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IMPLICATIONS: LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Using Performance Measures to Manage Child Welfare Outcomes: Local Strategies and Decision Making

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The federal child welfare performance measurement system exerts a profound influence over the design, delivery, and evaluation of child welfare services at the local level, with funding contingent upon participation in the federally mandated Child and Family Services Review. In this exploratory study the authors focus on local efforts to respond to and comply with the federal child welfare performance measurement system in 11 northern California counties. The authors review the System Improvement Plans of each county and the findings from focus groups with child welfare staff conducted in five of the counties that included the limitations of federal performance measures, the difficulty using these measures to inform decision making, and the continuing struggle to achieve the major child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. The implications include the need for: flexibility in the federal performance measurement system, opportunities to integrate local values and priorities, and child well-being measures so that timeliness does not take on more significance than well-being or the quality of relationships among local stakeholders in the child welfare system.

Keywords: Child welfare, performance standards, compliance, decision making

LOCAL STRATEGIES AND DECISION MAKING

The federal child welfare performance measurement system exerts a profound influence over the design, delivery, and evaluation of child welfare services at the local level, with funding contingent upon participation in the federally mandated Child and Family Services Review (CFSR; Reed & Karpilow, 2009). The federal CFSR was established under the *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997* (ASFA), enacted to address the issue of children remaining in foster care for long periods of time without a permanent resolution through reunification or adoption (Adler, 2001; Berrick, 2009).

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In addition to imposing stricter limits on the time children spend in foster care, ASFA mandated a set of child welfare goals and performance measures to ensure systematic data collection and measurement of state performance in relationship to the federally defined goals.

In order to avoid financial penalties, states must demonstrate progress toward the goals and outcomes set forth under ASFA. In California, the federal CFSR process and performance measures are also incorporated at the state level into the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), effectively transmitting federal mandates to local county agencies responsible for delivering child welfare services. As the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) notes, “By design, the C-CFSR closely follows the federal emphasis on safety, permanency, and well-being” (CDSS, 2009, p. 2). The C-CFSR incorporates the federal performance measures, supplementing them with additional measures under the goals of safety, permanence, and well-being (Reed & Karpilow, 2009). The C-CFSR process involves a three-step cycle of peer review, self-assessment, and strategic planning to evaluate and address county agency performance related to the federal child welfare performance measures. Through this process, each county develops a local System Improvement Plan (SIP) to guide decisions about program strategies and resource allocation.

In this exploratory study the authors examine local efforts to respond to and comply with the federally mandated child welfare performance measurement system in a sample of northern California counties. It includes a review of the SIPs of 11 counties, examining the decisions counties report in their selection of goals and related performance measures to be addressed. It is followed by a discussion of the findings from focus groups conducted with staff in 5 of the 11 counties, in which local practitioners were asked to describe their perspectives on the federal outcomes and performance measures. The examination of agency and staff level responses to the federal performance measurement system concludes with a set of implications for future reform efforts.

COUNTY SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLANS: LOCAL EFFORTS AT RESULTS-ORIENTED MANAGEMENT

The purpose of the review of county SIPs was to examine the experiences of local counties in their efforts to comply with the federal performance measurement system established at the federal level. The SIPs reviewed in this analysis were accessed online through the website of the CDSS (Alameda County, 2008; Contra Costa County, 2004; Marin County, 2007; Monterey County, 2004; Monterey County, 2008; Napa County, 2007; San Francisco County, 2007; San Mateo County, 2007; Santa Clara County, 2006; Santa Cruz County, 2008; Solano County, 2004; Sonoma County, 2008). The 11 counties represent the diverse political, racial, and economic demographics of northern California, with rural, semi-urban, and urban populations ranging in size, according to 2008 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, from the smallest county, with under 60,000 people, to the largest, with about 1.7 million people.

To provide guidance to counties in the development of their SIPs, the CDSS disseminates a County Self-Assessment Process Guide. As noted explicitly in the guide, “[a]nalysis of the outcomes forms the heart of the CSA” (CDSS, 2009, p. 20). The CSA Guide is based on a logic model that is common in the performance management literature (Hatry, 2006; Poister, 2003; Savaya & Waysman, 2005; Schalock & Bonham, 2003). Counties engaged in the SIP process are directed to review their administrative data in order to identify outcome measures where performance improvement is needed, and identify specific, achievable, and measurable goals and corresponding strategies directly linked to these outcome measures (see Figure 1). The guide also mandates that counties include local stakeholders and peer review as they develop goals and strategies related to the outcomes and standards identified by federal and state human service agencies (CDSS, 2009).

