

Section 5: CFSR Glossary

CFSR GLOSSARY

AFCARS

AFCARS, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System is a Federally mandated system for collecting data on children in foster care and children who have been adopted under the auspices of the State child welfare agency. AFCARS data are submitted on a Federal fiscal year basis.

AFCARS Penalty Check

An AFCARS penalty check is a check of an AFCARS submission to ensure compliance with the standards at 45 CFR 1355.40. A check of an AFCARS submission may be performed using the AFCARS Data Compliance Utility (DCU). Passing the AFCARS Penalty Check is not necessarily an indication of sound data quality; however, absence of a penalty indicates that a State has been able to meet minimum standards regarding numbers of missing data elements and/or responses falling within an acceptable range of values.

Aggregate Data

Aggregate data is the compilation of several data elements or data represented collectively in summary format. For example, case specific information about all the children still in foster care on the last day of the report year is presented as aggregate data. An example of this can be found in the Permanency Point-in-time Profile.

Alternative Response

Alternative response refers to the practice characterized by an emphasis on an assessment of needs of families and children with less emphasis on determining if maltreatment occurred. Some states offer both alternative response and traditional investigation as part of their child welfare services.

Average or Mean

The average or mean is a measure of central tendency that is found by summing all of the values in a distribution and dividing by the number of cases. The calculation of a mean is only suitable for interval or ratio level data, where there is equal spacing along a scale and various mathematical functions can be performed.

Case-level Data

In NCANDS, case-level data include information on the characteristics of the referral of abuse or neglect that are made to Child Protective Service agencies, the characteristics of the alleged child abuse or neglect victims, the disposition (or finding) and the alleged maltreatments, the risk factors of the child and the caregivers, the services that are provided, and the characteristics of the perpetrators.

Components

The term "component" refers to the primary parts of a composite. Components may incorporate only one measure or may have two or more measures that are closely related

to one another. (The table under the Composite definition identifies the components for each composite.)

Composite

Composite refers to the data indicator that incorporates State performance on multiple permanency-related individual measures. A composite is made up of separate related parts (components) to reflect the general area that is assessed by the data. The composites are used as the basis for national standards for permanency Outcome 1 and replace the prior four permanency national standard indicators.

Composite One: Timeliness and Permanency of reunification

- Component A: Timeliness of reunifications
- Component B: Permanency of reunifications

Composite Two: Timeliness of Adoptions

- Component A: Timeliness of adoptions for children exiting foster care
- Component B: Progress toward adoption of children in foster care for 17 months or longer
- Component C: Progress toward adoption of legally free children.

Composite Three: Achieving Permanency for children in foster care

- Component A: Children discharged from foster care to a permanent home.
- Component B: Children “growing up” in foster care

Composite Four: Placement Stability (only one component with the following measures):

- For children in foster care for less than 12 months, the percent with 2 or fewer placement settings.
- For children in foster care for 12 – 24 months, the percent with 2 or fewer placement settings.
- For children in foster care for 24 or more months, the percent with 2 or fewer placement settings.

Composite score

This term is the number that reflects a State's performance on a particular composite. Composite scores range from 50 to 150, with higher scores reflecting higher performance.

Contribution Weight

The contribution (weight) of each measure to the component score is determined by the coefficient resulting from the Principal Components Analysis. The standard score (i.e., Z-score) is multiplied by the coefficient to achieve the actual score for each measure. The contribution (weight) of each measure to the component score is determined by the coefficient resulting from the Principal Components Analysis.

Data Indicator

The term "data indicator" refers to the two safety measures and the four permanency composites for which national standards have been developed. That is, anything that has a national standard is referred to as a data indicator.

Discharged to a Finalized Adoption:

This term is used in several of the adoption-related measures. For the purpose of these measures, the term includes all children who have a date of discharge reported to AFCARS and a discharge reason of adoption. The date of discharge to adoption is the date that the adoption was legally finalized.

