

4/13/09
FINAL
REPORT:
ALASKA
CHILD &
FAMILY
SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Alaska Child and Family Services Review
February 2009

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Alaska. The CFSR is the Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. It is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau (CB) of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS.

The Alaska CFSR was conducted the week of September 8, 2008. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2007, through September 12, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services (OCS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides Alaska's child welfare data for the CFSR target 12-month period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites, including 31 cases in Anchorage, 17 cases in Bethel, and 17 cases in Juneau, all of which were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items relevant to seven outcomes and 22 items pertaining to seven systemic factors. In Section A: Outcomes of the CSFR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement (ANI) is assigned to each of the 23 items reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The ratings for the items are used to determine the performance of a State on the seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. Depending on item ratings, an outcome can be Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved. 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. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met.

In Section B: Systemic Factors, each item incorporated in each systemic factor is rated as either a Strength or an ANI based on whether State performance on the item meets Federal policy requirements as specified for the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). Information relevant to each systemic factor comes primarily from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the week of the Onsite Review. Depending on item ratings, a systemic factor can be either “in substantial conformity” or “not in substantial conformity.” The criteria for the rating for each systemic factor are shown in the table below.

Rating the Systemic Factor			
Not in Substantial Conformity		In Substantial Conformity	
1	2	3	4
None of the CFSP or program requirements are in place.	Some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, and no more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement.

A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome or systemic factor must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address that outcome or systemic factor. Because 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.

Many changes have been made between the first and second CFSR review cycles. These changes were based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field. Consequently, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparison of percentages for performance on the outcomes and items. Key changes in the process that make comparing performance difficult across reviews include, but are not limited to, 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 noncustodial parents

CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes

Alaska's 2008 CFSR identified the following areas of high performance with regard to achieving outcomes:

- Item 5, which pertains to foster care reentry, was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 11, which pertains to proximity of placements in foster care to parents and close relatives, was rated as a Strength in 90 percent of applicable cases.
- Item 12, which pertains to placement of siblings together, was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of applicable cases.
- The State met the national standard for the data indicator of Permanency Composite 3—Achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods.

Despite these areas of high performance, the State performance was at a low level for all case review outcomes. The highest performing outcome was Well-Being Outcome 2 (Children receive services to meet their educational needs), with 76.1 percent of cases found to have substantially achieved the outcome. Less than 50 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved four of the CFSR outcomes.

The most critical concerns identified with regard to outcomes for children and families pertained to Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect), Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate), Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), and Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs). Safety Outcome 1 was substantially achieved in only 47.1 percent of the cases. The primary concern for this outcome pertained to delays in initiating investigations of child abuse and neglect allegations. Although stakeholders suggested that delays occurred primarily with regard to allegations assigned as priority 2 or 3, there were four maltreatment allegations among the cases reviewed that were assigned as priority 1 reports (i.e., emergency situations) but were not investigated in the timeframe established by State policy.

Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) was found to be substantially achieved in only 38.5 percent of the cases. The primary concern in these cases centered on children being left at risk in their own homes because of a lack of service provision, safety and risk assessment, and monitoring.

Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was found to be substantially achieved in only 23.1 percent of the cases, with the primary concern being the lack of caseworker contact with parents and the lack of engagement of parents in case planning and services. However, it is important to note that there also was a lack of sufficient contact with children in the cases, particularly children in the in-home services cases, some of whom were never seen during the CFSR period under review. Also, although there was less contact with the fathers than with the mothers and less effort to engage the fathers than to engage the mothers, contact with the mothers and engagement of the mothers in case planning also was limited. The lack of contact

applicable Juneau cases. Both item 1 (timeliness of investigations) and item 2 (repeat maltreatment) were rated as ANIs. Alaska also did not 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.

Additional findings for this outcome were the following:

- There were 22 maltreatment reports that occurred during the period under review for which an investigation was not initiated in the timeframes required by State policy. Of these, 11 were priority 3 reports, 5 were priority 2 reports, and 4 were priority 1 reports. One report was never screened or assigned, and one report was assigned to the differential response program, but the children who were the subject of the report were never seen.
- In addition to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment in a number of cases, case reviewers expressed concern about the many cases involving multiple reports (both substantiated and not substantiated) on the family during the life of the case. For example, in 12 cases there were 15 or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case, with 4 of these cases having more than 20 reports.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during its first CFSR conducted in fiscal year 2002 and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. Both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs in the 2002 CFSR. Key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- The State did not meet the national standards for the measure of maltreatment recurrence or the measure of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.
- Although the agency initiated investigations of reports involving imminent risk (priority 1 reports) within the required timeframes, the initiation of investigations of maltreatment reports not involving imminent risk (i.e., reports assigned a priority 2 or 3 level) did not consistently meet required timeframes.

To address these concerns, Alaska included the following key strategies in its PIP:

- Revised policies relating to the investigative process, including specifying definitions for “face-to-face contact” and “initiation of investigation,” and trained supervisors and caseworkers on the policies
- Established a protocol to review cases that involve a recurrence of maltreatment
- Developed a new safety assessment model (training of staff on the model did not begin until the spring of 2006)

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two indicators. One indicator (item 3) addresses the issue of child welfare agency efforts to prevent children’s removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children’s safety while

Depending on the child's permanency goal, the remaining indicators focus on the child welfare agency's efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 15 percent of the 40 foster care cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 20 percent of Anchorage cases and 10 percent of Bethel and Juneau cases.
- The State did not meet the national standards for the national data indicators pertaining to the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Composite 1), the timeliness of adoptions (Composite 2), and placement stability (Composite 4).

Alaska met the national standards for the data indicator pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods (Composite 3).

For this outcome, item 5 was rated as a Strength, but all other items assessed for the outcome were rated as ANIs. Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- Alaska had a very low percentage of reentries into foster care (7.5 percent) compared to the performance of all States nationally.
- Many children in the cases reviewed were in multiple placement settings during the period under review. In nine cases, the children had three or more placements during the period under review, with three of these children having five or more placements.
- The child's permanency goal frequently was not established in a timely manner.
- There was a general lack of sufficient effort to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner.
- Agency practice was inconsistent with regard to filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements.
- There were frequent and considerable delays associated with the home study process for adoption—either completing or approving the home studies, resulting in considerable delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2002 CFSR. At that time, all relevant items except item 5 (foster care reentry) were rated as ANIs. The following key concerns were identified:

- The agency was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- Case goals often were not changed even when there were indications that the goal was not likely to be achieved.
- The goals of guardianship and reunification were not achieved in a timely manner in many cases.
- There were many agency-related delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner, including lack of timely decision-making and lack of follow-up with the child and pre-adoptive family.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Standardized practice for setting and changing permanency goals when concurrent planning occurs
- Improved the structure of administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences, with enhanced focus on permanency goals and concurrent planning
- Developed the continuous QA review system to monitor cases
- Established Regional Adoption Specialists who participate in administrative and permanency planning reviews to ensure that goals are established in a timely manner and are documented
- Implemented a statewide contract for post-adoption services

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six indicators that assess the child welfare agency's performance in (1) placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); (2) placing siblings together (item 12); (3) ensuring frequent visitation among children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); (4) preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); (5) seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15); and (6) promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of Anchorage cases, 60 percent of Bethel cases, and 60 percent of Juneau cases. Although items 11 and 12 were rated as Strengths, all other items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

Key findings for this outcome in the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- In most of the applicable cases, the child was placed in close proximity to parents or, if placed far away, the placement was determined to be necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the child's permanency goal.
- In most of the applicable cases, the child was placed with other siblings in foster care when appropriate.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to ensure visitation between children in foster care and their mothers, fathers, and siblings.
- There was a lack of concerted effort to maintain the child's connections with extended family, particularly with siblings who were not in foster care.
- Relatives were not consistently sought as placement resources for children in foster care.

- There was a lack of concerted effort to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children through activities such as encouraging parent participation in school activities and/or doctor's appointments or providing therapy to the family to address their relationship issues.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 in its 2002 CFSR. At that time, items 11 and 12 were rated as Strengths, but all other relevant items were rated as ANIs. During the 2002 CFSR, the agency was found to be inconsistent with respect to facilitating and supporting visits between children and their parents and siblings, preserving children's connections, seeking relatives as potential placement resources, and promoting or maintaining the parent-child bond.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Developed policies and guidelines to clarify supervised and unsupervised visitation requirements to enhance visitation opportunities
- Made paternity testing available statewide to ensure identification of the fathers
- Improved policy and training regarding maintaining connections between children in foster care and their families and communities

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs

Well-Being Outcome 1 incorporates four indicators. One pertains to the agency's efforts to ensure that the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents are assessed and that the necessary services are provided to meet identified needs (item 17). A second indicator examines agency efforts to actively involve parents and children (when appropriate) in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining indicators examine the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 23.1 percent of the 65 cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent of Anchorage cases, 6 percent of Bethel cases, and 18 percent of Juneau cases. Also, the outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent of the foster care cases compared to 4 percent of the in-home services cases (only one in-home services case was determined to have substantially achieved this outcome). All four items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

Key findings with regard to this outcome in the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- For the foster care cases, the agency was considerably less consistent in assessing and meeting service needs of mothers and fathers than it was in assessing and meeting the needs of the children. However, even for children, needs were adequately assessed

and met in only 73 percent of the foster care cases and 44 percent of the in-home services cases. The agency was least consistent in assessing and meeting needs of the fathers in both types of cases, although the percentage was particularly low (13 percent) in the in-home services cases.

- There was a general lack of involvement of mothers, fathers, and children (when appropriate) in case planning in both the foster care and in-home services cases. However, in both types of cases, mothers were more likely to be involved in case planning than were fathers or children. In addition, mothers, fathers, and children were more likely to be involved in case planning in the foster care cases than in the in-home services cases.
- In many cases, the frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and if visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. Caseworkers were more likely to visit children in foster care at least once a month than they were to visit children in the in-home services cases. In five in-home services cases, the children were never seen by the caseworker during the CFSR period under review.
- The frequency of visits with mothers and fathers was not sufficient and, if visits did occur, the quality was not sufficient to meet the needs of the children or further achievement of case goals.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR, with all items rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- In many cases, the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents were neither assessed nor addressed.
- The child welfare agency did not consistently involve parents and children in the case planning process.
- In the majority of cases reviewed, the frequency and quality of visitation with both children and parents was not adequate to meet the needs of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

To address the concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR, the State developed and implemented the following strategies:

- Enhanced and revised policy and procedure for administrative review feedback to the administration in July 2005
- Developed case planning protocols to identify required services
- Strengthened caseworker training in conducting initial assessments
- Developed the expectation that supervisors are to work with their staff regarding the assessment of child and family needs and the incorporation of these needs into a strengths-based case and service planning process
- Implemented statewide tracking of caseworker visits

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

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

Well-Being Outcome 2 pertains to the agency efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2, which includes only one item—item 21: Educational needs of the child. Reviewers determined that the outcome was substantially achieved in 76.1 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 90 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 42 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 85 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 78 percent of the 37 applicable foster care cases and 67 percent of the 9 applicable in-home services cases. A key finding was a lack of consistency with regard to both assessing children's educational needs and providing services when educational needs were identified.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR. A key concern of that review was that children in the in-home services cases had education-related issues to which the agency was not responding. To address this concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Amended court orders to authorize OCS to gather educational information about children in out-of-home care
- Established an interdepartmental work group to ensure enhanced relationships between the agency and school administrators at the local level
- Provided training regarding a new policy requiring workers to assess, address, and document the educational needs of children in the cases in which children remain in their homes

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

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

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 52.5 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 70 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 12.5 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 62.5 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Also, the outcome was substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases compared to 32 percent of the 19 applicable in-home services cases. Both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were that children's physical and mental health service needs were not consistently assessed nor addressed.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 in its 2002 CFSR, with both relevant items rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- Agency performance was inconsistent with regard to providing health screenings for children at entry into foster care and providing foster parents with children's health records.
- Agency performance was inconsistent with regard to assessing children's mental health needs and providing the necessary mental health services.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Training was provided to caseworkers regarding completing the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment screenings of children within State guidelines and using the health-care provider's recommendations as a guide for all health treatment decisions.
- Physical and mental health issues were added as a topic of discussion in the administrative review process.
- Policy was established to ensure that all children in foster care received mental health evaluations.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating a information system that can inform users immediately with the status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

Alaska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The key finding of the 2008 CFSR is that Alaska's statewide information system—Online Resources for Children in Alaska—can readily identify the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for each child in foster care. The State also was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during its 2002 CFSR and therefore was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Case Review System

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance for the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established in

ASFA (item 28), and notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Because the Alaska Statewide Assessment did not provide data on any of the key items associated with this systemic factor, the CFSR determinations were based on anecdotal information in the Statewide Assessment and on stakeholder interviews conducted during the onsite CFSR. Using this information, items 26 and 27 were rated as Strengths, and items 25, 28, and 29 were rated as ANIs. In general, the 2008 CFSR determined that periodic reviews and permanency hearings were being held in a timely manner and that they addressed the issues that are relevant to moving a child toward permanency. However, the 2008 CFSR also determined the following:

- Parents are not consistently involved in the development of their case plans.
- TPR petitions are not being filed in a timely manner on a consistent basis.
- Notification of caregivers regarding hearings and reviews involving the children in their care and the caregivers' right to be heard in these proceedings is inconsistent across the State.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this factor during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. In the 2002 review, items 26 and 28 were rated as Strengths. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR with regard to items 25, 27, and 29:

- There was a lack of goal-oriented case plans.
- The system did not consistently involve parents and children (when appropriate) in case planning.
- Permanency hearings were not consistently held in a timely manner.
- Foster parents and other caregivers were not consistently notified regarding permanency hearings nor were they provided with an opportunity to be heard at the hearings.

The following key strategies were implemented in Alaska's PIP to address these concerns:

- Policy and procedure changes were developed and implemented to strengthen and enhance the use of case plans, ensure that case plans are developed in conjunction with parents and children (when appropriate), and incorporate case planning for in-home services cases.
- In collaboration with the Court Improvement Project, a data system called Court View was implemented to enable the court to track court hearings (operates in only a few jurisdictions).
- In collaboration with the Attorney General's office, a new protocol was developed for notifying foster parents of court hearings. In 2005, Alaska statutes were changed to require that notification of all court hearings in a child's case be provided to the child, each parent, the Tribe, foster parent or other out-of-home care provider, guardian, and guardian *ad litem*. In some circumstances, written notice of all court hearings in a child's case must be provided to a grandparent of the child.

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Quality Assurance (QA) System

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. Both items assessed for this factor were rated as ANIs. Key findings were the following:

- Although the State has developed standards to ensure quality services to protect the safety and health of children, many of the standards are not being implemented on a consistent basis and, at the time of the onsite CFSR, many were not fully operational.
- Although the State has a QA system in place, it does not incorporate a process for following up on QA findings with the field offices to determine whether program improvements have been implemented in response to findings and to assess the effectiveness of program improvement efforts that have been implemented.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. In the 2002 CFSR, item 30 was rated as a Strength, but item 31 was rated as an ANI. The key concern identified in the 2002 CFSR was that Alaska did not have a statewide QA process and had no formal process for clients or stakeholders to evaluate agency performance.

To address this concern through its PIP, the State developed and implemented a comprehensive QA system that incorporates both case reviews and interviews with case-related stakeholders. In addition, the PIP focused on ongoing improvement of supervisory case reviews and administrative reviews.

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Training

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. All three items assessed for this systemic factor were rated as ANIs. The key findings were the following:

- Initial training provided to staff is not sufficient to prepare them to carry out their responsibilities.
- The State does not require caseworkers or supervisors to receive ongoing training as part of their jobs. In addition, training opportunities that are available for caseworkers and supervisors are limited, particularly outside of Anchorage, and agency staff

often cannot access ongoing training either because of workload responsibilities or constraints related to the cost and time needed for travel.

- Foster parents are not receiving sufficient training to carry out their responsibilities. Although initial training for foster parents is available, it is not required. In addition, although there is a requirement for annual training for foster parents (10 to 15 hours), the Statewide Assessment reports that in 2008, 23 percent of foster parents did not complete this requirement.

Alaska was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and therefore was not required to address the factor in its PIP.

Service Array

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. All three items assessed for this systemic factor were rated as ANIs. Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- Substance abuse and mental health services, in-home family preservation services, and foster family homes (particularly Native foster homes) are four key service gaps in the State.
- The Children's Services offices are not effective in ensuring that resources are available in all political jurisdictions. Although the Statewide Assessment attributes this to the remoteness of some of Alaska's communities and the resultant transportation difficulties, stakeholders indicated that there is a lack of necessary resources to ensure that people who reside in the more remote areas can access services. They noted that even basic child protective and case management services are limited in these areas because staffing plans for the agencies that serve these communities do not take into account the length of time required to travel to the more remote communities.
- Although there are flexible funding resources and culturally appropriate services in the State, they are not sufficient to meet the needs of the children and families for whom individualized services are critical.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- Key services were not available in sufficient quantity in either rural or urban communities.
- Many critical services were not available in all communities in the State.

- In many situations, the types of services provided to children and families were more likely to be influenced by what was available rather than by what was needed to meet their particular needs. To address these concerns in its PIP, OCS implemented the following strategies:
- Conducted an assessment of strengths and service gaps using a collaborative approach with community providers and stakeholders
- Collaborated with other State agencies and departments to ensure the efficient use of available resources for shared populations
- Used Tribal, paraprofessional, and village-based resources to assist in case planning
- Developed grant programs to expand services and worked with grantees to develop a baseline of current services and identify changes that are needed to evaluate services (including post-adoption services)

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the CFSP (items 38 and 39) and the extent to which the State coordinates child welfare services with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population (item 40).

