Planning for Success

An Analysis of California Counties' Child Welfare System Improvement Plans

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First Full Year Implementation of County System Improvement Plans under AB 636

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814

June 2007

Dear Friends:

We are pleased to provide you with a copy of the Executive Summary of *Planning for Success: An Analysis of California Counties' Child Welfare System Improvement Plans.* This report was produced for the California Department of Social Services by the Child and Family Policy Institute of California and summarizes its analysis of the first System Improvement Plans (SIPs) submitted to the Department under the Child Welfare System Improvements and Accountability Act (AB 636).

CFPIC presented the findings of its research to department leaders and policy makers in December 2006. After review and internal discussion, we outlined the following recommendations for supporting county efforts to improve statewide outcomes.

• Work to ensure that the child welfare outcomes and accountability system is modified to reflect the changing federal measures and thresholds in preparation for the next Federal Child and Family Services Review in 2007-08.

• Encourage counties to integrate data quality improvement activities into the way the state, the counties and community partners do business. With data quality improving, there can be an increased focus on using the data to understand the current performance of the program and to drive program improvements.

• Support the counties in their efforts to improve engagement of local agencies, both public and private, including probation, courts and tribes, in a continued effort of collaboration to improve outcomes.

• Provide technical assistance and address training needs as indicated by the counties and identified through their System Improvement Plans.

We continue to be impressed by the energy and commitment of the counties in the implementation of their System Improvement Plans and are confident that these statewide efforts will result in improved outcomes for the children and families we all seek to serve.

We welcome you to review this Executive Summary of the report and encourage you to view the full body of research at: www.childsworld.ca.gov/Outcomesan_1848.htm.

Sincerely,

Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division

Introduction

The Improvement and Accountability Act has been a great success so far. Counties are using data outcome measures to focus local discussions and working with community members on developing goals and strategies to improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children in their care.

Darrell Steinberg

Author of implementing legislation (AB 636)

This Executive Summary serves as an overview of the report, *Planning for Success: An Analysis of California Counties' Child Welfare System Improvement Plans.* It provides a synopsis of the first System Improvement Plans submitted by all 58 California counties in response to the requirements established in the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act established under AB 636 (Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001). This legislation defined statewide outcome goals for the Child Welfare System and required the development of state performance measures to assess progress toward these goals over time through a continual improvement process.

In 2004, the counties completed their first System Improvement Plans (SIPs). The Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC), under contract with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), conducted an analysis of these plans. The findings summarized here reflect processes and outcomes through 2005, which marks the end of the first full year of county implementation.

Key highlights of the report include:

- A summary of improvement goals and strategies developed by the counties
- A snapshot of early outcome data on performance measures from a statewide perspective
- Insight into the planning and implementation process at the local level
- Recommendations from the county perspective
- A review of resource augmentations for child welfare improvements during the first full year of implementation

This report captures the first steps in implementing California's dynamic new approach for continually improving outcomes for children and families.

Background

AB 636: The Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act

California's Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act took effect on January 1, 2004, shifting California from a process-based accountability system — focused only on whether a child received a particular service or a certain action was taken — to a performance-based system focused on achieving specific and measurable statewide goals related to safety, permanence and well-being, as defined below.

STATEWIDE GOALS

Safety

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

- Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanency

- Continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children, as appropriate.

