

Child Protective Services

Permanency Strategic Plan



Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

November 2015

Permanency Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

Safe, permanent placement of children with forever families has always been a priority for Child Protective Services (CPS). Over the years, numerous program enhancements have occurred to support this goal and, while Texas efforts lead the nation in many areas, CPS is always looking for ways to improve. Specifically, despite the fact that approximately 92% of Texas children in foster care exit to positive permanency, CPS is concerned about the remaining 8% of foster children who do not. Additionally, efforts are underway to identify methods to decrease the length of time it takes for children to achieve permanency.

Opportunities to address the challenges associated with permanency outcomes have been further enhanced by the collective observations and subsequent recommendations contained in numerous agency reviews that occurred. Child Protective Services (CPS) has undergone a number of reviews during fiscal years 2014 and 2015. Of particular note are: the Stephen Group Operational Review, the Sunset Review and the Casey Family Programs review of Harris County Region 6 practices. These reviews, especially the Operational Review and the Harris County Review, served as a springboard to boost existing permanency efforts.

As part of CPS Transformation, the Reunification and Permanency (RAP) group was formed to target agency practices regarding positive permanency. This group identified 95 process and practice changes to improve upon current success. Several of these changes have been implemented statewide. The Harris County plan focused on moving 600 children in substitute care to permanency, creating a culture of permanency in the organization, and organizing Texas Harris County operations geographically to reduce staff travel and logistical problems. Organizationally, DFPS Leadership made the decision to centralize this work under the direction of a Director of Permanency. One of the responsibilities of this position is to create a statewide permanency strategic plan to define and focus CPS's efforts to reunify children with their parents, transfer custody to relatives, or achieve legal adoption, which Texas defines as *positive permanency*.

The goals of the Permanency Strategic Plan are to:

1. Safely reduce the average time to achieve positive permanency by 25% by 2020
2. Achieve positive permanency for children under six years old who have been in DFPS conservatorship for more than two years
3. Reduce the number of youth exiting care without a permanent home
4. Create a culture in which staff and stakeholders value and demonstrate a sense of urgency to achieve positive permanency

To achieve these goals, CPS will execute a series of action plans. The work starts with a Call to Action to alert internal staff and external stakeholders of the importance of acting with a sense of urgency. Each region will hold a permanency summit designed to raise awareness of the critical nature of the work and the agency's commitment to positive permanency. The summits are sponsored by CPS and supported by Casey Family Programs (CFP). CFP is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely

reducing the need for foster care. CFP is partnering with child welfare systems, including Texas, to support practices and policies that safely reduce the need for foster care by fifty percent by the year 2020. CPS recognizes that each region has unique characteristics and faces different challenges, and consequently, CPS has focused this effort on regionally driven plans. Each region analyzed its data, conducted a root cause analysis, and identified its areas of focus to improve positive permanency. In addition to the IVE State Plan filed annually with the Administration for Children and Families, there are statewide permanency action plans for Legal Staff, for the Faith Based Community, for the Child Placing Agencies, and for Residential Contracting and Capacity Building. All the plans are supported by a Stakeholder Awareness and Communication campaign.

The strategic plan will be updated and adjusted over the next five years to reflect any changes to strategies and goals developed as the work progresses within the regions and across the state.

Permanency Strategic Plan

Defining Permanency

Positive permanency is the desired outcome for children served by the CPS system: that all children leaving DFPS conservatorship exit into a permanent setting, which involves a legal relationship to a family. Simply put, positive permanency is reunification with a parent or parents, transfer of custody to a relative or extended family member, or adoption. DFPS staff seek a positive permanency outcome when engaging in permanency planning for all children in DFPS care.

This outcome is based on the premise that every child has the right to a permanent and stable home, preferably with his or her own family. There is no adequate substitute for stable, permanent family ties. Family ties provide a child with a sense of belonging and connection to the larger world. When a child is unable to return home safely, DFPS staff actively seek another permanent family setting for the child. If DFPS is unable to achieve positive permanency for a child or youth, then the agency identifies, develops, and supports connections to caring adults who agree to provide life-long support to the youth once he or she ages out of the foster care system.

The Importance of Permanency

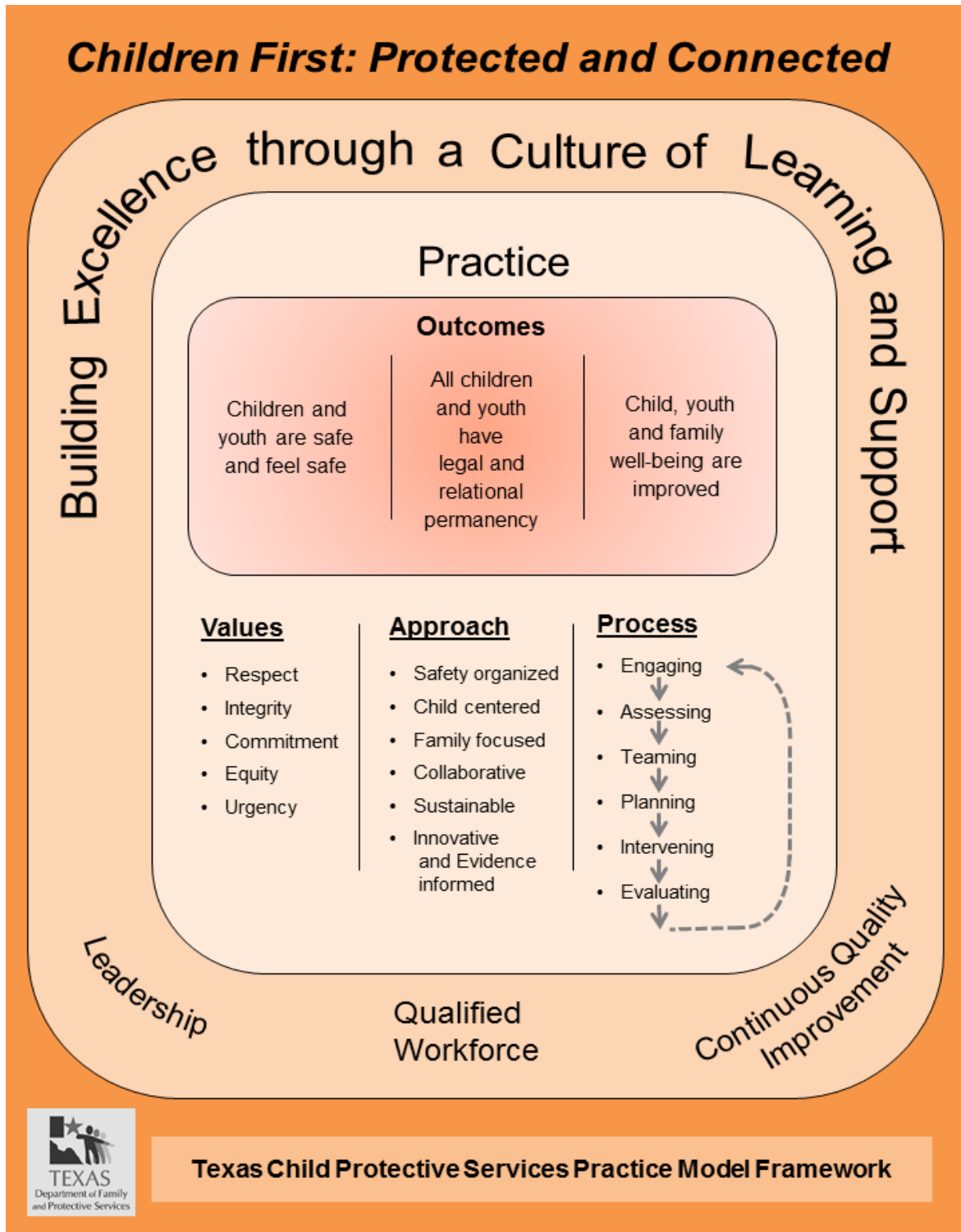
Texas CPS serves children and youth who meet statutory guidelines for investigation or assessment and are determined to be unsafe because of abuse or neglect. Our vision is “Children First: Protected and Connected.” We partner with families and communities to address child abuse and neglect through practice that ensures safety, permanency, and well-being for the children and youth we serve.

