Strategies to Reduce Racially Disparate Outcomes in Child Welfare

A NATIONAL SCAN

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Center for the Study of Social Policy

ALLIANCE
FOR RACIAL EQUITY IN CHILD WELFARE

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The Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare provides national leadership in support of improved outcomes for children and families of color involved with the nation's child welfare systems. The Alliance is committed to taking action to improve outcomes for children and families of color in the context of our underlying commitment to improve outcomes for all children and families receiving child welfare services.

Child welfare professionals and researchers have documented a pattern of disparities in the experiences and outcomes for children and families of color. For example, African American and Native American children are more likely than their counterparts to be removed from their families and placed in foster care, remain in care longer and are less likely to exit foster care through reunification or other forms of permanency. Although not revealed in national level data, similar patterns exist for Latino children and families in a growing number of states and communities.

The Alliance is guided by a coalition of national organizations, state and local leaders, judges, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, advocates, parents, as well as alumni and youth who have had direct experience with the child welfare system. Through this national network, the Alliance engages a broad cross-section of organizations, agencies and systems that touch the lives of children and families involved with child welfare.

Since its formation in 2004, the Alliance has helped to raise the visibility of equity issues in child welfare; consulted with state and local agencies to test innovative strategies; reported on recent research about the nature, causes and consequences of racial disparities; and disseminated data tools so that jurisdictions can track their progress in achieving better outcomes. Reflecting a fundamental Alliance value, each of these efforts has been directly informed and shaped by youth, parents and other family members with direct experience with the child welfare system.

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An Overview

Introduction

Increasingly, leaders of child welfare systems are recognizing the need to reduce racial disparities and improve outcomes among children, youth and families of color.

Growing numbers of advocates, child welfare administrators and elected officials have become concerned with the gap between the desired experiences and outcomes they'd like to see for all children and families who come to the attention of child welfare systems, and the far worse actual experiences and outcomes documented for children and families of color. Although the pattern of disparate outcomes is most stark for African American and Native American children and families, it also holds true for Latino children and families, as well as specific groups of Asian and Pacific Islander children and families.

Since 2004 the Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare[1] at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) has partnered with a host of committed

individuals, communities and organizations to better understand the extent of disparate outcomes by race and ethnicity, the range of factors contributing to this pattern and the policy and practice strategies that could lead to more equitable experiences and outcomes. The Alliance's perspective and work has benefited greatly from child welfare administrators, judges, policymakers, researchers and national and local advocacy organizations that have been engaged in this work, as well as parents and youth of color who have directly experienced child welfare interventions.

For many years prior to the Alliance's commitment to this work, numerous organizations and advocates had been calling for a greater national focus on the

1 Since 2004 the Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare has provided national leadership in support of improved outcomes and the elimination of racial disparities among children and families of color involved with the child welfare system. This mission is accomplished through information sharing and consultation with child welfare administrators, policymakers and advocates who are similarly committed to achieving equitable outcomes for children and families. Learn more about the Alliance at http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/alliance-for-race-equity.

disproportionate rates of involvement and poorer outcomes of African American and Native American children and families in foster care.

Greater understanding of the need to promote improved child welfare outcomes for children and families of color has led to a growing number of national, regional and local efforts to achieve this goal. Early initiatives were documented in the Alliance publication, *Places to Watch*.[2] This paper updates that national scan, identifying states' and localities' current efforts.

Purpose and Methodology

Given the time since the 2006 publication of *Places to Watch*, the Alliance surveyed the field in 2014 for an updated understanding of the strategies underway across the country to promote racial equity among children and families involved with the child welfare system.

The Alliance conducted an Internet-based survey of child welfare administrators and other professionals known to have been involved in efforts to achieve racial equity. The survey collected information about the types of strategies and the range of institutional and community partners (e.g., schools, courts, juvenile justice systems, mental health providers, etc.) that are involved in this work. Survey respondents were asked about their work and whether they would be willing to talk with the researchers in greater detail about their efforts, along with the opportunities and challenges of this work.

Once the survey responses were analyzed, CSSP staff contacted each of the individuals who indicated a willingness to talk more about the racial equity efforts in their jurisdiction. Twenty-two interviews were conducted with individuals who were directly involved with specific efforts in 12 states (see Figure I). Interview and survey responses were compiled and serve as the foundational information featured in this report.

describe **what improvement strategies look like** when systems aim to achieve racial equity among families involved with the child welfare system. Furthermore, this report depicts the **range of child welfare system partners driving these efforts**. This investigation is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of every effort currently underway.

It should also be noted that the national scan was conceived of as a way to support interested child welfare administrators, managers and policymakers with examples to inform their thinking and actions about how to apply a racial equity "lens" to their own system improvement efforts. This also explains our relatively greater focus on operational and system structures and processes – as opposed to approaches for direct family engagement. Though there are some examples of racially and culturally responsive direct family engagement strategies mentioned in the report, there remains a need for more detailed review of the ways in which systems can alter direct practice to be more effective for families of color.

CSSP and the Alliance recognize that there are additional places from which we and others can learn about effective policy and practice strategies that contribute to racial equity, and we will continue to document and highlight these efforts through the Alliance website (http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/alliance-for-race-equity) and related activities.

The Alliance is also preparing individual case studies of other equity efforts, including the work of the Fresno County Department of Social Services in California and the King County Coalition in Washington State. These case studies will be published in April 2015.

Figure I : States Where Efforts were Documented

Connecticut	Idaho
Illinois	Iowa
Kentucky	Michigan
Minnesota	New York
Oregon	Pennsylvania
Texas	Utah

The places featured and the strategies highlighted in this report reflect CSSP's and the Alliance's attempt to further

2 See, Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare at the Center for the Study of Social Policy, *Places to Watch: Promising Practices to Address Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare* (December 2006).

Summary of Major Themes

This section summarizes some of the prominent types of disparity reduction-related strategies that have been developed and the major themes that emerged in the reflections and lessons learned from these efforts. Part II of the report provides more detailed profiles of the disparity-reduction efforts underway in states and localities across the country.

Prominent Types of Disparity-Reduction Efforts

The disparity-reduction efforts in each of the places highlighted in this report have all evolved out of unique circumstances, as well as advocacy and organizing efforts. There is much diversity in the ways people in these places think and talk about racial disproportionality and disparities; the racial and ethnic communities that are the focus of their disparity-reduction efforts; the range of partners involved; and the amount of time specific places have been pursuing racial equity work.

These observations notwithstanding, there are also strikingly similar strategies and approaches that have evolved in some of these places. This is not surprising in that efforts to achieve racial equity are increasingly conceived and developed as foundational components of child welfare systems' underlying goal to improve outcomes for all children and their families. What uniquely defines the work in the systems featured in this report is that they are assessing some combination of their respective mission, values and operations through a lens that takes into account the meaning and significance of race and racism in the lives of children, families and communities, as well as in the institutions and organizations that exist to support them.

We have organized the kinds of efforts identified in the survey into seven strategic areas:

1. The use of **legislative directives and/or executive mandates** to initiate and monitor ongoing work to identify racial disparities and take actions to reduce them
2. The creation of **operational structures within the child welfare agency and key child- and family-serving systems with responsibility to advance a racial equity action agenda**
3. **A range of data development and analysis strategies**, with many states beginning their work by applying race/ethnicity and decision points analysis to better understand the extent and nature of racially disparate outcomes
4. **Training, workforce development and capacity-building** actions that deepen an understanding among staff at multiple levels of an organization of how race and racism impact the lives of children, families and communities, as well as the institutions that are charged with supporting them
5. **Structuring new partnerships** with other public and private agencies, communities and families to assist with and support disparity-reduction efforts

6. **Engagement with tribal governments** around compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act and reduction of poor outcomes among tribal communities

7. **Community engagement strategies** that support improved understanding between the public child welfare agency and community-based institutions and families within the racial and ethnic communities most impacted by the child welfare system

Legislative Directives and Executive Mandates

States report that their child welfare system's decision to focus on understanding and addressing racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes stems from a number of sources. One is executive leaders— governors, mayors or county executives— initiating a focus on equity. Another pathway is at the request of a state or local legislative body.

- In **Minnesota**, legislators convened a series of public hearings to better understand the experiences of African American children and families who came to the attention of child welfare. Hearing consistent concerns about the quality of the system's response, the Minnesota legislature directed the **Minnesota Department of Human Services** to convene an advisory committee, investigate the nature and extent of racial disparities and develop recommendations for reducing this pattern of disparate outcomes. The directive from the state legislature, and the system improvement effort it generated, has guided the state's racial disparity-reduction efforts for more than a decade.

- For several years in **Oregon**, child welfare officials, community organizations and other system partners convened numerous meetings to discuss the pattern of racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes among children and families involved with the state's child welfare system. In 2009, with the support of the state legislature, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski issued an executive order creating the **Child Welfare Equity Task Force**, which was charged with submitting recommendations to eliminate racial disparities in the Oregon child welfare system. After an inclusive process of analyzing data and talking with community residents and key system partners, the task force presented recommendations to the Oregon legislature in 2011. These recommendations focus on data-based decision-making, policy and practice, workforce development, community capacity-building and culturally specific practice. Those recommendations continue to shape the state's overarching child welfare system improvement efforts.

- The Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities was created by Senate Bill 501 of the 2011 **Texas** state legislature. The Center's creation also brought about the formation of the **Interagency Council on Addressing Disproportionality**, charged with examining best practices in training, reviewing the availability of funding and making strategy recommendations to the legislature for reducing racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes. Representation on the council includes executive leaders from more than 10 child- and family-serving state departments and offices, along with numerous faith-based and community organization representatives.

Operational Structures to Advance a Racial Equity Action Agenda

One feature that stands out in several system efforts is that a new operational structure was developed to support the race equity work. Although many of the state and local disparity-reduction efforts started with a small committee or workgroup, several evolved into a formal structure with designated individuals at the state and local level responsible for carrying out specific components of a larger action agenda. For the most extensive and successful system efforts, the new structure was either operated out of or reported directly to the executive leader's office (the director or commissioner, for example) and deliberately and thoughtfully engaged other key institutions and community members. In each case, individuals were assigned specific roles and responsibilities, and the work was handled as a fundamental part of the agency's continuing system improvement agenda.

- Prior to 2007, efforts in **Texas** to reduce and eliminate racial disparities among children and families involved with child welfare focused on the five regions within the state with the highest racial disproportionality and disparity rates. The 2007 Texas Legislature established a statewide operational structure to support the elimination of racial disproportionality and disparities among children and families involved with child welfare. Senate Bill 758 allowed for the statewide expansion of the strategy previously focused on the five regions, creating 13 **Disproportionality Specialist** positions to cover 11 counties, along with a state **Disproportionality Manager** who reported to the Assistant Commissioner for Child Protective Services. The Disproportionality Specialist role included the development and coordination of Regional Advisory Committees; cultivating relationships with partner systems and community organizations; and supporting the intensive training of staff, community and key institutional stakeholders on racial equity. These specialist positions still

exist, but now operate as a part of the Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities. The roles have expanded to include coordination with multiple health and human service systems.