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

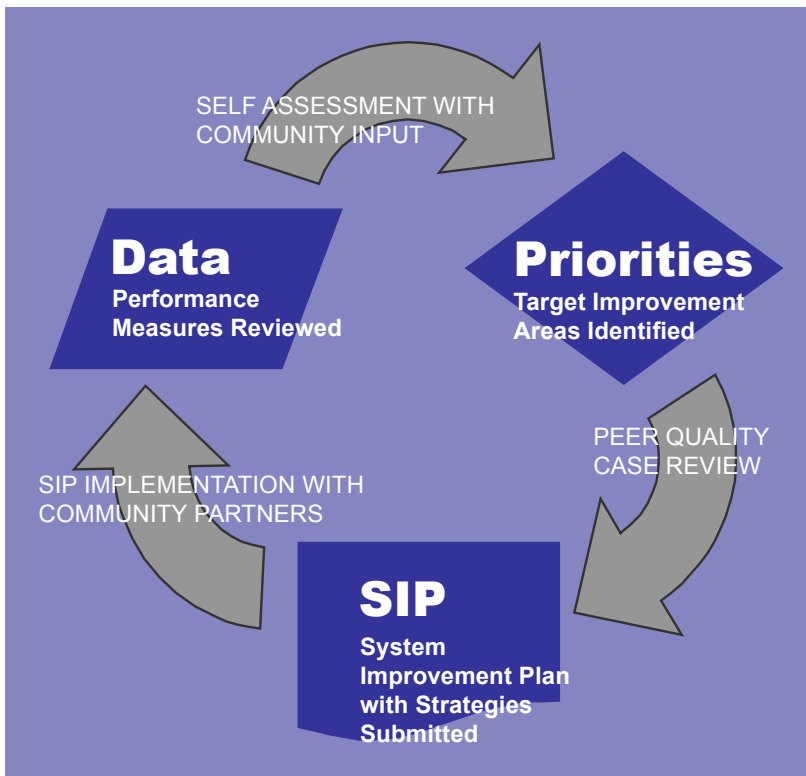- Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.

The new accountability system is built on an open and recurring cycle of county self-assessment, planning, implementation and review (see Figure 1). Fundamental to this continuous improvement cycle is the collection and periodic analysis of quantitative and qualitative data that measure county progress toward achieving identified goals. Key components of the new accountability system:

- **Quarterly County Data Reports.** Fourteen data indicators are used to measure progress toward state goals. Data reports are provided to each county welfare agency quarterly and published online.

- **County Self-Assessments.** Counties, in collaboration with community partners and other stakeholders, use the information in their data reports to assess the effectiveness of their interventions and identify priority areas for improvement. Reassessments occur in three-year cycles.

- **Peer Quality Case Reviews.** Counties establish peer teams to review randomly selected cases in at least one of their priority improvement areas. Structured interviews are conducted to better understand underlying issues.

- **System Improvement Plans (SIPs).** County child welfare agencies, in collaboration with local partners, develop strategic plans to improve outcomes in priority areas based on data indicators and case review findings. System Improvement Plans must be approved by local county boards of supervisors.

In September 2004, all 58 counties submitted their System Improvement Plans to the California Department of Social Services. The department reviewed each SIP and worked with the counties to identify areas where further support and assistance was needed.

Figure 1. Continuous Improvement Cycle Established by AB 636

SELF ASSESSMENT WITH COMMUNITY INPUT

Data
Performance Measures Reviewed

Priorities
Target Improvement Areas Identified

PEER QUALITY CASE REVIEW

SIP IMPLEMENTATION WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

SIP
System Improvement Plan with Strategies Submitted

California's new outcomes and accountability system is built on an open and recurring cycle of county self-assessment, planning, implementation and review.

Methodology

The Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) employed a variety of methods in conducting this analysis. First, CFPIC reviewed and analyzed all 58 county System Improvement Plans (SIPs). Performance measures and systemic factors targeted for improvements by counties were noted and tabulated. Strategies employed by counties to improve performance were identified, then categorized by type. This information was entered into a dataset along with county outcome data acquired from the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research. The dataset was analyzed to determine if any early trends could be identified.

For the process evaluation, CFPIC reviewed and analyzed the county System Improvement Plans for planning, community involvement and decision-making processes. A statewide survey was administered to each county to gain a basic understanding of its development and implementation processes, including its experience involving the community. Community partners identified by the counties were also surveyed to solicit their experiences in working with county child welfare agencies. The results of these surveys were then presented to regional focus groups composed of child welfare directors and managers. Focus groups were asked to respond to findings, provide more in-depth information on local planning efforts and resource gaps, and make suggestions for improving the SIP process. Additional information was gleaned from the Child Welfare Services Outcome Improvement Project to identify needed resources.

Content Analysis

What Counties Are Doing to Improve Outcomes

We are pleased to report that Child Safety was the top improvement area targeted by the counties in their SIPs — this is in complete alignment with the priorities of the State.

Mary L. Ault

Deputy Director, Children and Family Services Division, California Department of Social Services

To develop their System Improvement Plans (SIPs), counties were directed to select three to five performance measures and/or systemic factors most in need of improvement.