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Items 38 and 39 were rated as ANIs, although item 40 was rated as a Strength. The State was found to be effective in coordinating with other Federal or Federally-funded agencies in providing services. However, OCS does not have a formal process to consistently seek input from and engage stakeholders, including local child welfare agency staff, in the development of its goals and objectives for the State child and family services programs or in the development of its Annual Progress and Services Report.

The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, did not address this factor in its PIP. Findings from the 2008 CFSR are presented below.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

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

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Although items 42, 43, and 45 were rated as Strengths, items 41 and 44 were rated as ANIs. The key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

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 Here report by Jim by returns
 May 4th 1st draft of report due to
 needs re (PIP) - final to fall
 Report will be made available as soon
 to needs as available - as soon
 Tammy Sandra Var, Dir of OCS

- Alaska claims title IV-E funds only for children placed in foster homes that are fully licensed.
- Alaska complies with Federal requirements and completes criminal records checks on all fully licensed foster homes, adoptive homes, and relative placement homes.
- Alaska is effective in using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.
- While there are licensing standards established, many licensed homes with ongoing placements do not meet the full licensing standards.
- Alaska does not have a statewide process in place to recruit foster homes despite significant shortages of all types of foster homes; local offices do not have recruitment plans, recruitment resources are limited, and efforts to recruit foster homes are not sufficient.

Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and therefore was required to address the factor in its PIP. The 2002 CFSR identified the following key concerns in regard to this factor:

- The State granted variances to the licensing standards with the result that full licensing standards are not equally applied to all foster homes.
- The State did not have an effective recruitment plan for recruiting foster and adoptive parents who meet the needs of the children in foster care.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Implemented efforts to improve the licensing process, particularly with regard to the use of variances
- Developed a statewide foster care recruitment plan with the assistance of the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency
- Increased recruitment of Native Alaskan foster parents through increased collaboration with Tribes

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Table 1. Alaska CFSR Ratings for Safety and Permanency Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Items	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	47.1	No		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	56
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				ANI	81
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	38.5			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	51
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	39
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	15.0	Met C3; did not meet C1, C2, or C4		
Item 5: Foster care reentry				Strength	91
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	72.5
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	45
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	33
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	18
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	60
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	62.5			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	90
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	91
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	62
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	77.5
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	83
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	47

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

** Items may be rated as a Strength or an ANI. For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of the cases must be rated as a Strength.

Table 2. Alaska CFSR Ratings for Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes and Items

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved	Rating**	Percent Strength
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	No	23.1		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	32
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	37
Item 19: Caseworker visits with child			ANI	26
Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents			ANI	20
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	No	76.1		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	76
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	52.5		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	71
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	55

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

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

Table 3: Alaska CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	Yes	3	
Item 24: The 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
Case Review System	No	2	
Item 25: The State provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parents that includes the required provisions			ANI
Item 26: The State provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review			Strength
Item 27: The State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the States has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter			Strength
Item 28: The State provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)			ANI
Item 29: The State 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			ANI
Quality Assurance System	No	2	
Item 30: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children			ANI
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identified Strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluations program improvement measures implemented			ANI
Training	No	2	
Item 32: The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services			ANI
Item 33: The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP			ANI
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			ANI

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity?	Score	Item Rating**
Service Array	No	2	
Item 35: The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency			ANI
Item 36: The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP			ANI
Item 37: The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency			ANI
Agency Responsiveness to the Community	No	2	
Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, services providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP			ANI
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, Annual Progress and Services Reports delivered pursuant to the CFSP			ANI
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
Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention	No	2	
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards			ANI
Item 42: The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds			Strength
Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children			Strength
Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom adoptive homes are needed			ANI
Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

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

** Items may be rated as a Strength or as an ANI.

**Final Report
Alaska Child and Family Services Review
February 2009**

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau**

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Alaska. The CFSR is the Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. It is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau (CB) of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS.

The Alaska CFSR was conducted the week of September 8, 2008. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2007, to September 12, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Office of Children's Services (OCS)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides Alaska's child welfare data for the CFSR target 12-month period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 31 cases in Anchorage, 17 cases in Bethel, and 17 cases in Juneau
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

All 65 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the 65 cases reviewed are presented in the table at the end of this section. The percentages presented in this table and in subsequent tables in the report may not always total to 100 percent due to rounding.

The first section of the report (Section A: Outcomes) presents the CFSR findings relevant to Alaska'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 Alaska's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR review, which was held in fiscal year (FY) 2002; the State's status relevant to the current review; 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. 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 Key Characteristics

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Cases
Total Cases	40	25
When case was opened		
Case was opened prior to the period under review	34 (85%)	13 (52%)
Case was opened during the period under review	6 (15%)	12 (48%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	11 (27.5%)	NA
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	22 (55%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	4 (10%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	6 (15%)	*
16 and older	8 (20%)	*
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	24 (60%)	*
Black (Non-Hispanic)	1 (2.5%)	*
White (Non-Hispanic)	9 (22.5%)	*
Hispanic (of any race)	2 (5%)	*
Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic)	4 (10%)	*
Primary reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	15 (37.5%)	9 (36%)
Substance abuse by parent	15 (37.5%)	5 (20%)
Physical abuse	3 (7.5%)	2 (8%)
Sexual abuse	2 (5%)	3 (12%)
Medical neglect	0	2 (8%)
Mental/physical health of parent	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Mental/physical health of child	2 (5%)	0
Domestic violence in child's home	0	2 (8%)
Emotional maltreatment	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Abandonment	1 (2.5%)	0

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

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes Section of the CSFR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement (ANI) is assigned to each of the 23 indicators (items) reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The item ratings are used to determine the performance of a State on the seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for these outcomes are Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Achieved. For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, the national standards for each data indicator must be met as well as the case review requirements. 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 identified for that outcome.

CB has established a very high standard of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our nation's most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be considered acceptable. The standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being. This is consistent with the goal of the CFSR to promote continuous improvement in performance on these outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain either the 95-percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review or the national standards for the six data indicators by the end of their PIP implementation. CB recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often take time to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with CB to establish a specified amount of improvement or to determine specified activities for their PIP. That is, for each outcome that is not in substantial conformity or item that is an ANI, each State (working in conjunction with CB) specifies the following: (1) how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the ANIs and (2) the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of its PIP and still not perform at the 95-percent (for outcomes) or the 90 percent (for items) levels established for the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State's current level of performance by once more applying the high standards and a consistent, comprehensive case review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued PIPs addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, even though prior PIP goals may have been achieved. The purpose is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the completion of a PIP.

In the following sections, information is provided pertaining to how the State performed on each outcome in the first round of the CFSR. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round, the key concerns observed at that time are identified as well as the strategies implemented in the PIP to address those concerns.

Because many changes were made in the 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 its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of data indicators or percentages regarding Strength and ANI ratings. Key changes in the CFSR process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews include, but are not limited to, 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 enhance consistency and ensure an assessment of critical areas such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents in planning for their children

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					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	9	4	3	16	47.1
Partially Achieved	6	2	3	11	32.4
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	2	4	7	20.6
Total Applicable Cases	16	8	10	34	
Not Applicable Cases	15	9	7	31	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	
Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards					
Data Indicators	National Standard (%)		State's Percentage	Meets Standard?	
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6 or higher		90.7	No	
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68 or higher		99.57	No	

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 47.1 percent of applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 56 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 50 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 30 percent of applicable Juneau cases. In addition, as shown in the table, Alaska does not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant to Safety Outcome 1. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during its first CFSR conducted in FY 2002 and was required to address this outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs. Key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- The State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period or (2) the percentage of children experiencing maltreatment from caregivers while in foster care.
- Although the agency initiated investigations of reports involving imminent risk (priority 1 reports) within the required timeframes, the initiation of investigations of maltreatment reports not involving imminent risk (i.e., reports assigned as priority 2 or 3) did not consistently meet required timeframes.

To address these concerns, Alaska included the following key strategies in its PIP:

- Revised policies relating to the investigative process, including specifying the definitions for “face-to-face contact” and “initiation of investigation”
- Provided training to supervisors and caseworkers regarding new policy
- Established a protocol to review repeat maltreatment cases
- Developed a new safety assessment model (training of staff on the model in spring 2006)

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings for Alaska’s 2008 CFSR 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 Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 34 (52 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports 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 policy requirements.

According to the Statewide Assessment:

“The Alaska Office of Children’s Services policy defines the following timeframes:

“Priority 1 [P1] reports mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 24 hours of the initial report to OCS. P1 reports are defined as reports that indicate a present danger to the child and require an immediate response.

“Priority 2 [P2] reports mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 72 hours of the initial report to OCS. P2 reports are defined as reports where the situation is serious; however, information available does not indicate the child is in immediate danger.

“Priority 3 [P3] reports mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 7 calendar days of the initial report to OCS. P3 reports are defined as reports in which a delay in assessing the situation will not result in significant additional harm to the child.”

The Statewide Assessment also indicates that some areas of the State have a differential response program. According to the policy document, staff responding to maltreatment reports that are assigned to the differential response program are expected to meet the same timeframe requirements as P3 reports—i.e., a response must be initiated within 7 calendar days of the initial report to OCS. Anchorage is the only site included in the onsite CFSR that has a differential response program.

The results of the assessment of item 1 are presented in the table below.

Item 1 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	11	5	3	19	56
Area Needing Improvement	5	3	7	15	44
Total Applicable Cases	16	8	10	34	
Not Applicable	15	9	7	31	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 69 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 62.5 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 30 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy or law.

Item 1 was rated as an ANI in 15 cases in which the investigation of at least one maltreatment report on the family was not initiated and/or face-to-face contact was not made within the required timeframes. For the 15 cases rated as ANIs, there were 22 maltreatment reports that did not meet the timeframes required by State policy. Of these, 11 were P3 reports, 5 were P2 reports, and 4 were P1 reports. One report was never screened or assigned, and one report was assigned to the differential response program, but the children who were the subject of the report were never seen.

Rating Determination

Item 1 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 56 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall item rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in Alaska's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Quality Assurance (QA) reviews found that P1 referrals are consistently responded to and investigated in a timely manner. However, the QA reviews also found that there are challenges in meeting the response timeframes for P2 and P3 reports. It was noted in the Statewide Assessment that these challenges affect the State's overall results regarding compliance with item 1.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that for the P2 and P3 reports, when initial efforts to locate the child or family are not successful, the case "can fall between the cracks and a follow-up effort does not take place until the required timelines have been exceeded." In addition, the Statewide Assessment notes that although Alaska faces many geographically related challenges, the QA team reported that in the cases reviewed, weather and/or remoteness was seldom the reason that an investigation was not initiated in a timely manner.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that investigations of P1 reports generally are initiated within the required timeframes. However, they also noted that because of staff shortages of caseworkers who conduct investigations, when P1 reports are received, P2 and P3 reports tend to get pushed back and may be delayed. Anchorage stakeholders indicated that there are no limits on the number of cases that can be assigned to an investigations caseworker and as a result, the Anchorage office experiences a backlog in investigations. However, Anchorage stakeholders also noted that concerted efforts have been made to clear up the backlog, and it is not as large as it used to be.

Several stakeholders also indicated that although State policy as written specifies that the timeframe for initiating an investigation is to begin with the actual referral call to OCS, many agency caseworkers and supervisors believe that the timeframe for initiating an investigation does not actually begin until the screening decision is made by the intake supervisor, and the report is then assigned to the investigator. As a result, sometimes it is difficult to determine how long cases sit at the desk of the supervisor prior to the screening decision. A few stakeholders indicated that it can be difficult to gather all of the information necessary to make a screening decision in a timely manner.

Bethel and Juneau stakeholders said they were concerned about the lack of standardized criteria for accepting (i.e., screening in) referrals. Stakeholders at these sites expressed the opinion that the lack of standardized criteria can result in children with serious

problems not getting the attention they need because the screener does not accept the report. Several stakeholders suggested that this is a particular problem with sexual abuse reports, chronic neglect reports, and reports involving adolescents; they noted that such reports often are screened out without a clear reason.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 26 (40 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 if 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. The results of the assessment of item 2 are presented in the table below.

Item 2 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	11	4	6	21	81
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	1	5	19
Total Applicable Cases	13	6	7	26	
Not Applicable	18	11	10	39	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 85 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 67 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 86 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was only one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an ANI in five cases when there were at least two substantiated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period.

In addition to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment reports, reviewers expressed concern about the many cases involving multiple reports on the family during the life of the case. The "life of the case" refers to the time span from the date of the first allegation of abuse or neglect to the time of the Onsite Review. The following are key findings with regard to this concern:

- In 18 cases, there were at least 5 reports during the life of the case but fewer than 10 reports.
- In 9 cases, there were between 10 and 14 reports during the life of the case.
- In 12 cases, there were 15 or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case, with 4 cases having more than 20 reports.

Rating Determination

Item 2 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 81 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's QA team reported that when repeat maltreatment is identified in the QA review, it generally occurs in cases in which an investigation took place but services were not provided and the case was eventually closed. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, lack of ongoing monitoring and follow-up post-investigation appears to contribute to the repeat maltreatment incidents that occur in these cases. The Statewide Assessment did not provide QA data for this item.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Anchorage stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that repeat maltreatment is a problem at that site and that it may be attributed in part to a lack of follow through by the assigned caseworker after the initial contact. These stakeholders suggested that OCS is closing cases prematurely or letting cases remain open without efforts to work with the family.

In addition, some stakeholders indicated that maltreatment reports on open cases may be passed directly to the existing caseworker on the case. Sometimes, in these instances, the maltreatment allegation is not reported to intake and there is no full investigation of the new allegation or formal finding regarding substantiation of the allegation. Some Anchorage stakeholders indicated that often when contracted service providers working on an open case need to make a maltreatment report, they will call the ongoing caseworker rather than make a report through the intake process. Stakeholders suggested that at that point, the ongoing caseworker may or may not inform intake of the report so that it can be formally investigated.

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					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	16	3	6	25	38.5
Partially Achieved	4	4	4	12	18.5
Not Achieved or Addressed	11	10	7	28	43.1
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 38.5 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 52 percent of Anchorage cases, 18 percent of Bethel cases, and 35 percent of Juneau cases. Alaska also did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2 in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, both items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs. The following key concerns were identified at that time:

- The services offered to families often were not adequate to ensure children's safety and reduce risk of harm, and did not address underlying issues contributing to the maltreatment.
- Frequently, when services were offered to families, there was insufficient monitoring on the part of the agency to assess whether services were actually provided, whether parents were fully participating in services, and/or whether the children were safe.

To address these concerns, the State implemented the following key strategies:

- Issued new policies regarding in-home cases focusing on using Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools for assessments and case planning
- Provided training on reassessment and review of in-home case plans using the Future Risk of Harm form
- Implemented data collection through the QA process to evaluate the use and effectiveness of SDM tools

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings for the 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable for 47 (72 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 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. 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 presented in the table below.

Item 3 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	10	6	8	24	51
Area Needing Improvement	11	8	4	23	49
Total Applicable Cases	21	14	12	47	
Not Applicable	10	3	5	18	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 48 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 43 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 67 percent of applicable Juneau cases. Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 24 cases when reviewers determined that services were provided to the parents and children to prevent removal or that children were appropriately removed from the home without service provision because the removal was necessary to ensure the child's safety. Item 3 was rated as an ANI in 23 cases when reviewers determined the following:

- The services provided were insufficient to ensure the safety of the child while the child remained in the home (18 cases).
- The child was removed from the home, and the agency did not make concerted efforts to provide services to prevent the removal (three cases).
- No efforts were made to identify services that would ensure the safety of children residing with a relative (two cases). (In these cases, the child was not in foster care.)

Rating Determination

Item 3 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 51 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, high caseloads for investigators across the State make it difficult to provide in-home services to ensure safety. The Statewide Assessment also reports that accessing services that meet the complex needs of families also tends to be a challenge. Data provided in the Statewide Assessment indicate that in the State's 2008 QA review, approximately 68 percent of Anchorage cases, 28 percent of Bethel cases, and 78 percent of Juneau cases were found to have had services provided to prevent removal. (The actual percentages are estimates based on the charts provided in the Statewide Assessment. The sites specified in the Statewide Assessment data as Anchorage, Bethel, and Juneau pertain to the same geographic areas as those sites reviewed in the Onsite Review.)

Stakeholder Interview

Some stakeholders in Anchorage and Bethel expressed the opinion that children may not be maintained safely in their homes because of a lack of in-home services and follow up by the caseworker to monitor the family and ensure that services are being provided. The lack of caseworker follow-up was attributed to their high caseloads. A few Anchorage stakeholders also indicated that children may be removed from their homes because there are waiting lists for substance abuse treatment services for the parents and concern that the children cannot be left in the home if parents are not accessing these services.

Some Anchorage stakeholders reported that the caseworkers responsible for case management of in-home services also are responsible for investigations and, as a result, they do not have the time to follow up on these cases. One Anchorage stakeholder indicated that a specific in-home services unit was created recently to work with these families, but that there was no statewide guidance on working with these cases since they are mostly voluntary cases.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for all 65 cases. 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	16	3	6	25	38
Area Needing Improvement	15	14	11	40	62
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 52 percent of Anchorage cases, 18 percent of Bethel cases, and 35 percent of Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through the following: (1) conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children's home or in the children's foster home, and (2) addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as an ANI in 40 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was a lack of adequate safety and risk assessments in the home prior to case closure or prior to a trial home visit (nine cases).
- There was a lack of ongoing safety and risk assessments in the children's home during the period under review (23 cases).
- There were continued risk concerns in the home that were not addressed and/or monitored by the agency and the children were at risk in the home (17 cases).
- The case was closed without the child welfare agency ever having had any contact with the children in the home and without an initial risk assessment (one case).
- There was a lack of risk and safety assessments of the foster home (four cases).