- In 2000, the **Minnesota** legislature directed the Department of Human Services to convene a **Statewide Advisory Committee** to investigate the extent and nature of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. The committee issued a report and subsequently identified six counties with high rates of racial disproportionality to participate in a multi-year disproportionality reduction effort. The advisory committee, including representatives from each of the six counties, met monthly for more than 10 years to develop and implement specific disproportionality reduction strategies. Each monthly meeting included a review of data trends, updates on specific practice and policy strategies from each of the participating counties and opportunities to identify consistent policy and practice barriers to be addressed by state officials. Periodic convenings allowed for all of the individuals who were participating in the local disproportionality reduction efforts to come together for shared learning about the strategies that were leading to a decrease in disproportionality rates.

- A similar statewide initiative has been developed in **New York** state. In 2009, under its Commissioner's leadership, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) launched a **county-driven effort** to reduce racial disproportionality and disparities. Five counties initially signed on to participate and received small planning grants to organize and begin their work. As of 2014, 14 counties have joined this effort. Each county has developed a local planning group and has used race/ethnicity data to guide its local selection of priorities. State OCFS officials provide guidance for the counties and convene monthly conference calls that allow for county updates and for additional information sharing. Periodic convenings allow for more representatives from the locality to share and hear about strategies being developed as a part of the other efforts across the state.

- An **Anti-Racism Leadership Team** was formed by officials in **Ramsey County, Minnesota**, to guide the child welfare agency's efforts to reduce racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes. The group consists of more than 25 staff representing every level of the agency, from case worker to executive leadership. The group meets bi-monthly, with one of each month's meetings dedicated to *transactional system reform conversations* (i.e., specific policy and practice changes needed to achieve racial equity)

and *transformational reform conversations* (i.e., mission, values and the history and implications of race, racism and culture on personal attitudes, perceptions, etc.). Additional agency operational recommendations are produced by smaller working committees and include a focus on training, skill development and improved processes for recruiting and hiring a more diverse and culturally responsive workforce.

- Another unique statewide operational structure is managed by **Kentucky's Administrative Office of the Courts**. The **Statewide Disproportionality Committee** coordinates information sharing between the five counties participating in Kentucky's racial disproportionality and disparity-reduction initiative, *Race, Community and Child Welfare*. The five counties have each developed a local advisory board made up of multiple system partners and community representatives. Each has also developed a local action plan to guide its work. Each local advisory board has a chair and co-chair who guide the local action agenda and represent the local county on the statewide committee. The statewide committee's primary function is to facilitate information sharing and communication between the participating counties and to support the development and implementation of their local action plans. The statewide committee has a significant focus on the training and engagement of judges and attorneys working with local child welfare officials to reduce racial disproportionality and disparities. The statewide committee meets regularly via conference call and in person at least once per year. When resources allow, statewide convenings with all of the local action team members further enhance cross-site learning and sharing of ideas.

Data Decision Points and Analysis by Race/Ethnicity

One of the earliest stages of every state or local agency's focus on racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes is an analysis of child welfare administrative data organized by race/ethnicity, and sometimes gender. Data allow officials to understand the presence and extent of any racial disproportionality and/or disparate outcomes and to pinpoint where and at what decision points any disparities might exist. There are several examples that illustrate the range of ways data are being used to guide systems' disparity-reduction efforts.

- Executive leaders and managers within **Idaho Child and Family Services (CFS)** consistently review data highlighting patterns of racial and ethnic disparities in the experiences and outcomes for children and families. Administrators use the data to understand how well the system is responding to and supporting families, including

identifying the stage(s) during which child and family outcomes are not favorable for specific groups and developing strategies to support outcome improvements. For example, administrators observed a disproportionate rate of placement of children of color in institutional settings. In response, they organized a small workgroup to better understand the reason for the relatively high congregate care placement rates and are now preparing specific policy and practice changes aimed at increasing the rates of placement of children of color within family settings.

- The **Oregon Department of Human Resources** draws data from its administrative data system to understand whether and to what extent children and families experience key decision-making stages in disparate ways, with a focus on the decision to place a child in foster care, the placement type, the type of exit for children as they leave care, as well as the length of stay upon exiting. Furthermore, Oregon DHS' partnership with the University of Kansas[3] provides child welfare administrators, managers and supervisors regular access to up-to-date data reports – including analyses organized by race/ethnicity – on the experiences of children and families. The data are used to guide child welfare practice discussions and resource management considerations at both the executive leadership level, as well as at the level of the supervisory unit.

- All caseworkers and managers within the **Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)** have access to a "data warehouse" through which they can find data, organized by race and ethnicity, for each of the key stages of involvement by children, youth and families with child welfare, such as investigations, removals, placement and exits. Workers and supervisors review these data on a regular basis and consider practice strategy shifts that are likely to improve outcomes. General themes from these conversations are discussed across various supervisory units, and across regions within the state, to inform statewide policy and practice reform considerations. Also in Texas, the **Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities** gathers and reports data by race and ethnicity across all of Texas' child- and family-serving systems,

with the goal of understanding and undoing the patterns of racial disparity for similar groups of children and families.

Training, Workforce Development and Capacity-Building

Several state and local child welfare agencies have coordinated training and skills workshops for their workforce, key system partners, as well as other community stakeholders. Some agencies, for example, have organized training designed to help professionals and community members understand the history and impact of race and racism on the experiences of children, families and communities, as well as on the policies and practices within institutions and systems whose mission is to support children and families in need.

- The **Illinois Department of Children and Family Services** convened a series of trainings conducted by Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training, specifically using its Analyzing and Understanding Systemic Racism[4] workshop. The training provides a definition and language for understanding and talking constructively about race and racism, with a focus on the history and evolution of institutional racism in the United States. The training has been attended by hundreds of state and local DCFS administrators, staff and key partners within other systems. It provides a lens through which Illinois assesses policy and practice contributors to racial disparities, and the strategies that are most likely to eliminate this pattern of disparate outcomes.

- In **Texas**, both DFPS and the Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities have convened extensive training sessions for staff and other key stakeholders in partnership with the Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond. The institute's **Undoing Racism Workshop**[5] provides a definition and analysis of racism and its various manifestations, including individual, institutional, linguistic and cultural. Moreover, the workshop helps individuals understand how institutional racism manifests in one's work. This workshop has been attended by a large portion of the DFPS workforce, as well as leaders and other professionals from key systems, including education, juvenile justice, law enforcement and the courts.

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3 Oregon has partnered with the University of Kansas to develop reports on a range of child welfare system performance indicators, specifically through the university's Results Oriented Management (ROM) in Child Welfare Reporting System.
4 The Analyzing and Understanding Systemic Racism Training is conducted by Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training. A more complete description of this and other Crossroads training workshops is available at http://crossroadsantiracism.org/training/workshops.
5 The Undoing Racism Workshop is conducted by the Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond. A more complete description of the Peoples Institute and the Undoing Racism Workshop is available at http://www.pisab.org.

A similarly extensive approach has been used in several systems to help child welfare professionals and other partners understand the importance of healthy racial and ethnic identity development among children and youth. One approach involves the use of the **Knowing Who You Are**[6] (KWYA) video and training curriculum. Child welfare leaders in systems that have adopted the KWYA training have reflected that the training has become an invaluable part of their strategy for supporting the social and emotional well-being of children and youth in care.

- Child welfare leaders in **Idaho**, for example, partnered with Casey Family Programs to prepare a small number of Child and Family Services (CFS) staff to become trained facilitators of the Knowing Who You Are curriculum. With this core group of facilitators in place, the training was then embedded as an official course offered through the state's child welfare training academy. The training is offered monthly, with the location consistently rotating between one of the three CFS regions within the state. Although all staff are eligible to participate in the training, it is now a required training for all new CFS staff.

- A 2011 task force report on racial disproportionality and disparities in **Oregon's** child welfare system identified inadequate training on issues related to racially and culturally responsive practices as a contributing factor. After lengthy consideration of multiple training options, the system adopted KWYA as a primary training for staff and partners in 2013. The system subsequently piloted KWYA in a single county. Since then more than 175 staff and partners have participated in the training, with a goal of training the entire workforce. One of the factors guiding Oregon's selection and continued use of the KWYA training and curriculum is that it offers specific strategies that can be used by workers and caregivers to support this important aspect of youths' social and emotional well-being.

At least one additional approach has been used by multiple jurisdictions to familiarize stakeholders with the history and significance of race and racism in shaping the lived experience of children and families, as well as the policies and practices of systems that reinforce it.

- Representatives from each of the 14 **New York** counties participating in the state's disparity-reduction initiative participated in a multi-day racial equity workshop centered on the viewing and discussion of the three-part PBS video series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*[7]. After participating in the state-organized workshop, several of the counties organized a series of workshops for the entirety of their child welfare workforce. According to state and county officials, the training was especially helpful in creating a space in which child welfare staff can talk more openly about how racialized ideas about the experiences of specific racial and ethnic groups can shape institutional policy and practice.

- **Iowa** officials have also developed a training experience centered on the same PBS series. More specifically, Iowa's training focuses on a viewing and facilitated discussion of the series' third episode, *The House We Live In*. This episode focuses on the role of law and social policy in forming racialized communities in the United States. Using a train-the-trainer approach, a core group of Iowa staff have been equipped to facilitate this full-day workshop. The workshop is open to all Department of Human Services staff.

Disparity-Reduction Partnerships between Child Welfare and Other Key Systems

Leaders within many child welfare systems acknowledge that the public child welfare agency itself has a great deal of influence on, albeit with limited direct control over, the safety of children within the community. Child welfare agencies depend on the host of professionals, community-based organizations and other community members to support families in need and to alert child welfare authorities when there are concerns about a child's safety. Thus, effective partnerships between child welfare agencies and the network of individuals and organizations who see and engage children and their families every day are critical. There are several examples of agency efforts to partner with other key institutions and community networks worth highlighting.

- In **Minnesota**, child welfare officials in **Ramsey County** realized significant numbers of referrals to child protective services were coming from specific schools. Pre-

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6 Knowing Who You Are is a three-part (video, e-learning and in-person) training resource designed by Casey Family Programs to familiarize child welfare professionals, educators and caregivers with the importance of developing healthy racial and ethnic identity. A full description of Knowing Who You Are resources is available at http://www.casey.org/knowing.

