

**TRANSCRIPT: CFSR STATEWIDE DATA INDICATORS  
Children's Bureau WebEx Presentation, June 25, 2015**

MIRANDA LYNCH THOMAS:<sup>1</sup> My name is Miranda Lynch Thomas, here from the Children's Bureau. On behalf of CB, I want to thank you for joining us this morning, or this afternoon as the case may be.

We did want to provide this call to give an opportunity to highlight some of the changes that were made in the data indicators. Our intention is not to go through the entire package of information about the indicators on this call, but to focus specifically on the changes. We hope that you'll take advantage of the opportunity to peruse more of the documents that explain the changes in the context of the entire plan for indicators. Hopefully, you have already done that or plan to do that soon so that this all makes complete sense to you.

We look forward to your questions, either here on this call or, if we're not able to take your questions or you don't have them now, we look forward to your following up with the Regional Offices. If you are a state, if you're another partner, you are welcome to contact me, Miranda Lynch Thomas [miranda.lynch-thomas@acf.hhs.gov]. And my name is in the information for the Federal Register Notice and on our website.

So with that, I do want to hand it over to my colleagues, Valeria Fajardo and Kurt Heisler, who will walk us through the actual changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This transcript has been minimally edited for readability.

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VALERIA FAJARDO: This is Valeria Fajardo with the Office of Data, Analysis, Research, and Evaluation. We work closely with the Children's Bureau and on the CFSRs statewide indicators. And with me here is Kurt Heisler, also on the same team. And we're going to talk about the changes to the Federal Register notice.

There was an initial notice sent out on October 10, 2014, with the final rule related to CFSR indicators. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, [2015] we issued a revised Federal Register notice<sup>2</sup> which highlighted a few changes to just some of the calculations within the statewide data indicators, some slight changes to national standards due in part to the number of states excluded from calculations, some slight changes to program improvement plans, goals, improvement goals.

And we've also issued the CFSR syntax to calculate all of the indicators, began sending out Round 3 data profiles to states being reviewed in FY15 and also provided some other resources that I'll cover today.

So that's just a brief overview of what we're going to be talking about. We would encourage everyone to write in your questions during our presentation as you think of them using the feature online. And at the end of the call, we'll open it up so that we can take questions over the phone as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's note: The revised Federal Register notice is available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/05/13/2015-11515/statewide-data-indicators-and-national-standards-for-child-and-family-services-reviews>.

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So the purpose and the intent of the statewide data indicators have not changed. They are still capturing the same concepts. We've just made very slight clarifications and refined our calculations, very slight changes to data quality requirements and exclusions which were discussed in the Federal Register notice, and we will also go over the slight changes to national standards and the caps and floors on improvement goals.

The first one I'll discuss has to do with the source data we use to calculate the permanency-in-12-months indicator for the children entering foster care in a given year. This indicator uses 6 AFCARS submissions, which spans 3 years because each AFCARS submission is based on a 6-month report period. And we require 6 AFCARS submissions even though the indicator follows them for 12 months. We are using the entry cohort permanency-in-12-months indicator and re-entry indicator, our companion measures, and we are using the same source data for both indicators.

The re-entry indicator does require 3 years to track. And so we are making use of all of the data available to us from these source files for both. And this is important just so that we are tracking essentially the same children. Because sometimes the data can change slightly in later submissions.

The next topic is the trial home visit adjustment. Many of you are familiar with child home visit adjustments, but we want to make a clarification about its applicability. It applies only to the entry cohort permanency-in-12-months indicator. It has no effect on the first date cohorts because we do not track these cohorts beyond 12 months. So

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even if we were to have applied the syntax for trial home visit adjustments on those indicators, it would make no difference on the numerators and denominators for the indicators. So we are only using it for the entry cohort.

Another clarification related to the trial home visit adjustment was in the original Federal Register notice. We said if a child discharges from foster care during the 12-month period to reunification with parents or other caretakers after a placement setting of a trial home visit, anytime in that trial home visit that exceeds 30 days is discounted from the child's length of stay in foster care.

We revised that to say if a child discharges from foster care at any time within the 3 years used as source data for this indicator to reunification with parents or other caretakers after a placement setting or trial home visit, any time in that trial home visit that exceeds 30 days is discounted from the child's length of stay in foster care.

So the difference there is what you see in bold. And this is another reason that it's important to clarify that we did use 3 years of source data.

