

Foster Care & Education Q&A

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE REVIEWS AND THE EDUCATION WELL-BEING OUTCOME

Q: What are the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)?

A: In 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services adopted a new method of monitoring state child welfare programs. The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) measure “substantial conformity” with certain outcomes for child protective, foster care, adoption, family preservation and support, and independent living services. The seven outcomes reviewed are focused on safety, permanency, and family and child well-being.

Each CFSR has two phases: 1) a statewide assessment and 2) an onsite review of outcomes and program systems. The onsite review consists of case record reviews and interviews with children, families, and stakeholders. If found not in substantial conformity with an outcome, the state must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). States that do not achieve the improvements will be penalized. Round 1 of the CFSRs took place between 2001 and 2004. Round 2, which is ongoing, began in 2007.

Q: Do CFSRs address education outcomes for children and youth?

A: The CFSRs address one education outcome for children and youth. This outcome, Well-Being Outcome 2, states: “Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.”

Q: Have states been found to be in substantial conformity for the education well-being outcome?

A: During Round 1 of the CFSR, thirty-four states were found not in “substantial conformity” with this outcome. Round 2 of the CFSR began in 2007. Of the nine states whose Round 2 final reports are published at http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm, only two states, Massachusetts and North Carolina, have been found in substantial conformity with the education well-being outcome.

Q: What are some common problems the CFSRs have identified around meeting the education needs of children in out-of-home care?

A: For the states that failed to reach substantial conformity, there were several common problems identified in the CFSRs:

- **Multiple School Changes.** Too often, a move into foster care or a change in placement means the child is forced to attend a new school. For example, one state indicated that children had to leave their home school districts due to out-of-home placement in 75 percent of cases reviewed.
- **Lack of Complete Educational Records and/or Failure to Provide Records to Foster Parents or Schools in a Timely Manner.** In



many states, child welfare case files did not contain school records. Foster parents and new schools are often not receiving educational records in a timely fashion.

- **Failure to Adequately Assess Children’s Educational Needs.** Many states are not adequately assessing children’s educational needs, in spite of research indicating children in care often have unmet needs. This failure to assess educational needs affected both children in care and children receiving in-home services.
- **Failure to Provide Adequate Educational Services.** Even though some states are adequately assessing children’s needs, there are inadequate services available to meet the identified needs.
- **Failure to Address School Absenteeism, Tardiness, and Truancy.** A lack of caseworker follow-up on truancy issues was cited in several states. In addition, there is a lack of alternative programs for children with truancy or behavior problems.
- **Lack of Adequate Advocacy for Children.** Generally, the CFSTRs indicated a lack of adequate educational advocacy for children. Despite the existence of birth parents who are able to be involved, caseworkers assigned to a particular case, foster parents, child attorneys or other volunteers appointed to the child, children in out-of-home care too often do not have anyone advocating for their education needs. With numerous adults involved in the child’s life, it is sometimes unclear who is responsible for advocating for their education and who is legally responsible to make education decisions.

educational opportunities or academic resources for children in care, and/or require the appointment of educational advocates. Other states are expanding the McKinney-Vento Act definition of “awaiting foster care” to clearly provide a broader range of children in care with its protections. Interagency agreements are being used by states and local jurisdictions to improve school stability and solve transportation issues. Foster care liaisons and educational consultants are helping to keep accurate records, ensuring records are promptly transferred, and providing direct assistance to caseworkers in planning for children’s educational needs. Some states have designed model programs to address truancy issues or ensure children are receiving appropriate services.

A more detailed discussion of these and other state and local strategies, as well as broader national initiatives and programs that can aid states in reaching conformity, has been developed and will soon be released by the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. Please visit our website for more information.

Q: Where can I find more information about CFSTRs and the Education Well-Being Outcome?

A: For additional information about the CFSTRs, including details about all measured outcomes, the Round 2 schedule, and various factsheets, see the Children’s Bureau website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr>. To review states’ final reports and PIPs, go to http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm.

Q: What are some innovative strategies states have used to comply with Well-Being Outcome 2 or have included in their PIPs to address education issues?

A: There are several positive strategies used by states already conforming with this outcome or included in PIPs to address education issues. For example, statutory provisions in several states require school stability to be considered in placement decisions, detail timelines for record transfers, strengthen or require preschool programs, mandate equal access to

