in a variety of community forums, but there are no forums for presenting or reviewing the total plan. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the CFSP needs to be presented and discussed with stakeholders in a more formal and comprehensive manner. It was noted that, “While it is a strength that safety, permanency and well-being are agenda items in many forums, improvements can be made to strengthen collaboration and communication in the actual development of the total plan.”

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 22 stakeholder interviews, most of which involved multiple participants. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that DFS does engage stakeholders on a regular basis through advisory groups and collaborative bodies and through the Child Protection Advisory Commission, although this was not specified in terms of stakeholders providing input into the CFSP. However, stakeholders noted that the YRS, in particular, is directly involved in development of the CFSP. Although at present there is no formal avenue or process for involving tribal representatives, DFS has made concerted efforts to reach out to Tribal representatives in Sussex County. For example, Tribal leadership was sent a draft of Delaware’s five year coordinated plan in 2005 for their review and comment. In addition, Sussex County has recently hired a Native American caseworker.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because although representatives do not often review and comment on the annual reports of progress, they are consulted regarding some of the issues addressed in the reports. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Annual Progress and Services Reports are completed by a large departmental workgroup starting several months prior to the June 30th deadline. The Statewide Assessment reports that, "Recent efforts to include more information from a broader perspective have been a rewarding challenge." The Statewide Assessment also reports that the agency's progress with regard to meeting the goals and objectives of the CFSP is reviewed with community stakeholders at least annually using existing forums, meetings, or the CFSR process. In addition, the Annual Progress and Services Report is posted on the Family Services website. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, however, although specific items of the CFSP are under constant review by committees and review bodies, the full plan and the Annual Reports are not widely distributed and discussed. It is noted in the Statewide Assessment that the consultation process can be improved with a targeted collaborative effort to draft and update the State's coordinated plan.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was a topic of discussion in four stakeholder interviews. All stakeholders commenting on the item reported that they had the opportunity to provide input into the annual reports of progress.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as a Strength because DFS coordinates its services and programs with the services or benefits of other Federally-funded programs serving the same population. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Delaware's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS coordinates programs with a variety of agencies supported by federal funds, including the Court Improvement Plan, the Division of Child Support Enforcement, Delaware Department of Health and Human Services, Medicaid, Department of Education, child mental health, child-care services, and juvenile justice programs. The Statewide Assessment also notes that efforts are underway to enhance coordination with the Department of Labor's Workforce Initiative to improve employment services for older youth, and, in 2005, changes to the Delaware Code broadened the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act protections for foster children, a program supported by Federal funds. The Statewide Assessment reports that most focus group participants approved of DFS's efforts to coordinate services with other community resources. However, it also was reported that the efforts of individual caseworkers to access these resources often was hampered by caseload size.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the coordination of services often is formalized with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DFS and other agencies such as the Department of Education, law enforcement, Department of Justice, Children’s Advocacy Center, Dover Air Force Base, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Department of Corrections, Division of Social Services and the Division of Public Health. It was noted that an MOU with the Division of Child Support Enforcement and Division of Developmentally Disabled Services is pending. In addition, coordination with Family Court and the Division of Child Support Enforcement are priorities for the Department.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 18 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Almost all stakeholders reported that there was good coordination of services between DFS and other agencies and community services, particularly those that operated with funding support from the Federal government. They identified the same coordinated efforts and agencies that were noted in the Statewide Assessment. However, all stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the coordination between DFS and CMH is not as effective as it could be, and needs to be, improved to ensure that children receive the mental health services that they need.

DFS also has been effective in coordinating services with agencies and community services through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). The CCDF, which is located in DSS, coordinates licensing and training through the Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL). OCCL is the State program responsible for training and licensing child care providers and oversees Delacare licensing for foster placement. The CCDF State Plan allows foster parents, including those not working or in training, to access CCDF funds for child care for children in foster care.

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

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

STATUS OF FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Delaware is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. However, a concern was noted with regard to the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families (item 44). During the first CFSR, Delaware also was found to be in substantial conformity with this factor and received the same rating. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State has in place standards that govern the licensure and approval of foster family homes and other placement facilities. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, there was general agreement among focus group participants that the State standards for foster and adoptive homes are high. In addition, focus group participants acknowledged that the standards are applied equally to all who foster and adopt whether by through the State or private provider and that criminal background checks are required by all who foster, adopt, or work in a child care facility. The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that a recent IV-E Review (August 2006) conducted by the Federal government identified weaknesses in the approval process with regard to the period of approval, clearly identified approval dates, and method of documenting approvals. A Program Improvement Plan was developed to correct this weakness.

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 10 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that the standards for foster family homes and child care institutions are appropriate and are based on national standards. In addition, child-placing agencies have certain requirements that must be met by the foster family homes they license. Stakeholders also noted that in Delaware, families are “approved,” rather than being “licensed.” Stakeholders suggested that a particular strength of the system was that homes must be approved annually.