7 *Race: The Power of an Illusion* is a three-part PBS Series originally aired in 2003. The series examines the history of race as a social and political construct and challenges the viewer to scrutinize the misconceptions of race that many take for granted. The three episodes include: "The Difference Between Us," "The Story We Tell," and "The House We Live In." Additional information about the series, including related educational resources, is available at http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm.

liminarily, they met with school officials to better understand the experiences of students and their families. Next, and to identify challenges faced by families far earlier, child welfare officials located social workers in the affected schools. Their responsibilities included regular meetings with school officials, earlier meetings with children and families who were identified as needing additional support and the identification of community-based resources that could provide support to families in need.

- The statewide disparity-reduction strategy in **Illinois** has been developed with an understanding that all of the institutions and community organizations that support and serve children and families have a role to play in improving outcomes for children and families involved with, or at risk of becoming involved with, child welfare. It is with this understanding in mind that local counties were asked to develop **Local Action Teams** comprised of community individuals and organizations, as well as representatives from the courts, law enforcement, schools, juvenile justice, mental health professionals and local service providers. These local groups, sometimes with as many as 40-50 active participants, meet regularly to review data on child and family outcomes, identify unmet service and support needs of families and determine specific practice and policy strategies most likely to both improve outcomes and reduce racial disparities.

- Recognizing that child welfare has a majority white and majority female workforce, officials in **Connecticut** have made a commitment to developing a more diverse workforce, one with caseworkers and supervisors that reflect the backgrounds of the children, youth and families who are involved with the child welfare system. In support of this aim, DCF officials partner with the **University of Connecticut** to recruit and retain more males of color to the DCF workforce. Moreover, recognizing the large number of youth of color who are involved with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (dually involved youth), the Department of Children and Families (DCF) coordinates joint training opportunities with staff and managers from both systems on the influence of race, racism and culture in the lives of families and in these state child- and family-serving institutions.

- Officials at **Western Michigan University** recognized that youth transitioning out of foster care are significantly less likely to attend and graduate from college than their peers who are not in foster care and that this trend is even more pronounced for youth of color transitioning out of foster care. Since 2008, the **Seita Scholars Program** at Western Michigan University has worked directly with the Michigan Department of Human Services and each of the

county departments of social services to improve access to higher education opportunities, with an enhanced focus on increasing opportunities and success for transitioning youth and young adults of color. In 2012, the university formed the **Center for Fostering Success** and its signature initiative, **Fostering Success Michigan**, to support a statewide network of 11 higher education institutions and committed community partners working to improve educational access and success for youth transitioning out of foster care.

Engagement with Tribal Governments

Several states have developed operational structures and strategies involving formal partnerships with tribal governments and tribal social service agencies, almost always with an emphasis on improving compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act[8] and more generally improving outcomes for Native American children and families.

- The **Utah Foster Care Foundation (UFC)** partners directly with the Utah Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) to find, educate and nurture Utah families who are willing to care for children and youth placed in foster care. Given the disproportionate number of children of color (especially Latino and Native American children) in Utah's foster care system, UFC has made it a priority to find foster and adoptive resource families whose cultural backgrounds match the backgrounds of the children in care. UFC has thus developed a partnership with the Indian Child Welfare Act designee within each of the tribes in Utah. Through this partnership, Native American resource families are able to access the kinds of supports they need, and in a more timely way. The partnership also allows for more consistent problem-solving and ongoing system improvement discussions between DCFS, UFC and the tribes.

- In **Minnesota**, a **Statewide Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council** guides policy and practice changes related to services for Native American children and families. The council includes representatives from each of the tribes as well as the state's three major urban Native American communities. The council also makes grant decisions for monies that go to Native American organizations, tribes and tribal social service agencies.

- In **Oregon**, the **Tribal-State Indian Child Welfare Advisory Committee** includes representatives from each of the federally recognized tribes in Oregon, along with additional state child welfare leaders. The committee convenes regularly to think through the policy and practice changes for improving outcomes for Native American

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8 The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) provides guidance to States regarding the handling of child abuse and neglect and adoption cases involving Indian children and sets minimum standards for the handling of these cases. For more information visit the Bureau of Indian Affairs online ICWA resource page: http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/IndianChildWelfareAct/index.htm.

families, develop specific strategies to improve compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act, as well as to identify ways to strengthen approaches that are working well. One advancement made during 2014 was the creation of nine Native American child welfare positions intended to focus on meeting the *active efforts* standard of engaging and supporting Native American families. Advisory committee members worked directly with local child welfare officials to shape the position descriptions and responsibilities, which were ultimately approved by this statewide committee. Similar forms of effective partnership are evident in the inclusion of tribal representatives on hiring committees for statewide child welfare leadership positions.

Community Engagement Strategies

Some child welfare administrators acknowledge a cultural and communications barrier, and at least some level of distance and distrust, between the child welfare agency and the communities of color whose families and children are disproportionately removed and placed in foster care. Several child welfare systems have developed strategies to increase understanding and trust between the agency and community, with the goal of finding more effective ways of identifying families in need of support and providing relevant help to families before family-related challenges turn into crises that require more intensive agency intervention.

- In **Des Moines, Iowa** (Polk County), child welfare officials invited six African American community leaders to facilitate "courageous conversations" between the child welfare agency and residents within some of the communities from which a large number of children and families involved with child welfare come. This strategy, including a series of community forums, was supported by members of the Pastors and Ministers Association and other African American community leaders, who collectively served as cultural guides, or liaisons, between the community and the child welfare agency. The series of facilitated **community forums** culminated in a larger town hall meeting where child welfare officials responded to the feedback shared by community members and reaffirmed their commitment to working in partnership with the community to reduce disparities and improve child and family outcomes. Specific next steps included the formation of an **African American Case Review Team**, which focuses on increasing rates of relative placements and improving the cultural responsiveness of agency services and supports, and the formation of a **Pastors and Ministers Project**, which makes members of the clergy available to support families during pre-/post-removal conferences. Because of the success of this community engagement strategy, similar community forums have been scheduled for the near future.

- Officials with the **Ramsey County Children and Family Services Department** in Minnesota recognized that many professionals within the child welfare agency and many residents within the racial/ethnic communities of color held divergent perceptions of the department and its role and track record in supporting families within the community. In response, county child welfare officials sought out community leaders within communities of color to assist in bridging this gap in understanding and communication. Several **"cultural consultant"** positions were created by the department and filled by individuals who were familiar with the operations of the child welfare and broader human service system and who were simultaneously involved with and respected within their local communities. These individuals shared input on the system improvement strategies of the child welfare system, served on related committees and advisory boards and facilitated community forums designed to give community members an opportunity to share their reflections on experiences with the agency.

- Officials in **Allegheny County, Pennsylvania**, developed and implemented another version of the cultural consultant approach. In a local initiative aimed at decreasing rates of entry into foster care for African American males, county officials supported the development of cultural consultant positions that were located within community-based service provider organizations. These individuals worked directly with families whose children were at risk of being removed and placed in foster care, connecting them with community supports identified in their service plans, as well as building the parents' capacity to meet their children's developmental needs. Though this parent partner approach to using cultural consultants was implemented unevenly across the participating community organizations, it nonetheless highlighted the value of a racially and culturally informed approach to supporting families who are in crisis.

Reflections & Lessons Learned

Several jurisdictions and agencies featured in this report have been engaged in efforts to achieve racial equity and improved outcomes for children and families of color for many years. In each of these places, the work has evolved, and the strategies have been continually adjusted to reflect a more nuanced understanding about how the institution(s) contribute to racially disparate and otherwise poor outcomes among children and families. The following are among the major themes revealed in the reflections and lessons shared by respondents.

Racial equity work must be seen as fundamental to improving child welfare systems. Undoing racial disparities in child welfare experiences and outcomes must be framed within the context of improving child welfare outcomes for all children and families. Administrators, elected officials, policymakers and system and community partners must see this work as essential to improving child welfare system effectiveness.

An expanded commitment to racial justice requires an explicit focus on understanding the influence of race and racism on children, families, communities and institutions. Child welfare systems, their key institutional partners and the community-at-large must make a deliberate and sustained attempt to understand the meaning and significance of race and racism in the evolution of this country and its institutions and the impact of this complex history on the lived experiences of children and families. This includes a thorough understanding of institutional racism, structural racism[9] and implicit bias[10]. Thoughtful and sustained efforts must be undertaken to identify and reverse the often hidden manifestations of the legacy of racism in (and between) institutions and communities. Within this context, child welfare administrators and managers must

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9 *Institutional racism* refers to the policies and practices within or across institutions that create or reinforce (even if unknowingly) inequitable outcomes between racial and ethnic groups. Structural racism refers to a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing, ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. The structural racism lens allows us to see more clearly how our nation's core values—and the public policies and institutional practices that are built on them—perpetuate social stratification and outcomes that all too often reflect racial group sorting rather than individual merit and effort. For additional perspectives on institutional and structural racism: See, The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, *Structural Racism and Community Building* (June 2004).

10 *Implicit bias* refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. For additional perspective on implicit bias: See, Cheryl Staats and Charles Patton, *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* 2013, Kirwan Institute (2013), and also, Cheryl Staats, *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* 2014, Kirwan Institute (2014).

model, and create a regular time and space for, direct conversations about race, racism and agency culture. This is related to, but is not the same as, an organizational commitment to becoming "culturally competent" and/or "culturally responsive." At least one jurisdiction describes this as an **"expanded commitment to racial justice."**

The active involvement of community members and community-based organizations provides accountability and supports the sustainability of this work across multiple leadership tenures. Community organizations and community members remain present within a given jurisdiction far longer than the typical child welfare administrator. When organized, community members – including youth and families with direct experience of the child welfare system – can advocate for an operational structure and dedicated resources to support the long-term nature of this work.

Executive leaders from the child welfare and/or human service system, as well as other partnering systems, must be active champions of racial equity within their systems. Though it is an important first step, it is not sufficient for child welfare administrators just to "sanction" or allow efforts related to racial equity within their respective child welfare agency. It is important that other stakeholders, including judges, attorneys, private provider organizations and other key system leaders, see and hear child welfare leaders' explicit commitment to the achievement of racial equity and improved outcomes for children and families of color.

Disparity-reduction efforts must be guided by data analyses at as many different levels as possible. Child welfare officials must have the capacity to analyze and generate easy-to-read reports of administrative child welfare data by race and ethnicity, gender and age. Data should be available for key decision points and should be reviewed and discussed regularly at each of the leadership levels within an agency (i.e., executive level, manager level, supervisory level, etc.). It is critical to parse data to local and community levels to identify specific trends that may be occurring in local offices.

Legislative and executive office mandates are important catalysts for institutionalizing and resourcing this work. The work of undoing the pattern of racial disparities within a child welfare system requires some level of focus on improving a system's operations, policies and practices. Mandates from the legislative and executive leaders often provide specific requirements for assessing patterns of racial disparity, identifying contributing factors and identifying policy and practice strate-

gies that will promote racial equity. Moreover, these mandates can also allocate resources and designate operational structures to support the work, as well as outline the accountability processes for measuring and reporting progress. This level of support also promotes a long-term commitment to achieving racial equity, including through transitions of child welfare leadership.