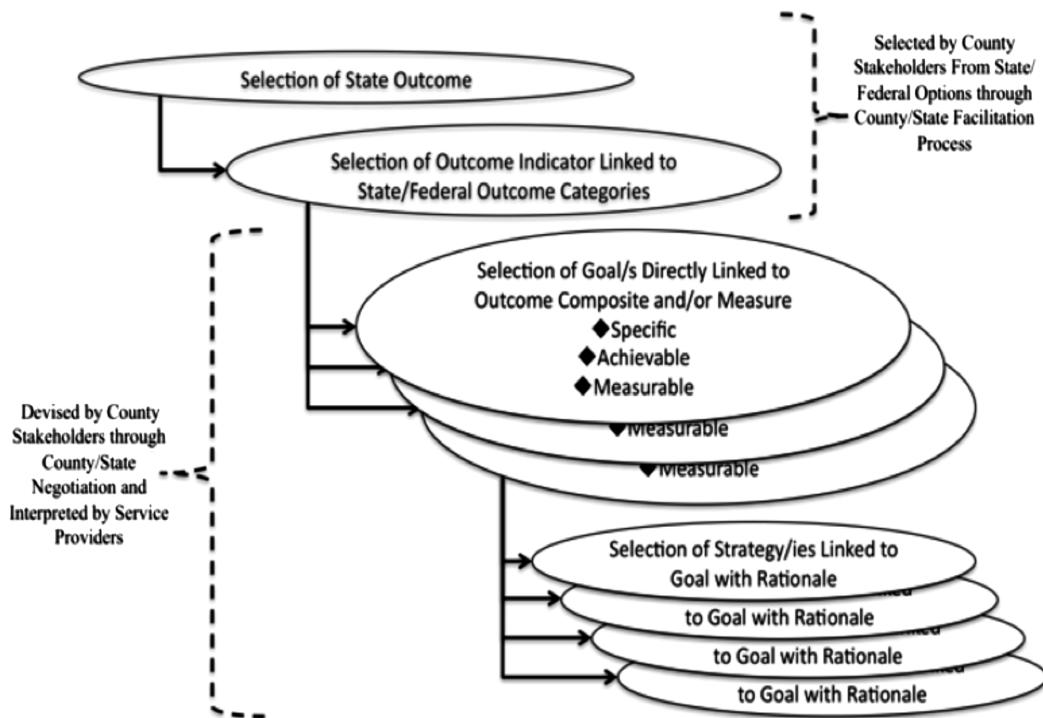


FIGURE 1 Procedure in practice as explained by state guide.

In our review of the 11 county SIPs, we found that most offered at least one example in which the county utilized the assessment and planning process described in the state guide, based on the recommended logic model format. In these examples, while the SIP goals and strategies were selected by local stakeholders, they were always tied to specific outcome measures defined by the federal performance measurement system. For example, one county selected the outcome measure “Percent of admissions who are reentries” and established a goal of maintaining “the rate of admission that are reentries as less than 8.6%” (Figure 2). This goal was specific, measurable, and directly linked to the state and federal reentry outcome measure.

In contrast, some counties specified outcome measures related to disproportionality and child well-being that differed from the federally defined measures. For example, one county determined that racial disproportionality should be a central focus for the county, explaining “it is critical to view improvement efforts from the lens of disproportionality given the alarming overrepresentation of children and families of color, including African American, Native American, and Latino.” Another county also noted that the issue of disproportionality was an area where improvement was needed, highlighting the intersection with established standards for timely permanency. This excerpt from the SIP narrative described the need to balance the federal performance measurement mandates with performance management priorities determined by local stakeholders:

The Redesign’s emphasis on permanency and youth transition will assist the Bureau in addressing racial disproportionality and the fact that over 50% of children still in care after 54 months are African-American. *While respecting the cultural viewpoint of African-American families regarding terminating parental rights and adoption of kin, the Bureau recognizes that it needs to improve its permanency focus for African American children and youth.* We intend to work with our collaborating agencies,

