

Partnering With Young People and Families in CFSR Data Discussions

Introduction and Purpose

Partnering with young people and families¹ who have a variety of direct experiences with the child welfare system is essential to the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). When exploring child welfare data, young people and families offer distinct insights into what’s happening behind the numbers. Their perspectives can help teams better understand what is and isn’t working in the child welfare system and identify strategies for future improvements. Meaningful partnerships embed lived experience into each part of the CFSR.

This tool presents action steps, talking points, and tips to help State agency leaders, program managers, data leads, and others working on a CFSR team prepare for data discussions with young people and families. It also supports young people and family members by providing introductory information (and helpful links) to understand the CFSR, data concepts, sample questions to ask, and more. Share this resource with young people, parents, and others new to CFSR work. Audiences may find it helpful to read and digest the content in short pieces and keep for later reference.

Use this tool to:

- ◆ Prepare young people and family members for meaningful participation in CFSR data activities
- ◆ Support state CFSR team members with partnering with people with lived experience to understand their state data

Key Steps for Partnering in Data Discussions

Partnering in meaningful data discussions can be broken down into seven key steps, shown in the exhibit and described in the sections below. The steps may not always occur in this order, and some may be revisited.

Exhibit 1. Seven Steps for Partnering in Data Discussions



Young people and family members with lived child welfare experience bring a unique viewpoint that is needed to truly understand child welfare system challenges and solutions.

¹ In this document, “young people” refers to youth and young adults who are currently in foster care or who were previously in care. “Families” refers to parents, caregivers, and extended family members who have received child welfare services. These groups are also referred to as “people with lived experience.”

Step 1. Prepare a Team to Work Together

The CFSR brings together people with different experiences, knowledge, and skills to improve the child welfare system. To partner well requires thoughtful preparation. This section presents a high-level overview of elements to prepare for partnering and suggests other resources to learn more.

What are key elements to address in preparation for partnership?

When preparing to work together, consider the following:

- ◆ **Defined purpose and roles**—Have the purpose, goals, and timeframes for the data activities been defined and shared? Are roles clear?
- ◆ **Readiness**—Does the agency have buy-in, resources, infrastructure, and needed supports for engagement of young people and families in system improvement efforts? Do young people and families have the support they need to be ready to participate? Has the agency identified individuals who can present and discuss data in a user-friendly manner?
- ◆ **Communication plan and materials**—Are there plans for ongoing communication and two-way feedback between the agency, young people, and families? Is there a clear and easy-to-reach contact person? Are user-friendly and easy-to-understand materials available?
- ◆ **Compensation plan**—Has the agency developed a fair plan to pay people with lived experience for their time and expertise? Has compensation been clearly communicated and agreed to?
- ◆ **Lived experience**—Has the agency reached out to young people and parents with lived experience? Do they reflect a variety of experiences (such as being unhoused), placement settings (foster home, residential treatment), and human services systems involvement? Has the team considered how to promote a sense of belonging for all participants?
- ◆ **Teaming dynamics**—Has the team created an environment in which participants report feeling safe and respected in voicing their thoughts (sometimes referred to as "psychological safety")? Has the team considered how to level the playing field to lessen differences in power and position?
- ◆ **Preparation and training**—Has the agency planned for how to train and support agency staff in trauma-informed and community-informed engagement of different individuals with lived experience? Does the team have a plan and supports in place for participants who may experience challenging emotions during a data discussion? Does the agency have easy-to-understand training and orientation materials to build partner understanding of the CFSR processes and related data? Have young people and families reviewed CFSR materials to gain better understanding? (See the following pages for a start.)

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Explain why young people and families are being involved in data discussions, how their input will be used, and how decisions will be made.
- ✓ Promote meaningful participation rather than “decorative” or “token” roles.
- ✓ Explore options to overcome barriers to participation (such as holding discussions outside normal work hours, virtual participation, transportation stipends).
- ✓ Be clear in your communications and follow up as needed.

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ Consider how you can best use your voice and experiences to help agencies understand their data and make improvements. Learn more about strategic sharing.
- ✓ Speak up when barriers to participation exist.
- ✓ Know that you always have the right to take a break or choose to end engagement. If a discussion activates intense emotions, take time for self-care (go for a walk, talk to a peer, or do other activities to relax).

For more information on engagement, see:

- ◆ [Engaging Young People With Lived Experience in the CFRs: Key Considerations, Roles, and Recommendations](#)
- ◆ [What's Sharing Power Got to Do with Trauma-Informed Practice?](#) (NCTSN)

Step 2. Build Understanding of the CFSR

To set a foundation for discussing CFSR data, young people, parents, and others need a working understanding of the purpose of the CFSR and its key parts. The following offers a high-level overview. Additional introductory resources are available on the [CFSR Portal](#).

What is the purpose of the CFSR?

The CFSR is a process to learn about and improve the experiences of children, young people, and families receiving child welfare services. Through the CFSR, the Children's Bureau (a Federal agency), State child welfare agencies, and their system partners examine data and information to

- ◆ Make sure that each State meets child welfare requirements set by the Federal Government
- ◆ Determine what is happening to children, young people, and families in the child welfare system
- ◆ Assist States in improving their abilities to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes

System partners include young people, parents, caregivers, Tribes, courts, service providers, and others.

What are the key phases of the CFSR?

CFSR activities take place in three phases, shown below.