An organizational structure and dedicated resources are important considerations for supporting staff and this work over time. Child welfare agencies are large institutions, with complex policies and practices that shape the agency's response to children and families. Efforts to eliminate racial disparities and improve child and family outcomes must be able to address, and in some cases, change various operational features of an agency (i.e., administrative practices, specific job functions, resources, linkages between various agency divisions or units, training and workforce development capacity, accountability processes, etc.). Agency administrators shared that having a specific organizational focus and structure for their disparity-reduction work has allowed many individuals within the agency to take on specific responsibilities of moving the work forward and to make the connections among the agency's various operational functions.

Additional resources are needed to support research and evaluation. The child welfare field must invest in the research and evaluation efforts to more fully understand the complex contributors to racial disparities, as well as the impact of disparity-reduction efforts. This includes the expansion of research and evaluation methodologies to include both quantitative and qualitative analyses of children, youth and family experiences, as well as institutional and system functioning. Relationships with local universities can be helpful in this regard.

Conclusion

The initiatives and system strategies highlighted in this report reveal several important insights. First, *over the last decade, the child welfare administrators and other key stakeholders represented here have developed more sophisticated approaches for gathering and analyzing multiple forms of data relating to the experiences of families of color with the child welfare system*. This expanded capacity for gathering and analyzing data has produced greater understanding about the complex factors contributing to disparate outcomes for children and families of color, especially the institutional contributors to this pattern at the state and local level.

Second, in many state and local jurisdictions, *this understanding has been enhanced by the active involvement of youth, families and community members directly impacted by the child welfare system*.

Third, *the experiences highlighted in this report reveal that there are neither easy nor quick solutions to reducing racial disparities and improving outcomes for children and families of color*. On the one hand, it is disappointing to look back and see how long it takes to generate support for this work and how little we still know about what strategies are most likely to produce results. This notwithstanding, there are examples of child welfare agencies and specific system improvement strategies that have been effective.

Some states have achieved a reduction in rates of involvement for specific groups of children and families of color. However, there are also states where, despite organized efforts, rates of foster care involvement, and the disparity rates between racial and ethnic groups, are unchanged or significantly higher. Although overall, there have been reductions in disparate outcomes, there is still reason to be concerned about the racialized pattern of outcomes we see within child welfare systems.

There should be no controversy in a child welfare profession stating unequivocally its desire to achieve equitable system responses and supports for all children, youth and families regardless of race or ethnicity. This goal, however, is not likely to be achieved without specifically examining and confronting the legacy of race and racism in this country, and its role in shaping the lived experience of individual children and families, the communities and tribal governments that nurture and sustain them. In conclusion, states and localities need to learn from the efforts of their peers and continue to boldly push this work forward.

UNITED STATES FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
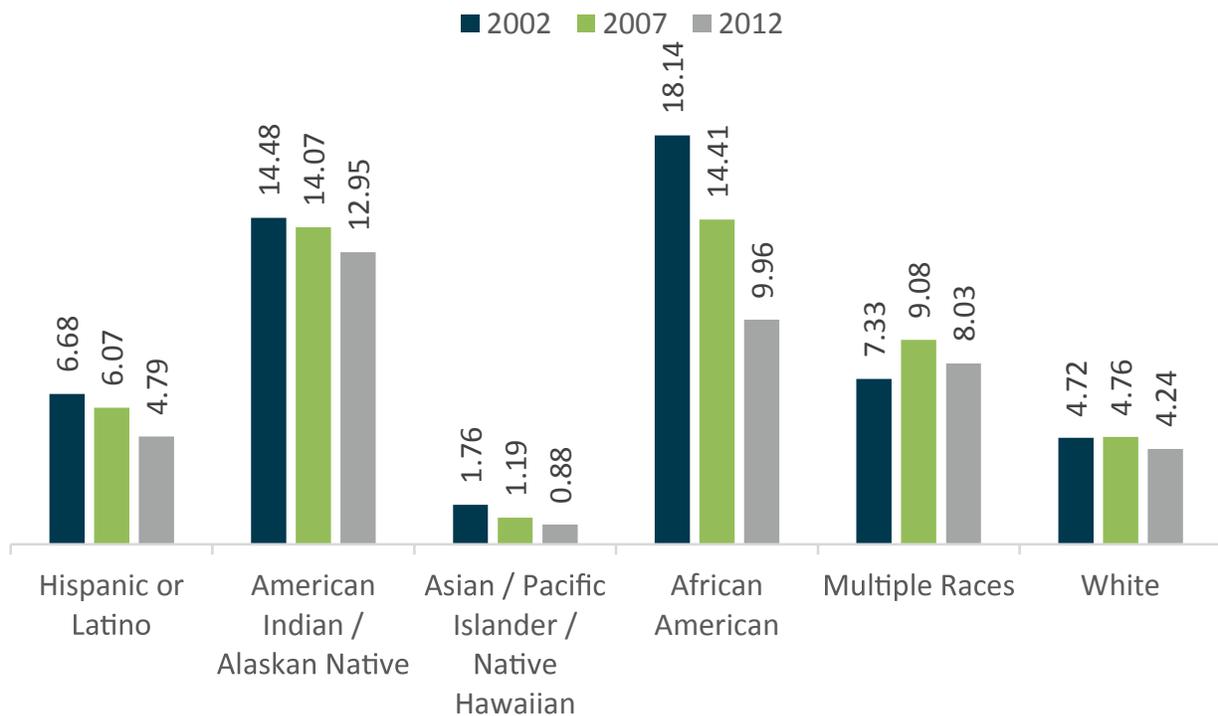
Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	6.68	6.07	4.79
American Indian / Alaskan Native	14.48	14.07	12.95
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	1.76	1.19	0.88
African American	18.14	14.41	9.96
Multiple Races	7.33	9.08	8.03
White	4.72	4.76	4.24

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source**: Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

CONNECTICUT

Efforts to achieve racial equity for children and families involved with Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF) are led by the Commissioner and operated through the department's Racial Justice Workgroup.

Although Connecticut has been involved with racial justice work in its child welfare system for more than a decade, it was not until recently that this work was able to be integrated into the system's improvement agenda. The state now uses this opportunity to convene a statewide workgroup with regional liaisons to discuss data, policy and practice, bearing in mind that a strong process is necessary to achieve positive outcomes. With leadership drive and support, planned future efforts include increasing the engagement of community members, expansion of cross-system partnerships and implementation of changes that promote improved outcomes for youth and families involved with the child welfare system.

INITIATIVES

Racial Justice Workgroup

The Commissioner of DCF established a state-appointed **Racial Justice Workgroup** in 2013. Although there was some initial concern and resistance among staff due to questions of overlap with pre-existing diversity action teams, DCF leadership ultimately decided to keep both groups and to maintain them as separate yet complementary efforts.

Leadership Structure

The Racial Justice Workgroup has a **tri-chair leadership structure** consisting of the department's director of multicultural affairs, a regional administrator and a national consultant. These individuals work in partnership to provide oversight and direction to the members of the workgroup. Workgroup membership is comprised of liaisons appointed by each of the department's regional administrators, as well as senior level leadership from the Commissioner's office. While cultivating a significant leadership presence, the workgroup consists of all levels of staff within the department.

Increasing Awareness and Understanding

The first phase of the workgroup's agenda included raising awareness among staff about the extent and nature of racial disparities, an examination of existing policies, developing a position statement about the importance of this work for the department, as well as a more expansive analysis of the state's administrative data by race and ethnicity. This early capacity-building work was necessary to achieve a shared understanding about why this work is important, and so that everyone involved can "speak the same language" with respect to understanding the influence of race and racism on families, as well as the system's policies and practices.

Operational Committee Structure for Applying a Racial Equity Lens

The Racial Justice Workgroup has organized its work through four committees, which operate independently and share and coordinate their work through the overall workgroup. The four committees include:

- Policy and practice committee
- Workforce development committee
- Community engagement committee
- Contracts/procurement committee

Through these committees, the workgroup has sought to create an operational structure to support an explicit focus on the department's operations as well as the policies and practices that guide the department's engagement with children, youth and families. Each of the four committees meets regularly and continues to propose specific recommendations for consideration by state administrators. Additionally, each committee shares updates at racial justice workgroup meetings, which allows for opportunities to talk about overlapping and interrelated recommendations.

Regional Focused Action on Racial Equity

In addition to the state level work, Connecticut has established a process for promoting and tracking regional focused action. The Racial Justice Workgroup meetings allow for sharing information from each of the regions, including updates on recent training and capacity building activities as well

as any emerging and related practice improvement efforts. While still early, agency administrators are expected to apply a similar racial justice focus in their respective regional leadership meetings, including a focus on data trends and reports on practice improvements aimed at reducing racial disparities and improving system responses and supports to families. These efforts are now directed as performance expectations by the Commissioner for all of the department leadership.

Use of Local Data Analysis and Reports by Race and Ethnicity

Building on the department's learning while participating in the Casey Family Programs Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Reducing Racial Disproportionality and Disparities from 2005 until 2008, DCF has expanded its use of administrative data to guide the department's planning and system improvement processes. DCF uses the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to analyze data and

to identify problematic child and family outcome patterns. Also, and in support of their enhanced data capacity, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago was invited to conduct a three-day training on advanced analytics with the department's quality improvement and direct line management staff.

Using the state's SharePoint system, data reports are organized by race and ethnicity of children and families and are provided for each of the key decision points in a family's engagement with child welfare system. Moreover, these data reports are available at the statewide level, at the regional level and at the area office level. This expanded capacity and understanding about how to use data effectively has also helped local office administrators understand where within their operations they should be paying closest attention.

Every office is encouraged to use data organized by race and ethnicity to understand where families are experiencing the most challenge with the system, and

where the department has the greatest need and opportunity to enhance direct service and practice. Such areas of focus include the referral process, the substantiation process, removal and placement of children in foster care, the timeliness and appropriateness of services provided for children and families and placement types for youth while in care. Regional and local office leaders use a Results-Based Accountability™ approach for identifying specific opportunities for improvement with local supervisors and caseworkers. Leaders also use the framework to consider the potential implications of race and racism in shaping their engagement with families or the availability of appropriate supports for a given family.