State Performance Measures and Goals Targeted

State performance measures indicate progress toward statewide goals related to safety, permanence and well-being. These measures supplement federal standards by tracking data on all children throughout their time in the child welfare system. This expanded approach allows California to review the federal standards and to look at performance in ways that can tell us much more of what we need to know.

A review of the measures most frequently targeted by counties reveals a consistent statewide focus on child safety. Counties primarily focused on measures related to keeping children safe in their own homes, followed by protecting children from abuse and neglect overall. Most counties targeted both of these statewide safety goals. Many counties also focused on providing permanent and stable homes for children placed in foster care.

Table 1 shows the relationship between goals and performance measures and the number of counties targeting each one.

Systemic Factors Targeted

As part of their self-assessments, counties were directed to identify systemic factors that could improve their capacity to achieve desired outcomes. Systemic factors are related to agency operations and can indirectly affect multiple performance measures. Almost half the counties focused on improving at least one systemic factor as part of their SIPs. Systems most frequently targeted by counties for improvement included management information, case review, foster/adoptive parent recruitment and retention, and service array.

Table 1. Goals and Performance Measures Most Frequently Targeted by Counties

		No. of Counties Targeting
SAFETY GOAL: **Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.**		41
MEASURE	Recurrence of maltreatment	38
MEASURE	Rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care	10
SAFETY GOAL: **Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.**		47
MEASURE	Percentage of children who receive a timely response to initial abuse and neglect allegations	22
MEASURE	Recurrence of abuse/neglect in homes where children were not removed	27
MEASURE	Percentage of children who receive timely visits from their social workers	32
PERMANENCY GOAL: **Continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children, as appropriate.**		16
MEASURE	Percentage of children placed in the least restrictive (most family-like) foster care setting	14
MEASURE	Percentage of children placed with some or all siblings	1
MEASURE	Percentage of American Indian children placed with an Indian caregivers	1
PERMANENCY GOAL: **Children have permanency and stability in living situations without increasing foster care re-entry.**		38
MEASURE	Percentage of children who experience multiple placements in foster care	13
MEASURE	Length of time to exit foster care and reunify with parents or caretakers	9
MEASURE	Length of time to achieve adoption	8
MEASURE	Percentage of children who re-enter foster care	17
WELL-BEING GOAL: **Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.**		15
MEASURE	Levels of self-sufficiency for youth exiting foster care	15

Improvement Strategies Employed

Counties developed or employed a wide variety of strategies to improve their performance on targeted measures. Further analysis revealed that, out of an unlimited number of strategies possible, 12 broad types could be identified. These strategies could be further categorized by locus of change: administrative, case, or collaborative. Table 2 below shows how often counties employed a strategy type to improve their performance on one or more targeted measures.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES

Improve record keeping: Clean up and enhance data entry on performance measures

Improve analytical methods: Develop better methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing data

Improve internal communication and information sharing: Facilitate sharing of case information, best practices and regulatory requirements, and improve internal communication across all levels

Improve oversight of social workers: Strengthen oversight and review of social workers to ensure best practices are implemented

Increase and/or optimize staffing: Reorganize staffing structure to adjust workload and increase supportive resources where feasible

CASE STRATEGIES

Improve quality and consistency of safety assessments: Enhance the use of standardized tools and procedures for assessing child safety

Improve needs assessments and use of resources: Develop more effective tools for getting children and families the help they need

Engage family members and youth in problem solving: Enlist the help of family members and youth in assessing their situation and identifying solutions

Recruit, train and support caregivers: Recruit relatives to be caregivers, and provide training and support to kinship and non-kinship caregivers

COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

Refer families to resources before serious harm occurs: Intervene before family problems escalate to the level of statutory abuse or neglect by involving or making referrals to community resource providers (includes Differential Response)

Develop partnerships with other service agencies: Expand the array of services available to families through interagency collaboration and partnerships with community-based organizations

Improve court processes and relationships: Strengthen relationships with the juvenile court through social worker training and streamlining of interagency processes

Table 2. Strategies That Counties Employed Most Often to Improve Performance Measures

