



What the Child and Family Services Reviews Tell Us About

How States are Doing on Foster Parenting Priorities Identified by the CHAMPS Campaign

INTRODUCTION

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CHAMPS is a campaign to strengthen fostering parenting policies nationally and in states to spur better outcomes for children and youth in foster care. CHAMPS brings together research and policy advocacy to advance six policy priorities that were developed with extensive input from health and child welfare experts, foster parents, kinship caregivers and individuals with lived experience in foster care. Underlying these policies is an abundance of research on child and adolescent development that confirms the critical importance of safe, stable families to child well-being.

See the [CHAMPS Playbook](#) to learn more about its six policy goals. For each policy goal, the Playbook explains the rationale, summarizes underlying research findings, recommends implementation strategies, and describes examples of existing policies and programs.

The federal Children's Bureau administers the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) to monitor the performance of state child welfare systems. A review of the CFSR measures demonstrates that quality foster parenting is central to a state's ability to achieve goals of safety, permanency and well-being for children in foster care. The findings from the most recent round of CFSRs demonstrate that many states continue to fall short of achieving these goals and that much work remains to be done to ensure the best outcomes for children in foster care.

This paper crosswalks the six CHAMPS policy goals with the relevant CFSR measures, reviews the results of the latest round of reviews and suggests policy and programmatic approaches to improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

BACKGROUND ON CFSR PROCESS

The CFSR process determines whether state child welfare systems are in substantial conformity with federal requirements in titles IV-B (Child and Family Services) and IV-E (Federal Payments for Foster Care and Adoption Assistance) of the Social Security Act. The CFSRs assess state performance on achievement of seven outcomes in the domains of child safety, permanency and well-being, and on the overall functioning of the child welfare system through assessment of seven "systemic factors." Each state's CFSR consists of a written self-assessment of the system's performance and capacities (Statewide Assessment); an onsite review of at least 65 cases, including both in-home and foster care cases; and interviews with key stakeholders. For the latest round of reviews (2015–2018), the Children's Bureau determined substantial conformity with the outcomes and systemic factors as follows:

- **Outcomes:** The Children’s Bureau used the case reviews to determine a state’s performance on the seven outcomes. Each outcome is composed of one or more “items” corresponding to the child welfare practices or processes integral to achievement of that outcome. There are a total of 18 items distributed across the seven outcomes. Items are rated as either a Strength or Area Needing Improvement. For an item to be rated a Strength, 90 percent of the cases applicable to that item must have been rated a Strength.¹ A higher standard, however, applies to outcomes, as opposed to items. In general, for a state to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent or more of the cases applicable to items under that outcome must be rated a Strength.
- **Systemic Factors:** The Children’s Bureau assessed the functioning of systemic factors based on the Statewide Assessment and, if more information was needed, stakeholder interviews. There are 18 items distributed across the seven systemic factors. Two systemic factors, Statewide Information System and Quality Assurance System, each consist of only one item, which must be rated a Strength to be in substantial conformity. The other 5 systemic factors consist of multiple items. For these systemic factors to be found in substantial conformity, no more than 1 item can be rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

CFSR OUTCOMES

Safety Outcomes

1. Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
2. Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanency Outcomes

1. Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
2. The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes

1. Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.
2. Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
3. Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

¹ Because two outcomes, Safety Outcome 1 and Well-Being Outcome 2 each consist of only one item, a 95 percent Strength rating standard applies to those items.

CFSR SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

- Case Review System
- Quality Assurance System
- Staff and Provider Training
- Service Array and Resource Development
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

A state that is found not to be in substantial conformity with any of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors is required to develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan that sets forth goals, strategies, activities and methods to measure progress.

This brief is based on the third and latest round of reviews that took place during FYs 2015-2018. The discussion of CFSR findings herein is based on the *CFSR Aggregate Report for Round 3: Fiscal Years 2015-2018* and a separate report, *Systemic Factors—Results from the CFSRs: 2015-2018*.² These reports contain aggregate findings and do not identify individual states. Individual state CFSR Final Reports, as well as Statewide Assessments and Program Improvement Plans, can be found at <https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/cfsr-reports>. The Appendix to this report shows individual state performance on the CFSR items discussed below.

A LOOK AT HOW STATES ARE DOING ON FOSTER PARENTING PRIORITIES PROMOTED BY CHAMPS

What follows is a discussion of the six CHAMPS goals in the context of the latest CFSR findings.

