

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Final Report: Montana Child and Family Services Review
April 2009

INTRODUCTION

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

The Montana CFSR was conducted the week of August 11, 2008. The period under review for the onsite case reviews was from April 1, 2007, through August 15, 2008. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Montana Child and Family Services Division of the State Office of Children and Family Services
- The State Data Profile, prepared by CB, which provides State child welfare data for fiscal year (FY) 2005, FY 2006, and the CFSR 12-month target period ending March 31, 2007
- Reviews of 62 cases (40 foster care cases, and 22 in-home services cases¹) that were open child welfare cases at some time during the period under review—17 cases in Cascade County, 17 cases in Missoula County, and 28 cases in Yellowstone 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 and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

Background Information

The CFSR assesses State performance in regard to its conformity with seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. For the outcome assessments, each outcome incorporates one or more of the 23 items included in the review, and each item is rated as a Strength or an Area Needing Improvement (ANI) based on the results of the case reviews. An item is given an overall rating of Strength if at least 90 percent of the applicable cases reviewed are rated as a Strength. Depending on item ratings, an outcome can be “substantially achieved,” “partially achieved,” or “not achieved.” For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent of the cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and

¹ Originally there were 25 in-home cases. However, during the onsite CFSR, only 22 in-home services cases were found to meet the sampling criteria for inclusion in the CFSR.

Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met.

There are 22 items that are considered in assessing the State’s substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors. Each item reflects a key Federal program requirement relevant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for that systemic factor. An item is rated as a Strength or an ANI based on whether State performance on the item meets the Federal program requirements. A determination of the rating is based on information provided in the Statewide Assessment and from interviews with stakeholders held during the onsite CFSR. Additional information may come from other Federal reports or assessments.

Overall performance on each systemic factor is based on the ratings for the individual items incorporated in the systemic factor. For any given systemic factor, a State is rated as being either “in substantial conformity” with that factor (i.e., a score of 3 or 4) or “not in substantial conformity” with that factor (a score of 1 or 2). Specific requirements for each rating are shown in the table below.

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

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

Because many changes were made in the CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State’s performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round. Key changes in the process that make comparing performance difficult 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 noncustodial parents

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Outcomes

The Montana CFSR identified several areas of strength with regard to the State's performance in achieving the outcomes assessed during the review. The State was in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2, which pertains to meeting the educational needs of children in foster care and children in the in-home services cases. In addition, Montana's performance was rated as a Strength for the following items:

- Item 5: Foster care reentry
- Item 11: Proximity of placement
- Item 12: Placement with siblings

In addition, Montana met the national standards for these data indicators and composites:

- Absence of maltreatment recurrence
- Absence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care
- Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions
- Permanency Composite 4: Placement stability

Although Montana did not achieve the 90 percent or higher required for a rating of Strength, the State performed at a fairly high level on the following items:

- Item 2: Repeat maltreatment
- Item 14: Preserving connections

Despite these areas of strength, the CFSR identified several key concerns with regard to the State's performance in achieving desired outcomes for children and families. The most critical concerns pertained to the following:

- Permanency Outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) was rated as substantially achieved in only 32.5 percent of the 40 foster care cases reviewed.
- Well-Being Outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs) was rated as substantially achieved in only 48.4 percent of the 40 foster care cases reviewed.

Within these outcomes, the following items were rated as Strengths in less than 50 percent of the applicable cases reviewed:

- Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives
- Item 9: Adoption
- Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning
- Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents

Another concern identified in the CFSR was that Montana did not meet the national standards for the following national data indicators pertaining to children's safety and permanency:

- Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification
- Permanency Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods

Although there are no clear causal relationships to explain Montana's performance with regard to the outcomes and items noted above, the State's performance may be attributed in part to the following key challenges identified during the CFSR:

