

Child Welfare Services Case Review Policies and Procedures Manual

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

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CHILD WELFARE SERVICES CASE REVIEWS

Qualitative case reviews are an important way to gather data about the “how” and the “why” questions associated with continuous quality improvement (CQI). These case level data compliment the quantitative data obtained through systems such as the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, SafeMeasures and Business Objects reports. California is currently using the Administration for Children and Families’ (ACF) Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) for review of all cases. County Case Review staff will conduct a qualitative review of a number of cases each quarter as determined by overall caseload inclusive of probation (see Appendix A for number of cases to be reviewed annually). This manual provides summary information and instructions for California’s case review process.

Case Sampling

Reviews must be completed that represent the full continuum of child welfare from Investigation through Permanency (inclusive of Differential Response). A number of sampling criteria are implemented to satisfy the requirements of the Federal government for approval of the State’s ongoing review process.

Federal Sampling Criteria - The state operates an internal case review process at least annually that assesses statewide practice performance for the key child welfare areas using a uniform sampling process and methodology.

- A statewide schedule that selects cases randomly from the entire state universe; or a stratified schedule of counties or jurisdictions, which consists of a cross-section of state child welfare practice and includes the largest metropolitan area and significant tribal or other populations that is representative of state demographics. That same stratification will then be replicated for ongoing performance measurement.
- The state uses a simple random sample design but may include additional stratification to achieve an adequate representation of key program areas.
- For in-home services cases, the sample frame is a state list of in-home services (including alternative response) cases opened for services for at least 45 consecutive days during the sampling period and in which no children in the family were in foster care for 24 hours or longer during any portion of the review period.

County Case Reviewer and Quality Assurance Staff Roles

County case reviewers are responsible for completing all aspects of the case review from start to finish. This includes the case record review, conducting interviews, and completing the OSRI in the Online Monitoring System (OMS) according to training standards. Throughout the process, case reviewers should create appropriate notes and documentation to substantiate the ratings given. Counties should follow their security, retention and destruction policies for case review material as they would for any case record. An individual in the case reviewer role may not concurrently perform quality assurance (QA) work within or outside of the county.

County QA staff are responsible for ensuring that all of the case review components are completed and that the review ratings are accurate and consistent. The QA staff should work with case reviewers if questions arise about ratings and perform QA “sessions” as part of the case finalization before

submitting to CDSS. An individual in the QA role may not concurrently perform case review work within or outside of the county.

Case Exclusion Criteria

Cases may be excluded from the sample in limited circumstances as follows:

- In-home services case open for fewer than 45 consecutive days during the period under review;
- In-home services case in which any child in the family was in foster care for more than 24 hours during the period under review;
- A foster care case that was discharged or closed according to agency policy before the sample period;
- A case open for subsidized adoption payment only and not open to other services;
- A case in which the target child reached the age of 18 before the period under review;
- A case in which the selected child is or was an “incoming” Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) case where the responsibility for that child lies in another state;
- A case appearing multiple times in the sample, such as a case that involved siblings in foster care in separate cases or an in-home services case that was opened more than one time during the sampling period;
- A foster care case in which the child’s adoption or guardianship was finalized before the period under review begins and the child is no longer under the care of the child welfare or probation agency;
- A case in which the child was placed for the entire period under review in a locked juvenile facility or other placement that does not meet the federal definition of foster care;
- A key participant in a case is excluded from the interview (see *Acceptable Exclusions to Conducting an Interview* on page 5) and sufficient information and perspectives from other key participants cannot be obtained;
- A situation which case selection would result in overrepresentation of a single caseworker relative to county size.

County reviewers must review the sample cases provided unless it meets one of the criteria listed above. In all cases, before a county can exclude a case from the sample, it must first contact the state and seek approval to exclude the case or to discuss other approaches to addressing an issue that arises in preparing for the case review. Local reviewers do not have the authority to exclude cases. Where a case exclusion request is needed, a Case Inquiry Form, available on the CDSS case review webpage, must be submitted to the state at the CWS case review email address (cwscasereviews@dss.ca.gov).

Case Participant Interviews

Interviews of key participants are a required part of the overall case review process. Concerted efforts to secure key participant interviews are essential. Examples include contact via letter and phone call, using the ongoing worker to assist in contact, and/or in-person visits. Below is a list of the required key participants to interview. It is highly recommended that group home staff and foster family agency social workers are interviewed in addition to the family’s caseworker. Additionally, reviewers are encouraged to secure interviews with providers who have case specific knowledge to inform the ratings for well-being (Health, Mental Health, and Education).

The following individuals related to a case must be interviewed:

- ☐ The child (school age)
 - For in-home cases: All children in the family home must be included
- ☐ The child's parent(s)
- ☐ The child's foster parent(s), pre-adoptive parent(s), or other caregiver(s), such as a relative caregiver or group home houseparent, if the child is in foster care
- ☐ The family's caseworker (When the caseworker has left the agency or is no longer available for interview, it may be necessary to schedule interviews with the supervisor who was responsible for the caseworker assigned to the family.)

In certain instances, cases may continue to be reviewed in the absence of key participants if there is sufficient information from other sources. County case review staff must submit a Case Inquiry Form to CDSS in order to secure approval to exclude required key participants and to continue with the review in the absence of key participants. To determine if a key participant should be excluded from an interview, see the acceptable exclusions listed below. Additionally, state staff are available to provide technical assistance regarding "additional" interviews above and beyond those required.

Acceptable exclusions to conducting an interview:

- ☐ Only school-age children are interviewed, unless other arrangements are made. Cases involving preschool-age children may be reviewed but do not require an interview with the child. Instead, the reviewers might observe the child in the home while interviewing the birth or foster parent(s);
- ☐ The parents cannot be located, or are outside of the U.S.;
- ☐ There is a safety or risk concern in contacting any party for interview;
- ☐ Any party is unable to consent to an interview due to physical or mental health incapacity;
- ☐ Any party refuses to participate in an interview and the agency can document attempts to engage them;
- ☐ Any party is advised by an attorney not to participate due to a pending criminal or civil matter.

