

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Georgia Child and Family Services Review
September 5, 2007

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Georgia. The CFSR assesses State performance with regard to seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. The Georgia CFSR was conducted the week of May 14, 2007. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS).
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides State child welfare data for the years 2003 through 2005;
- Reviews of 65 cases across Fulton County, Floyd County, and Walton County; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders, including, but not limited to children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance on 23 items pertaining to the 7 outcomes and 22 items pertaining to the 7 systemic factors. In the Outcomes Section of the report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 items. An item may be assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. State performance on the seven outcomes is evaluated as Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Achieved. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the areas of concern within that outcome.

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

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to achieve these standards through their Program Improvement Plan. ACF recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to improve outcomes are complex to implement and are not likely to have immediate results. Instead, States establish their own goals for their Program Improvement Plan. That is, for each

outcome or item that is an area needing improvement, each State specifies how much improvement they will demonstrate, and determines the procedures for demonstrating that level of improvement. Both the extent of improvement specified and the procedures for establishing improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of their Program Improvement Plan and still not meet the 95 or 90 percent requirements of the onsite CFSR.

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

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

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

CFSR Findings

The CFSR identified some areas of exceptional performance in Georgia. The State continues to achieve low rates of foster care re-entries and performed higher than most States for the individual measure of foster care reentry (Measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification. The State also met the national standard for this Composite indicating that the State is effective in achieving timely reunifications for children. Another area in which the State is consistently effective is in securing foster homes for children that are in close proximity to their parents, extended family members and communities.

Georgia also showed consistent performance in the onsite review in ensuring placement stability for foster children and in meeting the national standards for Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability. Georgia performed well in the area of repeat maltreatment in the cases reviewed during the onsite review, although the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator for absence of recurrence of maltreatment. In addition, the State demonstrated generally positive performance in a few areas in which the 90 percent threshold for a rating of Strength was not met. These areas include a) visits with children (particularly those in foster care), b) meeting the physical health needs of children, and c) placing children in foster care with their siblings.

With regard to systemic factors, Georgia has made improvements in the usability of the State's Internal Database System while beginning the State's SACWIS conversion to Georgia SHINES in 2007 and throughout 2008. Georgia's Quality Assurance system was also found to be addressing key practice areas through case reviews, review finding and data analysis reports, and G-Force management strategy meetings. In addition, the State was found to have a thorough pre-service training with certification and staff mentoring components and an excellent partnership with Georgia State University to coordinate Ongoing Professional Excellence Training. In this partnership Georgia State University coordinates with different universities to provide ongoing professional development courses for DFCS staff in key regional locations throughout the State.

Despite these areas of positive performance, Georgia was not in substantial conformity with any of the seven CFSR outcomes or with three of the systemic factors—Case Review System, Service Array and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

Of particular concern during the review was the agency's lack of consistency in assessing the needs of children and families, identifying appropriate services to meet those needs, and ensuring that the services meet the intended goals for children and families. While the State utilizes a risk assessment tool, Family Team Meetings, Multidisciplinary Team meetings, and the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment process for assessing the needs of children who enter foster care, the case reviews found that assessment and service provision were not consistently effective across the three review sites. Inhibiting factors may have related to the lack of parent engagement in case planning and the lack of caseworker contact with parents in general. Of particular note was the inconsistency in engaging fathers either in services to meet their own needs or in the process of planning for their children, particularly when the fathers were not readily involved with their children.

The lack of effective needs assessments may have also been influenced by the lack of substance abuse services, mental health services, therapeutic foster homes, and transportation services which were consistently identified as service gaps by stakeholders across the three sites. Stakeholders also identified many instances in which services were available in the metro region but not in the more rural areas of the State. The provision of independent living services for youth was also insufficient to meet the need, and the State did not meet the national indicators for Permanency Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time.

The State also exhibited difficulty with regard to achieving timely permanency for children in the foster care system. In many cases, permanency goals were not identified in a timely manner, and the goals were not the appropriate goals for children, given their circumstances. However, identifying timely permanency goals was more of a concern in Floyd County and Fulton County, than in Walton County. In addition, there were concerns identified around adequate compliance with ASFA requirements and timely achievement of adoptions. This was evidenced by the cases reviewed, the State not meeting the national standards for Composite 2: timeliness of adoptions, and stakeholder comments with regard to the systemic factor for Case Review System. Stakeholders identified the most common reasons for delays in filing for TPR and finalizing adoptions as a) a lack of adoptive resources, b) high staff turnover causing continuances in one county and a backlog of TPR filings in another county, and c) a lack of staff and judicial training on the use of "compelling reasons" not to seek termination of parental rights.

Another area of concern for the State pertains to ensuring that children's connections are preserved with their families. The onsite review indicated inconsistencies in facilitating visitation between children and their parents and siblings and in supporting the relationship between parents and their children who were placed in foster care. Performance in this area was lacking for both parents, but it was particularly impacted by a lack of concerted efforts to engage fathers. It is important to note that in these areas Walton County performed well, while Floyd County and Fulton County experienced more difficulty.

The specific findings with regard to the State's performance on the safety and permanency outcomes are presented in table 1 at the end of the Executive Summary. Findings regarding well-being outcomes are presented in table 2. Table 3 presents the State's performance with regard to the seven systemic factors assessed through the CFSR. In the following section, key findings are summarized for each outcome.

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two indicators. One pertains to the timeliness of initiating a response to a child maltreatment report (item 1), and the other relates to the recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment (item 2).

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 72 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Georgia also did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant for Safety Outcome 1. These indicators pertain to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in Federal fiscal year 2001.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR because the State did not meet the national standard for Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care. The State has since a) developed a new training curriculum for caseworkers, foster parents, and childcare institution staff that addresses policies and procedures with regard to discipline violations and maltreatment reports and b) enhanced the data collection system to allow for tracking of child maltreatment in private agency foster homes and child care institutions. However, the State did not meet the national standard for the Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care in 2007 CFSR.

The 2001 CFSR found timely investigations and absence of maltreatment to be Strengths, and in the 2007 CFSR absence of maltreatment remained a Strength while new concerns emerged with regard to the timeliness of initiating investigations. Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite review noted that there have been problems with CPS staff turnover in investigations, and this has caused problems with the quality and timeliness of investigations. While investigations in Walton County and Floyd County are occurring in a timely manner, serious concerns were raised by stakeholders in Fulton County about the investigation responses in

Fulton County. Stakeholders identified problems with intake in recording and responding to reports, with investigations in seeing children in a timely manner, and with law enforcement in coordinating on reports that require police investigation.

While the State continues to meet the overall rating requirement of a Strength for absence of repeat maltreatment in the cases reviewed in the 2007 CFSR, the State did not meet the national standard pertaining to the data indicator of absence of maltreatment recurrence indicating that the State is experiencing challenges with regard to maltreatment recurrences. Stakeholder interviews, however, identified the State's current use of the diversion program and risk assessment tools as approaches that should help contribute to an absence of recurring maltreatment.

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 they remain in their homes. The other indicator (item 4) pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to reduce risk of harm to children.

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 67.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Performance on this item varied across Counties. The outcome was substantially achieved in 65 percent of Floyd County and Walton County cases and 71 percent of Fulton County cases.

Key Concerns of the 2001 CFSR

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the 2001 CFSR because assessments were not adequately identifying family needs, and services were neither consistently nor appropriately matched with individual needs. In addition, there were inconsistent responses to families with difficulties related to mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence. There were also concerns identified regarding the safety of children in shelter care. Georgia has since focused efforts on preventing and addressing child abuse within local communities through the Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children (CPPC) which were piloted in 9 counties to function as local partnerships between DFCS and Family Connection Agencies. The State also developed CPS domestic violence protocols and a family assessment that emphasized the assessment of needs pertaining to mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

Findings from the 2007 CFSR indicate that the State continues to experience challenges with regard to assessing risk and safety and providing appropriate services to prevent removal or re-entry of children into foster care. The case review revealed inconsistencies with regard to appropriate initial and ongoing risk and safety assessment, appropriate identification of service needs, and adequate provision of services to reduce risk of harm. The sites performed somewhat consistently in assessing and addressing risk of harm, but there were variations across the three sites with regard to providing services to prevent children's entry or re-entry into foster care.

While the State continues to experience difficulty in consistently assessing and addressing risk of harm, the case review and stakeholder interviews indicated that the State has increased reliance upon a Concept Guided Risk Assessment, formal Safety Plans, Family Team Meetings, and the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment process in order to assess and address family service needs. Stakeholder interviews also revealed that Georgia has a broad preventive service capacity and an increased capability to divert cases to the Early Intervention/Preventive Service track or the Diversion Program. They noted that these mechanisms have assisted the State in decreasing CPS caseloads and in assessing family needs. While these service options are reportedly helpful, stakeholder interviews also suggested that substance abuse treatment programs, therapeutic foster homes, mental health services and additional transportation options in rural areas are needed in order to address risk of harm and ongoing safety issues adequately for children and families.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

There are six indicators incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all children. The indicators pertain to the child welfare agency's efforts to prevent foster care re-entry (item 5), ensure placement stability for children in foster care (item 6), and establish appropriate permanency goals for children in foster care in a timely manner (item 7). 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, and permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9), or to ensure that children who have "other planned living arrangements" as a case goal are in stable placements and adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for Federal fiscal year 2005, the State did not meet the national standards for Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions and Composite 3: Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Extended Periods of Time.

The State did meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunifications and Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability. Performance on the individual measures included in all composites is presented in the discussion of the items related to each measure.

Georgia's performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 70 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 35 percent of Fulton County cases and 30 percent of Floyd County cases. The data indicate that achieving Permanency Outcome 1 was a greater challenge in Floyd County and Fulton County than in Walton County.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

The State did not achieve Substantial Conformity with this outcome during the 2001 CFSR because there were inadequate placement resources which resulted in children being placed in settings that were inappropriate to their needs. Also, the 2001 CFSR indicated that there were inconsistencies in the timeliness of initiating TPR filings, finalizing adoptions, and achieving permanency goals. Since the 2001 CFSR the State has addressed issues with child placement data in the information system, revised foster parent manuals, developed a respite care program, and instituted new foster care recruitment practices. Further, Georgia a) conducted training for court personnel on timely achievement of permanency for children in the foster care system, b) developed standards to measure county compliance with ASFA requirements, and c) enhanced the capacity of the adoptions A-file system to evaluate and determine if delays are occurring between filing for adoptions and finalization. In addition, Senate Bill 236 was enacted to grant permanent guardianship following the termination of parental rights.

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, the 2007 CFSR indicates that the number of foster care re-entries for children continues to be a Strength for the State (item 5). Stability of foster care placements (item 6), permanency goal for the child (item 7), adoption (item 9), and permanency goal of APPLA (item 10) remain challenges for DFCS as indicated by the 2001 CFSR and the 2007 CFSR. In addition, new barriers to achieving timely reunification were identified in the 2007 CFSR. Related and additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR are presented as follows:

- The case review and the Data Profile for the Composite 1 individual measure on foster care re-entries indicate that Georgia is generally effective in preventing foster care re-entries within a 12 month period.
- The case review indicates that maintenance of placement stability is somewhat effective in the State although there are differences across counties. The State exceeded the national standards for the data measures associated with Composite 4: Placement Stability, and the State has been in the process of correcting data for current and historical placement changes for children.
- Georgia continues to experience challenges with regard to the timely establishment of permanency goals for children in foster care, and the State is not consistently meeting ASFA requirements and filing for TPR in a timely manner. Also, the State did not meet the national standard for data Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time.
- Georgia's achievement of the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives is also inconsistent across the State. The State did meet the national standard for data Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification.
- Information from the case reviews and data Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions indicates that the State is not completing adoptions in a timely manner.
- The case review findings also suggest that the State is not consistently assisting youth in achieving the goal of permanent placement or a permanent foster care placement.

Stakeholders expressed the following opinions relevant to this outcome.

- The State is generally effective in ensuring that children do not re-enter foster care.
- The State has concurrent planning policies which are part of the pre-service training, but concurrent planning is inconsistently practiced across the State.

- There are delays in timely filing for TPR when there is a lack of adoptive resources or other permanent placements for children.
- There are many eligible youth who are not receiving Independent Living Services.

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 with regard to: placing children in foster care in close proximity to their parents and close relatives (item 11); placing siblings together (item 12); ensuring frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care (item 13); preserving connections of children in foster care with extended family, community, cultural heritage, religion, and schools (item 14); seeking relatives as potential placement resources (item 15), and; promoting the relationship between children and their parents while the children are in foster care (item 16).

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 44 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 70 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 35 percent of Fulton County cases and 33 percent of Floyd County cases.

Key findings from the 2007 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR because of inconsistencies identified in the way that children and adolescents’ relationships with their parents and extended families members were supported. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State provided training materials to staff on appropriate placement of sibling groups and to foster parents on care giving for sibling groups. The agency also developed Visitation Centers in many areas of the State to facilitate visitation between parents, children and siblings, and focused efforts on ensuring that staff document visitation between parents, children and siblings.

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, item 11 (proximity of foster care placement) was rated as a Strength in the 2007 CFSR. Item 12 (placement with siblings) and item 13 (visitation with parents and siblings) were Areas Needing Improvement in the 2001 CFSR, and they remain Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR. Item 14 (preserving connections), item 15 (relative placement), and item 16 (relationship of child in care with parents) were rated as Strengths in the 2001 CFSR, but new concerns regarding these items emerged in the 2007 CFSR. Additional findings were as follows:

- There was insufficient visitation (or other forms of contact) between children in foster care and their parents and siblings. In particular, there was a lack of consistency in promoting visitation between children and their fathers (item 13).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to supporting children’s connections with extended family, siblings, school, and community connections (item 14). Stakeholder interviews indicated that agency policies often inhibit the ability of youth in foster care to preserve connections socially and with extended family members.
- There were insufficient efforts made to place children with their maternal relatives, and in particular, there were insufficient efforts made to place children with paternal relatives (item 15). Stakeholder interviews indicated that while the agency is making an

increased effort to place children with relatives, the timeliness of relative searches and the engagement of paternal relatives are lacking.

- There was insufficient support of the parent's relationship while the children were in foster care. While there were inconsistent efforts to promote the bonds of children with both parents, there was less attention to children's bonds with their fathers (item 16).

Despite these concerns, the case reviews also found the following:

- Children were routinely and consistently placed in close proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers (item 11).
- Children were consistently placed with their siblings, unless there was a valid reason for separating siblings (item 12).

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 child welfare 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 the child welfare agency's 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's contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children's parents (item 20).

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 35 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of Walton County cases, 35 percent of Fulton County cases, and only 6 percent of Floyd County cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 45 percent (18 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared to 20 percent (5 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 in the 2001 CFSR because of inconsistencies identified in family assessments, service provision, involvement of families (particularly fathers) in case planning, and worker visits with parents and children. There was also a shortage of foster homes identified for children with more intensive emotional/behavioral problems. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has provided training to DFCS staff and providers on assessments and wrap-around services policies, and the contact standards for caseworker visits with parents and children have been revised. In order to increase family involvement in case planning the State a) revised the training curriculum for new caseworkers to place additional emphasis on family-centered practice, b) offered trainings to SAAG's in order to increase their knowledge about the need for family involvement, and c) enhanced the Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS) to allow for the tracking of the number of case plans in the system and the number of families participating in case planning.

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, all four items for Well-Being Outcome 1 remain as Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR. The following concerns resurfaced in the 2007 CFSR:

- There continues to be a lack of consistency in assessing and meeting the services needs of parents (particularly fathers) and children (item 17). As a result, challenges in appropriate matching of needs to services remains an issue in the State. Stakeholder interviews noted that mental health services, therapeutic foster homes, substance abuse services, and transportation are not widely available to meet the service needs of families in all locales across the State.
- Adequate involvement of families in case planning continues to be a challenge for the State. The case review indicates that there is insufficient involvement of parents (particularly fathers) and children in the case planning process. Similarly, stakeholder interviews also indicated that the degree to which parents and children are involved in case planning varies across the State (item 18).
- Adequate caseworker visits with parents continue to be a challenge for the agency. The case review found that there were insufficient caseworker visits with parents, particularly with fathers, and stakeholder interviews were in agreement that efforts to engage fathers in frequent, quality visits are lacking (item 20).

Despite these concerns, the review indicated that in 80 percent of the cases reviewed there are routine, consistent efforts to visit with children monthly and in many cases more than monthly. The case review also found that children in foster care cases were more likely to be visited than children in the in-home cases (item 19).

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

There is only one indicator for Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to the child welfare agency's efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases (item 21).

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. Reviewers determined that 78 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as substantially achieved for this outcome. This percentage does not meet the required 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The number of applicable foster care cases was much greater than the number of applicable in-home cases for this outcome. However, the outcome was substantially achieved in 90 percent (26 cases) of the 29 applicable foster care cases suggesting that educational needs were not consistently addressed in the in-home cases.

Key Findings in the 2007 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR because there were inconsistencies identified with regard to assessing and addressing children's educational needs. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has required caseworkers to gather more information about foster children's educational needs and case plan goals during the assessment and case planning process. However, similarly to the 2001 CFSR, the State continues to experience challenges in ensuring that children's educational needs are met. The difficulties that emerged in the case review pertained to unaddressed educational needs involving truancy, developmental disability assessments, school enrollment and tutoring needs. Stakeholder interviews indicated that while there are effective local

collaborations between DFCS and education, children with changes in foster care placements are not consistently given the opportunity to remain in their schools.

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

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

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 68 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 77 percent of Fulton County cases, 69 percent of Walton County cases, and 53 percent of Floyd County cases. Performance did not vary based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 75 percent (30 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 71 percent (12 cases) of the 17 applicable in-home services cases.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR because mental health assessments were not consistently conducted, mental health needs were not consistently addressed, there was a lack of dental care providers, and there were inadequate numbers of health care providers and inadequate mental health resources in the rural areas. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has provided training to DFCS staff on assessing the mental and physical health needs of children and required increased recording of mental health and health information in the Case Plan Reporting System. The State also used the Qualitative Case Review (QCR) process to track the quality of mental health services provided and implemented a Level of Care System across the State to create placement services to address the individual needs of children. The State also collaborated with the Division of Public Health, The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Department of Community Health (DCH) to ensure that foster children have access to medical providers and receive appropriate health care in their communities.

The findings of the 2007 CFSR were similar to those of the 2001 CFSR, as item 22 (children's physical health needs) and item 23 (children's mental health needs) were both rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Findings from the 2007 CFSR are as follows:

- Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has made improvements in routinely meeting the health needs of children in foster care, although meeting the health needs of children was a greater challenge in the in-home cases than in the foster care cases. Stakeholders did note that there continues to be a lack of dental health care, particularly orthodontic providers, across the State.
- The State continues to struggle to meet the mental health needs of children, and meeting the mental health needs of children was a greater challenge in the in-home cases than in the foster care cases. Stakeholder interviews attributed the difficulty to a shortage of certain services as well as ongoing changes to the mental health/behavioral health system. According to stakeholders, there is a shortage of substance abuse services, intensive mental health services, residential treatment, therapeutic foster care, and transportation services across the State.

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 statewide information system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care.

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. This systemic factor was not in substantial conformity in the initial CFSR because the data in the State's predominant information system, the Internal Data System (IDS), was considered unreliable because the system was difficult to use, and county staff did not consistently input information. The State implemented strategies to improve data quality with the current systems and is rolling out the Georgia SHINES SACWIS system in 2007 and 2008.

Case Review System

Five indicators are used to assess the State's performance with regard to the systemic factor of a Case Review System. The indicators examine the 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), the implementation of procedures to seek termination of parental rights (TPR) in accordance with the timeframes established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (item 28), and the notification and inclusion of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in case reviews and hearings (item 29).

Georgia is not in substantial conformity with the factor of the Case Review System. This systemic factor was found to be in substantial conformity in the State's 2001 CFSR, and the State was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. The following items were rated as a Strength in the 2001 CFSR, but are rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR:

- Item 26, pertaining to the process that ensures that there is a 6-month periodic review of the status of each child by a court or administrative review.
- Item 27, pertaining to the process that ensures that each child in foster care has a 12-month permanency hearing.
- Item 28, pertaining to the process that ensures that termination of parental rights proceedings are in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.
- Item 29, pertaining to the process that ensures that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers are notified and have an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Quality Assurance System

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

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System because the State has an identifiable quality assurance system that evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and areas needing improvement, provides reports and evaluates program improvement. The State also has standards that ensure that children in foster care are provided services that protect their health and safety. In the initial CFSR, the State was also in substantial conformity with this systemic factor and was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan.

Training

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

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the Training systemic factor because the State has instituted an initial and ongoing staff development training program for all staff. In addition, the State provides initial and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents as well as staff of State licensed facilities that provide services to foster and adoptive children. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor was determined to be in substantial conformity, and the State was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan.

Service Array

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses three questions: (1) Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and family served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?

Georgia is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. This systemic factor was not in substantial conformity in the initial CFSR because there was an inadequate number of placement and specialized placement resources for children, and there was a lack of critical services to address the multiple needs of children and families, most specifically domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health services. In addition, there was a lack of knowledge amongst caseworkers about the services available to help families. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State conducted a statewide needs assessment to determine the availability of support and placement services and enhanced the service continuum through collaboration with providers, consumers and other stakeholders. All three of the items in this systemic factor were rated as Areas Needing Improvement in the 2001 CFSR,

and they remain Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR. Key concerns identified in the 2007 CFSR related to a) a lack of substance abuse services, mental health services, transportation services, and therapeutic foster homes, b) a lack of independent living service provision, c) shortages of certain services in rural areas, and d) insufficient efforts to individualize the needs of children and families in service provision.

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 Child and Family Services Plan (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).

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community because the State participates in ongoing consultation in developing and updating the Child and Family Services Plan and has an established mechanism in place to coordinate services among federal and federally assisted programs. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor was also determined to be in substantial conformity, and the State was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan.

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 that 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).

Georgia was found not to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the 2001 CFSR because a) there were differences in licensing standards for public and private sector placement resources b) the State granted waivers for over-placement of foster homes due to lack of resources, c) there was insufficient targeted recruitment reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of children served by DFCS, and d) there was insufficient attention paid to retention through provision of supportive services, respite care, and incentive payments. Since the 2001 CFSR, the State established a committee to explore the development of uniform licensing standards and reviewed policies associated with waiving minimum standards for foster homes.

In the 2007 CFSR, Georgia is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention because while the State has resolved the past concerns with different licensing standards for private and public placement agencies identified in the 2001 CFSR, the current recruitment mechanisms have not addressed the need for ethnic and racially diverse foster homes, and there are delays in facilitating cross-jurisdictional placements in a timely manner.

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Rating	
	<i>In Substantial Conformity</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>	<i>Met National Standards?</i>	<i>Rating* *</i>	<i>Percent Strength</i>
Safety Outcome 1-Children are first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	NO	72.0	NO		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	76
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				Strength	91
Safety Outcome 2 – Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	NO	67.7			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	74
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	68
Permanency Outcome 1- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	NO	42.5	Met 2 out of 4		
Item 5: Foster care re-entry				Strength	100
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	82.5
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	60
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship and placement with relatives				ANI	72
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	36
Item 10: Other planned living arrangement				ANI	43
Permanency Outcome 2 - The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	NO	44			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	100
Item 12: Placement with siblings				ANI	81
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	47
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	65
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	57
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	35.5

*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 Area Needing Improvement (ANI). For an overall rating of Strength, 90 percent of the cases must be rated as a Strength.