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES	Change Locus	Counties	Frequency
Improve internal communication and information sharing	Administrative	54	155
Develop partnerships with other service agencies	Collaborative	51	113
Engage family and youth in problem solving	Case	45	88
Improve analytical methods	Administrative	40	74
Improve record keeping	Administrative	40	67
Improve quality and consistency of safety assessments	Case	37	67
Recruit, train and support caregivers	Case	45	62
Improve oversight of social workers	Administrative	32	55
Refer families to resources before serious harm occurs	Collaborative	32	54
Increase and/or optimize staffing	Administrative	29	49
Improve needs assessments and access to resources	Case	23	31
Improve court processes and relationships	Collaborative	16	23

Quantitative Findings

Early Indications of Change: First Full Year SIP Implementation Data

With less than two full years of outcome data collected since most counties completed their System Improvement Plans, it is still too early to use the data to draw definitive conclusions about whether specific approaches taken by counties are having the desired effect or to weigh the impact that improvements in one measure are having on another (for example, improving reunification rates may cause the length of stay in foster care to increase since the population of children remaining in care is likely to have greater needs and be more difficult to place). Many technical factors also influence the data at this stage, including the integrity of data collection procedures and differences in how indicators are defined.

While it is difficult to draw meaningful quantitative conclusions about the overall performance of counties, the median data that is gathered here is presented to give as much of a statewide picture as is possible in the context of this system. For a complete review of each county's performance on each of their targeted measures and the strategies selected to improve that performance, please refer to the full report at www.childsworld.ca.gov/Outcomesan_1848.htm.

The percentages in this section represent the median change in performance among counties that targeted the measures for improvement, exclusive of very small counties.*

STATEWIDE SAFETY GOAL
Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

More than two-thirds of counties, 41 in total, focused their improvement plans on the state's primary goal of protecting children from abuse and neglect. Counties targeted recurrence of maltreatment more than any other performance measure.

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* The median change was calculated by determining the mid-point of percent change values, excluding very small counties and percent change values that could not be calculated (i.e., indeterminate values). Very small counties (defined as fewer than 100 children in care) were not used in the computation of the medians since performance levels for these counties are extremely volatile due to the few number of children represented.

Performance Measures
- #### Recurrence of maltreatment
  Counties that chose to monitor the recurrence of maltreatment showed a median improvement of 5% on the state measure and 20% on the federal measure.

- #### Rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care
  Data collection was too inconsistent and incomplete to enable a meaningful comparison among counties. CDSS has since issued instructions for properly reporting of data on this measure.

STATEWIDE SAFETY GOAL
Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

The vast majority of counties, 47 in total, chose to focus their efforts on improving the safety of children in their own homes. Within this category, counties selected one or more of the following measures to help gauge the effectiveness of their efforts.

Performance Measures
- #### Percentage of children who receive a timely response to initial abuse and neglect allegations.
  Overall, counties showed improvement in providing timely responses to child abuse reports. Counties improved a median of 21% in cases requiring response within ten days and by a median 2% in cases requiring an immediate response (where counties were already performing at a high level).

- #### Recurrence of abuse/neglect in homes where children were not removed.
  While the early statewide data on this measure is inconsistent, overall counties improved by a median 3% in reducing the recurrence of abuse and neglect when children remain at home.

- #### Percentage of children who receive timely visits from their social workers.
  Every county that selected this measure improved its record of timely visits with a median improvement of 22% from the first month reported (April 2003) through the end of 2005.

STATEWIDE PERMANENCY GOAL
Continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children, as appropriate.

A third of the counties, 16 in total, focused on strengthening the continuity of children's relationships with family members and preserving their existing community connections, as appropriate. Nearly all of the counties focused on improving the percentage of children placed in the "least restrictive" (most family-like) foster care setting. One county focused solely on placing sibling together while another focused solely on improving tribal placements.

Performance Measures

- **Percentage of children placed in the least restrictive foster care setting**

  Overall, these counties improved by a median of 27% in reducing the percentage of children initially placed in a group home or shelter. The one county that focused on increasing the percentage of children whose primary placements are in foster homes improved by 4%.

- **Percentage of children placed with some or all siblings**

  One county chose to target this issue, improving by 7% on the measure that tracks the percentage of children who are placed with all siblings and by 3% on the measure that tracks the percentage of children who are placed with some or all siblings.