Unacceptable exceptions to conducting an interview:

- ☐ An age cut-off that does not take into account a child's developmental capacity, e.g. a policy of not interviewing children under age 12;
- ☐ A party refuses to participate in an interview and the agency did not attempt to engage them beyond a letter/or telephone call;
- ☐ A party has a pending criminal, civil, or procedural matter before the agency, e.g. appealing a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR);
- ☐ The agency has not made attempts to locate a party for an interview;
- ☐ Any party speaks a language other than English.

Parents/Caregivers in In-Home Cases

Parents/caregivers for in-home cases include those individuals with whom the children were living when the agency became involved with the family and with whom the children will remain (for example, biological parents, relatives, guardians, adoptive parents).

If a biological parent does not fit the definition above, he or she may need to be included in interviews based on the circumstances of the case. Some things to consider in this determination are the reason for the agency's involvement, the identified perpetrators in the case, the status of the children's relationship with the parent, the nature of the case (court supervised or voluntary) and the amount of time the case has been open. If a biological parent indicated a desire during the period under review to be involved with the child and it is in the child's best interests to do so, the parent should be included in the case review and should be interviewed.

Parents/Caregivers in Foster Care Cases

Parents/caregivers in foster care cases include:

- Parents/caregivers from whom the child was removed and with whom the agency is working toward reunification;
- Biological parents who were not the parents from whom the child was removed;
- Adoptive parents, if the adoption has been finalized during the period under review;
- Legal guardians.

If it has been documented that it is not in the child's best interests to involve a parent in case planning or if the parent did not want to be involved in the child's life during the entire period under review, that parent does not need to be interviewed.

Foster Parents

Foster parents include related or non-related caregivers who have been given responsibility for care of the child by the agency while the child is under the placement and care responsibility and supervision of the agency. This includes pre-adoptive parents if the adoption has not been finalized. If there are multiple foster parents during the period under review, all foster parents should be included for interviews.

Arranging Interviews

Protocol for initiating the participant interviews is determined by each county. The CDSS has template letters and flyers available on the case review webpage for engaging key participants in the process and providing preliminary information in advance of the interviews. Counties should use these templates to ensure appropriate messaging. If counties choose to develop their own material for this purpose, it must be provided to and approved by CDSS to ensure proper messaging and confidence in the integrity of the process.

Case-related interviews should be scheduled to take place after reviewers have had an opportunity to thoroughly review case record documentation to determine who the key participants are in the case.

If possible, interviews with parents, foster parents and children should be conducted in their homes, group homes, or foster homes. Service providers may be interviewed wherever is most convenient for them and the reviewers. When travel arrangements and the schedules of reviewers preclude travel to those locations, or when persons to be interviewed prefer not to have reviewers in their homes or offices, the county may arrange to hold the interviews in a central location. Although face-to-face contact is preferred and likely to yield richer information, telephone interviews also may be arranged for when participants are not within reasonable travel distance.

When scheduling interviews with key case participants, reviewers should keep in mind that there are often multiple parents and/or caregivers who should be included in the review process. Ensuring that all of the relevant participants of the case are available for interviews is critical for a successful review process.

Safety Concerns

All case review staff are mandated reporters, and as such must follow the legal and ethical obligation associated with this responsibility. Any immediate safety issues that emerge during the review process, including but not limited to, new allegations of abuse/neglect, must be reported to the county hotline and accepted as a referral. No instances of new allegations may by-pass the required intake process.

If a concern about a child's safety or possible illegal behavior by an employee is identified while reviewing a case, the concern must be immediately reported by the case reviewer or QA staff to their supervisor and the appropriate Program Manager. This level of information should be provided in the OMS for documentation purposes of both the report and the rating affected by the action. For example, if through the case review, it's determined that the caseworker has not conducted the required monthly contacts for an excessive amount of time, this would be a safety concern that does not rise to the level of a mandated report yet still needs to be addressed.

Reviewing the Case Record

For each case in the sample, county case review staff are expected to conduct a thorough review of the relevant CWS/CMS and hard copy file to familiarize themselves with details of the case. Staff should use this process as an opportunity to develop appropriate lines of inquiry for interviews or other data gathering. Other records that exist should also be incorporated into the case record review including, but not limited to, probation case management systems, WebSDM, etc.

The timeframe for keeping a case review open is 6 weeks. This timeframe should allow enough time to engage key participants, conduct interviews and complete the review of the case. This timeframe is established to assist in completing case reviews timely and to avoid leaving a case review open for a long period of time in which case circumstance may change.

Onsite Review Instrument and Online Monitoring System

Case reviewers complete their reviews using the OMS which contains an electronic version of the federal Child and Family Services Reviews OSRI. All case reviews must be submitted via the OMS. Paper copies or other review instruments are not valid for the state's CWS case review purposes.

Collaboration Between Counties

Situations may arise that necessitate close collaboration between counties. Counties are encouraged to contact the appropriate staff in another county but may ask CDSS for assistance in identifying the correct individuals for making contact. Examples of times when collaboration with another county may be necessary or encouraged include:

- When a case has transferred to another county during the period under review;
- When the review of sensitive cases or conflicts of interest cannot be resolved within the county;
- When counties are unable to complete their case reviews and/or QA of cases;

Other instances of close collaboration between counties may occur. Counties may enter into an informal agreement or establish a contract or Memorandum of Understanding to complete these tasks. When these arrangements occur to resolve conflict of interest or inability to complete reviews, the counties must inform the CDSS of the intention to enter into this agreement.

Transfers Between Counties

If a county is assigned a case to review that has subsequently been transferred to another county, the county of jurisdiction will be responsible for the review. The transfer of cases does not relieve the county of origin from the obligation to have their staff interviewed as part of the process. The county of origin will inform CDSS that the case was transferred by submitting a Case Inquiry Form to the CDSS case review mailbox. That case will be removed from the county of origin's required cases and added to the receiving county's required cases. This will not result in a change to the number of total cases to be reviewed for either county.