Outcome/Systemic Factor: 3 F Percent of admissions who are re-entries				
County's Current Performance: For the most recent 12 month period for which results are available, ending 9/30/06, 9.8% of children admitted to child welfare supervised foster care were subsequent entries within 12 months of a prior exit.				
Improvement Goal 5.0: Maintain the rate of admissions that are reentries as less than 8.6%.				
Component C: Safety	Strategy 5.1: Utilize Differential Response to use community-based, culturally competent preventative services for families at risk of child abuse and neglect; this will support communities in increasing quantity and quality of services.		Strategy Rationale: The use of Differential response will improve family engagement, assist referred families to build on their strengths, and link families with community leaders and resources. This will help communities to "care for their own."	
	Milestones	Timeframes	Assigned To	
	5.1.1 Establish Differential Response Implementation Planning Committee.	May 2007	Senior Staff Services Analyst	
	5.1.2 Explore Collaboration with COPE, Family Resource Centers and other community partners.	February 2007	Senior Staff Services Analyst	
	5.1.3 Explore potential funding sources for implementation and ongoing support of DR	July 2007	Child Welfare Director	
5.1.4 Develop Policy responding to funding requirements including reporting time frames and implementation goals	Aug 2007	Assistant Child Welfare Director Senior Staff Services		

FIGURE 2 Example of outcome selection with directly linked goals and strategies from a county system improvement plan 2007–2009 (color figure available online).

faith-based communities and African-American community members in crafting an approach that will address this need [emphasis added].

A number of counties also used their SIPs to highlight child and family well-being as a critical outcome in addition to the federal and state performance measures. However, this approach runs contrary to the CSA Guide because while the state has established several process measures related to child well-being, neither the state nor the federal system has defined outcome measures related to child or family well-being. In one county that focused on the outcome of "no recurrence of maltreatment" the stakeholders participating in the SIP process did not propose simply reducing maltreatment recurrence by a certain percentage as its goal in this area, as the CSA Guide would have dictated. Instead, the county developed the goal to "Reduce and prevent parental substance abuse" along with a list of strategies and a rationale linked to substance abuse rather than to recurrence of maltreatment. The rationale for this approach is explained below:

Survey and key informant data identified parent's alcohol and drug issues as a major factor in ensuring child safety. *A majority of parents participating in the telephone surveys identified substance abuse as one of the top two challenges they faced.* Despite this high need, local key informants reported that there was a dearth of substance abuse services for child welfare parents. Parents who had difficulty assessing substance abuse services were parents with children living in the home and parents with children ages three and over in out of home care [emphasis added].

While federal performance measures appear to provide a degree of guidance for local agencies seeking to improve outcomes for children and families, locally defined priorities are deemed to take precedence in a number of instances. In these examples, agencies seek to frame and integrate

needs and values articulated by local stakeholders (e.g., substance abuse treatment or the cultural views of African American families) into the federal performance measurement structure and process. It should be noted, however, that the SIPs leave the reader to interpret the intent of county stakeholder decisions because they are primarily a performance reporting tool for state and federal accountability. For example, when county stakeholders identify a specific outcome measure to address in their SIP, it is difficult to determine conclusively if this is the most pressing area of children's services to address.

STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

In addition to the analysis of the SIPs, focus groups captured the perspectives of child welfare staff with respect to the federal child welfare performance measures. The focus groups of 10 to 15 participants included line staff, supervisors, managers, and analysts who engaged in two to three hour discussions focused on one or more of the following six CFSR performance measures that had been selected by their agency directors: (1) reunification timeliness; (2) exits to permanency; (3) placement stability; (4) adoption timeliness; (5) recurrence of maltreatment; and (6) re-entry to care. The detailed notes on each session were content analyzed to identify common and central themes. While the focus groups were conducted in a diverse cross section of northern California counties with staff holding a range of positions, they did not represent a random stratified sample, as county agencies volunteered to hold a focus group and staff were invited by senior management to participate. As a result, it is difficult to generalize the findings beyond these specific locales.