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Rating**	Percent Strength
	<i>Substantial Conformity</i>	<i>Percent Substantially Achieved*</i>		
Well Being Outcome 1 - Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs	NO	35		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	40
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	27
Item 19: Worker visits with child			ANI	80
Item 20: Worker visits with parents			ANI	30
Well Being Outcome 2 - Children receive services to meet their educational needs	NO	78		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			ANI	78
Well Being Outcome 3 - Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs are met	NO	68		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	82
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	57.5

*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 Area Needing Improvement (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: Georgia CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	Substantial Conformity	Score*	Item Rating**
STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM	YES	4	
Item 24: State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.			
CASE REVIEW SYSTEM	NO	2	
Item 25: 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: 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.			ANI
Item 27: 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.			ANI
Item 28: Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.			ANI
Item 29: Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.			ANI
QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM	YES	3	
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.			Strength
Item 31: The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided and that evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates implemented program improvement measures.			Strength
TRAINING	YES	4	
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
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			Strength

the CFSP.			
Item 34: The States 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
Table 3: (Continued)			
Systemic Factors and Items			
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	YES	3	
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.			Strength
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services 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.			Strength
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			Strength

has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.			
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.			ANI

*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 Area Needing Improvement (ANI).

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

Final Report
Georgia Child and Family Services Review
September 5, 2007

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 Georgia. 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 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 of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Georgia CFSR was conducted the week of May 14, 2007. The period under review was from 4/1/06 to 5/14/07. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

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

Information from each resource is presented for all of the items reviewed.

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 on the following page.

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

TABLE OF CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Case Characteristics	Foster Care Cases	In-Home Cases
	40	25
When case was opened/child entered foster care		
Open prior to the period under review	30	13
Open during the period under review	10	12
Child entered foster care during the period under review	11	NA
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than age 10	19 (48%)	
At least 10 but younger than 13	4 (10%)	
At least 13 but younger than 16	11 (28%)	
16 and older	6 (15%)	
Race/Ethnicity		
African American (Non-Hispanic)	21 (53%)	
White (Non-Hispanic)	14 (35%)	
Hispanic (of all races)	2 (5%)	
Two or more races	2 (5%)	
American Indian or Alaska Native	1 (3%)	
Primary Reason for opening case		
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	11 (27.5%)	9 (36%)
Physical abuse	7 (17.5%)	1 (4%)
Sexual abuse	0	2 (8%)
Medical neglect	3 (7.5%)	0
Child's Behavior/Juvenile Justice	3 (7.5%)	0
Substance abuse by parent	11 (27.5%)	8 (32%)
Domestic violence in child's home	1 (2.5%)	3 (12%)
Emotional maltreatment	0	1 (4%)
Abandonment	4 (10%)	0
Other ("Dependency")	0	1 (4%)

*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 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. In addition to the item ratings, States are evaluated with regard to performance on seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for these outcomes are Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Achieved. In order for a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to seven national data indicators. In order 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.

The Administration for Children and Families has set 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. The goal of the CFSR is to promote continuous improvement in performance on these outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95 percent standard established for the CFSR onsite review at the end of their PIP implementation. ACF recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often are time consuming to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with ACF to establish a specified amount of improvement or implement specified activities for their Program Improvement Plan. That is, for each outcome or item that is an area needing improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the Children's Bureau) specifies how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the areas needing improvement, and determines the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of their Program Improvement Plan and still not perform at the 95 or 90 percent level requirements of the CFSR.

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

In the following sections, for each outcome assessed, there is a discussion of how the State performed on that outcome in the first round. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round of the CFSR, there is a discussion of the key concerns identified at that time and the strategies implemented in the Program Improvement Plan to address those concerns. This discussion also focuses on whether the key concerns that emerged in the first CFSR continued to be present in the second review, or whether those concerns were resolved, but other concerns emerged.

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

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

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:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percentage
Substantially Achieved	7	6	5	18	72.0
Partially Achieved	0	3	2	5	20.0
Not Achieved or Addressed	0	2	0	2	8.0
Total Applicable Cases	7	11	7	25	
Not Applicable Cases	10	20	10	40	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)		State’s Percentage		Meets Standard
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6		93.0		NO
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68		99.19		NO

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 72 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. Georgia also did not meet the national standards for the two data indicators relevant for Safety Outcome 1. These indicators pertain to the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR and was required to address this outcome in a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). During the first review, item 1 (timeliness of investigations) and item 2 (absence of repeat maltreatment) were rated as Strengths. However, the State did not meet the national standard for Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care. The national standard was 0.57 percent, and the State's rating was 1.08 percent. To address these concerns, Georgia implemented the following strategies in the Program Improvement Plan:

- Georgia's data collection system was enhanced to allow for tracking of child maltreatment in private agency foster homes and child care institutions. These system enhancements allowed for the sorting of data by provider group, and provided information that could be used to target trainings for DFCS foster parents, private agency foster parents, and childcare institution employees.
- Georgia developed new training curriculum for social services staff, foster parents and institutional staff. The training addressed differences in policy and procedure with regard to discipline violations and maltreatment reports.

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

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

The 2001 CFSR found timely investigations and absence of maltreatment to be Strengths, and in the 2007 CFSR absence of maltreatment remained a Strength while new concerns emerged with regard to the timeliness of initiating investigations. Stakeholders interviewed during the onsite review noted that there have been problems with CPS staff turnover in investigations, and this has caused problems with the quality and timeliness of investigations. While investigations in Walton County and Floyd County are occurring in a timely manner, serious concerns were raised by stakeholders in Fulton County about investigation responses in Fulton County. Stakeholders identified problems with intake in recording and responding to reports, with investigations in seeing children in a timely manner, and with law enforcement in coordinating on reports that require police investigation.

While the State continues to meet the overall rating requirement of a Strength for absence of repeat maltreatment in the cases reviewed in the 2007 CFSR, the State did not meet the national standard pertaining to the data indicator of absence of maltreatment recurrence indicating that the State is experiencing challenges with regard to maltreatment recurrences. Stakeholder interviews, however, identified the State's current use of the diversion program and risk assessment tools as approaches that should help contribute to an absence of recurring maltreatment.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 25 (38 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency policy requirements.

Georgia policy states that there are two timeframes for initiating an investigation of child abuse and neglect once a report has been made. Cases with the most serious harm or threat of harm must be investigated within 24 hours of the report, and all other reports must be investigated within 5 workdays. Investigative timeframes are determined by supervisory review.

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

Item 1	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	6	6	19	76
Area Needing Improvement	0	5	1	6	24
Total Applicable Cases	7	11	7	25	
Not applicable	10	20	10	40	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Item 1 was rated as a Strength when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was established with the child within the timeframes required by State policy or law. It was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when face-to-face contact was not established within the required timeframes. In four of the six cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement, the required response timeframe was 5 days, in one case a 24 hour response time was required, and one case was mistakenly closed in error without supervisory approval or contact with the victim prior to the investigation. In three of the six cases, there was already an open case on the family at the time that the allegation was received.

For many of the cases reviewed, there were multiple maltreatment reports on families during the life of the case, most of which were not substantiated or indicated. More specifically, throughout the case histories there were 20 cases with between 3-5 maltreatment allegations on the family, and there were 15 cases with between 5-10 maltreatment allegations on the family.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 76 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with the required timeframes. This percent is less than the 90 percent required for an overall item rating of Strength. Also, for the State's 2001 CFSR this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

With regard to timely investigations, various stakeholders reported the following:

- CPS investigations staff turnover has adversely impacted the quality and timeliness of investigations.
- There are communication challenges on cross-county investigations. Although investigations must be completed within the required timeframe beginning from the time that the report is filed, some counties are operating with the understanding that timeframes begin at the time that the county intake office receives word of the report from the referring county.
- The Risk Assessment Tool is in the process of being redesigned because it has been too time intensive for staff to complete on a consistent basis.

State-level stakeholders reported that the State is tracking diversion cases, and the agency is seeing less repeat diversion cases than when the Diversion Program was initially implemented. In addition, stakeholders reported that Diversion protocols are locally designed. While the Statewide Assessment notes that most counties do not assign investigation timeframes to diversion cases, stakeholders reported that the timeframes are similar for CPS/Intake and diversion cases.

Floyd County and Walton County stakeholders reported that required timeframes are being met for the investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect for cases that are routed to CPS/Ongoing and cases that are directed to the Diversion program. Stakeholders in Floyd County further noted that the Diversion Program has caused a decrease in CPS caseloads, and this has improved both the quality of CPS investigations and the retention of investigation staff. Both Floyd and Walton Counties have reportedly strong internal and external team approaches that facilitate timeliness. Stakeholders from these counties noted that if caseworkers cannot meet the required timeframes, then supervisors or directors will ensure that children are seen. Stakeholders also noted that DFCS coordinates well with law enforcement in these counties, and stakeholders from Floyd County in particular noted that increased community collaboration has helped to facilitate improvements in timely investigation outcomes.

Alternatively, Fulton County stakeholders reported that there are significant problems with timeliness of investigations. It was reported that investigation case loads were between 40-60 cases in Fulton County, and additional staff were brought in to address the backlog of cases. In addition, stakeholders in Fulton County reported that mandated reporters are not able to reach intake workers

and are reportedly leaving voicemails on high risk cases and not receiving letters of disposition on their reports. Fulton County stakeholders indicated that prior reports made by mandated reporters cannot be accounted for by intake, and mandated reporters no longer trust that reports are being captured in the information system. Further, stakeholders reported that investigations that should be initiated within 24 hours are being investigated as much as three weeks later.

In addition, State law requires that DFCS forward all reports received for investigation to local law enforcement, and law enforcement determines which cases necessitate their involvement. Stakeholders in Floyd and Walton County said that this process is well coordinated, but stakeholders in Fulton County said that it is not functioning well. Stakeholders from Fulton County noted that the sheer volume of reports with and without criminal elements are incredibly time-consuming to examine, and alternative protocols must be established in order to improve timely responses on investigations in Fulton County.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, investigations must be completed within 30 days of the report. When reports are received from intake they are reviewed, and determinations are made about the nature of the report, the appropriate response, and the associated timeframes required for the response. Cases may be referred to CPS/ongoing or the Diversion program for case management and community-based services. Alternatively, the Statewide Assessment reports that cases may be screened out, referred to a community-based service or referred to the Early/Brief Intervention program for contracted case management and community services. According to the Statewide Assessment, certain types of neglect reports or suspicion-based allegations are directed to the Diversion Program where families receive short-term case management and community-based service referrals. Counties design their own Diversion protocols, and the Statewide Assessment reports that in most counties cases are assigned directly as a diversion case and are not assigned a response time. According to surveyed stakeholders, 28.4 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the State as being very effective in the timely investigation of child abuse and neglect, and 51.3 percent of DFCS stakeholders rated the State as very effective.

According to the Statewide Assessment, approximately 70 percent of reports received alleging maltreatment meet the requirements for a 24-hour response time. The Statewide Assessment points out that when staff have difficulty meeting the 24-hour timeframe, it is often attributed to heavy workloads and a time-consuming Risk Assessment Tool. According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Qualitative Case Review (QCR) report indicates that in FFY 2004, DFCS met the timeframes for initiation of investigations in 84 percent of the cases, and in FFY 2005, DFCS met the timeframes for initiation of investigations in 57 percent of the cases. The State cites the following reasons for a lack of timely contact with children:

- Children in the home who were not the subject of the report were not seen or interviewed.
- Safety assessments were not completed.
- There were delays in case assignment of investigations.
- The State has a protocol for abbreviating investigations when it is determined partway through the investigation that child maltreatment has not occurred. These cases must be discussed with supervisors who then approve closure of the abbreviated

investigation. In a number of reviewed cases, there was minimal or no documentation to support critical decisions about closing the case.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 22 (34 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine whether there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. Information regarding the ratings is provided below.

Item 2	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	8	6	20	91
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	1	2	9
Total Applicable Cases	6	9	7	22	
Not applicable	11	22	10	43	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Item 2 was rated as a Strength when there was no indication of two or more substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports on the family within a 6-month period (19 cases), or when there were two or more substantiated reports, but they did not involve the same perpetrator or circumstances (1 case). Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 case because there were 4 substantiated maltreatment reports related to inadequate supervision and domestic violence within 5 months of the first report. In the second case, there were 2 substantiated reports for emotional neglect and physical abuse within 3 months.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 91 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that there was no recurrence of maltreatment. This percent is more than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. However, the State did not meet the national standard for the data indicator for absence of recurrence of maltreatment suggesting that this is still an area of concern for the State. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders were in general agreement that the Diversion Program, the Risk Assessment Tool, Family Team Meetings, and interdisciplinary community meetings are useful in identifying family needs and targeting those needs with services in order to minimize the recurrence of child maltreatment in the family.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Qualitative Case Review (QCR) report indicates that repeat child maltreatment and maltreatment of children in foster care was absent in 92 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2004 and 97 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005. The Statewide Assessment reports that Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC) are currently functioning in eight counties, and in these counties where CPPC Family Team Meetings are conducted, an evaluation indicated a greater decline in recurrence of maltreatment than in counties without CPPC (4.5 percent decline from CY 2004-2005). According to the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders' perception of DFCS' ability to prevent repeat maltreatment differs from these data, however. According to surveyed stakeholders, 5.4 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the State as being very effective in the prevention of the recurrence of child abuse and neglect, and 15.8 percent of the DFCS stakeholders rated the State as very effective in the prevention of the recurrence of child abuse and neglect.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the following strategies contribute toward minimizing recurrence of child maltreatment:

- DFCS has protocols and procedures in place for assessing and evaluating risk during investigations. The State fully implemented the use of a Concept Guided Risk Assessment Tool in all Regions across the State in August 2006 in order to assess risk more comprehensively. In addition to completing the Risk Assessment Tool during all investigations, DFCS must conduct Risk Re-Assessments of cases every 90 days after the initial case plan has been developed.
- The State uses a Diversion program to help stabilize families through the provision of community services and resources to families where children are at risk of abuse and neglect. Diversion program protocols are locally coordinated.

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:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	11	22	11	44	67.7
Partially Achieved:	0	4	4	8	12.3
Not Achieved or Addressed:	6	5	2	13	20.0
Total Applicable	17	31	17	65	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 67.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity.

Key Concerns of the 2001 CFSR

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome during the 2001 CFSR. Item 3 (services to protect and prevent removal/re-entry) and item 4 (assessing risk of harm) were both rated as Areas Needing Improvement. At the time of the 2001 CFSR, the key concerns identified with regard to this outcome were the following:

- The assessments that were conducted were not always adequately identifying the needs associated with family circumstances and risk of harm.
- In-home services provided to families did not adequately match or support their needs.
- Some cases involving substance abuse and domestic violence were closed before problems were resolved.
- There were concerns about the safety of children in shelter care, particularly in the larger metropolitan areas.
- There were inadequate mental health services (particularly public mental health) to help stabilize families and to address identified safety and risk of harm issues.

Georgia implemented the following Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies to address these concerns:

- In order to focus efforts on preventing and addressing child abuse within local communities, Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children (CPPC) were piloted in 9 counties to function as local partnerships between DFCS and Family Connection Agencies.
- In order to better identify and address safety issues and risk of harm, a family assessment was developed that emphasized the assessment of needs pertaining to mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence. This assessment was developed as part of the Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children (CPPC) pilot.

- In order to ensure professional knowledge of child protection work, front line workers and supervisors are now certified through the State developed Child Protection Certification Program (CPCP) once they have been adequately trained in CPS and other areas of specialization prior to beginning case work. The CPCP ensures that standards of competency are met and tied to a career path program.
- In order to address safety issues identified in shelters, Fulton and DeKalb County shelters were closed on December 27, 2002, and February 14, 2003 respectively.
- In order to better address issues with the risk of harm associated with domestic violence, the agency developed CPS domestic violence protocols.

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

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Similar to the 2001 CFSR, item 3 and item 4 are rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Findings from the 2007 CFSR indicate that the State continues to experience challenges with regard to assessing risk and safety and providing appropriate services to prevent removal or re-entry of children into foster care. The case review revealed inconsistencies with regard to appropriate initial and ongoing risk and safety assessment, appropriate identification of service needs, and adequate provision of services to reduce risk of harm. The sites performed somewhat consistently in assessing and addressing risk of harm, but there were variations across the three sites with regard to providing services to prevent children’s entry or re-entry into foster care.

While the State continues to experience difficulty in consistently assessing and addressing risk of harm, the case review and stakeholder interviews indicated that the State has increased reliance upon a Concept Guided Risk Assessment, formal Safety Plans, Family Team Meetings, and the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment process in order to assess and address family service needs. Stakeholder interviews also revealed that Georgia has a broad preventive service capacity and an increased capability to divert cases to the Early Intervention/Preventive Service track or the Diversion Program. They noted that these mechanisms have assisted the State in decreasing CPS caseloads and in assessing family needs. While these service options are reportedly helpful, stakeholder interviews also suggested that substance abuse treatment programs, therapeutic foster homes, mental health services and additional transportation options in rural areas are needed in order to adequately address risk of harm and ongoing safety issues for children and families.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 42 (65 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 shown in the table below.

Item 3	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	6	15	10	31	74
Area Needing Improvement	5	5	1	11	26
Total Applicable Cases	11	20	11	42	
Not applicable	6	11	6	23	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

There is variation in performance on this item across the three sites. The item was rated a Strength in 91 percent of Walton County cases, 75 percent of Fulton County cases, and 54.5 percent of Floyd County cases.

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

- Services were provided to the parents and child to prevent removal (17 cases).
- The children were appropriately removed from the home because the removal was necessary to ensure the child’s safety (6 cases).
- The agency coordinated a safety plan to have the parent place the child with a safety resource, and services were provided to the safety resource, parents, and/or children (5 cases). In four of the five cases, the child was placed with a relative.
- The family received post-reunification services to prevent the child’s reentry into foster care (3 cases).

Case-review information indicates that a range of services was offered or provided to families. These included (but were not limited to) the following: mental health services, drug screens and substance abuse treatment, marriage counseling, parent aide services, child development assessment and support services, intensive in-home services, psychological evaluations, child care, domestic violence services, “Babies Can’t Wait” health checks, job support services, and economic and housing assistance.

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

- There was a lack of assessment to determine the types of services needed by the family (5 cases).
- No services were provided, and the children remained at risk in the home (5 cases).
- No services were provided after reunification to ensure the child’s ongoing safety and to prevent re-entry (1 case).

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 74 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFCS had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percent is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. This item was also rated an Area Needing Improvement in the 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There was general agreement amongst stakeholders that DFCS has a number of service options that can be used to prevent removal or re-entry of children into foster care. Various stakeholders indicated that Family Preservation Services such as Early Intervention/Preventive Services, Parent Aide Services, Prevention of Unnecessary Placement (PUP) services, and Homestead programs are utilized to prevent removal or re-entry of children into foster care.

Stakeholders generally agreed that families with child abuse reports deemed low risk are redirected to the Diversion program to receive case management and community-based services on a voluntary basis and that the goal of the Diversion program is to provide needed supports to families and to prevent child abuse. The majority of Floyd County stakeholders reported that the Diversion Program is very effective in providing more concentrated efforts on service provision for families, particularly around youth truancy. Walton County stakeholders suggested that the diversion program is helpful in linking families with services as well, although they also noted that there is no formal risk assessment process for diversion cases. Fulton County stakeholders pointed out that the Diversion Program allows for three months of services, although service providers are not sure what diversion referral protocols are. Stakeholders in Fulton County noted that there was a functioning Diversion Unit, but it was deconstructed due to a shortage of staff.

Stakeholders also cited service gaps which are needed in order to prevent removal and re-entry. Stakeholders were in general agreement that there is a lack of transportation, therapeutic foster homes, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment programs across the State.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Qualitative Case Review (QCR) report indicates that the agency averaged 90 percent achievement in the provision of services to protect children in their home and prevent removal in FFY 2004, and 75 percent achievement in the provision of services to protect children in their home and prevent removal in FFY 2005. Problems identified in the QCR report related to a) a lack of contact with families b) a lack of thorough and consistent assessments and c) inconsistent follow through on service referrals or service provider recommendations. Stakeholder surveys indicated that 12.3 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the State as being very effective in the provision of a range of support services. Non-DFCS stakeholders felt that DFCS was not effective in supporting families to prevent the removal of children from their home 40 percent of the time.

According to the Statewide Assessment, when reports are made DFCS differentiates between cases that a) require referrals to community providers for Early/Brief Intervention, b) are unsubstantiated and referred to the Diversion Program for support services through community resources when a CPS assessment is not required, and c) are assessed with enough risk of harm to the children

whereby the case is tracked to ongoing CPS. According to the Statewide Assessment, the Diversion Program is an alternative response that the State has devised in order to provide services to families without directing the case to CPS/Ongoing. The State points out that in the past, families had to have an open CPS case in order to receive services, but the Diversion Program links DFCS case management and locally based services to address the needs of families with identified stressors. The Statewide Assessment reports that for the SFY 2005, the State has experienced a reduction of 24.5 percent in CPS caseloads.

The Statewide Assessment reports that regardless of the type of DFCS response, a number of Family Preservation Services are used to prevent removal or re-entry. These include Early Intervention/Preventive Services, the Parent Aide Program, Prevention of Unnecessary Placement (PUP) services, Homestead Services, Intensive Family Intervention (IFI) crisis intervention, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health services, and domestic violence support services through partnerships with local domestic violence programs. In addition, DFCS is mandated to refer all children (age birth to 3) who have substantiated maltreatment or have been affected by illegal substance abuse or prenatal drug exposure to the local “Babies Can’t Wait” program. According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency uses contracted service providers to conduct the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA), a process which is used to assess the service needs of children and parents upon a child’s entry into foster care. Recommendations from the CCFA may be made for wrap-around services to preserve stable foster care placements or to support and stabilize homes upon reunification. Additionally, for diversion cases, local funds are available to provide economic assistance to families. However, according to the Statewide Assessment, transportation is a barrier to service provision for families living in rural areas, and while supports for transportation are available, transportation services are not readily available in rural areas.

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

Item 4	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	11	22	11	44	68
Area Needing Improvement	6	9	6	21	32
Total Applicable Cases	17	31	17	65	

As shown in the table, performance on this item was similar across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 71 percent of Fulton County cases and 65 percent of Floyd County and Walton County cases. The item was rated as a Strength in 77.5 percent of the foster care cases compared to 52 percent of the in-home services cases.

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

- There was risk of harm to the child in the home and the services necessary to reduce that risk were not provided (8 cases).
- Safety and risk were not appropriately assessed or addressed for children in foster care or safety resource settings (8 cases). Six of the eight cases were foster care cases, and in one of the six foster care cases, the case was closed prematurely without assessing safety and risk. In two of the eight cases safety resources were utilized. (Note: When a safety issue is identified and a child must be removed from a home, Georgia policy designates the use of relatives, neighbors or other fictive kin as "safety resources" which allow the parent to maintain custody and work with the agency to address the safety issue while the child lives with the safety resource.)
- Safety and risk assessments were done to address safety concerns for the target foster child, but there were no safety or risk assessments done on the target child's siblings who remained in the home (2 cases).
- There was not an adequate assessment of the safety resource before the child was placed and the case was closed (2 cases).
- There was risk of harm to the child during visitation, but the court ordered unsupervised visitation (1 case).

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 68 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFCS had appropriately addressed the risk of harm to the children. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for an overall rating of Strength. Addressing risk of harm to children appears to be a greater challenge in the in-home services cases than in the foster care cases. In the State's first CFSR, conducted in 2001, this item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that DFCS uses the following strategies to address the risk of harm and ongoing safety needs of children and families:

- DFCS establishes safety plans to have parents place children with relatives or other "safety resources" to address presenting risks with parents and to prevent children from entering foster care.
- DFCS develops safety plans to address circumstances in the home, visitation needs, and situations in which the agency coordinates with parents to place children with a safety resource.
- DFCS addresses risk of harm through utilization of interdisciplinary meetings, the CCFA process, and adequate service provision.