Shift from an Emphasis on Cultural Competence to an Explicit Focus on Racial Justice

DCF made a deliberate decision to expand its focus from its historical emphasis on cultural competence to include an explicit focus on racial justice. A racial

CONNECTICUT FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)

Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	12.76	12.7	8.99
American Indian / Alaskan Native	1.93	1.91	0.99
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	0.6	0.54	0.55
African American	22.45	18.19	14.1
Multiple Races	10.21	13.26	11.14
White	3.39	3.44	3.12

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

justice approach includes a focus on culture and language, but also emphasizes the importance of understanding the history and meaning of race and racism in the lives of children, families and communities, and how racial biases show up (even if unintentionally) in the policies, procedures and operational practices of public and private service providing institutions. To that end, an intentional decision was made to incorporate racial justice as an integral part of the agency mission statement and performance expectations set forth by the Commissioner. The purpose of the racial justice work is to eliminate any and all racial injustices that occur within the state agency in the area of hiring, policies, practices and purchasing. To support this expanded focus, every employee in the department including in the central office has completed a two- to three-hour orientation on the department's racial justice framework and work efforts.

Enhanced Engagement of Mandatory Reporters

Mandatory reporters have a critically important function, as they alert child welfare officials to real and potential instances of child abuse and neglect. More generally, because of their respective professions within the community, mandatory reporters can help the department understand the experiences and unmet service needs of children and families. DCF has expanded its training and orientation of mandatory reporters to include a description of racial disparities experienced by children and families of color who come to the attention of child welfare, how and why the department is working to improve system responses to children and families of color, as well as the range of services and supports available to children and families within the local community.

New and Innovative Cross-System Partnerships

DCF is beginning to develop new partnerships with other institutions that can be helpful in advancing the department's efforts to achieve racial equity among children and families. An example of these innovative partnerships is one created between DCF with the University of Connecticut to recruit more men,

and particularly men of color, to join the DCF workforce. DCF is also working closely with the juvenile justice system to provide training about race, racism and the racial justice framework that has emerged within DCF. The racial disparities observed for children and families involved with child welfare are similar across each of the major child and family serving systems, and thus justifies the need to expand the analysis and the resulting strategies to include each of these systems.

- DCF has worked to ensure the data on race and ethnicity in the SACWIS is accurate and complete. Ensuring that the racial and ethnic identity of all children, youth and families is accurately reflected in the state's data system has been a priority as it is foundational to further analysis.

- The number of kinship and relative placements for children and youth has increased as a result of deliberate efforts to place children with family members.

- Regional leadership teams are consistently conducting monthly activities from a toolbox of resources developed by the Racial Justice Workgroup.

- The executive and senior leadership of DCF are more diverse, more closely reflecting the population of children and families being served by the department.

- DCF workers have incorporated questions aimed at routinely assessing the cultural and racial needs of children and youth in their daily work with children and families.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

- *Importance of explicit leadership messaging and integration within overall system improvement agenda* – The DCF workforce experienced multiple starts and stops of efforts to address the pattern of racial disparities experienced by children and families involved with child welfare. One of

the key challenges for the executive leadership team has been to convey the seriousness and urgency of understanding and improving the department's response to and support for children and families of color. It was important to build this focus on racial justice into every aspect of the department's operations, from the mission statement to the process of training and measuring worker performance.

- *Challenge of shifting focus to system contributors and solutions* – The importance of open and honest conversations with staff about the department's role in eliminating racial disparities is a challenge that cannot be overstated. As this work evolved, there was also a need to move beyond a continuous analysis and discussion of the data, and to begin asking (and answering) the hard questions about how the agency's policies and decision-making practices contributed to the pattern of disparate outcomes. It was this shift that allowed the department to identify specific operational strategies that were needed, and to develop the kinds of partnerships DCF would need to more effectively meet the support and service needs of families. Managers at every level of the agency now participate in

THE TOOLBOX

Members of the DCF Racial Justice Workgroup identified short activities and exercises that could be used as "icebreakers" or "conversation starters" with staff about race, ethnicity, culture and diversity. These activities create non-blaming and less-stressful opportunities for department staff to reflect on the meaning and significance of race, racism, ethnicity and culture in their own lives and in the larger society.

results-focused discussions about disparate outcomes, the major policy and practice contributors, with an expectation of proposed solutions focused on agency process improvements and/or partnerships with key stakeholders similarly focused on racial justice and culturally responsive practice.

<div style="background-color:#b11; color:white; text-align:center; padding:10px; font-weight:bold;">FUTURE DIRECTIONS</div>

The department's urgent focus is to continue to identify the specific operational changes, as well as the broader policy and practice changes that are most likely to promote improved child and family outcomes.

- The agency has plans to track the race and ethnicity of mandatory reporters. In addition, the agency

screeners will receive enhanced training to ensure consistency of information gathering for all children who may be victims of abuse or neglect.

- In the very near future, the agency plans to involve key community stakeholders to assist the department with the elimination of racial justice inequities involving the children, youth and families served by the department. The goal is to ensure administrators and managers within each region have developed and are implementing a deliberate strategy for engaging other key stakeholder organizations and community residents in the department's continuing efforts to eliminate racial disparities in child and family outcomes.

Consistent with the department's results-based approach, administrators within each region have developed (proposed) performance expectations for their respective regions related to the elimination of racialized outcome disparities among families involved with child welfare. When finalized, these performance expectations are intended to guide the operations and supervision practices of managers and staff within the region. The Workforce Development Academy will be directly responsible for assisting the area offices and facilities with the implementation of the performance expectations related to racial justice. A management position has been established to lead the statewide implementation efforts by way of providing tangible support and resources in order to ensure changes in practice through a racial justice lens.

Connecticut 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	167,046	20.21%	1,501	32.90%	8.99	1.63	3.05
American Indian	2,029	0.23%	2	0.04%	0.99	0.19	0.35
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	36,684	4.41%	20	0.44%	0.55	0.10	0.19
Black / African American	88,043	11.06%	1,241	27.20%	14.10	2.46	4.61
Multiple Races	27,927	3.45%	311	6.82%	11.14	1.98	3.71
White	473,230	60.64%	1,475	32.33%	3.12	0.53	1.00
Total	794,959	100.00%	4,563	100.00%	5.74		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

IDAHO

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Child welfare leaders in Idaho have begun to address issues of racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes through a combination of: a) facilitated training experiences for the child welfare workforce, b) providing continuous learning opportunities for child welfare managers and supervisors and c) the expanded use of data to focus related system improvement efforts. A more detailed description of these expanded training and data use strategies are provided below.

<div style="background:#9e1b32;color:#fff;text-align:center;padding:6px;">INITIATIVES</div>

Understanding and Responding to the Influence of Race and Culture

An Introduction to 'Knowing Who You Are'

The early introduction to racial equity work in the Child and Family Services (CFS) program in Idaho was through the **Knowing Who You Are (KWYA)** video and training experience. The KWYA video and training was developed by Casey Family Programs, and prepares child welfare workers and other caregivers to understand the importance of, and to effectively support, the healthy development of racial and ethnic identity among children and youth. The initial impetus for exploring the KWYA training was CFS' continuing interest in helping its workforce understand the experiences of Native American children who become involved with child welfare.

Developing Core Training Capacity

In support of CFS' efforts to more effectively support the healthy development of Native American children and youth, Casey Family Programs invited a group of CFS staff to become trained facilitators of the KWYA training. This initial group of CFS staff completed the formal KWYA facilitators training, which included participation in the **Undoing Racism Workshop** (an anti-racism training developed by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond).

Embedding KWYA within Child Welfare Training Academy

With a core group of facilitators in place, the Knowing Who You Are training was subsequently added as a formal course within the Child Welfare Academy, Idaho's ongoing training program for child welfare professionals. Operationally, Idaho's child welfare system is divided into three regions, or 'hubs', including a North Hub, West Hub and East Hub. A KWYA training session is convened approximately once per month, for a total of 10 to 15 sessions each year. If the Child Welfare Academy does not hold a session during a given month, a training session is typically organized and made available to the broader community. Community sessions generally include teachers, parents, residential treatment staff and other interested partners. Community trainings tend to use a slightly modified curriculum, so that the activities and discussion are applied to all children and youth, and not only those involved with child welfare.

Staff Training Requirement & Community Engagement Opportunity

The KWYA training is required for all new CFS staff, and can also be attended as a professional development training by existing CFS staff. Sessions can hold up to 25 people and are typically full. The video and training are frequently used by CFS and close child welfare partners as a way to introduce the topic of race, racism, ethnicity and/or culture in such a way that is non-confrontational, and in such a way that focuses on the well-being of children, youth and families. Such conversations have been held frequently with the health division within the Department of Health and Welfare, as well as with juvenile and family court judges. CFS staff members and other child welfare partners call upon the KWYA facilitators as resources when concerns about race and culture come up, either within organizational operations or with respect to the experiences of specific children and youth.

CFS continues to develop and expand this partnership with Casey Family Programs, and is specifically looking to expand their partnerships with other child and family serving systems.

Engagement of Central Leadership Team

For several years, CFS' goal of reducing racial disproportionality and disparities was included as a standard agenda item during all division (operation) meetings, a meeting of state regional managers and supervisors. This stand-

ing agenda item included updates on recent training sessions and any related efforts resulting from trainings aimed at increasing awareness and understanding among CFS staff and community partners about the extent and nature of child and family outcome disparities. As specific challenges and barriers were identified by staff and managers throughout the state, the central leadership meetings included detailed discussions about those policies and practices that may contribute to some of the disparate outcomes experienced by children and families of color, and the potential solutions. Although this discussion no longer exists as a standing agenda item for every meeting, managers continue to provide periodic updates to the central leadership team throughout the year. Managers also continue to share additional information about racial disparities with supervisors and other state officials through periodic webinars and conference calls.

Data Driven Disparity Reduction Efforts

To focus and guide their disparity-related work, executive leaders and managers within Child and Family Services routinely – and increasingly – look at child welfare data, including specific analyses of racial disproportionality and disparities. Specific attention has been paid to the stages of child welfare involvement where racial disparities are most problematic. For a period of time, data consistently revealed a disproportionate rate of placement of youth of color in institutional placements. A small group has now begun to look further into these cases, with the goal of identifying policy and/or practice recommendations that might undo this pattern. The shift to specific policy and practice changes is a new component of CFS' disparity-reduction efforts, and a component of the work they intend to continue developing.