- **Percentage of American Indian children placed with Indian caregivers**

  Data is not yet available regarding the performance on this measure.

STATEWIDE PERMANENCY GOAL
Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing re-entry to foster care

More than half of the counties, 38 in total, focused on improving measures related to achieving stable living situations and permanent, lifelong connections for children who enter the foster care system. Most of these counties focused on preventing re-entry into foster care and reducing the need for multiple foster care placements.

Performance Measures

- **Increased placement stability in foster care**

  The counties that choose to focus on increased stability in foster care placements showed a median improvement on the 2% state measure and 4% on the federal measure.

- **Length of time to exit foster care and reunify with parents or caretakers**

  The counties that focused on reducing the length of time to reunification, although few in number, accounted for nearly half the foster care population. Overall, these counties improved a median of 16% on the state measure and 11% on the federal measure.

- **Length of time to exit foster care through adoption**

  The counties that focused on this measure were also few in number but accounted for a large percentage of children in foster care. These counties showed consistently strong improvement in shortening the time to adoption. Counties targeting the state measure improved by a median of 58% and those targeting the federal measure improved by a median of 41%.

- **Percentage of children who re-enter foster care**

  The results were highly mixed on this measure with some counties improving on the state measure but not on the federal, and vice versa. However, counties improved overall by a median of 15% on the state measure and a median of 8% on the federal measure.

STATEWIDE WELL-BEING GOAL
Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.

A quarter of the counties focused on the goal of ensuring that youth who turn age 18 while in foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.

Performance Measure

- **Levels of self-sufficiency for youth exiting foster care**

  Many counties chose to focus on improving self-sufficiency for youth exiting the foster care system, although indicators of success have not yet been defined for this performance measure,

Process Evaluation

Feedback from Counties and Local Partners

To evaluate the strengths and challenges of developing System Improvement Plans (SIPs) at the local level, CFPIC surveyed counties and county-identified community partners, then solicited additional input from child welfare administrators through regional focus groups.

Survey Results

County Survey: County respondents strongly agreed that the process of developing their System Improvement Plans was beneficial both in terms of building relationships with community partners and strengthening agency organization and focus. Counties also reported using their SIPs to track their performance on quarterly data indicators and reviewing their progress with staff and community partners. Counties also indicated having insufficient resources to effectively implement their System Improvement Plans and achieve the goals they set forth.

Community Partners: Community respondents indicated that they were generally engaged and involved in the development and implementation of System Improvement Plans within their counties. Community partners reported that their relationships with counties and their understanding of child welfare services improved due to their involvement in the SIP process. They also reported serving more families and using new approaches, such as community-based case management. Many community partners also indicated that they did not have sufficient resources to adequately serve the child welfare population targeted in their local System Improvement Plans.

County survey respondents strongly agreed that the process of developing their System Improvement Plans was beneficial both in terms of building relationship with community partners and strengthening agency organization and focus.

Regional Focus Group Findings

RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Successes: In discussions with regional focus groups, child welfare directors and managers reported that their relationships with community partners were solidified through the SIP process. The collaborative planning process broadened dialogues, changed attitudes, and deepened awareness about the complexities of child welfare services.

Challenges: Participants in all regions noted the difficulty of engaging new partners, citing limited funds as a serious deterrent. Many said they would take more care in future planning and implementation in identifying community partners that have the capacity to participate.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SIP

Successes: The counties reported that the structure provided by the State's new accountability system (AB 636) helped them to develop clear and measurable goals that were tied to outcomes, based on data, and linked to state policies.

Challenges: All counties reported the process was more labor intensive than originally envisioned. Many said that in future planning they would develop more realistic goals and look for more opportunities to leverage funding to support the process. They also noted a need to work more diligently to coordinate with their local juvenile probation departments. In addition, all counties reported that they would like more clarity from the State regarding their individual roles and the development of goals.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SIP

Successes: Most focus group participants found that their System Improvement Plans (SIPs) were useful for a variety of purposes. They were used to track progress towards targeted goals and served as an educational tool for the community and public officials. In addition, local child welfare agencies referred to them in the development of broad, long-range county plans and budget allocations, as well as using them for staff evaluation and motivation. They were also helpful in providing performance measurement tools for contracted services. Most counties reported that at least some of their implementation strategies appeared to be showing promise.