Exhibit 2. CFSR Phases

 Phase 1: Statewide Assessment	 Phase 2: Onsite Review	 Phase 3: Program Improvement Plan (PIP)
States and their system partners examine data and evidence to show how well the State's child welfare system functions.	The Children's Bureau and the State use a structured review of a sample of child welfare cases and interviews to determine strengths and areas needing improvement.	Child welfare agencies and system partners use information from the first two phases (and more if needed) to develop a plan to address areas identified as needing improvement. They then put the PIP in place and monitor.

What role do young people, parents, and other family members play in the CFSR?

The Children's Bureau expects States to engage people with lived experience and other system partners in a variety of ways throughout the CFSR. For example

- ◆ Helping to explore data and evidence for the Statewide Assessment
- ◆ Sharing perspectives on child welfare services in interviews for the Onsite Review
- ◆ Looking at data to identify themes and codeveloping PIP strategies for making improvements
- ◆ Monitoring PIP strategies and suggesting adjustments where needed

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Understanding CFSR processes can be overwhelming for people unfamiliar with it. Start simply by laying the groundwork and build from there.
- ✓ Define [CFSR terms and acronyms](#) as you use them.
- ✓ Check in regularly for understanding.

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ You don't need to learn everything at once! Take time to look through available CFSR products. (See "for more information" boxes).
- ✓ It can seem like the CFSR has a special language. **Use the appendix to look up unfamiliar terms and abbreviations as you come across them.**

For more introductory information:

- ◆ [Understanding the CFSRs Infographic](#)
- ◆ [CFSR Overview Video](#)
- ◆ [Fact Sheet for Youth](#)
- ◆ [Fact Sheet for Parents and Caregivers](#)

Step 3. Build Understanding of Data Concepts

The following high-level overview can help young people, families, and other system partners build their understanding of child welfare data and serve as a reference during data activities.

What can we learn by looking at CFSR data?

CFSR data provide a **picture of how a child welfare system is performing across three key outcome areas** (presented below along with some questions used to assess the outcomes):

◆ **Child safety**

- ◆ Is the State supporting families to protect children from abuse and neglect?
- ◆ Is the State working to safely keep children with their families?

◆ **Permanency**

- ◆ While in foster care, do children and young people have stability in their living situations? Have they been moved to different homes only when it is in their best interest?
- ◆ If children and young people come into foster care, has the State helped them maintain contact with people who are important to them?

◆ **Well-being**

- ◆ Are families meaningfully engaged in deciding how to address needs and support their children?
- ◆ Are children and young people in care getting the health, mental health, and educational services they need?

The CFSR also looks at **child welfare systems and processes** (called systemic factors) that affect the achievement of the outcomes. These include how case plans are developed, staff and foster parent training, the availability of services, and more.

The CFSR process helps States identify both **strengths and areas needing improvement**. It also offers an opportunity to examine and address **differences in the experiences, services, and outcomes for different subgroups** (for example, infants, adolescents, children living in rural areas, teenagers in group home settings, and others).

How are child welfare data collected?

Child welfare agencies collect data in several ways, including the following:

- ◆ **Information systems.** Agencies have processes and central databases to gather, store, and report case data about the child welfare services children and families receive. (This is sometimes referred to as “administrative data.”) While systems vary by State, there are Federal requirements to collect basic case-level information such as
 - ◆ Demographic characteristics of the children (for example, age, race/ethnicity, county)
 - ◆ Placement information (for example, placement setting, length of time in care)
 - ◆ Goals for permanency (for example, family reunification, guardianship, adoption, other)

- ◆ **National child welfare datasets.** State child welfare agencies submit data from their information systems to the Children’s Bureau for national data sets, including the following:
 - ◆ National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)—National and State data on child maltreatment reported to child welfare agencies
 - ◆ Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)—Demographic, case, and service data related to children and young people in foster care and adoptions supported by public child welfare agencies
- ◆ **Case reviews.** A case review is a structured process for looking at case records and interviewing case participants to understand whether certain procedures have been followed (for example, examining the frequency and quality of caseworker visits). Most States have some type of quality assurance or continuous quality improvement (CQI) process that typically includes case reviews using a standard tool.
- ◆ **Interviews, focus groups, and surveys.** These data sources can collect more information from agency professionals, young people and family members, and other system partners to better understand their experiences, beliefs about system strengths and challenges, and ideas for improvement.
- ◆ **System partner data.** Child welfare agencies may also rely on data collected by system partners, such as courts and other State and local agencies that provide services to children, young people, and families.

How do different types of data combine to tell a more complete story?

The CFSR pulls together both quantitative data and qualitative data to create a more complete picture of what’s happening in the child welfare system. Using both types of data is important to making well-informed decisions.

Exhibit 3. Types of Data

010 101 Quantitative Data	 Qualitative Data
Numbers and counts	Descriptions, qualities, opinions, experiences
Can help answer questions that explore what, who, how many, and how often	Can help answer questions that explore why, how, and in what way
Point to patterns and trends	Focus on human elements and personal experiences that offer insights into the factors driving the patterns and trends

How are data used to inform the CFSR process?

Data from multiple sources and data collection methods are used across the three phases of the CFSR. Exhibit 4 summarizes some key CFSR data sources, processes, and reports. Each phase builds on the data and evidence examined in the prior phase.

Exhibit 4. Key Data Sources, Processes, and Reports Used in the CFSR



What are some key ways that data are analyzed and presented?

Data analysis is a process used to organize and understand the meaning of the data. Data are analyzed and presented in a variety of ways for the CFSR, including those listed below. (See the appendix for definitions of other terms.)