The most pronounced change and improvement from this work has been among staff and caregivers. Staff and caregivers who have participated in the Knowing Who You Are training have reported greater comfort talking about the history and significance of race, racism and culture in shaping the experiences of children and youth of color. Most importantly, they report having far more confidence in their ability to *identify opportunities* to explore the 'experience of race and racism' in their daily life experiences, and to support the youth with *specific strategies* that support the development of a healthy racial and ethnic identity.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

The following are among the key challenges encountered while advancing

IDAHO FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
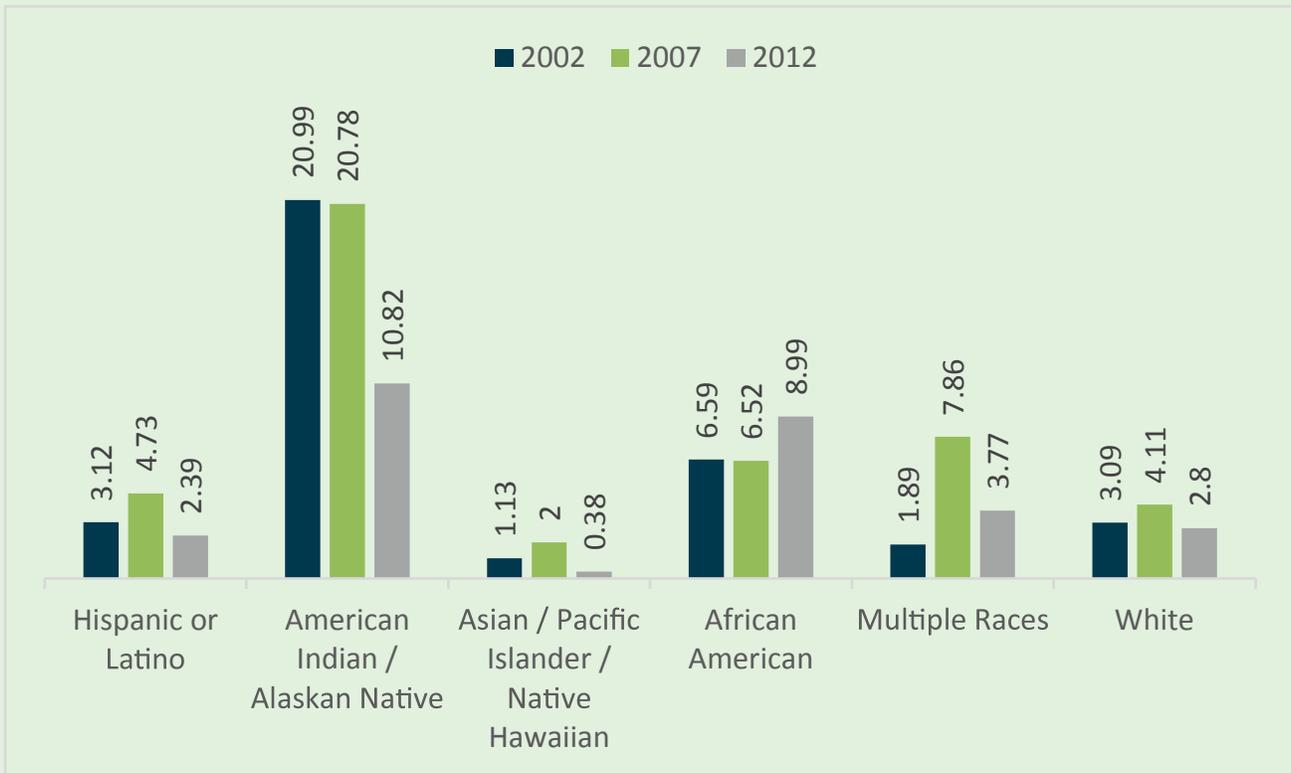
Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	3.12	4.73	2.39
American Indian / Alaskan Native	20.99	20.78	10.82
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	1.13	2	0.38
African American	6.59	6.52	8.99
Multiple Races	1.89	7.86	3.77
White	3.09	4.11	2.8

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

this work in Idaho:

- *Difficulty talking about race and racism* – Discussions about race and racism have proven to be particularly challenging among the workforce. The initial tendency among many individuals has been to personalize the discussion, and defend against accusations of being racially biased or racist. The KWYA video and training helps individuals understand the unintended ways in which people internalize messages about white superiority, while discounting the negative impact of this experience and dynamic on people of color.

- *Nurturing healthy racial and ethnic identity among young people* – More specifically, the KWYA training, and the tools and strategies the training

introduces, highlights the hurtful ways in which young people experience and internalize messages of racial superiority and racial inferiority while in foster care, and offers strategies to professionals and caregivers for nurturing healthy racial and ethnic identity for young people.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Idaho will continue to examine the data on disproportionality on a statewide and regional level on a regular basis, and continue the exploration of system contributors to racial disparities – and potential system improvement solutions – during management meetings. The management team will also develop a plan to incorporate information about the lived experience of race, racism and culture into other training opportunities

for staff. Similarly, program managers will continue to identify policy and practice barriers and potential solutions at every level of the organization, and share that information with the central leadership team.

Idaho 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	74,950	17.38%	179	14.51%	2.39	0.83	0.86
American Indian	4,900	1.19%	53	4.29%	10.82	3.62	3.73
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	5,299	1.24%	2	0.16%	0.38	0.13	0.13
Black / African American	3,559	0.91%	32	2.59%	8.99	2.85	2.93
Multiple Races	12,982	3.08%	49	3.97%	3.77	1.29	1.33
White	325,487	76.20%	912	73.91%	2.80	0.97	1.00
Total	427,177	100.00%	1,234	100.00%	2.89		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

ILLINOIS

Illinois' current efforts to achieve racial equity in child welfare began in 2007 at the regional level, and have since expanded into a statewide strategy. Entitled the Permanency Enhancement Project (PEP) Model, the state seeks to address systemic disparities through awareness and education about race, ethnicity and culture, the use of data, the engagement of community members in system improvement efforts, a focus on policy and practice changes and cross-systems partnerships. As capacity building continues to expand, Illinois ultimately hopes to realize the full implementation of a "race-informed practice" within the child welfare system. To broaden the workforce's understanding of these efforts, and the structural racism lens that undergirds them, system-wide (and statewide) trainings are expected to expand beginning in early 2015. The structural components of this model will also continue to evolve.

INITIATIVES

Permanency Enhancement Project Model

Efforts to achieve racial equity among children and families involved with Illinois' Department of Children and Family Services are primarily guided through the continuing development and operationalization of the state's **Permanency Enhancement Project Model.** The key components of this model follow.

Dedicated Office for Coordination

The Office of Racial Equity Practice in the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) was created two years ago to oversee the department's efforts to address race-based disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system. In 2007, prior to the creation of this office, the DCFS African American Advisory Council approached the then-director who agreed to address the extreme rates of outcome disparity experienced by African American children and families involved with the child welfare system. Today the Office of Racial Equity Practice is staffed by two administrators, each with statewide responsibilities.

Focus on Systems Improvement

The Permanency Enhancement Project Model was launched to examine permanency and racial disparities from a systems-improvement perspective.

The program model was also tied directly to the results of the federal *Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)* process as well as the permanency improvement portion of the state's *Program Improvement Plan (PIP)*. This was a strategic decision to ensure the state child welfare officials viewed the developing model as a priority, and to ensure that strategies for the reduction of racial disparities were directly linked to the department's more general work of improving agency policy, programs and practice. In this regard, child welfare practitioners should see disparity reduction efforts as a core part of the Department's continuous effort to improve the child welfare system for all children. All of these efforts are fundamentally the work of systems improvement.

Permanency Enhancement Symposium

To increase awareness and understanding among child welfare professionals and community providers in the Central Region, DCFS officials organized a region-focused symposium that included DCFS staff, contracted child welfare agencies and the range of other community-based agencies and organizations that touch the lives of children and families. Symposium participants thus included field and administrative staff, court personnel, state attorneys, guardian ad litems and other identified stakeholders. To support this effort, a series of focus group discussions was conducted prior to the symposium with the support of Illinois State University and the Illinois African American Family Commission. A summary of focus group findings was shared and discussed during the symposium. This initial 2007 symposium helped raise awareness of, and shed light on, the extent and nature of racial disparities in child welfare outcomes, particularly for African American children.

Regional Symposia & Local Action Teams

To facilitate increased levels of community engagement throughout the

state, additional regional symposia were organized, modeled after the approach of the Central Region's Permanency Enhancement Symposium. During each regional symposium, and after an opening plenary presentation, participants from specific counties were organized to analyze local data and to begin the formation of local action teams. There are currently 40 local action teams across the state, with 10 to 30 or more individuals participating on each team. In addition to community individuals and organizations, these individuals include educators, law enforcement, mental health and juvenile justice professionals. Each team is co-chaired by a supervisor of the local child welfare office and a representative from another stakeholder group. To model the importance of multi-racial leadership in this work, a deliberate effort is made to identify both one white person and one person of color to serve as co-chairs of the local action teams.

Colleges and universities throughout the state provide technical assistance to the local action teams, with a large focus on the effective analysis and use of data and identifying major system contributors to racialized outcome disparities. Local action teams have been in place for approximately five years and have proven effective in getting communities to discuss specific barriers and potential solutions to poor permanency outcomes, and the system's more general challenge of effectively engaging African American children and families of color.

Regional Transformation Teams

To inform the development of statewide racial equity policies and practices, DCFS also developed three *regional transformation teams* in the Southern, Central and Cook County regions. Each of the three transformation teams received intensive training from Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training (Crossroads) including a 10-day training session held over a seven to nine month period. The African American Family Research Institute engages and facilitates the teams' activities by connecting policy, social and practice issues with

data using a critical cultural competency framework.

The 50 members of each regional team includes judges, attorneys, DCFS officials, guardians ad litem, child welfare administrators, family advocacy center representatives, representatives from community organizations and staff at the field/worker level. Teams are led by two co-conveners, more deliberately reflecting the model of "shared responsibility and leadership", with one white person and a person of color.

The Crossroads training sessions provide an in-depth analysis of the legal, social and historical foundations of race in America; the ways in which systems work to (even if unknowingly) provide or deny resources; the ways systems have evolved to privilege those in charge at the expense of others (disproportionately people of color); and provides a clear definition of racism. A primary desired outcome of the training is for people to speak a common language when talking about race and racism, and the impact of both on systems and communities. Dedicated time is then spent applying antiracism principles to the system's approach to child welfare policy and practice and identifying persistent barriers and challenges. The teams then make a strategic plan with recommendations to the director.

The recommendations made to-date have informed what is now a policy and practice initiative with 12 workgroups covering 12 core system improvement priorities, including:

- Investigations and reporting
- Director's communications via the department's online information-sharing portal
- Mandated reporting
- Visitation practices and standards
- Diligent search for relative placement
- In-home counseling contracts
- Fictive kin
- Analysis of referral services

- Race-informed training
- Court personnel training
- In-service training
- Engagement of private agencies

There is at least one transformation team member from each of the three regions on each workgroup. The team members' role on the transformation team workgroups is to serve as content experts on the implications of race and racial equity.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment

DCFS in partnership with the African American Family Research Institute and Crossroads has developed a racial equity impact assessment tool, adapted from the model developed by Terry Keleher at Race Forward (formerly the Applied Research Center). The purpose of this tool is to evaluate the potential racialized impact of existing and proposed policies and practices and to mitigate any disparate or unintended (racialized) outcomes. The assessment, which consists of several reflective questions for assessing the potential impact of proposed policy and practice shifts, serves as an intentional tool to guide the transformation efforts, specifically related to the 12 aforementioned priority areas. The tool has evolved rapidly, and will continue to guide the development of what is expected to be a race-informed practice model.