Case Reviewer Conflict of Interest

Case reviewers or QA staff cannot participate in case reviews for cases which s/he had any oversight responsibility, supervision, or case decision making. Additionally, a conflict of interest arises in cases where the county staff knows the family personally (i.e. outside of a professional relationship). Whenever possible, cases that represent a potential conflict of interest should be reassigned to another case reviewer or QA staff person. In some instances, it may not be possible to reassign within the county. When this occurs, the county staff will need to seek assistance in securing another county to review the case in question. It is important to note that cases that are marked "Sensitive" in the CWS/CMS are part of the universe of cases. County staff should pay particular attention to these cases with respect to conflict of interest issues.

Quality Assurance Process

A critical piece of case review is ensuring the integrity of the review results. One way this is achieved is through a quality assurance process. This occurs at BOTH the county and the state level. Staff who will be completing the QA process will need to be certified as a case reviewer. Each county is responsible for designating a dedicated QA staff person. Once reviewers have completed a case record review, conducted interviews, completed the case rating on the OSRI in OMS and submitted for QA, then the QA

of a case should begin as soon as practicable. QA staff should meet with the reviewer to debrief the case, each of the ratings, and the reasons for the ratings in order to address consistency. The purpose of this discussion is to allow QA staff to get a basic understanding of what is happening in the case and ensure that:

1. Reviewers are correctly recording the practice observed in the proper location within the instrument,
2. Reviewers understand the key practice concerns needed to be analyzed within the OSRI, and
3. There is consistency across reviewers

There may be instances where reviewers will need assistance on how to reconcile inconsistencies in information gathered from interviews and case documentation; this should also be discussed during this initial QA conversation. The *Child and Family Services Reviews OSRI Quality Assurance Guide* is included in Appendix B.

County-Level Quality Assurance Post-Instrument Completion

Once a case review has been completed and submitted for QA, the QA staff should begin reading through the completed case review carefully, paying special attention to the rating documentation provided for each item. Use the following steps to complete an in-depth QA of the case:

1. **Confirm Completeness and Preliminary QA.** Initial quality assurance should begin with a basic scan to ensure that all items are completed.
2. **Gain a Basic Understanding of the Case.** Gain a basic understanding of the case as quickly as possible. Different QA staff employ different strategies for learning about the case details.
3. **Add QA Notes Where Necessary.** The OMS used for the final ratings has an option for QA notes after every item. As the QA staff begin to review the case, add notes where appropriate to any items that need correction, clarification, or additional information.
1. **Examine Main Reason Statements.** Each Main Reason statement, or primary reason for a given rating, should be clear, concise, and focused. Each statement should address only the issue being assessed in the item. It must also be consistent with the item's rating and should contain enough information to fully explain or justify the rating.
2. **Check Exploratory Questions.** Some of the information needed to fully explain the rating may be covered in the follow-up questions, and the QA staff will need to ensure that all questions are fully addressed and adequate in their Main Reason statement.
3. **Check for Consistency Throughout.** Also note that there should be no contradictory information between items throughout an instrument.
4. **Transfer back to Reviewers.** Once the QA process is complete, the case should be transferred back to the reviewer so that comments can be addressed.
5. **Resolve Notes/Comments.** Once the reviewer has finished addressing QA comments, QA staff will review the notes to ensure that all issues have been resolved.

State-Level Quality Assurance Post-Instrument Completion

CDSS staff will conduct an additional quality assurance check on a subset of cases. This will include all cases that are randomly selected to be transmitted to the federal ACF for California's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).

State level QA will also occur for a sample outside of the required federal CFSR cases. The number of additional cases will be dependent on the size of the county's total review sample. In smaller counties, this may result in a higher percentage of cases.

State-level QA will occur similarly to the county-level QA process. CDSS QA staff will review the case and county-level QA information in the OMS. The CDSS QA staff will then set-up debriefs with counties in-person or remotely via phone or online meeting. These debriefs will include a summary presentation of the case from the case reviewer, and a review of the responses to each item and the corresponding rationale for the rating.

The CDSS QA staff will provide immediate feedback on any issues that arise either in the specific ratings or general concerns on areas for improvement for the rater. If consistent or significant concerns are noted by the CDSS QA staff, CDSS will work closely with the county to resolve these concerns; however, CDSS may require county reviewers to obtain additional training before continuing with the reviews.

TRAINING

Initial Training and Certification

The California Child Welfare Services Case Review process requires reviewers to undergo training specific to conducting qualitative case reviews. To assure reviews and subsequent data collection are consistent, and to ensure inter-rater reliability, all staff who conduct reviews and perform QA must be “certified” as reviewers. To become a certified case reviewer, an individual must successfully complete all components of the case review certification process identified in the table below:

Certification Component	Duration	Key Elements	
In-Person Training	4 days	Case Review process overview including roles and responsibilities, Quality Assurance (QA), in-depth OSRI review, mock case, interviewing, and procedures.	Note: Reviewers will receive access to the TRAINING OMS site and a list of practice cases at the conclusion of the In-Person Training
Coaching Calls and Practice Cases	Approx. 6 weeks	Completion of practice cases including interviews and QA, participation in three coaching calls related to practice experience.	
Test Case Completion	2 weeks	The completion of a test case resulting in certification upon achieving a satisfactory score.	Note: Reviewers will receive access to the LIVE OMS site when certified

The case reviewer must complete the 4 day in-person training and three coaching calls before the test case can be administered. If a case reviewer has missed any component of the case review certification process, they must contact CDSS and the RTA for information on how to proceed.

As outlined above, the test case is to be completed within two weeks from the date the test case was administered. If a reviewer is not able to complete the test case due to planned vacations or sick leave or an unforeseen event, s/he must contact CDSS to request an extension. Extensions will be granted on a case by case basis. Failure to request an extension and/or complete the test case will result in restarting the case review certification process beginning with the 4 day in-person training.

Case review training is currently offered quarterly by the Regional Training Academies (RTAs). Staff from any county may attend any training session, not only the one from their county's designated RTA. The location and RTA responsible for providing the training rotates according to a set schedule as outlined below:

Regional Training Academy	Quarter
Northern California Training Academy	July-Sept
Public Child Welfare Training Academy (Southern)	Oct-Dec
Bay Area Academy	Jan-Mar
Central California Training Academy	Apr-June
Note: The month in which the training is scheduled will be determined in consultation with the RTAs.	

