



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Social Services  
Department No.: 044  
For Agenda Of: 7/7/09  
Placement: Administrative  
Estimated Tme:  
Continued Item: No  
If Yes, date from:  
Vote Required: Majority

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Department Kathy Gallagher, Department of Social Services Director  
Director(s) (805) 681-4501  
Patricia Stewart, Chief Probation Officer  
(805) 882-3652  
Contact Info: Melissa Hoesterey, Social Services Operations Division Chief  
(805) 346-7248

**SUBJECT:** Child Welfare Services and Probation County Self-Assessment 2009

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Other Concurrence:** N/A

As to form: Select\_Concurrence

**Recommended Actions: Summary Text:** Santa Barbara County Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Juvenile Probation conducted its third County Self-Assessment (CSA) from January - May 2009. The CSA is a macro analysis of how local programs, systems, and factors impact performance on the Federal and State Outcome Measures in three major areas: Safety, Permanency, and Well-being. As in the previous Self-Assessments, Santa Barbara County focused on obtaining extensive input from our many public and private partners believing that their knowledge of and experience with CWS and Juvenile Probation were critical in identifying the strengths, needs, and gaps in our service delivery system. The process focused on completing a gaps analysis with several existing groups who are integrally involved in promoting the safety and well-being of children and families. Eight focus groups were conducted involving members of the KIDS Network and Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC); the Juvenile Court; Child Welfare Services and Probation line staff; the CWS Team, which includes managers and supervisors; community partners and caregivers; as well as with the Independent Living Program (ILP) youth to ensure their voices had representation in our county self-assessment. Overall, more than 150 people representing over 30 agencies and organizations took part in the Self-Assessment.

The quarterly data reports from the University at Berkeley and CDSS combined with internal data analysis sources provided sufficient outcome data for the children served to inform the Self-Assessment process. The outcome data along with a trends analysis was provided to focus group participants prior to completion of the gaps analysis. The information and subsequent analysis

included in the CSA will form the basis for developing our County System Improvement Plan (SIP), which will also come before the Board early in the fall.

**Background:**

Assembly Bill 636 (Steinberg), Chapter 678, Statutes of 2001, enacted the Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability Act of 2001. This law required the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to establish the California Outcome and Accountability System (COAS) in response to the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) completed in 2004. The CFSR at the federal administrative level enables the Children's Bureau to: (1) ensure conformity with Federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services; and (3) assist States to enhance their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

Ultimately, the goal of the federal reviews is to help States improve child welfare services and achieve the following outcomes for children and families who receive services:

**Safety**

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

**Permanency**

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for families.

**Family and Child Well-Being**

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Within California, the purpose of the COAS enacted in 2004 is to significantly strengthen the accountability system used in California to monitor and assess the quality of services provided on behalf of maltreated children and/or children in the foster care system. As such, the COAS operates on a philosophy of continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement, and public reporting of program outcomes.

**Performance Measure:** The CFSR assesses State performance during a specific time period on seven child welfare outcomes pertaining to safety, permanence, and well-being and on seven systemic factors. In order for California to achieve compliance with the federal CFSR, Assembly Bill (AB) 636 instituted the Federal measures and a series of State outcome measures that provide key indicators of program performance, processes, and delivery of critical client services. Since our last County Self Assessment completed in 2006, there has been a change in the Federal Measures with the creation of four Permanency Composites distilled into fifteen individual measures. The addition of the composites further complicated an already complex outcome reporting structure.

The COAS Quarterly Outcome Data Reports provide the basis for understanding Santa Barbara County's performance over time as a means of continuous quality improvement, not for point-in-time comparisons across counties. Even point-in-time comparisons of Santa Barbara's performance does not in and of itself provide a valid picture of those factors that ultimately contribute to client outcomes as those are readily influenced by internal business process decisions; access and availability of critical client services; a multitude of community factors; and the varying roles and impact of stakeholders, and the simple economy of scales indicating that relatively small numbers create significant variability in percentage based measures. The quarterly outcome data itself is less than intuitive for child welfare professionals and yields a more comprehensive picture on where improvements might be needed when considered in conjunction with additional internal data sources and analysis along with departmental and community

contextual considerations. As identified in the CSA, the increasing complexity of family issues including substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, poverty, gang participation, cultural differences, the presence of more children with complex behavioral/emotional needs, and larger family sizes provides some of the contextual relevance to the outcome measures provided below.

Child Welfare Services during this cohort period received fewer community referrals for child abuse and neglect than the State average, while the number of substantiated referrals was slightly higher than the State average. Despite more substantiated referrals, Santa Barbara County has less children entering and in foster care, which speaks to the efficacy of the Family Preservation program and the increased exits from foster care to adoption. In July of 2006, Child Welfare Services implemented the Family Preservation Program, which deters children from entering foster care, and emphasized the importance of permanency for children in foster care by identifying and securing adoptive homes, which resulted in increased exits from foster care to adoption. The implementation of these programs and associated practices have mitigated the overall number of children residing in foster care and resulted in significant cost savings to the county. Nevertheless, an unintended consequence of the Family Preservation Program has resulted in the more challenging cases entering the juvenile court system resulting in longer reunification times.