CHAMPS POLICY GOAL 1:

Support Relationships between Birth and Foster Families

Supporting birth and foster family relationships has the potential to minimize the trauma experienced by children when they are removed from home; preserve and nurture the child's relationship with birth parents, siblings, and extended family; provide birth parents with mentoring and support to improve their parenting skills, facilitate reunification and prevent re-entry to out-of-home care; benefit foster parents and ensure that important relationships are preserved after reunification.

² Both reports can be accessed at <https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/cfsr-round-3-findings>

Two items under CFSR Permanency Outcome 2 (The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children) are relevant to this CHAMPS policy goal:

- **Item 8** (Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care): This item seeks to measure whether the child welfare agency made concerted efforts to facilitate frequent and quality visits between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in other foster care placements. **No state received a Strength rating on this item.** Practice strengths noted in CFSR final reports included holding visits in the foster home and participation by parents in caregiving activities during visits. Challenges included visits that were not of sufficient frequency and quality due to unaddressed barriers, such as transportation and location of visits.
- **Item 11** (Relationship of Child in Care with Parents): This item seeks to determine the extent to which the agency made concerted efforts to promote positive relationships between children in care and their parents. **No state received a Strength rating on this item.** Practice strengths noted in the reviews included caseworkers encouraging foster parents to mentor and have good relationships with birth parents. Practice concerns included failure by caseworkers to encourage or facilitate such relationships.

The CFSRs focus on relationships between children in foster care and their parents rather than relationships between birth and foster parents. However, the discussion of practice strengths and concerns in the CFSR aggregate report acknowledges that promoting and encouraging good birth/foster parent relationships can have a positive, if indirect, effect on child/parent relationships. Foster parents can mentor birth parents and help facilitate meaningful parental visits, which can help birth parents become better communicators and nurturers to their children in care. No state, however, achieved a Strength rating on either of the CFSR items (8 and 11) associated with this policy goal. More widespread adoption of a shared parenting approach to fostering could help states improve their performance on these items.

The Playbook describes state efforts to promote shared parenting or co-parenting, in which foster parents and birth parents work together as partners to parent a child in foster care in the context of a trusting relationship that is supported and facilitated by a caseworker. This approach often starts with an initial phone call between the foster and birth parent (“comfort call”), proceeds to a meeting in which the child’s needs and preferences are discussed, and culminates in the birth parent’s participation in school meetings, medical appointments, and visits with the child in the foster parent’s home.

CHAMPS POLICY GOAL 2:

Implement Data-Driven Recruitment and Retention Practices

Having good data on foster parent characteristics, children’s placement needs and barriers to recruitment and licensing of prospective foster parents helps agencies refine and target their recruitment and retention efforts to ensure recruitment of a pool of foster parents that reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of children in care, as required by the Multiethnic Placement Act. Many jurisdictions, however, lack the capacity to collect, analyze and interpret these data to make needed policy and practice changes.

One of the Systemic Factors assessed by the CFSRS is “Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention,” which includes **Item 35: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes. Seventeen states received a Strength rating on this item.** These states tended to use data effectively to meet the need for a racially diverse pool of foster families, to evaluate the effectiveness

of recruitment strategies and to adjust recruitment and retention approaches in response to changing needs and circumstances. Challenges affecting performance on this item included lack of a statewide recruitment plan, plans that were not data-driven, lack of centralized oversight of recruitment plans and lack of recruitment resources.

The states that achieved a Strength rating on item 35 did so primarily by being able to show how data are being used to inform recruitment and retention efforts. This finding confirms that more states need to invest in data collection and analysis and to incorporate the use of data in development of their Diligent Recruitment Plans required by Title IV-B by way of the Multiethnic Placement Act.

The Playbook recommends establishment of a foster parent census, an ongoing, periodic collection of data on licensed foster parents; use of market segmentation to identify the characteristics and interests of successful foster caregivers; and creation of regional recruitment plans based on local data, needs and strategies specific to a given county or region and developed in close collaboration with local stakeholders, including foster parents, youth, tribal representatives, providers, court personnel and licensing staff.

CHAMPS POLICY GOAL 3:

Engage Foster Parents in Decision-Making

Foster families spend more time with children in foster care than any other professional partner. Foster parents have valuable child-specific information that is important to share with courts and agencies, information that should assist with case planning, permanency planning, and health care and education decision-making. Accordingly, foster parents should be treated as priority partners on the child's care and treatment team and their input should be considered as seriously as that of professionals such as clinicians, attorneys, and caseworkers.