Judicial / Multi-Systems Engagement

Cross-systems collaboration is another key part of the Permanency Enhancement Project Model. Understanding the critically important role of judges in the decision making and accountability process, DCFS has worked closely with the judicial and court systems to train judges on racial equity. As a result of this influence, the Court Improvement Racial Justice Steering Committee, composed of nine judges, has developed a proposal to include racial equity training in the judges' educational conference, a mandatory event for judges every two years. The committee was able to negotiate the inclusion of a one day

training within the ethics track of the conference. The training, covering an overview of national, state and local disparities and structural racism, condenses the major themes of the extended Crossroads anti-racism training into four hours. DCFS has also worked with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) in their Courts Catalyzing Change initiative. The last two hours of the all-day training are used to orient judges to NCJFCJ's judicial "bench card" for use during preliminary protective hearings. Thus far, 48 judges from across the state have received this training.

DCFS is in the process of transitioning from a capacity-building phase to deliver a Racial Equity Practice Model to the entire child welfare system. The model will enhance current practice and interrupt the biased decisions or assumptions that contribute to race-based disparities in the system. Approximately 250 people have been trained so far by Crossroads on their 2.5 day "Understanding & Analyzing Systemic Racism"

and/or the 10 days of Antiracism Team training. The long-term goal is to train over 6,000 state and private sector child welfare service staff and stakeholders on a two-day "Race Informed Practice Model". The model is being jointly developed by Crossroads, the African American Family Research Institute and the DCFS.

<div style="background:#b11; color:#fff; text-align:center; padding:10px;">**OBSERVED CHANGES**</div>

• Overall the Illinois system is experiencing a healthier, more productive and literate dialogue regarding race-based disparities, implicit bias, institutional racism and child welfare practice. Heretofore these discussions were less informative and much more stigmatized.

• Through the organizing of individual staff and teams around the evidence and issues of racial disparities, the implications on practice and intervention methods, the

system has created a substantial cohort of committed volunteers to champion a transformed practice. The intimacy and camaraderie among these staff are discernable to their peers who themselves have not had the training or the team-building that is central to the Crossroads Transformation Team training and methodology. Even the regular and problem-based engagement of the members of the 40+ Local Action Teams exhibit significant personal and professional "bonding" that benefit matters of race in general practice and in collaboration.

• Across the state communities are learning that the child welfare system is much larger and more complex than DCFS. Through the Department's Permanency Enhancement Project Model many local community stakeholders are now volunteering to help improve

ILLINOIS FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
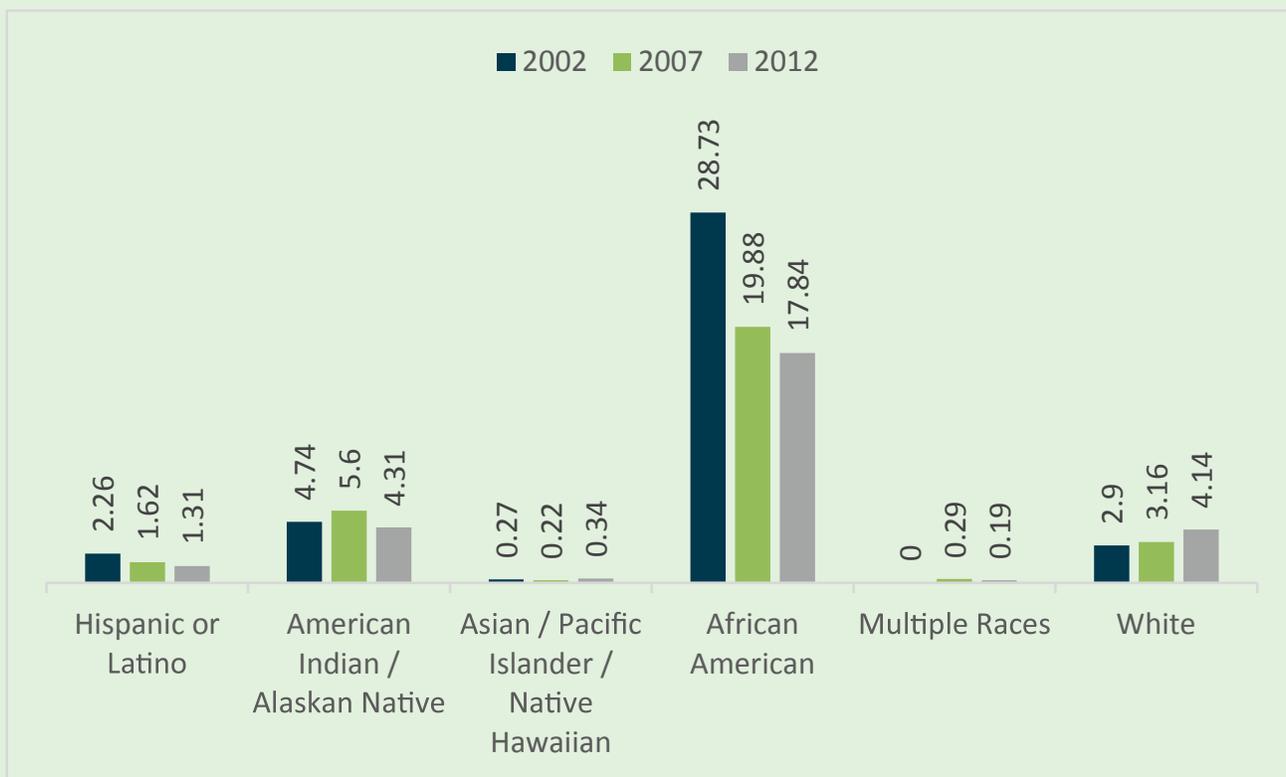
Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

	Hispanic or Latino	American Indian / Alaskan Native	Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	African American	Multiple Races	White
2002	2.26	4.74	0.27	28.73	0	2.9
2007	1.62	5.6	0.22	19.88	0.29	3.16
2012	1.31	4.31	0.34	17.84	0.19	4.14

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

permanency outcomes for children in their communities. Supported by their University partners, these teams link DCFS field operations to local community stakeholders to address issues of permanency and race.

A few examples of local interventions:

Dekalb County of Northern Region learned that approximately six percent of children in the county were African American, yet they accounted for 27 percent of the children taken into DCFS custody. The Action Team made the community aware of the statistics through the coordination of a series of meetings throughout the community. They also implemented parent cafes and community cafes to connect parents with each other and to community resources. As of June 2013, the number of children in DCFS custody had declined from 27 percent to 18 percent. The team continues to work towards reducing the percent of African American children in care until there is no disproportionality.

Sangamon County Action Team of Central Region has been focusing on reducing the amount of time that children remain in care. The Action Team provided training to DCFS, private agency staff and court personnel on the plan to reduce the amount of time between the shelter care hearing and adjudication by three months. Everyone has a timeline that they have agreed to in moving cases through the courts including judges, assistant state's attorney, guardian, public defender, DCFS and private agency staff. This action team is co-chaired by a judge and meetings are held in the courtroom.

North and West side Chicago Teams are focusing on families having access to a safety net so that families can remain intact or safely reunify with their children that have been placed in care. One action team identified a need for parents to become better aware of how to navigate through the courts and child welfare agencies. The team is in the process of reviewing parent surveys to develop a plan to help parents fulfill their obligations in working through the systems.

Illinois has experienced unprecedented engagement between system stakeholders (workers, clients, law enforcement, etc.) and members of the judiciary. The access and ability to discuss, plan, debate and train with judges on matters of policy and practice "outside of formal hearings" has been one of the hallmarks of this initiative on race and child welfare practice. Judges actively participate on many of the PEP Local Action Teams operating across the state. Many of the teams actually meet monthly in the judge's chambers or courtroom as a way to support the time constraints and interests of the judges.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

The efforts to reduce racially disparate outcomes in Illinois have been underway for several years, and have remained a consistent priority across several executive leadership teams. As this work continues to evolve, several themes stand out with respect to both challenges and opportunities:

- As executive leadership changes in state government on a regular basis, aligning this work with the priorities of every executive leadership team remains a major strategic challenge. For each successive leadership team, this initiative must be positioned in a way that is compelling, and in direct alignment with every leader's fundamental interest in improving outcomes for children and their families.

- Leaders of this work must state clearly that there is no conflict between understanding and mitigating the harmful influence of structural racism on system policies and practices, and the constant goal of improving the system's response to and support for children and families that come to the Department's attention. In fact, these are necessarily interdependent aims for any department interested in improving outcomes for children and families.

- To continue to advance the work, the Department's thoughtful engagement of partners, the use of data and critical self-reflection among the DCFS leaders and the broader human service workforce are all necessary.

- It is critically important to document and to share lessons learned about the improvements made as a result of this work, including both the success factors as well as the challenges encountered along the way. Increased resources are absolutely needed for evaluating this work.

- The active participation of community leaders and providers are critical to sustaining this work and effecting new policies and practices that honor the values of children and families.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The initiatives described above, having begun with a focus on permanency, are now expanding to include a focus on safety and well-being. As these efforts have continued, the Department's understanding of the relationship between race, racism and the disparities observed across all of the state's human service systems has become clearer. Moreover, the state's examination of racial disparities in specific child and family serving systems has led to a recognition of similar disparities in other systems. State legislation that requires an analysis of, and specific actions to reduce, racial disparities across all of the human service agencies is one strategy being considered, as this pattern of disparate outcomes are both problematic and changeable. State administrators express confidence that if they focus on these troubling patterns, and the system improvement strategies that make a difference across each of these multiple systems, the lives of many children and families can be impacted for the better.

Illinois 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	728,341	23.65%	952	5.79%	1.31	0.24	0.32
American Indian	4,409	0.15%	19	0.12%	4.31	0.76	0.99
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	138,563	4.35%	47	0.29%	0.34	0.07	0.09
Black / African American	486,563	16.24%	8,679	52.82%	17.84	3.25	4.23
Multiple Races	92,984	2.96%	18	0.11%	0.19	0.04	0.05
White	1,606,182	52.66%	6,657	40.51%	4.14	0.77	1.00
Total	3,057,042	100.00%	16,432	100.00%	5.38		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

IOWA

Iowa Department of Human Services

Efforts to reduce racial disproportionality and disparities among children and families involved with Iowa's foster care system began more than 10 years ago. The initial stages of this work in Iowa included a focus on Native American children and families in the Sioux City area (Woodbury County), as well as African American children and families in the Des Moines area (Polk County). As of 2014, racial disproportionality and disparity-related work had expanded to nine counties throughout the state. State child welfare administrators have been consistent in creating processes that: a) demonstrate the state's commitment to reducing racial disparities and b) support local counties in developing strategies that respond to the particular experiences of children and families at the local level.