Challenges: All participants punctuated the need to educate the community and policymakers about the interplay between performance measures and outcomes, as well as the time frame needed for improvements to be reflected in data.

RESOURCES

Successes: Participants identified a variety of strategies for leveraging funds to help them implement their plans, including linking their program with other plans and realigning staff resources. Some counties reported that they had secured grants from outside sources, such as private foundations, as well as state funded programs (e.g., Children's Trust Fund).

Challenges: Every county reported needing additional resources to effectively implement their System Improvement Plans and to take their improvement strategies to scale countywide. A key resource gap noted by virtually every county was the need for additional staff. Counties also reported significant staffing shortages at community-based organizations that they had hoped would provide the additional resources that are needed to serve families. Participants also reported a gap in dedicated, dependable funds for prevention, both internally and for community-based organizations. Counties noted that this made long-term planning particularly challenging.

County Focus Group Recommendations

The counties made the following recommendations regarding the implementation of the new outcomes and accountability system.

- **Maintain momentum.** Counties reported investing significant resources into the process to date. They felt encouraged about the progress they have made and optimistic about the outcomes. They unanimously supported continuing on this path.

- **Continue to monitor and improve the quality of data.** Counties stressed the need to allow the system to establish strong baseline data that can accurately inform the continuous improvement cycle.

- **Reinforce collaboration with other agencies.** Counties noted the need for ownership and commitment from partners such as the Judicial Council, the Chief Probation Officers Association of California, and local decision and policy makers, as well as from the executives of community based agencies.

- **Increase resources.** Counties identified the need for additional resources to support their work, either for the SIP process itself or for the strategies identified in their System Improvement Plans, including training, the development of best practices, and funding for non-traditional partners. In addition, counties expressed the desire for stable, dedicated funding before launching improvement strategies not only to sustain the work they've begun but to build and maintain the trust of the families they serve.

- **Improve statewide leadership, guidance and technical assistance.** Counties noted that leadership was a factor that must be addressed in the future development and implementation of the new accountability system. Counties specifically identified the need for more direction, support, feedback and training from CDSS.

Outcomes Improvement Resources Analysis

In recent years and in spite of structural deficits, the Administration and the Legislature have generally sustained funding for child welfare programs. With the changing landscape, it will become increasingly important to recognize the relationship between funding and outcomes.

It has been understood from the beginning of this process that improvements in the Child Welfare System would require additional resources. At the time the initial System Improvement Plans were developed, the counties and the State could not fully estimate the scope of the resources needed to sustain the improvement strategies that were being identified.

CWSOIP Funding. To help counties improve their performance on SIP-identified outcome measure, California authorized targeted funding through the Child Welfare Services Outcomes Improvement Project (CWSOIP) in 2005-06. Counties submitted requests totaling $16.4 million in additional resources for programs and services they identified as crucial to their success. The State was able to provide $12.7 million to support these targeted efforts, leaving a fiscal gap of $3.6 million for program improvement strategies that were unfunded that year.

Table 3 below shows county requests for CWSOIP funding in 2005-06 by strategy type. Counties most frequently requested funding to support collaborative efforts to provide additional resources to children and families, both before serious harm occurred and after families had entered the child welfare system. Many counties also requested funds to support more intensive case management, including engaging families and youth in problem solving, recruiting and supporting caregivers, and strengthening assessments.

Other AB 636 Augmentations. During 2005-06, the State also augmented county funding by $19.0 million through a number of other fiscal strategies to support the development of System Improvement Plans:

Counties' self-assessments and System Improvement Plans	$11.2 million
Enhancement of local service delivery systems	$5.9 million
Support of county workers participating in Peer Quality Case Reviews	$1.9 million

Pilot County Improvement Funding. Although not directly related to implementing AB 636, the State provided $13.7 million to eleven pilot counties for ongoing testing of innovative approaches to providing child welfare services.

Funding for child welfare services has traditionally been a critical topic in the State, as it is in most states. California state budget negotiations, even in years of revenue shortfall, have spotlighted the importance of child welfare services funding. In recent years and in spite of structural deficits, the Administration and the Legislature have generally sustained funding for child welfare programs. With the changing landscape and focus on improving program performance, it will become increasingly important to recognize the relationship between funding and outcomes.

