

CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES AND MEASURES

I. Original Outcome Measures for the Child Welfare Outcomes Report

These outcome measures have been used since the first Child Welfare Outcomes Report for 1998. They were developed by the Department of Health and Human Services (the Department) in consultation with State officials, advocates, and other experts in the field and reflect widely held performance objectives for child welfare program practice.

- **Child Welfare Outcome 1: Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect**

Measure 1.1: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during the first 6 months of the reporting period, what percentage had another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period?

- **Child Welfare Outcome 2: Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care**

Measure 2.1: Of all children who were in foster care during the fiscal year, what percentage was the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff?

- **Child Welfare Outcome 3: Increase permanency for children in foster care**

Measure 3.1: For all children who exited foster care in the fiscal year, what percentage left to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship?

Measure 3.2: For children who exited foster care in the fiscal year and were identified as having a diagnosed disability, what percentage left to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship?

Measure 3.3: For children who exited foster care in the fiscal year and were older than age 12 at the time of their most recent entry into care, what percentage left to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship?

Measure 3.4: Of all children exiting foster care in the fiscal year to emancipation, what percentage was age 12 or younger at the time of entry into care?

Measure 3.5: For all children who exited foster care in the fiscal year, what percentage by racial/ethnic category left to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship?

- **Child Welfare Outcome 4: Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry**

Measure 4.1: Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care in the fiscal year, what percentage was reunified in the following time periods?

- (a) Less than 12 months from the time of latest removal from home
- (b) At least 12 months, but less than 24 months
- (c) At least 24 months, but less than 36 months
- (d) At least 36 months, but less than 48 months
- (e) 48 or more months

Measure 4.2: Of all children who entered foster care during the fiscal year, what percentage reentered care:

- (a) Within 12 months of a prior foster care episode?
- (b) More than 12 months after a prior foster care episode?

- **Child Welfare Outcome 5: Reduce time in foster care to adoption**

Measure 5.1: Of all children who exited foster care in the fiscal year to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in the following time periods?

- (a) Less than 12 months from the time of latest removal from home
- (b) At least 12 months, but less than 24 months
- (c) At least 24 months, but less than 36 months
- (d) At least 36 months, but less than 48 months
- (e) 48 or more months

- **Child Welfare Outcome 6: Increase placement stability**

Measure 6.1: Of all children served in the fiscal year who had been in foster care for the time periods listed below, what percentage had no more than two placement settings during that time period?

- (a) Less than 12 months from the time of latest removal from home
- (b) At least 12 months, but less than 24 months
- (c) 24 or months or longer

- **Child Welfare Outcome 7: Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions**

Measure 7.1: For all children who entered foster care during the fiscal year and were age 12 or younger at the time of their most recent placement, what percentage was placed in a group home or an institution?

II. The 15 New Outcome Measures Developed for the Second Round of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)

Although some of the 15 new measures are similar to the original ones, one difference is that the calculation for all new measures excludes children who were age 18 or older on the first day of the fiscal year, whereas the original measures included them. States may vary with regard to their reporting of children age 18 or older to AFCARS. Some States do not report these children, some States report all children in foster care regardless of age, and some States report only some of the children age 18 or older in foster care. Excluding these youth from the new measures will help ensure consistency across States.

The 15 new outcome measures included in the Child Welfare Outcomes Report are incorporated into four separate data composites. The measures subsumed under each composite are presented below.

- **Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunifications**

This composite addresses issues relevant to national Child Welfare Outcome 4, reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry. The Department considers children to be discharged from foster care to reunification if the reason for discharge reported to AFCARS is either “reunification with parent or primary caretaker” or “living with other relative.” It is important to note that the discharge reason of living with other relatives applies only to children discharged from foster care to the care of a relative. It does not apply to children in the foster care system in out-of-home placements with relatives, and it does not apply to children discharged from foster care to a legal guardian, even if the legal guardian is a relative.