Rating Determination

Item 4 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children in only 38 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA reviews have found that children in foster care receive quality care and that abuse in foster care is rare. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that QA reviews also have found that OCS struggles with effectively

reducing risk of harm to children who remain in their own homes. The Statewide Assessment notes that QA case reviews reveal that often families who are receiving in-home services are seen only once in several months and that there is a lack of consistent ongoing monitoring that weakens OCS's ability to ensure the safety of children in their own home. However, no QA data were provided for this item in the Statewide Assessment.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several State-level, Anchorage, and Juneau stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the new safety model, although well-liked, is requiring more time and training than initially anticipated because it involves moving from an incidence-driven system to a more comprehensive holistic decision-based system. However, they also noted that because almost all in-home cases are voluntary, there can be some problems with the family but are not sufficient to keep a case open. Some Juneau stakeholders indicated that there is a lack of clear instruction or policy regarding reassessing the family prior to closing a case. They suggested that although assessments often are conducted, they are not being documented.

Several stakeholders also expressed concern about the safety of children who are being placed in nonlicensed homes because background checks are not completed on these homes prior to the placement and often not until the child has been in the home for several months.

A few stakeholders noted that in some differential response cases the children may need placement services while the contracted agencies are working with the families. However, these stakeholders suggested that OCS often does not address the placement concerns for these children because the case has been assigned to the differential response program.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations					
Number of cases reviewed by site according to degree of outcome achievement					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	4	1	1	6	15.0
Partially Achieved	15	8	6	29	72.5
Not Achieved or Addressed	1	1	3	5	12.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	
Conformity of statewide data indicators with national standards					
Data Indicators	National Standard (Scaled Score)		State's Composite Score		Meets Standard?
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +		122.4		No
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +		81.1		No
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7 +		125.4		Yes
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +		73.1		No

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in only 15 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 20 percent of Anchorage cases and 10 percent of Bethel and Juneau cases.
- The State did not meet the national standards for the national data indicators pertaining to the timeliness and permanency of reunification (Composite 1), the timeliness of adoptions (Composite 2), and placement stability (Composite 4).

The State met the national standards for the data indicator pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods (Composite 3). Alaska's performance on the individual measures included in each composite data indicator is presented in the discussion of the items related to the measure.

Alaska was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

During the 2002 CFSR, all relevant items except item 5 (foster care reentry) were rated as ANIs. The following key concerns were identified:

- The agency was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care, which was attributed primarily to a lack of effort to match children and foster parents.
- Case goals often were in place for extended periods of time even when there were indications that the goal was not likely to be achieved.
- Appropriate case goals often were not established in a timely manner.
- The goals of guardianship and reunification were not achieved in a timely manner.
- There were many agency-related delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner, including lack of timely decision-making and lack of follow-up with the child and pre-adoptive family.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Standardized practice for setting and changing permanency goals when concurrent planning occurs
- Improved the structure of administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences, with enhanced focus on permanency goals and concurrent planning
- Developed the continuous QA review system to monitor cases
- Established Regional Adoption Specialists who participate in administrative and permanency planning reviews to ensure that goals are established in a timely manner and are documented
- Implemented a statewide contract for post-adoption services

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings of the 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care reentries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 11 (27.5 percent) of the 40 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	5	3	2	10	91
Area Needing Improvement	1	0	0	1	9
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	3	2	11	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	14	7	8	29	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 10 cases in which the child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. The item was rated as an ANI in one case in which the child reentered foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. In this case the child was on a trial home visit that lasted longer than 6 months and was re-removed from the home due to the mother's continued substance abuse problem, which had not been adequately treated.

Rating Determination

Item 5 is assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 91 percent of the applicable cases, the child had not reentered foster care in less than 12 months. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on Composite 1: Measure relevant to the permanency of reunification

The data below are presented to provide additional information about foster care reentry. There is no national standard for the measure of foster care reentry. National standards with regard to permanency have been established only for the scaled composite scores. The measure of foster care reentry is part of Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification. The State's performance on Composite 1 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

The following is the State's performance for the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators. The CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators was from April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007. With regard to the individual measure of foster care reentry (measure C1.4) included in the Composite 1 data indicator—Timeliness and permanency of reunification, 7.5 percent of the children exiting foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the CFSR 12-month target period reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is lower than the 25th percentile of 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, efforts to prevent reentries into foster care are a strength for OCS. The Statewide Assessment attributes this positive performance in part to the fact that caseworkers mitigate the safety threats for children and determine that needed changes have taken place before the child is returned home. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that stakeholders expressed concern that the strength noted in this area may be gained at the cost of "length of time in care."

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 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 results of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 6 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	16	7	6	29	72.5
Area Needing Improvement	4	3	4	11	27.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of Anchorage cases, 70 percent of Bethel cases, and 60 percent of Juneau cases. Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's current placement was stable and that the child either did not experience a placement change during the period under review or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best

interests (i.e., they were intended to further achievement of the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child).

Item 6 was rated as an ANI in 11 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to further attainment of the child's permanency goal (11 cases).
- The child's current placement setting (at the time of the onsite CFSR) was not stable (two cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Seventeen children had one placement during the period under review.
- Fourteen children had two placements during the period under review.
- Nine children had three or more placements during the period under review, with three of these children having five or more placements.

Rating Determination

Item 6 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 72.5 percent of the foster care cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interests of the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on Composite 4: Measures of placement stability

The data below are presented to provide additional information about placement stability. There are no national standards for the individual measures of placement stability. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite scores for Composite 4: Placement stability. The State's performance on Composite 4 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

Alaska's performance for the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators on the individual measures included in Composite 4: Placement stability is as follows:

- 65.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 83.3 percent.
- 50.7 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 59.9 percent.
- 25.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is less than the national median of 33.9 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS and stakeholders agree that placement stability is an ANI for the State. The Statewide Assessment notes that placement stability can be affected by the age of foster children, the lack of therapeutic resource families to meet the needs of the child, the lack of consistent and available support resources for families, and the turnover in OCS caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment also notes that there is a lack of foster homes in the State, particularly those homes willing to care for adolescents. In addition, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, there are not enough therapeutic foster homes for youth with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) or significant mental health issues.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that ensuring placement stability for children in foster care is a challenge for OCS. Various stakeholders attributed this problem to the following:

- A lack of foster families that are willing to foster children with complex needs and problems
- A lack of support for foster families, particularly respite services
- A lack of support for relative caregivers who are not licensed and whose needs often are ignored
- An insufficient pool of foster families, including Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) placement families, to ensure appropriate matching between children and foster parents
- Too frequent use of emergency placements and shelters, even for children younger than age 12
- A lack of training of caseworkers on how and when to support foster parents

A few stakeholders also indicated that foster parents are not always provided with complete information on the child placed in their home and this often "sets them up for failure."

Some Anchorage stakeholders indicated that Team Decision Meetings (TDMs) often are used to prevent placement changes and that some caseworkers are very skilled in this process. However, these stakeholders also reported that TDMs are available only in Anchorage and are not available to all families in that location.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was

appropriate. Reviewers also were to determine whether the agency had sought termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	11	5	2	18	45
Area Needing Improvement	9	5	8	22	55
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 55 percent of Anchorage cases, 50 percent of Bethel cases, and 20 percent of Juneau cases. 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 item was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's current permanency goal (at the time of the onsite CFSR) was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (four cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (15 cases).
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA, particularly with regard to documenting in the case file compelling reasons for not seeking TPR (seven cases).

Case review findings pertaining to the case goals were as follows:

- Ten children had a goal of reunification with parents or relatives only.
- Nineteen children had a goal of adoption only.
- Three children had a goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) only. (OPPLA is a living arrangement other than adoption, reunification, living with other relatives, or guardianship that involves the child remaining in State custody until reaching the age of majority.)
- Two children had a goal of guardianship only.
- Three children had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification with parents.
- Two children had concurrent goals of guardianship and OPPLA.
- One child had concurrent goals of guardianship and reunification with parents.

Case review findings pertaining to meeting ASFA requirements for TPR were as follows:

- At the time of the onsite CFSR, 30 of the 40 children in the foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. ASFA requirements with regard to seeking TPR and documenting compelling reasons when TPR was not sought were

applicable for 29 of these foster care cases. In one case, ASFA requirements were not applicable because the child was in a foster care placement with a relative during the child's entire time in foster care.

- ASFA requirements were not met in 7 (24 percent) of the 29 cases for which the requirements were applicable.

Rating Determination

Item 7 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and acted in accordance with the requirements of ASFA in only 45 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on Composite 3: Measures pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods

The data below are presented to provide additional information about achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. There are no national standards for the individual measures included in Composite 3. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite scores for Composite 3. The State's performance on Composite 3 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

Alaska's performance for the CFSR target 12-month period on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 3 (achieving permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods) is as follows:

- 20.6 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the target period 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 target period (measure C3-1). This percentage is less than the national median of 25 percent.
- 99.4 percent of the children exiting foster care during the target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home (measure C3-2). This percentage exceeds the 75th percentile of 98 percent.
- 35.7 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation (or who turned age 18 while still in foster care) had been in foster care for 3 years or longer (measure C3.3). This percentage is less than the 25th percentile of 37.5 percent. For this measure, lower percentages indicate higher performance levels.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State QA reviews show an improvement in the establishment of permanency goals. However, no data were provided in the Statewide Assessment with regard to State QA findings for this item. In addition, although the Statewide Assessment notes that the incorporation of Regional Adoptions Specialists in administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences has increased the timeliness of goal establishment for children in out-of-home care, no evaluation data were provided to support this statement.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment process expressed concern that OCS caseworkers do not understand the purpose of concurrent plans and that concurrent plans are not being developed as early as they could be in some cases. These stakeholders suggested that additional OCS staff training is needed in the development, use, and purpose of concurrent planning.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed opinions regarding concurrent planning. Some stakeholders indicated that concurrent planning is occurring and that caseworkers are working toward concurrent goals simultaneously. However, a few stakeholders also noted that although the State's automated child welfare information system can accommodate concurrent goals, many caseworkers are not entering concurrent goals into the system, particularly when there is a goal of adoption.

Other stakeholders expressed the opinion that caseworkers generally are not implementing concurrent planning early on in a case and when there are concurrent goals, caseworkers are not working both goals simultaneously. Some Bethel stakeholders, for example, noted that concurrent planning is not considered at all until the 9-month permanency hearing.

A few stakeholders also indicated that sometimes permanency goals other than reunification may not be established in a timely manner because of the extensive turnover in both the caseworker and supervisor positions. These stakeholders said that new caseworkers and supervisors usually want to start over again with the family regardless of how long the child has been in foster care. Other stakeholders suggested that permanency goals may not be changed from reunification because the required services for the parents have not been available and the court will rule that reasonable efforts were not made.

Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 18 (45 percent) of the 40 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	3	1	2	6	33
Area Needing Improvement	4	6	2	12	67
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	7	4	18	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	13	3	6	22	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 8 is rated as a Strength in 43 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 14 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 50 percent of applicable Juneau cases. 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 ANI when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner. Some of the concerns identified in the cases pertained to problems or delays in completing paperwork, particularly for guardianships, and to a lack of visitation opportunities for parents and children.

Rating Determination

Item 8 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner in only 33 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Composite 1: Measures pertaining to timeliness of reunification

The data below are presented to provide additional information about the timeliness of reunification. There are no national standards for the individual measures included in Composite 1. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score for Composite 1. The State's performance on Composite 1 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

Alaska's performance for the 12-month CFSR target period on the three "timeliness" measures included in Permanency Composite 1: (timeliness and permanency of reunification) is presented below.

- 67.3 percent of the reunifications occurred in at least 8 days but less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 69.9 percent.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 7 months. This median length of stay is more than the national median length of stay of 6.5 months. For this measure, a lower number of months equates to a higher level of performance.

- 32.2 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 39.4 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QA review team indicated that there are challenges in moving cases to permanency, and they reported that this may be due in part to the fact that some treatment processes take longer than expected. The Statewide Assessment notes that drug and alcohol treatment, in particular, may be delayed because of the lack of available inpatient treatment, which results in waiting lists. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the achievement of permanency goals, such as timely reunification, is thwarted by the lack of consistent caseworker practice due to high staff turnover.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that there are barriers to achieving reunification in a timely manner and that one key barrier is a lack of adequate services for the parents. Stakeholders noted that this is a problem in the urban areas as well as in the bush. In particular, many stakeholders identified mental health and substance abuse treatment services for adults and supervised visitation as services that were not readily available to families and therefore resulted in delays in reunification.

Item 9. Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 22 (55 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to finalize adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below.

Item 9 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	3	0	1	4	18
Area Needing Improvement	10	4	4	18	82
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	13	4	5	22	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	6	5	18	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 23 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, none of the applicable Bethel cases, and 20 percent of applicable Juneau cases. 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 ANI in 18 cases due to one or more of the following concerns:

- Delays in filing for TPR (nine cases)
- Delays in the TPR process after filing (two cases)
- Delays in completing or approving home studies (six cases)
- Delays in searching for absent parents (four cases)
- Delays due to the Tribe wanting to ensure that there are no available relatives before they agree to adoption by a nonrelative foster parent (one case)
- Delays due to not addressing key service needs of child (two cases)

In six of the 18 cases rated as ANIs for this item, the child had been in foster care for longer than 3 years at the time of the onsite CFSR or at the time of adoption finalization. During the period under review, adoption was finalized in only 5 of the 22 cases with a case goal of adoption. There was no case in which finalization occurred in less than 24 months of the child's entry into foster care.

Rating Determination

Item 9 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner in only 18 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Composite 2: Measures pertaining to the timeliness of adoptions

The data below are presented to provide additional information about the timeliness of adoptions. There are no national standards for the individual measures included in Composite 2. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score for Composite 2. The State's performance on Composite 2 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

Alaska's performance during the CFSR 12-month target period on the individual measures included in Permanency Composite 2 (timeliness of adoptions) is as follows:

- 22 percent of adoptions occurred in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care (measure C2-1). This percentage is less than the national median of 26.8 percent.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 31.5 months (measure C2-2). This median length of stay is less than the national median of 32.4 months but higher than the 25th percentile of 27.3 months. For this measure, a lower number of months equates to a higher level of performance.

- 16.4 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged to a finalized adoption by the last day of the target period (measure C2-3). This percentage is less than the national median of 20.2 percent.
- 8.5 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the CFSR 12-month target period became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within 6 months (measure C2-4). This percentage is less than the national median of 8.8 percent.
- 40.8 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free (C2-5). This percentage is less than the national median of 45.8 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Alaska statutes and OCS policy outline processes for improving timeliness to adoption by addressing timeframes for TPR. Statutes and policy require that when a child has been placed out-of-home for 15 of the last 22 months, a petition for TPR must be filed unless there are compelling reasons for not filing a petition. Additionally, Alaska's statutes and policy address the consent to adoption by parent, which provides expedited achievement of timely adoptions particularly in cases of Alaska Native children. This process offers parents the opportunity to consent to adoption without a relinquishment or TPR.

The Statewide Assessment reports that there is agreement between OCS and stakeholders that delays in adoption may be attributed to insufficient staff training on this issue and that newly assigned caseworkers may resist moving toward TPR. Instead, new caseworkers sometimes want to give parents additional chances to reunify with their child. This is especially problematic when cases move from one worker to another due to staff turnover. Newly assigned caseworkers can be hesitant to move forward with TPR on unfamiliar cases and therefore delays often occur.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that a lack of available mental health and substance abuse services for OCS families is an obstacle for timely TPR. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the State QA review team observed that there are a number of factors that may affect the timeliness of adoptions. For example, concurrent planning often is not considered early in a case even when there is little hope of successful reunification, and some courts will not accept concurrent plans until 15 months of placement has passed even in poor prognosis cases. Finally, a limited number of cases get lost in the system when cases are transferred from one caseworker to another. These cases may appear stable to the new caseworker and therefore do not get the attention needed to finalize an adoption.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that, although there are challenges in achieving adoptions in a timely manner, the hiring of Regional Adoption Specialists has greatly improved the situation. However, there was a consensus among stakeholders that adoptions are taking too long to complete and that the most significant barrier to achieving adoptions in a timely manner is the home study process. Many stakeholders indicated that home studies, most of which are done by private contractors, take an extremely

long time to complete and can delay an adoption anywhere from 6 to 12 months. They noted that although the State has adopted stricter time requirements for the home study, it remains a significant cause of adoption delays.

Various stakeholders identified the following as additional barriers to timely adoptions:

- An insufficient number of adoptive homes, particularly ICWA adoptive homes and homes for children with behavior problems
- Delays in achieving TPR, including the need in some areas of the State for the caseworker to prepare a full case summary as part of the petition process
- Delays in scheduling TPR hearings because other types of cases have priority
- High staff caseloads that result in a lack of services to the biological family and, therefore, findings of no reasonable efforts in case
- Delays due to lengthy subsidy negotiations, which cannot take place until after the home study is completed
- The belief of some agency staff that there is an OCS policy requiring that a child be in a home for 3 months before a home study can be requested and 6 months before an adoption can be finalized

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 5 (12.5 percent) of the 40 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 OPPLAs. The results are presented in the table below.

