

## STRATEGIC GOAL 7:

### Improve the Stability and Healthy Development of Our Nation's Children and Youth

In order to promote the development and stability of our Nation's children and youth, HHS supports programs that increase the involvement and financial support of non-custodial parents; increase the percentage of children and youth living in a safe and stable environment; and aid the social and cognitive development of preschool children.

This report highlights three programs that contribute to achieving this strategic goal including Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Child Support Enforcement, Child Welfare, and Head Start programs.

Child Support Enforcement assures that resources are available to children by locating parents and establishing paternity and support obligations. These efforts are an integral component of the Department's effort to increase parental responsibility by promoting the involvement of non-custodial parents in the lives of their children.

The Child Welfare programs will continue to support States and localities in their efforts to keep children living in a safe, stable and permanent environment. Services offered include preventive intervention, where appropriate, so that children can remain in their homes, identifying alternative placements like foster care when necessary, and reunification services so that a child can return home. HHS will also support research and demonstrations that focus on the prevention and treatment of child abuse, neglect, and family violence.

The Head Start program ensures that children are ready to succeed upon entering school by supporting their social and cognitive development. Head Start programs provide comprehensive child development services, including educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services, to primarily low-income families. Head Start also engages parents in their child's preschool experience by helping them achieve their own educational and literacy goals as well as employment goals, supporting parents' role in their children's learning, and emphasizing the direct involvement of parents in the administration of local Head Start programs.

#### Highlighted Programs

- 7a: ACF Child Support Enforcement
- 7b: ACF Child Welfare
- 7c: ACF Head Start

**7a Child Support Enforcement**

*Administration for Children and Families (ACF)*

**Significance**

The Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program’s purpose is to enhance the well-being of children by assuring that assistance in obtaining support, including financial and medical, is available to children through locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing support obligations, and monitoring and enforcing those obligations. The primary customers and beneficiaries of the CSE program are children in need of support. The parents and/or custodians of these children are also customers. Child support is an important source of income for improving the quality of life for children and for families striving for self-sufficiency. Child support promotes stable, safe, and healthy relationships between parents and children by participating in the larger community’s efforts to strengthen families, and encourage healthy marriage and responsible parenthood. The performance measure, child support current collection rate, serves as a proxy for the regular and timely payment of support. Additional information can be found at the CSE web site [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse).

Performance Measure	Fiscal Year 2006		
	Target	Actual	Result
Increase the Title IV-D collection rate (collections on current support/current support owed).	62%	11/2007	Deferred
<b>Data Source:</b> OCSE Form 157.			

**Result Analysis**

The total amount of current support due in FY 2004 was \$28 billion, an approximate increase of three percent over FY 2003. The total amount of child support distributed as current support in FY 2004 was \$16.5 billion, approximately a five percent increase over FY 2003. Combined for FY 2004, these data represent a collection rate for current support of 59 percent, which exceeded the target by one percentage point. This means that 59 percent of the child support owed in that year was collected and distributed to families.

The FY 2005 data and FY 2006 data will be available in November 2006 and November 2007 respectively because of the time it takes to conduct data reliability audits. The OCSE-157 report is to be completed by State IV-D (child support) agencies for each Federal fiscal year ending September 30. The report is due within 30 calendar days after the last day of the fiscal year. Each year all States are expected to submit complete, accurate reports by October 30. States may revise previously submitted reports by submitting new ones. All revised final reports must be received in Office of CSE by December 31 of each year.

Performance Measure	Trends				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Increase the Title IV-D collection rate (collections on current support/current support owed).	58%	58%	59%	11/2006	11/2007

**Data Collection**

The annual state/grantee data are reported on lines 24 and 25 of the OCSE-157 form. Edit checks are built into Grants Administration Tracking and Evaluation System when data are entered by the grantees. Data are checked annually against historical data.

**Completeness**

CSE is largely dependent on state administrative systems for collecting performance data. In terms of data quality and reliability, States maintain information on the necessary data elements for CSE

measures. Federal auditors from the Office of CSE evaluate whether or not state data used to calculate the performance measure are complete and accurate.

**Reliability**

Data reliability audits are conducted annually. Federal auditors evaluate whether or not state data used to calculate the performance measure are reliable. Self-evaluation by States and the Office of CSE audits provide an on-going review of the validity of data and the ability of automated systems to produce accurate data.

**7b Child Welfare**

*Administration for Children and Families (ACF)*

**Significance**

Child welfare programs seek to provide for the safety, permanency and well being of children. For children who cannot remain safely in their homes, foster care provides a safe and stable environment. If a family cannot be reunified, adoption programs work to place a child permanently with an adoptive family. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 reconfirmed the Nation’s commitment to finding every child a permanent home and acknowledged that children who grow up in a safe, stable, and permanent home have improved long-term outcomes.

Performance Measure	Fiscal Year 2006		
	Target	Actual	Result
Increase the adoption rate.*	9.85%	10/2007	Deferred
<b>Data Source:</b> Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System			

\*This revised measure and target was published in the FY 2007 Congressional Justification.

**Result Analysis**

In FY 2004, there were 52,000 adoptions, slightly less than the target of 53,000 for that year. In FY 2005, preliminary data indicate that there were 51,000 adoptions (the most recent year for which data is available). However, this number may increase as additional adoptions for that year are reported.<sup>2</sup> While the annual number of adoptions increased dramatically in the last decade (from the 26,000 adoptions in FY 1995 to 51,000 adoptions in FY 2000), the number of adoptions annually has leveled off. Data for FY 2006 will be available in October 2007.