As previously mentioned, the COAS captures data in three areas; safety, permanency, along with Family and Child Well being. Within the **safety** measurement there are extracts specific to:

1. The recurrence of maltreatment within six months.
2. The rate of child abuse/neglect in foster care.
3. The percentage of immediate child abuse/neglect referrals seen in a timely response.
4. The percentage of "10 day" child abuse/neglect referrals seen within that time frame.
5. Timely social worker visits with the child.

Santa Barbara County performance, as captured in these measures is very good. There was no recurrence of maltreatment in 93.3% of the cases, this is above the state average of 92.7%. The rate of no child abuse/neglect while in foster care was 99.88%. Put in whole numbers, this meant there was 1 case out of 856. Agency response to assess immediate referrals was at 98%, it was 92.9% for "10 day referrals". Timely or regular social worker visits improved from 88.6% to 91.5% between April to June in 2008. With continued focus and monitoring this has increased to almost 98% by September 2008. The desired Federal standard is 90%

Respective to **permanency**, extracts focus on reunification, specifically the time to reunify a family, along with subsequent re-entry to the dependency system. While improvement has been observed, this is an area warranting continued focus. Extracts indicate that CWS reunifies approximately 44% of the children with their families with a median time of 12.8 months. County probation reunifies approximately 60% of the minors with their families in a median time of 11.5 months. Noted by both Probation and DSS are the complex issues presented within families such as substance abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence, all of which delay reunification.

While Santa Barbara County performance is understandable given the aforementioned factors, reunification remains a high priority measure and CWS/Probation remain committed to working with stakeholders to improve timely reunification.

Further, included in permanency, are extracts such as adoptions, long term care, placement stability, placement with siblings, and placement in the least restrictive setting.

Santa Barbara County continues to exceed the federal standard for the Adoptions composite since the second quarter of 2006. In 2008, 92 children received a family for life through adoption. Santa Barbara county is performing below on the adoptions timeliness measure but that is a practice decision of not terminating parental rights on children unless an adoptive home has been located.

The Long Term Care composite extract essentially evaluate the performance of achieving timely permanence through reunification, adoption, guardianship for youth under 18, or emancipation for youth 18 and over. Santa Barbara County's performance on this measure has been rather fluid over time with the majority of the quarterly reports indicating success in exceeding the national standard for the composite.

Placement Stability measures if youth in care have had two or fewer placement at three different time intervals. Santa Barbara County continues to be challenged in meeting the federal standard for these measures. While this measure is considering stability, it does not take into consideration that some placement moves may actually improve the overall outcome for children. For example, CWS brings a child into protective custody with severe emotional and behavioral concerns. In order to ensure the safety of the child, they are placed in a high level group home (placement #1). After about a year, the child's mental, emotional and behavioral concerns have stabilized and they are moved into a foster family agency home (placement #2). During this time, the child has been communicating with an aunt who has recently expressed interest in the child coming to live with her and pursuing guardianship. After completion of the relative approval process, the child is eventually moved to the aunt's home (placement #3) and guardianship is established within the year. The outcome is positive for the child in that permanency has been established for the youth. That said, with the extracts as written, the County would have failed the placement stability measure for this child.

Probation is equally challenged in achieving placement stability for minors placed in out of home care. While 80% of the minors in care 8 days to 12 months have had two or fewer placements, the longer the minors remain in care that percentage shifts to 80% of minors in care at least 24 months having three or more placement settings. Stability for probation youth is often challenged by many of these youth absconding from a placement shortly after arrival. Similarly, programs will discharge a youth for noncompliance with program rules or inappropriate behavior necessitating placement in another program. In many cases, a probation youth is detained in a secure setting until another program can be found. It is not unusual for this pattern to be repeated two or three times before a youth remains in a particular program long-term.

Santa Barbara County has been performing almost on par with the State average for children placed with some of their siblings, which has been no easy task given the large sibling groups (four to six or more children) entering care.

As the data indicates, Santa Barbara County is achieving substantial conformity on some of the measures, while there is the identified need for improvement on others. Considering the Quarterly Outcome Data presented above in context with additional data analysis and a macro analysis of local programs, systems, and factors included in the CSA the following outcomes have been identified as needing continued attention to enhance Child Welfare Services' and Probation's performance in meeting Federal and State Outcome Measures:

- No Recurrence of Maltreatment
- Timely Reunification
- Placement Stability

These identified measures will form the basis for the Santa Barbara County System Improvement Plan.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

Budgeted: Yes

**Fiscal Analysis:**

Narrative:

The County Self-Assessment is cost neutral to Santa Barbara County.

**Staffing Impacts:** None

**Legal Positions:**

**FTEs:**

**Special Instructions:** Please send an original copy of the minute order and signature page for submission to CDSS to:

Department of Social Services  
Attn: Administration, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
2125 S. Centerpointe Parkway  
Santa Maria, CA 93455

**Attachments:**

Santa Barbara County Self-Assessment, January - May 2009.  
Appendix - Santa Barbara County Self-Assessment 2009

**Authored by:**

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**cc:**