Discharge to a Permanent Home

This term is used for Composite Three: Achieving Permanency for children in foster care relating to achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time. A child is considered as discharged to a permanent home if there is a date of discharge reported to AFCARS and if the reason for discharge reported to AFCARS is one of the following: Reunification with Parents or Primary Caretakers, Living with Other Relatives, Adoption, or Guardianship.

Discharge to Reunification

This term is used for the measures of timeliness and permanency of reunification. For purposes of this measure, a child is considered as discharged to reunification if there is a date of discharge reported to AFCARS and if the reason for discharge is reported to AFCARS as either "Reunification with Parents or Primary Caretakers" (the child was returned to his or her principal caretaker's home) OR "Living with other Relatives" (the child went to live with a relative other than the one from whose home he or she was removed).

Emancipation from Foster Care

This term is used for Composite Three: Achieving Permanency for children in foster care. A child is considered as having been emancipated from foster care if there is a discharge date reported to AFCARS, and the reason for discharge that is reported to AFCARS is emancipation. Emancipation is defined in AFCARS as "The child reached majority according to State law by virtue of age, marriage, etc."

Entry into Foster Care

For purposes of all the measures focusing on time of entry into foster care, the entry into foster care is the date of the child's latest removal from home for the purpose of being placed in foster care. Please note that this AFCARS-related definition of date of entry is different than the regulatory definition of entering foster care.

Federal Fiscal Year

The federal fiscal year is October 1st through September 30th.

First Time Entry Cohort Profile

The First Time Entry Cohort Profile provides information on a specific group of children who entered out of home care for the first time during a designated time period, within

the first six months of the Federal fiscal year. That specific group can then be tracked over time to observe, for example, the effects of policy changes.

Indicated

NCANDS defines “Indicated” as a type of investigation disposition that concludes that maltreatment could not be substantiated under State law or policy, but there was reason to suspect that the child may have been maltreated or was at risk of maltreatment. This disposition is only applicable to States that distinguish between substantiated and indicated dispositions.

Legally free for adoption

A child is considered legally free (LF) for adoption if a date for the termination of parental rights for both living parents is reported to AFCARS. Also, if a child’s circumstance associated with their removal includes “Parent(s) Died” and one date for the termination of parental rights exists, this child would be considered legally free for adoption.

Longitudinal Measures

Longitudinal measures in the CFSR Data Profile follow a cohort of children over time to establish timeliness of permanency and placement stability.

Maltreatment In Foster Care Measure

For the measure of maltreatment of children in foster care, a child is counted as having been maltreated in foster care if the perpetrator of the maltreatment was identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff. Counts and perpetrator relationship are derived from NCANDS, while total children placed in foster care are derived from AFCARS. Under regulation, children should only be reported to AFCARS as being in foster care if they are in foster care for 24 hours or longer and if the State agency has placement and care responsibility.

Measures (Individual measures)

The term "individual measures" refers to the specific measures that are included in each composite. Although it would be technically correct also to use that term to refer to the two safety measures, it may be clearer to refer to the two safety measures as safety "data indicators" since they have national standards associated with them. That way we will be able to differentiate them from the individual measures in the composites.

Measures of Central Tendency

Measures of central tendency are mathematical tools used to evaluate the average scores in a data set. Median, mean, and mode are the most commonly used measures of central tendency.

Median

The median is a measure of central tendency representing the point in a distribution where half of the cases fall above the value and half fall below. The median is often the preferred measure when summarizing skewed distributions (i.e., data with potentially

extreme high or low values), even with interval level data, as it more accurately reflects the central value.

Example:

- Take set of values (7,47,25,6,1,4,8)
- Put into ascending order: 1,4,6,7,8,25,47
- The median for this frequency distribution is the value 7, as it the point in the distribution where half of the cases fall above the value and half below.

Mode

The mode is the individual category or value that appears most frequently in a frequency distribution. The mode is often referred to as the largest number of cases in a frequency distribution. The mode is the preferred measure of central tendency for qualitative data.