The findings illustrate the different ways that staff try to balance the aims of locally responsive daily practice with the accountability requirements of the state and federal review processes. The findings are organized into three categories: (1) performance measures that are not adequately addressed in the CFSR and C-CFSR processes; (2) specific challenges in utilizing official measures of performance to inform decision making, and (3) the struggle to achieve the major child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

Missing Performance Measures

Participants described two missing performance measures in the CFSR process; namely, child well-being and stakeholder engagement. First, participants explained that although they were ultimately responsible for making decisions that were in the best interest of the child, efforts to maximize *child well-being* were not adequately addressed by existing CFSR and C-CFSR outcome measures (e.g., school performance and general health). Second, participants noted that the level of stakeholder engagement (e.g., strong supportive relationships with and among children, families of origin, kin, foster and adoptive families, group home coordinators, and representatives of the court) was not incorporated into the federal measures, despite the local priority given to developing a strong network of care-giving among these stakeholders.

Using Data to Inform Decision Making

The second theme emerging from the focus groups involved the following challenges in using existing CFSR measures to guide decisions: (1) the practice dilemmas created by the use of the performance measures, (2) the influence of stakeholders representing the legal profession, and (3) the impact of the local context.

Challenge 1: Performance measures creating practice dilemmas. Focus group participants noted that CFSR performance measures often presented counties with the dilemma of balancing conflicting assessments of performance arising between timely reunification and adoption as well as between timely reunification/exits to permanency (other than adoption) and placement stability. In essence, the focus of practice efforts on one outcome measure could put the county at risk of inadequate performance on another measure.

Balancing reunification timeliness with adoption timeliness posed challenges for caretakers as well as for child welfare workers. In concurrent planning it is the role of child welfare workers to convince all stakeholders that working toward timely reunification and adoptive placement simultaneously is based primarily on promoting child well-being. Strong supportive relationships among all stakeholders are required to achieve this goal. However, focus group participants reported that potential adoptive parents are often conflicted as they struggle with a process that could potentially lead to reunification with the family of origin after they bond with the child in hopes of adoption. Many adoptive and foster parents thus seek to maintain emotional distance from families of origin, based on a fear of losing the child and and/or resentment about the apparent lack of attention to the supportive family environment that they are trying to create to promote child well-being. For example, engaging in full disclosure practices with foster and adoptive parents regarding the problems that the biological parents are experiencing (e.g., substance abuse and other mental health issues) can backfire when this practice leads to raised expectations on the part of adoptive parents who are seeking to formalize their relationship with the child. By using permanency timelines to assess performance, it is difficult to account for the time it takes to develop strong relationships among the child welfare stakeholders in order to build the integrated child support network needed to facilitate quality long-term placements.

In addition, the barriers to coordination between adoption and reunification workers demonstrated the challenges posed by using CFSR outcomes for results-oriented decision making and those posed by the lack of performance measures focused on child well-being and stakeholder engagement. For example, one group noted that when intake workers assess the potential for reunification between a child and the family of origin and focus only on the likelihood of timely reunification, this practice can lead to inadequate attention to finding placements that offer the possibility of adoption. Where reunification efforts fail, workers may pass the responsibility for the case on to the adoption unit where workers focus on adoption timeliness. Simply measuring the timeliness of reunification and adoption may inadvertently encourage this type of uncoordinated practice.

Similar challenges are evident in the conflict between measures of placement stability and the timeliness of exits to permanency. For example, when focusing on child well-being, efforts to establish permanency are often more effective when viewed within the context of an integrated network of support for children (e.g., a child might maintain a permanent placement with kin but never attain legal permanency with these relatives). In essence, current CSFR measures do not adequately capture an alternative view of permanency where priority is given to “emotional permanency” and “long-term stability” based on the assessed well-being of a child within a more holistic network of kin support.

Challenge 2: Influence of legal stakeholders. Relationships between the county and representatives of the court (along with the regulatory and procedural frameworks governing child welfare) also present challenges to performance with respect to the CFSR outcome measures. For example, the judge who interprets child welfare law in relationship to permanency decisions (along with legal counsel/advocates for children and their families of origin) directly influences performance outcomes related to reunification and adoption timeliness as well as reentry into care. In addition, overloaded court dockets can negatively impact adoption and reunification timelines but are beyond the control of county child welfare agencies.

