

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).