Two CFSR Systemic Factors are relevant to this policy goal: Case Review System and Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

- Under Case Review System, **Item 24, Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers**, assesses how well the agency is ensuring that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of the child are notified of, and have a right to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child, as required by federal law. **Five states received a Strength rating on this item.** These states were able to provide evidence of compliance with this requirement in the form of data from agency or court-generated tracking systems, statewide case record reviews and/or statewide surveys of resource parents. Challenges affecting performance on this item included lack of data to show compliance, lack of a process to notify caregivers, inconsistent implementation of notification processes, and missing or outdated information in the state's information management system.
- Under Agency Responsiveness to the Community, **Item 31, State Engagement and Consultation with Stakeholders Pursuant to CFSP and APSR**, assesses how well the agency is consulting with stakeholders, including foster parents, regarding implementation of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and development of Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs). **Thirty-two states received a Strength rating on this item.** These states engaged in ongoing collaborations and consultation with stakeholders through advisory councils, workgroups, focus groups, meetings and/or presentations. Other states failed to engage foster parents and other stakeholders in ongoing consultation and collaboration.

Other than item 24 regarding notice of court hearings, the CFSRs do not seek to assess how well agencies engage foster parents in decision-making at the individual case level. Item 31 assesses engagement at the systems level in the form of consultation with foster parents on implementation of the CFSP and development of the APSR. State performance on this item was encouraging, with 32 states receiving a Strength rating. However, giving foster parents a more substantive role in case level decision-making could improve state performance on other items, such as items 12C (foster parents' needs and services), 17 (children's physical health), and 18 (mental/behavioral health).

The Playbook recommends engaging foster parents in decision-making by including them in team meetings, developing policy and training caseworkers to reinforce the importance of foster parents' participation in court hearings, creating foster parent advisory boards, and training caseworkers and clarifying policy on the types of information that must be shared with foster parents pursuant to federal law.

CHAMPS POLICY GOAL 4:

Provide Timely Access to Trusted, Dedicated Staff and Peer Support

Foster parents commonly report that the single most important factor in their ability to care for children (and the factor that most influences their desire to continue fostering) is the ability to connect with someone they trust to discuss how best to meet the needs of the children in their care. The types of support identified as being critical to foster parents include timely support from caseworkers, effective training, support during crises and peer support.

The following CFSR items are relevant to this policy goal:

- Under Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations), **Item 4** assesses the stability of children's foster care placements, measured by the number of placement changes the children experienced. **One state received a Strength rating on this item.** Practice strengths noted in the CFSR final reports included matching children with placements that met their needs and provision of services to resource parents to ensure placement stability. Practice concerns included lack of appropriate resource homes to meet children's needs and lack of agency responsiveness in addressing concerns and securing needed services.
- Under Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs), **Item 12** assesses whether the agency made concerted efforts to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents and to provide the services necessary to meet those needs. **Sub-item 12C** focuses specifically on needs assessment and services to foster parents. **Five states received a Strength rating on sub-item 12C.** Practice strengths noted in CFSR final reports included use of multiple types of communication with resource parents to assess their initial and ongoing needs, timely caseworker responses to resource parents' needs and keeping resource parents up to date on children's permanency status. Practice concerns included inconsistent or inadequate efforts to assess and meet expressed needs, failure to share key information or case details with resource parents and responding to crises by moving the child rather than providing services to stabilize the placement.
- Under the Systemic Factor of Staff and Provider Training, **Item 28** assesses how well training of current and prospective foster parents, adoptive parents and staff of licensed facilities addresses needed skills and knowledge. **Twenty-two states received a Strength rating on this item** by providing quantitative data from learning management data systems to show timely completion of training and by providing

qualitative data showing resource parent satisfaction with trainings. Challenges related to this item included lack of data to track compliance with training requirements, lack of training on relevant topics, inconsistent quality of trainings, and training accessibility issues, such as inconvenient times and locations and lack of childcare.

Effective foster parent preparation and support of children with foster families can play a key role in reducing placement disruptions and instability. The CFRs focus on formal services, caseworker responsiveness and foster parent training, but peer support can be just as effective, if not more so, at averting placement disruptions. The Playbook contains examples of peer support programs that have been successful at preventing conflicts from becoming full-blown crises, thereby reducing rates of placement instability. Peer support also promotes foster parent satisfaction and retention, which are critical to a state's recruitment and retention efforts assessed by item 35, and contribute to enhanced child well-being. The Playbook recommends that agencies provide an array of support services to foster parents, including dedicated peer support workers, dedicated agency caseworkers, foster parent support groups, telephone support and kinship navigator programs.

CHAMPS POLICY GOAL 5:

Prioritize Placements with Family Members and Other Family Connections

Relative placements have been shown to reduce the trauma of removal, maintain connections with family and community, and promote placement stability and child well-being.