- ♦ **Mean:** The *average* for a range of data. The mean is equal to the sum of all numbers divided by the count of the numbers in the dataset. For example, the mean age of three children ages 3, 6, and 12 is equal to $3 + 6 + 12$ (21) divided by $3 = 7$.
- ♦ **Percentage:** The proportion or share of one thing in relation to a whole. A percentage is expressed as a fraction of 100. For example, a pizza may have 10 slices. If you eat 3 slices, that is 30 percent. (See exhibit 8 for use of percentages in CFSR data.)
- ♦ **Rates:** A ratio of two measures. Rates can help explain how often something happens for every instance something else happens. This can help with comparisons. For example, a car's speed is measured in miles the car travels in one hour. (See exhibit 7 for use of a rate in CFSR data.)
- ♦ **Common themes:** Responses from interviews and focus groups are examined for repeated topics, ideas, and views. For example, in responses to a parent survey, a team may find a common theme that limited hours are a barrier to service use.
- ♦ **Comparisons over time:** Looking at a State's data points from different years helps teams understand how performance is changing over time, discuss trends, and then consider the reasons for them. For example, a State may explore the 5-year trends in the number of children entering foster care. (See exhibit 5 for a comparison over time.)
- ♦ **Comparisons between the State's performance and a national performance value:** For example, the CFSR State Data Profile presents national performance (how the nation as a whole performed on a given data indicator) as a reference point to compare a State's performance. (See exhibit 6 for a comparison of State and national performance.)
- ♦ **Comparisons across subgroups:** Breaking down the data or themes by groups (sometime referred to as "disaggregation") can help teams understand how the experiences and outcomes of various subgroups may differ. For example, a team may look at how outcomes or views differ for children and young people of different ages, race/ethnicity, geographic location, or other groupings of interest. (See exhibit 5 and exhibit 7 for comparisons across subgroups.)

What should we be careful about when looking at data?

Almost all data will have some limitations. That does not mean that the data are not meaningful, yet teams will have to recognize where to use caution in drawing conclusions. When looking at data, think about the following:

- ◆ **Small sample sizes** (or “small n”)—When only a small number of people or data points have been included in the analysis, they may not represent the larger population.
- ◆ **Timeframe of data collection**—If data were collected more than 5 years ago, they may not represent what is currently happening in the State.
- ◆ **Data context**—Pay attention to who is included in the data and who may be excluded.
- ◆ **Data quality issues**—Consider how data have been checked for accuracy and completeness.
- ◆ **Data bias**—Bias may occur from the way that data are gathered and recorded (for example, when family members are not asked to self-report their race and instead it is assumed by someone else entering the data).
- ◆ **Data gaps**—Important viewpoints may be missing (for example, survey findings that only reflect caseworker views and not family input).

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Look for ways to make data concepts relatable.
- ✓ Break down concepts to make them easier to understand.
- ✓ Keep in mind that words and phrases commonly used in child welfare (such as safety and permanency) may mean different things to young people and parents. Make sure that definitions are clear in the context they are being used. Use the appendix as a starting point and discuss terms to build shared understanding.

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ Consider the following:
Many individuals think they are not “data people.” Yet, we all use data every day to make decisions. Think about when you compare prices at the store or use online ratings and reviews to help you decide what to buy or watch. These are examples of looking at data to make decisions. As part of the CFSR, you can look at data to assess performance and help make decisions for improvements.

For more information on CFSR data concepts, see:

- ◆ [CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual](#)

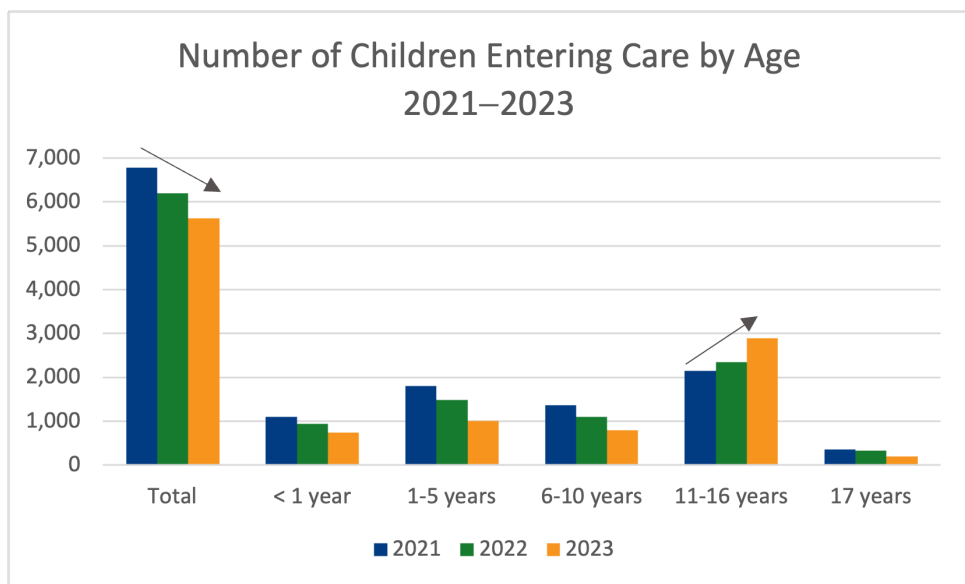
Step 4. Prepare and Present Data

Carefully selecting data and presenting them in easy-to-understand formats is an important step leading to productive data discussions with young people, families, and other system partners.

How can data visualization help in understanding the data?