Online Temporary Certification Process

CDSS will utilize an online certification process that will allow case review staff to be temporarily certified to conduct case reviews for up to six months from date of completion. The online temporary certification process may be used when:

- 1.) Case review staff are newly hired and the 4 day in-person training offered through any of the RTAs is not available, or
- 2.) Case review staff are unsuccessful in their first attempt to meet the required criteria for becoming a certified case reviewer (i.e. completion of the 4 day in-person training, three coaching calls, and test case).

In order to complete the online temporary certification, the following steps are necessary:

- 1.) Case review staff must log-in to the online training located at www.cfsrportal.org,
- 2.) Case review staff must successfully pass the online 80-question quiz, scan and send a copy of the certificate of completion to cwscasereviews@dss.ca.gov

Once the certificate is received, CDSS will respond, acknowledging receipt of the certificate. Within six months of completing the online temporary certification process, the case review staff must attend/re-attend the 4 day in-person training. In order to become a certified case reviewer, successful completion of the 4 day in-person training, three coaching calls, and test case is required.

Case review staff temporarily certified through the online temporary certification process will be removed from the OMS if successful completion of the 4 day in-person training is not completed within the prescribed timeframe above.

Quality Assurance Training

The QA training is offered quarterly by each RTA. The location and RTA responsible for providing the training rotates according to the same set schedule for case review training as outlined above. This training is required for all staff who will be the designated QA in the county, although case review staff may attend as well. The QA training is a half-day training that focuses on the quality assurance process, and will develop the skills of the participants to conduct quality assurance reviews.

Refresher Training

A refresher training is offered quarterly by each RTA for case reviewers and QA staff. Case reviewers and QA staff are expected to attend at least one refresher training per year. This training will provide the opportunity to maintain case review skills and help avoid “drift” that sometimes naturally occurs. Additionally, this training will ensure that reviewers have an understanding of new procedures and item-level clarifications. Specifically, the refresher training will cover updates to case review procedures as provided by CDSS and/or the ACF and detailed coverage of new/updated/clarified OSRI instructions and items.

Beyond the training sessions, CDSS maintains a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Item-Level clarifications on the case review web page located at: <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG4727.htm>. These are regularly updated and should be reviewed often by those conducting reviews in any capacity.

Appendix A: Required Case Reviews by County

County	Number of Cases to be Reviewed Annually
Alameda	100
Alpine	1
Amador	8
Butte	70
Calaveras	20
Colusa	8
Contra Costa	100
Del Norte	20
El Dorado	70
Fresno	100
Glenn	20
Humboldt	70
Imperial	70
Inyo	7
Kern	100
Kings	70
Lake	20
Lassen	8
Los Angeles	100
Madera	70
Marin	20
Mariposa	4
Mendocino	70
Merced	70
Modoc	3
Mono	3
Monterey	70
Napa	20
Nevada	20

County	Number of Cases to be Reviewed Annually
Orange	100
Placer	70
Plumas	8
Riverside	100
Sacramento	100
San Benito	20
San Bernardino	100
San Diego	100
San Francisco	100
San Joaquin	100
San Luis Obispo	70
San Mateo	70
Santa Barbara	70
Santa Clara	100
Santa Cruz	70
Shasta	70
Sierra	1
Siskiyou	20
Solano	70
Sonoma	70
Stanislaus	100
Sutter	20
Tehama	20
Trinity	8
Tulare	100
Tuolumne	20
Ventura	100
Yolo	70
Yuba	20

Appendix B: Child and Family Services Reviews OSRI Quality Assurance Guide

This quality assurance (QA) guide is recommended for use by QA staff to ensure that Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) data are accurate, complete, and consistent. It contains information regarding general and item-specific issues to consider when conducting QA on an OSRI. The guide also describes an approach to conducting QA that encourages discussions with reviewers prior to completion of the OSRI instrument in addition to a final QA review of the instrument once it is completed.

BEGINNING THE QA DISCUSSION

Once reviewers have conducted their case record review and interviews, and have completed the face sheet of the instrument, QA staff should meet with reviewers to discuss the case before they begin to work on the OSRI item ratings. The purpose of this discussion is to allow QA staff to get a basic understanding of what is happening in the case and ensure that (1) reviewers are taking the right approach to rating the case based on the case circumstances and correctly recording the practice observed in the proper location within the instrument, (2) reviewers understand the key practice concerns that will need to be analyzed within the OSRI and (3) reviewers have had the opportunity to obtain any needed clarification on the rating process/criteria and applicability of items in the OSRI. There may be instances where reviewers will need assistance on how to reconcile inconsistencies in information gathered from interviews and case documentation and this should also be discussed during this initial QA conversation.

Obtaining relevant background and contextual information for a case is a critical step in providing QA. Begin the discussion by reviewing the face sheet and discussing the following with the reviewers:

What type of case is it?

- In-Home (make sure there were no foster care episodes during the PUR)
- Differential/Alternative Response (make sure the state has this program and that the case is accurately identified as DR/AR)
- Foster Care (check to see if it is a short-term FC case, as such cases have unique rating instructions throughout the OSRI)

Case Status

- Is the case currently open or closed? How long was the case open?
- Why is the agency involved with the family? Ask reviewers to describe the risk and safety concerns that existed during the PUR.

Case Participants - Children

- For IH and FC cases, which children were in the family home during the PUR? Note ages of children. Were there specific children in the home who were the focus of services?
- For FC cases, note the target child's age and ask whether any siblings are in foster care. Note the length of time the child has been in foster care and ask reviewers what the child's current permanency goal(s) is/are.