Item 10 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	2	1	0	3	60
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	2	2	40
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	1	2	5	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	18	9	8	35	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in three cases when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement for the child and to provide the necessary service to prepare the child for independent living. Item 10 was rated as an ANI in two cases when reviewers determined that the child was not in a permanent placement and there were delays in providing the child with Independent Living (IL) services.

Rating Determination

Item 10 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 60 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 10 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, since the 2002 CFSR, OCS has established Regional Independent Living Specialists (RILS) in each of the four OCS regions. RILS work with foster youth and former foster youth on building IL and transitional living skills. RILS participate in case reviews to ensure that the identified needs are addressed prior to releasing custody and that custody is maintained if those needs have not been addressed. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that, statewide, the availability of IL services and transitional living programs is limited.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that IL services are provided to older youth in foster care. Anchorage stakeholders praised the IL services provider and coordinator in that site, although some expressed the opinion that the eligibility age of 16.5 years should be lowered to age 14 or 15. Juneau stakeholders also praised the RILS and noted that this person is effective in reaching out to youth and engaging them in IL services.

Some Anchorage stakeholders indicated that although there are exit plans for most youth, often youth who transition out of foster care do not have a permanent adult resource person in the community.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children					
Number of cases reviewed by site according to degree of outcome achievement					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	13	6	6	25	62.5
Partially Achieved	7	4	3	14	35.0
Not Achieved	0	0	1	1	2.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 62.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of Anchorage cases and 60 percent of Bethel and Juneau cases. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, all items assessed for Permanency Outcome 2 were rated as ANIs except for items 11 (proximity of placement) and 12 (placement with siblings). The following key concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR:

- Agency practice was inconsistent with respect to facilitating and supporting visits between children and their parents and siblings.
- There was a lack of concerted efforts to preserve children's connections and to seek relatives as potential placement resources.
- In many cases, efforts were not made to promote or maintain the parent-child bond.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Developed policies and guidelines to clarify supervised and unsupervised visitation requirements
- Made paternity testing available statewide to ensure identification of noncustodial fathers
- Improved policy and training regarding maintaining connections between children in foster care and their families and communities

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings of the 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 31 (77.5 percent) of the 40 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 interests,

and/or (3) parents were deceased or their 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	13	8	7	28	90
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	1	3	10
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	13	10	8	31	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	0	2	9	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 90 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the 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 percentage equals the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA reviews indicate that OCS is very effective in placing foster children close to their birth parents or their own communities. The Statewide Assessment reports that in the vast majority of QA case reviews, most field offices are performing well in this area.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 32 (80 percent) of the 40 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	14	7	8	29	91
Area Needing Improvement	2	1	0	3	9
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	16	8	8	32	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	2	2	8	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 87.5 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 87.5 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 100 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was in a placement with all siblings (14 cases).
- The child was not in a placement with some siblings, but the separation was necessary to meet the special needs of one or more of the siblings (15 cases).

Item 12 was rated as an ANI in three cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together and the separation was not intended to meet special needs.

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. Reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care (when appropriate) in 91 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA review data indicate that OCS is placing siblings together in the majority of cases. The chart presented in the Statewide Assessment shows 100 percent compliance for this item with regard to placement with siblings for cases reviewed in Anchorage, Bethel, Mat-Su, and Juneau, and approximately 75 percent for cases reviewed in Fairbanks.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item in a substantive way during the onsite CFSR.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 13 was applicable for 34 (85 percent) of the 40 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 the following: (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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	10	6	5	21	62
Area Needing Improvement	5	4	4	13	38
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	15	10	9	34	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	0	1	6	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 67 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 60 percent of Bethel cases, and 56 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that (1) the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children, or (2) the agency made concerted efforts to promote frequent visitation even when the current visitation frequency did not meet the child's needs.

Item 13 was rated as an ANI in 13 cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the mother (nine cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with the father (eight cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings in foster care (six cases).

Specific information about visitation frequency is provided in the table below. As shown in the table, for the applicable cases, children visited with their mothers at least once a month in 44 percent of the applicable cases, with their fathers at least once a month in 50 percent of the applicable cases, and with their siblings at least once a month in 56 percent of the applicable cases.

Visitation frequency for children in foster care (during the period under review)	Visits with Mother	Visits with Father	Visits with Siblings in Foster Care
At least once a week	10 (37%)	8 (33%)	5 (28%)
Less than once a week but at least twice a month	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	3 (17%)
Less than twice a month but at least once a month	1 (4%)	3 (12.5%)	2 (11%)
Less than once a month	13 (48%)	9 (37.5%)	6 (33%)
Never	2 (7%)	3 (12.5%)	2 (11%)
Total cases for which item 13 was applicable	27	24	18

Rating Determination

Item 13 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 62 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child and family. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 13 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, visitation with parents was addressed in a 2006 Stakeholder Survey of 140 parents. When asked if they were satisfied with the visitation schedule, 50 parents out of the 140 interviewed indicated that they were satisfied with the visitation schedule, while 82 parents indicated that they were not satisfied with the visitation schedule.

The Statewide Assessment reports that QA review data indicate that compliance with the requirements for visitation between parents and siblings varies throughout the State. The table presented in the Statewide Assessment shows that, for 2008, the Juneau and Mat-Su offices were in 100 percent compliance with this item; in Anchorage and Bethel compliance was about 80 percent; and in Fairbanks compliance was approximately 75 percent.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some Anchorage stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that when visits do not occur with parents it is usually due to the lack of supervised visitation services. They noted that there are not sufficient resources to coordinate and support visits.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for all 40 foster care cases. 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. This item is not rated on the basis of visits or contacts with parents or siblings in foster care. The results of the assessment are provided in the table below.

Item 14 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	15	8	8	31	77.5
Area Needing Improvement	5	2	2	9	22.5
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of Anchorage cases and 80 percent of Bethel and Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child's connections with extended family members, religious or cultural heritage, schools, neighborhoods, and friends. Item 14 was rated as an ANI in nine cases when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to extended family (eight cases). In seven of these cases, the lack of connection was with siblings who were not in foster care.
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections to his or her cultural heritage (three cases). In all three cases, the children were of Native American heritage.

Rating Determination

Item 14 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 77.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain the child's connections with extended family, culture, religion, community, and school. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 14 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the table presented in the Statewide Assessment, the QA review for 2008 found that 100 percent of the cases reviewed in Anchorage, Juneau, and Bethel and about 81 percent of the cases reviewed in Fairbanks and Mat-Su were determined to have met the requirements of this item. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that in a survey of 140 parents conducted in 2006, only 45 percent of the parents reported that their children were able to remain in the same school while in foster care, only 60 percent of the parents surveyed indicated that their children were able to maintain community activities while in out-of-home care, and only 65 percent of the parents reported that their children's cultural activities had been supported and maintained while in out-of-home placement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions with regard to notification of Tribes when Native children come into contact with the child welfare system. Several stakeholders indicated that in some areas of the State, caseworkers are not making concerted efforts to identify Native children and therefore are not providing timely notice to the Tribes. However, other stakeholders said that OCS does a good job in determining whether children have Native Alaskan heritage and are notifying the Tribes and seeking relative placements whenever possible. Anchorage stakeholders said that Native Alaskan children are not always placed with relatives because if the parents live in Anchorage the parents often do not want the child moved far away to a remote village.

A few Anchorage stakeholders reported that there are 62 languages spoken in the Anchorage schools and many more cultures than Native, and it was not clear whether any efforts were being made to address the cultural heritage of these children. A few Anchorage stakeholders also noted that when children are moved from foster homes or relative placements, no efforts are made to maintain the children's connections to these families.

Juneau stakeholders said that there is a cultural night activity held in that site for non-Native parents who are fostering Native children. They reported that this activity was well attended and perceived as helpful for foster parents and children.

Item 15. Relative placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 36 (90 percent) of the 40 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 time 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	14	10	6	30	83
Area Needing Improvement	4	0	2	6	17
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	18	10	8	36	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	2	0	2	4	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 78 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 100 percent of Bethel cases, and 75 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed with relatives (20 cases).
- The child was not placed with relatives but the agency made diligent efforts to search for maternal and/or paternal relatives (10 cases).

Item 15 was rated as an ANI in six cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency had not made efforts to search for maternal relatives (five cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to search for paternal relatives (five cases).

Rating Determination

Item 15 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 83 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QA case reviews for the 2008 period found that in 100 percent of the cases reviewed, concerted efforts were made to place the child with relatives, including paternal relatives, when appropriate. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that in a 2007 survey of 130 Tribes, only 63 percent of respondents stated that they strongly agree or agree that OCS makes efforts to place children in an ICWA-preference placement setting with a relative or Tribal care provider and only 75 percent of the respondents stated that they strongly agree or agree that OCS involves the Tribes in relative searches for children in foster care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several Anchorage stakeholders indicated that TDMs in that location have been beneficial in promoting relative placements, particularly for Native children. Some stakeholders at this site also noted that the ICWA specialist raises the issue of the need for continued relative search at every 6-month review involving a Native child.

Although most stakeholders expressed the opinion that relatives often are sought, several noted that some relatives who are not licensed may not have the resources necessary to assume care of the children. A few stakeholders suggested that relatives are not always fully informed about their right to be licensed. Stakeholders also noted that while there might be some criminal background incident that prevents licensure, the children are still placed in the homes. In these situations, the relative caregivers do not get the financial support or other supports that would help them care for the children.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 30 (75 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	6	5	3	14	47
Area Needing Improvement	7	5	4	16	53
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	13	10	7	30	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	0	3	10	
Total Foster Care Cases	20	10	10	40	

Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 46 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 50 percent of Bethel cases, and 43 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children. For the most part, this involved the agency encouraging the parent's participation in school activities and/or doctor's appointments.

Item 16 was rated as an ANI in 16 cases when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the mother (12 out of 27 applicable cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the father (10 out of 24 applicable cases).

Rating Determination

Item 16 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care in only 47 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 16 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QA reviews have found that the majority of field offices have been performing at or near 100 percent on this item across the State. However, the Statewide Assessment did not provide specific data pertaining to this item.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

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 site according to degree of outcome achievement					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	11	1	3	15	23.1
Partially Achieved	8	4	7	19	29.2
Not Achieved or Addressed	12	12	7	31	47.7
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in only 23.1 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent of Anchorage cases, 6 percent of Bethel cases, and 18 percent of Juneau cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35 percent (14 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared with 4 percent (1 case) of the 25 in-home services cases. Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

During the 2002 CFSR, all items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- In many cases, the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents were neither assessed nor addressed.

- The child welfare agency did not consistently involve parents and children in the case planning process.
- In the majority of cases reviewed, the frequency and quality of visitation with both children and parents was not adequate to meet the needs of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

To address the concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR, the State developed and implemented the following strategies:

- Enhanced policy and procedure for administrative review feedback to the child welfare agency administration (issued July 2005)
- Developed case planning protocols to identify required services
- Strengthened caseworker training in conducting initial assessments
- Developed the expectation that supervisors are to work with their staff regarding the assessment of child and family needs and the incorporation of these needs into a strengths-based case and service planning process
- Implemented statewide tracking of caseworker visits with children and parents

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings of the 2008 CFSR pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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, physical health, and mental health needs. These issues are addressed in later items. The case review results are presented in the table below.

Item 17 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	13	3	5	21	32
Area Needing Improvement	18	14	12	44	68
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 42 percent of Anchorage cases, 18 percent of Bethel cases, and 29 percent of Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 45 percent (18 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared with 12 percent (3 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases.

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 ANI 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 are shown in the table below. For the foster care cases, the data suggest that the agency was considerably less consistent in assessing and meeting service needs of mothers and fathers than it was in assessing and meeting the needs of the children, although the needs of children were adequately assessed in only 73 percent of the cases. However, for the in-home services cases, the needs of the children were assessed and met in only 44 percent of the cases. The agency was least consistent in assessing and meeting needs of the fathers in both types of cases, although the percentage was particularly low in the in-home services cases.

Item 17. Assessment and Services Summary

Target person for assessment and services	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Yes	Total Applicable Cases	Yes	Total Applicable Cases
Mother's needs assessed and met?	14 (52%)	27	10 (40%)	25
Father's needs assessed and met?	11 (46%)	24	3 (12.5%)	24
Foster parents' needs assessed and met?	25 (66%)	38		
Child's needs assessed and met?	29 (72.5%)	40	11 (44%)	25

Rating Determination

Item 17 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents (when applicable) in only 32 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QA reviews have indicated that Alaska's performance with regard to the adequate assessment of needs and services of child, parent, and foster parents has declined in most of the State since 2006. The data presented in the Statewide Assessment for 2008 indicate that slightly less than 60 percent of the cases reviewed in Anchorage, Bethel, and Fairbanks were rated as a Strength, slightly less than 80 percent of the cases reviewed in Juneau were rated as a Strength, and about 90

percent of the cases reviewed in Mat-Su were rated as a Strength. The Statewide Assessment reports that OCS speculates that staff turnover and the struggle with implementation of the safety decision-making model are significant contributing factors to the decline in performance. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, "Again, challenges do not seem to be limited to a specific area or group and are more the result of uncovered cases and cases with new or overworked caseworkers who falter in maintaining consistent contact and follow-through with the provision of needed services."

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several Anchorage stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there are not sufficient service supports for foster parents, children in residential treatment, and relative caregivers. A few Anchorage stakeholders also expressed concern about the agency not being proactive in engaging parents in services and instead just giving them a list of referrals.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 18 was applicable for 63 (97 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 interests. 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	13	4	6	23	37
Area Needing Improvement	16	13	11	40	63
Total Applicable Cases	29	17	17	63	
Not Applicable Cases	2	0	0	2	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 45 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 24 percent of Bethel cases, and 35 percent of Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 58 percent (22 cases) of the 38 applicable foster care cases compared with 4 percent (1 case) of 25 in-home services cases. Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties actively participated in case planning or that the agency had made concerted efforts to involve them in case planning. The item was rated as an

ANI when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to involve the mother, father, and/or child (when age appropriate) in case planning.

Key findings with regard to this item are presented in the table below. As shown in the table, the largest differences with regard to involving the mothers, fathers, and children in case planning occurred between foster care and in-home services cases. However, in the in-home services cases, the mothers were more likely to be involved in case planning than were the fathers or children.

Target person	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Yes	Total Applicable Cases	Yes	Total Applicable Cases
Mother involved in case planning?	18 (67%)	27	7 (28%)	25
Father involved in case planning?	14 (58%)	24	2 (8%)	24
Children involved in case planning?	14 (67%)	21	2 (14%)	14

Rating Determination

Item 18 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in case planning in only 37 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. Item 18 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the results of the QA review in 2008 indicate that Alaska has room for improvement in the area of involving parents and children in case planning. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, in the QA review, only those cases that were determined to have successfully involved all parties in a meaningful way in the development of the case plan were rated as a Strength. The Statewide Assessment reports that in the State's 2008 QA review, a Strength rating was assigned to 52 percent of Anchorage cases, about 12 percent of Bethel cases, about 81 percent of Fairbanks cases, and about 58 percent of Juneau and Mat-Su cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that Bethel's low level of compliance in this area may be related to staffing and workload issues; in comparison, Fairbanks' performance, which is better for this item, may be attributed to its more stable work force.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several Anchorage stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that children and families can express their opinions and perspectives during a TDM. However, other Anchorage stakeholders indicated that TDMs primarily focus on placement decisions and not on the services or the case plan.

Other comments on parent involvement in case planning are provided under item 25 in the Systemic Factors section of this report.

Item 19. Caseworker visits with child

___ Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 19 was applicable for all 65 cases. In assessing this item, 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	13	0	4	17	26
Area Needing Improvement	18	17	13	48	74
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 42 percent of Anchorage cases, 0 Bethel cases, and 24 percent of Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 40 percent (16 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared to 4 percent (1 case) of the 25 in-home services cases.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children were 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 ANI in 48 cases when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child and when visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (33 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 (four 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 (six cases).
- There were no visits with children during the period under review (five cases).

Specific information on the frequency of caseworker visits is presented in the table below. The data in the table indicate that caseworkers visited children less frequently than once a month in 55 percent of foster care cases and 84 percent of in-home services cases.

Typical frequency of caseworker visits with child (during the period under review)	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Services Cases
Visits occurred at least once a week	1 (2.5%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than once a week but at least twice a month	2 (5%)	0
Visits occurred less frequently than twice a month but at least once a month	15 (37.5%)	4 (16%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	22 (55%)	16 (64%)
There were no visits during the period under review	0	5 (20%)
Total cases	40	25

Rating Determination

Item 19 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality in only 26 percent of the cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS policy requires an OCS caseworker to have face-to-face contact at least once a month with any child with an open case who resides in Alaska and who is placed either in his or her own home or in an out-of-home placement. This contact must occur in the home in which the child resides at least once every other month. The Statewide Assessment also notes that policy requires that the contact must allow for discussion with the child regarding their current placement, activities on the case plan, and any safety or well being issues that have been identified.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the results of the State's QA reviews indicate that Alaska has difficulty conducting monthly caseworker visits. For the 2008 data, caseworker visits with children was rated as a Strength in only 28 percent of Anchorage cases, 18 percent of Fairbanks cases, 9 percent of Juneau cases, 25 percent of Mat-Su cases, and 0 Bethel cases.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that, according to ORCA data, the statewide percentage for caseworker visits for March 2008 for all regions and field offices was 18.9 percent for children in custody. The Statewide Assessment indicates that ORCA data does not include visits with children receiving in-home services, although the QA data includes this population.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed different opinions regarding the frequency of caseworker visits with children. Some State-level stakeholders cited the State data regarding the lack of adequate contact between caseworkers and children and suggested that this may be due to a lack of skills on the part of the caseworkers and a lack of confidence in their

ability to engage children and families. Several Anchorage stakeholders, however, said that caseworkers have at least monthly contact and often weekly contact with the children on their caseloads, although they may not be documenting this appropriately. However, several Anchorage stakeholders also noted that contact varied across caseworkers, with some caseworkers doing a better job than others.

Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 55 (85 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. All cases that were not applicable were foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	6	1	4	11	20
Area Needing Improvement	18	16	10	44	80
Total Applicable Cases	24	17	14	55	
Not Applicable Cases	7	0	3	10	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 25 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 6 percent of Bethel cases, and 29 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 30 percent (9 cases) of the 30 applicable foster care cases compared with 8 percent (2 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases.

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 ANI when reviewers determined the following with regard to visits with the mothers (52 applicable cases):

- The frequency of visits with mothers was not sufficient and, when visits did occur, the quality was not sufficient to meet the needs of the children or further achievement of case goals (24 cases).
- The frequency of visits with mothers was sufficient, but when visits did occur, the quality was not sufficient (two cases).

- The frequency of visits with mothers was not sufficient, but when visits did occur, the quality was sufficient (seven cases).
- There were no visits with the mother during the period under review (five cases).

Item 20 was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined the following with regard to visits with the fathers (48 applicable cases):

- The frequency of visits with fathers was not sufficient and, when visits did occur, the quality was not sufficient to meet the needs of the children or further achievement of case goals (20 cases).
- The frequency of visits with fathers was sufficient, but when visits did occur, the quality was not sufficient (one case).
- The frequency of visits with fathers was not sufficient, but when visits did occur, the quality was sufficient (three cases).
- There were no visits with fathers during the period under review (13 cases).

In one case, there were no visits with either the mother or the father during the period under review, but the case was rated as a Strength because reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to visit both the mother and the father.

Additional information on the frequency of caseworker visits with parents is provided in the table below. As shown in the table, the most typical frequency of visits with both mothers and fathers was less than once a month for both types of cases.

Typical frequency of caseworker visits with parents (during the period under review)	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
At least once a week	0	0	0	0
Less than once a week but at least twice a month	2 (7%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	0
Less than twice a month but at least once a month	2 (7%)	4 (17%)	5 (20%)	3 (12.5%)
Less than once a month	20 (74%)	13 (54%)	16 (64%)	12 (50%)
Never	3 (11%)	5 (21%)	3 (12%)	9 (37.5%)
Total Applicable Cases	27	24	25	24

Rating Determination

Item 20 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals in only 20 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS policy requires that the assigned caseworker must have face-to-face contact with both of the parents, or Native custodian, with an open case at least once a month. This contact must occur in the home in which the parent(s)/Indian custodian reside(s) at least once every other month and may occur in an alternate setting every other month. The Statewide Assessment also reports that if the required contact standards cannot be met, the caseworker must document the reasons why in the ORCA case file.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, QA reviews found that visits with parents are not occurring in accordance with OCS policy. The data presented in the Statewide Assessment show that in the QA case reviews, visits with parents were rated as a Strength in only 17 percent of Anchorage cases, 20 percent of Fairbanks cases, and 0 cases in Bethel, Juneau, and Mat-Su.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders did not comment on this item during the onsite CFSR.

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					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	19	5	11	35	76.1
Partially Achieved	1	0	0	1	2.2
Not Achieved	1	7	2	10	21.7
Total Applicable Cases	21	12	13	46	
Not Applicable Cases	10	5	4	19	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 2

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2, which includes only one item—item 21: Educational needs of the child. Reviewers determined that the outcome was substantially achieved in 76.1 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 90 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 42 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 85 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The outcome was substantially

achieved in 78 percent (29 cases) of the 37 applicable foster care cases and 67 percent (6 cases) of the 9 applicable in-home services cases. Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

A key concern of the 2002 CFSR was that children in the in-home services cases had education-related issues to which the agency was not responding. To address this concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP.

- Court orders were amended to authorize OCS to gather educational information about children in out-of-home care.
- An interdepartmental work group was established to ensure enhanced relationships between the agency and school administrators at the local level.
- Training was provided regarding a new policy requiring workers to assess, address, and document the educational needs of children who remain in their homes.

The State met its PIP target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to this outcome are presented below.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 46 (71 percent) 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 in in-home cases 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 concerted efforts were made to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below.

Item 21 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	19	5	11	35	76
Area Needing Improvement	2	7	2	11	24
Total Applicable Cases	21	12	13	46	
Not applicable	10	5	4	19	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's educational needs were appropriately assessed and concerted efforts were made to provide services, if necessary. Item 21 was rated as an ANI in 11 cases when reviewers determined the following:

- No efforts were made to assess the child's educational needs (seven cases).
- Educational needs were assessed or identified but no services were provided (four cases).

Rating Determination

Item 21 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children in 76 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent or higher required for this item to be rated as a Strength. A 95-percent standard is set for this item because it is the only item assessed for the outcome.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS policy requires that the case plan address the goal of child and family well-being, which includes the outcome that children in custody will have their educational needs met. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, when a child enters custody, the caseworker is required to obtain education information from the parents including whether or not the child has been determined eligible for services by the special education or infant learning programs. The caseworker is expected to use this information in developing case plans and placement plans. The Statewide Assessment reports that for 2008, QA case review findings were that educational needs were met in approximately 92 percent of Anchorage cases, 100 percent of Bethel cases, 88 percent of Fairbanks cases, 82 percent of Juneau cases, and 100 percent of Mat-Su cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some Anchorage stakeholders commenting on this item said that the school system is using the McKinney-Vento Act to identify foster care children as homeless so that they can transport them to their "home" school if they are placed away from their communities. However, a few of these stakeholders expressed the opinion that OCS caseworkers often do not know about this transportation program, and other stakeholders suggested that caseworkers may not be accessing the program because foster parents may want children to attend their local schools.

Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that OCS caseworkers are not knowledgeable about education-related concerns. Bethel and Juneau stakeholders suggested that the agency is involved in the education of youth in foster care, but that youth often are forced to change schools when they enter placements.

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					
Outcome Achievement	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	19	2	10	31	52.5
Partially Achieved	3	3	3	9	15.3
Not Achieved or Addressed	5	11	3	19	32.2
Total Applicable Cases	27	16	16	59	
Not Applicable	4	1	1	6	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 52.5 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 70 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 12.5 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 62.5 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The outcome was substantially achieved in 62.5 percent (25 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared with 32 percent (6 cases) of the 19 applicable in-home services cases. Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, both relevant items were rated as an ANI. The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- Agency performance was inconsistent with regard to providing health screenings for children at entry into foster care and providing foster parents with children's health records.
- Agency performance was inconsistent with regard to assessing children's mental health needs and providing the necessary mental health services.

To address these concerns, Alaska implemented the following strategies as part of its PIP:

- Training was provided to caseworkers regarding completing the EPSDT screening of children within State guidelines and using the health-care provider's recommendations as a guide for all health treatment decisions.
- Physical and mental health issues were added as a topic of discussion in the administrative review process.
- Policy was established to ensure that all children in foster care received mental health evaluations.

The State met its target goals for this outcome by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings for the 2008 CFSR 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 Findings

Item 22 was applicable for 49 (75 percent) of the 65 cases reviewed. 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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	20	5	10	35	71
Area Needing Improvement	4	8	2	14	29
Total Applicable Cases	24	13	12	49	
Not Applicable Cases	7	4	5	16	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 83 percent of applicable Anchorage cases, 38 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 83 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 80 percent (32 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 33 percent (3 cases) of the 9 applicable in-home services 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. The item was rated as an ANI when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Physical health needs were not assessed or addressed (eight cases).
- Dental health needs were not assessed or addressed (eight cases).
- Physical health needs were assessed but identified needs were not addressed (four cases).

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of ANI. In 71 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency adequately addressed the health needs of children in both the foster care and in-home services cases. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State QA case review findings for 2008 indicate that meeting the physical health needs of children was a Strength in 73 percent of the Anchorage, Bethel, and Fairbanks cases and 100 percent of the Juneau and Mat-Su cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders in Anchorage expressed concern about the need for children in foster care to have parental consent for any medical procedure unless there has been a TPR for both parents. This problem was noted to be critical in emergency situations. Stakeholders also indicated that there are other barriers with regard to children to receiving medical care. These barriers include a lack of dentists who will accept Medicaid, the fact that the agency does not supply either foster parents or children with a list of doctors who accept Medicaid, and the need to have proof of Native Alaskan blood to receive services from Alaska Native Health Care.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

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 Ratings	Anchorage	Bethel	Juneau	Total	Percent
Strength	15	2	7	24	55
Area Needing Improvement	5	10	5	20	45
Total Applicable Cases	20	12	12	44	
Not Applicable Cases	11	5	5	21	
Total Cases	31	17	17	65	

Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 75 percent of the applicable Anchorage cases, 17 percent of applicable Bethel cases, and 58 percent of applicable Juneau cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 62 percent (18 cases) of the 29 applicable foster care cases and 40 percent (6 cases) of the 15 applicable in-home services cases.

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 ANI in 20 cases when reviewers determined the following:

- Mental health needs were not assessed nor addressed (15 cases, 7 foster care, and 8 in-home services cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed but services were not provided to address identified needs (four cases, all foster care cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed for some of the children in the family and services provided, but there was no assessment or service provision for the other children in the family (one in-home services case)

Ratings Determination

Item 23 is assigned an overall rating of ANI. Reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children in 55 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State QA case review for 2008 found that children's mental health needs were adequately assessed and addressed in approximately 68 percent of Anchorage cases, 38 percent of Bethel cases, 75 percent of Fairbanks cases, 80 percent of Juneau cases, and 50 percent of Mat-Su cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

A few Anchorage stakeholders expressed the opinion that youth in foster care sometimes are medicated when they do not need to be and are placed in residential treatment when they do not need to be there. Some Juneau stakeholders indicated that in that location there are a limited number of mental health service providers, which results in waiting lists for mental health services. They also noted that some providers there are not of the highest quality.

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

This section of the CFSR Final Report provides information on Alaska's substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors examined during the CFSR. Information on the items included under each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders conducted during the onsite CFSR. It should be noted that ratings for the systemic factors are not based on single comments from an individual stakeholder; however, these comments are included in the report when they provide important insights or clarification regarding the State's performance on a particular systemic factor.

The scoring categories for the systemic factors are "Not in Substantial Conformity" or "In Substantial Conformity." The assessment for substantial conformity pertains to the requirements of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) that States are required to submit to CB. Numerical scores of 3 and 4 represent substantial conformity. Scores of 1 or 2 mean that a State is not in substantial conformity with the requirements of the systemic factor. If a State is not in substantial conformity with a specific systemic factor, then that factor must be addressed in the State's PIP. Specific information regarding the scoring of systemic factors is provided in the table below.

Rating the Systemic Factor			
Not in Substantial Conformity		In Substantial Conformity	
1	2	3	4
None of the CFSP or program requirements are in place.	Some or all of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, but more than one of the requirements fail to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place, and no more than one of the requirements fails to function as described in each requirement.	All of the CFSP or program requirements are in place and functioning as described in each requirement.

Information is provided in this section regarding the State's performance on each systemic factor and on each of the items incorporated in a systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each systemic factor during the State's 2002 CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State's PIP, the key concerns addressed in the PIP and the strategies for assessing those concerns are presented.

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

Status of Statewide Information System

Alaska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, was not required to address the factor in its PIP. Findings of the 2008 CFSR are presented below.

Item 24. The 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 is operating a Statewide Information System called ORCA from which staff can readily identify the legal status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for each child in foster care. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that information in ORCA with regard to these data elements is current and reliable. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, ORCA is used to track the location of every child in foster care and maintains information regarding each child's legal and placement status (including pre-adoptive placements, type of custody, and trial home visits); permanency goals (if the child is in out-of-home care); and characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and Tribal affiliation. The Statewide Assessment reports that in the majority of cases, information regarding placement information and child characteristics is entered in a timely manner, although there may be a few cases in rural areas where there is a delay in data entry due to connectivity and bandwidth issues. The Statewide Assessment also reports that ORCA supports intake, investigation, case management, adoption, and provider management. ORCA also is the system of record for eligibility determination, payment processing, and personnel functions.

The Statewide Assessment notes that ORCA is a relatively new data system for Alaska. In January 2008, using ORCA, Alaska was able to produce data sufficient for the CB to generate a State Data Profile in preparation for the September 2008 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State's management information system (ORCA) can identify the location of children in foster care, their demographic characteristics, and their case goals. Stakeholders in all sites also indicated that managers and supervisors have access to a variety of managerial reports and that, despite several problems with the system, ORCA is an improvement over the previous legacy system. However, there were some differences of opinion regarding how up-to-date the location information is at any given point in time. While some stakeholders indicated that ORCA information is current, others suggested that the currency of the information varies by caseworker. Several stakeholders also suggested that ORCA is not user-friendly and Bethel stakeholders noted that in some of the more rural locations in the State, there are connectivity problems that often frustrate caseworkers and contribute to delays in data entry.

Some stakeholders suggested that there is variation across caseworkers with regard to entering data into ORCA correctly and in a timely manner and that this may be attributed to the lack of access to consistent ongoing training on ORCA, particularly for caseworkers who are not in the Anchorage area. Juneau stakeholders, for example, expressed concern that sometimes the information that caseworkers enter is not showing up in ORCA because the caseworkers did not enter it correctly, but the system does not alert them to the data entry error. However, it was noted that this problem does not pertain to basic information regarding the children's demographic characteristics, case plan, or location.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

Status of Case Review System

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with this factor during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 review, items 25 (case planning process), 27 (permanency hearings), and 29 (notice to foster parents and other caregivers) were rated as ANIs. The following key concerns were identified:

- There was lack of goal-oriented case plans (item 25).
- The system did not consistently involve parents and children (when appropriate) in case planning (item 25).
- Permanency hearings were not consistently held in a timely manner (item 27).
- Foster parents and other caregivers were not consistently notified regarding permanency hearings nor were they provided with an opportunity to be heard at the hearings (item 29).

The following key strategies were implemented in Alaska's PIP to address these concerns:

- The State developed and implemented policy and procedure changes to strengthen and enhance the use of case plans, to ensure that case plans are developed in conjunction with parents and children (when appropriate), and to incorporate case planning for in-home services cases.
- The State implemented, in collaboration with the Court Improvement Project (CIP), a court data system called Court View to enable the court to track court hearings. (This system currently is in operation in only a few jurisdictions.)
- In conjunction with the Attorney General's office, developed a new protocol for notification of foster parents of court hearings. In 2005, Alaska statutes were changed to require that notification of all court hearings in a child's case be provided to the child, each parent, the Tribe, foster parent, or other out-of-home care provider, guardian, and guardian *ad litem*. In some circumstances, written notice of all court hearings in a child's case must be provided to a grandparent of the child.

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The specific findings of the 2008 CFSR are presented below.

Item 25. The State 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 ANI because, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, a statewide survey of parents found that although parents are familiar with their case plans, their input is not consistently sought in developing the plans. The Statewide Assessment also notes that stakeholders expressed similar concerns about the case planning process and said that caseworker training does not focus adequately on involving parents in developing the case plan. In addition, in the CFSR onsite case reviews, item 18, which assesses the involvement of parents and children in case planning, was rated as a Strength in only 37 percent of the cases. Item 25 also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, although OCS has enhanced policy and procedure to improve case planning, the concerns outlined in the previous CFSR continue to exist. The Statewide Assessment reports that in a consumer survey conducted by OCS, parents indicated that they are familiar with their case plan and that they receive copies of their plan, but that their input is not sought in developing the case plan. The Statewide Assessment also reports that stakeholders expressed similar concerns about the case planning process and said that caseworker training does not focus adequately on involving parents in developing the case plan.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following as potential reasons why parents and children are not being involved in case planning:

- OCS does not have a structured process for working with parents, youth, or children in the development of the family's case plan.
- Caseworkers do not always understand the importance of case planning with regard to reunifying children with their parents in a timely manner.
- New caseworkers lack training on the purpose, value, development, and maintenance of well-defined, measurable case plans that parents can understand and follow.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the agency QA team looks comprehensively at case plans and how they are developed and has found that performance is inconsistent across the State. The QA findings for FY 2007 indicate that case planning met Federal guidelines in 50 percent of Anchorage cases, slightly more than 80 percent of Fairbanks case, fewer than 30 percent of Juneau cases, and about 58 percent of Mat-Su cases.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in the three sites included in the CFSR expressed a wide range of opinions regarding both the timeliness of the written case plan, the quality of the case plan, and the involvement of parents and children (when appropriate) in case planning. However, there was general agreement among stakeholders that the ORCA case plan is difficult to understand and not family-friendly. Some stakeholders indicated that ORCA-generated case plans are not considered useful in the court process because of their complexity and volume. Several stakeholders made strongly negative comments about the ORCA case plan, such as "Everybody hates it." A few Bethel and Juneau stakeholders expressed concern that the initial case plan is not routinely or consistently updated. The lack of updated case plans was attributed to the caseload burden of caseworkers, turnover in the caseworker positions, and the difficulty of updating case plans in ORCA. Stakeholders also noted that the quality of case plans varies considerably across caseworkers.