Charts, graphs, and other visualizations from the agency or system partners can help teams see trends and patterns. Well-designed visuals prompt viewers to interpret data without a lot of extra effort. See the example below.

Exhibit 5. Sample Data Visualization



Source: CFSR Statewide Data Profile Context Data

Key takeaway: The number of children entering care declined between 2021 and 2023 in all age groups except young people aged 11–16 years old.

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Detailed child welfare data reports can be overwhelming. Select data based on the questions that you are trying to answer.
- ✓ Use clear labels that all audiences will understand.
- ✓ Reach out to people with lived experience for support in creating and testing data visuals before presenting to a larger group.

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ Look for patterns and trends in the data visualizations.
- ✓ Start by focusing on one group or year at a time. Write down what you notice immediately and then pause to look for what else stands out.
- ✓ Ask as many clarifying questions as you need to fully understand the data presented. This is an expected part of the discussion.

For more information on presenting data, see:

- ◆ [Data Visualization](#) (QIC-WD)
- ◆ [Dabbling in Data: A Hands-on Guide to Participatory Data Analysis](#) (Public Pro it)

Step 5. Review the Data and Ask Questions

Asking questions about the data helps agency staff, young people, parents, and other system partners develop a shared understanding of what the numbers represent and gain insight into what they mean. Pay attention to where there may be differing perspectives and dig in further.

What questions can agency staff ask young people and families about data?

The following are sample questions to ask when presenting data. Questions may become more detailed and specific to reflect the data and the audience.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What stands out to you when you look at these data?◆ What story do you think the data tell?◆ What do you think might contribute to [identified pattern or trend]?◆ What factors may influence these data?◆ Does this look accurate to you? Does anything about this make you skeptical? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What do you think is missing from the data?◆ What populations are not represented?◆ What else would you like to know related to these data? How can we gather more information on that?◆ How can we present these data in ways that are easier to understand or more relatable for young people and families?◆ What additional information or support can I provide to help make sense of the data? |
|---|---|

What questions can young people and families ask about data?

The following are sample questions to ask when looking at data. Questions may become more detailed and specific to reflect the specific data and issues being discussed. (See examples in step 6.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What questions are you trying to answer with these data?◆ What do the numbers reflect? For what time period?◆ How were these data gathered?◆ Who is represented in the data? Is the data from the full population served or is it a sample? Who is missing?◆ Is it possible to break the data down into subgroups (for example, by age, different placement settings, different racial/ethnic groups, or different parts of the State)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What are the limitations of these data?◆ How will the data be used or shared?◆ Has the team considered potential consequences or harm of collecting and distributing these data?◆ What story do the data tell?◆ What other data or information sources are available to learn more? |
|---|---|

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Create a welcoming and respectful environment for learning in which participants feel safe to ask and answer questions.
- ✓ Seek out differing perspectives and enable healthy disagreements.
- ✓ Be mindful of how your biases may influence how you view system data.
- ✓ Admit when you don't know an answer to a participant's question, follow up to find it, and plan how to communicate the answer.

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ Bring a list of questions with you to data discussions to refer to.
- ✓ Follow your curiosity to lead you to more questions.
- ✓ **Don't hesitate to voice your thoughts in response to questions posed.** Keep in mind that your experiences with the child welfare system may help you see what others may miss.

Note Before Moving on to Step 6



Steps 1 through 5 of this document set a foundation for partnering in data activities. The content describes key CFSR and data concepts. In step 6, many of these concepts are brought together to show how a team might dig deeper into data during team data discussions. The exhibits and related notes may seem a bit overwhelming at first to individuals new to the CFSR. **Keep in mind that not all team members are expected to be data experts.** Take time to unpack the pieces, think about what you see, and ask questions.

Communication between agency staff presenting data and young people, parents, and other team members is key to strengthen everyone's abilities to understand, interpret, and use data to support the CFSR process.

Step 6. Explore Further

Often the process of looking at State CFSR data will spark insights and questions that lead to gathering and examining additional data and information to dig further. In turn, the new data and information will spark more insights and questions. Each piece may reveal new details or offer a different lens to create a deeper understanding. An example of a step-by-step approach to dig deeper into multiple data sources is shown below.

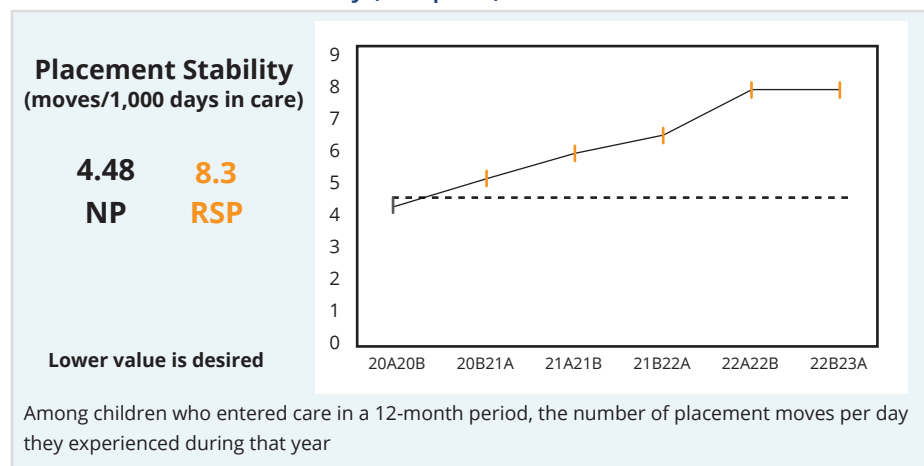
Example: How might a State explore data and information related to placement stability?