Identifying Parents/Caregivers

- Review the case participant table in the face sheet and discuss who the parents/caregivers are who will be rated in the case considering that these terms are designed to be inclusive of the various familial and fictive kin circumstances encountered in child welfare cases.
- Biological and legal parents should be included in the table, regardless of their involvement with the child/ren at the time of the review, in order to ensure that a parent is not inappropriately left out of consideration in the review. If biological parents are not listed, reviewers should explain why. Ensure that reviewers have considered all appropriate case participants including same sex parents, paramours, and members of intergenerational households, as applicable.
- Based on case circumstances, paramours who have contact with children should be considered in the provision of safety-related services (item 2), and assessments of risk and safety (item 3). Paramours typically should be assessed in the context of their relationship with the primary caregiver(s) who will be caring for the children. For example, if the biological mother is the caregiver that the child(ren) will be reunified with and her boyfriend needs services to ensure he can appropriately care for the child(ren) because he lives in the home, the agency may need to assess and provide services to him, but that would be captured under “mother” in item 12 because it impacts the assessment of her protective capacity in caring for her children. If he doesn’t comply with services, that could necessitate a change in assessment and service provision to the mother.
- If the whereabouts of a parent are unknown, discuss whether concerted efforts to locate the parent were made and how this will impact ratings.
- Review the definitions of parents for items 8 and 11, and for items 12, 13, and 15 with reviewers to ensure that they will capture the right caregivers in each item based on the case circumstances.

Once you have a general overview of the case, discuss whether the reviewers have adequate information from the case record and case-related interviews to rate the case or whether additional interviews may be necessary. Discuss any conflicts reviewers may have noticed in the information gathered. Move into a discussion with the reviewers that begins broadly at the outcome level, but also allows reviewers to explain strengths/concerns as they relate to particular items. QA staff should ask appropriate follow-up questions that will help trigger the reviewers to consider whether the case achieved the best practice standards that are presented in the OSRI. The following questions can be used to guide the initial QA discussion:

Safety Questions — What strong case practice was in place related to safety and what were key concerns?

- What were the key risk and safety concerns during the PUR? (Make sure reviewers are correctly differentiating between risk and safety issues.)
- Did the agency appropriately assess and address risk and safety concerns?
- Were children maintained in their homes when possible/appropriate?

Permanency Questions — What strong case practice was in place related to permanency and what were key concerns?

- Will permanency be achieved timely based on the length of time the child has been in foster care?

- How did the agency work with the courts in moving the case forward toward permanency?
- Did the child have permanency and stability in his/her living situation?
- Were the child's family relationships and connections preserved?

Well-Being Questions — What strong case practice was in place related to well-being and what were key concerns?

- Did the agency adequately engage the family, conduct appropriate assessments, and provide needed services so that parents could provide for their child(ren)'s needs?
- For FC cases: Were the child's educational, physical, and mental-health needs adequately assessed and addressed?
- For IH cases: Discuss which children will be assessed in items 12, 13, and 14 and discuss which items (16–18) may be applicable based on case dynamics. Discuss whether any applicable needs were assessed and addressed.
- How did the agency work with other system partners to ensure the family's needs were assessed and addressed?

GENERAL QA ISSUES

Once you have discussed the case and any unique case dynamics with the reviewers in the initial QA discussion, reviewers should then complete the item ratings in the OSRI. Reviewers should conduct their own review of the completed instrument before submitting it for final QA review.

Some of the general issues to review once the case has been submitted for QA may include:

- Ensuring that documentation in item questions provides appropriate rationale for “no” responses. If not, discuss with reviewers to determine whether the rationale can be strengthened or they should reconsider their response to the question.
- Ensuring that any item rated NA has adequate rationale to support that rating (be sure to inspect items that do not have any non-applicability criteria checked yet are rated NA).
- Ensuring that the right case participants (children and parents) are assessed in appropriate items.

ITEM-SPECIFIC QA QUESTIONS

Depending on the level of detail reviewers were able to provide in the initial QA discussion, QA staff may not need to ask reviewers all of the questions below. These questions are provided as a guide to ensure that reviewers accurately rated the case based on the practice standards outlined in the OSRI. Since reviewers do not need to provide justification to support item ratings, the questions are intended to help QA staff understand the rationale behind reviewer responses.

Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment

- Confirm with reviewers that they included all reports received during the PUR, including any reports that came in after the case was closed (if applicable).
- Review the policies on state-specific priority response time frames to ensure accuracy.

Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Children in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry Into Foster Care

- Carefully review the item applicability criteria that reviewers selected. For foster care cases, ensure that all foster care entries and all reunifications during the period under review were considered when responding to the criteria.
- If question A is answered Yes, ask the reviewers to describe which services were provided to the family, to ensure that they were safety-related. Services that were offered to the family that were not safety-related should be captured in item 12B.
- If question B is answered Yes, ask the reviewers to explain the circumstances that warranted immediate removal.

Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment and Management

- For foster care cases, if the child entered foster care during the period under review but reviewers selected NA for item 2, ask the reviewers about the circumstances for removal to determine if any concerns should be noted in item 3.
- Ensure that reviewers are only considering safety concerns when responding to questions C-F and are not considering risk issues in those questions.
- If question B is rated NA, ask the reviewers to explain their rationale and ensure that it is consistent with the instructions provided.
- Discuss the quality of the risk/safety assessments that the agency conducted. Ensure that the frequency and quality of worker visits with the child(ren) and/or parents (in items 14 and 15) was adequate to appropriately assess risk and safety throughout the PUR.
- If any of the concerns in A1 are checked Yes, and reviewers answered A or B Yes, ask the reviewers to explain their rationale.
- If question C is answered Yes, ask reviewers to describe the safety plan and how it was monitored.
- If question C and/or D is rated NA and the question is applicable for assessment, ask the reviewers how they determined that there were no apparent safety concerns during the PUR.

Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement

- Ensure that the reviewers have considered all time periods that the child was in care during the PUR. If you notice that the placement dates do not account for all time periods, ask reviewers if the child was in a placement that is not considered a “placement setting” during those periods.
- Discuss all the “reasons for change in placement” with reviewers to determine whether question B is answered appropriately. Ensure that any moves up to higher levels of care because of increased mental health/ behavioral needs have been evaluated carefully.
- If a child’s placement was disrupted during the PUR or is/was not stable, reviewers should assess whether the agency provided any services to the foster parent/caretaker to stabilize or support the placement. This should be captured in item 12, section 12C.

Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child

- Review the table to determine whether question B is answered accurately. Ensure that reviewers completed the table by noting dates that goals were *established*, not achieved.
- Discuss the response to question C and ensure that reviewers considered the child’s age, needs, and the circumstances of the case (length of time in foster care, status of caretakers in resolving safety concerns, etc.). In cases in which the appropriateness of the goal is based on a child/youth’s “age of consent” for adoption, did reviewers assess the agency’s efforts to

work with the child around these issues? (e.g., what was the level of work done with the child to determine whether he/she really does not want to be adopted?)