Interactions with the court system highlight the need for CFSR measures to focus on outcomes related to child well-being and the strength of stakeholder connectedness. By requiring the termination of parental rights within a certain timeframe, the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) limits the possibility of reunification for families of origin making progress toward dealing with personal struggles (e.g., substance abuse problems or struggling to find steady sources of income) or working to build strong support networks (e.g., with county social workers, kin, etc.). Court representatives in some instances interpret ASFA's emphasis on exits to permanency as requiring quick determination of the likelihood of reunification followed by the termination of parental rights, leaving adoption and guardianship as the only remaining options.

Other court-related challenges involved the unique preferences of individual judges and court workers, which in some instances required child welfare workers to balance a judge's assessment of the performance of the agency with the CFSR measures of performance. It is clear that the strength of the relationship between child welfare agencies and judges is a key to achieving effective performance on CFSR measures. The nature of the relationship between individual social workers and judges is also important. For example, child welfare cases may be assessed by judges in terms of the agency's performance on how well holistic approaches are used to assist the child (e.g., how well social workers knew the child's progress in school) rather than focusing more narrowly on the federal permanency and stability measures. Some judges make decisions based on the preferences of the child, sometimes contrary to the recommendations of social workers, making it difficult to meet CFSR requirements when there is the potential for recurrence of abuse.

Challenge 3: Local demographic and system differences. In each focus group, participants repeatedly challenged the federal measures for failing to take into account the importance of demographic and other local characteristics in shaping performance on the federal measures. The majority of these discussions fell into the following three categories: (1) specific child characteristics (e.g., age or mental health status), (2) cultural beliefs and knowledge of child welfare held by families of origin as well as adoptive and foster parents, and (3) local differences in county size and geography.

The majority of participants expressed concern that the standards for county agency performance, as measured by the CFSR performance measures, did not account for specific child characteristics and needs. Participants explained that specific child characteristics can lead social workers to make decisions that might seem unpalatable to policy makers but are influenced by the lack of viable placement options for youth. For example, the best interest of a 16-year-old child who is able to negotiate her environment in order to ensure her own safety with a non-abusive alcoholic parent may be different than the best interest of an 8-year-old where the risk of a recurrence of neglect poses a greater threat of harm.

Participants also noted that the prevalence of particular cultural beliefs and knowledge of child welfare held by families of origin as well as adoptive and foster parents presented another important factor that is not accounted for in the federal performance measures. For instance, some participants described the reluctance of family members who provide kin placements to engage in more formalized procedures to ensure a more permanent placement for the child, because they approach their roles as temporary guardians of children with the expectation that the child's parents would re-engage with their parental duties. Participants also described kin as often having a sense of entitlement to the child, believing that it preempted child welfare intervention (e.g., the reluctance of a grandmother to complete adoption paperwork because she felt that being a child's grandparent already established her legitimacy as a parent to the child).

Cultural competence is another prominent issue, particularly as it relates to matching foster and adoptive families with children. Participants explained that placement stability depends upon how well the specific needs of the child can be met by culturally competent, knowledgeable, and trained adoptive and foster families who fully understand the challenges they face with a

particular child. However, participants also explained that the availability of culturally appropriate families and the resources needed to ensure placement stability were either limited or lacking in their counties. Some participants in rural counties noted that working with a large proportion of mostly Spanish-speaking migrant workers impacted the timeliness of finding stable and permanent placements because of language and cultural barriers that slowed progress on procedural matters and impeded their understanding of how child welfare agencies operated. These participants also explained that cultural, language, and financial barriers often limited their ability to recruit foster and adoptive families from a diverse pool of potential applicants, thereby reducing the likelihood of matching children with families that were prepared to handle the array of child needs.