For this example, imagine a State wants to explore whether children who have been removed from their homes experience stability in their living situations (fewer moves) while they are in foster care.

Starting With Statewide Data Indicator Data

The CFSR Statewide Data Indicator of Placement Stability is a starting point for the analysis.

Exhibit 6. Placement Stability (Sample A)



What we're looking at in Exhibit 6:

This exhibit resembles a graphic on a State's CFSR Data Profile. The indicator reflects how often children and young people experience new placement settings while in foster care.

RSP represents the State's performance adjusted for some factors that they have little control over. NP represents national performance. In this case, the State's performance (RSP, shown in the solid line) is worse than the national performance (NP, shown by the dotted line). In addition, placement stability is getting worse over time (moves are increasing).

A few things to note (getting more into the details):

- ◆ A lower value is desired for this indicator because we want there to be fewer placement moves compared to the number of days in care.
- ◆ Since moves in care are not a frequent event, performance is expressed as a **rate** of moves per 1,000 days in care. This makes comparisons easier.
- ◆ The statewide data indicator of placement stability is calculated by the following numerator divided by the following denominator:
 - ◆ Numerator: Among the children who entered foster care in a 12-month period, the total number of placement moves during that 12-month period
 - ◆ Denominator: Among the children who entered foster care in a 12-month period, the total number of days these children were in foster care as of the end of the 12-month period
- ◆ This indicator includes children who entered care in a 12-month period. It does not include children who have been in care for longer periods.
- ◆ Data are presented for multiple data points that correspond to Federal data collection periods. For example, 20A20B spans the Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020, the period from October 2019 through September 2020.

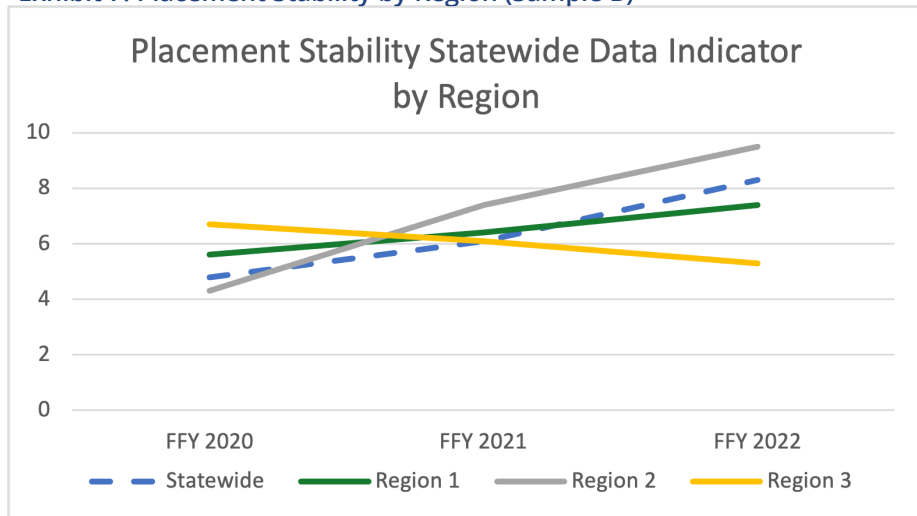
Some questions the team may ask:

- ◆ Why has the rate of placement moves increased in recent years?
- ◆ Do certain subgroups of children experience less stability (more moves)?

Looking at Data Broken Down by Groups

Next the State might look at how the placement stability data differ across selected subgroups. Data are shown here for regions within the State.

Exhibit 7. Placement Stability by Region (Sample B)



What we're looking at in exhibit 7:

This exhibit compares placement stability for children and young people who live in different parts of the State. In Regions 1 and 2, placement stability is worsening (moves are increasing). In Region 3, placement stability is improving (moves are decreasing). In the latest year, Region 2's rate is higher (more moves) than the statewide rate.

A few things to note (getting more into the details):

- To make comparisons, the state uses observed performance data, and placement moves are shown as rates of placement moves per 1,000 days in care.
- A lower value is desired for this indicator, because we want there to be fewer placement moves compared to the number of days in care.

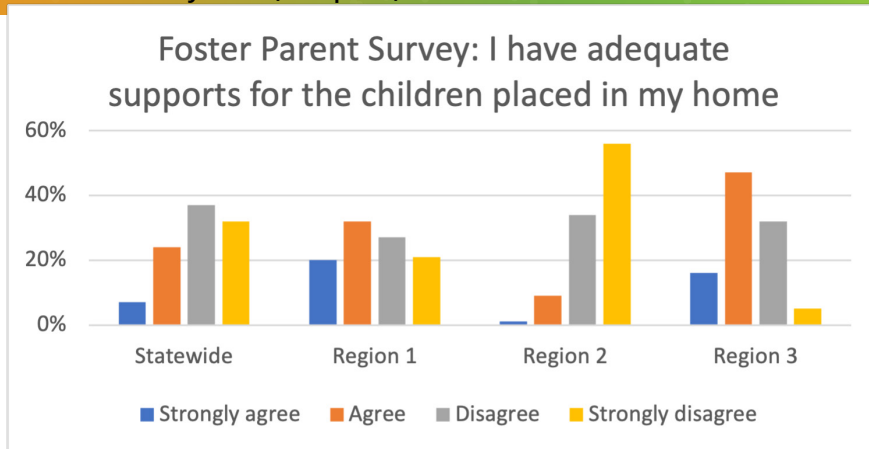
Some questions the team may ask:

- ◆ Why might there be differences in placement stability in different parts of the State?
- ◆ Is the availability of services and supports a factor in placement moves? How do we know?
- ◆ How might stability patterns differ for children and young people of different ages? Of different racial/ethnic backgrounds?
(Note: Related data are available in the Statewide Data Indicator Context Data Workbook.)
- ◆ How often are changes in a child's or young person's placement in their best interests?
(Note: Related data are available from case review findings on CFSR Item 4.)