The calculation of three of the measures included in Permanency Composite 1 excludes children who were discharged from foster care in less than 8 days and incorporates a “trial home visit” adjustment, when relevant. These are explained below.

- *Exclusions of children discharged from foster care in less than 8 days.* The calculation of some of the new measures excludes children who were discharged from foster care less than 8 days from the time of entry. This exclusion was not part of the calculation of any of the original Child Welfare Outcomes measures. When the exclusion is incorporated, it is explicitly stated in the wording of the measure. Casework practices and agency efforts needed to achieve timely reunification for the typical child in foster care are not usually applicable for children in care for very short stays. In addition, some States may use foster care in this short-term way while others may not. Therefore, the exclusion of these very short-stay cases promotes consistency of measurement across States.
- *The trial home visit adjustment.* The new timeliness of reunification measures incorporate what is referred to as the trial home visit adjustment. The use of this adjustment is explicitly stated in all measures to which it applies. The trial home visit adjustment addresses the variation across States with regard to the practice of returning children in

foster care to their families for a period of time without discharging them from foster care in order to provide continued monitoring and/or services. This practice often is referred to as “physical reunification,” and may be required in State statute, written into agency policy, or simply reflect standard case practice in a State. Using the adjustment will help ensure uniformity across States in this measure. An important feature of this adjustment is that the child must exit foster care with a discharge of reunification or living with other relatives before the trial home visit adjustment is considered. At the time of official discharge from foster care, any time in that final trial home visit beyond 30 days is subtracted from the total length of stay.¹

The individual measures included in Permanency Composite 1 (C1) are as follows:

Individual Measure C1.1: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to reunification in the fiscal year, and who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, what percentage was reunified in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (This includes the trial home visit adjustment, if relevant.)

Individual Measure C1.2: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to reunification in the fiscal year, and who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, what was the median length of stay in months from the date of the latest removal from home until the date of discharge to reunification? (This includes the trial home visit adjustment, if relevant.)

Individual Measure C1.3: Of all children who entered foster care for the first time in the 6-month period just prior to the target year, and who remained in foster care for 8 days or longer, what percentage was discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months from the date of latest removal from home? (This includes the trial home visit adjustment.)

Measure C1.3 reflects a new approach to assessing timeliness of reunification for both the Child Welfare Outcomes Report and the CFSRs. Instead of evaluating timeliness from the perspective of children discharged from foster care, this measure (usually referred to as an “entry cohort” measure) evaluates timeliness of reunification from the perspective of children entering foster care. This approach was not possible when measures were initially developed for the Child Welfare Outcomes Report because, at that time, most States did not use consistent encrypted child identifiers that permitted tracking children over time. The same child was sometimes assigned a different encrypted ID in different years. All but two States are now using consistent identifiers. Those two States are expected to have completed this change very shortly, and certainly by the time the 2003-2006 Child Welfare Outcomes Report is published.

¹ More information on this adjustment is provided in the *Federal Register* of November 9, 2005, and June 7, 2006, and on the Children’s Bureau website.

Individual Measure C1.4: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the target year, what percentage reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge?

Similar to measure C1.3, this measure became possible only when States began reporting unique encrypted identifiers that permit a longitudinal assessment of children over reporting periods. The measure tracks children who exited foster care to reunification to identify those who reentered foster care in less than 12 months. Therefore, it assesses State performance with regard to the permanency of reunifications. Because the longitudinal measure of reentry into foster care is a more direct measure than the original reentry measure, it will replace the original measure as the assessment of reentry.

- **Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions**

This composite addresses national Child Welfare Outcome 5, reduce time in foster care to adoption. The following measures are included in Permanency Composite 2 (C2).

Individual Measure C2.1: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the fiscal year, what percentage was discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home?

Individual Measure C2.2: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the target year, what was the median length of stay in foster care in months from the date of latest removal from home to the date of discharge to adoption?