Table 3. Improvement Strategies Most Frequently Requested for Funding by Counties
Child Welfare Services Outcomes Improvement Project (OIP) Funding, 2005

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY	Change Locus	County Requests	Amount Funded
Refer families to resources before serious harm occurs	Collaborative	30	$4.0 million
Develop partnerships with other service agencies	Collaborative	29	$2.6 million
Engage family and youth in problem solving	Case	21	$1.5 million
Recruit, train and support caregivers	Case	18	$2.0 million
Improve internal communication and information sharing	Administrative	14	$0.5 million
Increase and/or optimize staffing	Administrative	8	$0.5 million
Improve quality and consistency of safety assessments	Case	6	$0.5 million
Improve analytical methodologies	Administrative	6	$0.2 million
Improve needs assessments and access to resources	Case	5	$0.8 million
Improve court processes and relationships	Collaborative	1	$0.4 million
Improve oversight of social workers	Administrative	1	$0.2 million
TOTAL		139	$12.7 million

Conclusion

California's groundbreaking Child Welfare Services outcomes and accountability system, while in its infancy, is already providing the structure and guidance necessary to ensure that counties and communities work together to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children and their families.

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In reviewing the work that the counties have undertaken to date, it is clear that the foundation for the next phase of the quality improvement cycle is in place. Data associating strategies with outcomes are now available on a county-by-county basis (see the full report),* providing counties with a critically important self-assessment tool as well as offering them opportunities to draw on similarly situated counties for peer learning and support.

The process evaluation reveals a newfound understanding among county child welfare staff and the community about the possibilities of partnering on behalf of California's most vulnerable children. It also indicates that counties clearly desire leadership, technical assistance and support from the State in the interest of achieving measurable improvements.

While it is still early in the process, the new accountability system is resulting in very real changes in the way child welfare agencies "do business" across the state:

- Data outcome measures are focusing discussions toward common goals.

- Child welfare staff and other agencies are sharing information and knowledge to improve outcomes for children.

- Counties are involving communities throughout the state in an open problem-solving process on behalf of children and families.

These achievements are the critical first steps in developing a successful process for ensuring greater safety, permanence and well being for California's children.

* The full report, including county-by-county data on each measure, is available at www.childsworld.ca.gov/Outcomesan_1848.htm

Addendum

		# of Times Targeted in County SIPs	MEDIAN COUNTY CHANGE*			
			State Measure		Federal or Other Measure	
			% Change	Desired Direction	% Change	Desired Direction
STATE SAFETY GOAL **Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.** Targeted by 41 counties						
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Recurrence of maltreatment (1B and 1A)[a]		38	-5.3	✔	-20.4	✔
Case Strategy	Improve consistency and quality of safety assessments	24				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	24				
Collaborative Strategy	Refer families to resources before serious harm occurs	22				
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	20				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care (1C)		10			**	
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	7				
Case Strategy	Recruit, train and support caregivers	7				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	6				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	4				
STATE SAFETY GOAL **Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.** Targeted by 47 counties						
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Percentage of children who receive a timely response to initial allegations (2B)[b]		22	+2.3	✔	+20.5	✔
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	17				
Administrative Strategy	Improve record keeping	11				
Administrative Strategy	Increase and/or optimize staffing	11				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Rate of recurrence of abuse/neglect in homes where children were not removed (2A)		27	-2.6	✔		
Case Strategy	Improve consistency and quality of safety assessments	17				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	16				
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	15				
Collaborative Strategy	Refer families to resources before serious harm occurs	11				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	10				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Percentage of children who receive timely visits from their social workers (2C)[c]		32	+21.6	✔		
Administrative Strategy	Improve record keeping	25				
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	24				
Administrative Strategy	Improve oversight of social workers	20				
Administrative Strategy	Increase and/or optimize staffing	11				
STATE PERMANENCY GOAL **Continuity of family relationships for children is preserved, as appropriate.** Targeted by 16 counties						
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Percentage of children in the least restrictive (most family-like) foster care setting (4B)[d]		14	-27.2	✔	+3.6	✔
Case Strategy	Recruit, train and support caregivers	11				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	7				
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	7				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Percentage of children placed with some or all siblings (4A)[e]		1	+6.7	✔	+3.3	✔
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	1				
Case Strategy	Improve needs assessments and access to resources	1				
Administrative Strategy	Improve analytical methods	1				
Administrative Strategy	Increase and/or optimize staffing	1				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Percentage of American Indian children placed with Indian caregivers (4E)		1	**		**	
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	1				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	1				