A final set of local factors related to a county's resources, size, and population density. For example, the recent state budget cuts are likely to diminish the level of county due diligence in assessing the risk that temporary and permanent placements for children pose for instability, reentry, recurrence of maltreatment in reunified families, or occurrence of maltreatment in foster care. Resource constraints affected the amount of staff time available for assessing individual child well-being or facilitating inter-agency collaboration (e.g., agents of the court, CalWORKs, mental health) and family involvement (families of origin, foster parents, kin, and potential adoptive parents). Participants from smaller counties suggested that their capacity to engage in these practices was affected by fewer resources in smaller economies when compared to larger counties that had more financial and human capital.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHILD WELFARE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

The review of 11 county SIPs and focus group discussions with representatives from five counties provide insights into how individual counties and child welfare workers respond to the federal performance measurement system. The perspectives of local child welfare staff, who are engaged in the daily practice of protecting children and responding to the federal performance measurement system, should inform efforts to improve that system. While the focus groups identified a number of specific challenges and tensions relating to the federal performance measures, they also noted that the measures provide a framework for dialogue among practitioners to critically examine their own practice and the outcomes they seek for children and families.

The county SIPs offered examples of the interaction and tensions between the accountability aims of the performance measurement system at the federal and state level and the internal performance management objectives of local county level practice. In some cases, there was clear alignment between federal and local priorities. In others, counties sought to incorporate the needs and values of local stakeholders, including substance abusing parents in families of origin and African American family members providing kin placements. A degree of flexibility needs to be built into the federal performance measurement system in order to ensure that local values, needs, and priorities can be integrated into performance improvement efforts.

By explicitly authorizing and encouraging states and counties to incorporate locally defined goals into their system improvement efforts, the federal performance measurement system can provide the context for multiple pilot projects around the country aimed at improving outcomes for children and families. Overly rigid performance measurement systems can inhibit experimentation and lead to "ossified" systems of care (Smith, 1995, p. 284, as cited in Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2009). By maintaining rigorous standards for the evaluation of projects or programs addressing locally defined priorities, a flexible performance measurement system can help to identify new evidence-based practices. Furthermore, requiring states to develop performance measures and standards to evaluate progress toward locally determined goals could provide a laboratory for measuring child and family well-being across the country. Finally, to ensure that implementing local objectives

does not hinder progress being made toward ensuring safety and timely permanency, it is necessary to continue tracking these outcomes.

The findings from focus groups identified multiple themes, including: (1) the failure of the current federal performance measurement system to address child and family well-being or the engagement of essential stakeholders; (2) the competing practice demands created by existing CFSR performance measures; (3) the role of legal stakeholders in achieving timeliness of adoption or reunification; and (4) the contributions of local factors such as demographics or county size to performance outcomes.

The issues noted by child welfare workers raise a number of potential implications for child welfare practice and related research. In the absence of explicit child well-being measures, the safety and permanency measures are at risk of promoting outcomes that are inconsistent with the ASFA's goals of child safety, permanency, and well-being. Strengthening the focus on child well-being and the engagement of stakeholders will demand that child welfare staff think about children holistically by examining their experiences and outcomes in multiple domains (in addition to safety, stability, and permanency) that include education, social networks, and more fundamentally, emotional stability and connectedness. This kind of practice will demand a broader systems perspective, drawing on formal institutional entities as well as informal systems, including community, family, and friends, to develop a strong network of support and emotional connection for the child (Wulczyn et al., 2010).

To support the shift from a sole focus on safety and permanency to an increased emphasis on well-being, research is needed to identify appropriate measures of well-being. Most notably, measuring well-being requires the child welfare system to take a longitudinal perspective by tracking outcomes for children and youth into adulthood (Hook & Courtney, 2010). Focused efforts are needed to develop workable measures of child and family well-being as a way to ensure that the performance measurement system does not give rise to a performance paradox (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002) in which timeliness takes precedence over child well-being or the quality of relationships among local stakeholders in the child welfare system.

Placing well-being at the center of the federal performance measurement system offers a potential remedy to the competing demands experienced by child welfare workers as they seek to balance the goals of safety, stability, and timely permanency. As focus group participants described, there are multiple instances where the federal guidelines may inhibit a decision that benefits the child. For example, a decision to move a child that exceeds the federal guideline of two moves per stay in care may promote child well-being by offering a better cultural fit. Similarly, the complex process of achieving readiness to adopt for some caregivers may dictate a slower timeline than established under the federal system, but ultimately result in permanency for the child. A performance measurement system needs to be redesigned around the central goal of child well-being in order to allow for local flexibility that benefits children in care.

