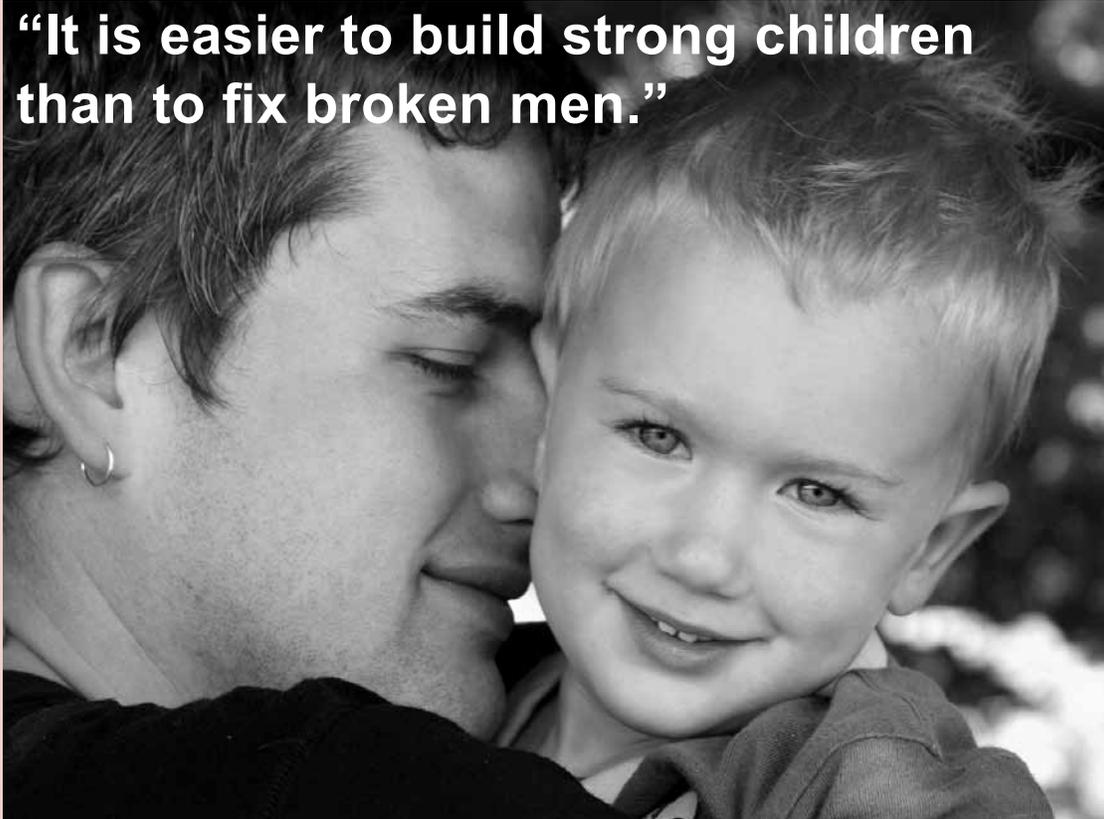


**“It is easier to build strong children  
than to fix broken men.”**



The quote on the front cover is by Frederick Douglass, 1818 to 1895, who escaped from slavery and became a leader in the abolitionist movement, a social reformer, an orator, a writer and a statesman. This adage carries the wisdom of generations, experience, and science and it remains true to this day.

# INTRODUCTION



For a number of years, the New York State Citizen Review Panels have called for a shift in child welfare practice away from removing children from their homes and into foster care placements, to supporting families and building communities so families can better care for their children.

We know quite a bit about the human costs and lost opportunities when we don't support and strengthen families enough and have to remove a child from his or her home. Chapin Hall researchers conducted a longitudinal study following former foster youth, and in 2011 reported on how those youth have fared as adults at age 26. By that age, most young people have completed their education, formed good relationships, found employment, and are settling down.<sup>1</sup> Many former foster youth have not reached these important life stage events, and they continue to struggle. For example, the findings show:

- 19.9% of former foster youth did not have a high school diploma or GED compared to 6.1% of youth in the comparison group<sup>2</sup>
- 2.5% completed a four year degree compared to 23.5% in the comparison group
- 48.3% were employed compared to 79.9% in the comparison group
- Average earnings were \$13,989 vs. \$32,312 in the comparison group
- Foster youth were less likely to have health insurance, 58.7% vs. 78%, and more likely to be receiving Medicaid or other medical assistance, 47% vs. 9% in the comparison group
- 56.6% received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits over the past year
- Girls were more likely to have been pregnant, 79.2% vs. 55% in the comparison group
- Former foster youth were more likely to have been incarcerated, 57% vs. 13% in the comparison group
- 31% reported being homeless or having couch-surfed within the past two years<sup>3,4</sup>

The costs of these poor outcomes are enormous. Each youth who is out of work and out of school, as are many former foster care youth, costs taxpayers \$13,900 per year and accounts for a social burden of \$37,450 per year.<sup>5</sup> By the time a “disconnected” or “opportunity youth” reaches age 25, his or her projected lifetime burden to taxpayers and society amounts to \$170,740 in tax dollars and \$529,030 in social costs, or a combined total of \$700,000 per youth.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, a conservative cost estimate totals \$5.7 billion for each cohort year of foster youth who age out of care. Further, the value placed on avoiding criminal justice involvement, heavy drug use or failure to complete high school ranges from \$2.6 to \$5.3 million per youth.<sup>7</sup>

New York cannot afford the lost productivity, lost tax revenues, increased crime, and burden on our communities due to a failure to address the trauma, social-emotional, medical and mental health, and educational needs of the children who enter the child welfare system early on. The more effective approach is to build strong families, prevent abuse or neglect in the first instance, ensure early identification and intervention as needed, and avoid foster care placements.