- Caseworkers are not consistently engaging parents, particularly fathers, in case planning, in visiting with their children, and in activities that are intended to strengthen the parent-child bond. In addition, caseworkers are not consistently assessing the needs of fathers, and when needs are assessed, service provision is inconsistent.
- Delays in achieving timely permanency may be due to a lack of integration of the case plan and case plan review process with the court's treatment plan and treatment plan review process. This lack of integration results in confusion regarding the steps necessary to achieve the permanency plan and a lack of concerted efforts to achieve timely permanency. The practice of handling permanency planning goals sequentially rather than concurrently may prolong permanency attainment as well.
- Permanency is delayed in some legal jurisdictions when the court approves repeated extensions to treatment plan timeframes in spite of agency and/or case review recommendations. Permanency also is delayed when defense attorneys advise their clients not to cooperate with treatment planning or when the attorneys seek frequent delays.
- Caseworkers are not consistently visiting parents, especially fathers, resulting in delays in achievement of permanency. In addition, caseworkers are not consistently visiting children to ensure their safety, permanency, and well-being and to promote achieving case goals.

Key CFSR Findings Regarding Systemic Factors

With regard to systemic factors, Montana is in substantial conformity with six of the seven systemic factors:

- Statewide Information System
- Quality Assurance (QA) System
- Staff and Provider Training
- Service Array and Resource Development
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Montana is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System.

Specific findings for 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 sections, key findings are summarized for each outcome and systemic factor. Information also is provided about the State's performance on each outcome and systemic factor during the Federal FY 2002 CFSR.

I. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

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

Safety Outcome 1 incorporates two items. 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). Safety Outcome 1 also incorporates two national data indicators for which national standards have been established. These data indicators measure the absence of maltreatment recurrence and the absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff.

Montana is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 79.3 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 95 percent or higher required for a rating of substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 88 percent of Cascade County cases, 60 percent of Missoula County cases, and 81 percent of Yellowstone County cases. Montana met the national standard for both of the two data indicators pertaining to Safety Outcome 1: Absence of maltreatment recurrence, and Absence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care.

Montana was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 review:

- Montana did not meet the national standard for the measure of maltreatment recurrence.
- Item 1 (Timely initiation of investigations of child maltreatment) was rated an ANI.
- Item 2 (Repeat maltreatment) was rated an ANI.

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

- Conducted periodic reviews of cases to monitor timeliness and handling of repeat maltreatment referrals to ensure continued progress in safety issues
- Used the expertise of regional Risk Directors to improve response to repeat maltreatment for the most vulnerable children

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

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

Performance on Safety Outcome 2 is assessed through two items. One item (item 3) assesses State efforts to prevent children's removal from their homes by providing the family with services to ensure children's safety while they remain in their homes. The other item (item 4) assesses efforts to manage safety and reduce the risk of harm to children in their own homes and in their foster care placements.

Montana is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 71.0 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent or higher required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 82 percent of Cascade County cases, 47 percent of Missoula County cases, and 79 percent of Yellowstone County cases.

The key findings for this outcome in the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- Service provision was inconsistent, did not address the needs of all family members, and/or did not target the key safety concerns in the family.
- Ongoing safety and risk assessments were inconsistent, especially prior to reunification or during children's visitations with parents.

Montana was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR:

- The State was inconsistent in its efforts to ensure that risk of harm to children was effectively reduced.
- The State was inconsistent in monitoring risk during children's visitations with parents.

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

- Designed and implemented a Safety Assessment Guide, which included several safety assessment tools, including the Investigative Safety Assessment and other tools to assess safety throughout the life of a case.

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

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

Six items are incorporated in the assessment of Permanency Outcome 1, although not all of them are relevant for all of the foster care cases reviewed. The items pertain to State efforts to prevent foster care reentry (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 items focus on an assessment of State efforts to achieve permanency goals (such as

reunification, guardianship, adoption, or permanent placement with relatives) in a timely manner (items 8 and 9) or to ensure that children who have a case goal of other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) are in stable, long-term placements and are adequately prepared for eventual independent living (item 10).