Several stakeholders across sites reported specific challenges related to the adequate assessment of risk of harm and ongoing safety issues. While the Risk Assessment Tool is comprehensive, some stakeholders noted that its' length has been overly burdensome to investigation staff and has contributed toward causing a backlog of cases in investigations. Consequently, some counties with backlogs of cases have begun creating alternative tools to alleviate the problem. Some stakeholders also reported that when the

agency uses safety plans for “safety resources” in order to keep children out of foster care, services are not always provided to parents, children, and safety resources, and there is no court oversight to protect the interests of all parties involved in these circumstances. Also, a few Fulton County stakeholders expressed concerns that investigations and service referrals are not happening consistently and that DFCS is closing cases when safety risks have not been addressed.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that based on the State’s annual Qualitative Case Review (QCR) report, the achievement rate for compliance with risk assessment and safety management was 83 percent in FFY 2004 and 96 percent in FFY 2005. Children were considered to be safely maintained in their home whenever possible in 84 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2004 and in 81 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 05.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS policy requires the use of the Risk Assessment Tool in every investigation to identify any concerns related to categories which include child vulnerability, caregiver capability, quality of care, maltreatment, home environment, social environment, and response to intervention. According to the Statewide Assessment, a Reasonable Efforts Checklist identifies available resources that would support a child remaining safely in the home, and Safety Plans must outline the actions that are necessary to ensure a child’s safety with regard to the identified safety concerns. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Risk Assessment Tool is 48 pages long, time consuming, and collects duplicate information, and the agency has taken steps to refine the tool to make it more user friendly.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved	3	7	7	17	42.5
Partially Achieved	5	13	3	21	52.5
Not Achieved or Addressed	2	0	0	2	5.0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (Scaled Score)	State’s Composite Score	Meets Standard (Yes/No)		
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6 +	129.0	Yes		
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4 +	93.2	No		
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for			No		

extended time periods	121.7 +	118.6	
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5 +	107.4	Yes

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

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

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 42.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for Federal fiscal year 2005, the State did not meet the national standards for Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions and Composite 3: Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Extended Periods of Time.

The State did meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunifications, and Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability. Performance on the individual measures included in all composites is presented in the discussion of the items related to each measure.

Georgia’s performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 70 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 35 percent of Fulton County cases and 30 percent of Floyd County cases.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR:

The State did not achieve Substantial Conformity with this outcome during the first CFSR conducted in 2001. During the first review, items 6 (stability of foster care placement), item 7 (permanency goal for the child), item 9 (adoption), and 10 (timely achievement of APPLA) were rated as an Areas Needing Improvement. In addition, in the 2001 CFSR, Georgia did not meet the national standards associated with the length of time to achieve reunifications and adoptions for children in foster care. In the 2001 CFSR the following key concerns were identified with regard to Permanency Outcome 1:

- There were inadequate placement resources which resulted in children being placed in settings that were inappropriate to their needs.
- There was not a timely achievement of permanency goals for some children in foster care.
- There were delays in initiating TPRs and in finalizing adoptions.
- There was a lack of effort to establish legal guardianship for older children.

Georgia implemented the following Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies to address these concerns:

- In order to address data discrepancies associated with placement stability, the State examined the causes of placement data discrepancies, and instituted system changes to increase placement data accuracy.

- Efforts to increase placement stability for foster children included revising foster parent manuals to include information about services available for foster parents, implementing a foster parent poster campaign, developing a respite care program, instituting recruitment of families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and revising policies to more suitably support foster parents.
- In order to improve the timeliness of achieving permanency for children in the foster care system, trainings were conducted on permanency hearing requirements for judges, caseworkers, Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG's), Guardians Ad Litem (GAL), parent attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Citizen Panel Review Volunteers.
- In order to better meet ASFA requirements associated with achieving permanency, the State developed standards to measure county compliance with filing for TPR, and the Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS) was enhanced to require a mandated field for the documentation of "compelling reasons."
- In order to improve the timeliness of adoption finalizations, the State enhanced the capacity of the adoptions A-file system to evaluate and determine if delays are occurring between filing for adoptions and finalization.
- To establish guardianship for older children, Senate Bill 236 was enacted to grant permanent guardianship following the termination of parental rights.

The State did not meet its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, the number of foster care re-entries for children continues to be a Strength for the State (item 5). Stability of foster care placements (item 6), permanency goal for the child (item 7), adoption (item 9), and permanency goal of APPLA (item 10) remain challenges for DFCS as indicated by the 2001 CFSR and the 2007 CFSR. In addition, new barriers to achieving timely reunification were identified in the 2007 CFSR. Related and additional key findings of the 2007 CFSR are presented as follows:

- The case review and the Data Profile for the Composite 1 individual measure on foster care re-entries indicate that Georgia is generally effective in preventing foster care re-entries within a 12 month period.
- The case review indicates that maintenance of placement stability is somewhat effective in the State although there are differences across counties. The State exceeded the national standards for the data measures associated with Composite 4: Placement Stability, and the State has been in the process of correcting data for current and historical placement changes for children.
- Georgia continues to experience challenges with regard to the timely establishment of permanency goals for children in foster care, and the State is not consistently meeting ASFA requirements and filing for TPR in a timely manner. Also, the State did not meet the national standard for data Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time.
- Georgia's achievement of the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives is also inconsistent across the State. The State did meet the national standard for data Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification.
- Information from the case reviews and data Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions indicates that the State is not completing adoptions in a timely manner.

- The case review findings also suggest that the State is not consistently assisting youth in achieving the goal of permanent placement or a permanent foster care placement.

Stakeholders expressed the following opinions relevant to this outcome.

- The State is generally effective in ensuring that children do not re-enter foster care.
- The State has concurrent planning policies which are part of the pre-service training, but concurrent planning is inconsistently practiced across the State.
- There are delays in timely filing for TPR when there is a lack of adoptive resources or other permanent placements for children.
- There are many eligible youth who are not receiving Independent Living Services.

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

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	5	3	11	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	5	3	11	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	15	7	29	

State performance in FFY 2005 on the individual measure of foster care reentry (Measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification was as follows: 9.5 percent of the children exiting foster care in 2004 reentered foster care in less than 12 months. For the data set used to establish the national standards for the data composites, the median performance on this measure was 15.0 percent, and the 25th percentile was 9.9 percent. For this measure, lower percentages are associated with higher levels of performance. These data indicate that Georgia performed better than the 25th percentile for the data set used to establish the national standards. Item 5 was rated as a Strength in all 11 applicable cases.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of the cases, which is more than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was also rated a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders reported that while prevention of re-entry does vary across counties, the State is generally effective in ensuring that children do not re-enter foster care.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia’s QCR report indicates that in FFY 2004 foster care re-entries were prevented in 96 percent of the cases reviewed, and in FFY 2005 foster care re-entries were prevented in 90 percent of the cases reviewed. The Statewide Assessment reports Intensive Family Intervention services and emergency crisis support services are available 24 hours a day through the Georgia Parent Support Network in some counties, and wrap-around services and after care services including in-home support services and economic assistance with food and housing are available.

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 findings of this assessment are presented in the table below.

Item 6	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	16	10	33	82.5
Area Needing Improvement	3	4	0	7	17.5
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied across counties. The item was rated a Strength in 100 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 80 percent of Fulton County cases and 70 percent of Floyd County cases.

Georgia's performance in 2005 exceeded national performance standards on all three individual measures of placement stability included in Composite 4: Placement Stability, as presented below.

- 86.9 percent of the children in foster care for less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. The State scored higher than the 75th percentile (86 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards for the data composites.
- 71.2 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. The State scored higher than the 75th percentile (65.4 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards for the data composites.
- 49.7 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. The State scored higher than the 75th percentile (41.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards for the data composites.

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

- The child did not experience a placement change during the period under review, and either the current placement was stable, the child was discharged from foster care or the child was adopted during the period under review (29 cases).
- The placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest and were intended either to promote achieving the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services to the child (2 cases). For example, placement changes were made in one case to move the child into a less restrictive group home setting, and changes were made in another case to move the child to an alternate relative's home when the first relative was no longer able to provide for the care of all siblings.
- The child did experience a placement change, but the initial placement was one day and it was for the purposes of achieving a stable placement (2 cases).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that 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 attain the child's permanency goal (7 cases). In most of these cases, the child was moved due to behavior problems and due to foster parent requests that alternative placements be sought for children.

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 29 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review.
- Children in 5 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 6 cases experienced 3 or more placements during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82.5 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability or that changes in placements were in the best interests of the child. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. It should be noted that all cases in Walton County were rated a Strength for this item. Item 6 was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the State's 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Walton and Floyd County stakeholders agreed that placements for children are typically stable. Where there was placement instability in Floyd County, stakeholders noted a shortage of foster homes and therapeutic placements in the county. Fulton County stakeholders reported challenges with inappropriate placement matching. More specifically, stakeholders noted that the State Treatment Team determines Level of Care (LOC) ratings for children in need of more structured placements, and while determinations are in process, children are placed in settings that are not appropriate to their needs.

A few stakeholder opinions indicated that the State uses emergency shelters for children in some counties. Stakeholders in Fulton County noted that shelters are used as 90-day assessment centers until a more stable placement is established. Walton County stakeholders pointed out that emergency shelters are consistently used as placements for adolescents when there are no available foster homes.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that stability of foster care placements was rated a Strength in 79 percent of the cases reviewed for FFY 2004 and 86 percent of the cases reviewed for FFY 2005 in the State's QCR report. The Statewide Assessment notes that in 35 of the 212 cases reviewed children had multiple moves, and these moves were often attributed to the behavioral issues of the child and the foster parent's inability to cope with their behavior. In addition, when youth were engaged in the CFSR self-assessment process, they reported that they would prefer to have open discussions and decision-making opportunities with staff about their placement options and permanency goals.

The Statewide Assessment also notes some challenges with regards to placement stability. First, there is a lack of placement resources for adolescents and for children with special needs. Second, the Statewide Assessment notes that there are an increased number of children with delinquent backgrounds from the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) that need placements in the DFCS system. Third, the Statewide Assessment reports that children are not consistently transitioned out of intensive treatment services when they no longer need that level of care, and the Level of Care (LOC) system is being redesigned to transition more children into community-based placements.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has taken measures to improve the accuracy of data for all children in care by training caseworkers on child placement data entry practices and initiating monthly data checking processes by data managers. The Statewide Assessment reports that the State is currently analyzing data used in calculations for Measure C-4-3 of XII. Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability by comparing IDS/AFCARS and IDS/Placement Central data and resolving identified inconsistencies. In addition, the State has developed a data clean-up team that will be preparing county offices for data conversion in preparation for the SACWIS/SHINES program.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

___ Strength __X__ 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. The results of this assessment are shown below.

Item 7	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	11	8	24	60
Area Needing Improvement	5	9	2	16	40
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied considerably across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 80 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 55 percent of Fulton County cases and 50 percent of Floyd County cases.

Georgia’s performance in 2005 with regard to the individual measures incorporated in Permanency Composite 3: Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time was the following:

- 29.5 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the fiscal year were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (i.e., adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the fiscal year. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile (29.1 percent) for the dataset used to establish the national standards.
- 95 percent of the children exiting foster care in 2005 who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percent is less than the national median for this measure (96.8 percent) for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- 48.7 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care in 2005 with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percent is slightly higher than the national median of 47.8 percent for the data set used to establish the national standards. For this measure, lower scores indicate more positive performance.

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

- The child’s permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (6 cases).
- The child’s goal was not established in a timely manner nor was it appropriate to the needs of the child (6 cases).
- The goal is not appropriate to the needs of the child, and is not realistic with respect to the potential for achievement (4 cases).

Case review findings pertaining to case goals were as follows:

- 9 children had a single goal of adoption.
- 6 children had a single goal of APPLA.
- 21 children had a single goal of reunification (including living with other relatives).
- 4 children had concurrent goals of adoption and reunification.
- 1 child had concurrent goals of adoption and APPLA

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

- At the time of the onsite review, 25 of the children in the 40 foster care cases had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- TPR had been filed in 8 of the cases.
- In 8 of the 17 cases for which TPR had not been filed at 15-months, a reason for not filing for TPR was noted. In the 9 remaining cases there was no reason identified for not filing for TPR, although the 15-month criterion had been met.

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Case reviewers found that in 60 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR this item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Establishing appropriate goals for children in foster care in a timely manner appears to be a greater challenge in Floyd County and Fulton County than in Walton County.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders across the sites were of the opinion that reunification is the most common permanency goal for children in the State and that relatives are increasingly sought as permanent placements for children who enter foster care or for children who the agency determines would be likely to enter foster care. A few stakeholders indicated that when the Court has determined that reunification is not possible, the agency no longer provides re-unification services, and an alternate permanency goal is established. Stakeholders pointed out that "non-reunification" is not typically granted when there are no viable permanent options for a child, such as placement with a relative, adoption or APPLA. It was also noted that youth are more likely to have "Live with other Relative" as a goal than reunification or adoption.

Some stakeholders indicated that while concurrent planning is part of the KEYS pre-service training, it is inconsistently used in practice. A few state-level stakeholders indicated that some courts in the State do not support the use of concurrent planning. Stakeholders in Walton County agreed, however, that the agency uses concurrent goals on a case-by-case basis, usually after a goal of reunification has been in place for at least 6 months. Concurrent plans are also used in Walton County when there is a "Fit and Willing Relative" for the child.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's QCR report indicates that appropriate and timely permanency goals were achieved for children in 71 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2004 and 91 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005. According to the State's QCR report, permanency goals were appropriate and timely for children in 224 of the cases reviewed, and neither appropriate nor timely in 21 cases. As stated in the Data Profile, the most common permanency goals for the State in FFY 2005 were reunification for 67.9 percent of children in foster care at any point in time and adoption for 15.3 percent of children in foster care at any point in time.

The Statewide Assessment highlights some current practices which contribute toward the establishment of timely and appropriate permanency goals for children. The State again refers to the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA) for every child who enters the foster care system as well as the Family Team Meetings and the MDTs as methods of practice which address associated issues with permanency. The Statewide Assessment also points out that specialized caseloads were created so that caseworkers could focus on the permanency needs of children who have been in care for 18 months or longer.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there are a few challenges related to the timely and appropriate establishment of permanency goals for children. The State points out that while caseworkers are trained in concepts of concurrent planning, concurrent planning policies do not provide enough direction and are easily misunderstood. The State also indicates that DFCS and the Juvenile Court often disagree on the appropriateness of particular permanency plans and placement alternatives, and this presents challenges in achieving and maintaining permanency for children in the State.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 25 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	9	6	18	72
Area Needing Improvement	3	4	0	7	28
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	13	6	25	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	7	4	15	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

As shown in the table, performance on this item varied considerably across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 69 percent of Fulton County and 50 percent of Floyd County cases.

Georgia's performance in 2005 with regard to the national indicators for timeliness of reunification measures included in Data Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification were as follows:

- 68.5 percent of the reunifications occurred in less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percent is lower than the median of 69.9 percent for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to adoption was 7.3 months. This length of stay is greater than the national median of 6.5 months for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards for composite 1. (Note that lower number of months means higher performance.)
- 51.2 percent of children entering foster care in the last 6 months of 2004 were discharged from foster care to reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile (48.4 percent) for State performance on this measure for the data set used to establish the national standards.
- The State scored better than the 25th percentile for the fourth measure on foster care reentries which is outlined in more detail in the discussion of item 5.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Six of the seven cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item had a goal of reunification, and one case had concurrent goals of living with a relative and adoption.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Case reviewers found that in 72 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. However, all cases in Walton County that were applicable for this item were rated a Strength, and the State met the national standard for Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification. In the State's 2001 CFSR, there was no comparable item. At that time, item 8 pertained to

independent living services. The change for item 8 from an assessment of independent living services to an assessment of timeliness of achieving goals of reunification, guardianship and permanent placement of relatives was not made until FFY 2002.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Various stakeholders identified barriers to achieving timely reunification, guardianship or permanent relative homes for children. Stakeholders in Fulton County noted that there is a lack of consistent transitional planning and visiting for children who are reunifying with their families, and relative placements are not being conducted in a timely manner both within and across counties, leading to delays in stable and/or permanent placements for some children. Walton County stakeholders reported that the lack of substance abuse and mental health services can have a negative impact on achievement of timely reunification.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State’s QCR report indicates that the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives were achieved in 75 percent of the cases reviewed for FFY 2004 and 90 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005. Non-DFCS stakeholders who were surveyed by DFCS indicated that the agency was very effective 8 percent of the time in securing permanent homes in a timely manner for children, and non-DFCS stakeholders felt the agency was somewhat effective 42 percent of the time. DFCS stakeholders felt that the agency was very effective in securing permanent homes for children 18.6 percent of the time and somewhat effective in securing permanent homes for children 55 percent of the time. Both DFCS and non-DFCS stakeholders indicated that the agency was somewhat effective to very effective 90 percent of the time in securing relative placements when it is not possible for children to remain with their parents.

According to the Statewide Assessment, placement with a “Fit and Willing Relative” is sought only when reunification, adoption, and guardianship are not viable options for children in foster care. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the State utilizes the Relative Care Subsidy Program in order to enhance permanent placement options for children with their relatives. The Statewide Assessment reports that the Enhanced Relative Rate is utilized for relatives who provide care for child who are in the custody of DFCS, and the Subsidized Guardianship Payments are available to relative caregivers after a child has been in DFCS custody for 12 months and reunification is unlikely. Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship is available if custody has been transferred from DFCS to relative legal custody, and the relative caregivers’ income is less than \$150,000 per year.

Item 9: Adoption

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 14 of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been made or were being made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results are shown in the table below.

Item 9	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	0	2	3	5	36
Area Needing Improvement	2	4	3	9	64
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	6	6	14	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	14	4	26	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

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

- 20.7 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percent is lower than the national median of 26.8 percent for the data set used to establish the national standards for the composite.
- The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 35 months. This median length of stay is greater than the national median of 32.4 months for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite. (Note that for this measure the lower the number of months, the higher the performance).
- 20.8 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the year. This percent is very close to the national median of 20.2 percent for the data set used to establish the national standard for this measure.
- 11.1 percent of children in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile for this measure of 10.9 percent for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite
- 55 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percent exceeds the 75th percentile for this measure of 53.7 percent for the data set used to establish the national standard for the composite.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 cases when reviewers determined that the State had not made diligent efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. In three of the nine cases there were delays related to incorrect birth certificates for the child, confusion regarding subsidy options for the pre-adoptive parent, or agency delays in acquiring the signed adoption order from the judge. In two cases there were delays in TPR due to 1) the attorney not filing timely and the court not ruling timely and 2) a lack of concerted efforts to locate a potential adoptive resource and file for TPR.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement, and the State did not meet the national standard for Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions. Case reviewers determined that DFCS had made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner in

only 36 percent of the cases. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders indicated that efforts are being made to improve the timeliness of adoptions. Stakeholders in Fulton County indicated that permanency reviewers from the State office will review cases in which children have been in custody for 13 months. Floyd stakeholders noted that there has been an ongoing effort to address the significant backlog of TPR filings which resulted from a large staff turnover in the year prior. Also, DFCS and the Juvenile Court in Floyd County are making an effort to improve coordination. Stakeholders in Walton County noted there were no delays associated with the small number of TPR cases that the agency typically oversees.

Some stakeholders reported that there are delays in adoption finalizations. Floyd County stakeholders indicated that there are a number of TPR cases that are held up due to court continuances related to a) a lack of transportation for birth parents to present in court and b) late public notifications to missing parents. A few stakeholders also indicated that the practice of concurrent planning is inconsistent across the State, and there are some judges across the State who will not file for TPR unless there is an adoptive resource available for a child.

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

Statewide Assessment Information

Based on the State's QCR report on the timeliness of adoption finalizations, 66 percent of the cases were rated a Strength in FFY 2004 and 67 percent were rated a Strength in FY 2005. Of the 24 cases reviewed with a goal of adoption, 8 were rated as an area in need of improvement. The Statewide Assessment reports that in these cases there were delays in the court system, delays in level-of-care decision-making, and a lack of identified adoptive resources for children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State uses adoption as a concurrent goal when reunification is uncertain, and the State does not have an open adoptions policy. The Statewide Assessment points out that the number of children with adoption as a permanency goal has decreased, perhaps in part because of the increased use of relative placements and the targeted financial resources that are available to support these placements. The Statewide Assessment reports that adoption disruptions have decreased from 8 percent to 3 percent in the past three years, and the State identifies post-adoption services and adoption assistance payments as contributing to this reduction. According to the Caregiver Survey, adoptive parents rated the agency at 3.41 (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) in terms of how strongly they agreed that the agency offered and/or provided post-adoption services.

The Statewide Assessment also identifies particular challenges for the State in increasing the number of timely adoptions:

- There is a shortage of adoptive homes to meet the needs of children of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and for children who speak languages other than English.

- There is a lack of adoptive homes for children with intensive physical or mental health needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, TPR requirements could be adhered to more consistently if DFCS and the Juvenile Court coordinated more effectively, if caseworkers were better trained in the documentation of compelling reasons, and if Special Assistant Attorneys General (SAAG) submitted TPR petitions in a timelier manner. Delays in submission of materials to the SAAG for preparation of TPR also results in delays in adoption finalization.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 7 (17.5 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 alternative planned permanent living arrangements. The results are presented in the table below.

Item 10	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	0	2	1	3	42.9
Area Needing Improvement	2	2	0	4	57.1
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	4	1	7	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	8	16	9	33	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Item 10 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was in a long-term, stable placement and was receiving the necessary services and supports to promote a successful transition from foster care to independent living once the child reaches the age of emancipation (2 cases).
- The child had long-term special needs that were being adequately addressed in a specialized setting, and the State was planning to transition the child to a supervised living arrangement at the age of majority (1 case).

Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- There was no formal agreement that the current foster parent would care for the child until the age of majority (3 cases).
- The agency was not providing the child with sufficient services to assist in transitioning to independent living (1 case).

Case review findings pertaining to the age of children with the goal of APPLA were as follows:

- 3 of the 7 cases assessed for this item involved children who were 16 or older (at the beginning of the review period).

- 3 of the 7 cases assessed for this item involved children for whom this goal was established when they were younger than age 16.
- This goal was established for 1 child at age 11.

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 43 percent of the seven cases, reviewers determined that the goal of alternate planned living arrangement was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percent does not meet the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, this item was an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders were of the opinion that emancipation and long-term living arrangements are not being handled consistently across the State. A few stakeholders indicated that across the State there are many eligible youth who are not receiving independent living services. Stakeholders in Walton County noted that there are waiting lists for youth to receive ILP services. Stakeholders in Fulton County noted that youth receive outstanding support from the Independent Living Program.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to Georgia's QCR report, 88 percent of cases reviewed in FFY 2004 and 90 percent of cases reviewed in FFY 2005 were rated a Strength for achieving the permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement. The Statewide Assessment reports the following feedback received from youth in the self-assessment process:

- Youth expressed a desire for more input and discussion with caseworkers on their placement options and permanent living arrangements.
- Youth indicated a desire for Individualized Deposit Accounts (IDA) for housing/homeownership as well as for educational opportunities.
- Youth suggested that they would like successful foster care youth as mentors.
- Youth expressed the desire to receive copies of their important documents such as birth certificates, social security cards and State photo identifications.