New York State is beginning to realize the benefits that result from supporting families and keeping children in their homes. Over the past five years, even when reports to the State Central Register (SCR) increased, fewer children were placed into foster care. Implementation of Family Assessment Response (FAR) has meant that fewer families experience an intrusive child protective services (CPS) investigation, and instead are partnering with CPS caseworkers to define and seek needed assistance and supports. Increased investments into home visiting programs are leading to improved parenting skills, less abuse and neglect, increased school success and other benefits.<sup>8</sup> When children

must be removed from their families, more placements are being made with relatives, a practice that achieves better outcomes. Kinship Guardianship Assistance (KinGAP) legislation was enacted in 2010 providing support for long-term guardianship commitments. New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) included addressing Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparities (DMR) as a priority in their work with counties and continues to expand this effort to an increasing number of counties. These are all extremely positive developments in practice that are good for children, good for families, good for communities, and good for New York State's bottom line.

Progress has been made, but more needs to be done. Some of the panels' recommendations over the past five years require further attention. For instance, though perceptions are changing, FAR still requires a call to SCR and family members worry about having their children removed, a barrier that should be addressed. Stresses on state and local budgets have transitioned many "optional" or "voluntary" services to "mandatory" services, which used to be reimbursed at a 75% state share.<sup>9</sup> Over the past few years, there has been a lack of investment into evidence-based preventive and intervention services of sufficient intensity and duration to address the immense social-emotional and education needs of children involved in the child welfare system. Difficulties remain when dealing with "cross-systems" children who require coordination across several agencies. The reduction in Community Optional Prevention Services (COPS) funding to almost a fifth of what it once was means that local departments of social services (LDSS) don't have the flexibility required to adequately meet service needs, unless a call is made to the State Central Registry. The panels have also called for changes to the educational neglect statute for teens because a CPS solution in these cases does not work; this statute has not been changed and evidence-based models to better engage students have yet to be identified. And, racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities continue to exist.

Panel members encourage further reforms that focus on building strong families and supporting child and family well-being, with the goal of reducing the occurrence of abuse and neglect in the first instance. When we do the right thing, it benefits kids, families, communities and taxpayers. We need to invest in vulnerable children, address any trauma they may have experienced, and help and support them on a path to success.

In their position as citizen advocates, the three New York State Citizen Review Panels work on behalf of New York's most vulnerable children and families, those who come through the front door of the child welfare system. In that role, the panels respectfully submit their recommendations jointly.

Key New York State Child Welfare Facts, 2011	
SCR Reports Accepted	156,258
Number of children named in reports	219,383
SCR Reports Assigned to Investigative Track	146,997 or 94%
SCR Reports Assigned to FAR	9,261 or 5.9%
Indicated Reports	48,493
Undetermined Reports	785
Recurrence, number of children	4,779 or 12.2%
Admissions into foster care	12,539
Exits out of foster care	14,425
In care population, 12/31/11	21,463

Source: OCFS Data Warehouse of as 12/16/11 and 1/31/12.  
 Accessed at <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cfsr/counties.asp>.