Under CFR Permanency Outcome 2 (the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children), the following items are relevant to this policy goal:

- **Item 7**, Placement with Siblings, assesses whether states made concerted efforts to ensure that siblings in foster care were placed together unless a separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the children. **Twelve states received a Strength rating on this item.** Practice strengths associated with this item included using relative resources for sibling placement. Practice concerns included a lack of placement resources able to accept sibling groups.
- **Item 9**, Preserving Connections, assesses whether the agency made concerted efforts to maintain connections between a child in foster care and his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends. **One state received a Strength rating on this item.** Practice strengths identified in the CFR final reports included using relative placements to facilitate contact with extended family. Challenges included a lack of placement resources in the child's community and failure to contact and offer opportunities to extended family to maintain connections with the child.
- **Item 10**, Relative Placement, assesses whether the agency made concerted efforts to place the child with relatives when appropriate. **No state was rated a Strength on this item.** Practice strengths included effective use of relative questionnaires, searches and notifications to identify relatives for placement, including children in the process of identifying relatives, and use of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to facilitate relative placements. Challenges included relative placement instability, lack of ongoing efforts to identify, inform and evaluate relatives for placement, and lack of effort to identify paternal as well as maternal relatives.

Given the attention that kinship care has received from researchers, advocates, and policymakers, it is surprising and disheartening that no state was rated a Strength on item 10, Relative Placement. It is commonly reported that kinship caregivers, many of whom are unlicensed, often do not receive the same level of support that licensed non-kin foster parents do. The Playbook describes some successful peer support and kinship navigator programs that are well-equipped to deal with the unique needs of relative caregivers. As for lack of effort to identify kin, states have adopted policies that require such efforts begin at first contact with a family, well before a decision has been made to remove a child from home. Some states also allow for non-kin placements only after a caseworker has documented multiple unsuccessful efforts to arrange for a relative placement and has received permission from agency leadership (kinship firewall).

CHAMPS POLICY GOAL 6:

Ensure Timely Access to Physical and Mental Health Services

Many children in foster care have experienced significant trauma and have complex physical and behavioral health care needs. Quality foster parenting is a therapeutic intervention that promotes children's health and well-being. A core aspect of this role is being an effective partner in ensuring children receive the health services they need.

Under CFSR Well-Being Outcome 3 (Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs), two items are relevant to this policy goal.

- **Item 17**, Physical Health of the Child, assesses whether children's physical health needs (including dental needs) had been appropriately addressed. **Three states were rated a Strength on this item.** Practice strengths included timely provision of physical health services and encouragement by caseworkers of parents and/or youth to learn how to make appointments and monitor the child's health. Challenges included lack of oversight and follow-up to ensure that medical appointments were made and kept, lack of agency oversight of prescription medication, and failure to arrange for dental assessments and services.
- **Item 18**, Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child, assesses whether children's mental/behavioral health needs had been addressed. **One state received a Strength rating on this item.** Practice strengths included formal and informal assessment of children's behavioral health needs, provision of services targeted to address children's needs, and adjustment of services based on the child's ongoing needs. Challenges included assessment delays, gaps in service provision and provision of services for some, but not all, needs.

The CFSR results demonstrate that states are finding it much harder to meet children's behavioral health needs than their physical health needs. While this finding reflects the fragmented and underfunded nature of behavioral health care in the United States, states have a special responsibility to meet the complex needs of children placed in their care.

The Playbook identifies the following strategies to ensure that children in foster care receive the physical and behavioral health care services they need:

- Authorize foster parents to consent to routine medical care;
- Facilitate sharing of health information through electronic information exchange;
- Develop and implement federally-required Health Oversight and Coordination Plans that provide medical homes and trauma-informed care;



- Establish a mobile crisis response program;
- Ensure through training and ongoing support that foster parents are prepared to understand and manage children's physical and behavioral health needs;
- Require child welfare agencies to have medical directors.

CONCLUSION

The CFSR results confirm that effective recruitment, preparation, support, and retention of foster families contributes to better outcomes for children. They also confirm that very few states are meeting the high standards of performance set by the Children's Bureau regarding the 7 outcomes in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being. No state achieved substantial conformity with the outcomes that most directly affect children in foster care, namely those related to permanency, placement stability, and continuity of family relationships and connections. This report shows how adoption and implementation of the CHAMPS policy goals can help improve state performance on the CFSRs and, more importantly, the lives of children and families.

APPENDIX

See table on next page for state-by-state CFSR findings on items relevant to CHAMPS policy goals on foster parenting.