Our practice secures positive and consistent results for children, youth, and families. Our desired outcomes include the following.

- Children and youth are safe and feel safe.
- All children and youth have legal and relational permanency.
- Child, youth, and family well-being are improved.

The Practice Model diagram below shows how the entire system is designed to produce these outcomes. It shows how CPS values, approach, and processes all drive towards achieving these key results.

CPS Practice Model



Permanency is important for a number of reasons. These include:

- **Intent** – While a permanent home or family may not be certain to last forever, it is one that is intended to last indefinitely and offers the hope of lifetime connections and support
- **Commitment and continuity in family relationships** –A permanent family is meant to survive geographic moves and the unexpected challenges of life because it involves sharing a common future – whether with the family of origin, an adopted family, or a guardianship family.
- **Sense of belonging to a family** – This sense evolves from commitment, continuity, and social/legal status. It is critical to security and positive self-esteem and paves the way to healthy growth and development.
- **Legal and social status** --A permanent family offers a child a definitive legal status separate from the child welfare system, provides parents who assume responsibility for protecting his or her rights and interests, and promotes a sense of belonging.

Youth who exit substitute care without achieving positive permanency face many hardships. National outcomes for these youth include the following:

- One in four will be incarcerated within the first two years after they leave care
- Over one-fifth will become homeless for some period after age 18
- Approximately 58% will have a high school degree at age 19 compared to 87% of national comparison non-foster youth
- Of the youth who aged out of care and are over 25 years of age, less than 3 percent will earn college degrees, compared to 28% of the general population.

Texas CPS has made considerable changes over the past five years to support its commitment to permanency. This value for permanency and the methods necessary to achieve it are rooted in the CPS practice model and embedded within our practice. Permanency work is built on the principles that people can change, that children can be safe within families and their communities, that children need permanency, and that collaboration with families and the community is key to achieving our goals.

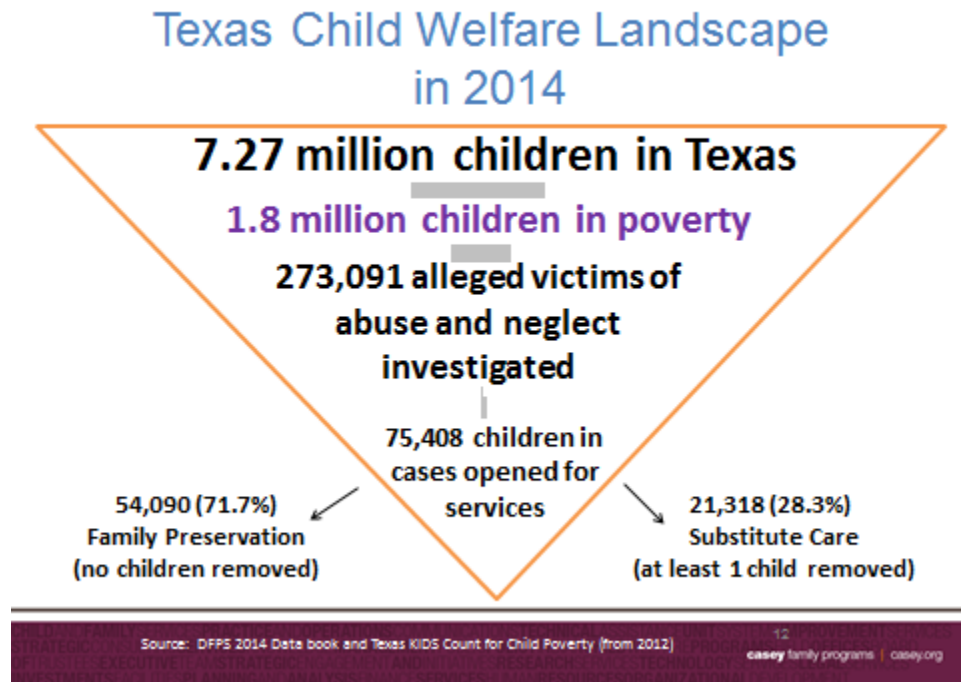
Permanency Crosses Every Stage of Service

Although conservatorship staff engage in permanency planning for children, permanency is a priority for staff in every stage of service. The path to permanency begins when the first referral comes into State-wide Intake. Actions and decisions that occur early in a case, such as locating relatives, affect the ultimate outcome of the case and whether a child is able to achieve positive permanency.