# 2012 RECOMMENDATIONS

## PREVENTION

**Reimburse open-ended preventive funding at the full 65% state share, as called for in New York State's statute.**

**Revise New York's statute to return to a 75% state/25% local share for primary prevention and intervention services.**

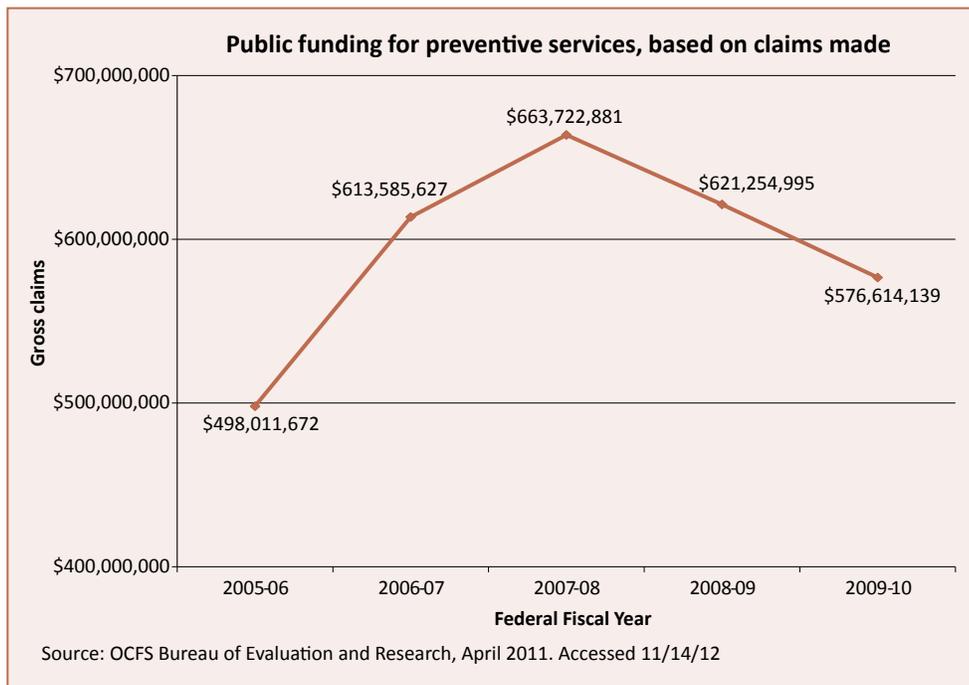
This funding supports protective, preventive, adoption, aftercare, and independent living services with the aim of reducing repeat maltreatment and re-entry into the system. The fact that foster care numbers continue to decline is verification of the focus by OCFS and LDSS on providing links to needed services that support families. But quality and access are not always available. Since the state share was reduced by 3% in the past few budget years, counties have had to come up with a 38% share to offer these services. County budgets are stressed, leaving county executives with difficult decisions regarding which critical services to fund. In many instances this preventive funding in county budgets is "swept" for other purposes. The state should support funding for these services at the statutory 65% in place of the current 62% share.

Because these services are often mandatory, the panels call for restoration to the 75% state share used previously, before funding sources for both mandated and community optional preventive services were combined into one. In addition, severe reductions in funding for COPS programs have stripped away counties' ability to identify and serve children at-risk of foster care placement, absent a call to the SCR.

Child well-being will become a more important focus of the child welfare system as it moves forward with reforms. The system is expected to ensure child safety, permanency, and well-being, but has focused predominantly on safety and permanency. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children, Youth and Families issued an Information Memorandum to announce the Administration's priority of promoting social and emotional well-being for children and youth receiving child welfare services.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis on social and emotional well-being recognizes the latest research evidence documenting that the trauma children experience from poverty, abuse and neglect negatively impacts their developing brains, health, and functioning. State child welfare systems will be expected to achieve better outcomes on well-being indicators.

They can do this by focusing on early interventions, increased access to evidence-based or evidence-informed practices, and offering more holistic approaches involving collaborations across systems with data sharing. Panel members ask that OCFS provide the strong leadership needed to make this shift in practice successful in New York State.

Panel members urge the state to fund these important services at the full share called for in statute and to support a change in statute to increase the state share to 75%.



## FAMILY ASSESSMENT RESPONSE (FAR)

**Continue to support implementation of Family Assessment Response throughout New York State.**

**Maintain flexibility in funding and regulations to allow local departments of social services to decide how best to implement FAR to meet individual family needs.**

For many years, the New York State Citizen Review Panels have been strong supporters of FAR. They advocated for passage of permissive legislation in 2007 and again in 2011 to make the FAR option permanent in the state. Panel members followed with great interest the progress made with FAR implementation throughout the state. Now, 28 counties offer a FAR response and over 27,000 families have been assigned to the FAR track.<sup>11</sup> Many of the initial counties that adopted the FAR approach have expanded its use by increasing the number of teams dedicated to FAR and increasing the types of reports assigned to FAR.

Orange County, as one example, did both. The county grew its FAR workforce from 12 workers to 17½ and expanded the FAR approach to cases involving domestic violence, a category of reports often excluded by counties from an assignment to FAR. Orange County's process focuses on the child and whether or not a child has been harmed in any way. If an allegation suggests that the child was physically involved in an incident or has physical injuries, the case is assigned to the investigative track. Using solution-focused techniques inherent to FAR practice, caseworkers find that mothers are more open with them about the situation in the home and more receptive to services. In fact, mothers in these cases often have detailed safety plans of their own in place to protect their children. In Jen's situation, the father of her 8-year-old son became unpredictable when he used drugs; when not using, he was a good father. Caseworkers using the FAR approach provided support, outlined several options available, gave her the space to make the right decisions for her family, and provided needed assistance to make changes in her life to stay safe. She received an order of protection, her husband moved out of the house, and her son was able to keep contact with his father through supervised visits. The process empowered her and



provided a choice as to their future, something she did not have previously. One factor that contributes to FAR's success with these domestic violence cases is the co-location of the domestic violence liaison who goes out in the field with caseworkers on calls.