Stakeholders expressed different opinions about the involvement of parents in case planning. Most stakeholders suggested that the involvement of parents in case planning varies depending on the skill level of the caseworker. A few Bethel stakeholders suggested that parent involvement is particularly problematic in ICWA cases. However, a few stakeholders indicated that there is a process for involving parents when the caseworker meets with the family initially and conducts a social history interview, followed by a case planning conference. These stakeholders noted that there is ample opportunity for parent input into the case plan during the case planning conference.

Several stakeholders reported that Tribal caseworkers rarely are involved in case planning and often do not see the case plan until just before the 6-month review. These stakeholders suggested that OCS caseworkers often do not respond to Tribal efforts to be involved in case planning.

Item 26. The State 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. Although data are not available for this item, there was general agreement among stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR that the State is conducting timely and meaningful 6-month administrative reviews for all children in foster care. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS policy requires that a Child and Family Conference, which is an administrative review process, must be held every 6 months for all children in custody. The Statewide Assessment notes that reviews always are held before an established panel no later than 6 months from the date of the most recent removal from the home and/or no later than 6 months from the

date of the last administrative review. It is written in policy that administrative reviews must continue every 6 months until the child returns home, or until the child is in a finalized guardianship or adoption.

The Statewide Assessment reports that stakeholders interviewed during the development of the Statewide Assessment expressed the opinion that most case reviews, but particularly the 6-month administrative reviews, are occurring consistently, and that many case participants, including the public defenders and guardians *ad litem*, are regularly invited.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, youth surveyed during the Statewide Assessment process reported that often they were not given sufficient notification of the administrative reviews and that reviews were scheduled at times when they (the youth) were not able to attend. The Statewide Assessment reports that recently regions have been making efforts to schedule an administrative review at the end of the school day when the review involves a youth. Although youth agreed that they are encouraged to attend reviews, they said that they do not always understand the process nor do they think their opinions or concerns are acknowledged.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Almost all stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that administrative case reviews are held at least every 6 months and that the reviews are effective in moving a case toward permanency. They noted that policy requires that the first review be held after 3 months in foster care and then every 6 months after that.

Stakeholders also reported that there have been improvements in the number of people attending the reviews and that the reviews currently are very detailed and comprehensive. A few Anchorage stakeholders expressed concern about a new agency policy to reduce the time for the reviews from 1 hour to 45 minutes. Stakeholders indicated that 45 minutes was not sufficient to cover the issues necessary to ensure that the reviews are meaningful.

Some stakeholders also expressed concern that although the reviews result in recommendations regarding case plan changes, these changes do not consistently happen and there is no accountability to ensure that they occur.

Item 27. The State 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 a Strength. Although the Statewide Assessment did not provide data with regard to the timeliness of permanency hearings or whether the hearings are substantive, most stakeholders reported that the hearings are held in a timely manner and that they focus on achieving permanency for children. Item 27 was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, permanency hearings are occurring for every child and youth who has been in foster care for 12 months. The Statewide Assessment reports that the Alaska Court System analyzed the timeliness of permanency hearings in the Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Palmer courts during 2006 and found that, for all three communities, the average number of days from probable cause to permanency hearing "did not support a concern that permanency hearings are untimely." The Statewide Assessment also reports, however, that in approximately 16 to 31 percent of the cases, findings were not made in a timely manner due to continuances.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, input from judges indicated that for permanency hearings they will most often grant continuances for reasons related to the parties' due process rights—e.g., because a required report was late or missing, or because a party could not attend the hearing. The Statewide Assessment reports that an investigation found a correlation between late reports and continued hearings. Specifically, in the two court locations with the longest time between probable cause and the permanency hearing, approximately 36 percent of reports were filed late. In the court with the shortest time between probable cause and the permanency hearing, only 23 percent of reports were late.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that, in an effort to improve timely submission of reports needed for the permanency hearing, OCS issued a Program Instruction in Spring 2008 that mandated the timeframe for submitting permanency reports to the court. The Department of Law reported in May 2008 that timely submissions of permanency reports are occurring in Anchorage, Southeast, and Northern regions, but that challenges for filing timely permanency reports continue in the Southcentral region and could be due to the diverse geographical location of the region, staff turnover, and the number of vacancies in the child welfare agency.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that Permanency Hearings are held at least every 12 months for every child in foster care. Stakeholders noted that the date for each subsequent hearing is set at the current hearing so that the date is entered early on court dockets. Stakeholders reported that often the permanency hearing dates are scheduled for 10 months to allow for unforeseen circumstances that may delay the hearing. Stakeholders said that continuances are possible, but that they do not occur often. Several stakeholders acknowledged that continuances have been more of a problem in the past and when they occur now, they are most frequently due to late reports from the caseworkers. This was attributed to the excessive caseloads carried by the caseworkers.

Most stakeholders also indicated that permanency hearings are substantive and are effective in moving the case forward. However, a few stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of judicial support in some courts for the agency establishing concurrent goals. In addition, some Bethel stakeholders questioned the efficacy of the permanency hearings.

Item 28. The State 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 an ANI. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, OCS does not track the percentage of cases in which TPR petitions are filed on time and, consequently, no data are available to support timely filing. In addition, most stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that TPR petitions are not filed in a timely manner. Finally, the data from the CFSR onsite case review indicate that ASFA requirements regarding petitioning for TPR were met in only 72 percent of the applicable cases. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Alaska has a process for filing TPR petitions in accordance with ASFA. The Statewide Assessment reports that “. . . it is the view of the practitioners that, generally, petitions for TPR are filed in a timely manner unless compelling reasons exist.” No data were provided to support this statement. The Statewide Assessment also reports that OCS does not track the percentage of cases for which petitions are filed in a timely manner or whether compelling reasons are documented when a petition is not filed.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR said that OCS has established a process for filing a TPR petition within the timeframes required by the ASFA and a process for documenting compelling reasons if the decision is made not to petition for TPR. Although a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that OCS usually files for TPR in a timely manner, most stakeholders expressed the opinion that sometimes caseworkers are not implementing the OCS procedural requirements pertaining to filing TPR petitions in accordance with ASFA timeframes or documenting compelling reasons when a TPR petition is not filed.

Some stakeholders noted that often a case goal is changed to adoption but no TPR petition is filed. Several Anchorage stakeholders attributed this to the requirement in that location that caseworkers instead of the agency attorneys must complete the TPR petition, which is a time-consuming and difficult process, particularly given their caseload demands and the frequent turnover among caseworkers.

Stakeholders also noted that in some cases, the child will have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, but the caseworker and supervisor do not want to change a goal to adoption and want to continue to work with parents toward reunification. Stakeholders noted that this situation is most likely to occur when there is a new caseworker or supervisor assigned to the case who wants to “start over” with the family.

With regard to documentation of compelling reasons, many stakeholders said that the issue of compelling reasons is frequently discussed in the permanency conference held at 9 months, as well as during the permanency review. However, several stakeholders questioned whether compelling reasons are being documented in the case file or in ORCA. They suggested that in some situations compelling reasons may be presented at the court hearing but not documented in ORCA

One concern identified by stakeholders is that there is no automated system in place to alert caseworkers when a case is due for a TPR filing and the “month count” usually has to be done by the caseworker or supervisor. Stakeholders also expressed concern that there are no statewide data to track TPR filings or outcomes.

Item 29. The State 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

This item is rated as an ANI. According to the Statewide Assessment and stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR, although OCS caseworkers are responsible for notifying caregivers, notification is not occurring consistently across the State. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State’s 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS policy and Alaska State statutes outline notification procedures for all parties for court hearings and case conferences for each child in out-of-home care. When there is a court hearing, the Attorney General’s Office is responsible for notifying the legal parties to the case, and OCS caseworkers are responsible for notifying the foster parents and relative caregivers. When there is an administrative review or permanency planning conference, all notifications are sent out by OCS staff 30 days prior to the administrative review or permanency planning conference. The Statewide Assessment reports that although the notifications to the legal parties of the case are made consistently by the Attorney General’s (AG) Office, the notifications that the OCS caseworkers are responsible for (foster parents, grandparents, and other relative caregivers) are not occurring consistently. The Statewide Assessment also reports that data are not available to document how well OCS is complying with notification to foster parents, grandparents, and other relative caregivers.

Stakeholder Interview Information

All stakeholders who commented on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that foster parents are notified of administrative reviews and that they are given ample opportunity to be heard during those reviews. However, stakeholders expressed different opinions regarding notification and participation of foster parents in court hearings. Most Anchorage stakeholders indicated that foster parents are not routinely notified of court hearings in that location. They suggested that this may be due to the confusion regarding the responsibility for notification. That is, according to stakeholders, the agency believes it is the AG's responsibility to notify foster parents and other caregivers of court reviews, but the AG's Office believes it is the responsibility of the OCS caseworker to make the notification. In contrast, stakeholders in Bethel and Juneau indicated that foster parents are routinely notified about court hearings and are given opportunities to be heard when they attend.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

Status of Quality Assurance System

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the factor in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

In the 2002 CFSR, although item 30 was rated as a Strength, item 31 was rated as an ANI. The key concern identified in the 2002 CFSR was that Alaska did not have a statewide QA process and had no formal process for clients or stakeholders to evaluate agency performance.

To address this concern through its PIP, the State developed and implemented a comprehensive QA system that incorporates both case reviews and interviews with case-related stakeholders. In addition, the PIP focused on ongoing improvement of supervisory case reviews and administrative reviews.

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of its PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

The findings of the 2008 CFSR with regard to the items assessed for this systemic 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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as an ANI. Although the State has developed standards to ensure quality services that protect the safety and health of children, many of the standards are not being implemented on a consistent basis and, at the time of the onsite CFSR, many were not fully operational. This item was rated as a Strength in the 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS has revised policy and procedures to ensure that children in foster care receive quality services to protect their safety and health. It was noted that OCS policy is readily available online and easy to access for caseworkers and stakeholders. Each caseworker also has a hardcopy binder that is updated as new or revised policies are issued. The Statewide Assessment reports that OCS has made concerted efforts to ensure that policies are written in a manner that is clear and easily understood by all staff. The Statewide Assessment also reports that OCS managers and caseworkers have indicated that the newly written sections of the policy are easier to follow and provide better guidance to workers.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that some of the standards that have been established by OCS are not being implemented. Stakeholders noted, for example, that although OCS has established a safety-related standard requiring caseworkers to have once-a-month contact with each foster child in the home, this requirement is not being met. Anchorage stakeholders expressed concern about the ability of the agency to meet safety standards pertaining to timeliness of investigations because of the considerable backlog of child maltreatment allegations requiring investigation. Stakeholders also indicated that the safety model is not fully implemented. Stakeholders in Juneau noted that while the safety model process is being used at the beginning of a case, it is not being used throughout the life of the case.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan 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 an ANI. Although the State has a QA system in place, the QA system does not incorporate a process for evaluating program improvement measures that are implemented. For example, there is no process for following up on QA findings with the field offices to determine whether program improvements have been implemented in response to findings and/or the effectiveness of program improvement efforts. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, over the past 5 years, the State has developed a QA system that provides for ongoing consistent measurement of the quality of practice, incorporates stakeholder input, and includes a system of data dissemination to the agency staff and public. The Statewide Assessment reports that the current QA system is able to evaluate practice and generate outcome information that is disseminated to caseworkers and supervisory staff as well as managers. The system also has a feedback loop that provides the field offices with an opportunity to respond and make changes in practice to improve outcomes. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the findings from all QA activities are compiled into reports for use by field staff and managers. These data are used to examine programs and practice and make changes to improve outcomes.

The Statewide Assessment describes the QA system as including a review of a random sample of approximately 250 cases per year and interviews with case-related stakeholders. In addition, the QA system conducts various surveys to gain additional information from families served by the system and from Tribal and community partners. The Statewide Assessment reports that the QA unit conducts approximately 10 surveys per review year either by mail, telephone, or electronically and that survey findings and focus group information are compiled into reports that are provided to managers, supervisors, staff, and the public. The reports are available online at the OCS website.

The Statewide Assessment reports that a continuing challenge in Alaska with regard to ongoing QA is the size of the State, the number of field offices (26), and the ability of the QA program to adequately serve each office. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, approximately 20 field offices are reviewed per year, with other field offices rotated for review on alternate years. The Anchorage Field Office is reviewed at least twice yearly because approximately 41 percent of the State's caseload is in that field office. Twelve cases are reviewed in each field office; half are in-home and half are out-of-home cases. The Statewide Assessment notes that there are difficulties in some field offices in identifying a sufficient number of in-home cases to fit the ratio of in-home to out-of-home cases.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that, in addition to the activities of the QA team, each region has a Continuous Quality Improvement Committee composed of representatives from the community. The committees meet on a regular basis and review information and data from the QA case reviews, information gained from stakeholder surveys, and other data reports through the SACWIS system. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, the committees assist regional management in planning and in responding to agency issues and provide a community perspective that can directly affect practice.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there is a statewide QA system in place that is very similar to the CFSR case review process and uses the CFSR Onsite Review instrument (with some additional questions specific to Alaska). Several stakeholders noted that input from community stakeholders is obtained through surveys of foster parents, providers, and other relevant groups. However, a key concern expressed by stakeholders at the State level and in all three sites was that although OCS shares information with local offices about the QA review findings, the State does not have a formal program improvement process or requirement of the field offices to address identified concerns. In addition, OCS has no process in place to monitor whether changes are being made. Stakeholders in one site, for example, noted that the local child welfare office will hold discussions about the QA findings and possible improvement efforts, but there is no State requirement to report on these discussions or to implement program improvement efforts. Some stakeholders suggested that the lack of accountability results in little change actually being made.

State-level stakeholders indicated that there is a need to formalize the feedback loop to ensure that caseworkers, supervisors, and managers are getting the information that they need. Some stakeholders suggested that it would be useful if caseworkers had a better understanding of the QA process, although they noted that the high level of turnover makes this difficult.

Local level stakeholders also identified other forms of QA including a manager's retreat held once per quarter, a self-evaluation workgroup started in Anchorage through the Family-to-Family initiative, individual unit meetings to review cases, and weekly office staff meetings. Stakeholders also said that ORCA reports are used to monitor and evaluate the performance of caseworkers and to identify areas of concern.

IV. TRAINING

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

Status of Training

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. Alaska was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and therefore was not required to address the factor in its PIP. The findings for the 2008 CFSR 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 an ANI because the initial training that is provided to staff is not sufficient to prepare them to carry out their responsibilities. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS partners with the University of Alaska Anchorage, Family and Youth Services Training Academy (FYSTA) to provide the Training and Orientation of New Employees (TONE) program. TONE is the initial orientation and training offered to all new line staff and licensing workers. It is a 10-day training that must be completed before a caseload is assigned to a new employee. The Statewide Assessment reports that even after a new employee is assigned a caseload, training continues throughout the first 12 months of employment for a total of 20.5 days.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that in response to concerns about the adequacy of cultural training, the TONE curriculum was revised in 2006 to improve the cross-cultural training component and issues in child protection. In addition, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, Tribal-State collaboration members, in partnership with FYSTA, are revising the ICWA curriculum to better serve workers.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the Anchorage region has recently implemented a 2-week New Employee Orientation for Anchorage regional employees, which immediately follows each TONE training. This additional training is a part of the initial training that focuses on specific programs in the Anchorage region such as Family-to-Family. The training is provided to support administrative staff as well as front-line caseworkers.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, at the completion of each course, FYSTA conducts an evaluation of the training. FYSTA also conducted a survey about the training in January 2008. The Statewide Assessment reports that over 90 percent of trainees saw the

training as useful (the child abuse and neglect training was the most well-received by staff, while the court/legal training was rated lower). However, the Statewide Assessment also reports the following survey or evaluation findings with regard to TONE:

- Almost all respondents wanted to see additional trainings in the following topics: interviewing/information gathering; family assessment; ICWA; legal issues; and cultural awareness beyond Alaska Native cultures.
- After 6 months of employment, the majority of training attendees reported that TONE was useful but was not sufficient to cover all aspects of CPS work.
- Survey respondents consistently mentioned wanting more support in making the transition from the classroom or theory aspect of training to the field. This included the opportunity to shadow workers in a variety of OCS positions and to have mentors who assist new employees.

The Statewide Assessment reports that although licensing workers are required to complete the TONE training as their initial training, the initial training for licensing workers currently does not provide a focus on the statutory and regulatory processes for licensing foster homes, foster group homes, and child placement agencies. Instead, training on the statutory and regulatory requirements for licensing has been provided annually through the State of Alaska Department of Law to all licensing staff. Licensing staff do not routinely receive training in the licensing process before being assigned a caseload.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that caseworkers generally complete the initial 10-day TONE training before being assigned a caseload. However, most stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the current (at the time of the onsite CFSR) initial training (TONE) does not adequately prepare caseworkers for their jobs and that the entire initial training program is under revision, with the new version to be piloted in January 2009. Anchorage stakeholders indicated that an additional 2-week training program is provided to new caseworkers in the Anchorage office because the State training is not sufficient. Anchorage stakeholders reported that new caseworkers in that office must complete the additional 2-week training before they are assigned a caseload.

The following are some key concerns noted by various stakeholders with regard to the existing TONE initial training:

- There is a “disconnect” between what is offered in training and what is actually going on in the field. As a result, current workers and supervisors must fill in the gaps through on-the-job training, but there is no formalized system for them to do that. Stakeholders noted that existing caseworkers become overwhelmed when they are given the responsibility of training new caseworkers but are not paid for that task or given the time to do it correctly.
- The current training that must be completed before assuming a caseload tends to emphasize investigations and safety, so caseworkers who are not going to be investigators are not prepared for their jobs after the initial 10-day training. This was seen as particularly problematic because not all new caseworkers have social work backgrounds or degrees in that field.