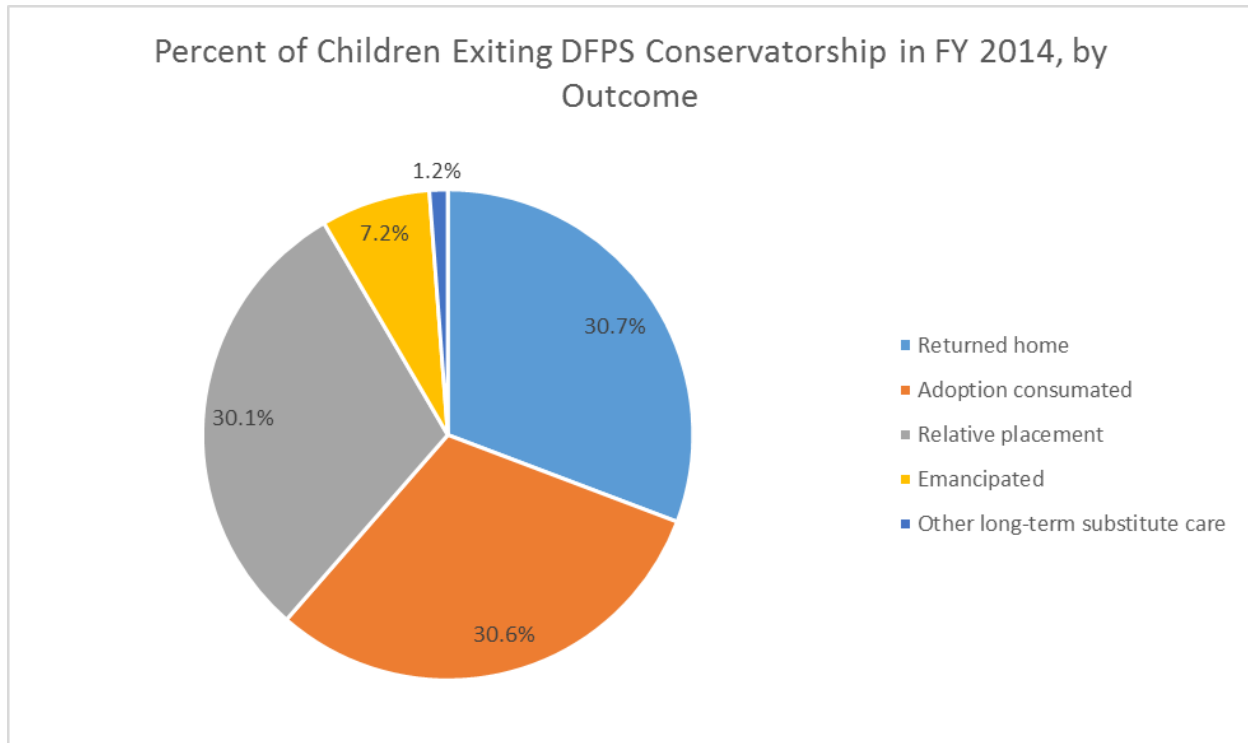
DFPS continues to work with all caseworkers to educate them about their role in permanency and to instill a sense of urgency about permanency. One strategy to accomplish this is to provide Permanency Values training to staff and stakeholders. The training is an exploration of the concepts around permanency and why it is important, and it also highlights the role of active engagement with the family and youth in developing permanency plans. DFPS has trained over 8,000 caseworkers, CASA employees and volunteers, judges, attorneys, residential child care providers, therapists, and foster parents. CPS continues to provide this training and requires it for all caseworkers and supervisors.

Starting Point for the CPS Permanency Strategic Plan

Of the 7 million children in Texas, there are 273,091 that are alleged victims of abuse and neglect. CPS investigates these cases. In less than 8% of the cases investigated, CPS assesses safety concerns to be serious enough to merit removing the child from his or her home.



Once children are in DFPS custody, the caseworker works with the family and the court system to establish a permanency goal for the child. Services are oriented towards finding a strategy for the child to achieve a safe, long-term home with positive permanency. In 2014, approximately 30% of children who exited substitute care were able to return to their original home, 30% were adopted, and 30% were placed with a relative. An additional 7% of the youth aged out of the system without finding positive permanency, and 1.2% remained in other long-term substitute care.



The majority of children in DFPS conservatorship achieve positive permanency and do not age out of care. Both the number and percent of youth aging out of care has steadily declined from 1789 children (13%) in FY2010 to 1639 (10%) in FY2011 to 1577 (9%) in FY2012 to 1526 (9%) in FY13 and finally, to 1456 (9%) in FY2014. That means 91% of the children and youth exited from care to a permanent home through reunification, relative PMC, or adoption. It should be noted that Texas does better than the national average for children and youth aging out of foster care. The national average is 10%.

The average length of time children in Texas spend in substitute care, also known as the time to permanency, was 18.8 months in FY2014. The average child spent 13.2 months in care before returning home, 13.1 months in care before custody is given to a relative without Permanency Care Assistance (PCA), 24.2 months in care before custody is given to a relative with PCA, 26.6 months in care before an adoption is consummated by relatives, 30.8 months in care before an adoption is consummated by non-relatives and 54 months in care before emancipation.

When CPS challenged each of the regions to begin work on the Permanency Strategic Plan, December 2014 data was provided as a starting point for their planning process. At that time, CPS had 573 children under the age of six who had been in care two or more years. Of these children, 7 had been in care five or more years, 39 had been in care 4 or more years, 97 had been in care 3 or more years, and 430 had been in care two or more years. From the point of view of a six-year old, this time in care represents a huge percentage of his or her lifetime.

Permanency Goals

While CPS has made progress in achieving positive permanency for many youth, there is still more work to be done. As a result of the extensive data and root cause analysis, CPS identified a number of goals for the Permanency Strategic Plan.

1. Safely reduce the time to achieve positive permanency by 25% by 2020.

Based on the data analysis outlined in the previous section, the overarching permanency goal in the strategic plan is to safely reduce the average time for children in substitute care to achieve positive permanency by 25% by the year 2020. Currently the average time to permanency is 18.8 months. By 2020, the average time to permanency will be approximately 14 months, which will place Texas as one of the leaders in the nation.

The 25% reduction will occur over a five year period. Each year, regions will be assigned their own annual reduction targets. The regional targets are based on current performance. Regions with longer times to permanency are expected to show greater improvements. For 2016, the regional targets are as follows:

Regional targets for 2016

Region	Current Average Time to Permanency	Target Average Time to Permanency	Target Improvement (in months)
Region 01	21.7	19.7	2
Region 02	19.8	18.8	1
Region 03	17.5	16.8	.75
Region 04	15.9	15.3	.6
Region 05	16.9	16.4	.6
Region 06	21.7	19.7	2
Region 07	17.5	16.8	.7
Region 08	20.2	19.2	1
Region 09	21.1	19.6	1.5
Region 10	17.8	17.0	.7
Region 11	15.9	15.4	.5

Statewide, the 2016 regional targets will result in a reduction of the average time to permanency of one month. In FY2014, 15,456 children achieved permanency in Texas. A reduction of one month in that year would have resulted in these children spending 463,680 fewer days in state custody; this equates to a savings of approximately \$12M dollars. More importantly, the children would have achieved permanency more quickly. This will be a significant accomplishment.