Montana is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 in its 2008 CFSR. The outcome was substantially achieved in only 30.0 percent of the foster care cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 50 percent of Cascade County cases, 30 percent of Missoula County cases, and 25 percent of Yellowstone County cases. Item 5 was rated as a Strength, while items 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were rated as ANIs. In addition to the case review findings, Montana met the national standards for the data composites pertaining to timeliness of adoptions (Permanency Composite 2) and placement stability (Permanency Composite 4) but did not meet the national standards for the data composites pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification (Permanency Composite 1) or permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods (Permanency Composite 3).

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

- The State was effective in preventing reentry into foster care for the cases reviewed.
- The State was not effective in ensuring placement stability.
- The State was not consistent with regard to establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent in making concerted efforts to achieve reunification or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner.
- The State was not consistent in meeting the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements related to termination of parental rights (TPR).
- There were extensive delays in achieving adoptions in a timely manner.
- The State did not consistently address the goal of OPPLA in an appropriate way.

Montana was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The following key concerns were identified in the 2002 review.

- There were concerns about the agency's ability to prevent the reentry of children into foster care.
- The agency was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- The agency was not consistent with regard to making concerted efforts to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner, particularly adoptions.
- The agency was not consistent with regard to establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.

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

- The State corrected a data entry problem related to trial home visits and runaway situations that had misrepresented the data for foster care reentries.
- Montana implemented a programming change to the Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS) to monitor the number of foster care placements.
- The agency implemented the Safety Assessment at Reunification and the Safety Assessment at Case Closure to prevent foster care reentries.
- The State trained staff in developing crisis plans for resource families (e.g., foster families, pre-adoptive families, and relative caregivers) based on a child's known behaviors and stressors and the families' skills in dealing with them. This was designed to prevent placement disruptions.
- The State created a mechanism to evaluate permanency goals for appropriateness by requiring approval of the goal by the Foster Care Review Committee (FCRC).
- The State created a documentation protocol related to achieving adoptions in a timely manner, including documentation of compelling reasons not to file a TPR petition.

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

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

Permanency Outcome 2 incorporates six items that assess State 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).

Montana is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 77.5 percent of foster care cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 100 percent of Cascade County cases, 80 percent of Missoula County cases, and 65 percent of Yellowstone County cases. Items 11 and 12 were rated as Strengths, while items 13, 14, 15, and 16 were rated as ANIs.

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

- The State was effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents.
- The State was very effective in ensuring that siblings were placed together when appropriate.
- In several cases, the frequency and/or quality of visits between children and their fathers, mothers, or siblings were insufficient to meet the needs of the child.

- There was a lack of concerted effort in some cases to maintain the child’s connections with extended family, culture, religion, community, and school.
- There was inconsistency in practice with regard to agency efforts to locate and assess maternal and paternal relatives as potential placement resources for children in foster care.
- There was inconsistency in practice with regard to agency efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and fathers.

Montana was not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address this outcome in its PIP. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 review:

- The State was not establishing regular visitations between parents and children.
- When siblings were separated, diligent efforts were not made to ensure their ongoing contact and visitation.
- The agency was not consistent in making diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children and their mothers and fathers through efforts other than arranging visitation.
- There were inconsistent efforts to search for relatives, particularly when initial relative placements disrupted.

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

- Revised visitation policy and implemented a tool to document quantity and quality of visitation
- Modified intensive in-home contracts to require more caseworker visitation
- Awarded grant monies to providers to facilitate and supervise visitation between parents and children
- Implemented policy requiring that a Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meeting is offered to all families whose children enter foster care as a means of identifying potential relative placements
- Implemented policy requiring a permanency meeting for every child in care more than 90 days and modified the documentation for the meeting to include diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placements
- Developed standard observation/evaluation criteria to address the evaluation of the relationships between parents and children

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

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

Well-Being Outcome 1 incorporates four items. One item pertains to State 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 item examines State efforts to actively involve parents and children, when appropriate, in the case planning process (item 18). The two remaining items examine the frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with the children in their caseloads (item 19) and with the children’s parents (item 20).