- Ensure that reviewers accurately calculated the child's time in foster care in question D.
- If question E is answered Yes, ask reviewers which ASFA TPR criteria the child met.
- If any exception in question G1 is checked, discuss the specifics with reviewers to confirm accuracy.
- Placement information in item 4 should be reviewed to assess whether the child was placed with relatives at the 15/22 month timeframe. Compelling reasons must be documented in the case file to count as an exception.

Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

- If concurrent goals were in place, ensure that reviewers responded to questions B and C appropriately.
- If Question B is answered Yes but the child has been in foster care for more than the suggested timeframe (12, 18, or 24 months, depending on the goal) and the goal has not yet been achieved, ask reviewers to describe the circumstances to ensure that a delay is justified (see examples in instructions).
- If question B is answered Yes and the child has not been in foster care for more than the suggested timeframe but has not yet been discharged from foster care, ask reviewers when the goal is projected to be achieved to ensure that it meets the recommended timeframes in the instructions. Also ask reviewers to describe the concerted efforts that have been made to ensure timely achievement of the goal.
- If question C is answered Yes but question C2 is answered "no date," ask reviewers why they believe the child's living arrangement can be considered permanent.

Item 7: Placement with Siblings

- Ask reviewers to describe the placement arrangements of siblings placed separately. If question B is answered Yes, what were the reasons for separate placement? If a valid reason existed, was the separation re-assessed by the agency over time during the PUR?
- Ensure that only siblings as defined in the instructions are included in the item assessment. Issues related to preserving connections between children who grew up in the same household but are not related biologically or through adoption and/or marriage should be addressed in item 9.

Item 8: Visiting With Parents and Siblings in Foster Care

- Ensure that case participants selected as mother and father are accurate based on instructions and case circumstances.
- If visitation frequency for A, B, and E are anything less than "more than once per week", and the question is answered Yes, discuss with reviewers how the frequency was sufficient for the child and whether efforts for more frequent visits were made.
- Ask reviewers to describe the visitation arrangement (location, length, supervision, etc.) when discussing their responses to questions C, D, and F.

Item 9: Preserving Connections

- Ensure the item was not rated on connections the child formed while in foster care. The focus is on maintaining connections the child had at the time he or she entered care.
- If, prior to removal, the child had contact and a relationship with biological parents who are

not the caregivers the child was removed from or is being returned to, ask whether those relationships should be preserved and were addressed in this item.

- Ask the reviewers to describe the child's connections and how they were/were not maintained. If the child was not maintained in the same school setting, ask for the reasons and how that decision was made.

Item 10: Relative Placement

- If B and/or C are answered Yes, ask the reviewers to describe the quality of efforts that were made throughout the PUR and at critical points in the case.
- If B and/or C are answered NA, ask about the rationale to ensure it is consistent with the instructions.

Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care With Parents

Ensure that case participants selected as mother and father are accurate based on instructions and case circumstances. The same participants should be selected in items 8 and 11.

Item 12: Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents Sub-Item 12A: Needs and Services of Child

- Ask reviewers to explain what the child(ren)'s needs were during the PUR. Were all of these needs accurately assessed by the agency? Consider the circumstances of the case, age(s) of the child(ren) etc. as you discuss needs. Also ask about how needs were assessed. Did the worker visit with the child(ren) frequently enough to allow for ongoing assessment? Did the worker ask about the child(ren)'s needs with the child(ren)'s caretakers and/or foster parents? Ensure that reviewers answered question A1 based on the adequacy of the assessment(s).
- Ask the reviewers to describe the services that the child(ren) received during the PUR. Discuss whether the services addressed all of the child(ren)'s needs.
- Ensure that assessment and services related to education, physical health, and mental health were not considered for this item.
For foster care cases, if the target child is an adolescent, ensure that independent living services were addressed.

Sub-Item 12B: Needs and Services of Parents

- Ensure that the right case participants were selected as mother and father based on instructions and case circumstances. Ensure that the same participants were rated in items 12B, 13, and 15.
- If the whereabouts of a parent were unknown during the PUR and the agency did **not** make concerted efforts to locate them, the applicable item questions for that parent should be answered No, resulting in an Area Needing Improvement rating for sub-item 12B as well as item 12. This parent should **not** be assessed in items 13 and 15. Questions for that parent in those items should be answered NA. In Well-Being Outcome 1, concerns about efforts to locate a parent should only be reflected in item 12.
- Ask reviewers to explain what the mother's and father's needs were during the PUR. Were all of these needs accurately assessed by the agency? Consider the circumstances of the case, reason for the agency's involvement, length of time case has been open, case plan progress, etc., as you discuss the parents' needs. Also ask about how needs were assessed: did the worker visit with the parent frequently enough to allow for ongoing assessment?

- Ensure that reviewers answered question B1 based on the adequacy of the assessment(s).
- Ensure that paramours have been appropriately assessed in this item, as applicable. Paramours typically should not be included in the definition of “mother” or “father” but instead should be considered through their relationship with the primary caregiver(s) who will be caring for the children. For example, if the biological mother is the caregiver that the child(ren) will be reunified with and her boyfriend needs services to ensure he is safe with the child(ren) because he has a lot of access to them, the agency should assess and work with him, but that would be captured under “mother” in item 12 because it affects the assessment of her protective capacity. If he doesn’t comply with services, that could necessitate a change in assessment and service provision to the mother.
- For foster care cases, if biological parents did not have an established relationship with the child prior to removal, the agency should assess whether developing a relationship with biological parents would be in the child’s best interests and determine whether anything should be done to support that goal. Services in support of such needs (e.g., providing for visits, phone contact, arranging for therapy) should also be captured in this item. Ask the reviewers to describe the services that the mother and the father received during the PUR. Discuss whether and how these services addressed all of his/her needs and whether the services enhanced the parents’ ability to provide appropriate care/supervision of their child(ren) and ensure their safety and well-being. Were there any barriers to accessing services? Were services matched to the parent’s needs? Were they culturally appropriate?