So we provide an example here. So the child is counted as discharged to permanency in 12 months in this example. So, if a child entered foster care, let's say on August 15, 2011, and was placed in a trial home visit placement setting on January 15, 2012, and remained in that placement setting until discharge, we would only be counting 30 days of that trial home visit setting. And then let's say the child officially discharges to

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reunification in 2014, so much later, this child would actually be given credit as having achieved permanency in 12 months.

Now, because the source data for the entry cohort permanency-in--12-months indicator includes 6 AFCARS periods, we also want to clarify that our data quality limits are going to be applied to all of those periods as well. And, as many of you know, when states exceed the data quality limits that were set in the Federal Register notice in a particular period that's required for source data, we will exclude the state from calculating performance on that indicator. So that made a difference in a couple of cases to make that change.

Now, I just want to go over just some minor changes to the data quality items, limits, and applicability. This table was published in the Federal Register notice. It has the data quality items listed below. We wanted to just use a different term for dropped cases. Dropped cases was what we called it originally. We are going to refer to them as child records.

We also wanted to clarify that the NCANDS data cross-file checks. All of the NCANDS checks are limited to victims only. And that was true for the first time we published the Federal Register notice, but we just weren't explicit about it. We added the words for victims to be more clear here.

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Another thing to point out here is that when we did the check for child IDs for victims, matching across years with the dates of birth or sex not matching, we said originally that that applied to the maltreatment and foster care indicator, but actually it's not relevant to that indicator because that only uses 1 year of data to calculate. So we changed that to say not applicable.

Another thing to point out is the data quality checks related to the percent of children who are on their first removal episode. That's an important data quality check. The table does show correctly that the data quality check applies to all permanency indicators. And it showed that the first time around, we did not apply that exclusion in the first release to the first state cohort permanency indicators. This time around, we have applied those exclusions when states exceed the proportion of children on their first removal episode. So that just made a slight difference in the number of states included in the national standard.

When it comes to our calculations, logic, and the syntax, in earlier syntax versions, we imputed some dates of discharge for some children when possible. When we would learn, for example, a child had a date of discharge that was reported in a subsequent report period as the date of discharge from the last foster care episode, we were making use of that information and plugging it in on the record it should have applied to.

And here's an example. Let's say a child was reported in 2012A on their first removal episode with a date of latest removal 6-15-11. In this case, [there was] no date of

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discharge from the last foster care episode and no date of discharge from the current episode either. But then we get another report for the same child in 2012B showing they are now on their second removal with a more recent date of latest removal and we have the date of discharge from their last foster care episode which we could plug into the 2012A record.

We were doing that before we made the decision not to do this for various reasons. And on rare occasions, it introduced error. It wasn't a correct computation. And more importantly, we are committed to just using the data that states provide to us. And as always, states may resubmit data to correct their data at any time. So we're on safer ground using what's provided.

I'm going to hand it over now to Kurt who will discuss the national standards.

**KURT HEISLER:** So some of the changes we made to the data quality checks did affect the number of states that were excluded from the calculation of the national standards. The logic for doing that is we do not want to include in that calculation data that we know to be problematic because that would bias the national standards going forward.

And we just had very minor changes to one or two states. You can see for the permanency in 12 months for children that are in care, what we published in the original Federal Register was that 3 states were excluded due to data quality. In the revised Federal Register where we had the revised data quality checks, one additional state was

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excluded. The next indicator went from 1 to 2 states being excluded. And you can see the remainder.

Now, we're not disclosing the names of the states here for this public call. But we are working with the individual states that are affected to help them address their data quality concerns and improve whatever they can. So that way they can move forward with successful monitoring in PIP if needed.

The changes we made to the syntax, data quality and other changes, had very slight impacts on the national standards that we originally published. The ones we originally published are there and next to that is how they were revised. You can see very small changes. Just as a reminder, national standards are observed performance for all children in the nation. This is not risk-adjusted data. The risk-adjusted piece is what we use for a state's performance. And so when we are assessing whether a state has met the national standard, we are comparing the state's risk-standardized performance against the national standard. So that's the context.

Some people have asked about this last indicator for maltreatment in foster care and observed that it looks like the difference is quite large, from 8.04 victimizations per 100,000 days up to 8.5. And it's actually not very large. It looks large because we've multiplied the original number by 100,000. And we do that to make the number more meaningful, 8.5 victimizations. And also to put it in the context of a certain number of days in care, how many victimizations do children experience?