Accounting for the role played by legal stakeholders in the child welfare system raises additional concerns and questions for child welfare researchers and practitioners. While child welfare staff can provide numerous illustrations of the impact of the judicial process on federally defined outcomes, a scan of the research literature reveals few studies that systematically examine this issue. Promising court improvement initiatives around the country provide opportunities to enlist judicial support for better outcomes, as well as enlarge our understanding of the ways in which the court system hinders or helps the promotion of positive outcomes for children. As a starting point, improved court–agency relations may serve to improve timeliness outcomes, enabling system level issues such as scheduling conflicts to be jointly addressed (Carnochan et al., 2007).

Finally, although the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. DHHS) has declined to develop risk adjustment models that would account for critical local variations in population demographics, child welfare staff participating in the focus groups provided illustrations of the potential harms to children that may result. Some described the additional time required to

help non-English speaking families, whether original or adoptive, to understand the aims and requirements of the child welfare system. Failure to allow for longer timelines in these cases may result in premature TPR or the loss of potential adoptive placements. At the level of policy and practice, incentives to engage these families may be lessened, as efforts are centered on achieving the timeliness benchmarks set forth in federal regulations. To ensure that risk adjusted outcomes for certain populations do not lead to worse outcomes for these children or for all children in care, agencies must track and compare outcomes over time between populations and between locales. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of risk adjusted measures may be limited, as Rothstein (2009) argues:

Attempts to control analyses of outputs for variation in the quality of inputs (severity of cases) can never be fully successful, because practitioners in direct contact with clients will always have insights about clients' potential that is more sophisticated than can be revealed by clients' membership in defined demographic groups. To avoid such distortion and corruption, an accountability system for child welfare services should rely on human judgment of trained professional evaluators. (p. 71)

As Rothstein argues, the assessments made by child welfare workers reflect a depth of knowledge about specific clients that broadly applied quantitative measures of performance cannot replicate.

These findings from exploratory research conducted at the local level examining agency and child welfare worker responses to the federal performance measurement system echo the arguments made by child welfare experts that the current performance measures and standards are problematic and require reform (Schuerman & Needell, 2009; Rothstein, 2009). The broad critiques articulated by Schuerman and Needell (2009) relate to: (1) variations in the state data that were used to develop the national standards, stemming from differences in policies, practice, population demographics, and other factors, (2) variations in the quality of data used by states to assess outcomes, (3) conflicts among the aims of the measures, (4) equal weighting of large and small states in developing national standards, and (5) failure to utilize longitudinal measures to assess outcomes. Efforts to improve the current federal child welfare performance measurement system should be informed by the analyses and experiences of local child welfare practitioners as well as child welfare researchers, in order to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children in care.

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APPENDIX: SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLANS

- Alameda County (September 24, 2008) Waiver Implementation Plan/System Improvement Plan: June 2007–2010.
- Contra Costa County (September 28, 2004) System Improvement Plan.
- Marin County (June 1, 2007) Child and Family Services System Improvement Plan: June 2007–June 2010.
- Monterey County (September 27, 2004) Child and Family Services Review: System Improvement Plan: October 1, 2004–September 30, 2005.
- Monterey County (January 26, 2008) California Outcomes and Accountability System (COAS) System Improvement Plan: 2008–2010.
- Napa County (June 5, 2007) System Improvement Plan: 2007–2009.
- San Benito County (August 8, 2008) System Improvement Plan for the Period of July 1, 2008–June 30, 2010.
- San Benito County (January 2009) System Improvement Plan: Update: January 26, 2009–January 26, 2010.
- San Francisco County (April 7, 2007) AB636 Child Welfare Services System Improvement Plan: October 2007–September 2010.
- San Mateo County (March 12, 2007) California's Child and Family Services System Improvement Plan: FY 06/07–FY 08/09.
- Santa Clara County (November 9, 2006) System Improvement Plan: August 1, 2006–July 31, 2009.
- Santa Cruz County (February 15, 2008) Child Welfare System Improvement Plan: 2008–2010.
- Solano County (September 2004) Child and Family Services System Improvement Plan.
- Sonoma County (June 2008) System Improvement Plan: Update: July 2008–June 2009.