- Although there is a post-training test, there is no evaluation of how caseworkers are doing in the field after training. Stakeholders noted that most caseworkers feel they have not received adequate training.
- ORCA training is not provided in the initial training and sometimes is not accessible until 4 to 12 weeks after employment. This means that new caseworkers are working on cases without training on how to manage the case through ORCA. Stakeholders noted that it is an addition burden for supervisors or other caseworkers to have to train new caseworkers on how to use ORCA. Although web-based training is available, most stakeholders said that it is just an introductory training, and most caseworkers do not access it.
- Although improvements have been made in focusing the training on cultural competency, that component of the training is still not adequate to prepare caseworkers for working with Native Alaskan families.

Stakeholders' recommendations regarding initial training included the following:

- New caseworkers should shadow experienced caseworkers before they attend TONE training.
- Supervisors should go out in the field with new caseworkers to see how they are interacting with clients.

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 an ANI. The State does not require caseworkers or supervisors to receive ongoing training as part of their job requirements. In addition, the training opportunities that are available for caseworkers and supervisors are limited, particularly outside of Anchorage. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, agency staff often cannot access training either because of workload responsibilities or lack of transportation. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, although on-going training opportunities are available to all OCS caseworkers and licensing staff, on-going training varies from region to region and is based on availability of funds. Stakeholders and OCS agree that caseload demands and high staff turnover impact the time workers have to attend trainings. The Statewide Assessment identifies the following as additional factors that affect the ability of the State to deliver ongoing training on a consistent basis.

- There are constraints on the training budget that limit the provision of ongoing training to all caseworkers throughout the State. Often, field offices outside of Anchorage must make choices to send new caseworkers to the initial training instead of existing caseworkers to on-going training due to these budget constraints.
- Training is not readily accessible to all caseworkers statewide. Scheduled trainings in OCS service regions outside of Anchorage occur when FYSTA sends staff to other locations to provide trainings. However, if trainings do not have enough trainee

participants, they are cancelled. This scarcity of training opportunities makes it difficult for caseworkers to receive the required ongoing training hours.

- Staff turnover and burnout limits the opportunities for expanded training options for tenured employees, as much of the training time is spent on the provision of initial trainings.
- The lack of caseworker availability to attend training limits the numbers of trainings that can be offered by FYSTA.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that ongoing, in-service training for supervisors is limited to two courses through FYSTA trainings and is not mandated, although it is strongly encouraged. In addition, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, OCS has recognized that expanded training to supervisors is needed to meet the needs of OCS staff. The Statewide Assessment reports that supervisors new to OCS are required to complete the initial 10-day TONE training as well as two courses specific to supervision of child protection workers, which total 6 hours. Both of the supervisory training courses are offered within the first year of a supervisor's employment. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the State of Alaska through the Department of Personnel provides a week-long Academy for Supervisors specific to Human Resource matters within the State system generally and that OCS supervisors are encouraged to attend these trainings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that OCS received increased funding for staff training from the legislature in July 2007 and OCS is expanding TONE training from 2 weeks to 4 weeks and developing a mandatory new supervisory curriculum.

The Statewide Assessment notes that a stipend program is available to current OCS staff interested in pursuing continued education to obtain a Bachelor or Master of Social Work degree.

Stakeholder Interview Information

All stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there is a training requirement for new caseworkers during the first year of employment, but there are no requirements for ongoing training beyond the first 12 months of employment. Stakeholders in Bethel and Juneau said that caseworkers in those communities have difficulty even accessing the required training during the first 12 months of employment, although they are able to access the initial 10-hour TONE training.

Stakeholders indicated that, for the most part, caseworkers are not receiving the training support that they need after their first year on the job. Stakeholders suggested that training is needed in domestic violence, substance abuse, interviewing, adoption (particularly how to have a conversation with families about TPR), and other critical areas.

Stakeholders also noted that OCS will not fund training for caseworkers to maintain their licenses. It was noted that in order to maintain a license, caseworkers must have 45 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) each year, but many caseworkers are unable to obtain the required credits because the agency will not pay for the training and because they often cannot leave their

caseloads unattended in order to access training. Stakeholders indicated that the lack of ongoing continuing education opportunities is one reason why many of the caseworkers do not become licensed social workers. A few stakeholders in Anchorage indicated that some, but not all, caseworkers in that office are able to meet their CEU requirements for licensure. They noted that a training is offered by the Anchorage office every Tuesday. Juneau stakeholders reported that although agency trainers are supposed to come to that location to offer training, they usually do not.

Stakeholders also expressed concern about the lack of training for new supervisors and of ongoing training for supervisors. A few stakeholders noted that the State is developing new training for supervisors that will focus on the role of the supervisor as a coach and consultant and the need for supervisors to set expectations for work quality. One stakeholder noted that there used to be statewide supervisory meetings but that these were stopped in 2005.

Stakeholders reported that while ongoing training on ORCA is available in Anchorage, it is not available in the other field offices and caseworkers have to go to Anchorage to access the training.

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 an ANI because foster parents are not receiving sufficient training to carry out their responsibilities. The Statewide Assessment and stakeholders interviewed as part of the onsite CFSR process indicated that initial CORE training for foster parents is available but is not required. In addition, although there is a requirement for annual training (10 to 15 hours), the Statewide Assessment reports that in 2008, 23 percent of foster parents did not complete these requirements. This item also was rated as an ANI in the 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, State statutes and regulations outline foster parent orientation and training requirements. OCS provides resource families with a 2-hour orientation session covering basic information on becoming a resource family. All resource families are encouraged (but not required) to complete the orientation process before placement of a child in their home. In emergency placement situations, training is initiated at the beginning of placement.

The Statewide Assessment also describes a resource family training that consists of an 8-week initial CORE curriculum, as well as specialized training for all resource families. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, new resource families are strongly encouraged

to complete the 8-week CORE curriculum before placement, or within the first year of licensure. Specialized trainings are offered to resource families to assist them in meeting specific needs of the children in their care.

Although there are no mandatory training requirements for foster parents prior to placement of a child in their home, there are requirements for training after a child is placed in the home. The Statewide Assessment reports that State statutes and regulations require that foster parents complete 10-15 hours of resource family training per year: 10 hours for a single-parent family; and 15 hours for a two-parent family, with each parent completing at least 5 hours of training. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, OCS encourages foster parents to access trainings that are held in the foster parents' community and the Alaska Center for Resource Families works with foster parents to identify available trainings within the community that can be used to fulfill the required training hours. Despite efforts to ensure that foster parents can access training, the Statewide Assessment reports that in 2008, about 23 percent of resource homes statewide had not met the training requirement. Due to an increased focus on compliance with training standards by regional licensing staff and management, OCS has been able to demonstrate incremental improvements on meeting training requirements in three of the four OCS service regions.

According to the Statewide Assessment, training for State-licensed or State-approved residential facilities is provided through a grant with Alaska Children's Services. Initial training primarily consists of behavioral intervention strategies and building rapport with children and families. Ongoing training is provided according to the facilities' self assessment of their needs and based on staff skills and client profiles.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there is an orientation session (the 2-hour initial session) that is mandatory, but the core training for foster parents, which consists of six sessions, is not mandatory, although it is strongly encouraged. However, most stakeholders noted that foster parents do not have to complete the core training to have a child placed in their home. They said that many foster parents participating in the core training already have children placed in their homes.

Stakeholders also noted that foster parents must complete 10 hours (for a single parent) to 15 hours (for a couple) of ongoing training each year to maintain their licensure. However, when foster parents do not meet training requirements, they may still be issued a new license, although the license will indicate that not all conditions have been met. Many stakeholders said that foster parents do not always meet the ongoing training requirements. While several stakeholders noted that ongoing training is available on the Internet and in a number of distance learning formats, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that if a foster parent's primary language is not English, it is difficult for them to take advantage of many of the training opportunities.

Stakeholders reported that there are no training requirements for relative caregivers who are not licensed.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

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

Status of Service Array

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The State was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, was required to address this factor in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

The key concerns identified in the 2002 CFSR were the following:

- Key services were not available in sufficient quantity in either rural or urban communities (item 35).
- Many critical services were not available in all communities in the State (item 36).
- In many situations, the types of services provided to children and families were more likely to be influenced by what was available rather than by what was needed to meet their particular needs (item 37).

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

- Conducted an assessment of strengths and service gaps using a collaborative approach with community providers and stakeholders
- Collaborated with other State agencies and departments to ensure the efficient use of available resources for shared populations
- Used Tribal, paraprofessional, and village-based resources to assist in case planning
- Developed grant programs to expand services and worked with grantees to develop a baseline of current services and identify changes that are needed to evaluate services, including post-adoption services

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings from the 2008 CFSR for 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 ANI. The Statewide Assessment and stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR reported that statewide, substance abuse and mental health treatment services are not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families. Stakeholders also identified the lack of in-home family preservation services and basic case-management services, and the statewide shortage of foster homes (particularly Native Alaskan foster homes) as key service gaps. This item also was rated as an ANI in the 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, in January 2005, OCS modified the grantee process for grants funded by title IV-B that resulted in an improvement in the availability of family support services; family preservation services, which are prioritized for families with an open in-home case; family preservation visitation centers; time-limited reunification services; the differential response program; adoption support services; and Child Advocacy Centers.

The Statewide Assessment also identifies the following services as part of the service array for children in the Alaska child welfare system:

- Early Intervention and Infant Learning services are available for families with infants and toddlers (birth to age 3).
- Resource Family Training and Support Services are available to all OCS foster families providing initial and ongoing training to assist with meeting the individualized and unique needs of children.
- The Alaska Children's Trust's grantees provide a hotline for parents to obtain services to improve knowledge, skills and understanding about child development, age-appropriate expectations, and roles and responsibilities. Services also include professional counseling, parenting classes, and education.
- The Bring the Kids Home program was established within the DHSS across the Division of Behavioral Health, Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and OCS with funding partners at the Mental Health Trust, Denali Commission, and the Department of Education. The focus of this project is to decrease the number of children placed in out-of-State residential treatment facilities and increase capacity to serve Alaska's children at home.
- The Rural Social Services program provides grants to three Tribal organizations to provide services such as child abuse prevention, support services to families at risk of entering into OCS custody, coordinated case management services, and placement support for children who are involved in the OCS system.

Despite these services, the Statewide Assessment notes that substance abuse treatment services and mental health services are not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families in any areas of the State. With regard to mental health services, the Statewide Assessment reports that staff shortages, low pay, and demanding job duties within provider agencies add to the lack of services available. Also, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, although collaboration to deliver behavioral health services exists among community providers statewide, the focus often is on crisis care rather than on long-term therapies that are crucial to parents and children on the path to reunification. In addition, the Statewide Assessment indicates that OCS recognizes that allocations of funding for mental health services continue to be a challenge due to the fact that residential placements consume the majority of limited funds that are available to OCS; OCS would like to shift funding to serve children in less restrictive environments.

With regard to substance abuse treatment services, the Statewide Assessment notes that most, if not all, substance abuse treatment programs have waiting lists and that many clients must wait an average of 2 to 3 months before they are accepted into an in-patient treatment program. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, this waiting period diminishes the likelihood of the parent actually enrolling in the in-patient program. The Statewide Assessment also reports that only three programs in the State allow children to reside with parents during the course of treatment. This means that many parents attending programs far from their homes have little or no contact with their children during the course of treatment.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Almost all stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the current service array in the State is not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families regardless of their locations. The most frequently mentioned service gaps pertained to mental health and substance abuse services, particularly in-patient substance abuse treatment services. Stakeholders also reported that a lack of sufficient in-patient substance abuse treatment for youth was a statewide concern and that there are no detoxification services available for parents and children.

A few stakeholders indicated that substance abuse assessments can be done quickly, but other stakeholders said that the assessment process often involves a long waiting period, sometimes 2 to 3 months. Some stakeholders noted that because of a scarcity of substance abuse treatment services, even when assessments are done in a timely manner, parents may not be able to access treatment for several months, at which time the assessment may be out-of-date and a new one required by the court.

With regard to mental health services, Stakeholders said that there are clinics available throughout the State that will provide short-term, crisis-related mental health services, but that there is a lack of longer-term services. Stakeholders reported that many therapists will not accept Medicaid, and OCS will not pay for services from anyone who does not accept Medicaid.

Another key service gap identified by stakeholders in all sites pertained to in-home services and placement prevention services. Many stakeholders spoke about the disappearance of these services over the past few years as budget cuts have eliminated funding for them.

Stakeholders suggested that as a result, children who are being removed from their homes could have remained at home if services were available. Stakeholders also expressed concern about the lack of services statewide for parents and children with FASDs. In particular, stakeholders noted that parents with FASD experience numerous difficulties parenting and need ongoing support, which is not readily available.

A third key service gap identified by stakeholders pertained to the lack of foster and adoptive homes throughout the State. In particular, stakeholders expressed concern about the insufficient number of Native Alaskan foster and adoptive homes to meet the needs of these children who are in foster care.

Finally, most stakeholders said that even the basic case management services are not being provided consistently. They attributed this lack of basic case management services to insufficient staffing of OCS offices and insufficient support for OCS caseworkers.

Other key services gaps identified by various stakeholders were the following:

- Housing for youth who are in custody and after leaving custody
- Visitation services to ensure sufficient and high quality visitation between children and parents
- Domestic violence services for both victims and perpetrators
- Family support services for foster parents, particularly respite services
- Parenting classes
- Pre- and post-adoption support services
- Sex offender treatment services, including treatment for youth who are perpetrators
- Methadone clinics

Despite these concerns, most stakeholders praised the State's IL program, although a few noted that it is difficult to extend this program to youth living in the very remote villages. Stakeholders also noted that youth are referred to the IL program even if they do not have a case plan goal of OPPLA and can be served as young as 14 years of age. Anchorage stakeholders identified the local trauma program, positive parenting program, and Father's Journey program as exemplary services available in that location. Other stakeholders praised the Programs for Infants and Children and the Anchorage Child Advocacy Center.

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 ANI. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment and by stakeholders interviewed during the onsite CFSR, the agency is not effective in ensuring that resources are available in all political jurisdictions. Although the Statewide Assessment

attributes this lack of available services to the remoteness of some of Alaska's communities and the resultant transportation difficulties, stakeholders indicated that there also is a lack of State effort to ensure that local offices have the resources necessary to adequately serve those populations residing in remote areas. These stakeholders said that even basic child protective and case management services are limited in these areas due in large part to insufficient child welfare staff in the offices that serve these areas. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Alaska continues to struggle to provide all services in all political jurisdictions of the State. The lack of available services was attributed to the size of the State, the fact that the population is spread out among numerous villages, and the lack of a road system in many areas of the State. The Statewide Assessment notes that OCS is divided into four regions: Anchorage, Northern, Southcentral, and Southeast. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, key resources such as family support, family preservation, time limited reunification, early intervention/infant learning program, Child Advocacy Centers, residential treatment, and post-adoption services are available in all regions. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that although these services are available in each region, they may not be available from each field office location and access to services may require plane, boat, or snow machines.

According to the Statewide Assessment, QA team members have reported that in some cases children and families receive all required services regardless of their geographic location, while in other cases, they do not.

The Statewide Assessment reports that although residential treatment facilities are available in all regions, psychiatric services for the most complex children and adults are located only in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. Family Preservation Supervised Visitation is available only in Anchorage, while the Differential Response program is available only in Anchorage, Wasilla, and Nome.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that key services are not available to children and families in all jurisdictions covered by the CFSP. For the most part, stakeholders attributed the differential availability of services to the fact that some of the families served in Alaska live in remote areas that have few if any services. They noted that most of these areas do not have funds to pay for families to come to the more urban areas to access services.

Some stakeholders also noted that many children in rural areas are not being protected and are not safe. They expressed the opinion that the lack of safeguards for children is due to the fact that OCS offices that serve these areas are understaffed because OCS staffing plans do not take into account the large distances that caseworkers have to travel and the potential for bad weather. As a result, even basic child protective services and case management services are not available to many children and families.

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 an ANI. Although there are flexible funding resources and culturally appropriate services in the State, they are not sufficient to meet the needs of the children and families requiring individualized services. This item also was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Alaska has worked on providing individualized services to children and families through the use of individualized service funds, which are intended to keep children in their home communities. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that these funds are limited and approval must be provided through the State office. The Statewide Assessment reports that the special needs funds that are available support individualized service needs because they allow caseworkers to pay for services that are not available under Medicaid, not covered by the foster care base rate, and/or not attainable by the family. Examples of these services include bus passes, entry fees for camps/activities, individual counseling services, drug screening, and genetic testing for paternity.

The Statewide Assessment says that to individualize services for children and families, caseworkers must be creative and collaborate with local resources to ensure that these services are provided. One example noted in the Statewide Assessment is that in many rural communities there are ICWA workers who provide services to families in an effort to keep them together. These services include transportation, food, shelter, heating fuel, parenting skills development, anger management classes, and respite care.