According to the Statewide Assessment, of the 25 youth responding to the Care Solutions DFCS stakeholder survey, four youth felt prepared to live on their own in a working environment or a college environment. Six of these youth felt they received educational services when they needed them. Seven out of nine responding youth felt that their caseworker treated them with a great deal of respect.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia policy requires that the goals of permanent living arrangement and emancipation are utilized when the court has ordered "non-reunification," DFCS has determined that there are no other permanency options, and there is a compelling reason documented in the case plan. According to the Statewide Assessment, the child and the substitute caregiver sign an informal, non-legal agreement indicating the intention for the placement to last until the child no longer needs foster care or until the child reaches age 18. The Statewide Assessment reports that for youth who are age 14 or older, a referral is made to the Independent Living Coordinator, and a written transitional living plan is developed with youth, which outlines the needed goals and

services to achieve independence. Youth are eligible for ILP services up to age 21, and youth who are engaged in an approved educational plan are eligible for ILP until age 25.

According to the Statewide Assessment, services provided under ILP include educational funds, vocational/employment preparation, life skills, personal development workshops, and health education, and many others. According to the Statewide Assessment, youth may also qualify for Transitional Living Services which help former foster children with housing costs and household supplies as well as counseling fees. The Statewide Assessment notes that the State is working on improved coordination between Education and ILP Coordinators in order to improve the educational achievement of youth. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that ILP Coordinators are not recruiting enough eligible children to receive independent living services. While the ILP participation rates have increased over the last two years, the Statewide Assessment notes that current rates of participation for youth in foster care are around 50 percent.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	3	7	7	17	43.6
Partially Achieved:	6	12	3	21	53.8
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	1	0	1	2.6
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	20	10	39	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	0	0	1	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 44 percent of the cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 70 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 35 percent of Fulton County cases and 33 percent of Floyd County cases.

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR and was required to address this outcome in a Program Improvement Plan. During the 2001 CFSR, item 12 (placement with siblings) and item 13 (visits with parents and siblings in foster care) were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. In the 2001 CFSR, the key concerns identified for Permanency Outcome 2 were the following:

- A lack of transportation was a barrier to visitation for parents who lived outside of the communities where their children were placed.
- There were an inadequate number of foster homes that could accommodate large sibling groups.
- High caseloads and high staff turnovers adversely impacted facilitation of parents and sibling visits.
- Visits with extended family members were not encouraged.
- Children had inadequate contacts with parents who were incarcerated.
- Children in residential placements had inadequate contact with their parents.
- The need to facilitate stronger relationships between adolescents and their parents was identified.

To address the concerns relevant to items 12 and 13, Georgia implemented the following strategies in the Program Improvement Plan:

- The State provided training material to supervisors and caseworkers outlining appropriate efforts to place siblings together.
- Trainings were provided to foster parents with an emphasis on managing sibling groups.
- The State established a workgroup with the task of ensuring that supervisory reviews included staff efforts to document visitation between siblings, children and parents.
- Visitation Centers were developed in many areas of the State to facilitate frequent and meaningful visitation between parents, children and siblings.

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

Key findings from the 2007

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, item 11 (proximity of foster care placement) was rated as a Strength in the 2007 CFSR. As mentioned, item 12 (placement with siblings) and item 13 (visitation with parents and siblings) were Areas Needing Improvement in the 2001 CFSR, and they remain Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR. Item 14 (preserving connections), item 15 (relative placement), and item 16 (relationship of child in care with parents) were rated as Strengths in the 2001 CFSR, but new concerns regarding these items emerged in the 2007 CFSR. Additional findings were as follows:

- There was insufficient visitation (or other forms of contact) between children in foster care and their parents and siblings. In particular, there was a lack of consistency in promoting visitation between children and their fathers (item 13).
- There was a lack of consistency with regard to supporting children's connections with extended family, siblings, school, and community connections (item 14). Stakeholder interviews indicated that agency policies often inhibit the ability of youth in foster care to preserve connections socially and with extended family members.
- There were insufficient efforts made to place children with their maternal relatives, and in particular, there were insufficient efforts made to place children with paternal relatives (item 15). Stakeholder interviews indicated that while the agency is making an increased effort to place children with relatives, the timeliness of relative searches and the engagement of paternal relatives are lacking.
- There was insufficient support of the parent's relationship while the children were in foster care. While there were inconsistent efforts to promote the bonds of children with both parents, there was less attention to children's bonds with their fathers (item 16).

Despite these concerns, the case reviews also found the following:

- Children were routinely and consistently placed in close proximity to parents or potential permanent caregivers (item 11).
- Children were consistently placed with their siblings, unless there was a valid reason for separating siblings (item 12).

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

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 32 (80 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 interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most current foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 11	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	9	15	8	32	100
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	15	8	32	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	5	2	8	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

In all of the cases reviewed for item 11 reviewers determined that children were placed in the same community or county as their parents or that the children's placements were not in the same community or county, but were still in close proximity to their parents.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 100 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFCS made concerted efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives, or that were necessary to meet special needs. This percent exceeds the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item also was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that children are placed out of county when the resources needed to support the care of the child are not contained within the child's community. Stakeholders noted that children are typically placed outside of their communities when the number of foster homes is insufficient or when the child is in need of a more specialized setting.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia's QCR report indicates that in FFY 2004 children's foster care placements were in proximity to their parents in 61 percent of the cases reviewed. In FFY 2005, children's foster care placements were in proximity to their parents in 95 percent of the cases reviewed. According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia policy guides DFCS in prioritizing foster care placements within the child's community. The Statewide Assessment reports that when children are placed outside of their communities, it is usually because there is a lack of available, therapeutic, placement options in their community or they are placed with a relative who lives outside the child's county or outside the State. The Statewide Assessment cites two foster care and adoptive recruitment pilots that aim to increase the number of available foster and adoptive homes as well as the number of foster homes specifically for adolescents, for children with intensive physical and mental health needs, and for children with sexual abuse issues.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 12 was applicable for 21 (52.5 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 service or safety needs of one or more of the children. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 12	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	4	9	4	17	81
Area Needing Improvement	0	3	1	4	19
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	4	12	5	21	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	6	8	5	19	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

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

- The child was in a placement with all siblings (8 cases).

- The child was in a placement with some siblings and the separation from other siblings was determined to be in the best interests of one of the siblings (5 cases).
- The child was separated from siblings due to the needs of one of the siblings (4 cases).

Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the children were not placed with siblings, and the separation was not deemed to be in the best interests of the siblings (4 cases).

Rating Determination

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 81 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed siblings together in foster care whenever possible and appropriate. This percent does not meet the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders indicated that the agency makes attempts to place siblings together, and when siblings are not together the agency makes efforts to support sibling visitations. Some stakeholders noted that waivers may be obtained in order to support larger sibling groups in lieu of the six child limit for children in any given foster home. However, a few stakeholders noted that some foster homes are caring for overly large numbers of foster children in order to accommodate sibling groups, other foster children, and the foster parents’ own children.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, efforts are made to place siblings together. Siblings are placed separately when there is a lack of available resources or if placement together would be contrary to the developmental, treatment and/or safety needs of one of the children. The Statewide Assessment reports that additional foster homes are needed for larger sibling groups. According to the Statewide Assessment, there are private agencies such as Neighbor to Family that specialize in meeting the needs of large sibling groups who enter foster care, but there is a need for more tailored supports for foster parents who care for large sibling groups. According to the Statewide Assessment, in July 2006 the State initiated the use of a monthly sibling incentive of \$100 per child for foster parents willing to care for sibling groups.

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 (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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	7	6	16	47
Area Needing Improvement	6	11	1	18	53
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	18	7	34	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	2	3	6	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied significantly across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 86 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 39 percent of Fulton County cases and 33 percent of Floyd County cases.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with parents and siblings met the needs of the children. Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the agency a) did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with mothers, fathers and/or siblings and/or b) the agency did not make concerted efforts to locate or contact an absent father or a father in prison to involve him in visitation.

The frequency of visitation with mothers, fathers, and siblings during the period under review is presented in the table below. As indicated in the table, in 72 percent of the cases in which visits with father were applicable, there were no visits during the period under review.

Visitation Frequency for Children in Foster Care (During the period under review)	Mother (Number of cases)	Father (Number of cases)	Siblings in Foster Care (Number of Cases)
Visits occurred at least on a weekly basis	7	1	3
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	10	4	5
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	3	1	3
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	4	1	4
There were no visits during the period under review	7	18	1
Total cases for which item 13 was applicable	31	25	16

Rating Determination

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 47 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the family. This percent is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Ensuring sufficient visitation was a greater challenge in Fulton County and Floyd County than in Walton County. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholder opinions indicated that there are challenges associated with timely and effective visitation between children and youth and their parents and siblings. In Fulton County, for example, stakeholders reported that there is a large volume of parent complaints about their lack of visitation with their children. Stakeholders reported that in Walton County, wrap-around funds to support service provision for visitation between children and parents were depleted, and when this happens foster parents have to bear the burden of bringing children to and from visitation with their parents, creating a difficult dynamic for some foster parents. A few stakeholders in Walton County also reported that youth have requested more contact with their parents and more information about the established rules regarding visitation with their parents. A few stakeholders in Floyd County noted that the agency is effective in planning and facilitating visits between children and their mothers and siblings through the local Family Resource Center which provides transportation and supervised visits at local parks or other community-based settings. However, Floyd County stakeholders noted that the agency is less effective at facilitating children's visits with their fathers.

Statewide Assessment Information

Georgia's QCR report indicates that in FFY 2004 the agency averaged 85 percent achievement in facilitating visitation with parents and siblings in foster care, and in FFY 2005 the agency averaged 94 percent achievement in facilitating visitation with parents and siblings in foster care. The Statewide Assessment notes that in cases where visitation was not sufficient, there was a lack of visitation with fathers due to fathers' lack of involvement with their children or the agency's lack of knowledge of the father's residence. In addition, the State reports that "over 80 percent of the non-DFCS stakeholders indicated that children in foster care "sometimes to often" had visits with their parents and siblings in foster care."

According to the Statewide Assessment, children are required to visit with their parents at least twice a month unless the Court has ordered an alternative schedule. Siblings in separate placements are scheduled for at least one visit per month unless the sibling is placed out of the State, the visit would be harmful to one of the children, or the distance between the children is more than 50 miles and the child is placed with a relative.

According to the Statewide Assessment, as of 2006, twenty-five PSSF Family Access and Visitation Centers were established to serve families in 9 out of 12 Regions in the State. The Statewide Assessment reports that these Centers have improved the frequency and quality of visitation between parents, children and siblings because visitations are being conducted in community-based settings such as schools, churches and resource centers during traditional and non-traditional hours. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that the PSSF Time Limited Reunification Services support quality improvement of visits through child-enrichment activities and parent

coaching, and transportation services are provided to increase access to visitation. The Statewide Assessment points out that there are plans to expand the Family Access and Visitation Centers to additional Regions in the State.

Item 14. Preserving connections

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 14 was applicable for 37 (92.5 percent) of the 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, extended 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	12	7	24	65
Area Needing Improvement	3	7	3	13	35
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	19	10	37	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	1	0	3	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

This item was rated as a Strength in 70 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 62.5 percent of Floyd County cases and 63 percent of Fulton County cases.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections with extended family members and friends through phone contact, visits and placements. In four of the 24 cases that were rated a Strength for this item, there were also efforts made to preserve the child’s connections with school, community and religious and cultural heritage.

Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined *one or more* of the following:

- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to extended family members and siblings who are not in foster care (12 cases).
- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to friends and community (4 cases).
- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to cultural and religious heritage (2 cases).
- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to school (3 cases).
- The agency did not facilitate the child’s connections to a tribal affiliation (1 case).

Rating Determination

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that in 65 percent of the applicable cases DFCS made concerted efforts to ensure that children in foster care maintained their connections to extended family, communities, schools, and cultural heritage. This percent does not meet the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Several stakeholders indicated that connections for youth are not consistently preserved due to restrictive agency policies and untimely permission and approval processes. Stakeholders pointed out that youth do not see extended family members enough, and that there are burdensome approval processes for going on overnight trips in another county or in another state. In addition, a few stakeholders noted that while DFCS requires that friends and extended family visits for youth in custody be approved by the agency, some youth may not disclose information about who they spend time with in order to protect the privacy of their friends and in some cases family members. A few stakeholders further pointed out that youth in group homes need permission for activities such as walking in the neighborhood, going to the movies or making phone calls to family members, and these restrictions inhibit feelings of normalcy.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia's QCR report indicates that in FFY 2004, connections were preserved in 93 percent of the cases reviewed, and in FFY 2005, connections were preserved in 98 percent of the cases reviewed. In the Parent Survey, parents averaged a 2.69 rating (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly disagree) on how strongly they agreed that relatives had visits with their child. Of the youth that responded in the Stakeholder Survey, 2 out of 7 respondents indicated they were able to maintain relationships with relatives "a great deal", and 3 felt that they were able to maintain relationships with other relatives "some".

Item 15. Relative placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 15 was applicable for 37 (92.5 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	8	8	21	57
Area Needing Improvement	4	11	1	16	43
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	19	9	37	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	1	1	1	3	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Performance on this item varied considerably across the three sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 89 percent of Walton County cases, 55.5 percent of Floyd County cases, and 42 percent of Fulton County cases.

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

- The child was placed with relatives (10 cases).
- In these cases, despite diligent efforts made by the agency, the children were not placed with relatives for reasons including the relative’s inability or unwillingness to care for the children (7 cases) and/or their criminal records or history of substantiated child maltreatment (4 cases).

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

- The agency did not make diligent efforts to search for either maternal or paternal relatives (7 cases).
- The agency did make efforts to search for maternal relatives but did not make efforts to search for paternal relatives (7 cases).
- The agency did make efforts to search for paternal relatives but did not make efforts to search for maternal relatives (1 case).
- The agency placed the child with a relative, but the placement is neither stable nor appropriate for the child (1 case).

Rating Determination

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item agreed that DFCS is seeking to locate and secure placements for children with their relatives prior to court involvement or when a child first enters foster care. Some stakeholders pointed out that there are inconsistencies across the State with regard to the timely completion of relative searches and the regularity with which paternal relatives are sought, however.

Statewide Assessment Information

Georgia’s QCR report indicates that in FFY 2004 the agency identified and used relative placements for children entering foster care in 93 percent of the cases reviewed. In FFY 2005, the agency identified and used relative placements for children entering foster care in 92 percent of the cases reviewed. The State reports that difficulties that emerged in this review most often related to a diligent search for maternal relatives but not for paternal relatives. According to the Relative Caregiver Survey, relatives rated the agency a 3.19 (1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) on how strongly they agreed that the agency provides enough financial support to meet the child’s needs and a 3.23 on how strongly they agreed that the agency locates community resources to meet the child’s needs. According to the Statewide Assessment, while the agency has set a goal of placing 30 percent of foster children with relatives, not all stakeholders surveyed by the State were convinced that relative placements are appropriate for children who are in need of care and protection from their parents.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there has been an overall decrease in children who are removed and placed into foster care, and an overall increase in the number of children who are placed with relatives. The Statewide Assessment reports that in 2003 the discharge to relative placement rate was 26.03 percent, and in 2005 the discharge to relative placement rate was 27.36 percent. State policy designates the use of relatives, neighbors and other fictive kin as safety resources in order to increase children’s safety and allow the parent to maintain custody of the child while working with DFCS on the presenting safety issues. According to the Statewide Assessment, a relative placement may be a licensed foster home or a relative home eligible to receive an Enhanced Relative Subsidy. The Statewide Assessment notes that support services are often retained by relative caregivers after the agency has closed the case.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 16 was applicable for 31 (77.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. A case was not applicable if (1) parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, or (2) a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child’s best interests throughout the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation. The results of this assessment are provided in the table below:

Item 16	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	4	5	11	35.5
Area Needing Improvement	7	11	2	20	64.5
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	9	15	7	31	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	1	5	3	9	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	20	10	40	

Item 16 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. Examples of DFCS efforts to promote bonding between the child and parents included providing opportunities for therapeutic situations to help the parent and child strengthen their relationship, encouraging the parent's participation in school activities and extra curricular activities, providing or arranging for transportation so that the parent could attend the child's medical appointments, and facilitating contact with incarcerated parents.

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

- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support positive relationships with the mother or father (11 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child's father (7 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support the relationship with the child's mother (2 cases).

Rating Determination

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 35.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the QCR report indicates that in FFY 2004 the agency maintained the relationship of children in foster care with their parents in 80 percent of the cases reviewed. In FFY 2005, the agency maintained the relationship of children in foster care with their parents in 95 percent of the cases reviewed. According to survey data, ten percent of the non-DFCS stakeholders rated the agency as very effective in maintaining connections, and 22 percent of the DFCS stakeholders rated the agency as very effective in maintaining connections. Fifty-seven and a half percent of the non-DFCS stakeholders felt the agency was somewhat effective in maintaining relationships for children, and 61.1 percent of the DFCS stakeholders felt the agency was somewhat effective in maintaining relationships for children.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFCS makes an effort to facilitate communication between birth parents and foster parents through a child's medical appointments, extra curricular activities, and extended family functions on a case-by-case basis with agency approval when appropriate. The Statewide Assessment also notes two specific challenges in promoting bonds between parents and children. First, the Statewide Assessment highlights challenges in promoting bonds between very young children and their parents

and between children and parents who are incarcerated. Second, the Statewide Assessment reports that some school systems are reluctant to allow non-custodial parents to visit the school or attend school-related activities without DFCS present.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	1	11	11	23	35.4
Partially Achieved:	12	13	5	30	46.2
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	7	1	12	18.4
Total Applicable Cases	17	31	17	65	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 35 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 65 percent of Walton County cases, 35 percent of Fulton County cases, and only 6 percent of Floyd County cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case. The outcome was found to be substantially achieved in 45 percent (18 cases) of the 40 foster care cases compared to 20 percent (5 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases.

Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 in the 2001 CFSR. During the first review, item 17 (assessing and addressing service needs), item 18 (child and family involvement in case planning), item 19 (worker visits with children), and item 20 (worker visits with parents) were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. The key concerns identified in the 2001 CFSR with regard to Well-Being Outcome 1 were the following:

- Needs that were identified in comprehensive assessments were not consistently reassessed to determine that needs were being met.
- Children with multiple needs which required intensive services were not consistently receiving those services.
- Families (particularly fathers) were not actively involved in case planning.
- Services were not tailored to the individual needs of family members.
- Worker visits with families were inconsistent, and this was attributed to high case-loads.

- There was a shortage of foster homes for children who were sexually abused and for children with emotional/behavioral problems.
- There was a lack of mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence services in some communities across the State.

To address these concerns Georgia implemented the following strategies in the Program Improvement Plan:

- In order to improve assessment practices, trainings were provided to DFCS staff and providers on revised First Placement/Best Placement (FP/BP) assessments and on wrap-around services policies and standards.
- In order to increase family involvement in case planning: a) the training curriculum for new caseworkers was revised to place additional emphasis on family-centered practice, b) trainings were offered to SAAG's in order to increase their knowledge about the need for family involvement, and c) the Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS) was enhanced to allow for the tracking of the number of case plans in the system and the number of families participating in case planning.
- In order to increase worker contacts with families, Georgia revised the contact standards between caseworkers and children and caseworkers and parents.

The State did not meet its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, all four items for Well-Being Outcome 1 remain as Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR.

The following concerns resurfaced in the 2007 CFSR:

- There continues to be a lack of consistency in assessing and meeting the services needs of parents (particularly fathers) and children (item 17). As a result, challenges in appropriate matching of needs to services remains an issue in the State. Stakeholder interviews noted that mental health services, therapeutic foster homes, substance abuse services, and transportation are not widely available to meet the service needs of families in all locales across the State.
- Adequate involvement of families in case planning continues to be a challenge for the State. The case review indicates that there is insufficient involvement of parents (particularly fathers) and children in the case planning process. Similarly, stakeholder interviews also indicated that the degree to which parents and children are involved in case planning varies across the State (item 18).
- Adequate caseworker visits with parents continue to be a challenge for the agency. The case review found that there were insufficient caseworker visits with parents, particularly with fathers, and stakeholder interviews were in agreement that efforts to engage fathers in frequent, quality visits are lacking (item 20).

Despite these concerns, the review indicated that in 80 percent of the cases reviewed there are routine, consistent efforts to visit with children monthly and in many cases more than monthly. The case review also found that children in foster care cases were more likely to be visited than children in the in-home cases (item 19).

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review 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 are addressed in later items. The case review results were the following:

Item 17	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	3	12	11	26	40
Area Needing Improvement	14	19	6	39	60
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied considerably across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 65 percent of Walton County cases, 39 percent of Fulton County cases, and only 18 percent of Floyd County cases. Performance also varied somewhat based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 52.5 percent (21 cases) of the 40 foster care cases, compared to 20 percent (5 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 Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that there was either inadequate assessment of needs or inadequate services to meet identified needs.

Specific case review findings for item 17 are shown in the table below. These data suggest that the agency is not effective in meeting the needs of parents and children in the in-home and foster care cases, and in particular the agency is not effectively assessing and meeting the service needs of fathers (21 percent Strength in the in-home cases and 25 percent Strength in the foster care cases).

Item 17: Assessment Needs and Services			
In-Home Cases			
Assessment and Services Evaluations	Number of Cases		
	Strength	ANI	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	14 (58%)	10 (42%)	24
Father's needs assessed and met	5 (21%)	19 (79%)	24
Child's needs assessed and met	15 (60%)	10 (40%)	25
Foster Care Cases			
Assessment and Services Evaluations	Number of Cases		
	Strength	ANI	Total Applicable
Mother's needs assessed and met	22 (69%)	10 (31%)	32
Father's needs assessed and met	6 (25%)	18 (75%)	24
Child's needs assessed and met	34 (85%)	6 (15%)	40
Foster parents' needs assessed and met	24 (80%)	6 (20%)	30

Rating Determination

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 40 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the State had adequately assessed and addressed the service needs of children and parents. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the State's 2001 CFSR. Assessing and meeting the needs of parents and children is a challenge across the State but appears to be particularly challenging for Floyd County.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders identified the Family Team Meetings (FTM) and Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) as effective assessment and case planning practices, and a few stakeholders noted that FTMs enhance youth involvement in case planning. Some stakeholders indicated that the agency does an effective job of assessing and meeting the identified needs of children and parents through the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA). However, other stakeholders noted the following challenges associated with the CCFA process:

- It is not often tailored to the individual family.
- It is not frequently completed in a timely manner by the service provider.
- The assessment information it yields is not always transferred or captured in case planning.
- The assessment process needs to emphasize the identification of youth needs.
- Once service recommendations and referrals are made, there is no consistent follow through on assessing service participation and progress.