For FY 2006, ACF revised the measure of total adoptions with a new outcome measure of an adoption rate: the annual number of adoptions divided by the number of children in foster care at the end of the prior year. The new measure takes into account the pool of children in foster care from which those children for whom adoption is appropriate are identified. This change to the measure was necessary because the number of children in foster care has declined from 567,000 in FY 1999 to 513,000 in FY 2005. The adoption rate has increased from 9.72 percent in FY 2002 to 10 percent in FY 2004, and to 9.86 percent in FY 2005, based on preliminary data. There are varied reasons for the gradual slowing in the numbers and rate of adoptions. Many of the adoptions finalized from FY 1998 through FY 2000 were children who had been in the system for a long time. With improved case-practice following the Adoption and Safe Families Act, the backlogs are being eliminated. At the same time, the age of children “waiting” to be adopted continues to increase, with almost half over the age of nine. These older children are harder to place. This reflects the child welfare system’s priority for children to be raised by their parents or a relative, when the child’s safety and well-being at home are no longer at risk.

Performance Measure	Trends				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Increase the adoption rate.*	53,000/ 9.72%	50,000/ 9.19%	52,000/ 10%	51,000/ 9.86%	10/2007

\*The first number represents the number of adoptions in the year of interest; the second number represents the adoption rate, which is calculated as the number of adoptions in the year of interest divided by the number of children in care at the end of the year prior to the year of interest multiplied by 100.

<sup>2</sup> Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) permits adoptions finalized in one year to be reported in later years. Based on previous experience, it is likely that the number of adoptions finalized in FY 2005 will increase by as many as 2,000 adoptions. Please see [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/trends](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/trends) for further information.

**Data Collection**

States report child welfare data to ACF through the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS). All state semi-annual AFCARS data submissions undergo extensive edit-checks for internal reliability. The results of the AFCARS edit-checks for each of the six-month data submissions are sent back to each state, to help the state to improve data quality. Many States submit revised data for prior submission periods.<sup>3</sup> The Children's Bureau conducts several AFCARS compliance reviews each year, which typically result in a comprehensive AFCARS Improvement Plan.

**Completeness**

To ensure a complete and accurate account of the annual number of adoptions, AFCARS permits the reporting of adoptions finalized in one year to be reported in later years. States are required to submit AFCARS data semi-annually to ACF. The AFCARS report periods are October 1 through March 31 and April 1 through September 30. Preliminary reports of AFCARS data from States are received twice annually. Interim reports include subsequent submissions to improve the quality of data, and final reports are issued when it appears that States have resubmitted data to the point that outcomes no longer can be improved. These reports may be issued three or more years after the year of interest.

**Reliability**

ACF has recently implemented the AFCARS Project, including a detailed review of all aspects of AFCARS by federal staff and participation of the field in identifying possible improvements. The AFCARS assessment review (AAR) process is a "validation and verification" of an automated information system. The AAR assesses the ability of a state's system to gather, extract, and submit the correct AFCARS data accurately.

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<sup>3</sup> Since AFCARS foster care data are used in the implementation of Program Improvement Plans, resulting from the Child and Family Services Review process, States often resubmit AFCARS data to ensure that the data used for this purpose are accurate. The resubmitted data are then processed and made available to the statistical analysts as soon as possible. The analysts review the data to determine which states' data are usable in this plan.

**7c Head Start**

*Administration for Children and Families (ACF)*

**Significance**

Good health is an important component of school readiness, which is related to school success and later achievement. Head Start children are an economically disadvantaged population. Low-income children and families face persistent difficulty in gaining timely access to health care, with particular problems in receiving oral health care.

Performance Measure	Fiscal Year 2006		
	Target	Actual	Result
Achieve goal of at least 80 percent of children completing the Head Start program rated by parent as being in excellent or very good health.	80%	81%	Met
<b>Data Source:</b> Family and Child Experiences Survey			

**Result Analysis**

Head Start met the ambitious target of 80 percent of children completing Head Start being rated by their parents as in excellent or very good health, for FY 2006. The Office of Head Start has implemented an Oral Health Initiative in partnership with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration. Since 2004, the Oral Health Initiative has supported a national network of technical assistance designed to improve Head Start children's access to oral health care. With this resource focused on improved oral health care access, and its continued attention to the overall health of Head Start children, Head Start expects to continue to meet the target on this measure.

Performance Measure	Trends				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Achieve goal of at least 80 percent of children completing the Head Start program rated by parent as being in excellent or very good health.	78% <sup>4</sup>	78% <sup>5</sup>	81%	81%	81%

**Data Collection**

The Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) is an ongoing, longitudinal study of Head Start program quality and child outcomes, which currently has three nationally representative cohorts (1997, 2000 and 2003). Data for FY 2005 and FY 2006 are the same as for FY 2004 (FACES 2003 cohort data), since the FACES data source only provides data triennially (FY 1998, FY 2001, and FY 2004). A 2006 FACES cohort is expected to begin data collection with a similar number of children and programs in fall 2006. The next new round of FACES data will be available in FY 2007.

**Completeness**

FACES was launched as a part of the Head Start Program Performance Measures Initiative. The goal of this initiative was to provide solid representative data on the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes for children and families served by Head Start. The use of new cohorts every three years allows the program to have continual access to up-to-date information about program performance and quality.

<sup>4</sup> The FY 2006 HHS Annual Plan and FY 2007 Congressional Justification report 79% as the actual result for FY 2002 and FY 2003. The correct actual result for these years is 78%.

<sup>5</sup> Same as above.

**Reliability**

The FACES study uses scientifically established methods to collect data that can be used to analyze Head Start's quality. All the measures used in FACES to measure child outcomes and program quality (including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems scale, and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) have been assessed for validity and reliability, and are well-respected in the field of child development.