2. Achieve positive permanency for children under six years old who have been in DFPS conservatorship for more than two years.

For young children, spending two or more years in substitute care constitutes a huge percentage of their lifetime. DFPS is committed to making more rapid progress to find positive permanency for this age group. The goals for this group are extremely aggressive – to reduce the number of children in this category statewide to zero by the end of fiscal year 2016. The regional starting points are shown below. All regions share the same target of zero children by August 2016.

Regional Target – Number of Children under Six Who Have Been in Care Two Years or More

Region	Number of Children Meeting Criteria	Target August 2016
Region 01	34	0
Region 02	23	0
Region 03	127	0
Region 04	10	0
Region 05	13	0
Region 06	108	0
Region 07	32	0
Region 08	100	0
Region 09	18	0
Region 10	7	0
Region 11	101	0
Statewide	573	0

3. Reduce the number of youth exiting care without a permanent home

DFPS believes everyone in substitute care deserves a permanent family regardless of age. This goal aims to dramatically reduce the number of youth exiting without that permanency. The statewide target for FY2016 is to reduce the number of youth in this category to 750. Each region is expected to contribute a pro rata share towards the overall goal based on the number of children in care between 16-17 years of age in each region (as of May 2015).

**Regional Target – Number of Youth Aging Out of Care
Without Positive Permanency**

Region	Current Number of 16 & 17 Year Old Youth in Care	Target August 2016
Region 01	150	44
Region 02	88	26
Region 03	519	151
Region 04	171	50
Region 05	64	19
Region 06	514	150
Region 07	292	85
Region 08	414	121
Region 09	92	27
Region 10	53	15
Region 11	218	63
Statewide	2575	750

4. Create a culture in which staff and stakeholders value and demonstrate a sense of urgency to achieve positive permanency.

The rationale for this goal lies in the realization that any practice changes to achieve the three goals above must be supported by creating a broader, sustained culture of permanency that permeates the entire DFPS enterprise. This culture of permanency emphasizes the importance of permanency and the urgency to achieve it for children and youth. In other words, we have no time to lose. Even a month without permanency may seem like a lifetime to a young child. The five-year time frame of the Strategic Plan reinforces the long term commitment of DFPS to this effort. The time frame recognizes the substantial time period required to achieve a culture change evidenced in the behavior of staff and stakeholders and reflected in hiring practices, training, performance reviews, policy, QA processes, data reports, resource allocation, and leadership. Over the course of the strategic plan, these system components will be examined and modified to support a culture of permanency. A focus on culture shift begins with the regional summits described earlier.

Outcome Evaluation

Our practice secures positive and consistent results for the children, youth, and families we serve. The intended outcomes resulting from the Permanency Strategic Plan include the specific measures outlined in our goals as well as a number of other achievements. DFPS will monitor progress on small steps that contribute to the longer term goals. DFPS will also monitor for unintended consequences including abuse, neglect, the rate of recidivism, and the rate children return to DFPS care. Child safety will remain foremost in any decision about permanency.

The key outcome measures tie directly to the goals outlined in this Strategic Plan:

- Number of exits to positive permanency
- Time in care is reduced by shortening the time to achieve relative non PCA, relative PCA and relative adoptions
- Number of children under six years old in care two or more years
- Number of youth aging out

There are a number of supporting measures that act as leading indicators of whether staff and partners are taking necessary actions to lead to greater positive permanency. Each of these metrics alone does not guarantee that positive permanency will occur. They allow CPS to see whether the culture of urgency is taking hold in every location. These include:

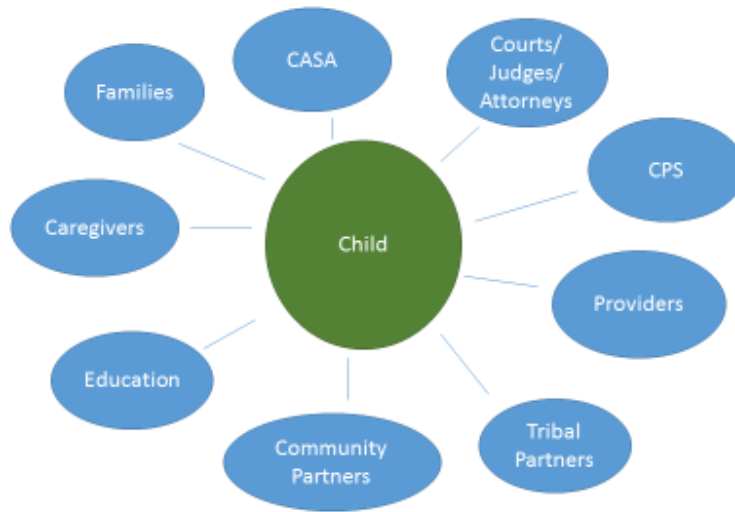
- Timely Kinship Home Screening requests
- Increased timeliness of services
- Increased visitations between children and parents
- Increased participation by kinship development worker and Kinship caregivers in permanency planning meetings and legal proceedings
- Increased participation by external stakeholders.
- Providing immediate support to Kinship Placements
 - Decreased time to issue financial payments
 - Timely Day Care services arranged
 - Increased frequency of parent/child visits
- Improved time to foster home verification for Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) referrals
- Improved collaboration and decision making between CVS and Kinship

This is a five-year strategic plan. Measurement will continue over the duration of this plan. Actions will be modified based on feedback from our stakeholders and the data observed over the course of the plan.

Partners in Permanency

DFPS works with a large number of partners to care for the children in substitute care. There are many stakeholders involved in the process of finding and providing substitute care for these children, in determining the best course of action to ensure the safety and well-being of the child, and in providing services to the family and the child. DFPS cannot make progress on the strategic plan without the support from these key stakeholders

Partners in Permanency



Action Plan to Achieve Goals

Permanency Strategic Plan



The action plan to achieve the permanency goals has several integrated facets. These are highlighted in the diagram above. They include:

Call to Action

Each region will hold a Regional Summit on Permanency. Supported by Casey Family Programs, CPS will bring an external speaker to each region to meet with internal staff and key external stakeholders. Each region will choose the location of its event, customize its agenda, determine the attendees, and host its summit. The keynote speaker, Amelia Franck Meyer, presents a compelling and inspiring seminar that builds a sense of urgency for permanency. She highlights the academic research on the impact of childhood trauma, the harm to children caused by delays in achieving permanency, and the negative impact of multiple placements. Lastly, she presents specific, new clinical strategies to address the trauma caused by removal and placement changes. Regions will supplement Ms. Meyer's presentation with local content and take the opportunity to review local data with stakeholders. Region 6B, for example, hosted a panel of former foster children to share their own experiences about moving from home to home and about the importance of permanency to their lives. Region 1 supervisors created *Vision Boards* which are visual displays of their vision for permanency for the children they serve. The summits will all occur in calendar year 2015.