The Statewide Assessment reports that OCS recognizes that it is critical to understand the cultural differences among families in Alaska to be able to address individual needs of Alaska Native children and families. Although all caseworkers are required to take the ICWA training offered through TONE, it can be difficult for local child welfare agencies to consistently be staffed by caseworkers who are aware of the cultural issues of children from diverse villages and Alaskan Native cultures primarily due to high staff turnover and limited training opportunities. The Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) is working on development of culturally appropriate training for all State employees. Additionally, OCS is working with Tribes to include cultural training requirements for OCS grantees.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that the populations of Hispanic, Asian, and African Americans varies across the State with a greater number of these ethnic and racial groups located in Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks. There has been a higher rate of immigration to the State of Hispanics and Asians in the past few years. Resources are accessed from leaders in the Asian and Hispanic communities for services such as interpreters and culturally based services.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR acknowledged that the general lack of services makes it difficult for caseworkers to address the individual needs of children and families. Many stakeholders identified the scarcity of OCS caseworker staff as a key problem in ensuring that cases are treated individually. However, a few stakeholders noted that because of the lack of services, some good caseworkers and service providers get creative about working with families and advocate for the families to meet their unique needs.

Many stakeholders spoke about the lack of culturally appropriate services for Native Alaskan children and families. A few stakeholders noted that there is a need for proven traditional Native services to be accepted by the general culture as effective in resolving some of the problems experienced by children and families. They noted, for example, that if a family goes to a traditional healer, that is not counted for the case plan. Some stakeholders suggested that although the OCS caseworkers are supposed to work with Tribal caseworkers on case planning for Native children, often the Tribal caseworker receives the case plan just before the 6-month administrative review without having had any input into the plan.

Stakeholders also noted that there are few culturally appropriate resources for the Korean and Hmong communities in Anchorage.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Alaska is not 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 in its 2002 CFSR and therefore did not address this factor in its PIP. Findings with regard to the 2008 CFSR 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 X Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as an ANI because OCS does not have a process to consistently seek input from and engage stakeholders, including local child welfare agency directors and staff, in the development of its goals and objectives for the State child and family services programs. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the goals and objectives of the Alaska CFSP reflect input from individuals who represent a wide range of agencies and community partners throughout the State. These include the following: TSCG; CIP; Department of Law; Alaska Citizen Review Panel; Facing Foster Care in Alaska; OCS grantees; Alaska Association of Homes for Children; and State office administrators, managers, program staff, regional managers, and supervisors.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, although OCS may not facilitate regularly scheduled "formal" CFSP meetings, the regular contact and collaboration with the partners listed above provides a rich ongoing exchange of information and allows for an evaluation of CFSP progress and services.

In addition, Facing Foster Care in Alaska, a foster care youth group that was established in 2003, meets quarterly with the OCS IL Coordinator and the statewide IL Specialists to discuss challenges facing youth as they prepare for adulthood. Membership comprises youth currently in the system as well as alumni. Members also have participated in other child welfare conferences and public forums.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that there is no formal child welfare advisory group in the State that provides input to the State's 5-year plan or CFSP, or that is consulted on a formal and routine way when making decisions regarding the child welfare system. In addition, stakeholders at the local sites indicated that even local-level agency supervisors and administrators often are not engaged in the development of the State plan, and there is no mechanism in place for seeking or using their input. Stakeholders also noted that Tribal input with regard to new child welfare program initiatives often is sought after OCS has decided to develop a particular initiative and not during the early decision-making stages. Tribes are asked to assist with implementation but not the development of the initiative. One stakeholder noted that there is a new effort to have one person from OCS focus on Tribal input, and that effort may help this situation.

A few stakeholders reported that some members of the Citizen's Review Panel participated in the development of the last 5-year plan. Some stakeholders also indicated that recently representatives of various departments, including the Department of Education, participated on a State Assessment Team, which was a group of about 45 people who were given the task of determining how to improve the State child welfare system.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs) delivered pursuant to the CFSP

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as an ANI because OCS does not have a formal process for engaging stakeholders in developing annual progress and services reports. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, OCS is actively involved with all representatives that contribute to the CFSP and works with them to evaluate CFSP goals and strategies on an informal basis. If necessary, goals and strategies are modified to support the direction of the agency and its partners. Information for the plan is regularly obtained from the collaboration with these groups and is integrated into the APSR, which is developed once a year. The APSR is shared with community partners and is available on the OCS website.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders reported that they participate in a variety of meetings and workgroups designed to affect practice and the direction of the child welfare agency. Stakeholders noted for example that the TSCG is used to work together on identified statewide issues such as disproportionality. However, several stakeholders also noted that, although in past years Tribal groups have had a chance to comment on the APSR, in the past year, they were not provided with the report for comment. Other stakeholders noted that community stakeholders may have seen the report, but most expressed the opinion that they have not had much opportunity for input into the annual report although they believe that they have input into agency planning and programs.

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 the State's services are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, coordination efforts are ongoing with the Division of Behavioral Health—mental health and substance abuse, DJJ, Child Advocacy Centers, Alaska Children's Trust, CIP, Division of Public Assistance—TANF and Child Care, Department of Revenue—Child Support, Faith Based Programs (FLAME), Department of Education—Individual Service Plans and Head Start, Division of Public Health, Division of Senior and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Public Safety, Social Security Administration, Department of Law, Department of Labor—Workforce Investment Act, and the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

In addition, as reported in the Statewide Assessment, OCS has memoranda of agreement with the Department of Education, Department of Public Safety, Department of Revenue, and numerous Tribes/Tribal Entities that outline the agency interchanges and responsibilities for children under the purview of Alaska's Child Welfare System.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that the DHSS Leadership Team includes all Division Directors within the Department and works cooperatively to resolve departmental issues that arise. In May 2008, the Department published its five top priorities: substance abuse, vulnerable Alaskans; health and wellness; health-care reform; and long term care. The Children's Policy Team meets bimonthly and includes representatives from DHSS Commissioner's Office, Behavioral Health, Public Assistance, OCS, Public Health, Medicaid, and Senior and Developmental Disabilities to coordinate services and programs among divisions within the department.

Stakeholder interview information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR identified the following efforts to coordinate services among Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population:

- OCS and the courts are working together to develop meaningful visitation plans for parents and children.
- OCS, DJJ, and Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) agencies work together to ensure that children do not get lost when they transition from Juvenile Justice to OCS.
- OCS, DBH, and the courts collaborate on developing the Shields program for residential substance abuse treatment for mothers and children.
- OCS and TANF work together to ensure integrated services to families through the Families First! initiative.
- There is preliminary matching of families who are served by OCS, DJJ, TANF, and DBH at the same time.
- OCS and TANF work together to ensure support for relative caregivers not licensed foster parents.

- OCS participates in a system of care effort with TANF, Tribes, and other divisions of DHSS.
- The Bring the Kids Home program is a joint effort of DBH, OCS, and other agencies.
- OCS works with Tribal groups and other agencies on disproportionality issues.

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

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

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Alaska also was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and, therefore, was required to address the factor in its PIP.

Key Concerns From the 2002 CFSR

The 2002 CFSR identified the following key concerns with regard to this factor:

- The State granted variances to the licensing standards with the result that full licensing standards are not equally applied to all foster homes.
- The State did not have an effective recruitment plan for recruiting foster and adoptive parents who meet the needs of the children in foster care.

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

- Implemented efforts to improve the licensing process, particularly with regard to the use of variances
- Developed a statewide foster care recruitment plan with the assistance of the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency
- Increased recruitment of Native Alaskan foster parents through increased collaboration with Tribes

Alaska met its target goals for this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2008 CFSR

Findings of the 2008 CFSR for this factor are provided 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 an ANI because while there are licensing standards established, many licensed homes with ongoing placements do not meet the full licensing standards. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Alaska's new licensing standards provide adequate protection to the health and safety of children and require monitoring and home visits as part of the renewal process. The initial provisional license is issued for a period of 1 year. The provisional license can be fully licensed or not fully licensed; at the end of 1 year the license changes to a biannual license. If at any time, the license does not meet all "fully" licensed standards, the worker will change the status of the license from "fully" licensed to "not fully" licensed.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that many homes in rural communities do not meet all of the standard-by-standard home environmental licensure requirements, especially with regard to the "physical plant" of the home. In these cases, a variance may be requested and approved in order to accommodate children's special needs, or the best interest of children, such as placement of a sibling group. The variance process allows a particular standard to be varied if an alternate way of meeting the standard can be identified and implemented while ensuring the child's safety. The two most common reasons that variances are utilized are the following: (1) the physical plant of the foster home does not meet necessary fire and safety codes, and (2) the number of children in the home exceeds the standard in order to accommodate large sibling groups. OCS does not use variances for safety equipment requirements such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and carbon monoxide detectors. In cases of foster home capacity, variances are approved whenever possible to ensure that children are placed with a relative and/or that siblings are placed together.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR identified the following types of foster parent licenses:

- Provisional license: Foster parents who meet all of the requirements for a licensed foster home and have had a complete background check with fingerprints are given a provisional license for a 12-month period.

- 2-year license: Foster parents who complete the first year as foster parents, and for whom no problems have been identified, are then issued a license for a 2-year period.

While there are licensing standards established, many licensed homes with ongoing placements do not meet the full licensing standards.

Anchorage stakeholders reported that in that location, licensing caseworkers conduct the home assessments for all applicants, including relatives, and explore whether they can be licensed and then give the information to the placement caseworker who makes the final placement decision. These stakeholders also indicated that licensing caseworkers investigate licensing violations and if there is a child abuse or neglect allegation, the licensing caseworker goes out to investigate with the CPS investigator.

Stakeholders also indicated that variances often are made to licensing standards and regulations. It was noted that these variances can apply to the number of children who can be placed in the home (this is not limited to sibling groups), whether there is a criminal record indicating a "barrier" crime, and for the physical aspects of the home, such as windows that are narrow. Stakeholders in Anchorage noted that many caseworkers have children in foster families that have variances that permit more children in the home. This situation may be because foster families in Alaska generally are licensed for a maximum of only three children. Stakeholders noted that with variances, this maximum often is increased to six children, even if the children are young. In addition to variances, some stakeholders noted that some families, in order to have more children in the home, will be licensed as group home facilities rather than be given a variance, which allows them to care for six or more children.

Some stakeholders expressed concern about the licensing process and about licensing workers having little contact with foster homes except for the 6-month assessments. However, other stakeholders reported that licensing caseworkers have frequent interaction with foster homes and provide support and assistance to foster parents that caseworkers cannot provide because of their caseloads.

A few stakeholders commented on Native Alaskan foster homes and noted that in some places a Tribe can license their own homes, but State funds cannot be used for payment in these homes. Some stakeholders indicated that State-licensed Native foster homes often are pushed to capacity.

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 Statewide Assessment and stakeholders both stated that Alaska claims title IV-E funds only for children placed in foster homes that are fully licensed. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment

According to the Statewide Assessment, all licensed foster homes, relative and non-relative, are required to comply with the same set of standards. Relatives are provided a choice of whether to be licensed or not. If relatives are not licensed, OCS requires a criminal and child protection background check and a physical check of the home surroundings. Unlicensed relatives do not receive reimbursement from OCS; however, unlicensed relatives can receive TANF funding through the Division of Public Assistance to assist with the support of the children in their homes.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, variances are requested and approved through regional variance committees. In every case, OCS is utilizing the variance process to make sure that each standard for licensure is applied equally and that each home meets the safety requirements outlined in the licensing regulations. In the event that a variance is denied, OCS may use State funding and title IV-E reimbursement to make necessary physical modifications to the home so that a child can be placed in the home.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that the standards for foster home licensing are applied equally to all licensed homes that receive title IV-E funds. Stakeholders noted that the State does not claim title IV-E funds if the foster parents are missing training, fingerprints, criminal history check, background information forms, references, or if they are not in compliance with key licensing issues. However, a few stakeholders indicated that many families often are not in compliance with the training requirements, particularly families in the rural areas, and it is not clear whether or not these homes continue to have full licenses.

Stakeholders noted that relatives are required to meet the same licensing standards as other foster homes. However, they can choose not to be licensed and still provide care to children.

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 the State complies with Federal requirements and completes criminal records checks on all licensed foster, adoptive, and relative placement homes. This item also was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, criminal background clearances are required for all foster parents, unlicensed relatives and pre-adoptive or adoptive homes. The Federal barrier crime regulations apply to unlicensed relatives and foster and adoptive families. The State barrier crime statutes and regulations only apply to licensed foster homes and facilities within the DHSS and are more restrictive. The Statewide Assessment also reports that Alaska has faced challenges in the timeliness of receiving fingerprint results, but is actively working to improve these outcomes through the use of fingerprint scanners. It is anticipated that the electronic transfer of fingerprints and results will significantly reduce the timelines for foster care licensing and adoption home study approvals.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the State conducts criminal background clearances, including fingerprint checks, in the process of licensing foster care placements and approving relative placements. However, many stakeholders expressed concern regarding the length of time required to get fingerprint information, which ranged from 3 to 6 months.

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 ANI because numerous stakeholders reported that Alaska does not have a statewide process in place to recruit foster homes despite significant shortages of all types of foster homes. Stakeholders reported that local offices do not have recruitment plans, recruitment resources are limited across the State, and efforts to recruit foster homes are insufficient. This item was rated as an ANI in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, over the past 5 years, Alaska has invested many resources into recruiting and retaining foster and adoptive parents. However, the Statewide Assessment notes that better tracking of these efforts is needed to determine their effectiveness with regard to the outcomes for children. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the development of a multi-year recruitment plan will better synthesize the various local and regional recruitment and retention efforts.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following activities as part of Alaska's recruitment and retention efforts:

- Technical assistance was received from 2003 to 2005 from the National Resource Center on Foster Care and Permanency Planning to develop a recruitment and retention plan for OCS. (The Statewide Assessment indicates that this recruitment and retention plan was never formalized within OCS; however, a smaller recruitment effort was developed to address the need for additional Native foster families in rural Alaska.)
- The Native Rural Recruitment Team (NRRT) was developed in 2006 in response to the need for more Alaska Native and rural resource family homes to prevent Alaska Native rural children from being removed from their community and placed in urban areas of Alaska. This approach has increased the number of homes in rural villages available to children in need. To date, 37 foster homes in remote, village communities have been identified and licensed through the NRRT community teams.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family-to-Family Initiative has been implemented in the Anchorage region since 2004.
- As a part of the National Adoption Awareness month in 2006 and 2007, OCS funded a statewide media campaign that focused on the adoption of older youth in foster care. These media ads (radio and television) ran from November through May.
- Other recruitment strategies have occurred such as advertising signs on city buses, interviews with newspapers and radio stations, as well as print media. National Foster Care month activities have included foster parent appreciation events in all of the OCS service regions.
- Adoption days were implemented in the Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks, and Juneau courts over the past 3 years.
- The DHSS Office of Faith-Based Initiatives brought together the faith-based community in the Anchorage region to create a support network for resource families. This group has been meeting for more than a year and has developed a support plan that was finalized in March 2008; however, the plan is not yet implemented.
- In 2007, the OCS became a grantee of the Dave Thomas Foundation's Wendy's Wonderful Kids program. Through this program, Wendy's Wonderful Kids funds a half-time position for a child-specific recruiter in the Anchorage region to actively focus on six children a year who have been in foster care for the longest period of time and are legally free for adoption. In early 2008, this position was expanded by OCS to a full-time position through State funding resources to provide recruitment efforts focused on adoption and guardianship in the Anchorage region.

The Statewide Assessment notes that, despite efforts by OCS, Tribally licensed foster homes have not been established in Alaska due to various legal barriers. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, OCS remains committed to working with the Tribal partners on the establishment of licensed foster home standards for Alaska Native families and children in foster care, should legal impediments be resolved.

Stakeholder Interview Information

All stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that there is a considerable need for foster homes, particularly for Native Alaskan children. Stakeholders indicated that at present, there is no systematic agency plan for recruiting Native Alaskan foster homes either at the State or local levels.

Stakeholders also noted that homes are needed for older children who often must seek their own placements or end up living in a shelter for 6 months or longer until they turn 18 because there is no place for them to go. Stakeholders indicated that families are needed for children with special needs, but when those families are found, they do not receive the support they need from the agency, and as a result, they drop out. Stakeholders generally viewed the lack of support for foster parents as problematic. Many stakeholders indicated that it is difficult to ask current foster parents to recruit other families to be foster parents because so little support is given to the foster parents. Several stakeholders indicated that, as a result, attention is being given more to retaining existing foster parents rather than recruitment. Some stakeholders said that licensing staff are trying to provide more of the support services to foster families because they realize that caseworkers are overwhelmed and do not have the time to assist foster parents with their concerns.

All stakeholders commenting on this item also expressed the opinion that there is no statewide recruitment plan. It was noted that local offices do their own recruitment, but have few resources; it was noted that even at the local levels, there is no systematic recruitment plan. Anchorage stakeholders reported that licensing caseworkers are responsible for recruiting foster homes but that they do not have a systematic recruitment plan and there is no budget set aside for recruitment.

The general recruitment strategies identified by stakeholders included recruitment picnics, ads, posters, word-of-mouth, and child-specific recruitment through the Heart Gallery.

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 is effective in using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children. This item was rated as a Strength in the State's 2002 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, in 2007, the Alaska Adoption Exchange was established as a service within the Adoption program of the OCS State Office. The listing of a child on the Alaska Adoption Exchange automatically means that the child will be listed on the Northwest Exchange and the AdoptUsKids exchange. The Statewide Assessment notes that since the Alaska Adoption Exchange was established within OCS, 32 children have been listed on the exchange. One of the successes of the exchange has been to connect families from various locations in Alaska with waiting children statewide.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item identified the following as cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate adoptive or permanent placements for children:

- Placement of the child on the Alaska Adoption exchange, which leads to automatic placement on AdoptUsKids, and the Northwest Adoption Exchange
- The Heart Gallery

Stakeholders noted that the greatest barrier to out-of-State placement is the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children process, which can result in considerable delays.