Individual Measure C2.3: Of all children in foster care on the first day of the 12-month target period who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, what percentage was discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption by the last day of the 12-month target period?

Individual Measure C2.4: Of all children in foster care on the first day of the 12-month target period who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, and who were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, what percentage became legally free for adoption during the first 6 months of the 12-month target period? (A child is considered to be legally free for adoption if there is a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father.)

Similar to the entry cohort measure of reunification and the new measure of reentry, individual measures C2.3 and C2.4 capture State performance in achieving timely adoptions from a longitudinal perspective, rather than from the point of discharge from foster care. The measures reflect the statutory requirement of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 that States pursue adoption as a permanency goal for any child who has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, unless

the agency documents a compelling reason why such action would not be in the best interests of the child.²

Individual Measure C2.5: Of all children who became legally free for adoption during the 12 months prior to the target year, what percentage was discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 12 months from the date of becoming legally free?

This is another longitudinal measure that became possible when States began reporting unique encrypted identifiers for children that permitted tracking them over time.

- **Permanency Composite 3: Achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time**

This composite addresses issues relevant to national Child Welfare Outcome 3, increase permanency for children in foster care. The following measures are included in Permanency Composite 3 (C3):

Individual Measure C3.1: Of all children who were in foster care for 24 months or longer on the first day of the target year, what percentage was discharged to a permanent home by the last day of the year and prior to their 18th birthday?³

Individual Measure C3.2: Of all children who were discharged from foster care during the target year, and who were legally free for adoption (i.e., there is a parental rights termination date for both parents) at the time of discharge, what percentage was discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday?

This measure reflects the concern of the field that, by pursuing termination of parental rights for children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, child welfare agencies may be creating “legal orphans,” that is, children who, at the time of discharge from foster care, have no legal parents and no permanent home.

Individual Measure C3.3: Of all children who either (1) prior to age 18, were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation, or (2) reached their 18th birthday while in foster care but had not yet been discharged from foster care, what percentage was in foster care for 3 years or longer?

² ASFA requires State child welfare agencies to file a petition to terminate parental rights and pursue adoption for a child who has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, unless the agency documents a compelling reason why such action would not be in the best interests of the child. A 17-month rather than a 15-month timeframe was chosen for the measure because, in accordance with ASFA, a child is considered to have “entered foster care” (for purposes of starting the clock for the 15 of 22 months) on the earlier of (1) the first judicial finding that the child has been subjected to abuse and neglect or (2) the date that is 60 days after the date on which the child is removed from the home. The 17-month timeframe is used in the measure because AFCARS does not collect information pertaining to the date of the first judicial finding.

³ The 24-month period was chosen because nationally, about 50 percent of the children in foster care on any given day have been in foster care for approximately 2 years or longer.

This measure, and the original measure 3.4 in the Child Welfare Outcomes Report, are both intended to assess whether children are spending a large part of their childhood in foster care without ever being discharged to a permanent home.

- **Permanency Composite 4: Placement stability**

Permanency Composite 4 (C4) is consistent with the objectives of national Child Welfare Outcome 6, increase placement stability. The three individual measures included in this composite are similar to the original measure 6.1 in the Child Welfare Outcomes Report. As previously noted, however, one difference is that the measures included in this composite exclude children who were age 18 or older on the first day of the fiscal year. Measure 6.1 does not exclude these children. In addition, measure C4.1 excludes children who were not in foster care for at least 8 days. (See Composite 1 for an explanation of the less than 8-day exclusion.)

Individual Measure C4.1: Of all children who were served in foster care during the fiscal year, and who were in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, what percentage had two or fewer placement settings?

Individual Measure C4.2: Of all children who were served in foster care during the fiscal year, and who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percentage had two or fewer placement settings?

Individual Measure C4.3: Of all children who were served in foster care during the fiscal year, and who were in foster care for at least 24 months, what percentage had two or fewer placement settings?