Montana is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in only 48.4 percent of cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 59 percent of Cascade County cases, 29 percent of Missoula County cases, and 54 percent of Yellowstone County cases. The outcome also was substantially achieved in 63 percent of the foster care cases compared to 23 percent of the in-home services cases. All items assessed for this outcome were rated as ANIs.

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

- There was inconsistent practice with regard to assessing and addressing the service needs of fathers, mothers, children, and foster parents.
- Children, mothers, and particularly fathers were not consistently involved in case planning.
- Caseworkers were not consistent with regard to visiting children with sufficient frequency and ensuring that the visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.
- Caseworkers were not consistent with regard to visiting parents, particularly fathers, with sufficient frequency and ensuring that visits with parents focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

Montana was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The following concerns were identified in the 2002 review:

- The State was not consistent in its efforts to identify and address families' services needs.
- The State was not consistent in involvement of family members in case planning.
- Caseworker visits with children and caseworker visits with parents were of insufficient frequency to meet the family's needs.

To address identified concerns, the State developed and implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- A behavioral assessment procedure and documentation tool to improve identification of service needs
- A policy requiring that every family who has an open case is offered an opportunity to participate in case planning through FGDM; modified the case planning tool to improve documentation of family participation in case planning
- A policy requiring monthly face-to-face contacts with children
- A policy on caseworker visits with parents

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

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

Only one item is assessed under Well-Being Outcome 2. It pertains to State efforts to address and meet the educational needs of children in foster care and, when relevant, children in the in-home services cases (item 21).

Montana is in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 95.1 percent of the applicable cases. This percentage is greater than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 100 percent of Cascade County cases, 82 percent of Missoula County cases, and 100 percent of Yellowstone County cases. Also, the outcome was substantially achieved in 97 percent of the foster care cases and 86 percent of the in-home services cases.

Montana also was in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2002 CFSR and was not required to address the outcome in its PIP.

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

This outcome incorporates two items that assess State efforts to meet the physical health (item 22) and mental health (item 23) needs of children in foster care and children in the in-home services cases, if relevant.

Montana is not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. The outcome was substantially achieved in 67.9 percent of the 62 applicable cases. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for substantial conformity. The outcome was substantially achieved in 62 percent of Cascade County cases, 69 percent of Missoula County cases, and 70 percent of Yellowstone County cases. Also, the outcome was substantially achieved in 74 percent of foster care cases and 53 percent of in-home services cases. Items 22 and 23 were rated as ANIs.

Montana was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 during its 2002 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its PIP. The key concern of the 2002 review related to inconsistencies in the State's efforts to meet the physical and mental health needs of children.

To address this concern, the State implemented the following strategies in its PIP:

- Participated with representatives of the Health Services Policy Division to strategize recruitment of dentists to the Medicaid plan
- Used the FCRC to monitor the physical and mental health of children by adding specific physical and mental health questions to the review format
- Updated legal petition templates to routinely include authorization for medical care including physical examinations
- Worked with dentists individually to accept foster children as Medicaid patients in one community in each region
- Participated in Montana Policy Academy to develop systems of care for children with mental health needs and their families
- Developed a behavioral assessment tool and policy to assist foster parents and social workers in assessing the mental health needs of children

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

II. KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System is determined by whether the State is operating an information system that can provide accurate and timely information pertaining to the status, demographic characteristics, location, and case goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

Montana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System in its 2008 CFSR. The State is operating a statewide information system from which staff can readily identify a child's status, demographic characteristics, placement location, and case goals.

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

Case Review System

Five items are included in the assessment of State performance for the systemic factor of Case Review System. The items examine development of case plans and parent involvement in that process (item 25), the consistency of 6-month case reviews (item 26) and 12-month permanency hearings (item 27), implementation of procedures to seek TPR in accordance with the timeframes established in ASFA (item 28), and notification of foster and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers about schedules for case reviews and hearings and about their rights to be heard in those proceedings (item 29).