Sub-Item 12C: Needs and Services of Foster Parents

- If there are multiple foster parents during the PUR, ensure that reviewers included all of them in the assessment of the item.
- In some cases, foster parents may be a potential permanent placement for the child and if so their needs related to permanency achievement should also be assessed in this item.
- Ask reviewers to describe how the foster parents’ needs were assessed. Were there any concerns about their ability to care for the child that were not assessed and addressed? (Refer to item 4 to assess the child’s stability in the placement.)
- Ask reviewers to describe any services that the foster parents received during the PUR. Did services meet the identified needs?

Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning

- If reviewers answered Yes to A, B, or C, ask them to describe how the agency actively involved each person in case planning.

Item 14: Caseworker Visits With Child

- In situations in which secondary worker visits are accepted in addition to primary worker visits, the frequency and quality of BOTH types of visits should be considered in the assessment.
- If visitation frequency is less than once per month, question A should be answered No unless reviewers have substantial justification for answering Yes.
- Discuss with reviewers how visitation frequency met the needs of the child in ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being.
- If question B is answered Yes, ask reviewers to describe the quality of the visits (location, length, etc.). Ensure that the child(ren) was/were visited alone for at least part of each visit and that conversations focused on the child(ren)’s needs, services, and case goals.
- For FC cases, if the child is non-verbal, ensure that reviewers visited the child in the foster

home, assessed the child's living arrangements, and assessed the child's interactions with caregivers when determining the quality of visitation.

Item 15: Caseworker Visits With Parents

- In situations in which secondary worker visits are accepted in addition to primary worker visits, the frequency and quality of BOTH types of visits should be considered in the assessment.
- If visit frequency is less than once per month, questions A1 and B1 should be answered No unless reviewers have substantial justification for answering Yes response.
- Discuss with reviewers how visitation frequency did or did not support achievement of case goals and effectively address the child's safety, permanency, and well-being.
- If question C and/or D is Yes, ask reviewers to describe the quality of the visits (location, length, content, etc.)

Items 16: Educational Needs of the Child

- If there were "services needed but not provided" in the table but question B is answered Yes, discuss what concerted efforts were made to advocate for services.

Item 17: Physical Health of the Child

- If there were "services needed but not provided" in the table but question B is answered Yes, discuss the circumstances with reviewers to ensure item instructions were followed.
- If question B1 is answered Yes or No, discuss with reviewers which medication was prescribed and how it was monitored. Review any state protocols for medication monitoring to ensure reviewers appropriately considered compliance with any protocols in place.

Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child

- If there were "services needed but not provided" in the table but question B is answered Yes, discuss the circumstances with reviewers to ensure item instructions were followed.
- If question B is answered Yes or No, discuss with reviewers which medication was prescribed and how it was monitored. Review any state protocols for medication monitoring to ensure reviewers appropriately considered compliance with any protocols in place.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR SHORT TERM FOSTER CARE CASES

Apply the following guidance when rating foster care cases in which the child has been in foster care fewer than 45 days:

Items 1–7, 10, 14, and 16–18: There is no difference in rating/applying the instrument for these items.

Item 8: An NA rating for this item should be based on the length of time the case is open, the case circumstances, and how reasonable it is to expect visits to have been arranged with the target child and parents/siblings. Typically, a child should have visits arranged within 1–2 weeks of being placed in foster care.

Item 9: Reviewers should rate this item as NA if the child is not of Native American heritage, and not yet school-aged.

Item 11: An NA rating for this item should be based on the length of time the case is open, the case circumstances, and how reasonable it is to expect the agency to have made efforts to strengthen the parent-child bond while the child is in care through activities other than visitation.

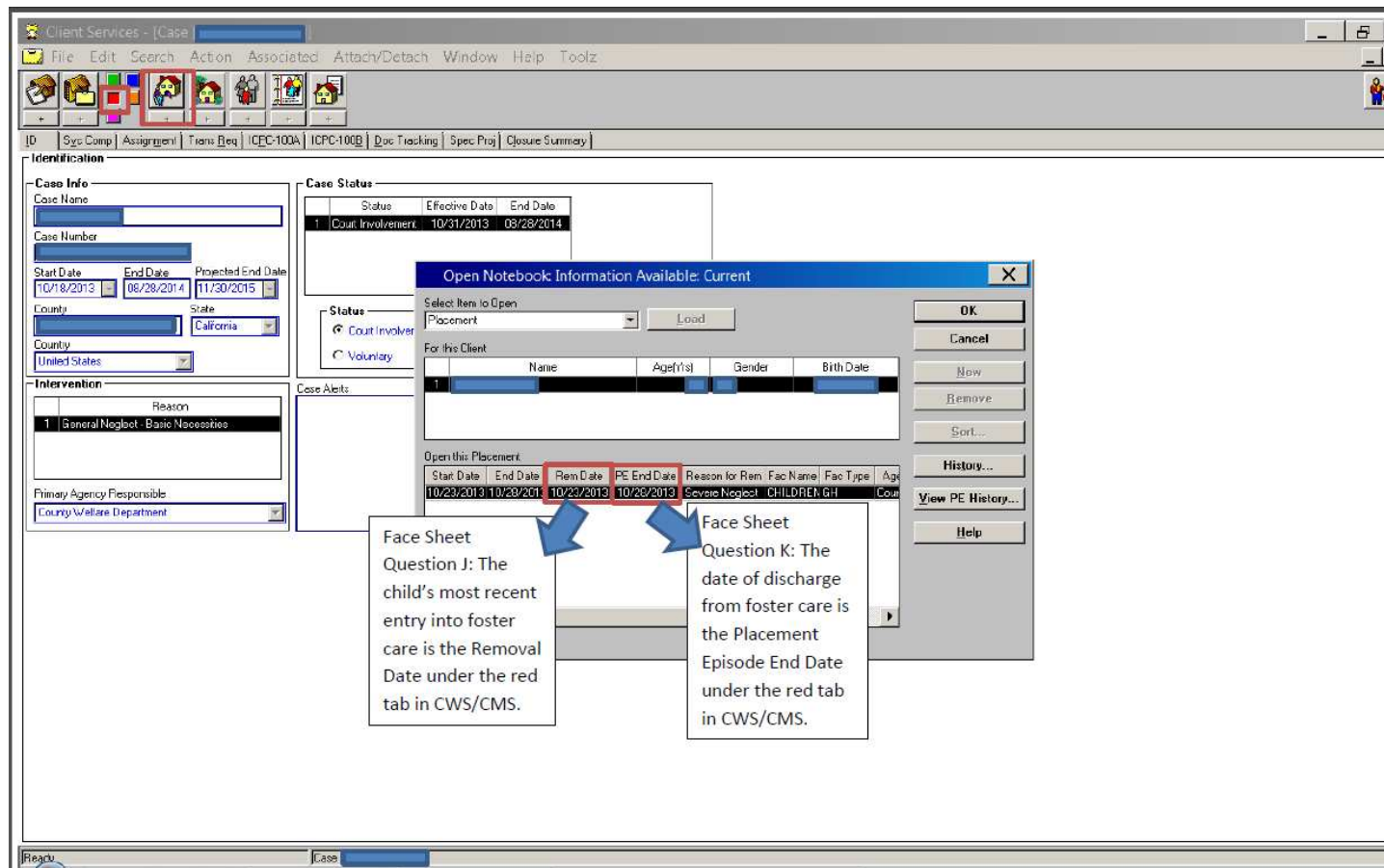
Item 12: Because reunification is assumed to be the goal in short-term foster care cases unless there is evidence another goal is in place, this item should be rated based on the assessment and services necessary, while the case is open, to achieve reunification (or another goal). If the parents' whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was open, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents (sub-item 12B).