Stakeholders also noted that services are not always appropriately coordinated and matched to family needs, perhaps due to a shortage of certain services. Stakeholders identified a lack of transportation, substance abuse treatment (especially for methamphetamine use), therapeutic foster homes, supportive services for foster parents, Spanish speaking services/service providers, and community dentists and doctors as some of the services that are not uniformly available when they are needed. In addition, in Fulton County stakeholders noted that foster parents do not have the fundamental contact with DFCS caseworkers that is necessary to assess their needs, and some service providers in Fulton County are not receiving the number of referrals they would expect to see from the agency.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State QCR report indicates that in meeting the needs and services of children, parents and foster parents, the agency achieved a 76 percent achievement rating for the cases reviewed in FFY 2004. In meeting the needs and services of children, parents and foster parents in FFY 2005, the agency achieved a 69 percent achievement rating for the cases reviewed. The State reports associated difficulties in certain cases with incomplete family assessments, inadequate service provision, and a lack of monitoring of service provision once referrals were made and services had begun. Stakeholder surveys indicate that less than 23 percent of all stakeholders feel that DFCS does a very effective job in the provision of services needed by families, and 39 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders indicated that the agency was not very effective in the provision of services. In the area of building parent capacity through services and supports, 46 percent of DFCS stakeholders and 42 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the agency as very effective.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS utilizes the CCFA assessment process in conjunction with Family Team Meetings and MDT's to bring relevant family members and service providers together to identify family needs and appropriate services. The Statewide Assessment points out that historically, FTMs have not been conducted in a timely manner, but the *Kenny A. Consent Decree* has positively influenced the timeliness of FTMs, particularly in Fulton County. The Statewide Assessment also reports that there are reported problems related to the quality and the completion rates of the CCFA reports within the 30 days required, and MDT meetings are reportedly delayed when CCFA assessments are not completed in a timely manner. In the stakeholder survey, at least 50 percent of DFCS and non-DFCS stakeholders indicated that FTMs, in particular, are very effective strategies for improving child outcomes and 10 percent of these stakeholders indicated that FTMs are not very effective.

The Statewide Assessment also reports on service strengths as well as service challenges that impact the ability of the agency to address family's needs. The State reports that the Family Preservation pilot is a new assessment and service provision approach for in-home cases currently being implemented in 10 counties. The Statewide Assessment also notes the value of parent aides and Homestead services in providing services for families. Alternatively, the Statewide Assessment notes that there are an inadequate number of substance abuse treatment programs, independent living services for adolescent parents, affordable homes, and mental health services for children whose behaviors indicate the need for intensive treatment but who do not yet have the qualifying diagnosis for such services. In addition, the Statewide Assessment points out that there are particular challenges in successfully assessing and providing services to families with domestic violence. According to the Statewide Assessment, wrap-around services and after-care services including in-home support services and economic assistance with food and housing are available, although service providers are not available in every part of the State, and funds for these services are usually depleted toward the end of the State fiscal year.

Also, while these services are available, they are not always accessed by families, and DFCS discharge planning meetings and after care visits are not occurring consistently for all children exiting care. Finally, the Statewide Assessment notes that improvements are needed in ensuring that case transfer procedures between CPS Investigations, Family Preservation, and Placement are efficient to ensure that family assessments, service referrals and service monitoring are occurring.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 18 was applicable for 64 (98 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 case planning, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

Item 18	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	1	6	9	16	27
Area Needing Improvement	15	22	6	43	73
Total Applicable Cases	16	28	15	59	
Not Applicable Cases	1	3	2	6	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item indicates significant challenges across all three sites, but particularly so in Fulton and Floyd County. The item was rated as a Strength in 60 percent of Walton County cases, 21 percent of Fulton County cases and 6 percent of Floyd County cases. However, performance on the item did vary somewhat based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 32 percent (11 cases) of the 34 applicable foster care cases and 20 percent (5 cases) of the 25 in-home services cases.

Item 18 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all appropriate parties had actively participated in case planning or that the agency had made concerted efforts to involve them in the case planning. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to involve the mother, father, and/or child (when age appropriate) in the case planning process. Key findings with regard to this item are shown in the table summary below:

Item 18 Summary: Families Involved in Case Planning			
Family Member	Involved	Not Involved	Total Applicable
Mother	35 (62.5%)	21 (37.5%)	56
Father	10 (22%)	36 (78%)	46
Child	17 (53%)	15 (47%)	32

Rating Determination

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 27 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Georgia’s 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders in all three sites discussed their utilization of Family Team Meetings (FTMs), Multidisciplinary Meetings (MDTs), and Citizens Panel Reviews/Judicial Reviews as mechanisms for involving families in case planning. Also, stakeholders in Floyd County and Walton County indicated that efforts are made to include parents and youth in case planning.

While most stakeholders agreed that case plans are being developed for children, stakeholders from the State and Fulton County indicated that parents and children are not as involved as they could be in the development of their case plan. Also, some stakeholders in Fulton County indicated that FTMs are inconsistent since the meetings are not always scheduled in a timely manner, and when they are scheduled caseworkers are not always present. Also, as cited by various stakeholders under item 25 in the Systemic Factors section of the report, “case plans are too lengthy, they are inconsistently signed, they often include boiler point language, and they may contain standardized service requirements which may not be particularly relevant to the individual needs of the family.”

Statewide Assessment Information

The State QCR report indicates that in involving the child and family in case planning, the agency averaged 65 percent achievement for the cases reviewed in FFY 2004 and 70 percent for the cases reviewed in FFY 2005. For those cases where there were identified areas in need of improvement, the Statewide Assessment reports that many were CPS cases containing case plans that had not been reviewed or discussed with families, and many lacked a parent’s signature or any other indication of parent involvement in plan development. In several instances, the Statewide Assessment notes that the initial case plans were not developed within 3 months, and there was little evidence that interpreters were used in developing case plans with families for whom English is not their first language. In the Parent and Caregiver survey, the Statewide Assessment reports that parents felt that the agency did not adequately address their progress on case plans, and 40 percent of the parents also indicated there were services and or supports they needed but did not receive. According to the Statewide Assessment, of the 8 youth responding to the stakeholder survey 5 felt they had input in their case plan “some” to “a great deal”.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 19 was applicable for all 65 foster care cases. In conducting the assessment of 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	13	24	15	52	80
Area Needing Improvement	4	7	2	13	20
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

This item was rated as a Strength in 88 percent of Walton County cases, 77 percent of Fulton County, and 76 percent of Floyd County cases. Performance on the item did vary based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 87.5 percent (35 cases) of the 40 foster care cases and 68 percent (17 cases) 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 Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (8 cases).
- The caseworker did not conduct visits with the child during the period under review (3 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child, and the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (2 cases).

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

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Child	Foster Care Cases (Number and Percent)	In-Home Services Cases (Number and Percent)
Visits occurred on at least a weekly basis	1 (2.5%)	0
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	11 (27.5%)	7 (28%)
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	24 (60%)	15 (60%)
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	3 (7.5%)	2 (8%)
Visits never occurred	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)
Total cases	40	25

Rating Determination

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 80 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders reported that caseworkers must see children at a minimum of once per month or if children are in a residential treatment program, contacts must occur quarterly. Stakeholders agreed that the degree to which visits occur depends upon the caseworker, but generally, most stakeholders felt that DFCS staff are seeing children as required.

Stakeholders in Fulton County reported that as a result of the *Kenny A.* Consent Decree, caseworkers must see children a minimum of two visits per month, but in many cases, caseworkers are seeing children at least four times per month in their foster homes due to placement disruptions or crisis situations. Fulton County stakeholders reported that the consent decree has mandated a decrease in caseloads, but this has not occurred yet, and the combination of high case loads and frequent contact requirements has negatively impacted the quality of visits and the prioritization of other case work needs.

A few stakeholders reported that youth in residential facilities would like to see their caseworkers more than the required 4 times per year, particularly if they used to see their caseworkers once a month or more. Stakeholders also reported that some youth feel that their caseworkers do not consistently return phone calls.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia's QCR report indicates that in 80 percent of the cases reviewed caseworkers made appropriate contact with children in FFY 2004, and in 65 percent of the cases reviewed caseworkers made appropriate contact with children in FFY 2005. In the cases identified as having areas in need of improvement, there were 3-month gaps in caseworker visits, and visits did not focus on achievement of case-plan goals. The Statewide Assessment points out that the lack of contacts may be associated with staff turnover and subsequent vacant caseloads.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the risk level that is assigned during the investigation is used to determine the minimal monthly contacts required with the family. Low-risk cases require monthly visits with parents and children, moderate risk cases require 1 monthly visit with children and 2 with parents, and high risk cases require 1 monthly visit with children and 3 with parents. According to the Statewide Assessment, risk level and caseworker contacts can be reassessed with supervisory approval. The Statewide Assessment also reports that Homestead counselors and accredited pastoral counselors provide direct, crisis-intervention services, and their contacts with parents can be substituted for parent contacts during periods of crisis.

In addition, the Statewide Assessment also notes the following difficulties associated with caseworker contacts with families:

- CPS documentation requirements are burdensome and inhibit more frequent contact with families.
- There is no automated process for monitoring caseworker contacts so placement supervisors are using manual processes.
- Contact standards have not been established for the Family Preservation Services Pilot which is currently operating in 19 counties, and this creates confusion on how to monitor the contacts associated with these cases.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 20 was applicable for 57 (88 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. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker’s face-to-face contact with the children’s mothers and fathers was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well being. The results of this assessment are presented in the table below:

Item 20	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	2	6	9	17	30
Area Needing Improvement	14	20	6	40	70
Total Applicable Cases	16	26	15	57	
Not Applicable Cases	1	5	2	8	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied considerably across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 60 percent of Walton County cases, compared to 23 percent of Fulton County, and only 12.5 percent of Floyd County cases. There was little variation, however, based on

the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 34 percent (11 cases) of the 32 applicable foster care cases and 24 percent (6 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 Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined *one or more* of the following:

- Visits with the father were not of sufficient frequency or quality (32 cases).
- Visits with the mother were not of sufficient frequency or quality (18 cases).
- Visits with the mother were of sufficient frequency, but not quality (5 cases).
- Visits with the father were of sufficient frequency, but not quality (3 cases).
- Visits with the child’s guardian were not of sufficient frequency or quality (2 cases).

Additional information from the case reviews is provided below for frequency of contact based on the type of case:

Typical Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Parents	Foster Care Cases		In-Home Services Cases	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Visits occurred on a weekly basis	1	0	0	0
Visits occurred less than weekly, but at least twice a month	7	0	9	4
Visits occurred less than twice a month, but at least once a month	13	4	6	3
Visits occurred less frequently than once a month	6	4	6	6
There were no visits during the period under review	5	15	3	9
Not Applicable	8	17	1	3
Total Applicable Cases	32	23	25	25

Rating Determination

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 30 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State’s first CFSR this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders reported that the expectation for parent contact is monthly but that waivers are available so that caseworkers do not have to make face-to-face contact with parents who are staying in a shelter, incarcerated or living in another county. Phone contact is required with these parents, however. A few stakeholders pointed out that frequent quality visits with birth fathers are lacking.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia’s QCR report indicates that in 63 percent of the cases reviewed, caseworkers made appropriate contact with parents in FFY 2004, and in 41 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005, caseworkers made appropriate contact with parents. The QCR report identified the following reasons for the lack of parent contact in the cases reviewed:

- Although the home was a two-parent home, only one birth parent was visited.
- Diligent search efforts were not done in cases where parent’s whereabouts were unknown.
- There were periods of no contacts documented.
- Visits with parents were not of sufficient quality to address case plan goals.
- Often gaps in documentation for several months existed.

According to the Parent and Caregiver survey, parents rated the agency as an overall 3.11 (1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree) on how strongly they agreed with whether their caseworker met with them at least monthly. CPS Parents (3.47) rated the agency higher than Diversion (3.08) and Placement Parents (2.75) in how strongly they agreed with whether their caseworker met with them at least monthly. The Statewide Assessment also reports that Placement Parents (3.36) agreed that caseworkers and training were useful in assisting them to be a better parent, compared to Diversion Parents (2.92) and CPS Parents (3.08).

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:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	7	14	7	28	77.8
Partially Achieved	0	1	1	2	5.5
Not Achieved	3	3	0	6	16.7
Total Applicable Cases	10	18	8	36	
Not Applicable Cases	7	13	9	29	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. Reviewers determined that 78 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as substantially achieved for this outcome. This percentage does not meet the required 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The number of applicable foster care cases was much greater than the number of applicable in-

home cases for this outcome. However, the outcome was substantially achieved in 90 percent (26 cases) of the 29 applicable foster care cases suggesting that educational needs were not consistently addressed in the in-home cases.

Key findings of the 2001 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR. Key concerns from the 2001 CFSR were identified as follows:

- Caseworkers were not conducting educational assessment of children’s needs in some of the cases reviewed.
- There was inadequate follow-up on educational needs of children on cases transferred to other counties.
- In Fulton County educational needs were not consistently addressed in case plans.

To address the concerns relevant to item 21, Georgia implemented the following strategies in the Program Improvement Plan:

- CPRS functionality was enhanced requiring caseworkers to gather more information about a child’s educational needs and case plan goals once the child has entered foster care.
- First Placement Best Placement (FPBP) assessment trainings were provided to staff, providers, judges, foster and adoptive parents statewide on the use of the information collected to meet the educational needs of children and families.

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

Key Findings in the 2007 CFSR

Similarly to the 2001 CFSR, the State continues to experience challenges in ensuring that children’s educational needs are met. The difficulties that emerged in the case review pertained to unaddressed educational needs involving truancy, developmental disability assessments, school enrollment and tutoring needs. Stakeholder interviews indicated that while there are effective local collaborations between DFCS and education, children with changes in foster care placements are not consistently given the opportunity to remain in their schools.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 21 was applicable for 36 (55 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 services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment are provided below.

Item 21	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	7	14	7	28	78
Area Needing Improvement	3	4	1	8	22
Total Applicable Cases	10	18	8	36	
Not applicable	7	13	9	29	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Item 21 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child’s educational needs were appropriately assessed and services were provided, if necessary. Examples of ways in which DFCS ensured that children’s educational needs were met include a) the agency ensured that the child was in the right educational setting to meet their needs, b) appropriate referrals were made to Babies Can’t Wait to assess delays and developmental needs, and c) tutoring services were provided. Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in eight cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not addressed educational issues related to truancy, developmental disability assessments, school enrollment and tutoring needs.

Rating Determination

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 78 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. This percent is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the 2001 CFSR, this item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Note: The requirements for this item are different because there is only one item assessed under the outcome. For the other outcomes, an item rating of 90 percent is considered sufficient for a strength rating because there are multiple items within the outcome, and they involve fewer cases than those incorporated in the overall outcome rating. This is not the case for Item 21. Therefore, for this item, the rating of Area Needing Improvement is based on the same criteria as the rating of substantial conformity.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item pointed out positive efforts and associated challenges with meeting the educational needs of children. Stakeholders in Floyd County indicated that there are strong collaborations between the schools and DFCS. Stakeholders identified the “Drop-Out Prevention” program, the Diversion program, and the Truancy Treatment Team as effective educational interventions. Also a few stakeholders reported that foster parents are very involved with teacher-parent conferences and IEP meetings, and caseworkers work closely with school counselors.

Alternatively, stakeholders in Fulton County suggested that the educational needs of children are not prioritized, and the biggest challenge relates to foster children who change placements and are not given the opportunity to remain in their prior schools. A few stakeholders noted that while the schools will provide transportation for these youth to remain in their schools upon placement, DFCS may choose instead to enroll children in schools near the home of the foster parent. Children with multiple moves have reportedly had

trouble transferring their educational credits, and their IEPs must often be traced back 2 to 3 schools. In addition, Fulton County stakeholders reported that while there are many services available, educational services are lacking. One private foster care provider has a strong Educational Advocate, but DFCS does not have this, and DFCS foster parents often have difficulties in relaying children's personal information when seeking to enroll them in school. Stakeholders in Walton County noted that the tutoring needs of youth are assessed but that some youth have had to change schools because of placement changes.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia's QCR report indicates that in 86 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2004 the educational needs of children were met, and in 81 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005, the educational needs of children were met. The agency cited the following reasons for educational needs not being met in the cases reviewed:

- Educational needs were identified in the investigation, but not addressed in the ongoing work with the family.
- Recommendations from the CCFA were not followed or addressed.
- Truancy issues were not addressed.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the CCFA requires that the educational needs of children 5 years and older must be assessed to determine the educational needs of the child. The Statewide Assessment indicates that legislation passed in 2006 requires that all children in foster care, including children living in residential treatment facilities, must be enrolled in public school. The Statewide Assessment also reports that children should be enrolled in school within 2 days of foster care placement, and efforts must be made to keep children in their community school if possible. The Statewide Assessment reports that it is required that information about the educational needs of foster children must be shared with the child's caregiver and the school to ensure that all involved parties understand the child's strengths and needs. Further, caseworkers must ensure that children receive educational supports and services such as special education, tutoring, pre-kindergarten, or summer school courses as needed.

In the stakeholder survey, 32.5 percent of the non-DFCS stakeholders indicated that the agency was not very effective in ensuring that the educational needs of children in foster care were met, compared to 11.9 percent of the DFCS stakeholders. In the Caregiver/Parent survey, 11.6 percent of caregivers and 6.9 percent of the parents indicated the agency failed to provide adequate supports around needed programs inclusive of tutoring, after school programs, mentors or camps. Parents also reported that there was a need for resources to support children's involvement in extracurricular and recreational activities. Through the Metro Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative (MAYOI) meeting with youth, the Statewide Assessment reports that youth expressed the following with regards to their educational needs:

- Youth need greater flexibility to be able to participate in school activities such as proms, clubs and sports.
- Youth requested that a statewide policy make clear which educational opportunities the State will provide.
- Youth do not want to move or change schools when they are close to finishing school.
- Youth need more internships, jobs, and career exploration opportunities.

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:					
	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Substantially Achieved:	8	20	11	39	68.4
Partially Achieved:	1	2	3	6	10.5
Not Achieved or Addressed:	6	4	2	12	21.1
Total Applicable Cases	15	26	16	57	
Not Applicable:	2	5	1	8	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Georgia did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 68 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. Performance on this outcome varied considerably across sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 77 percent of Fulton County cases, 69 percent of Walton County cases, and 53 percent of Floyd County cases. Performance did not vary based on the type of case reviewed. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 75 percent (30 cases) of the 40 applicable foster care cases and 71 percent (12 cases) of the 17 applicable in-home services cases.

Key Concerns from the 2001 CFSR

Georgia was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in the 2001 CFSR. During the first review, items 22 (physical and dental health) and item 23 (mental health) were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. During the 2001 CFSR, key concerns identified with regard to Well-Being Outcome 3 were the following:

- There was a lack of dentists who accept Medicaid.
- There were inadequate numbers of health care providers and inadequate mental health resources in the rural areas.
- In the larger county there were concerns that health problems of children in foster care were not always addressed.
- Routine mental health assessments were not consistently conducted, and identified mental health needs were not consistently addressed.

Georgia implemented the following strategies in a Program Improvement Plan:

- Georgia collaborated with the Division of Public Health, The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Department of Community Health (DCH) to ensure that foster children have access to medical providers and receive appropriate health care in their communities.
- Training was provided to the Division of Public Health staff on identification of child abuse and neglect.

- Trainings were provided to DFCS staff and providers on revised First Placement/Best Placement (FP/BP) assessments and on the use of the information collected to meet the physical and mental health and dental needs of children and families.
- The CPRS was enhanced to track mental health assessments and mental health services information.
- The State revised Performance Management Plans (PMP) of supervisors and caseworkers to ensure that staff focus on mental health needs of children and families as emphasized in the FP/BP assessment.
- The Qualitative Case Review (QCR) process was used to track the quality of mental health services provided.
- The State implemented a Level of Care System across the State to create placement services to address the individual needs of children.

The State did not meet its target goals for this outcome by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2007 CFSR

The findings of the 2007 CFSR were similar to those of the 2001 CFSR, as item 22 (children’s physical health needs) and item 23 (children’s mental health needs) were both rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Findings from the 2007 CFSR are as follows:

- Since the 2001 CFSR, the State has made improvements in routinely meeting the health needs of children in foster care, although meeting the health needs of children was a greater challenge in the in-home cases than in the foster care cases. Stakeholders did note that there continues to be a lack of dental health care, particularly orthodontic providers, across the State.
- The State continues to struggle to meet the mental health needs of children, and meeting the mental health needs of children was a greater challenge in the in-home cases than in the foster care cases. Stakeholder interviews attributed the difficulty to a shortage of certain services as well as ongoing changes to the mental health/behavioral health system. According to stakeholders, there is a shortage of substance abuse services, intensive mental health services, residential treatment, therapeutic foster care, and transportation services across the State.

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

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	8	21	11	40	81.6
Area Needing Improvement	5	3	1	9	18.4
Total Applicable Cases	13	24	12	49	
Not Applicable Cases	4	7	5	16	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

Performance on this item varied considerably across sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 92 percent of applicable Walton County cases and 87.5 percent of applicable Fulton County cases, compared to 61 percent of Floyd County cases.

Item 22 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's health needs (medical and dental) were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 cases where the child, parent, foster parent or medical specialist had identified the child's need for medical services, and these needs were not met. In 2 cases, DFCS did not ensure that the child's health needs were adequately assessed. In one case, DFCS did not ensure that the child's Medicaid card was activated, and the child went without a Medicaid card for over a year, despite the fact that the child and foster parent could not afford to pay for health services up front. In another case, the child was reunified upon leaving a residential treatment facility, and the agency did no further assessment of the child's health or medication needs. For this item, five of the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement were foster care cases and four were in-home services cases.

Rating Determination

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. This percent does not meet the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. In the State's 2001 CFSR this item was rated an Area Needing Improvement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

A few stakeholders in Fulton County indicated the Dental Van is effective in providing dental services for families in the metro area. However, the majority of stakeholders commenting on this item identified challenges associated with meeting the health needs of children. A few stakeholders indicated that youth are not currently eligible to receive Medicaid beyond age 18. If youth sign themselves out of care, they have the option of purchasing low-cost insurance between the ages of 18-21, but they may not be prepared to cover the cost of their health insurance. Several stakeholders also noted that there are not enough orthodontists who will accept Medicaid, and these dental needs are not consistently addressed for youth. In addition, a few stakeholders in Fulton County indicated that acquiring activated Medicaid cards is a challenge, and DFCS foster parents do not consistently receive the health information of the children in their care.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia’s QCR report indicates that in 86 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2004 the health needs of children were met, and in 77 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005, the health needs of children were met. In cases rated a strength, children received regular medical examinations, dental checks ups, and immunizations. In cases where there were areas in need of improvement, the State reported that identified dental needs were not met, physical health of the children was not assessed despite medical neglect, and Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA) recommendations for medical services were not followed. According to the Statewide Assessment, the stakeholder survey results indicate that 80 percent of DFCS and non-DFCS stakeholders feel the agency is somewhat to very effective in meeting children’s physical health needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia policy requires that all children entering foster care have a health check (EPSDT) within 10 days of their placement. Initial health checks and ongoing periodic health screenings may be obtained at the local health department or with approved health check providers. The Statewide Assessment indicates that information concerning the child’s initial health status and needs should be obtained no later than 30 days from removal, and developmental assessments are required within 30 days of the health screen when developmental delays are identified. In addition, children, under the age of three are referred to Babies Can’t Wait (BCW) for health assessments. According to the Statewide Assessment, County Public Health Offices work with DFCS caseworkers to schedule check-ups as required and maintain records of children’s routine health needs. The Statewide Assessment further notes that all the health needs of DFCS foster children will eventually be tracked by the Division of Community Health (DCH).

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 23 was applicable for 40 (61.5 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	Floyd	Fulton	Walton	Total Number	Percent
Strength	5	13	5	23	57.5
Area Needing Improvement	6	6	5	17	42.5
Total Applicable Cases	11	19	10	40	
Not Applicable Cases	6	12	7	25	
Total Cases	17	31	17	65	

The item was rated as a Strength in 68 percent of applicable Fulton County cases, 50 percent of applicable Walton County cases, and 45 percent of Floyd County Cases. Performance also varied based on the type of case. The item was rated as a Strength in 64 percent (18 cases) of the 28 applicable foster care cases, compared to 42 percent (5 cases) of the 12 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 Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Mental health needs were neither assessed nor addressed (9 cases).
- Mental health needs were assessed but not met (8 cases).