Montana is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Although the 2008 CFSR determined that the State has a functioning administrative review process for the periodic review of the status of each child at least every 6 months (item 26), the following concerns were identified:

- Parents, especially fathers, were not consistently involved in case planning.
- Court adherence to timely permanency hearings was inconsistent throughout the State due to overloaded court dockets and attorney requests for continuances. Other factors causing delays in permanency hearings were delayed permanency reports or a delay in appointment of a guardian *ad litem* (GAL).
- Although the State has a process in place for filing a TPR petition, the agency was not consistent with regard to filing for TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA.
- There was inconsistency with regard to notification to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers regarding hearings and reviews.

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

- Parents and children were not actively involved in the development of case plans on a consistent basis.
- There was confusion between case plans and treatment plans, with staff viewing case plans as compliance documents, while treatment plans were viewed as the heart of the direction of services and outcomes for children and families.
- Periodic review of the status of each child at least every 6 months either by court or administrative review was described as perfunctory. In some parts of the State, periodic reviews were inconsistently held, especially for youth in long-term foster care.
- The periodic review was seen as a compliance detail that did not affect the case outcomes in terms of achieving permanency.
- Court adherence to timely permanency hearings was inconsistent throughout the State, due to continuances and delays caused by full court dockets. In addition, some courts were closing cases after TPR.

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

- Created a new case plan format and documentation standards that required documentation of involvement of children and parents and trained staff on the new standards
- Modified the periodic review process by obtaining input to determine its strengths and weaknesses; collaborated with courts, GALs, Tribal authorities, and others to develop training on periodic reviews; and trained staff and FCRC members on revised requirements of the periodic review process
- Provided training on permanency hearing requirements to county attorneys and judges
- Worked collaboratively with the Court Assessment Project to improve timeliness of permanency hearings
- Introduced legislation to allow the FCRC, instead of a judge, to conduct the permanency hearing

The State met its target goals with regard to this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Quality Assurance System

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

Montana was in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of QA System. The key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- The State has in place effective licensing standards and policies to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services.
- The State has a clearly identifiable and functioning QA system that addresses practice areas and provides feedback on key findings.

The State was not in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and was required to address it in its PIP.

The following concerns were identified in the 2002 CFSR:

- The State's policy requiring caseworkers to make face-to-face contact with children in foster care once per quarter posed a safety issue for children.
- Due to a lack of foster homes in some parts of the State, foster home capacity was exceeded when additional children were placed in foster homes. This practice presented risks to the safety of some children in foster care.
- The State was not operating an identifiable QA system in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP were provided.

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

- The State created, implemented, and trained staff on a policy requiring monthly face-to-face caseworker contacts with children in foster care.
- The State created, implemented, and trained staff on licensing standards for increasing the number of children for whom a home is licensed that ensures the safety of the children in the home.
- The State developed guidelines for documenting case activities in the CAPS application.
- The State implemented a QA system to evaluate the quality of services, identify strengths and needs of the service delivery system, and provide relevant reports including evaluation of program improvement measures implemented. The QA system consists of peer case reviews using a case reading instrument that is consistent with the CFSR onsite case review tool.

The State met its target goals with regard to this systemic factor by the end of the PIP implementation period.

Staff and Provider Training

The systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training incorporates an assessment of the State's training provided to new caseworkers (item 32), the ongoing training provided to agency staff (item 33), and both initial and ongoing training provided to foster and adoptive parents (item 34).

Montana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Staff and Provider Training. The CFSR determined that the State provides initial and ongoing training for staff that was sufficient to prepare them for the duties required by their jobs. The CFSR also determined that the State's training program for foster and adoptive caregivers is generally effective in addressing the skills and knowledge necessary for them to parent the children in their care.

The State was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor in its 2002 CFSR and was not required to address it in the PIP.

Service Array and Resource Development

The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development addresses three areas: The State has in place an array of services that meets the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35), services are accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36), and services can be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and family served by the child welfare agency (item 37).

Montana was in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- The State has an array of services to assess and address the needs of children and families.
- The availability of flexible funds and wraparound services enables the agency to individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families.
- Although improvements in service access have been made since the 2002 CFSR, the accessibility of key services, such as substance abuse services, mental health services, and foster homes (especially for Native American children), are not accessible in all parts of the State.