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So if you actually break this down to the original number, originally it's .000008498. When you multiply that by 100,000, which again puts it into that metric of days and produces a more reasonable number, it's 8.5. So the ultimate difference between the two is actually quite small.

VALERIA FAJARDO: We also made some slight modifications to the caps and the floors on improvement goals as a result of the revised syntax and the revisions to observed performance for states. Because that process uses the distribution of all states observed performance, there were just slight, slight changes.

In the original Federal Register [notice], we have here in the left column, you can see the floor and the cap. When we say floor and the cap, we mean the minimum amount of improvement needed and the maximum amount of improvement needed. And just as a reminder, those are generally calculated—improvement factors are calculated using [the] state's own data that they submit and the amount of variability that you see over time between those data points. But if the state-generated improvement factor is too high or too low, we are sort of imposing these bounds on them, a floor and a cap, just to make them more meaningful.

So you can see just very slight changes. The floor went from for permanency in 12 months for children entering foster care from 1.035 to 1.031. I won't read them all to you, but you can see that they're generally pretty small. The way that those work is they

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are basically the multiplier. If you have a value for observed performance in a baseline year and you multiply that by this number, that's how you will see what your goal will be.

CFSR Round 3 data profiles, syntax, and other materials—we just want to make a few comments. For all those states who were reviewed in fiscal year 2015, we did send out new CFSR Round 3 data profiles with all of these revisions that we've discussed already applied. So if you are one of those states, the profile that you received recently in May would have used all of these changes.

We also made available the CFSR Round 3 syntax. It's available in PDF readable format for those of you who do not have access to the statistical programs. We also made it available in SBSS and data which were used to run the programs themselves.

If you are working with these files, please identify your technical assistance needs in the discussion with the Children's Bureau Regional Office and the Capacity Building Center for States.

We'll now open it up to questions. And there's one final slide we'll show just for additional resources. If you want to see where the link [is] or to see the corrections for the final notice, the statewide indicators, this is where you can find it. You can also find other CFSR Round 3 materials available on the CFSR Information Portal. That also includes sort of a version of the Federal Register that incorporates the original plus all of

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the changes highlighted in yellow to make it more clear. And we also have the CB website where the CFSR resources are shown.

So should we begin with the ones that were submitted through the Q&A function online?

KURT HEISLER: Yes, I think so. So we have several questions that have come through and we'll try to knock these out the best we can. Let me tackle one right now. It says one state tried to replicate this data in its own reports to understand their historic and recent performance. And since the state looked at it by calendar year not AFCARS files, the performance is much different than what ACF calculated. And what can the state make of that?

That's a tough one to answer without some more information. The answer to that might be a question that we want to route through the TA approach. And that way, we can take a close look at exactly what the state did, how different the performance is versus what we calculated.

But depending on the year and time frame you focused on, for example, children who entered in one 12-month period versus children who entered in a different one, you're obviously going to see differences in performance. So some of it's to be expected, but large departures from performance may be something to take a look at. So all we can suggest is that [the] state contact their Regional Office and start the TA process so we can assist with that.

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VALERIA FAJARDO: And if they begin by, just to add to that, trying to replicate it with their AFCARS files, that might be a good place to start to see if they are first getting close to what was published and made available by us using the regular AFCARS report period as a starting point and then seeing how much it changes with the calendar year. That would probably be useful.

I'm going to go down the list here. We have a question if this measure is part of a state's PIP—and I don't know what measure they're referring to, but maybe just if any measure is part of a state's PIP—given the lag time, how can they improve to any meaningful extent?

So I think this question is related to probably the entries to permanency in 12 months. And if you've asked this question, I think we're unmuted and you're welcome to—

KURT HEISLER: Yes, I think this question came in on the slide where we were talking about entry, perm in 12 months.

VALERIA FAJARDO: So this is the indicator that has the most lag time. So I understand the concern that if you're looking at a cohort of children that entered much earlier than the year you're working with, I think people might be curious about how they can see improvement.

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We are still going to be calculating performance on a rolling basis. So one thing that's interesting to monitor as we move forward is if you're looking at the entry cohort, let's say 15AB for example, we'll still be showing 15B and 16A. So it would be moving forward 6 months, you'd have another year of cohorts. Moving forward incrementally every 6 months for how that performance trends.

So I think given the fact that this indicator is—there's really not much more we can do in the sense of making it newer. I understand it would be nice to look at this year and tracking for 3 more years. We don't have quite the luxury of time in the PIP window to do that for as long. But certainly, states are welcome to continue to track that moving forward. So even if their CFSR was over, they could be looking at children entering this year.