State Performance on CFRS Items Relevant to CHAMPS Policy Goals

STATE	Outcome Items: Percentage of Cases Rated Strength (Items rated Strength are highlighted*)									Systemic Factor Items: Strength (S) or Area Needing Improvement (ANI)			
	4 PLACEMENT STABILITY	7 SIBLING PLACEMENT	8 VISITING WITH PARENTS	9 PRESERVING CONNECTIONS	10 RELATIVE PLACEMENT	11 CHILD-PARENT RELATIONSHIP	12C SERVICES TO FOSTER PARENTS	17 PHYSICAL HEALTH	18 MENTAL HEALTH	24 NOTICE OF HEARINGS	28 FOSTER PARENT TRAINING	31 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	35 DILIGENT RECRUITMENT
AL	60	65	50	53	54	39	57	60	53	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
AK	80	89	55	75	76	64	56	68	45	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
AZ	83	68	73	60	83	39	86	54	76	ANI	S	S	S
AR	70	47	64	49	70	48	89	81	68	ANI	S	S	S
CA	63	74	45	44	60	42	47	54	45	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
CO	73	90	73	84	86	63	79	92	63	ANI	ANI	S	S
CT	86	76	75	50	62	67	61	62	45	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
DE	90	88	77	94	84	78	98	86	91	ANI	ANI	ANI	S
DC	68	96	66	85	64	65	58	70	41	S	S	S	ANI
FL	82	85	69	82	72	60	80	85	72	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
GA	68	77	45	39	46	34	56	49	29	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
HI	74	80	36	64	75	31	64	53	56	ANI	ANI	S	S
ID	78	96	70	88	88	69	84	90	84	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
IL	75	87	62	69	65	52	72	63	66	S	S	ANI	ANI
IN	78	78	67	65	81	63	56	69	68	ANI	S	S	ANI
IA	80	88	74	63	78	66	85	59	56	ANI	ANI	S	S
KS	70	100	85	83	86	79	86	81	78	ANI	S	S	ANI
KY	68	96	63	68	54	52	81	76	63	ANI	S	ANI	S
LA	88	53	34	59	60	30	72	36	36	ANI	S	S	S
ME	75	91	58	85	87	64	63	64	67	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
MD	75	89	54	59	64	46	85	81	51	ANI	ANI	ANI	S
MA	80	64	59	74	71	64	81	85	62	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
MI	78	89	69	79	79	67	63	62	51	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
MN	65	88	67	84	69	54	72	48	56	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
MS	88	72	42	60	56	46	74	63	49	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
MO	88	97	71	70	79	58	68	66	72	ANI	ANI	S	S
MT	78	81	51	75	76	52	58	62	59	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
NE	80	90	79	88	85	76	73	85	65	ANI	S	ANI	ANI
NV	73	88	68	75	53	62	73	52	61	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
NH	73	79	70	67	69	85	68	78	62	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
NJ	80	87	78	87	82	64	76	80	83	ANI	ANI	ANI	S
NM	65	79	48	45	63	54	90	65	78	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
NY	75	83	73	59	50	62	77	79	68	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
NC	76	78	59	73	79	58	87	76	67	ANI	S	ANI	ANI
ND	88	86	77	85	70	72	73	86	86	S	S	ANI	ANI
OH	76	85	71	75	89	66	95	80	79	ANI	S	S	S
OK	58	66	23	10	33	33	31	37	16	ANI	S	S	S
OR	78	89	82	88	77	79	63	68	49	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
PA	78	91	72	68	66	74	78	71	74	S	ANI	S	S
RI	78	83	69	70	74	61	68	69	59	ANI	ANI	ANI	ANI
SC	70	67	50	38	50	33	66	64	25	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
SD	70	70	58	62	67	59	96	76	66	S	S	S	S
TN	60	86	38	31	43	48	48	59	33	ANI	S	ANI	ANI
TX	77	85	54	78	86	64	94	88	79	ANI	S	S	ANI
UT	48	100	80	82	72	76	62	73	60	ANI	S	S	S
VT	75	90	76	85	80	77	81	87	74	ANI	S	S	ANI
VA	70	69	35	47	34	30	69	82	51	ANI	S	S	ANI
WA	68	85	64	82	81	67	70	59	60	ANI	S	S	S
WV	55	86	68	73	68	52	76	75	59	ANI	S	S	ANI
WI	88	83	66	65	68	65	79	72	55	ANI	ANI	S	ANI
WY	80	95	78	80	82	77	80	91	69	ANI	S	ANI	ANI
STATES RATED STRENGTH	1	12	0	1	0	0	5	3	1	5	22	32	17

* Highlighted findings indicate items that were rated a Strength.