Ratings Determination

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57.5 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. This percent is less than the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength. This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Georgia's 2001 CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item agreed that mental health services are not sufficient to meet the needs of children and families. Stakeholders did note that home-based mental health services including wrap-around services and Behavioral Link (public emergency mental health) are available to provide crisis stabilization both in the home and in foster care settings. However, these services are not available in all locations in the State, and a few stakeholders reported that current emphasis is on short-term and crisis-oriented mental health, despite the fact that preventative mental health is also a need. Some stakeholders reported that the local mental health system provides services in a more time-limited manner now that the system has transitioned to fee for service, and this does not meet the needs of children and families who need more long-term services. In addition, several stakeholders pointed out that families must travel long distances for services, and the capacity and quality of local mental health centers is reportedly compromised by the limited services provided and the lack of needed mental health providers in any given area of the State.

A few stakeholders also reported that the State's commitment to transitioning children from long-term residential treatment into the community is concerning considering the lack of mental health resources available throughout the State. In addition, a few stakeholders in Fulton County indicated that while private foster care providers who provide therapeutic foster care receive psychological evaluations for each child, DFCS providers who are not licensed to provide therapeutic care are often called upon to care for these children without psychological health information.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia's QCR report indicates that in 90 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2004, the mental health needs of children were met, and in 72 percent of the cases reviewed in FFY 2005, the mental health needs of children were met. Where cases were rated a strength, DFCS ensured that counseling occurred, psychological evaluations were completed, and medications were administered. Where difficulties were identified, the QCR reports that needs for mental health assessments, counseling, domestic violence assessments and medications were identified but not provided. According to the stakeholder surveys, 85 percent of DFCS stakeholders feel the agency is somewhat to very effective in meeting children's mental health needs, and 46.1 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders feel that the agency is not very effective in meeting the mental health needs of children in foster care.

The Statewide Assessment reports that CCFA providers are required to conduct a Developmental Assessment within 30 days of placement for children in foster care under age four and a mental health assessment within 30 days for children in foster care age four and older. The State reports that mental health services, substance abuse treatment services, counseling, anger management, and other services can be offered within a child's home, a relative home, or a foster care setting.

SECTION B: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

This section of the CFSR Final Report provides information regarding the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors examined during the CFSR. Information for the items included in each systemic factor comes from the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. A score for substantial conformity is established for each systemic factor. In addition, information is provided regarding the State’s performance on each systemic factor for the State’s first CFSR. If the systemic factor was part of the State’s Program Improvement Plan, the key concerns addressed in the Program Improvement Plan and the strategies for assessing those concerns are noted, as well as any changes in ratings that occurred as a result of the State’s second CFSR.

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System. This systemic factor was not in substantial conformity in the initial CFSR, and the State was required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. Findings for the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

Key Findings from the 2001 CFSR

The following concerns were identified with regard to the Statewide Information System systemic factor:

- The data in the State’s predominant information system, the Internal Data System (IDS), was considered unreliable because the system was difficult to use, and county staff did not consistently input information.
- Rather than using the State’s information system, caseworkers and supervisors were using manual systems to track children’s data.
- Case managers and supervisors were not routinely able to interpret and utilize the data in the system.

Georgia developed 27 Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies to address challenges associated with the information system, the majority of which pertained to SACWIS development. The strategies that were related to SACWIS development were negotiated out of the Program Improvement Plan, and the remaining work focused on improving IDS as follows:

- A web-based training component was developed and training was provided to caseworkers and supervisors.
- Communication and reporting strategies were developed to address data errors.
- Additional management tracking tools were created using available data.
- One of the State’s legacy systems was merged into IDS.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because the State is operating a statewide information system that can readily identify child demographic characteristics as well as the status, location and permanency goals of children in the foster care system. In the State's first CFSSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the primary information system that DFCS uses for tracking child demographic characteristics, status, location, and permanency goals is the Internal Data System (IDS). The AFCARS component of IDS contains information on all AFCARS elements, while the Placement Central component tracks the child’s foster care placements. Case plans for children in foster care are developed by using the statewide Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS). The CPRS captures information related to permanency plans, mental and physical health, and education. The Statewide Assessment notes that juvenile court judges have access to case plans through a web server, but this internet component is not being utilized in all judicial circuits.

According to the Statewide Assessment, IDS produces a variety of county-level reports that track case-plan deadlines, court order expirations, caseworker workload, and case histories. The Statewide Assessment notes that county caseworkers, administrators, directors and field specialists have access to IDS Online information for county case-level data as well as historical information on cases in other counties. All counties and regions also receive monthly Outcome Measure reports for tracking performance. In addition, county managers may request additional specialized data and trend reports to improve their case-management practices, and these reports are generated by the Evaluation and Reporting Section.

The Statewide Assessment reports that Georgia is developing a SACWIS called SHINES which will be rolled out beginning in July 2007 and throughout 2008. According to the Statewide Assessment, SHINES will have many expanded features including a case management system and a client history/resource information search function. The Statewide Assessment points out that the new system will consolidate case management information and eliminate information duplication. In addition, it will establish eligibility interfaces for programs across the State to address the significant problems the State has had in the past in sharing information.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 15 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders agreed that the State is operating an information system that can readily identify child demographic characteristics as well as the status, location and permanency goals of children in the foster care system. According to stakeholders, the State uses IDS, ADAMS, CPRS, and Placement Central to maintain information on children and families who are involved with DFCS. IDS maintains AFCARS-and NCANDS-related data, ADAMS maintains adoption information, CPRS is used for case planning, and Placement Central maintains essential information on children in foster care.

In addition, stakeholders also commented on the quality of the data that is captured in the information systems. Some stakeholders reported that the State has engaged in efforts to improve the quality of the placement data, for instance, by a) comparing systems and verifying that information is accurately reflected in all systems and b) by organizing technological clean-up efforts when errors are found. Other stakeholders identified some general data quality issues without discussing the specifics of the data elements affected. For instance, a few stakeholders indicated that there are usability challenges related to IDS and to the multiple system requirements and, as a result, data quality may vary across counties. Stakeholders in Fulton County reported that there are data integrity issues, but stakeholders in Walton County indicated that data quality is consistent. Walton County stakeholders attributed the consistency of data quality to quality checks by supervisors and administrators who review both caseworker data entry and State reports for inaccuracies. Although stakeholder opinions indicated that there are inconsistencies in data quality across counties, some stakeholders pointed out that Georgia's new SHINES system will centralize information from the multiple systems. It will also improve the usability of the statewide information system, the consistency of the data, and the access to eligibility information through interfaces with TANF, Child Support, and the courts. Stakeholders reported that once the system conversion occurs, IDS will predominantly be used for maintaining historical information.

Stakeholders' comments were generally consistent with the Statewide Assessment with regard to the reports that the system produces. A few stakeholders indicated that there are many state and local reports which provide statistical data for performance analysis and that counties receive report summaries from the State with information related to case loads and diversion cases. Also, counties can receive reports on issue specific data such as repeat maltreatment. Stakeholders in Floyd County reported that the system also generates summaries used for local management practices in monitoring case loads and preparing for internal case reviews, for example.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Georgia is not in substantial conformity with the factor of the Case Review System. This systemic factor was found to be in substantial conformity in the State’s 2001 CFSR, and the State was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. The following items were rated as a Strength in the 2001 CFSR, but are rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR:

- Item 26, pertaining to the process that ensures that there is a 6-month periodic review of the status of each child by a court or administrative review.
- Item 27, pertaining to the process that ensures that each child in foster care has a 12-month permanency hearing.
- Item 28, pertaining to the process that ensures that termination of parental rights proceedings are in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.
- Item 29, pertaining to the process that ensures that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers are notified and have an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of a) the lack of joint case-plan development between DFCS and parents, children and youth and b) problems noted with the quality of the case plans. Ratings from the case review (item 18) reveal that there is a need for the State to focus on engaging parents and children in the case planning process, and in particular, there is a need to focus on engaging fathers in the case planning process. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia policy directs that initial case plans must be completed within 30 days of a child's entry into foster care and within 90 days of case opening for in-home, ongoing case-management. Case plans for children in foster care are reviewed and updated within 90 days and every 6 months thereafter. Case plans for in-home, ongoing cases are referred to as Family Plans, and these must be reassessed every 90 days. The Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS) is used to develop a case plan for children in foster care, and it captures placement information, permanency goals, visitation with parents and siblings, educational needs, and physical and mental health needs. According to the Statewide Assessment, parents, caseworkers and supervisors must sign case plans, and parents must be provided with a copy of the case plan. Reported State efforts and/or mechanisms to involve families in case planning include the following:

- Utilization of a family-centered model which emphasizes family inclusiveness in decision making.
- Family Team Meetings (FTM) and Multidisciplinary Team Meetings (MDT), which encourage parent participation. FTM policy requires that parents be given a 5-day written invitation to attend.
- Citizen Panel Reviews and Judicial Reviews in which notification is typically given by the Juvenile Court

The Statewide Assessment reports that while parent participation is expected at Family Team Meetings and MDT's, there is a significant lack of parental attendance and participation. The Statewide Assessment points out that family participation at FTMs is inconsistent, children who are old enough are not regularly included, and FTMs are more often used to respond to a crisis rather than for short-and long-term case planning. The Statewide Assessment also notes that according to Quality Assurance reviews, parents and children are not often involved in the development of their case plans. As far as challenges with the case planning system itself, the Statewide Assessment reports that staff feel the case plan is lengthy and cumbersome to use and likely intimidating to parents. Also, judicial stakeholders have noted that the CPRS would be more user friendly if specific case plans could be more easily accessed for review or if party relevant goals and activities could be more efficiently culled from the plan.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 26 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders in all three sites discussed their use of Family Team Meetings (FTMs), Multidisciplinary Meetings (MDTs), and Citizen Panel Reviews as mechanisms for facilitating parent and child involvement in case planning. According to stakeholders, the FTMs typically occur within 3-9 days of a child's placement, and at these meetings information is gathered from family members in order to develop the case plan. MDT meetings are held within 25 days of a child's placement, and these meetings are used to clarify goals and to present findings from the assessment process to those involved in a foster care case. In addition, stakeholders noted that either Citizen Panel Reviews or Judicial Reviews are held every six months for children in foster care for the purpose of reviewing the child's case plan. In Floyd County, stakeholders noted that parents are given a letter at the 10-day hearing by the judge that outlines a date and time for the parent to meet with their caseworker in order to develop the case plan.

However, while there are systems in place that may be used to facilitate parent and child involvement in case planning, stakeholders from the State, Fulton County, and Floyd County indicated that parents, children and youth are inconsistently involved in the development of their case plan. Alternatively, stakeholders in Walton County indicated that parents and youth are involved in case planning.

In addition, the majority of stakeholders across the sites pointed out that the quality of case plans is not adequate. Stakeholders reported that case plans are inconsistently signed and may not be routinely updated. Stakeholders from Walton and Fulton Counties suggested that case plans contain standardized service requirements which may not be tailored to the individual needs of the family, and a number of stakeholders from Fulton County reported that case plans predominantly utilize “boiler plate” language which parents and children may not understand.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement due to inconsistencies across the State in the timeliness and effectiveness of the review process. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to DFCS policy, the case-plan status of each child must be reviewed within 90 days of the dispositional order and within six months of a child coming into custody. The Statewide Assessment notes that from the point in time of either of these reviews, all subsequent reviews are held in six-month intervals. According to the Statewide Assessment, counties across the State ensure that these hearings are occurring in one of two ways, depending upon the county. Counties utilizing the Citizen Panel Reviews have a Panel Coordinator that tracks and notifies counties and review parties of scheduled review dates. Counties that use Judicial Reviews depend upon DFCS or court staff to notify all parties of scheduled hearings. Some counties use both mechanisms to review the case goals of children in custody.

The Statewide Assessment notes two factors that hinder the timely completion of reviews. First, counties use AFCARS data to track review requirements, but caseworkers may not consistently enter AFCARS data, and this may adversely impact timely scheduling. Also, while all courts have access to case plans through the web server, not all courts are using this network to acquire case plan information.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 25 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that the mechanism for periodically reviewing cases varies by county.

Stakeholders in both Fulton and Floyd Counties reported that 6-month reviews are conducted through Citizen Panel Reviews (CPR), while Walton County stakeholders reported that a judicial review process is used. A few stakeholders noted that there is a review appeals process for instances in which the panel or the parents disagree with a review outcome. According to stakeholders in Floyd and Walton Counties, reviews are both timely and substantive. In Floyd County, the initial CPR is held within 3 months of the child entering care and every 6 months thereafter, and in Walton County the reviews are consistently held by the judge at 90 days and every 6 months thereafter.

According to stakeholders in Fulton County, there is a review process in place which is initiated by notification from the Juvenile Court to DFCS. DFCS selects cases for review, and then transfers relevant information to the CPR who notifies participants. Although CPR members are reportedly very involved in making recommendations to the court, many stakeholders indicated that a) reviews are not happening consistently, b) there have been an increasing number of reviews that have had to be postponed due to lack of caseworker attendance, and c) when reviews do occur they are not productive. Stakeholders reported that caseworkers are often not in attendance or are ill prepared when they are present for reviews, and some stakeholders attributed this to high levels of staff turnover in Fulton County.

Various stakeholders also indicated the following concerns with the current review process:

- The CPR system could be more consistently strengthened across the State. For example, CPR forms that are used to capture the review information that is shared with the court may not be adequate. As a result, judges may not be receiving the information they need.
- There is some confusion across the State as to whether the commencement date for the 6-month review timeframe is the removal date or the adjudicatory hearing date.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of concerns related to the timeliness and effectiveness of the hearing process in promoting timely permanency for children in foster care across the State. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, permanency goals are selected within 30 days of a child coming into care, and these goals are documented in the case plan. The Statewide Assessment points out that the courts and DFCS regularly review the appropriateness of

permanency goals for children as well as the progress toward achieving those goals. The 12-month review requirement is typically met at 6-month case plan reviews and 12-month custody renewal/extension hearings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that compliance rates with annual permanency hearings are high, particularly when the Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG) who represents the Department has a) adequately addressed the permanency plan in the dispositional hearing or the custody extension/renewal hearing and b) incorporated the permanency plan review and approval language into the supplemental order. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that there is often a lack of consensus between DFCS and the Juvenile Courts on permanency plans, and time constraints often obstruct coordination between DFCS and SAAGs. The Statewide Assessment also notes that there are court continuances associated with parents not being present in court, TPR related delays, and scheduling conflicts due to the private law practices of some SAAGs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia law requires that a permanency hearing must be held prior to the assignment of any goal that does not facilitate the reunification of children with their parents. After a non-reunification plan is submitted to the court, permanency hearings can be held within 30 days.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 20 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders generally agreed that the State has a process in place for conducting 12-month permanency hearings for children in foster care, but stakeholders commenting on this item have different opinions regarding the timeliness of the hearings across the sites. In terms of positive efforts to hold timely permanency hearings, Fulton County stakeholders pointed out that 12-month hearings have been happening in a more timely manner over the last year due to the *Kenny A* class action and the subsequent hiring of additional court personnel. A few stakeholders in Floyd County reported that permanency hearings are timely and slated for 11-month and 15-month timeframes for each case. Also, stakeholders in Walton County agreed that permanency hearings happen in a timely manner, with permanency addressed at each 6-month review and 12-month hearing.

Alternatively, stakeholders noted some challenges with regard to timely permanency hearings. Stakeholders in Fulton County noted that high staff turnover causes many court continuances related to caseworkers' absenteeism, and the agency has had to station DFCS employees in court to ensure that DFCS caseworkers are present for court proceedings. A few stakeholders noted that caseworkers have also been subpoenaed in order to ensure their presence in court. A few stakeholders in Floyd County noted that the court process was slow to determine when the agency has made reasonable efforts, and this impacts timely achievement of permanency for children. A few state-level stakeholders indicated that after 12 months of jointly serving children in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice, DFCS no longer claims IV-E reimbursement for these children, and there is no longer a SAAG available to the Department of Juvenile Justice. This results in a lack of 12-month judicial reviews for these children.

In addition, a few stakeholders pointed out that although the courts have made improvements in addressing whether or not the agency has made reasonable efforts to prevent removal of children from their homes, the courts are not consistently addressing whether the

agency has made reasonable efforts to achieve permanency for children. A few stakeholders noted that a) the agency needs to be more consistent in evaluating permanency plans prior to hearings, b) service providers need to provide more constructive information about the needs of children, and c) the courts need to be more consistent in thoroughly reviewing case plans and permanency goals.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of identified inconsistencies in holding timely hearings and in adhering to ASFA requirements. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia files for TPR when a child has been abandoned, a parent has been convicted of a felony, or when a child has been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, and there are no “compelling reasons” approved by the judge. The Statewide Assessment identifies a number of “compelling reasons” attributable to children, parents, DFCS and the courts that DFCS documents in the case plan and the court approves, but the Statewide Assessment also notes that caseworkers need additional training in documentation of “compelling reasons.”

According to the Statewide Assessment, there is no formalized judicial or agency system in place that tracks the timeliness of the TPR process, and the Statewide Assessment highlights a number of challenges that cause hearing delays. Mediating factors such as appeals, public searches for absent parents, criminal dispositions, and immigration issues, may bring on hearing delays. There are also delays which relate to the needs of court personnel. For example, there may be continuances brought on by increased numbers of attorneys on a case, SAAG conflicts or inattentiveness, or court scheduling challenges affected by the use of part time judges, for instance. The Statewide Assessment also notes delays when judges are newly assigned to a case upon recusal of a prior judge, and they do not know the case history. Additional delays are reportedly brought about by the court’s reluctance to TPR young parents or parents with mental health problems.

According to the Statewide Assessment, judges are seeking to expedite TPRs by asking for a “conflicts rule change” whereby attorneys must prioritize TPR cases over everything except criminal cases. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, Judicial stakeholder opinions indicate the following:

- Support for concurrent planning, particularly for children younger than three and for cases involving chronic substance abuse
- Support for early petitions when parents are not making progress six months into the case
- Concerns that DFCS may have misperceptions about filing for TPR when there is no adoptive resource (due to impressions of a recent overturning of a TPR petition)

- Interest in having DFCS training on relevant policy issues or areas of concern at judges orientation and bi-annual trainings.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the Qualitative Review Process assesses ASFA compliance. Also, Regional Directors obtain monthly reports that outline factors that inhibit achievement of TPR, and relevant strategies are then developed in coordination with Legal Services and the Adoptions Unit.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 16 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders agreed that while ASFA timeframes are driving the court system toward permanency for children, there are inconsistencies across the State in filing for TPR when a child has been in care for 15 of 22 months. In terms of positive efforts in proceeding with timely filing for TPR, stakeholders indicated that depending upon the county, DFCS typically staffs cases at the 9-month or 12 month-mark in order to assess permanency plans. Stakeholders in Fulton County indicated that permanency reviewers from the State office will review cases in which children have been in custody for 13 months. Walton County stakeholders reported that while there are not a large number of TPR cases there, when they do need to file, the agency does so in a timely manner. Stakeholders in Walton County pointed out that the agency uses a tickler system to identify cases that are approaching the 15-month mark. A few stakeholders also noted that a) there has been an overall increase of TPRs filed in the State, and b) appeals can be expedited and decisions can be typically made within a 6-8 month timeframe.

Stakeholders also noted various barriers in moving children toward permanency in the required timeframes. Stakeholders pointed out that attorney representation for parents, children, and the agency is not guaranteed in all regions of the State, and this is a particular challenge in some rural areas. Stakeholders in Floyd County noted that there is a backlog of cases where TPR must be filed, and this may be attributed to a need for more judges and attorneys and numerous court continuances related to a) a lack of transportation to court for birth parents, b) late public announcements for missing parents, and c) parents being given extensive opportunities to meet case plan goals. Stakeholders in Floyd County also noted that the judge must approve of the goal of adoption in order to move forward with TPR, and this can cause delays in achieving the goal of adoption. A few Fulton County stakeholders noted that there are judges who will not proceed with TPR unless there is an identified adoptive resource.

In addition, stakeholders reported that when the agency does not file for TPR, “compelling reasons” are documented in the case-plan and approved and tracked by the courts. In Fulton County “compelling reasons” are documented in the case plan and stakeholders noted such reasons as “placement with a relative”, “guardianship” or “older youth not wanting to be adopted.” Stakeholders in Walton County reported that documentation of compelling reasons is not often necessary since the county does not have a high volume of cases that require TPR, but the most typical reasons cited include “placement with a relative”, “goal of APPLA/child is older”, and “parents are making progress”. In general, stakeholder opinions indicated that there is an inconsistent understanding of ASFA requirements and “compelling reasons” amongst agency staff and attorneys, and it was noted that the Juvenile Courts have not been trained on “compelling reasons.”

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there are inconsistencies in the manner in which foster and pre adoptive parents are notified of reviews and hearings and afforded the opportunity to be heard. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

While there is no DFCS reporting system that ensures that foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers are invited to be heard at reviews and hearings, the Statewide Assessment reports that they are served with notice of any meeting or hearing which addresses the child’s case plan or legal status. The Statewide Assessment suggests that Georgia’s Foster Parent Bill of Rights is a law which safeguards foster parent rights, whereby foster parents can file grievances against DFCS offices that do not ensure their right to appear and present information on children in their care.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 18 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholder opinions across the sites suggested that foster and pre-adoptive parents are inconsistently receiving notification of upcoming hearings and/or reviews across the State. State-level stakeholders reported that feedback across the State regularly reveals that foster parents are not receiving notice of reviews and hearings. Stakeholders across the three sites reported that foster and pre-adoptive parents are receiving notice of case reviews, but foster parents in Fulton County are not consistently receiving notice of court hearings.

According to stakeholders, foster parent notification methods vary. In Floyd County, notices for the CPR and court hearings are mailed to all interested parties by the court. In Fulton County, notification of CPR hearings is coordinated through the CPR, and notification of court hearings are generated by the court, although caseworkers are responsible for informing foster parents. In Walton County, the agency sends written notices to foster parents 30 days prior to a review or hearing.