Exploring Other Sources of Data to Better Understand the Trends

Next the State might look at additional data sources to better understand what's happening and why. Sample survey data are shown here.

Exhibit 8. Survey Data (Sample C)



What we're looking at in Exhibit 8:

This exhibit presents foster parent responses to a survey question about the availability of services and supports that aid successful foster care placements. Statewide, most foster parents do not feel that they have adequate supports (37 percent disagree and 32 percent strongly disagree on the survey question). Foster parents in Region 2 were more likely to strongly disagree that they have adequate supports when compared to foster parents in the other regions. Region 3 had the most foster parents that felt they had adequate supports.

A few things to note (getting more into the details):

- ◆ Survey data can help provide context to understand the indicator data. Other questions might explore other areas or dig in deeper to look at what specific services could be helpful.
- ◆ Pay attention to what is “better” in each dataset. For example, in exhibits 6 and 7, lower values are better (suggesting more stability). In exhibit 8, higher responses to “strongly agree” and “agree” are better.
- ◆ Sometimes different survey responses will be grouped together in an analysis (for example, agree and strongly agree) and that may affect how findings appear.

Some questions the team may ask:

- ◆ Which foster parents were surveyed and how? How many foster parents were surveyed? What was the response rate?
- ◆ Might other foster parents not included in the responses have different views?
- ◆ Why are there differences in support across regions? What's happening in Region 3 that might be helpful in Region 4?
- ◆ What other data breakdowns (age, race/ethnicity, placement type) may help us understand patterns of performance across the State?
- ◆ What else might we want to ask foster parents in an interview or focus group? What other groups would we want to talk to and learn from about their experiences with placement stability?
- ◆ What other factors might be affecting placement stability? How do we know?

Summing Up

Looking at the three exhibits, the team can learn some things about placement stability, particularly as it affects different parts of the State. Service availability appears to be one contributing factor. Before moving forward with solutions, the team should consider that there might be other factors affecting placement stability trends and explore further. If you were on the team, what else would you want to know?

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Help teams use available data to generate conversations, spark insights, and prompt new questions for further exploration.
- ✓ Introduce new data with a high-level overview of what it measures. Explain timeframes and other key features and how they may vary across sources.
- ✓ Allow young people, families, and other partners time to digest and process the data.
- ✓ Keep in mind that you may have to repeat key points for audiences to fully grasp complex information.
- ✓ Be open to questions about data collection processes, CFSR

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ Think about what story the different data sources tell.
- ✓ Make notes on what strikes you when you look at the data.
- ✓ Consider what information is missing to help make decisions and what information could complete the picture.
- ✓ Ask "how" and "why" questions about the data.

Step 7. Share Feedback

Communication and open feedback loops are essential to true partnerships. This section offers some considerations for how feedback can strengthen relationships and engagement in data discussions.

What are some feedback approaches to strengthen engagement?

Avenues for feedback can take many forms and should occur at different points in the process:

- ◆ Build in opportunities for young people, family members, and other system partners to ask questions.
- ◆ Invite young people and parents to openly share challenges and issues within the child welfare system and brainstorm solutions.
- ◆ Create safe spaces to express ideas and concerns without judgment or fear of consequences.
- ◆ Recognize different experiences and validate viewpoints.
- ◆ Debrief after data discussions and activities to learn more about what worked and where improvements can be made in future discussions.
- ◆ Provide peer-to-peer connections when possible.
- ◆ Offer updates on how input has been used in the CFSR and PIP processes.
- ◆ Explain reasons for not incorporating or acting on input provided.
- ◆ Check back with young people and families to assess whether PIP strategies are having the intended result and whether adjustments are needed.

Tips for agency staff:

- ✓ Ask young people and families how they prefer to give and receive input both as part of the data activities and about the engagement process.
- ✓ Provide multiple opportunities to receive and offer feedback.
- ✓ Make sure that teams represent a range of experiences in child welfare to provide broader perspective.
- ✓ Adopt a continuous improvement mindset and reflect on what you could do differently.

Tips for young people and families:

- ✓ Consider giving and receiving feedback as an opportunity for learning.
- ✓ Provide feedback directly and honestly with the mindset of making improvements.

Find More CFSR Planning Tools and Supports

The National Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement (NCWCIA) provides data-driven assistance to public child welfare agencies to help them identify innovative ways to address challenges and improve performance and outcomes so that children can remain safe and with their families whenever possible. To request services tailored to your needs, email NCWCIA-Info@jbsinternational.com or contact your [NCWCIA innovation and advancement navigator](#).

For More Information on Engagement of Young People and Families With Lived Experience

Children's Bureau. (2022). [Engaging Young People With Lived Experience in the CFSRs: Key Considerations, Roles, and Recommendations](#).

Global Fund to End Modern Slavery and National Survivor Network. (2023). [Meaningful Engagement of People with Lived Experience](#).