KURT HEISLER: Yes, and this reflects a challenge with entry cohorts which our indicators focused more on in Round 3 than they have in past rounds. The criticism of the past rounds is that we rely too much on exit cohorts. It does provide a useful window into performance, but they have their downsides. The advantage of the entry cohort is you can start with a child who has just entered the system and follow him or her for a period of time. So you have a much more holistic view of that child's experience.

The downside, though, is that you have to follow them for much longer in order to see their performance. So, it is sort of a cost-benefit. But we've got the benefit of emphasizing that your cohorts outweighed some of the costs. And we did our best to

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still allow states and us to monitor performance for these children entering the system within the time allotted for the PIP window.

We have a question that I'd like to defer to Miranda on. Miranda, this is a question that says would a state have been notified by now if they were excluded on a measure due to data quality issues that came out of these changes?

MIRANDA LYNCH THOMAS: Yes, there's a couple of issues within this question. The workbook that we published and updated as a result of the changes does show where we were unable to calculate information because the state had data quality issues, exceeded those data quality items. But that is just the initial take.

So it depends on where the state is in the cycle of reviews and what indicator it is, whether updated information or more recent information may result in data quality issues. So I believe this is a question coming from Florida and they are up for review next year. We really invite you to talk to your Regional Office for more information on this. This applies really to any state that is upcoming for review and thinks that they have data quality issues that may need some resolution as we're going through the CFSR.

KURT HEISLER: We have another question about the re-entry measure. Does the re-entry measure only include kids who exited within 12 months, excluding those who exited to reunification or guardianship within 12 months using the child home visit criteria?

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VALERIA FAJARDO: And I'll take this one. I want to clarify that the re-entry indicator does not incorporate a trial home visit adjustment criteria. So this uses these reported discharges of the children who are in the entry cohort who also exited within 12 months to reunification or [living] with a relative or guardianship. However, those that were pulled in using trial home visit adjustment with the permanency-in-12-months indicator are not incorporated into the denominator for re-entry. I hope that answers that question.

**[Note: CB provided additional clarification to this answer following the call: The syntax does include these records in the denominator for re-entry. However, the date of discharge is not overwritten with an adjusted one. The determination of whether the child would qualify for the re-entry numerator is dependent upon the reported dates of discharge for the child.]**

We have sort of a related question. In the example provided—and I think this was trial home visit adjustment. We have that up on the screen again. If the child returns to care past the 30 days, is that child considered a new entry?

So, I think, yes, this is related. We don't apply the child home visit adjustment in the re-entry indicator. I think just for simplicity and more of a clean measure that we get around some of those issues.

KURT HEISLER: Okay. There's a question—are the standard coefficients by each state available? This is referring to a product of the modeling where you have coefficients for

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different variables used in the modeling. And they can be useful for a particular state to understand the impact of different variables, the impact of age on the outcome, and so on. That's a question that we suggest you ask your Regional Office and we'll direct that into the TA route. And that's probably the best place for us to handle that.

Another question is what purpose does the cap serve? This refers to the floors and caps that Valeria described. The purpose of these floors and caps, the nature of the method that calculates a target—and this is true not only for this method, but for other methods that people have tried to use when trying to project a performance target in different disciplines—the nature of the methods sometimes, due to the variability of some states, can produce a target that seems unrealistic to reach, a target that's unrealistically high, for example. Conversely, it can produce one that is microscopically small, so small that it probably would not yield a substantial, meaningful change in the outcomes.

So because we have those potential extremes in the target method suggests we have a floor and cap to pull them in and make the target more realistic or more meaningful. And that's the purpose of those floors and caps. And those floors and caps, the detail about how they were determined, is described in detail in the technical bulletin<sup>3</sup> and to some extent in the Federal Register. But it looks at the distribution of other states to pull that in. So that's the purpose of them and that's sort of the nature of their use.

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's note: Technical Bulletin #8A, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/cfsr-technical-bulletin-8a>.

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VALERIA FAJARDO: There's another comment related to the trial home visit adjustment I just wanted to mention, and probably related to the fact that we use 3 years for source data for the permanency-in-12-months indicator—pointing out that really the only thing that would change are a few trial home visit end dates.

