



USER GUIDE

What is Insights?

Insights is an ongoing publication that examines the links between data, policy and outcomes for children and families involved in California's Child Welfare System.

Each issue of *Insights* includes user-friendly explanations of data designed to help policymakers reach informed decisions, including an "anchor chart" that summarizes California's progress on six national standards and tracks these standards over time. *Insights* also examines individual standards or other indicators in depth, discussing the state's performance and how practice and policy can impact improvements in child welfare outcomes.

Background: National Standards

The federal government funds a portion of the cost of child welfare and requires states to track performance focused on safety, permanency, and well-being. It regularly audits the progress of all 50 states and has the authority to levy steep fines against states that do not make sufficient improvements toward nationally established standards.

California is a national leader when it comes to using data to track progress. In 2004, Assembly Bill (AB) 636 put in place a state outcomes and accountability system to measure and improve results for children and families. Counties receive quarterly data reports based on specific outcomes—those that are federally mandated and others that the state considers important.

The six national standards cover the following indicators and composite scores:

Safety Indicator 1 (S1.1) – No recurrence of child maltreatment

Children who are victims of abuse or neglect and have come to the attention of the child welfare system should receive services to prevent further maltreatment. This indicator tracks how many maltreated children are not victimized again.

Safety Indicator 2 (S2.1) – No maltreatment in foster care

Foster care is intended to be a safe haven for children who cannot remain at home. The state must ensure the safety of these children in out-of-home placements. This indicator reflects the percentage of children who are safely served in foster care during the year.

Composite Score 1 (C1) – Reunification

Although placement into foster care is sometimes necessary, it is always a stressful event for children and families. Timely reunification is a goal whenever possible. This standard includes three measures that address the timeliness of reunifications after placement and one that looks at reentry into foster care following reunification.

Composite Score 2 (C2) – Adoption

When children cannot return to their birth family, adoption is often a positive alternative. This standard includes four measures related to timely adoption and one that captures the likelihood of adoption for children in long-term care.

Composite Score 3 (C3) – Long-term Care

No state or county agency believes children should grow up in foster care, yet every state in the country has a number of youth who do exactly that. This composite includes two measures related to the likelihood of establishing permanent connections for children in long-term care, and one that measures permanency for children who have had parental rights terminated.

Composite Score 4 (C4) – Placement Stability

Children who enter foster care and are moved from placement to placement often lose connections with siblings, extended family members, schools, and communities. Stable placements offer more support for children who must be removed from their parents. This score includes three measures of placement stability for children in care for both short and longer periods of time.

Background: State Measures

California's Outcomes and Accountability System (AB 636) augments the federal performance standards with state measures to help each county understand what is working for families in its local communities. Across California, child welfare leaders and policymakers hold focused conversations to bring their data to life by examining the stories behind the numbers. Data help to identify trends that then inform programmatic changes in practice and policy.

The California system provides quarterly data on a range of issues, including "Participation Rates" that count children who come in contact with the child welfare system as a rate per 1,000 children in the population:

- **Participation Rate 1 (PR 1) – The rate of reports of abuse or neglect:** Each county measures the number of children who are reported through calls to its child abuse and neglect hotline. Is the number of maltreatment reports going up or down as a share of the county child population? As unemployment and poverty increase in the current recession, this is a key measure.
- **Participation Rate 2 (PR 2) – The rate of substantiated reports:** Although many child abuse or neglect reports are unsubstantiated and do not call for further involvement by child welfare authorities, knowing the rate of substantiated reports throughout the county is key to program planning and response.
- **Participation Rate 3 (PR 3) – The foster care entry rate:** This refers to the number of children entering foster care during a given year, given the child population. Entry rates "set the stage" for the foster care performance measures that follow placement.
- **Participation Rate 4 (PR 4) – The foster care in-care rate:** Foster care is often measured by the number of children in care on a given day, given the child population. This is a "snapshot" or "point in time" view of the out-of-home caseload.

The California data system also includes measures that address the timeliness of investigations of abuse or neglect, the timeliness of social worker visits, the proportion of siblings in foster care placed together, and the use of less restrictive types of placement, such as kinship care, instead of more restrictive settings, such as group homes.

The California data system is a work in progress. Additional measures have been added over time while other measures have been dropped. The state system does not have predetermined standards. The goal is for each county to continually improve its outcomes.

California Child Welfare Performance Indicators Project

The California Department of Social Services has an interagency agreement with the University of California at Berkeley to collaborate on the California Child Welfare Performance Indicators Project. As part of this project, comprehensive state and county level information is compiled to allow for the continuous tracking of federal measures, as well as many additional indicators of child welfare performance. These data are shared with the public on the project's Web site: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Dr. Barbara Needell serves as Principal Investigator on the project.



California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership

The California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership is a collaborative group of state agencies, foundations and other nonprofit organizations. Our goal is to ensure a coordinated approach to the investments needed to improve the lives of children and families who are in, or are at risk of, entering the state's child welfare system. We provide information to policymakers and the public and have a range of materials on our Web site.

California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership

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