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Appendix: CFSR Terms, Acronyms, and Definitions

Use this glossary as a reference and to build shared understanding of the terms and acronyms used when discussing the CFSR and related data. These definitions are a starting point for those new to the CFSR—including young people, parents, other system partners, and child welfare professionals. More detailed and technical descriptions appear in the linked resources. Underlined words in the Definition column are links that will take you to that word in the appendix.

Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System	AFCARS	A federal data collection and reporting system with case-level adoption and foster care data.	AFCARS webpage (Children's Bureau)
Aggregate		The total number or amount made by combining smaller parts.	
American Indian or Alaska Native	AI/AN	Federal terminology to refer to individuals with origins in any of the original people of North, Central, and South America.	
Analysis		Process of examining the parts, relationships, and features of data to better understand it, identify patterns, and answer questions.	
Annual Progress and Services Report	APSR	A yearly report that provides updates on State progress toward goals in the Child and Family Services Plan and outlines activities for the following year.	State CFSPs and APSRs webpage (Children's Bureau)
Area needing improvement	ANI	A rating (or "grade") assigned to CFSR case review items based on an evaluation of certain child welfare practices and processes. ANI indicates that the child welfare system did not meet the needs of children and families served or achieve performance standards. Other ratings at this level include "Strength" and "Not Applicable."	CFSR Procedures Manual (CFSR Portal)
Child and Family Services Plan	CFSP	A 5-five-year strategic plan that describes a State's vision and goals to improve the child welfare system.	State CFSPs and APSRs webpage (Children's Bureau)
Child and Family Services Review	CFSR	A periodic review of State child welfare systems to learn about and improve child welfare services and the experiences of children, young people, and families receiving them.	Understanding the CFSRs and CFSR Overview Video (CFSR Portal)

Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
CFSR Final Report		A document prepared by the Children’s Bureau following the Onsite Review with CFSR findings, substantial conformity determinations, State child welfare system strengths , and areas needing improvement .	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 7) (CFSR Portal)
Child welfare system	CW	A group of services designed to strengthen families and keep children safe. The system includes a public child welfare agency (often known as DCF or DCYF) that works with State, local, and Tribal partners, including courts, public and private social services agencies, community service providers, and others.	How the Child Welfare System Works (Child Welfare Information Gateway)
Children’s Bureau	CB	A Federal Government agency that seeks to improve the safety , permanency , and well-being of children through leadership, support for necessary services, and partnerships. CB is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.	Children’s Bureau About webpage (Children’s Bureau)
Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System	CCWIS	A State information system that collects and reports data on child welfare services to children, young people, and families. Each State’s system may have its own name and design.	Federal Guidance for Child Welfare IT Systems (Children’s Bureau)
Continuous quality improvement	CQI	The process of identifying, defining, and examining strengths and problems and then testing, implementing, learning from, and modifying solutions. The CFSR follows CQI principles.	
Court Improvement Program	CIP	A Federal program for State and Tribal courts to assess child welfare judicial practices, promote collaboration, and implement improvement plans.	Court Improvement Programs (Information Gateway)
Data Profile		A document produced by CB twice each year for each State with performance information on seven CFSR statewide data indicators .	
Data quality	DQ	The degree to which data are accurate, complete, reliable, and appropriate for their intended use. On the CFSR State Data Profile , “DQ” indicates a data quality issue and performance was not calculated.	
Data visualization		Images, graphs, and other visuals that present data in an engaging, easy-to-understand way and highlight trends and patterns.	Data Visualization (QIC-WD)
Denominator		In a fraction, this is the bottom number. It is the number of equal pieces the whole can be broken into. In CFSR data, it often refers to a specific population.	



Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
Disaggregate		To break down data by subgroups. This includes examining data by children's age, race/ethnicity, placement setting, county, or other grouping to understand the experiences and outcomes of different groups.	
Entry cohort		A group of children and young people who enter foster care during a certain time period (usually 1 year). Analyses of this group's experiences are "entry cohort analyses." Example: Of the children who <i>entered</i> foster care in 2020, what percentage left within 12 months of entry?	What is longitudinal data, and why do we need it? (Center for State Child Welfare Data)
Exit cohort		A group of children and young people who left foster care during a certain time period (usually in the past year). Analyses of the experiences of this group are "exit cohort analyses." For example: Of the children who <i>exited</i> care in 2020, what percentage exited with a reason of family reunification?	What is longitudinal data, and why do we need it? (Center for State Child Welfare Data)

Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
Fiscal year Federal fiscal year State fiscal year Calendar year	FY FFY SFY CY	FY is a 12-month period that agencies use for planning and budgeting that does <i>not</i> correspond with the CY beginning January 1 and ending December 31. For example, the Federal Government's FFY for 2024 begins October 1, 2023, and ends September 30, 2024. Each State government may set their own SF and many begin July 1 and end June 30.	
Foster care	FC	Temporary living situations for children and young people whose parents are unable to safely take care of them and whose needs have come to the attention of a child welfare agency. Foster care includes out-of-home care of a child or young person in the care of a foster parent, relative, kin, group home, or residential facility.	
In-home services	IHS	Child welfare services provided to families whose children remain at home or have returned home from out-of-home care .	In-Home Services to Strengthen Children and Families (Information Gateway)
Lived experience		Knowledge and understanding from firsthand personal experience and involvement. People with lived experience in child welfare include children, young people, parents, and caregivers who have current or past experience with foster care or other child welfare services. The perspective and insight of people with lived experience informs and improves practices and systems.	
National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System	NCANDS	A Federal data system that annually collects and analyzes information from all states and territories about reports of child abuse and neglect to child welfare agencies.	About NCANDS webpage (Children's Bureau)
National performance	NP	A value that represents how the nation as a whole performed on a CFSR statewide data indicator . On the CFSR State Data Profile , "NP" is used for comparison to the State's risk-standardized performance (RSP).	
Numerator		When looking at a fraction, this is the top number. It is a part of the whole or a segment of the population in the denominator .	
Observed performance		How a State performed on a statewide data indicator for a specific period using the state's data without any adjustments. (See also risk-standardized performance .)	

Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
Online Monitoring System	OMS	A web-based tool that supports the Onsite Review . The OMS contains the Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions , Stakeholder Interview Guide, and reporting tools.	OMS webpage (CFSR Portal; requires login)
Onsite Review		The second phase of the CFSR that helps determine strengths and areas needing improvement. The Onsite Review includes (1) a structured review of a sample of child welfare cases; (2) interviews with children, young people, and families in the cases; and (3) interviews with system partners (including young people and parents who have lived experience and people who work in the child welfare system).	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 3) (CFSR Portal)
Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions	ORSI	A tool used in the Onsite Review to review case documents and conduct interviews to assess case practices in the CFSR.	Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (CFSR Portal)
Outcomes		A measurable change or result. The CFSR examines seven child welfare outcomes related to safety , permanency , and well-being .	
Out-of-home care		Placement of a child or young person in the care of a foster parent, relative, kin, group home, or residential facility when a home environment is not safe. Also referred to as “foster care.”	Foster Care webpage (Information Gateway)
Period under review	PUR	A specified timeframe for analysis (for example, the period examined in a case review).	
Permanency		One of three outcome areas examined in the CFSR. In the CFSR, States are assessed on (P1) Children have permanency and stability in their living situations; and (P2) the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children	Permanency webpage (Information Gateway)
Program Improvement Plan	PIP	A plan developed by child welfare agencies and their system partners with goals and strategies to address areas identified as needing improvement during the CFSR.	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 9) (CFSR Portal)
Qualitative		Descriptive or other nonnumerical data. Qualitative data explore experiences and quality and help answer questions about how or why something is occurring.	

Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
Quantitative		Data expressed as numbers or counts. Quantitative data help answer questions that explore who, how many, and how often.	
Rate		A ratio of two measures. Rates explain how often something happens for every instance something else happens. For example, the rate of maltreatment in care per 100,000 days in care (based on a combined total for all children and young people in care.)	
Representative sample		A selected subset of a population where the individuals have the same characteristics as the full population.	
Risk-standardized performance	RSP	A calculation used to compare state performance on a CFSR statewide data indicator and national performance (NP) . RSP adjusts for some factors that the State has little control over, such as age of children entering care.	
Root cause analysis	RCA	A structured process for identifying why a problem occurs and what to address so that the problem does not continue or happen again.	
Safety		One of three outcome areas examined in the CFSR. In the CFSR, States are assessed on (S1) children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect; and (S2) children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate	
Stakeholder interviews		Discussions to gather input from people who work in or have experience with the child welfare system. This includes young people and family members, legal and court representatives, Tribal representatives, foster parents, caseworkers, service providers, and others. Note: While the term “stakeholders” has been commonly used to refer to people with a vested interest, today many prefer use of the term “partners.”	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 6) (CFSR Portal)
Statewide Assessment	SWA	The first phase of the CFSR examines how well the child welfare system functions. The Statewide Assessment includes analyses of (1) CFSR outcomes (including performance on statewide data indicators) and (2) systemic factors .	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 2) (CFSR Portal)
Statewide data indicators	SWDI	Seven measures used in the CFSR to evaluate State performance on safety and permanency outcomes.	

Term	Acronym	Definition	Resource to Learn More
Strength		A rating (or “grade”) assigned to CFSR case review items based on an evaluation of certain child welfare practices and processes. Other ratings at this level include “ Area Needing Improvement ” and “Not Applicable.”	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 7) (CFSR Portal)
Substantial conformity		A summary rating used by the Children’s Bureau to indicate that a State meets or exceeds Federal performance standards for each CFSR outcome and systemic factor . The designation considers case review ratings and performance on statewide data indicators where relevant. “Nonconformity” means the State did not meet the standards.	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Chapter 7 and Appendix B) (CFSR Portal)
System partners		Individuals or groups with which a child welfare agency collaborates to ensure child safety , permanency , and well-being , and to conduct the CFSR. Partners include young people, parents, and other family members; Tribal representatives; State and county agency administrators and staff; foster parents and other caregivers; judicial and legal communities; State and community-based service agencies; prevention organizations, community leaders, policymakers, and others (also known as “stakeholders”).	CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual (Appendix E) (CFSR Portal)
Systemic factor	SF	A required child welfare process or system that affects the achievement of outcomes . As part of the CFSR, States assess the functioning of seven systemic factors: (1) statewide information system; (2) case review system; (3) quality assurance system; (4) staff and provider training; (5) service array and resource development; (6) agency responsiveness to the community; and (7) foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention.	Assessing Systemic Factor Functioning (CFSR Portal)
Target child	TC	The child or young person whose foster care or in-home services case is under review during the CFSR case review.	
Well-being	WB	One of three outcome areas examined in the CFSR. In the CFSR, States are assessed on (WB1) families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs; (WB2) children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs; and (WB3) Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.	