Stakeholders also reported that whether or not foster parents are heard in reviews and hearings also varies by county. Where there is inconsistent foster parent involvement in court hearings, various stakeholders attributed this to a) differences of opinion amongst judges about the circumstances in which foster parents should be heard in court and b) DFCS discouragement of foster parent participation in hearings. In Floyd County, stakeholders reported that the opinions of foster parents are not routinely sought in hearings or reviews. In Fulton County, stakeholders reported that foster parents are routinely heard in CPRs, but are only heard in

court if they request to be heard through the child advocate. In Walton County, foster parents are consistently invited in judicial reviews to share information about children in their care, although some stakeholders noted that foster parents were more involved and more informed about children in their care when the county had previously employed the use of the CPR.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System because the State has an identifiable quality assurance system that evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and areas needing improvement, provides reports and evaluates program improvement. The State also has standards that ensure that children in foster care are provided services that protect their health and safety. In the initial CFSR, the State was also in substantial conformity with this systemic factor and was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because multiple mechanisms are in place to address the health and safety of children in foster care. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports a number of standards intended to maintain the safety and health of children in foster care. According to the Statewide Assessment, Georgia policy requires that all children entering foster care have a health check (ESPDT) within 10 days of their placement, and foster children who are age 3 and under are referred specifically to Babies Can’t Wait (BCW) for health assessments. The Statewide Assessment also reports that CCFA providers are required to conduct a developmental

assessment within 30 days of placement for foster children age 4 and under and a mental health assessment within 30 days for foster children age four and older. Regardless of the type of case, the Statewide Assessment reports that all children are to be visited by a DFCS caseworker at a minimum of one time per month. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that the State's Qualitative Case Review process monitors safety standards, and yields evaluative annual reports that document the State's conformity with standards that secure children's safety.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 10 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. Various stakeholders cited the following examples of minimal standards to ensure the health and safety of foster children:

- There are requirements that children in foster care receive physicals and mental health assessments.
- Foster and pre-adoptive parents are required to participate in initial and ongoing training prior to licensure.
- Any reported issues in foster homes related to licensing standards or alleged abuse are investigated within 24 hours. Also, foster care administrative reviews are conducted on all abuse allegations, and homes are required to develop corrective action plans as necessary.
- In Walton County, case managers work as a team to ensure that children are seen, and often children are seen more than the minimal standards of contact require.
- In Floyd County, two nurse practitioners provide physicals and developmental assessments for children entering foster care and child developmental and health consultations with parents and foster parents on an ongoing basis. Floyd County has also established a supervised visitation program with an emphasis on assessment of parent-child interactions during the initial period of removal.
- In Fulton County, the MDT was identified as a safeguard for ensuring that the medical, dental and mental health needs of foster children are met.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as a Strength because the State has a functioning quality assurance system that addresses key practice areas and provides feedback on key findings. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Social Services Quality Assurance Review Team undertakes a county by county review of the services provided to children and families. The case review instrument and overall process are similarly modeled after the Federal CFSR, and as such, the State uses the data to determine compliance with federal review items. Case records in CPS and placement cases are examined, and family members, agency staff and stakeholders who are involved with the case are interviewed. Exit interviews are conducted within the county office to explain findings, and trends within counties and across the State are reported upon annually. While the State did not review all counties in FFY 2005, the Statewide Assessment reports that counties that were reviewed comprise 70% of DFCS consumers. In a 2005 review report, a total of 2021 randomly selected cases were reviewed, and these cases included CPS screen outs, investigations, ongoing cases, and placement cases. As with the Federal CFSR, the Statewide Assessment reports that seven outcomes were assessed, and any outcome with a rating of less than 95% substantially achieved required a corrective action plan by the county department that was reviewed.

According to the Statewide Assessment, two counties in Georgia are operating under the *Kenny A.* Consent Decree. As such, the State is quite focused on related quality assurance measures. The Department of Human Resources Evaluation and Reporting Section (E & R) has provided support in monitoring and tracking decree activities through data collection and analysis and case record reviews. The State Quality Assurance unit conducted qualitative case reviews for Fulton County at three different points in 2004, and the Quality Assurance unit in Fulton County reviews, monitors, and tracks various activities emphasizing data integrity and *Kenny A.* compliance.

The Statewide Assessment points out that the E & R Unit uses IDS Online to provide a number of Outcome Measure (OM) reports which capture information used for monitoring caseloads, managing staff, and examining performance trends. According to the Statewide Assessment, OM reports are disseminated to all Counties and Regions along with an analysis when requested. In addition, several counties have created either internal databases or manual data tracking systems in order to evaluate local work efforts. For example, the Child Demographic Database was created by DeKalb County to monitor some of the *Kenny A.* Outcome Measures. Outcome Measure reports and other specialized reports are also used in the agency's "G-Force" meeting process, where DFCS staff from all levels meet and review statistical data and determine ways to improve agency performance.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 14 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders are in general agreement that the State has a quality assurance system in place that identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides reports, and tracks program improvements. Georgia's QA system mirrors various components of the CFSR in that county offices complete self-assessments 2 months prior to a review and participate in a 3-week review that measures performance on child safety, permanency and well being outcomes. In addition, stakeholders are interviewed, exit conferences are held, and program improvement plans are developed. According to stakeholders and as noted in the Statewide Assessment an annual report is disseminated with findings from the reviewed counties that make up 70% of the DFCS caseload.

According to stakeholders, localities receive information about the reviews at exit conferences, and QA reports are developed and disseminated within 30 days of a review. Stakeholders reported that review findings are shared at “G-Force” meetings. These meetings are a forum for management level discussion of review findings and data summaries in order to determine improvement strategies. Stakeholders also reported that review feedback is shared with caseworkers, and their names may be attached to certain activities within a corrective action plan. In addition, a few stakeholders noted that regional directors typically review and monitor corrective action plans, and regional program consultants provide training for areas identified as deficiencies in a review.

In addition, some stakeholder comments indicated that quality assurance may be targeted differently across counties. For example, a few Fulton County stakeholders reported that State QA and Fulton QA review the county, and because the county is operating under a consent decree, there are QA staff strictly associated with reviews required to track *Kenny A.* outcomes. Reports for Fulton County reviews are generated from all three sources. Fulton County stakeholders also noted that the county must report on data every 6 months for the consent decree, and Accountability Agents will commission selective reviews to gather this data.

While the QA system is in place and functioning, various stakeholders cited the following as needed improvements:

- The lack of supervisory involvement in casework oversight is a consistent problem across the State.
- The system might be more effective if it were independently situated at a university or as a special unit, for example.
- Staff turnover in investigations has impacted the quality of investigations, and as such, more CPS cases need to be reviewed.
- It would be helpful if review summary reports were developed more often than annually so that interim information could be analyzed.
- The State does not have a functioning system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the contracted service providers that are utilized by the agency.

IV. TRAINING

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

STATUS OF TRAINING

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the Training systemic factor because the State has instituted an initial and ongoing staff development training program for all staff. In addition, the State provides initial and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents as well as staff of State licensed facilities that provide services to foster and adoptive children. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor was determined to be in substantial conformity, and the State was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as a Strength because the State is operating a well-designed, well-functioning, initial training program for DFCS staff, although there were areas identified as in need of further development. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

New DFCS workers must complete a certification process which includes completion of the "KEYS" training program, specialized training specific to assignment, and practice work in the field. To achieve initial certification, new caseworkers must score 70 percent or higher on knowledge assessments, adequately complete a case record, and complete a field observation with a supervisor or field program specialist. The Statewide Assessment reports that in FFY 2006, 879 staff enrolled in the KEYS training program, and the state certified 725 staff to provide CPS and/or Foster Care services. According to the Statewide Assessment, in instances where staff did not get certified they either a) changed program areas and did not complete the appropriate training, b) did not achieve a high enough level of performance, c) they voluntarily selected out of the training or d) were selected out of the training by the county due to performance.

The Statewide Assessment notes that the pre-service training takes 3-4 months to complete, and instruction is alternatively delivered in classroom settings and in the field. For example, new staff are trained in the field on child welfare services, computer concepts and internet training, and CPS Intake and Investigations. Alternatively, staff receive classroom instruction on child maltreatment, family centered practice, cultural responsiveness, child growth and development, case planning and case processes, documentation, legal issues, substance abuse, child removals, foster care and adoptions policy and practice, and data entry and use of information systems. Additional follow-on training addresses topics related to domestic violence as well as federal requirements on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Multiethnic Placement Act (IEPA).

According to the Statewide Assessment, there is an additional training component in which new staff are assigned a Field Practice Advisor (FPA) as a mentor during the training process. FPAs are seasoned staff who ensure that training and observations of service programs, case reviews, court hearings, and other relevant meetings are completed. The Statewide Assessment points out that from 2005 to February 2007, there were 547 FPAs (and more certified by Field Program Specialists although these numbers are not known). In post training surveys, new staff have reported the FPA concept to be very helpful and a good support to their developing field skills. On the other hand, some staff reported that they felt that they were burdening overly busy FPAs or FPAs were not experienced in the new worker's specialization area.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 24 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders indicated that the State operates a pre-service training, and certification and completion of the training is required for all new employees. Stakeholders commented that the training design has improved over time, and the current base of KEYS pre-service training includes 3 weeks of classroom instruction and 3 weeks of field experience.

Various stakeholders described different elements of the pre-service training. According to stakeholders, the first week of training begins with basic field orientation on computer concepts, family centered practice, child development, an introduction to child welfare, and other related topics. In the weeks following, training consists of classroom instruction, online training, fieldwork, and mentoring. According to stakeholders, new staff must pass a final training test with a grade of 70 percent or higher in order to be certified as a caseworker, and if they do not pass the test, they have the opportunity to retake it within two weeks. Once caseworkers have completed a certain portion of the training, they are provisionally certified to receive their first 7 cases. Stakeholders noted that at the discretion of county office managers, staff that do not pass may be transferred to positions that do not require certification. The Education and Training Services Section collects surveys to assess supervisory and caseworker performance post training, and they identify trends which are shared with management.

Some stakeholders commented positively on the pre-service training. Stakeholders in Walton County indicated that the training was effective in preparing them for their work, and stakeholders in Walton and Fulton Counties noted the value of having experienced staff as mentors. Walton County stakeholders reported that a pilot is underway in one region that is a coordinated effort between the region and the University of Georgia. Social work students complete new worker training, CPS TRACK training, and technology training in their first semester. In addition, Walton County stakeholders noted that the Educational Consortium, which is comprised of ten universities in the State, gives input into the DFCS training as well as incorporates DFCS training into their BSW and MSW programs. This is an effort to improve the continuity of curriculum and to ensure that it adequately reflects public child welfare practice and adequately prepares students for their practicum in the child welfare agency.

However, stakeholders in Fulton County and Floyd County also noted that while many elements of the training are helpful to caseworkers, the training needs to place more emphasis on practical field skills in order to better prepare caseworkers for the reality of

their work. Some Fulton County stakeholders reported that caseworkers lack knowledge of service options for families, and supervisors are not adequately preparing staff for court. A few stakeholders surmised that this may be due to staff turnover, as there was reportedly a 50 percent staff turnover in Fulton County, and at the time of the review 40 new staff were in pre-service training.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 is rated as a Strength because the State has made significant gains since the initial CFSR in developing the ongoing training program for staff in partnership with universities in the State. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, all staff must participate in 20 hours of training annually. Professional Excellence trainings on topics such as court proceedings and methamphetamine use are contracted through Georgia State University and are available statewide. In addition, there are a number of outside training resources provided to DFCS staff such as statewide conferences and local agency trainings. Further, whenever there are new policies or identified deficiencies, on-going trainings are provided within regions by Field Program Specialists and Regional Adoption Coordinators. For example, the Statewide Assessment states that in 2006 DFCS frontline staff utilized 4900 training slots, and 1900 of those were associated with instruction on Family Team Conferencing. This training was part of an effort to integrate a family-centered model of casework practice. The State is also developing a measurement tool for determining how well acquired training knowledge is being transferred into field practice.

According to the Statewide Assessment, supervisors have engaged in a separate certification process since 2005. Supervisors must complete self-assessments and must be observed by Field Program Specialists. In addition, the agency sponsors supervisor academies for ongoing training opportunities.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that problems with turn-over in some counties pose particular training challenges. For example, it is difficult to keep up with new policy and program training, FPA assignments, and quality casework practice in counties where there is high caseworker and supervisor turnover. According to the Statewide Assessment, the Office of Human Resource Management reports that caseworker turnover rate for social services staff was 29 percent for social services staff in SFY05 and 10.21 percent as of June 06 for SFY06.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 12 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. According to stakeholders, 20 hours of ongoing, annual training is required for both caseworkers and supervisors. The first 20 hours of training are standardized and required, and then staff can choose from other available trainings, local or otherwise. Ongoing Professional Excellence Training is coordinated through Georgia State, which partners with universities across the State to deliver trainings in Regional hubs. Stakeholders noted that trainings are provided to certified staff on a monthly basis on rotating topics such as Legal Interviewing and Youth/Independent Living. A few stakeholders reported that these trainings are practical, hands on, and useful to caseworkers. According to stakeholders across the sites, counties have different ways of accessing these and other ongoing trainings. Some counties have Training Coordinators who inform supervisors of upcoming trainings, and other counties primarily depend upon the Statewide Central emails that inform staff of upcoming trainings. Attendance is tracked by Athens Tech, the Education and Training Services Section, and in some counties, by local training units. Information on training attendance is updated by supervisors and accessible to county directors, and stakeholders noted that supervisors are responsible for ensuring that caseworkers complete training.

Stakeholders provide mixed opinions about the quality of supervisory training. A few Fulton County stakeholders pointed out that there is a satisfactory supervisory training which covers performance appraisals and supervisory and staff work-styles. Stakeholders in Walton County pointed out that the supervisory training that is available is repetitive, and the activities are not specifically relevant to child welfare supervision. A few stakeholders did note, however, that Georgia State and the Educational Consortium are working with DFCS to develop general training and advanced training modules for supervisors.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State is operating an effective training program for foster and adoptive caregivers, despite some suggestions for program improvements. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, IMPACT is a 20-hour assessment and pre-service orientation that provides prospective foster parents with an overview of the requirements and challenges of fostering children. Once resource families are approved, they must also participate in additional in-service training and 10 hours of ongoing training annually. The Statewide Assessment reports that foster parents may attend the Annual Foster and Adoptive Parent Conference where topics covered include ADHD, drug addictions, the IEP processes, foster parent bill of rights, mental health disorders, reactive attachment disorders and a host of other behavior

related trainings. In addition, foster parents can participate in on-line trainings, local DFCS office trainings, and local Foster Parent Association Meetings. According to the Statewide Assessment, in-home support services are available to foster parents to provide support and to minimize child placement disruptions.

The Statewide Assessment reports that in November 2006, one foster parent from each of the 159 counties in Georgia was randomly selected to participate in a survey focused on their training and ongoing experiences in fostering. Foster parents indicated the following as being the most valuable learning derived from IMPACT (and formerly MAPP):

- Empathy and understanding of child's needs and coping strategies
- Learning and support generated from group instruction with other foster parents
- Knowledge of child welfare policies, legal information and associated laws that impact children in the system

Respondents also suggested that the IMPACT training could be improved if:

- It was located in individual counties and held on days and times that are convenient for foster families
- Case managers could be included so that they would understand the training needs and associated stressors of foster parents and so that the caseworker/foster parent relationship could be improved
- A resource section could be included so that foster families could better understand available resources for themselves and the children they foster
- More opportunities were provided to connect seasoned foster families with new foster families
- More trainings were available on children with special needs, parental visits, cross-cultural care-giving, teenage transitional needs, and behavior issues.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the DHR/DFCS Caregiver and Parent Survey was a mailed survey that was distributed to foster parents/caregivers, adoptive parents, relative caregivers, and birth parents. The Statewide Assessment reports that a total of 3,777 caregivers gave caseworkers an average rating of 3.48 when asked how strongly they agreed that caseworkers have adequate ability to address caregiver training needs (1=strongly disagreed and 5 =strongly agreed).

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 14 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders expressed the opinion that the State provides an adequate training for current or prospective foster parents. According to stakeholders, DFCS relative foster parents and non-relative foster parents are provided with a 20-hour pre-service training entitled IMPACT, and private providers choose their own training curriculum for foster parents. IMPACT is the revised version of a former curriculum called MAPP. Although the curriculum was revised to include recommendations from the Foster Parent Association, a few stakeholders reported that they preferred the MAPP curriculum because it included more interactive learning and provided in-depth training that related to real life situations. Also, while policy dictates that foster parents should be included as foster parent trainers, a few stakeholder comments indicated that this is happening inconsistently across the State.

According to stakeholders, DFCS foster and pre-adoptive parents are required to do 10 hours of ongoing training per year while private providers are required to complete 35-40 hours of annual training. A few stakeholders suggested that 10 hours is not enough training, especially considering some of the special needs and mental health diagnosis of the children in DFCS custody. Also, there is no standardized mechanism for selecting or completing training. However, various stakeholders pointed out that there are many training opportunities through county in-services, foster parent associations, and conferences, and the State foster and adoptive parent conference is reportedly a wonderful training resource.

Various stakeholders suggested that the following would be helpful to include in pre-service or ongoing training:

- Training on behaviorally challenging children and enhancement of the behavior component in IMPACT
- Training that is tailored to the individual needs of the foster family
- More training, support and mentoring for new foster parents, foster parents with children with intensive special needs (including medical), and foster parents with teenagers

V. SERVICE ARRAY

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

STATUS OF SERVICE ARRAY

Georgia is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. This systemic factor was not in substantial conformity in the initial CFSR, and the State was required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. All three of the items in this systemic factor were rated as Areas Needing Improvement in the 2001 CFSR, and they remain Areas Needing Improvement in the 2007 CFSR. Key concerns related to a) a lack of substance abuse services, mental health services, transportation services, and therapeutic foster homes, b) a lack of independent living services available across the State, c) shortages of certain services in rural areas, and d) insufficient efforts to individualize the needs of children and families in service provision. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Key Findings from the 2001 CFSR

Georgia was found not to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the 2001 CFSR. Item 35 (service array), item 36 (service accessibility), and item 37 (service individualization) were determined to be Areas Needing Improvement in the 2001 CFSR. Some of the key concerns included the following:

- There was an inadequate array of placement resources and specialized placement resources.
- Services were put in place without adequate assessments, and this resulted in a) poor matching of services to individual needs of children and families and/or b) services were provided based on availability rather than need.
- There was a lack of critical services to address the multiple needs of children and families, most specifically domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health services.
- There was a lack of knowledge amongst caseworkers and supervisors about what services were available.

The State developed four Program Improvement Plan strategies including the following:

- A statewide needs assessment was conducted to determine the availability of support and placement services.
- The service continuum was enhanced through collaboration with providers, stakeholders, and consumers.
- A web-based service resource directory was compiled and deployed.
- Staff and providers were trained on assessment practices and procedures.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there are significant gaps in the service array, especially with regard to having adequate independent living services, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services, among others. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, counties utilize federal, State and occasionally county funds to provide reunification services to families. The agency provides wrap-around services such as in-home services for parents and foster parents, transportation and supervision for parental visitation, and transitional and after-care services upon reunification or permanent placement. The Statewide Assessment reports that all children in need of CPS or foster care services are referred to the local public health office for screening and assessment. Programs such as "Babies Can't Wait," "Children First," and EPSDT support improved access to basic physical and

dental care for children, and Georgia’s “Right from the Start” Medicaid program covers most children and youth who are not covered through private insurance. The State has also funded post-adoption services to assist with pre-adoption preparation and adoption finalization. The Statewide Assessment reports that the State’s preventive programs include parent aide services, Homestead services and PUP (Prevention of Unnecessary Placement), although there are not always enough of these services to meet the need.

The Statewide Assessment reports that Family Connection Agencies have Preserving Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) funded contracts to provide family support, family preservation, reunification, and adoption promotion services in their communities. In addition, eight counties are using their Family Connection Agency and local DFCS office to sponsor a Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC) model. The Statewide Assessment reports that the CPPC model is a way of building hubs of resources that are tailored to address the risk factors for child abuse and neglect that reside in a particular community, and the State intends to replicate the CPPC model statewide. In addition, a State Prevention Workgroup is using PSSF funds for special initiatives such as the Family Resource Connection Pilot and Foster Care Emancipation Support.

The Statewide Assessment also reports particular service gaps such as a lack of therapeutic placements, substance abuse treatment services, and public mental health services. First, the lack of therapeutic placements often necessitates children leaving their Region to access them. As such, the lack of therapeutic care impedes a child’s proximity to family and community connections. Second, the Statewide Assessment notes that there is an increased number of children in foster care due to manufacture and abuse of methamphetamine within some Regions, and the availability of affordable inpatient and outpatient substance abuse programs, especially for males, does not meet the Regional demand. Third, the Statewide Assessment reports there has been an increase in the number of children with mental health and addiction problems, and there are not enough services to address these needs.

According to the DHR/DFCS Caregiver and Parent survey, 39 percent of caregivers, 40 percent of parents, and 59 percent of parents with children in placement indicated that they did not receive services or supports they felt they needed. When asked about the services they did not receive, 88 percent of the caregivers and 84 percent of the parents said they did not receive services for children with disability-related needs. The Statewide Assessment reports that “other areas noted were mental health services, caseworker support (communication, information, responsiveness, and paperwork) and financial issues (pay, per diem, late payments/reimbursements).”

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 42 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that there is a wide array of services, but there is not enough of some services to meet the needs of children and families in Georgia. Stakeholders most consistently identified transportation as a needed service (although this was not identified as an issue in Fulton County). Several stakeholders pointed out that there are public mental health services available, but they are not sufficient to meet the demand. For example, there is a paucity of psychiatric residential services. In addition, many stakeholders across the sites were of the opinion that the substance abuse service array is lacking, as there

are not enough methamphetamine treatment programs or substance abuse treatment services for adults, adolescents, and for mothers with children. Stakeholders further pointed out that certain counties are challenged to meet the needs of a growing Hispanic population, and there are not enough bilingual services or culturally relevant foster homes to meet the need. In addition, several stakeholders pointed out that independent living services are available, but they are of inconsistent quality, and they are only serving half as many youth as they could be serving. Some stakeholders reported that the services are not effective, although stakeholders in Fulton County reported that youth receiving independent living services are immensely satisfied with those services and receive much support from their independent living workers.

In addition, a number of stakeholders identified particular areas of concern with regard to the State's service array. First, a few stakeholders noted that the shift to a fee-for-service, local, mental health system has disrupted the therapeutic foster care system and decreased the length of time that service providers spend with children and families. Second, some stakeholders pointed out that the State is making an effort to reintegrate children from long-term residential placements into community settings, but there is a lack of services needed to support these children in the community. Third, a few stakeholders noted that although DFCS typically draws on an array of services to prevent removal, re-entry, and placement disruptions for children in foster care, gaps in these services are occurring when DFCS depletes certain funding streams. Finally, stakeholder comments indicated that there is some confusion about the degree to which DFCS contracted service providers are evaluated for the effectiveness of the services they provide.

Various stakeholders also reported the following service and resource gaps:

- Section 8 housing (particularly in Fulton County, this was cited as a barrier to reunifying families)
- Services for children with developmental disabilities
- Long-term therapeutic treatment services, group homes, therapeutic foster homes and ethnic and racially diverse foster homes
- Resources for the increasing number of DJJ youth being served by DFCS
- Targeted educational services to support foster children
- Dental and orthodontic care services that accept Medicaid
- Educational services for teens with sex offense histories
- Homeless shelters
- Emergency funds for the needs of foster children and youth (ie, clothes, furniture)
- Services for adoptive parents
- Adolescent services, services for adolescent mothers
- Services tailored to support fathers
- Child care for parents with overnight work schedules
- Services for young juvenile offenders (8-14 yrs)
- More Medicaid covered health services for youth in foster/residential care
- Services for youth with dual-diagnosis

A number of stakeholders indicated that the State has made a commitment to preventive services through an increased number of targeted initiatives. Examples of these services include First Steps Program, Home-Based Healthy Families, Family Connections, Natural Helper, etc. These services are community-based, and some utilize Family Team Meetings and evidence-based service models. Various stakeholders pointed out that other service strengths include wrap-around services and home-based services for families, post-adoption services, parent support groups and parent aides, respite services, visitation services, domestic violence services, sexual abuse support services, alcohol and drug assessments, local mental health services, Spanish language instruction for foster parents, and in-home drug screens for parents who do not have transportation.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of the significant discrepancy in access to critical services between rural and urban areas of the State, and because of the waiting lists for some services, especially in rural areas. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that the agency partners with providers for Promoting Safe and Stable Family Support Services, Family Connection Agencies, Community Partners for Protecting Children, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia and with multiple private providers to ensure reasonable access to all services across the State. According to the Statewide Assessment, regional allocations for programs for children in foster care and family preservation are based on case-load size, historical spending projections and specialized projects. The Statewide Assessment reports that the agency has the ability to purchase needed services such as substance abuse treatment or in-home behavioral health services that are not readily accessible in a community from another provider.