Regional Action Plans

CPS recognizes the importance of acting locally when approaching Permanency. Each region has its own set of challenges ranging from rural areas with limited availability of services to urban locations with multiple court systems to navigate. Language issues, disproportionality challenges, and location of available foster parents or relatives add to the complexity of increasing the number of children achieving positive permanency quickly. While State Office has facilitated the process of creating Permanency action plans, each region owns their individual plan.

The process of developing a plan started with a state-wide meeting of all regional leaders in the Conservatorship stage of service. All Program Directors, Program Administrators and Regional Directors came together with their State Office counterparts and spent two days reviewing their regional data and determining their own issues. Facilitators led each region through a root cause analysis to understand the underlying implications of the data and to drive the regional plan. Based on their assessment of their issues, the regions each selected a primary area of focus. Some focused on accelerating reunification with parents, some on working better with relatives to find positive permanency, and some on non-relative and relative adoptions. The table below summarizes the primary area of focus for each region.

Regional Areas of Focus

Region	Reunification	Relatives/Kin	Adoption
1/9		✓	
2		✓	
3	✓		
4/5		✓	
6a	✓		
6b			✓
7	✓		
8	✓		
10			✓
11			✓

Regional Map



The regions each created action plans to jumpstart their effort and move their culture towards an increased sense of urgency. They established checkpoints for reviewing their progress and determined how they would incorporate the action plans into their normal operations. Highlights of the regional plans are shown below.

Region 1/9

This region identified a number of changes they could make to their operational processes to move with an increased sense of urgency. They plan to conduct family group conferences earlier and to increase the amount of concurrent planning. They are linking the Transformation initiative around aligning Kinship with the CVS units to support their Permanency work. They are increasing their use of the PUSH list, training Kinship workers on PRIDE, and including FAD staff in their efforts. They will increase the amount of work they do across Regions 1 and 9 to support this effort. In addition, they have created an internal tracking tool to monitor their progress on all the necessary activities.

Region 2

This region immediately established very specific goals for the children in care. They updated the region's Fostering Connections procedures and protocols and developed a CVS job aid to assist staff on what work should be done in the first 30 days of the case. They are working with their CPAs to address barriers to kinship families completing pre service training, as well as putting a plan together to train Kinship Staff in PRIDE (the CPS pre service training). In addition, they have updated the region's CPA

provider manual and shared with the Provider Child Placing Agency Council for the region. They have implemented a tracking and monitoring plan for kinship home studies and have monthly calls with providers to discuss the status of individual families and the barriers to the completion of the home study. They are expanding the focus on Permanency to other stages of service and asking the FBSS staff and the Special Investigators to assist in finding relatives. They are enlisting the support of their local CASA in finding relatives. They conduct monthly adoption staffings between CVS units and Adoption staff. Children identified for transfer are staffed and the list is monitored to ensure cases are updated and ready for transfer.

Region 3

As a large region, Region 3 looked at the workload of their caseworkers and the process flow they used to do their work. They identified opportunities for streamlining the Family Reunification Staffing forms and tools and consolidating them with other conservatorship forms and processes. They looked to simplify the work the CVS worker does to free up time to promote faster reunification and better family engagement. They are working closely with the largest CPA in their region, Our Community/Our Kids, to host their regional summit. They are also aligning this effort with the rollout of Foster Care Redesign in their region and with the rollout of the Transformation initiative on Accelerated Family Reunification. They are focused on changing the language they use between their Program Directors and supervisors/caseworkers to reflect the importance of engaging families. They are also focused on increasing the availability of services in all parts of their region.

Region 4/5

To increase exits to relatives, this region focused on increasing the coordination between Kinship, CVS, and FAD. They plan to revise their protocol for these three areas, accelerate the way they involve workers from these areas in cases, and train Kinship workers on PRIDE. They will match the FAD workers with Kinship workers to increase communication and coordination. They will expand the preliminary assessment (kinship assessment). They plan to work with their stakeholders to see if courts will agree to particular days where they only hear CPS cases and will provide judges and attorneys more information on PCA.

Region 6a

Casey Family Programs began working with Harris County last year. They have already made significant progress in achieving positive permanency for hundreds of children. Their current focus is to introduce the CANS assessment and develop data and reporting around it. They are focused on creating a map and catalog of services and comparing it to the historical needs of the population being served. They will develop capacity for evidence-based interventions if need exists. They will use trauma based case planning to better match need with services.

In an effort to improve child welfare outcomes in Texas and in response to a request of DFPS in House Bill 748 of the 83rd Legislative Session 2013, DFPS was selected for a child welfare waiver demonstration project that involves the waiver of certain requirements of Title IV-E from the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Region 6b

This region also identified a number of training and process changes they will make to accelerate achieving positive permanency. They identified opportunities for training new caseworkers and changes to the protocol for how to handle cases where permanency has stalled. They identified changes to the protocol for transferring to the adoption units. They are focused on the role INV and FBSS can play in achieving faster permanency as well. Working with their stakeholders, they identified training for their regional attorneys and ways to bring lack of resource issues to the awareness of the Faith Based groups and the Regional Council. They met with the Child Welfare Boards in twelve counties to discuss ways they can support permanency. They have conducted meetings with judges in all twelve counties as well. They talked to CPS partners about home studies and ways to increase the approval rating and quality of the studies. They offered visitation matters training to all programs.

Region 7

This region started with a focus on behaviors, not services, which are necessary to get kids home. They identified areas where terminology changes could influence behaviors, such as renaming the Removal Staffing to Initial Reunification Staffing. They looked at the issues that prevent staff from family reunification and identified coaching opportunities for local leadership to work with staff.

Region 8

This region identified opportunities for immediate action and communication to their staff. They took a data-driven approach which included teaching supervisors how to pull data warehouse reports to assess progress against their goals. They identified their best performing CVS unit and conducted a process review of what they did differently from other units. They pulled the list of all children in Family Reunification placements and drilled down on the barriers to permanency. Their focus is on creating individual plans for each case to accelerate progress. They also plan to name Reunification Champions and to emphasize early use of the Family Group Conference as a tool.