FAR represents a significant child welfare reform which offers an alternative approach that engages families in partnership with CPS workers to identify their needs, often poverty related, and match them with services. Evaluation of the first six pilot counties to implement FAR indicated that the approach was well received by both families and caseworkers.<sup>12</sup> Without compromising child safety, FAR removes the fear of involvement with CPS and family members are more receptive to accepting services. In one of those counties, mandated reporters now specifically ask that a report be tracked to FAR and the department is receiving calls from family members they would never have heard from previously. Another county reported saving money by identifying community resources and family supports that meet family members' needs. The county is spending less money on preventive services as a result.<sup>13</sup>

Panel members thank OCFS for its strong leadership with the implementation of FAR in New York State. Its rapid adoption by counties is testament to the careful

“Being dragged through CPS would have been awful. I feel like I would have gotten lost in the shuffle and that my baby would have been taken away. Knowing it was FAR and understanding what that meant, I felt hopeful. I felt that I had a chance, that someone cared and would help me through this. I felt that my needs as a mother and my family’s needs were heard and understood. I didn’t feel pressured into making quick, hasty decisions. I felt that I could take the time to make smart decisions. My son was allowed to continue his relationship with his father and he is doing well.”—Jen

planning, training, and coaching provided by OCFS staff and their contract trainers. Panel members are particularly excited that New York City is moving forward with FAR implementation.

Panel members urge OCFS’s continued support and leadership for the expansion of FAR throughout the state for all cases allowable under current law. FAR must maintain its flexibility in funding and regulations to allow each LDSS to decide how best to implement FAR, including contracting with service providers or meeting individual family needs.

## HOME VISITING

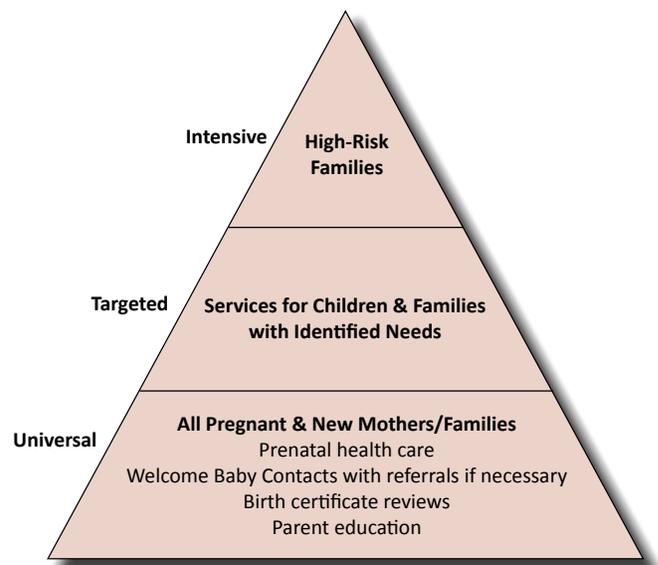
### Develop a five year plan to implement and fund universal maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting in New York State.

Maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting programs are a cost-effective means to reach out to new and expecting parents at a time when they need it most and are uniquely receptive to receive assistance.<sup>14</sup> Home visiting programs support new families by providing parenting education, linkages to services and health care, and offering appropriate screenings leading to early identification and linkages to intervention services. Programs such as Healthy Families New York and Nurse-Family Partnership are proven practices which can lead to reductions in low-birth weight babies, reductions in child abuse and neglect, improved parenting, and increased graduation rates.<sup>15</sup> This results in tremendous cost savings due to a decreased need for expensive services. Every \$1 spent on home visiting results in a return on investment of as much as \$2.24 to \$5.70.<sup>16, 17</sup>

While there are several effective home visiting models in New York State and many programs available across

the state, the number served is far short of the number who could benefit. Every year, 250,000 babies are born in New York, 100,000 of whom are born to first-time parents. Almost half of the new births are to low-income parents.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, there are gaps in eligibility and services offered with the various programs leaving many families with missed opportunities for help and support. New York State needs a universal system that is voluntary and offers, at minimum, a personal contact with all pregnant women with increased attention to those who could benefit most. This will require expansion of existing, evidence-based programs such as Healthy Families New York and Nurse-Family Partnership.

A three-tiered system for home visiting would include a universal contact with all pregnant women, assessments leading to targeted services for identified needs, and intensive services for those most at-risk. Specific attention would be given to the health and mental health needs of both mother and child; physical, social and emotional



development of the child; and parenting skills of family members, including fathers, or services for other identified concerns limiting family members' ability to better care for their children.<sup>19</sup>

Developing and implementing universal home visiting will take careful planning at both the community and state levels to assure statewide access to services for families, especially those most at-risk. It will also require sufficient funding.

Panel members urge the development of a five year plan to fully fund and implement universal home visiting in New York State.

## KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND KINSHIP CARE

**Fund Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) as an uncapped permanency option with no reduction to the Foster Care Block Grant.**

**Restore funding for Kinship Caregiver Programs.**

In New York State, 153,000 children, or 3% of all children, are living with relatives or close family friends in private or public kinship care arrangements. One in five of these children reside in formal, approved foster care families, amounting to 25% of the children in foster care.<sup>20</sup> Nationally, one in eleven children and one in five Black children spends at least three consecutive months in kinship care at some point before the age of 18.<sup>21</sup>

Kin placements lead to better outcomes for children than other foster placements. Children placed with family members experience less trauma, are better able to adjust, and are more likely to maintain sibling relationships. The placements are more stable due to fewer disruptions. For older youth in foster care, finding a kin placement may be their only opportunity to have a family. Too many leave foster care to live on their own without the support of family. For them, the outcomes are bleak. They are more likely to be disconnected (out of work and out of school), have higher rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration, and more likely to be on public benefits.<sup>22</sup>

New York State recognizes the importance of kin placements when children can't live with their parents. In 2010, New York enacted legislation to offer Kinship

Guardianship Assistance to family members, often grandparents on limited incomes, to continue to care for their relatives outside the formal foster care system with financial assistance. Implementation of KinGAP began in 2011. Funding for KinGAP was provided within the Foster Care Block Grant, a funding resource fully utilized to meet the complex needs of those children who remain in foster care. Having funding for KinGAP within the block grant means more local districts use local tax funds to cover funding once the block grant is expended. As of October 1, 2012, 40 KinGAP agreements were approved in the state.<sup>23</sup> OCFS child welfare practice emphasizes family engagement, family decision making, and Family Finding, all promising practices which will lead to more kin placements.

Attention must also be given to the large majority of children living with kin or close family friends outside the formal foster care system. They may be placed through formal custody arrangements or by informal agreements. These children have the same needs for services as those in approved foster care homes. Their family members have chosen to step up and care for them without financial or legal support and often without the expertise or knowledge to identify and enroll them into services, benefits, medical care and schools that meet their complex needs. These families deserve support as well.



Yet, funding for the services to families outside the formal foster care system decreased from over \$2.7 million in the 2009-10 Budget to under \$400,000 in the 2012-13 Budget. This resulted in three kinship caregiver programs closing their doors and another ten operating with greatly reduced services surviving on one-year TANF grants and private donations. Funding within the OCFS budget is used to support eight programs instead of the 21 regional programs it once supported.

The panels strongly urge funding support for Kinship Guardianship Assistance as an uncapped permanency option with no reduction to the Foster Care Block Grant, and restoration of funding to support kinship caregiver programs to keep children from entering the more costly foster care system.

## EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT

**Eliminate educational neglect as a basis for child protective reports for children 13 and older.**

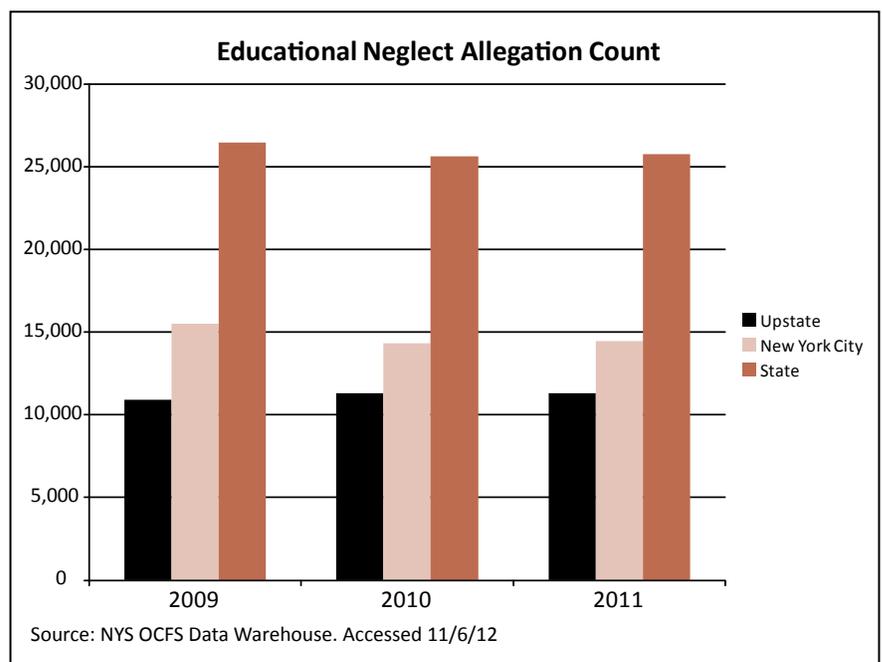
**Identify effective practices to reduce absenteeism, educate school district personnel about these practices, and support the implementation of promising models throughout school districts in New York State.**

The panels once again reiterate their 2010 recommendation calling for the elimination of educational neglect as a basis for child protective reports for children ages 13 and older. Nearly half of the states in the United States do not define educational neglect as a basis for a report in law.<sup>24</sup> Many of these reports involving teens are situations where teens choose for themselves not to attend school and school officials contact the SCR to report the parents. A CPS response in such cases is not effective and overwhelms CPS caseloads, taking caseworkers' time and attention away from serious cases of abuse and neglect.