Median Change in Performance Measures Targeted in County Child Welfare Services System Improvement Plans (SIPs) *Organized by Statewide Outcome Goals with Strategy Types Most Often Employed to Improve Measure ***

INITIAL COUNTY SIP IMPLEMENTATION (AB 636) COVERING 18-MONTH PERIOD ENDING DEC. 31, 2005

		# of Times Targeted in County SIPs	MEDIAN COUNTY CHANGE*			
			State Measure		Federal or Other Measure	
			% Change	Desired Direction	% Change	Desired Direction
STATE PERMANENCY GOAL **Children have permanency and stability in living situations without foster care re-entry.** Targeted by 38 counties						
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Increase in foster care placement stability (3C/3B)f		17	+2.3	✔	+4.2	✔
Case Strategy	Recruit, train and support caregivers	16				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	7				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	5				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Length of time to exit foster care and reunify with parents or caretakers (3A/E)g		9	+16.1	✔	+11.1	✔
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	7				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	6				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Length of time to achieve adoption (3A/3D)h		8	+57.6	✔	+40.6	✔
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	7				
Collaborative Strategy	Improve court processes and relationships	6				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	4				
Case Strategy	Recruit, train and support caregivers	4				
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Percentage of children who re-enter foster care (3G/3F)i		21	-15.3	✔	-7.8	✔
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	13				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	12				
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	12				
Case Strategy	Improve consistency and quality of safety assessments	7				
STATE WELL-BEING GOAL **Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.** Targeted by 15 counties						
PERFORMANCE MEASURE Levels of self-sufficiency for youth exiting foster care (8A)		15				
Collaborative Strategy	Develop partnerships with other service agencies	12				
Case Strategy	Engage family and youth in problem solving	11				
Administrative Strategy	Improve internal communication and information sharing	8				

* Median Change in Performance Measure represents mid-point of percent change values, excluding very small counties and percent change values that could not be calculated (i.e., indeterminate values). Performance levels for the very small counties are extremely volatile because of how few children are represented. Therefore, performance percentages for very small counties are not used in the computation of the medians.

** The Quarter 4, 2005 CFSR abuse in care reports employ a new method and should not be compared to the previously published abuse in care measure. For details, please see the methodology at: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/cfsrdata/standards/method_ACLabuseinCare.html

***Capturing this data involves new data instructions for counties. As a result, the current numbers are likely an undercount. An All County Letter (ACL), distributed on December 3, 2003, discusses the method of populating the necessary variables. The ACL can be viewed at: http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/acl03/pdf/03-61.pdf

a 1B/1A = 1B. Percent recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months / 1A. Percent recurrence of maltreatment (federal measure).

b 2B/2B = 2B. Percent of child abuse/neglect referrals with a timely response (Immediate Response Compliance) / 2B. Percent of child abuse/neglect referrals with a timely response (10-Day Response Compliance)

c 2C = Percent change for measure 2C from first month reported (Apr 2003) to most recent month reported (Dec 2005)

d 4B/4B = 4B. Initial Placement: Group/Shelter / 4B. Primary Placement: Foster Home

e 4A/4A = 4A. Percent of children in foster care that are placed with ALL siblings / 4A. Percent of children in foster care that are placed with SOME or ALL siblings

f 3C/3B = 3C. Percent with 1-2 placements – if still in care at 12 months (entry cohort) / 3B. Percent with 1-2 placements within 12 months (federal measure)

g 3A/3E = 3A. Percent reunified within 12 months (entry cohort) / 3E. Percent reunified within 12 months (federal measure)

h 3A/3D = 3A. Percent adopted within 24 months (entry cohort) / 3D. Percent adopted within 24 months (federal measure)

i 3G/3F = 3G. Reentry within 12 months (entry cohort) / 3F. Reentry to foster care (federal measure).