National Standard

The national standard established for each of the data indicators are used to determine substantial conformity in the reviews. The national standards are generated from NCANDS and AFCARS data. For statistical purposes, the input data for each indicator were used to fit a normal probability distribution to that data set.

When a State begins a Child and Family Service Review, a State's data for the period under review are compared with the national standard to determine whether the State is in substantial conformity. If a state is found to be not in substantial conformity the outcome associated with the national standard data indicator must be addressed in the Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

NCANDS

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a collaborative, voluntary information collection system that gathers and analyzes annual State statistics on abused and neglected children. There are two components, the Summary Data Component (SDC) and the Detailed Case Data Component (DCDC), which collect State child abuse and neglect information at different levels of detail. The SDC collects aggregate data and the DCDC collects case-level data on all children who are the subjects of reports alleging maltreatment. NCANDS data are collected on a fiscal year basis.

Outcomes

There are seven outcomes used to measure safety, permanency, and child well being.

The following are associated with the outcome for Safety:

- (1) Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect; and,
- (2) Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.

The following are associated with the outcome for Permanency:

- (1) Children have permanency and stability in their living situations; and,
- (2) The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

The following are associated with the outcome for Child and Family Well-Being:

- (1) Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs;
- (2) Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs; and,
- (3) Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Performance Indicators and Substantial Conformity

A set of performance indicators is used to determine substantial conformity for each of the seven case specific outcomes based on information from each case reviewed onsite and data in the statewide assessment. The performance indicators are in two forms: one includes qualitative items that are evaluated through case reviews conducted onsite in the State, and the other includes statewide aggregate data obtained from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). Currently only two of the seven case specific outcomes (Safety Outcome #1 and Permanency Outcome #1) are compared to the statewide aggregate data. Final decisions about the State's substantial conformity are made on the basis of statewide aggregate data in addition to the findings of the onsite review. With a goal of continuous quality improvement, States whose data remain below the national standard in will be required to establish benchmarks of improvement to be made toward the national standard. As long as the State reaches the agreed-upon level of improvement, failure to reach the national standard will not be the basis for a determination that the state is not in substantial conformity and the resulting withholding of Federal funds with respect to the outcome in question.

For the remaining five case outcomes, the performance indicators reviewed on-site provide the basis for determining the State's substantial conformity. In a similar manner, the substantial conformity of systemic factors occurs at two levels. First, the statewide assessment includes an evaluation by the State members of the review team of the requirements related to each systemic factor covered in the review. Second, during the onsite review, members of the review team interview selected community stakeholders to determine how well each of the systemic factors functions in the State.

Permanency-Related Measures

The following are the definitions of terms used in the permanency related measures that reflect the performance areas addressed by the four data composites identified in the Federal Register Announcement. The four composites address the following performance areas:

- Timeliness and permanency of reunification
- Timeliness of adoptions
- Permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time
- Placement stability.

Physical Reunification

Physical reunification is distinguished from a reunification in which custody is transferred to the parents or relatives.

Placement Setting

This term is used in the measures of placement stability. Placement occurs after removal and is the physical setting in which a child finds himself or herself, that is, the resultant foster care setting. A new placement setting results when the foster care setting changes; for example, when a child moves from one foster family home to another or to a group home or institution. The following are NOT considered changes in placement settings:

- Visitation with a sibling, relative, or potential caretaker
- Hospitalization for medical treatment, acute psychiatric episodes, or diagnosis
- Respite care
- Day or summer camps
- Trial home visits
- Runaway episodes

Point-in-time Permanency Profile

The Point-in-time Permanency Profile provides data on all children who are in care on a specified date, in this case, the last day of the fiscal year.

Principal Components Analysis (PCA)

Principal Components Analysis is a commonly used and widely accepted statistical technique for reducing a large set of variables into a smaller set. The PCA not only combines inter-correlated variables but also identifies those that are redundant because they are very highly inter-correlated. PCA was used by ACF as an exploratory tool to describe and summarize data by grouping together variables (measures) that are correlated.