Item 13: Because reunification is assumed to be the goal in short-term foster care cases unless there is evidence another goal is in place, this item should be rated based on the planning that occurs regarding case direction while the case is open, given that a formal case plan may not be expected in short-term cases. If the parents' whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was open, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents.

Item 15: There is no difference in rating/applying the instrument for this item unless the parents' whereabouts are unknown. If the parents' whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was opened, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents.

Appendix C: CWS/CMS Screenshots

Dates that are used for identification of cases to be used for review are taken from our state AFCARS submissions. These dates are identified below, along with screenshots of where they can be found in the CWS/CMS.



Client Services - [Case []]

File Edit Search Action Associated Attach/Detach Window Help Toolz

ICD Svc Comp Assignment Trans Req ICPC-1004 ICPC-1008 Doc Tracking Spec Proj Closure Summary

Case Info

Case Name

Case Number

Start Date: 10/18/2013 End Date: 08/28/2014 Projected End Date: 11/30/2015

County: State: California

Country: United States

Case Status

Status	Effective Date	End Date
1 Court Involvement	10/31/2013	08/28/2014

Status: Court Involvement Effective Date: 10/31/2013

Voluntary End Date: 08/28/2014

Intervention

1	General Neglect - E

Primary Agency Response: County Welfare Department

Notes:

Face Sheet

Question I: The date of the first case opening is the Start Date under the green tab of a case in CWS/CMS.

Appendix D: Federal and State Statutes Relevant to Oversight and CQI

The goal of child welfare is to promote, safeguard and protect the overall well-being of children and families, to intervene on behalf of children who have been abused or neglected, and to work with children and families to assure that every child has a permanent, safe, and nurturing environment in which to achieve their maximum potential. Quality Assurance (QA) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) activities are vital to ensuring case workers carry out this goal and ensure the safety, permanence, and well-being of children and families.

States are required to develop and implement a five-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) in order to receive funds under the Title IV-B. As part of the CFSP, each state must describe their quality assurance system and how they will improve child welfare practices when needed. California's current and past CFSPs are available online at <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG1995.htm>

Quality assurance is also a systemic factor in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). As such, states are required to, at a minimum, dedicate child welfare staff to QA initiatives in order to monitor performance. QA staff must work to ensure that people throughout the agency use information on quality, and to engage all staff in the process of examining data and acting to make improvements. ACF also requires that state quality assurance systems be in place in all regions of the state and all groups of families served.

The following federal and state laws govern the child welfare QA/CQI process:

- 471(a)(22) of the Social Security Act "In order for a State to be eligible for payments under this part, it shall have a plan approved by the Secretary which provides that, not later than January 1, 1999, the State shall develop and implement standards to ensure that children in foster care placements in public or private agencies are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children."
- 45 CFR 1357.15(u) "The State must include in the CFSP a description of the quality assurance system it will use to regularly assess the quality of services under the CFSP and assure that there will be measures to address identified problems."
- 45 CFR 1355.34I(3) "Quality assurance system: The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care placements are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children (section 471(a)(22)) and is operating an identifiable quality assurance system (45 CFR 1357.15(u)) as described in the CFSP that: (i) Is in place in the jurisdictions within the State where services included in the CFSP are provided; (ii) is able to evaluate the adequacy and quality of services provided under the CFSP; (iii) Is able to identify the strengths and needs of the service delivery system it evaluates; (iv) Provides reports to agency administrators on the quality of services evaluated and needs for improvement; and (v) Evaluates measures implemented to address identified problems."
- Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code §10601.2 "(a) The State Department of Social Services shall establish, by April 1, 2003, the California Child and Family Service Review System, in order to review all county child welfare systems. These reviews shall cover child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support, and independent living.; (b) Child and family service reviews shall maximize compliance with the federal regulations for the receipt of money from Subtitle E (commencing with Section 470) of Title IV of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 670 and following) and ensure compliance with state plan requirements set forth in Subtitle B (commencing with Section 421) of Title IV of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C.

Sec. 621 and following).”; (d)(1)The California Child and Family Service Review System outcome indicators shall be consistent with the federal child and family service review measures and standards for child and family outcomes and system factors authorized by Subtitle B (commencing with Section 421) and Subtitle E (commencing with Section 470) of Title IV of the federal Social Security Act and the regulations adopted pursuant to those provisions (Parts 1355 to 1357, inclusive, of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations).; (e)The State Department of Social Services shall identify and promote the replication of best practices in child welfare service delivery to achieve the measurable outcomes established pursuant to subdivision (d).”