Region 10

This region reviewed their data and identified a need to focus on children ages 2-12 that have been in care over two years. These children and their siblings were assigned to the Making Permanency Priority (MP3) team members to review and analyze any specific trends and patterns which may have been a hindrance in achieving permanency. In addition, this team is responsible for providing support, guidance, and assistance to the caseworker in overcoming the identified barriers for each child. Five separate workgroups have been formed to focus on specific systemic barriers and develop solutions. These groups are comprised of staff at all levels and are inclusive of all program areas. The PUSH (Putting Us in Safe Homes) workgroup developed an Adoption Readiness Consultation to move children into adoption. The TARE workgroup is exploring better practice in matching children. The youth workgroup (ages 13-17) is identifying barriers and solutions specific to this age group. The media campaign workgroup is working with local CPAs for specific recruitment activities. The Investigation/FBSS workgroup is focused on family connections at the beginning of every case.

Region 11

This region focused on improving adoptions. They looked at their processes and identified ways to increase the coordination across CVS, FAD, KIN, and FGDM workers. They looked at training opportunities for their workers. They held a permanency conference and are increasing their use of parallel processes. They want to increase the recognition they give staff who do move quickly and successfully to adoptions.

Regional Monitoring

Each region is paired with a liaison from State Office. Once a month, the region reports to State Office the progress they have made towards their plan. Together, they assess progress and barriers. They share ideas and lessons learned from other regions.

On a quarterly basis, the State Office Permanency team will pull data across all regions and assess progress towards each of the goals. They will update the plans, as needed, to continue to make steady progress.

State Monitoring

With the assistance of the State Office CPS Systems Improvement Division, CPS will use data analytics to identify which children are at a higher risk of not achieving permanency and implement a process to review cases involving such children shortly after they enter conservatorship to ensure needed actions that promote permanency have been completed.

Creating a Culture of Permanency

Permanency is not a new area of focus for CPS; it has always been a priority for the agency and many program enhancements have occurred to support the goal of achieving positive permanency for children. There is no single program enhancement or practice that in isolation would exit children to positive permanency; rather, together, the interplay of the practices contributes to the desired outcome. Below is a summary of the existing initiatives.

Visitation

When children in substitute care visit with their family, they experience less anxiety and depression and there is an increased likelihood for reunification and other positive outcomes, including reduced time in foster care. DFPS is committed to ensuring children in substitute care visit family. In 2013, CPS partnered with key stakeholders to enhance its visitation practices. This partnership resulted in the following initiatives:

- Enhanced Visitation/Visitation Matters – Tools and training were developed to ensure workers understand the importance of visitation and to aid them in providing parents with direction and skill development.
- Contracted visitation – DFPS developed procedures to contractually procure for supervised visitation services to observe and document parent/caregiver interactions with a child.
- Visitation coaching – HHSC is developing a new benefit for children in foster care called “Enhanced Parental Visitation,” with the goal of decreasing time in conservatorship and increasing the likelihood that reunification/permanency is achieved.

Family Group Decision Making

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) describes a variety of collaborative practices to work with and engage children, youth, and families in safety and service planning and decision-making. CPS began using FGDM in the conservatorship stage of service in 2003, and expanded the practice into the investigative stage in 2007 and into the family based safety services stage in 2009. DFPS has applied FGDM in the following ways:

- Family Team Meeting (FTM) – An FTM is generally held in the investigations stage before a child is removed from the home but may be used in other stages of service. This model is used to provide a quick, family-involved response to concerns regarding the child’s safety or placement, and it is used to achieve positive results for the child during the earliest stages of interaction with CPS.
- Family Group Conference (FGC) – An FGC is generally held after a child is removed but may also be used before removal when the family is receiving family based safety services. The FGC is used to convene the child’s family, other relatives, friends, and community members, to develop a plan for the child and family that addresses specific concerns and ensures the child is cared for and protected from future harm.
- Circle of Support (COS) – A COS is held when a youth who has been removed from his or her home reaches age 16. The COS focuses on developing a transition plan and on connecting the youth to supportive and caring adults who can provide support when the youth becomes an adult.

Kinship

Kinship care is a term that describes the care of a child by relatives or close family friends, also known as fictive kin. Kinship caregivers are the preferred placements for children who must be removed from their home because they maintain connections with their families and communities. Children placed in kinship care are less likely to re-enter care than a child in foster care, experience fewer placement changes, and are more likely to be placed with siblings, among other benefits. Kinship care has been in place for decades; however, in 2009, DFPS formalized the program and added supports for kinship caregivers. Examples of new kinship initiatives include:

- Kinship Development Worker – This CPS worker helps kinship caregiver navigate services, address placement needs, and participate in case planning.
- Kids2Kin – This practice change identifies and tracks children placed in kinship homes to resolve barriers that prevent timely permanency.
- Financial Supports for Kinship Caregivers – Qualified caregivers may receive a one-time \$1,000 integration payment for one child (plus \$495 for each additional sibling in the family group) and up to \$500 for each child in reimbursement for flexible expenses each year. Also, Kinship caregivers who meet eligibility requirements and who are awarded permanent managing conservatorship by the court can qualify for additional financial supports.

Parent and Youth Collaborations

CPS engages parents and youth in practice and policy development, as these individuals bring a unique perspective and offer recommendations for changes based upon personal experiences. These collaborations include the statewide Parent Collaboration Group, a partnership between DFPS and

parents who have been recipients of CPS services, and the Youth Leadership Council, a group consisting of current and former foster youth.

Adoption

When the abuse and neglect suffered by a child or youth is so severe that parental rights are terminated, DFPS first pursues adoption, as it provides the most legal protections. To support adoption, DFPS has several initiatives, including:

- Adoption Assistance – This program defers some of the costs associated with adopting a child with special needs. Benefits include health insurance, reimbursement for certain one-time expenses (up to \$1,200 per adoption), and monthly payments to assist with the child’s needs.
- Operation PUSH (Placing Us in Safe Homes) – This annual initiative seeks to identify children in DFPS conservatorship who are near adoption and “push” to complete tasks to finalize the adoption. It began in 2005, and occurs between April and November (National Adoption Month).

Texas has been selected to participate in a five-year project through the National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG). This partnership with the QIC-AG is to implement new interventions and develop system capacity, not only to promote adoption and guardianship as permanency options, but also to support adoptive and guardianship families. Over the five-year initiative, Texas will receive financial resources, technical assistance, and guidance from the QIC-AG Partnership Team, which includes experts from Spaulding for Children, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Children’s Bureau.

Texas has selected to participate in the Pre-Permanency Continuum of Services & Supports. These services and supports are directed towards engagement, preparation, and connecting families to services prior to finalization of adoption or guardianship. Pre-permanency services focus on increasing resiliency and ensuring permanency and placement stability. These services focus on emotional-behavioral health issues and provide caregivers with education that improves their capacity to support stable permanency once adoption or guardianship has been finalized.

Expected Long-Term Outcomes for the five years of the grant:

- Increased post-permanency stability;
- Improved behavioral health for children; and
- Improved child and family well-being.