Range

The range is the difference between the highest and lowest score in a frequency distribution. The results/data are considered unreliable if extreme values skew the data set.

Recurrence of Maltreatment

The data indicator which measures the percent of children associated with a substantiated or indicated finding of maltreatment during the first six months of a year that had another substantiated or indicated finding within six months.

Reentry Into Foster Care

This term is used in the measure of permanency of reunification. It refers to a child entering a new foster care episode who had been discharged from a prior foster care episode.

SACWIS

The Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) is a comprehensive automated case management tool that supports social workers' foster care and adoptions assistance case management practice. SACWIS is a federally supported project whose main goals include: 1) facilitating more efficient child welfare program administration and case management; 2) integrating and coordinating other Federal

programs such as Title IV-A, Title IV-D, Title XIX, and NCANDS; and, 3) facilitating the collection and reporting of AFCARS data.

Standardized Scores

Standardized scores provide important information about data. They were developed because raw scores often need complicated interpretations to make sense. By using standardized scores, the average person can quickly get a comprehensive idea of how a particular score ranks compared to other scores. The use of standardized scores rather than actual calculated results allows for variables measured in different units to be included in the analysis. A common way to make comparisons is to calculate a Z-score (see below).

Statewide Assessment

The statewide assessment is the first phase of the Child and Family Services review process. The statewide assessment requests general information about the State agency. One section focuses on State child welfare agency characteristics and requires narrative responses on systemic factors, based on data to the extent available to the State. Another section includes data profiles for the safety and permanency outcomes, including the statewide aggregate data indicators used to determine substantial conformity. A fourth section requires a narrative assessment of the outcome areas based on the data profiles. Finally, the State assesses its strengths and needs and identifies issues and locations for further examination through the onsite review. The data profiles are based on the Adoption Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data that are provided by the ACF to the State.

Substantial Conformity

Please see Performance Indicators and Substantial Conformity.

Substantiated

This type of investigation disposition concludes that the allegation(s) of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment was supported or founded by State law or State policy.

Systemic Factors

Systemic Factors are those statewide systems which promote or support safety, permanency and well-being for children. The CFSR reviews the following seven systemic factors:

- Statewide information system capacity
- Case review system
- Quality assurance system
- Staff and provider training
- Service array and resource development
- Agency responsiveness to community
- Foster and adoptive home licensing, approval and recruitment

Trial Home Visit

A child is considered as being in a trial home visit if the child is reported in AFCARS as being in a Trial Home Visit placement type after a foster care placement. The child remains under State agency supervision, and has been returned to the principal caretaker for a limited and specified period of time. The term “trial home visit adjustment” refers to the incorporation of the time beginning 30 days after a child is reported as being in a trial home visit as the default reunification date when that was the final placement before a child discharges with a return to family or relatives as used in Composite One: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification.

Victim

A victim of child maltreatment is a child who has been determined by the State Child Protective Services agency to meet the definition of abused or neglected or at risk of abuse or neglect. The State will have made a determination that has been mapped to NCANDS’ dispositions of substantiated, indicated, or alternative response victim. Only children whose determination is identified to NCANDS as substantiated or indicated are included in the measure.

Z-score

A statistical measure that quantifies the distance (measured in standard deviations) a data point is from the mean of a data set. In statistics, a standard score (also called *z*-score or normal score) is a dimensionless quantity derived by subtracting the population mean from an individual (raw) score and then dividing the difference by the population standard deviation. For example, a *z*-score of -1.4 indicates that someone is 1.4 standard deviations below the mean. Someone who is in that position would have done as well or better than 8% of the students who took the test. To calculate a *z*-score, subtract the mean from the raw score and divide that answer by the standard deviation. (i.e., raw score = 15, mean = 10, standard deviation = 4. Therefore 15 minus 10 equals 5. 5 divided by 4 equals 1.25. Thus the *z*-score is 1.25.)