The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and was not required to address this factor in its PIP.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Performance with regard to the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community incorporates an assessment of the State's consultation with external stakeholders in developing the CFSP and producing annual reports (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).

Montana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

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

- There are processes in place for ongoing consultation including the Child and Family Services Advisory Council structure, which solicits input from representatives of providers, Tribes, courts, and caseworkers in developing the CFSP.
- The State provides complete and comprehensive annual reports for IV-B funding, and the reports include consultations with and input from community stakeholders.
- There was considerable coordination of services among various child welfare funding streams and with other Federal programs. The use of title IV-E funding for child welfare clients under the jurisdiction of Tribal courts also was a coordinated effort.

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

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

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

Montana is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention in its 2008 CFSR.

Key findings of the 2008 CFSR were the following:

- The State has established and implemented clear standards for approving foster family homes and licensing child care institutions.
- The State applies consistent standards for all licensed child-placing agencies, child care institutions, and foster family homes.
- The State is in compliance with the Federal requirements for criminal background clearances and safety requirements for prospective foster and adoptive parents.
- The State has in place a process for the use of cross-jurisdictional resources.
- Although the State has a plan in place for recruiting families to meet the specific needs of children, the plan has not been implemented effectively and has not addressed the identified need for more foster homes, particularly for older youth, Native American children, large sibling groups, and behaviorally challenging children.

The State was in substantial conformity with this factor in its 2002 CFSR and was not required to address it in its PIP.

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings			Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Met National Standards?	Rating**	Percent Strength
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	No	79.3	Met 2 of 2		
Item 1: Timeliness of investigations				ANI	83
Item 2: Repeat maltreatment				ANI	85
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes when possible and appropriate	No	71.0			
Item 3: Services to prevent removal				ANI	78
Item 4: Risk of harm				ANI	73
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	No	32.5	Met 2 of 4		
Item 5: Foster care reentry				Strength	92
Item 6: Stability of foster care placements				ANI	72.5
Item 7: Permanency goal for child				ANI	53
Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, and placement with relatives				ANI	48
Item 9: Adoption				ANI	21
Item 10: Other planned permanent living arrangement				ANI	57
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved	No	77.5			
Item 11: Proximity of placement				Strength	96
Item 12: Placement with siblings				Strength	100
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care				ANI	70
Item 14: Preserving connections				ANI	87
Item 15: Relative placement				ANI	83
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents				ANI	67

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

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

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

Outcomes and Indicators	Outcome Ratings		Item Ratings	
	In Substantial Conformity?	Percent Substantially Achieved*	Rating**	Percent Strength
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children’s needs	No	48.4		
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents			ANI	55
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning			ANI	49
Item 19: Caseworker visits with child			ANI	73
Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents			ANI	45
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive services to meet their educational needs	Yes	95.1		
Item 21: Educational needs of child			Strength	95
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs	No	67.9		
Item 22: Physical health of child			ANI	76
Item 23: Mental health of child			ANI	79

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

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

Table 3. Montana CFSR Ratings for Systemic Factors and Items

Systemic Factors and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Statewide Information System	Yes	4	
Item 24: The State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care			Strength
Case Review System	No	2	
Item 25: The State provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child’s parents that includes the required provisions			ANI
Item 26: The State provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review			Strength
Item 27: The State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the 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			ANI
Item 28: The State provides a process for TPR proceedings in accordance with the provisions of ASFA			ANI
Item 29: The State provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child			ANI
Quality Assurance System	Yes	4	
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 Child and Family Services Plan (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
Staff and Provider 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

Systemic Factors and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
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
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
Service Array and Resource Development	Yes	3	
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
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			Strength
Agency Responsiveness to the Community	Yes	4	
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
Item 39: The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP			Strength
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	Yes	3	
Item 41: The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that 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

Systemic Factors and Items	In Substantial Conformity?	Score*	Item Rating**
Item 43: The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case-planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children			Strength
Item 44: The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom adoptive homes are needed			ANI
Item 45: The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children			Strength

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

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