Students who are chronically absent (defined as missing more than 10% of the school year whether excused or unexcused) compromise their education and their future. Schools and communities



have an important role in promoting attendance. Early on, schools should monitor attendance and help parents understand the importance of being in school. They should engage parents and create welcoming environments for both students and parents.<sup>25</sup> They should identify students with learning differences, develop individualized education plans (IEP) for them, and be accountable for meeting each student's plan. Each school should develop partnerships with community-based organizations, such as Bridge Builders in New York City, Say Yes to Education in Syracuse and Buffalo, and other on-going efforts in the state that help identify at-risk students early on, link to services that meet students and families needs, and provide tutoring, afterschool experiences and other educational supports.<sup>26, 27</sup>



New York City's Department of Education is working closely with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and other City agencies as part of the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative and Taskforce on Truancy and Absenteeism.<sup>28, 29</sup> The work involves identifying chronically absent students, engaging parents and helping students find pathways to success by providing mentors and other supports. The comprehensive three-year pilot, now in 100 schools in the city, will be rolled out citywide in 2013. An evaluation in the second year of the pilot with 50 schools demonstrated an increase in instruction time of over 11,000 days.<sup>30</sup> A different model, Student Attendance Review Boards (SARB), involving members from various community organizations and institutions, is used widely in California to address attendance and behavior problems with a goal of keeping students in school and out of the juvenile justice system.<sup>31</sup> With concentrated efforts placed on increasing attendance, schools can close the achievement gap and increase graduation rates.

School personnel must also understand what constitutes educational neglect in order to know when to make a report to the SCR. LDSS staff should reach out to school districts in their counties and offer staff development training on mandated reporting and what CPS can and cannot do. LDSS staff can work with school district personnel, especially social workers, to set up protocols for making reports to the SCR and to develop a process to resolve concerns before making a report to the SCR.



Panel members urge increased attention placed on the formation of community-school partnerships to increase early identification and interventions as needed and support attendance in schools. They also recommend a change in statute to eliminate educational neglect only reports for teenagers.

## DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY REPRESENTATION (DMR)

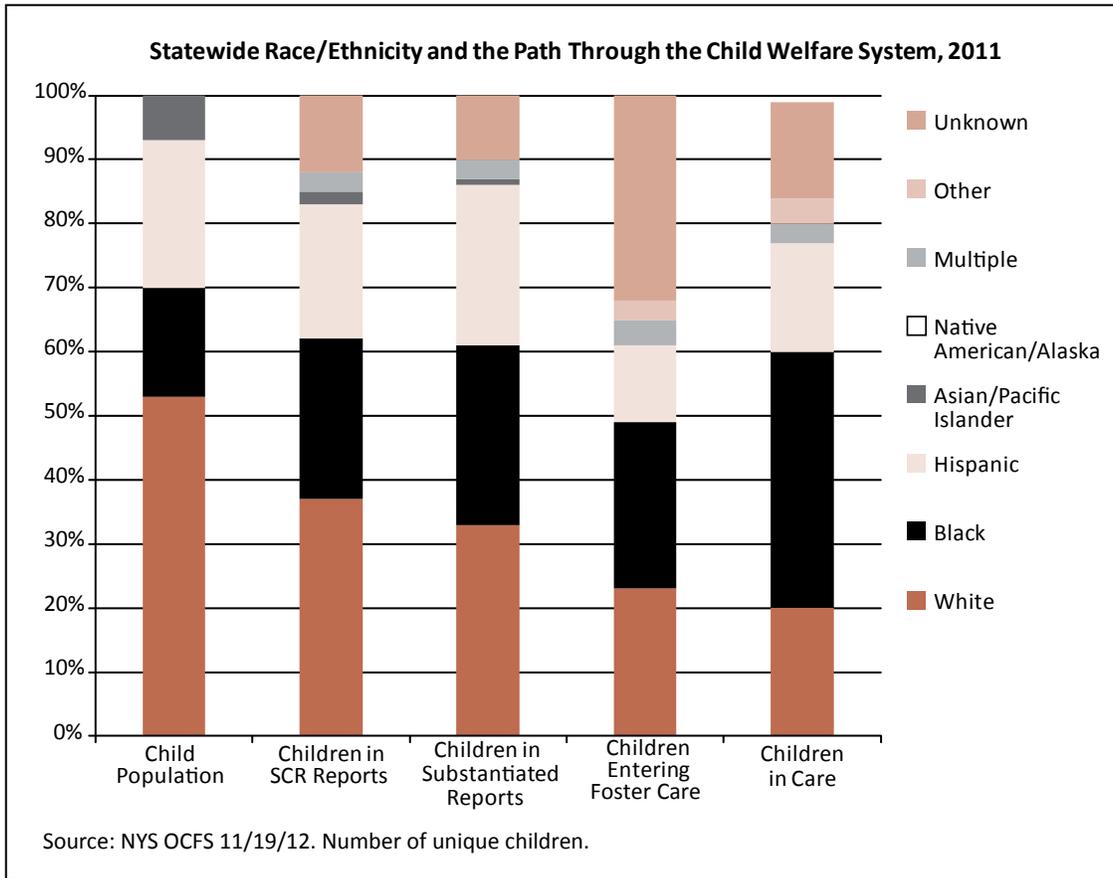
**Continue to address and seek to eliminate racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities by expanding OCFS's work to additional counties through the use of data informed and data driven strategies.**

**Recruit more racially and ethnically diverse and bi-lingual staff to child welfare.**

**Require continuous staff development and education advancing cultural competence and responsiveness in child welfare.**