And you're right. It would be a very small difference between using the 4 submitted AFCARS periods versus the 6 AFCARS submitted periods. We don't anticipate that makes much of a difference at all. But I think that just in an effort to keep things, you know, to use the same source data for re-entry that we use for permanency in 12, it makes sense to just use all of the same files. So we don't think that—you're right. It would probably not make much of a difference, especially in states that don't rely heavily on child home visits.

KURT HEISLER: Okay. We have a question. Do the profiles contain county-level data? This is probably referring to the state data profiles that we provide states that gives them a summary view of their performance as well as some context data. At this point, they do not provide county-level data. That is something that is on our radar because it's a popular request. So we are exploring the resources available and the time frame for trying to incorporate that into the profiles. But currently, that information is not provided.

Another person asked will the code used for the risk adjustments be shared? We have shared the syntax that is used for the risk adjustment. And this is the syntax in Stata, which is a statistical software program. And it is for the multi-level modeling. And that is

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the piece where we look at a state's observed performance. And then we adjust it based on the age of the children in the state, and in some cases the entry rate in the state. And that produces the state's risk-standardized performance. And that performance and its competence intervals are compared against the national standard. And that syntax has been shared. It is on the CFSR website. And it's the last slide in this presentation, which I'll get to now.

So that syntax right now is available as a PDF document on the CFSR Information Portal website.<sup>4</sup> But there's also a link to an e-mail that you can contact to get the actual syntax file for Stata. So that should provide all of the code that one needs to understand what the Children's Bureau did and how they handled the multi-level modeling.

A question is: our understanding is that the national standards are set for the entire third round period. Is that the case? Or will these change as states resubmit their data? These will not change. These national standards are indeed fixed for the entire Round 3. And they will not change as states resubmit their data.

We simply had to draw the line because we could potentially have resubmissions constantly. And it would not be practical to have a national standard that is constantly in flux. So we had to draw the line and make these national standards fixed.

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<sup>4</sup> Editor's note: For the syntax documents and a related overview, go to <https://training.cfsrportal.org/resources/3105> and scroll down to "Data Indicators and National Standards."

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However, states, of course, are always encouraged to resubmit data that can improve the data quality. And that's definitely something we always welcome.

Will the questions and answers from today's webinar also be posted on the CFSR portal? I'd like to defer that to—oh, I'm sorry, the Q&As will be a part of the posting to the portal, yes.

A question, where is the syntax posted? So on the slide I'm showing now, if you go to the CFSR Information Portal website—that's the one that starts with training. CFSR portal—you'll see a link to the PDF syntax. That's just for people who don't have the statistical software, but still want to read the syntax. There's also a link on there of who you can contact to obtain the actual syntax files. And that would be in the SPSS and Stata. So start by going to the CFSR Information Portal website.<sup>5</sup>

Okay. So those are the questions that we've had that have come in. Are there any additional questions that we can take on the phone? States are also always welcome to contact the Regional Office for any questions. The Regional Office can sort of connect you with the right people and work with you that way as well. So please always keep that resource in mind.

VOICE: Kurt, I do believe there was one more question that I can answer. The question is about states receiving profiles in the later years. What I can tell you right now is for the

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<sup>5</sup> Id.

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states that are upcoming in year 2016 or year 2 states, they will be getting an initial profile [in] early fall. And I also wanted to let you know that we are in the process of working on a vehicle to have data profiles and more data-related information available in a dashboard. That is still a work in process. So we look forward to doing more for roll-out and information sessions when that is available to states on their particular CFSR performance.

KURT HEISLER: Okay. Any additional questions or comments?

VOICE: And JBS if you receive questions directly somehow, can you let us know about that? I'm not sure if we've covered everything that came in on the chat or the QA.

VOICE: It looks like we've covered everything, all the questions from the Q&A. And folks, your phones are unmuted. So feel free to unmute your own phone if you'd like to submit a question via audio.

VOICE: Hi, I was not able to access the information online on the webinar. Is there a way for me to get the content directly, the PowerPoint that you reviewed?

VOICE: So, the PowerPoint and the recording will be available on the public website. So that is something we'll make available. So CFSRportal.org, you will be able to find it under the resources tab.

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VOICE: Okay, thank you.

VOICE: Anything else we have coming in? Last call. Well, thank you very much to Kurt and Valeria for providing this presentation for us and for the incredible hard work of getting this information out to the field and continuing to work on improving our measures that we use in CFSR. And thank you all for listening and being interested in this way of [our] reviewing states' performance. So thank you very much for your time and we look forward to talking with you more soon.

**(END OF TRANSCRIPT)**