The Statewide Assessment reports that domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse services are available across the State, but services that may not be available in every county include foster parent resources, substance abuse inpatient and outpatient treatment resources, community-based therapeutic, medical, and educational resources, and relative and DFCS/private provider foster homes. The Statewide Assessment points out that while there are funds available to assist families in rural areas with transportation, there may not be transportation services available to purchase.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 21 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that while there are a wide variety of services available in the State, service availability varies by region and county. Many stakeholders pointed out that services are less available for localities that are

not situated in or around the Atlanta metro area. Several stakeholders identified transportation and mental health services as challenges for rural counties, and some stakeholders pointed out that there are not a sufficient number of service vendors or qualified service providers to meet the needs in rural areas. A few stakeholders also reported that there is a lack of attorneys and psychologists in rural areas of the State. In addition, stakeholders across the sites indicated that there are long waiting lists for certain services. These services include subsidized housing, services for children with developmental disabilities, in-patient treatment services, transitional housing for older youth, and anger management services. In addition, various stakeholders identified the following services as being available in some Regions while not available in others:

- Post-adoption services
- Recreational services for children and youth
- Placement resources to accommodate sibling groups (so children are not placed outside the county)
- Child Advocacy Centers
- Drug Courts

Floyd County stakeholders identified the Drop Out Prevention and Truancy Treatment Team, the Dental Health Clinic, and a support group for adopted teens called Camp A-Team as strong services. Fulton County stakeholders pointed out the Dental Van, the Match Committee for placement assessments, Fulton County Drug Court, and the Healthy Grandparents Organization as strong services.

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

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although there is some capacity within the State to tailor services to the needs of children and families, there continues to be limited capacity in serving Spanish-speaking families, providing well-matched foster care placements, and ensuring that appropriate services meet the identified needs of families. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that during the investigation, formal risk assessments are completed on seven areas of vulnerability, and caseworkers are required to tailor case plans to the specific areas of concern for each individual. The Statewide Assessment reports that children who enter foster care receive a Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA) which addresses the families’ areas of concerns and provides a detailed assessment of the individual child. The Statewide Assessment further points out that the recommendations from the CCFA should be incorporated into the Case Plan Reporting System.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency has the capability to secure psychological evaluations, behavioral therapy, substance abuse treatment, in-home crisis management, financial support for rental, utilities, medical care etc, and in-home treatment and testing for children placed out of home. (These same services can be offered to the removal home if reunification is imminent) In

addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that referrals are made to community-based providers who have tailored programs unique to the needs of their particular clients. The Statewide Assessment reports that community programs can provide services in the most appropriate settings, and if program services are too generic, caseworkers can work with providers to develop individualized programs for the family.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 19 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. Some stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that the State has the capacity to individualize services through case planning and the MDT's, Family Team Meetings, Citizen Panel Reviews, other collaborative meetings, and contracted and community services. A few stakeholders indicated that service vendors can be reimbursed at a higher rate in order to individualize services, and wrap-around services can be individually tailored to meet the needs of children and families. Also, a few stakeholders noted that there are flexible funds available for youth receiving independent living services. Stakeholders in Fulton County and Floyd County pointed out that there are flexible funds available for emergency needs or special services. While all regions have flexible funds, some counties may have to rely more heavily on local service providers to help with such things as rental assistance, clothing or household needs.

Alternatively, many stakeholders indicated that there are problems associated with service individualization. Some stakeholders across the sites pointed out that case plans tend not to reflect the diversity of family needs and may too often be "one size fits all". In Fulton County, stakeholders reported that parents and children are not consistently involved in the case planning process, and as such, families' needs in these circumstances are inappropriately assessed. In addition, Fulton County stakeholders reported that caseworkers are not consistently following up to determine if services are appropriate. As a result, determinations cannot be made about whether or not services were appropriately matched in the first place. Likewise, a few stakeholders noted that children are placed in settings that are not appropriate to meet their needs when appropriate placement resources are not available.

In addition, a few state-level stakeholders pointed out that it is more difficult for parents and children in ongoing cases to receive the individualized services they need because when there are limited funds for mental health services available, for example, families with court ordered services are likely to be prioritized. Also, Fulton County stakeholders reported that Spanish speaking families are not being seen in a timely manner because DFCS has not secured interpreter services.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

STATUS OF AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Georgia is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community because the State participates in ongoing consultation in developing and updating the Child and Family Services Plan and has an established mechanism in place to coordinate services among federal and federally assisted programs. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor was determined to be in substantial conformity, and the State was not required to address it in the Program Improvement Plan. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because the State has engaged in significant consultation with a variety of stakeholders in the State, although there continues to be a need to strengthen consultation and collaboration with the Courts. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State hosted 13 Community Forums around the State with a total attendance of 293 stakeholders. Stakeholders represented state legislators, primary and secondary schools, foster parents, private and contracted service providers, juvenile courts, child, parent and agency attorneys, local political officials, advocates, law enforcement, and faith-and community-based organizations. The Statewide Assessment reports that these representatives were given the opportunity to provide direct feedback to DFCS leadership on issues that are relevant to child safety, permanency and well-being.

In addition, over 2,900 stakeholders (59% DFCS and 41% non-DFCS) participated in the stakeholders surveys representing 155 of the 159 counties. According to the Statewide Assessment, the survey suggests that stakeholders identify substance abuse, poverty, resources, family structure and functioning and education as the primary issues affecting family and child well-being in Georgia. The Statewide Assessment reports that “the survey supported the DFCS belief that there are significant gaps in the perceptions of DFCS and non-DFCS stakeholders in terms of values, strategies and agency effectiveness.” With regard to stakeholder perceptions of higher performance, the Statewide Assessment reports that 51 percent of DFCS stakeholders and 28 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the agency “very effective” in investigating reports. With regard to stakeholder perceptions of lower performing areas, 38 percent of DFCS stakeholders and 58 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the agency “ineffective” in transitioning youth to independent living. Also, 26 percent of DFCS stakeholders and 50 percent of non-DFCS stakeholders rated the agency “ineffective” in securing permanent homes in a timely manner for children who cannot return to their homes. The Statewide Assessment also notes that stakeholders indicated there is a need for additional numbers of qualified, well trained and well compensated DFCS staff as well as decreased caseloads and/or workloads per worker.

According to the Statewide Assessment, county representatives attended county-focused, protocol meetings with community partners to discuss resource coordination on case planning for shared families and to reduce costly duplications of effort. Many counties also attend truancy panel meetings, combined case-planning meetings, MATCH intensive placement decision meetings and other county-specific teams.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 24 stakeholder interviews, many of which had multiple participants. State-level stakeholders suggested that DFCS meets regularly with DJJ, law enforcement, mental health, and community health and engages in joint planning that is ultimately integrated into the CFSP. In addition, State-level stakeholders pointed out that there are several advisory groups such as the CPS Advisory Group, the Children’s Justice Act Advisory committee, the Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel, and the PSSF Advisory Committee which meets quarterly to address child welfare issues. A few stakeholders also pointed out that DFCS makes efforts to engage with community stakeholders in order to streamline service provision and avoid duplication of services. Stakeholders noted the following collaborative efforts:

- DFCS local administrators attend board meetings of partner agencies and have one-on-one meetings with community partners to inform planning and to collaborate on improving practice and services.
- DFCS partners with the Educational Consortium to develop a constancy of curriculum on child welfare practice.
- While “G- Force” meetings are primarily internal meetings to address performance, some county offices have incorporated the “G-Force” meeting concept into their planning, and they have included external partners.

Stakeholders were of mixed opinions about the level of collaboration with the courts. Some stakeholders noted that DFCS and local courts work well in setting joint goals which in some localities has been driven by an increase in data sharing (AFCARS). Other

stakeholders pointed out that DFCS has not been a presence in court collaboration efforts, and there do not appear to be regular planning meetings occurring between DFCS and the courts at the State level.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as an Area needing improvement because there continues to be a need for consistent consultation and collaboration with courts in developing the annual reports of progress and services pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

Information on this item was not provided in the Statewide Assessment.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 9 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. State-level stakeholders are in agreement that DFCS engages in consultation with the Department of Juvenile Justice, law enforcement, Mental Health and the Health Department (Medicaid) to inform annual planning. However, a few stakeholders noted that DFCS has not consistently collaborated with the Court Improvement Program, and judges are not systematically collaborating on system improvements across the State.

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 has made gains since the initial CFSR in coordinating services with other federal or federally assisted programs. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State collaborates with other federally funded agencies including:

- the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) on shared responsibility for children in joint custody
- the Health Department on routine health needs of foster children

- Public Health on EPSDT screenings
- Mental Health (MHDDAD) on preventative and behavioral health services and on the “unbundling” of LOC/TRIS services.
- Office of the Child Advocate, Georgia Bureau of Investigations, Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel, and Prosecuting Attorneys on “Building Successful Teams” training for community partners
- Local schools and law enforcement on local roles and responsibilities
- MHDDAD and DJJ on “Bring the Children Home,” an initiative to help children in LOC placements return to their community through “step down” placements
- TANF and Food Stamps on responsibility plans related to receipt of benefits
- Child Care staff on funding for protective child care
- Department of Aging on “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren” (GRG) programs that a) provide services for grandparents raising children in DFCS custody (or at risk of removal) and b) use TANF redirects for older Americans re-entering the workforce
- Department of Child Support Services (CSS) on locating relatives for potential placement and establishing paternity

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 9 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. Various stakeholders cited a number of examples of coordination between DFCS and other federal or federally assisted programs:

- DFCS partners with Georgia State University to provide ongoing, child welfare Professional Excellence Training for DFCS staff.
- DFCS has an interagency agreement with DJJ that defines the protocols for working with youth involved with both agencies, and DHR staff are co-located in DJJ offices to determine IV-E eligibility.
- Medicaid representatives attend “G-Force” meetings and work with DFCS on targeted areas for performance improvement around issues related to community mental health, for example.
- DFCS and the Public Health pair public health nurses and DFCS staff for prevention-based home visits prior to DFCS involvement. This effort is currently in two sites with plans to expand to counties with the highest rates of child abuse and neglect.
- DFCS and Mental Health have complimentary plans with mutual input. In the past year, DFCS and other DHR Divisions have been involved in the consolidation of mental health services to respond to the CMS requirement that the State un-bundle therapeutic, medically necessary services and shelter oversight services.
- DFCS and Education coordinate around the educational needs of children in foster care.
- DFCS and the Department of Health collaborate in addressing the medical and dental health service needs of children in foster care.
- The Family Resource Connection (FRC) Pilot is a prevention-based pilot currently located in four counties. The FRC connects DFCS first contact families with DFCS, TANF and community-based resources.

Stakeholders in Floyd County noted that the agency has made strong efforts to establish quality collaborative relationships with community providers and community stakeholders. Floyd County stakeholders noted that coordination of the visitation program provided to families who are in need of supervised visitation services is a good example of this. A few stakeholders in Walton County said that great relationships have been established between DFCS, the school system, and law enforcement. In Fulton County, a few stakeholders noted that Best Practice Committees are held and the health and education systems are involved in discussions of community needs that translate into new protocols. However, several Fulton County stakeholders pointed out that increased coordination and communication is needed between DFCS, law enforcement, education and the courts.

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	4

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

Georgia is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention because while the State has resolved the past concerns with different licensing standards for private and public placement agencies that were identified in the 2001 CFSR, the current recruitment mechanisms have not addressed the need for ethnic and racially diverse foster homes, and there are delays in facilitating cross-jurisdictional placements in a timely manner. In the initial CFSR, this systemic factor was determined not to be in substantial conformity, and the State was required to address it in a Program Improvement Plan. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Key Findings from the 2001 CFSR:

Georgia was found not to be in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the 2001 CFSR. Item 41 (standards for foster family homes and institutions), item 43 (criminal background checks), and item 45 (process for cross-jurisdictional placements) were rated as Strengths. However, item 42 (application of licensing standards) and item 44 (diligent recruitment) were found to be Areas Needing Improvement. Key concerns noted as a result of the 2001 review were as follows:

- There were differences in licensing standards for public and private sector placement resources.
- Too frequently the State granted waivers for over-placement of foster homes due to lack of resources sometimes resulting in compromising child safety.
- There was a lack of sufficient numbers of placement resources including specialized resources for different child populations.

- There was no State funding for foster family recruitment, and there was insufficient targeted recruitment reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of children served by DFCS.
- There was insufficient attention paid to retention efforts such as the provision of supportive services, respite, and incentive payments.

Two Program Improvement Plan strategies were developed as follows:

- There was a committee established to explore the development of uniform licensing standards.
- There was a review of policy regarding waivers of minimum standards for foster homes.

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

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State has established and implemented clear standards for licensing foster family homes and child care institutions. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

The Statewide Assessment reports that the State Office of Regulatory Services (ORS) has outlined regulations for child-placing agencies and child-care institutions. The Statewide Assessment reports that all private agencies used by DFCS for the placement of children in care must be licensed by ORS. ORS conducts annual re-licensing visits and investigates complaints in these approved homes or facilities. DFCS and ORS jointly investigate and assess reports of maltreatment to children. In addition, the Statewide Assessment points out that resource families must attend pre-service training and complete ongoing training hours annually to maintain status as a resource.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State will be hiring a contractor to focus primarily on the recruitment, retention and support of foster families. The State will look to this provider to:

- Track and analyze resource family retention rates, reasons for resource home denials, and foster parent training outcomes
- Track approvals for children with special needs, children with large sibling groups, and youth
- Provide initial and ongoing training, establishing uniformity and consistency throughout the State

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 7 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item identified the process for approving/licensing public and private

foster homes as including a home study and safety inspection, family assessment and health screening, income verification, criminal background checks and drug screens, criminal background checks of foster parent child-care providers, and completion of pre-service training and ongoing training. Upon approval, quarterly home visits are done by resource development staff, approvals must be renewed annually, and criminal background checks and health screenings must be done every 5 years.

According to a few stakeholders, the agency uses a full approval, temporary approval and special approval process. Foster homes receive temporary approvals if the home has met most standards but may be out of compliance with a particular requirement. Stakeholders noted that temporary approvals are granted for 3 months at a time, and after the initial 3 months, they must be approved by a regional director. Stakeholders reported that children in placements with temporary approvals are funded under IV-B rather than IV-E. Special approvals, also referred to by stakeholders as “waivers,” are usually associated with circumstances in which a) large sibling groups are placed in homes that would put the foster home over the State’s six child limit or b) when children are placed in homes that have not been licensed to foster for their age group. In addition, stakeholders pointed out that there are problems in some counties with “waivers” being given to place too many children in a home.

A few stakeholders also pointed out that the process for licensing institutions requires that all staff must have criminal background checks and be trained on new standards related to the appropriate use of behavioral management techniques. Stakeholders noted that DFCS tracks the use of these techniques by reviewing incident reports in the child care institution. Licenses for child care institutions must be renewed annually, and on site unannounced visits are required. Stakeholders noted that temporary licenses are issued to child care institutions initially for 6 months and then the program is reassessed once children are placed there. A determination is made about the level of program functioning, and a second temporary license may be granted if there are concerns. Unannounced visits are also required during the period of a complaint investigation, and if a concern is substantiated, the program must develop a corrective action plan when appropriate.

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 State has consistent standards for the licensing/approving of child placing agency foster homes and DFCS foster homes and because the standards for licensing/approving relative and non-relative foster homes are uniform. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, there are uniform standards for all DFCS foster and adoptive homes. The Statewide Assessment indicates that counties have developed their own internal tracking systems that alert staff when renewal dates for resource

families are due, and county directors provide final review and approval of all initial resource home studies and re-evaluations. In addition, the Statewide Assessment reports that resource development staff conduct home studies for adoptive parents, and a contracted service provider is available to assist with completion of foster home conversions and child life histories for adoptive homes.

Regarding private foster homes and child care institutions, the Statewide Assessment reports that the Office of Regulatory Services (ORS) establishes and monitors the standards for these homes and facilities. DFCS also works with private agencies to complete conversion studies for private homes who wish to adopt children who are in the State’s permanent custody. In addition, training hours, safety standards and other licensure requirements for private agencies are assessed by the private agency and by ORS. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS works with these private agencies to complete CPS checks and investigations into allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect when they occur.

Regarding relative placements, the Statewide Assessment notes that the State uses waivers for relative placements with compelling circumstances. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the screening process for assessing relative caretaker’s ability to cope with children with intensive needs is not sufficient.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 6 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. Stakeholders commenting on this item indicated that child placing agency standards and DFCS standards are predominantly similar with a few noted differences. According to a few stakeholders, child placing agencies must verify that all conditions of licensure are being met, and it was noted that child placing agencies have additional standards associated with supervisory requirements and additional training hours for foster parents. In addition, DFCS requires drug screens for home approvals, and not all child placing agencies require this. A few stakeholders noted that both DFCS foster parents and private provider foster parents must participate in pre-service training.

In addition, the majority of stakeholders were of the opinion that the same standards apply for the licensing/approval of relative foster homes and non-relative foster homes. Stakeholders were also in general agreement that home evaluation standards are uniform for all prospective foster and adoptive families, although the approval process for each is distinct.

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.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because the State has a process in place for completing criminal background clearances. In the State's first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's QCRs indicate that the Regions are completing criminal background checks upon initial approval of foster and adoptive homes. The State requires all prospective foster and adoptive parents to have both a Georgia Bureau of Investigation and a Federal Bureau of Investigation criminal background check. Through a pending contract to provide recruitment and retention of foster families, the State will be looking to incorporate additional background checks using the Sexual Offender Registry, Pardons and Parole data banks, and the Georgia Department of Corrections.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that the Office of Regulatory Services sets minimum standards for private agencies, and the DFCS Adoption Unit contracts with several private adoption agencies for the placement of children who meet Georgia's definition of special needs. A DFCS contract manager approves the adoption studies from these private agencies.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 6 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. According to the majority of stakeholders commenting on this item, the State is effective in acquiring criminal background checks and fingerprint checks for employees of child-placing agencies and for all foster and adoptive families. Local criminal history information is submitted to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for State and Federal criminal checks, and potential resource homes are also screened through IDS to check on child abuse histories. Some stakeholders pointed out that the process is lengthy, taking between 6 weeks to 8 months to receive results, and this hinders timely placements. A few stakeholders noted that some regions have access to a Live Scan system which speeds up the process of acquiring information, but these systems are not accessible in all regions of the State. Also, the process of acquiring criminal background checks is reportedly slower for private agencies because they do not have direct access and must obtain the information from the State.

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

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the current recruitment mechanisms have not addressed the need for ethnic and racially diverse foster homes reflective of the current State population. In the State's first CFSR, this item was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFCS approved foster homes numbered 4,198 and non-DFCS active homes numbered 1,212 in December 2006. The Statewide Assessment reports that all counties are required to develop an Annual Recruitment Plan in accordance with the State's Recruitment Plan and MEPA requirements.

The Statewide Assessment reports that the predominant racial groups reflected in DFCS foster parents are White (2,094), Black (2,086) and Hispanic (48), although there are also a very small number of foster homes reflective of the Asian and American Indian populations. The Statewide Assessment indicates that Region III has seen an increase in the Hispanic population as well as an increase in Hispanic foster children. The State has made attempts to recruit Hispanic and bilingual foster and adoptive homes, although currently there are not enough homes to meet the need. In Gwinnett County, for example, more than 25 percent of the agency's foster children are Hispanic. Gwinnett County has partnered with the Hispanic community to increase awareness about the need for more homes for Hispanic children. The Statewide Assessment also points out that Fulton County has partnered with relevant local agencies to expand resources for children and families for whom English is not the primary language.

According to the Statewide Assessment, targeted recruitments will be conducted through a pending contract, and the State will be tracking the number of new homes which reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care. In addition, the agency is working with the Family Connection Partnership on a pilot to recruit, prepare and support foster parents in local communities. The Statewide Assessment indicates that the goals of this pilot are to a) increase foster families for larger sibling groups and adolescents and b) evaluate models of local partnerships that successfully support foster parents. Regarding children who are legally free for adoption, the Statewide Assessment reports that they are registered with national, regional and local adoption exchanges.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 15 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. Some stakeholders indicated that there are counties that keep pace with their need for foster homes, while others reported that there are not enough homes for children in foster care. For example, stakeholders in Floyd County reported that there is a significant shortage of foster homes. Stakeholders in Walton County reported that while there is a specific shortage of foster homes for adolescents, the agency has been able to maintain enough homes for the general population of children in foster care. Stakeholders across the sites generally agreed, however, that there are not enough homes reflective of the diversity of the population across the State, and a few stakeholders noted that foster parents do not necessarily know how to provide culturally appropriate care to the children in their homes. While there are targeted efforts to recruit more homes for Hispanic children as well as for adolescents across the State, there are not enough of these homes at present to meet the need.

In addition, stakeholders noted that the agency is employing the following recruitment strategies through State and local efforts:

- Each county has an annual recruitment plan which can be inputted into an automated statewide system along with local quarterly updates.
- Regional Resource Development Teams meet consistently with counties within each Region on local recruiting strategies. The Resource Development Teams and local counties utilize adoption fairs, television features, conferences, Adoption Month

activities, billboards, yard signs, press articles, church activities, annual festivals, branded pens, notepads, and fraternity/sorority forums, etc.

- The Foster Parent Initiative is employing various community-and faith-based organizations to design strategies with strong foster parent support components.
- There is a 1-800 intake line for foster and adoptive parents.
- Contracted services will be conducting targeted recruitment of homes for siblings and adolescents.

Although the State does have various recruitment initiatives in place, some stakeholders noted that DFCS retention rates of foster homes are low. A few stakeholders pointed out that supports for foster parents are not consistently available across the State. A few stakeholders also said that foster parents feel that the state of communication with the agency in some areas of the State has been consistently very poor.

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 an Area Needing Improvement because of delays in facilitating cross-jurisdictional placements in a timely manner. In the State’s first CFSR, this item was rated as a Strength.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, “as part of the State’s effort to recruit adoptive families for its general population of children free for adoption, the agency utilizes the following state programs: My Turn Now Photo Listing, The Heart Gallery, Wednesday’s Child, Video Conference Adoption Party and Regional Paper Matches.”

The Statewide Assessment reports that the metro Atlanta region has a transient population, and as such, there may be fewer options for relative placements for these families within the State. The Statewide Assessment reports that in situations in which relatives reside out of the State, the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is a lengthy and time-consuming process.

Stakeholder Interview Information

During the CFSR onsite review, this item was the topic of discussion in 11 stakeholder interviews, some of which had multiple participants. The majority of stakeholders commenting on this item were of the opinion that the agency does make efforts to place children and to find permanent placements for children in other States. A few stakeholders reported that the State uses an in-state recruitment website and national exchanges such as Wendy’s Wonderful Kids to find placements for children in other jurisdictions. Placements are jointly handled by the ICPC Unit and the local office. The Unit uses a system that flags when actions are required and a database that tracks ICPC cases, but a few stakeholders noted that ICPC cases continue to create long delays in placing children out

of State. One stakeholder noted that there are differences in type and quality of required home studies that can be difficult to resolve across States.

A number of stakeholders pointed out that the State seeks relative placements for children in other jurisdictions across the State. However, some stakeholders pointed out that there are problems with facilitating these placements in a timely manner. In general, stakeholders pointed out that the process for securing cross-county placements for children is slow, and there is a need for increased coordination across counties to make these placements happen more quickly for children. For example, Floyd County stakeholders reported that placements for children within the county are completed in a timely manner, but for placements occurring outside of the county, the process does not move efficiently. A few Fulton County stakeholders reported that there are particular challenges when home studies must be conducted for relatives who live in alternate counties. For example, Fulton County stakeholders noted that the requesting county must have permission from the county of the relative's residence in order to conduct a home study, and the relative caregiver's county does not necessarily act with urgency upon these requests. This can lead to delays in achieving stable and/or permanent placements for children.