Nationally, Black, Latino, and Native American children enter the child welfare system in greater numbers relative to their proportions of the general population. Once reported out of concern for abuse or neglect, they are more likely to progress through the system at a higher rate than White children. Their cases are more likely to be indicated, they are more likely to be removed from their families and placed into foster care, and are more likely to stay in foster care for a longer period of time.<sup>32</sup> The same is true for New York State. For example, the disparity ratio for children in SCR reports is 2.1 for Blacks, 1.3 for Hispanics, and 1.2 for Native Americans.<sup>33</sup> For children in foster care the ratio is 6.2 for Blacks, 1.9 for Hispanics, and 2.8 for Native Americans in New York.<sup>34</sup> The disparity is particularly pronounced for Black children who were named in SCR reports at more than twice their proportion in the general population, and represented in the foster care population at a rate over six times their numbers in the general population.

The panels applaud OCFS for the agency's concentrated effort to bring DMR to the attention of LDSS and to provide data, training, and expertise to address policies, procedures, and practices in child welfare that may contribute to these inequities. OCFS's work began



with six pilot counties and is now spread out to 12 counties. OCFS continues to expand this work. In 2013, OCFS will concentrate its efforts in three counties that offer FAR, an important tool to engage family members and link them to services with funding support from Casey Family Programs. The work is difficult, complex, and critically important if the child welfare system is to achieve fair outcomes. Panel members urge full implementation of this work across the state using data to drive the process. OCFS should develop an advisory entity to assist and support the work throughout the state.

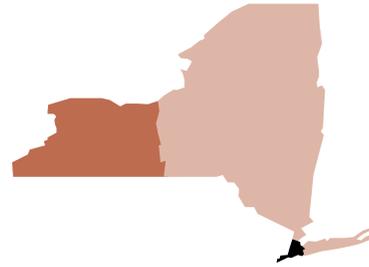
To be successful, more racially and ethnically diverse, bi-lingual staff should be recruited into child welfare positions at both the state and local levels to better meet the needs of the population they serve. This is particularly true of leadership positions at the state and local level. More needs to be done to ensure that staff positions are filled with workers who are ethnically and racially reflective of the state. Counties could be at risk of violating federal Title VI funding requirements if services are

unavailable in one's native language. Panel members encourage OCFS staff to work with LDSS in collaboration with the New York State Department of Civil Service to increase hiring of culturally competent staff.

In addition, the panels recommend that yearly mandated cultural competence training be required for the child welfare workforce and for community-based agency staff working with system-involved families. Such training would serve as a reminder of the importance of attending to cultural issues, as well as to advance knowledge and skills with the ever changing populations served.

Panel members urge the continued expansion of the DMR work statewide, recruitment of a more racially and ethnically diverse workforce, and a new yearly training requirement.

# 2012 PANEL ACTIVITIES



## New York City Panel

### MEETING, FEBRUARY 7, 2012

Gilbert Taylor, ACS Executive Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Child Protective Services, and Bryan Kemp, Executive Director of Systems Development and Program Operations discussed ACS' Strategic Plan and application for Family Assessment Response for Queens. Jaron Ben-Shalom, Director of Adoption Services and KinGAP Applications and Tinnadine Turner, Director of Adoption Permanency Services discussed ACS' implementation of Kinship Guardianship Assistance. Panel members received an update on the proposed Executive Budget and release of their 2011 annual report.

### MEETING, APRIL 17, 2012

ACS Commissioner Ronald Richter met with panel members to respond to New York City-specific recommendations submitted by the panel. Three NYC child welfare advocates met with panel members to discuss their responses to the panel's recommendations and offer ideas for future recommendations. Several panel members commented on their visits to ChildStat.

### MEETING, JULY 17, 2012

ACS Commissioner Ronald Richter and several members of his staff met with panel members to respond to New York City-specific concerns related to recent media coverage of child protective services cases in the city. A report of the discussion at the June Joint Panel meeting was provided and panel members discussed potential recommendations for 2012.

### MEETING, SEPTEMBER 11, 2012

Dr. Dorita Gibson, NYC Department of Education Deputy Chancellor for Equity and Access, Elayna Konstan, CEO for the Office of Safety and Youth Development, and Cheryl Hall, Citywide Coordinator – Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention discussed initiatives within the City's Education Department to

improve attendance and outcomes for students who are chronically absent. Panel members discussed recommendations to bring to the Joint Panel meeting in October.

### MEETING, NOVEMBER 13, 2012

Meeting was cancelled due to the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and accompanying recovery efforts.

## Eastern Panel

### MEETING, FEBRUARY 24, 2012

Delaware County Commissioner William Moon, Montgomery County Commissioner Michael McMahon, Albany County Deputy Commissioner Lynn Tubbs, Westchester County Commissioner Kevin McGuire, and Westchester County Deputy Commissioner John Befus met with panel members to discuss the panel's 2011 recommendations and to offer suggestions for future recommendations. Kate Breslin, President/CEO for the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, provided an overview of health care reforms that will impact children in the child welfare system. Panel members received an update on the proposed Executive Budget and release of their 2011 annual report.

