

Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636)

• In 2001, the California Legislature passed the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636). The groundbreaking legislation was designed to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system while holding county and state agencies accountable for the outcomes achieved. This statewide accountability system, which went into effect January 1, 2004, is an enhanced version of the federal oversight system mandated by Congress and used to monitor states' performance.

Goals of AB 636:

- Protect children from abuse and neglect.
- Have children safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- Provide children permanency and stability in their living situations.
- Preserve the continuity of family relationships and connections for children.
- Enhance families' capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Ensure children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Ensure children receive adequate services to meet physical and mental health needs.
- Prepare youth emancipating from foster care to transition into adulthood.

To measure progress towards these goals, 14 performance indicators are currently used. Examples include: measuring the number of children who are in foster care, the rate of recurrence of maltreatment of children in foster care, the number of placements of a foster child, length of time to reunification with birth parents and the rate of adoption.

• Under California's new accountability system, all 58 counties now receive quarterly data reports on their outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being of children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. The foundation for this new oversight system comes from data obtained from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), the statewide information system for child welfare. The baseline performance data is gathered for each county and also made available to the public.

• Under California's new accountability system, each county has conducted a self-assessment using community-based groups to facilitate public input into the process. The intent of these self assessments was for counties to examine all program areas to determine the basis for their current level of performance and to help them identify and remove barriers to improving performance.

• Following the self-assessments, counties were required to collaborate with other local partners to develop a county System Improvement Plan (SIP). The purpose of the SIP is to establish program priorities, define specific action steps to achieve improvement and establish goals for improvement.

• The SIP Plans have been submitted to California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and the state has reviewed each plan and is working with counties to identify areas for further support and to ensure coordination in improving results for children and families. Counties use the data reports to further target their efforts and make needed improvements. Counties also continue to collaborate with community partners and stakeholders who are now engaged more fully in local efforts to improve child welfare services for children and families in need. As progress continues, the state will report California's progress to the federal government as required by its Program Improvement Plan and to the state legislature.

- Through the state's new accountability system, data is now being made available to the counties, and counties are collaborating with increased numbers of community partners. Simultaneously, key program and practice improvements recommended by the Child Welfare Stakeholders Group Redesign are underway which target attention in critical areas. Collectively, these efforts are intended to improve results for children and youth, and enable California ultimately to reduce the number of children and youth who are abused and/or neglected in the state and also meet federal targets for improved performance.

Related Links

- [UC Berkeley CWS/CMS Reports](#)
- [CDSS County Data Reports](#)
- [County System Improvement Plans Reports](#)