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) – Texas created this online recruitment tool for prospective adoptive homes in 1995. Texas was the first state to use an electronic photo listing of children waiting for adoption. DFPS increased user friendliness and responsiveness to families with a redesign in 2011.

CPS developed additional practices and policies to ensure children exit DPFS conservatorship to permanent families and to reduce the number of youth that age out of care, including:

- Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) – PRTs are an internal consultation process to facilitate discussions regarding children and youth in the permanent managing conservatorship of DFPS, with priority given to cases involving children and youth who are in care the longest, who are not in their intended permanent placements, or who meet other criteria (i.e., children and youth of color).
- APPLA Policy – In 2013, CPS changed its policy to reflect that no child under 16 can have a permanency goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, to ensure young children do not grow up in DFPS conservatorship. In 2014, the U.S. Congress codified this policy in HR 4980, *Preventing Trafficking and Strengthen Family Act*.
- Mediation – A policy on mediations exists to ensure legal agreements are not made that will prohibit children from achieving positive permanency. Program Directors must approve decisions when DFPS is given permanent managing conservatorship of a child without termination of parental rights.

Youth Transitioning to a Successful Adulthood

Preparing youth for successful transition into adulthood is every parent's responsibility, including DFPS. While achieving positive permanency is the ultimate goal, providing knowledge and skills is done concurrently while preparing youth for permanency. To assist in this process, DFPS has a division dedicated to transitional services to support youth as well as young adults who participate in extended foster care, and those youth formally in foster care.

Beginning at age 16, all youth in DFPS conservatorship participate in Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes; however, Preparing youth for adulthood involves much more than teaching youth how to find a job, balance a checkbook and sign a lease. Transitional services include involvement in programs aimed at improving youths' self-esteem and improving their ability to make responsible decisions. Transitional Living Services include, but not limited to:

- Experiential Life Skills Training for Youth Ages 14 and Older;
- Opportunities for youth to participate in regional and statewide conferences and councils;
- Ongoing provision of information and support through Texas Youth Hotline, Texas Youth Connection website and Facebook Page;
- Access to Post-Secondary Education Resources:
 - The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program
 - State College Tuition and Fee waiver
 - Temporary Housing Assistance Between Academic Terms
- Access to medical coverage after the age of 18, and;
- Access to ongoing case management and housing through the age of 21 for youth who are finishing high school, completing college or vocational/technical training, working at least 80 hours a month, or if disabled and not able to complete education or employment related goals.

Transformation Initiatives

As part of the CPS Transformation work, the Reunification and Permanency (RAP) team sponsored the piloting, evaluation, and statewide rollout of a number of initiatives. Each region determined their own sequence and timing for rollout and worked with their staff and stakeholders to make these initiatives successful in their region. The concepts, and the results from the pilots, are summarized below.

Alignment of kinship workers and conservatorship units

This initiative paired kinship workers with conservatorship unit. This kinship worker is subsequently assigned to all of that unit's cases needing a kinship referral. Historically, kinship workers were assigned geographically. This resulted in some situations of siblings groups placed with different relatives having different kinship workers. The expected outcome for this change is to reduce time to positive permanency by expediting financial and other support for kinship placements by increasing participation of the kinship worker and caregivers in permanency planning meetings and legal proceedings, and by increasing placement stability. The evaluation results of this pilot are still under review, as initial data collection and analysis revealed some needed modifications in the evaluation design. CPS is working with DFPS Information Technology and MRS to improve the availability of meaningful data.

Timing of CVS Worker Assignment

This initiative focuses on assigning a CVS worker to a case earlier in the process than the typical assignment timeframe. In some regions, CPS assigns the CVS worker very early in the process. In other regions, this does not occur until well after the first court hearing. The concept is to get CVS workers involved as soon as possible so they can meet the family at the first court hearing, familiarize themselves with the case, and start working with the family sooner.

Accelerated Family Reunification

The law provides that CPS cases must be concluded in a year. That statute was significantly more aggressive than the later federal legislation but in both instances the intent was to provide parents a clear time frame to work towards safe reunification while also clearly emphasizing the need for legal permanence for the child. However, one unintended consequence of this statute is that CPS and other legal stakeholders sometimes delays reunifying the child with his or her family during that 12 month period. This initiative was designed to focus on cases that meet very strict criteria for potential reunification earlier than normal. This initiative refocuses the threshold for reunification by asking workers to consider the question "Why can't the child go home today?" While this is not a new idea, it is worth repeating and emphasizing. It encourages workers to consider scenarios in which the parent has done well in completing the requested services and is capable of providing a safe home.

The tracking for this initiative is dependent upon the number of cases that qualify under the criteria and the evaluation monitors time to reunification. Specifically, for the pilot, the RAP team measured the average time in days from removal to a trial home visit for the children in a trial home visit.

FGC within 30 days of removal

A Family Group Conference is a meeting in which the family, partnering with CPS and other stakeholders, creates the family service plan. This has proven to be a critical step in engaging parents regarding the activities required for positive permanency. The rationale behind this initiative is to

conduct an FGC early so that parents are engaged sooner, a service plan is created early, and permanency occurs sooner. It also speeds up the identification of potential relative placements and permanency resources (individuals who provide support to the child while in substitute care).

Statewide Legal Plan

CPS regional attorneys will educate the county and district attorneys who represent Child Protective Services on transformation and permanency initiatives. This includes a plan to meet individually with those attorneys in order to build relationships and share information. Managing attorneys have begun the process of working collaboratively with CPS by participating in and arranging "brown bag" lunches where updated statistics regarding children in foster care are shared. Both managing and regional attorneys are participating in regular "judge's meetings" where barriers to permanency are discussed with a view toward improving case outcomes. Managing attorneys will attend Permanency Summits in their areas and regional attorneys are attending trainings offered by CPS program.

Regional litigation will be sending out bi-monthly letters that provide information about the various offices of the services and support that the regional legal offices can provide, including specialized trainings and expertise in areas such as immigration, ICWA and appellate matters. Included in the letters will be contact information for the regional managing attorneys, a link to DFPS' Practice Guide, information about our monthly CLE training, and information on how to obtain CPS case records.

CPS will continue to use the scholarship program to allow attorneys to attend specialized training as it relates to Permanency. Examples of this training include "Implicit Bias" as presented by Dr. Jeffrey Rachlinski at the New Judges Conference in January 2015; "Our Children's Well-Being" as presented by Judge Scott McCown at the Child Welfare Judges Conference in August 2015; and Judges Chris Oldner's and Meca Walker's presentation at the Cross-Systems Summit by the Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities in August 2015. Additionally, the Child Protection Law Bench Book was updated and released in August 2015 and included an updated chapter on Disproportionality.