### MEETING, MAY 18, 2012

Representatives from the Greater Amsterdam School District and Schenectady School District participated in a discussion with panel members regarding the intersection of child welfare and education systems and the reporting of educational neglect. They discussed various issues raised at their February meeting with commissioners of social services from four counties in the eastern region, and reviewed data on involvement with the child welfare system broken down by ages. Panel members were also provided updates on the legislative session and plans for the Joint Panel meeting.



### MEETING, SEPTEMBER 21, 2012

Orange County Case Supervisor Faith Aprilante, Onondaga County Administrative Supervisor Tracy Miller, and Onondaga County FAR Unit Supervisor/Trainer Jessica Hopps met with panel members to discuss their counties' experiences implementing FAR and lessons learned from those experiences. Panel members discussed recommendations to bring to the Joint Panel meeting in October.

### MEETING, NOVEMBER 16, 2012

The New York State Council on Children and Families' Director of Policy, Planning & Research, Mary DeMasi, met with panel members to discuss the Council's Chronic Absenteeism Project. Panel members devoted most of their meeting to a discussion on Disproportionate Minority Representation pilots in New York State. Meeting with panel members were Terri Miller, Westchester County Case Supervisor, Farouk Mohamed, Onondaga County Caseworker, Dennis Nowak, Suffolk County Division Administrator for Children and Family Services and Greg Owens, OCFS Director of Special Projects Office of Strategic Planning & Policy Development. The panel elected their panel chair and vice-chair.

## Western Panel

### MEETING, MARCH 9, 2012

Cindy Lewis, Monroe County Director for the Child and Family Services Division, provided an overview of Monroe County's practice, innovations, and budget impacts. Panel members received an update on the proposed Executive Budget and release of their 2011 annual report. Panel members planned for their June 1<sup>st</sup> meeting with the Commissioners of Social Services in their 17 county region and approved an agenda, list of questions, and letter of invite. Panel members also discussed child welfare reform.

### MEETING, JUNE 1, 2012

Panel members met with fourteen representatives of the county departments of social services from the Western Panel region of New York State to discuss and receive input on various issues related to child protective services and funding. Panel members discussed next steps and agreed to submit a letter of request for a child fatality review report from Erie County Department of Social Services. The panel also met via phone conferences on May 4<sup>th</sup> and May 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss a child death in the western region.

### MEETING, SEPTEMBER 14, 2012

Panel members discussed their next steps with a request for a fatality review and discussed topics raised at their June meeting with Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Directors of Services in the 17 county region in the Western Panel region. Panel members discussed recommendations to bring to the Joint Panel meeting in October.

### MEETING, NOVEMBER 30, 2012

Panel members met with Burt Marshall, Social Services Director, Niagara County Department of Social Services and front-line caseworkers to discuss child protective services practice and various initiatives implemented in Niagara County including Family Assessment Response, Family Conferencing, and a new collaboration with the Niagara Falls School District to reduce absenteeism. Panel members elected their vice-chair.

## 90

### MEETING, JUNE 14, 2012

The three New York State panels met in Albany with representatives of the State Education Department (SED) to discuss reporting of educational neglect, priorities for SED, and SED initiatives to increase attendance of students. Laura Velez, Deputy Commissioner Child Welfare and Community Service, provided an update on OCFS priorities. Mary McCarthy, Eastern Panel Chair, provided an overview of the HHS Administration for Children and Families child well-being focus. Each panel provided an overview of their work and discussed their 2012 annual report.

### MEETING, OCTOBER 4, 2012

Members of the three New York State Citizen Review Panels met to discuss their 2012 Annual Report and Recommendations. Laura Velez, OCFS Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Child Welfare and Community Service, and Eric Brettschneider, OCFS Assistant Commissioner, provided updates on various issues impacting child welfare policy and practice. Panel members discussed and made decisions regarding the recommendations to include in their 2012 report.

For the full minutes of these meetings go to [www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org](http://www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org).



## Endnotes

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## FEDERAL LAW AND THE CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS

The 1996 amendments to the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) mandate that states receiving federal funding under that legislation create volunteer Citizen Review Panels. The purpose of these Panels is to assess whether state and local agencies are effectively carrying out their child protection responsibilities. The federal statute broadly defines the work of the Citizen Review Panels.

The Panels must meet not less than once every three months and produce an annual public report containing a summary of their activities and recommendations to improve the child protection system at the state and local levels. They must evaluate the extent to which the state is fulfilling its child protective responsibilities under its CAPTA State Plan by:

1. Examining the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local agencies.
2. Reviewing specific cases, when warranted.
3. Reviewing other matters the Panel may consider important to child protection, consistent with Section 106(c) (A) (iii) of CAPTA.

Following the order of federal CAPTA Amendments of 1996, the New York State Legislature passed Chapter 136 of the Laws of 1999, establishing no less than three Citizen Review Panels, with at least one in New York City. The other Panels are in Eastern and Western New York.

Each Panel has up to thirteen members; the Governor appoints seven, with the Senate President and Assembly Speaker appointing three each.

For further information please visit the Panels' website at [www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org](http://www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org) or contact:

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