During a IV-E review in August 2006, the use of provisional licensure for foster homes and facilities with deficiencies was identified as an area requiring change. The State developed a program improvement plan to revise its foster home licensing and approval process to assure that provisional approvals are only awarded to new homes and facilities and are not awarded to homes and facilities with deficiencies.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as a Strength because the standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment and Stakeholder Interviews

Information from both the Statewide Assessment and most CFSR onsite stakeholder interviews indicates that the standards are applied equally to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving IV-E or IV-B funds. In addition, the same standards were reported to apply to both relative/kinship foster homes and non-related foster family homes.

However, Kent County stakeholders said that sometimes when potential resource families are not approved or are closed by DFS the families sometimes go to a private agency and receive approval. These stakeholders noted that this raises concerns about the communication between DFS and private agencies concerning standards for approval.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because they have a clear process for criminal background clearances. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware's first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Delaware has had Code, regulations, and policy regarding criminal background checks in place since 1990. Delaware and DFS policy requires background checks prior to foster home approval and for all child care employees. The Statewide Assessment notes that focus group participants agreed that DFS was effective with regard to requirements for background clearances.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was the topic of discussion in 12 stakeholder interviews, some of which involved multiple participants. There was general consensus among stakeholders that the State is effective in conducting criminal background checks on all prospective foster and adoptive parents. They noted that all background checks are completed before approval, and that the checks go back 5 years. Some stakeholders noted that sometimes there is a long wait to get information back from the fingerprinting process, but that the "risk is worth the wait."

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the Statewide Assessment notes that the racial and ethnic representation of foster parents are proportionate to the representation of those children in the State's foster care population, a general finding of the CFSR was that there is an insufficient number of foster parents to meet the demand. In addition, current recruiting efforts are not sufficient to address this problem.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, recruitment is a collaborative effort between private and public agencies and various methods are used. However, although new foster parents are being recruited every year, the supply is not keeping up with the demand. Key gaps identified by focus group participants are foster homes for Hispanic children and for older youth who are "challenging to parent." Youth who participated in the focus groups convened by the State indicated that there are not enough resources for children who want to be adopted and that existing resources are of poor quality.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that DFS has been successful in recruiting and maintaining a culturally diverse group of foster parents and that the racial or ethnic representation among the foster parents are proportionate to the representation of those children in the foster child population. The Statewide Assessment reports the following statistics as of March 31, 2006:

- 56.8 percent of the children in foster care were African American and 58.7 percent of the available foster homes were African American
- 42.7 percent of the foster children were Caucasian and 40.55 percent of the foster homes were Caucasian.
- 7.0 percent of the foster children were identified as having Hispanic or Latino background, and 6.0 percent of the foster parents were identified as having that background.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 25 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. All stakeholders were in agreement that existing recruitment efforts have not resulted in a sufficient number of foster parent or adoptive homes. However, stakeholders expressed disparate opinions regarding whether there were diligent recruitment efforts in place. A few stakeholders reported that the agency had a marketing campaign to recruit parents, that the agency was working with faith-based organizations in a variety of ways to increase recruitment, and that the agency was providing a \$100.00 finders fee to foster parents who recruited new families as foster parents. Some stakeholders also noted that children are registered for adoption on national and local sites, and that representatives from the One Church, One Child program are part of an interagency group that meets quarterly. Several stakeholders also reported that there are efforts to focus on recruitment of specific racial/ethnic groups to ensure that there are a sufficient number of resource families that are representative of the children in foster care.

Other stakeholders, however, were unaware of any organized recruitment efforts at the agency level, or of an agency recruitment plan or community-based initiatives. Several of these stakeholders indicated that there had been coordinated and comprehensive recruitment efforts in the past, but that nothing has been done recently. A major concern expressed by stakeholders was that

recruitment appears to be the responsibility of the foster parent coordinators and that their caseload size does not allow them sufficient time to focus on recruitment of either foster or adoptive homes. Stakeholders noted that the agency appears to rely on exiting foster parents to recruit new parents, or to become adoptive parents themselves. Apart from registering children on national adoption resources, most stakeholders were unaware of efforts to recruit adoptive families outside of the existing foster parent population. One stakeholder reported that there is no budget item for adoptive parent recruitment. Some stakeholders attributed the lack of foster parents and the difficulty of recruitment to the generally low payments that are provided to foster parents. Others noted that foster parents sometimes are lost to the agency when they decide to adopt the children in their care.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because the State routinely accesses out-of-State resources to facilitate adoptions and permanent placements for children. This item was rated as a Strength in Delaware’s first CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS has an Interstate Compact unit that manages interstate placements. Efforts to meet new time frames for home studies are underway. DFS also has procedures that allow adoptive families across the nation to adopt without bias. Adoptive families for children are sought through AdoptUsKids, the National Adoption Center, and Deladopt listings. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, focus group participants reported that the ICPC process takes too long and expressed concern about long-distance monitoring of services. Delaware has placed children in adoptive homes in 31 states and is exploring border agreements with contiguous states.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the onsite CFSR, this item was a topic of discussion in 14 stakeholder interviews, many of which involved multiple participants. There was general consensus among stakeholders that the State is effective in seeking resource families outside of Delaware and that the ICPC is used to the full extent of the law. However, most stakeholders expressed concern about the length of time that was required for completion of and ICPC approval process.