Faith Based Community Plans

DFPS uses Faith-Based efforts in child welfare work, specifically the use of Faith-Based recruitment. Two pieces of legislation provide guidance regarding these efforts. HB 2468 (1995, Section 162.309, ratified in 1997 in the Texas Family Code) established the Advisory Committee on Promoting Adoption of Minority Children; and SB 1489 (2003, Section 264.113 of the Texas Family Code), which addressed the needs of children removed by engaging congregations of faith within the community where the child resides. This legislation was removed from statute by the 84th legislative session but is under review to determine if it needs to be placed in rule.

Advisory Committee on Promoting Adoption of Minority Children (ACPAMC)

Established in 1995, the Advisory Committee on Promoting Adoption of Minority Children (ACPAMC) promotes the adoption of and provision of services to adoptable minority children by studying, developing and evaluating programs and projects relating to community awareness and education, family support, counseling, parenting skills and education, and reform of the child welfare system. The

ACPAMC sets goals each year and presents an annual report to the DFPS Council no later than November 1st each year as legislated to outline progress on these goals.

“Adoption Forums” and other community engagement meetings are held in partnership with pastors as well as Child Placing Agencies to educate the community on the need for placement resources in any geographic area. The committee also works in each community to encourage support to birth parents, relatives, fostering, and adopting families from the faith community.

Collaborative Case Planning Work Group

In March 2015, CPS launched a workgroup of internal staff and key leaders from Child Placing Agencies to focus on a new, more collaborative approach to planning services for children and families. The group created a vision for the future on how CPS and CPAs can work together better. The vision centered around seeing the family as one unit, supporting the parents as well as the children with services, getting everyone to the table, and sharing more information with foster families, providers and biological parents, thus prioritizing the sequence of services. This will enable the caregiver to learn from the parents the child’s normal routines and allow for less disruption in the child’s life. It will allow the caregiver to know all the medical history and the child’s triggers. It will support better normalcy for the child in activities like sports, as well as more contact between the child and their parents. The parents will have more hope and motivation and a plan for moving forward.

The Work Group identified a number of barriers to achieving the vision and created three sub-groups to focus on the important activities in each area. Each of these consist of CPS and CPA personnel responsible for the outcomes. They are:

- Documentation and Policy Sub-Committee – This group is responsible for reviewing and updating the existing policy as it relates to child service planning. They are looking at the current practices regarding the timing and participation at the service planning meetings held by child placing agencies and CPS and working towards making recommendations on how to create a plan that serves both CPS and the CPA.
- Training Sub-Committee – This group is responsible for reviewing and updating the existing training materials, curriculum, and training audience. They will recommend and make necessary changes to support the new comprehensive plan.
- Contracts/Legal/Minimum Standards Sub-Committee – This group will examine the existing contracts, minimum standards, and legal requirements and make recommendations for necessary changes to align with the requirements of the Comprehensive Plan practice.

The entire Work Group meets quarterly to monitor progress.

Residential Contracting

Within DFPS, Residential Child Care Licensing (RCCL), CPS regional operations, and the CPS residential contracts monitoring unit work together to keep children in foster care safe. RCCL has responsibility for licensing residential child care facilities, investigating claims of abuse and neglect for DFPS children at these facilities, monitoring the facilities, and providing training as well as technical support to these providers. CPS regional operations place children and coordinate with RCCL as needed. The CPS regional

contracts unit procures and manages contracts with 300+ licensed foster homes for children in CPS conservatorship.

Today's system of monitoring residential facilities with CPS Purchased Client Services relies heavily on administrative and financial indicators, not on outcomes of child safety, permanency, and well-being. Monitoring is annual, not real-time. Monitoring is desk-based and reactive. Both the Sunset Commission as well as Internal Audit have recommended the CPS residential contracts monitoring unit move to a performance-based approach focused on the outcomes of child-safety, permanency, and well-being. The new performance measures will be organized around these key themes. They are aligned with the goals of this Permanency Strategic Plan. A draft version of the current and proposed performance measures, as they relate to permanency, are shown below.

	Current Performance Measures	New Performance Measures
Permanency	Child placements remain stable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average length of Stay in Foster Care • Number of placement disruptions

The timeline for this effort includes Design work for FY2015, a demonstration of concept in FY2016, expansion to additional providers in FY2017, and full implementation by FY2018.

Capacity Building

Research has shown the importance of having the right services in the right place to meet a child and parent's needs. It is important for Texas to have a sufficient number of foster homes to enable placing a child as geographically close to the parent's home as possible. This enables the child to maintain the connection to their school, their friends, their neighbors and many other familiar places. Convenient services enable the parents to take advantage of the services offered by the State and regularly attend parenting classes, therapy sessions or other relevant service commitments. Lengthy drive times, challenging bus schedules, or lack of services in the parent's neighborhood reduce the likelihood of successful participation in the recommended family plan.

CPS is committed to identifying the gaps in service capacity at a local level and working with HHSC, legislators, and community leaders to rectify the shortages.

Stakeholder Awareness Campaigns and Communication

The regional summits started the communication campaign, both internally and externally. These provided the emotional appeal for urgency and the actual data for the starting point for each location. To sustain the momentum, CPS has a number of additional communications activities planned at statewide and local levels. Highlights of these are:

Regional

- Regions are working with local judges, attorneys, CASA and tribal councils to highlight the importance of positive permanency and work as a community to find more solutions

Judges

- CPS presented at the CPS Judges Conference in August 2015
- CPS presented at the Judges Conference in September 2015

Child Placing Agencies

- CPS will present on permanency and collaborative service planning at the Alliance Conference in 2015
- CPS will present Permanency Values Training and Visitation Matters at the Texas Foster Family Association (TFFA) Conference in 2015

CASA

- DFPS and Texas CASA are working to develop Family Finding pilot which will include enhanced training and skill development for CPS staff and CASA to collaboratively work towards finding family of children served.
- CPS will present a visitation workshop at the 2015 CASA Conference

Conclusion

CPS is committed to the goals of the Permanency Strategic Plan, including reducing the time to positive permanency, achieving permanency for children under six years old who have been in care two or more years, and reducing the number of youth exiting without positive permanency. This will require a cultural shift, both for CPS and for all the stakeholders involved in the lives of children in care. All parties will need to demonstrate a sense of urgency in safely achieving permanency. CPS will work within the context of the Practice Model and will enlist the support of every caseworker in every stage of service to move towards the ambitious goals contained in this plan. CPS will monitor progress and continue to make the necessary behavioral, organizational, process, and technology changes to achieve success for the children and youth who depend on us.