INITIATIVES

Early Exploration in Des Moines and Sioux City

In the early stages, Des Moines and Sioux City were the first Iowa sites to explore avenues for reducing racial disproportionality and disparity. Des Moines' early efforts were largely guided by participation in a national Breakthrough Series Collaborative coordinated by Casey Family Programs. One of the most successful practice changes resulting from this effort was the implementation of **pre/post- removal conferences** which directly supported an increase in rates of relative placement.

These conferences are similar to family team decision-making meetings, but are held within 24 hours of placement and serve as a way to pull the immediate family and extended family resources together. Participants typically include the Department of Human Services (DHS), family members, any other individuals the family wants to invite, African American ministers and 'parent partners' (former child welfare clients who now serve as coaches for currently involved parents).

Sioux City child welfare leadership formed a strong working relationship with the Native American community. As a result of this relationship, DHS developed a **Native American social work unit** within the DHS office. Now Native American social workers work directly with an advocate for Native American families and serve as cultural guides for others within the system.

Iowa Breakthrough Series Collaborative

During 2009, building on the experiences of child welfare officials and other key partners in both Des Moines and Sioux City, state child welfare officials developed a statewide Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) for counties wanting to better understand the extent and nature of racial disparities in child welfare, and to develop strategies to reverse this trend. This collaborative was largely supported by Casey Family Programs, and was modeled after the

national Breakthrough Series Collaborative methodology and process. Additional support of these efforts was provided by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare.

The nine participating Iowa counties include:

- Black Hawk County
- Dallas County
- Des Moines County
- Dubuque County
- Johnson County
- Linn County
- Polk County
- Webster County
- Woodbury County

Engagement of Multiple System and Community Partners

Child welfare leadership from nine counties signed on to participate in the BSC. As a condition of participation, each county developed a local BSC team comprising child welfare agency leadership, supervisors, front line staff, parents and youth who were previously involved with the child welfare system, community partners as well as judges and/or court representatives. The cross-section of participants on the local

IOWA FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE

(per 1,000 children)

■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	6.28	10.08	9.01
American Indian / Alaskan Native	47.66	54.99	38.43
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	3.18	6.16	5.36
African American	25.92	42.17	27.77
Multiple Races	0.94	7.17	10.95
White	5.77	9.23	6.99

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

BSC teams allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of children and families, and the implications for the multiple system partners.

Local Analysis and Use of Data

Each participating BSC team received county data (by race and ethnicity) on outcomes for children and families at key decision points. The data included referrals to the Child Protective Services (CPS) hotline, assessment, founded and unfounded allegations, placements in foster care, types of exits from care and length of stay. Information on referrals from mandated reporters were broken into categories by type of reporter, nature of the allegation and a more detailed look at where within the community the reporter is involved (i.e. specific schools, hospitals, police precincts, etc.). All of these data were shared at the county level, and were intended to

help local teams create goals, and to determine where their efforts should be focused to have a meaningful impact on improved outcomes for families of color. Some counties, for example, chose to work with local school officials to ensure that mandated reporter training included a greater focus on cultural diversity and understanding, and knowledge of the range of community supports available for families in need.

Local Team Meetings and Strategy Development

In the early phase of the collaborative, local teams met either monthly or bimonthly to review and make sense of the local disparity data, identify opportunities for improved system policies and practices, and identify unmet family support and service needs. Future team meetings, typically held with the same level of frequency, focused on sharing updates from their respective activities,

and a discussion of progress, challenges and lessons learned from any of the system improvement strategies underway. Similarly-focused conference calls also were convened periodically for all of the BSC team managers. Each county's local work was organized around small tests of change (plan-do-study-act cycles) that – if data suggested were contributing to an improvement – could be expanded and spread. This model of improvement has been credited with increasing levels of reflective practice as well as staff buy-in and support for related system improvement efforts.

All-Collaborative Learning Community

Additionally, and in support of the local county efforts, county BSC teams came together semi-annually to participate in all-collaborative 'learning sessions.' These two-day sessions provided an opportunity for all of the county teams to

learn more about the influence of race, ethnicity and culture on children, youth and families, as well as on institutions. It also provided an opportunity for counties to share information about the activities and improvement strategies that were making a difference in their respective counties (i.e. analyzing and understanding data, engaging community partners, developing the workforce, improving family engagement, etc.). Parents and youth routinely attended a capacity building workshop on the day before each learning session, specifically designed to enhance their advocacy and organizing skills, as well as to increase their understanding of child welfare system operations and specific child welfare policies. Though the hands-on involvement of Casey Family Programs in Iowa's BSC has ended, the nine participating county BSC teams continue to come together for semi-annual learning sessions.

Agency & Community Problem-Solving Partnerships

The local BSC work in Polk County generated a model of agency-community partnership and problem-solving. This partnership led to the development of a community review board specifically focused on supporting improved outcomes for children and families in the community who became involved with child welfare (disproportionately African American).

Facilitated Community Forums & Town Hall Meeting

Six African American community leaders were invited to become facilitators of "courageous conversations" between the child welfare agency and the communities from which most child welfare-involved children and families come. Each of the six leaders participated in a training to prepare them to facilitate community forums, with a focus on strategies for guiding emotionally and racially charged conversations focused on community perceptions of foster care in general, and the Department of Human Services in particular.

Members of the Pastors and Ministers Association, formerly the Black Ministerial Alliance, and other African American community leaders were very supportive of this initiative and served as cultural guides to the neighborhoods for department officials. Conversations were held at African American churches and small African American grass roots community service agencies. The conversations culminated in a large town hall meeting where DHS administrators responded to the feedback shared at the various sessions. These community forums were eye-opening and produced valuable feedback for the department. The community suggestions led to several Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) strategies related to practice at the Department of Human Services.

African American Case Review Team

One result of this effort was the creation of the **African American Case Review Team**, focused on cases where African American children have been removed from their parents' care and not placed with relatives, as well as cases nearing permanency where reunification has not been achieved. The case review team includes representatives who mirror the racial and ethnic composition of the community in which it is focused and includes African American professionals from the areas of substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health, trauma, foster care, education and the Fatherhood Initiative. The team reviews the cases from a cultural lens and makes recommendations for alternative placements, such as with relatives or other close family supports, as well as recommendations for services. This strategy which was brainstormed as a PDSA has now become an institutionalized practice, with the team meeting twice a month to review cases. The team recently conducted a related training at the Model Court Training Academy and has been invited to present to juvenile judges from across the state.

The Latino Forum has expressed interest in working with the Department of Human Services to train facilitators and conduct Courageous Conversations in the Latino community in Polk County. Additionally, leadership at Juvenile Court Services has asked to be trained to facilitate similar groups with a focus on the African American youth and families that they serve.

Pastors and Ministers Project

Another PDSA strategy that grew out of the Courageous Conversations is the **Pastors and Ministers Project**. This is an initiative where members of the Pastors and Ministers Association make themselves available to African American families at the pre/post- removal conference to offer informal, support from faith based institutions. Training to support this effort has been developed and DHS is working with the Association to recruit volunteers.

Pocket Guide for Families

The community also asked that an easily understood **pocket guide** to DHS terms, expectations and client rights be developed and provided to all families whose children have been removed. Parents and community members worked with DHS staff to develop this product which is currently being piloted with families.

Strategic Sharing: Understanding the Experiences of African American Families

The community expressed concern about DHS' engagement of African American families and asked for experiential training of workers. DHS is training African American parents, relative placements and youth who have been involved with DHS in **Strategic Sharing** to tell their stories to DHS workers in small groups. The focus will be on what happened to them and what they needed from DHS.

Two subsequent Town Hall meetings have been scheduled for DHS to report back to the community on the efforts that have been underway, field questions and gather concerns. Ongoing Town Hall meetings will be scheduled during the spring and fall 2015.

Statewide Cultural Equity Alliance Steering Committee (CEASC)

Iowa developed a state-wide committee, **Cultural Equity Alliance Steering Committee (CEASC),** including court representatives, child welfare professionals, parents, youth, DHS members of all levels and diverse members of the public and private sectors. One of the early tasks for this committee was to develop a set of guiding principles and standards for the agency's work with children, youth and families. The committee adapted a set of 15 standards for cultural and linguistic competence from the Office of Minority Health, adjusting the language to reflect the committee's and the department's focus on supporting children and families. The committee then conducted a survey of staff throughout the state to determine what types of activities and work were already being done that were consistent with the standards. One of the aims of the committee is to ensure that all interested partners develop a better understanding of how these standards can and are being infused into the work of the department.

To focus their work, the committee has now developed several subcommittees, through which each of several related standards will be addressed.

- The *collaboration and communication subcommittee* consists of multiple institutional and system partners, and aims to have these standards adopted by all of DHS' program areas, as well as all of the institutional partners that work directly with DHS.

- The *training subcommittee* identifies workforce development needs, especially with respect to understanding the implications of race, racism, ethnicity and culture on child welfare policy and practice. The committee is especially concerned with improving the workforce's ability to effectively engage families of different racial and cultural backgrounds.

- The *culturally responsive services subcommittee* is focused on language. A language translation telephone line is open to all workers but is not used to its full potential. Utilization also depends on the region and staff capacity. The ultimate goal is for all staff and families to have access to language resources to ensure timely and responsive engagement of families of all backgrounds.

- The *evaluation subcommittee* is exploring ways in which various state agencies collect and use information on race and ethnicity to determine the feasibility of refining existing race and ethnic categories.

Race: The Power of an Illusion

Iowa partnered with consultant Khatib Waheed to launch a series of full-day learning exchanges centered on the PBS series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion.* Specifically, the learning exchange focuses on the third episode, 'The House We Live In.' The learning exchange provides an introduction to the historical role of law and social policy in shaping the racialized experiences of children, families and communities, and the implications for how institutions in American society think about and (frequently) respond inequitably to individuals within specific racial and ethnic groups. The learning exchange is open to DHS office administrators and staff, as well as cross-system and cross-community partners. Ten individuals participated in a train-the-trainer process and have become particularly skilled at building trust among participants and creating an open space for these frequently uncomfortable yet important conversations.

Attendance at the learning exchange has usually been voluntary. Polk County, however, requires all DHS staff to attend, and a proposal is currently being considered that would require all new child welfare workers to attend a session within their first six months of being hired. Each learning exchange is scheduled for a full day, and can accommodate approximately 40 individuals. The sessions are ideally held in a neutral setting, such as a community center, to create an atmosphere that is as comfortable and inviting as possible. Much of the curriculum has been written down for consistency of structure and facilitation. Once a session has been completed, DHS's goal is to schedule periodic and regular opportunities for staff to participate in facilitated discussions to deepen their understanding of how this information and perspective can be applied. A more advanced curriculum will likely be developed in the future to guide this applied learning strategy.

Institutional Analysis

During 2011, Linn County (Cedar Rapids) participated in an Institutional Analysis to better understand the institutional and structural contributors to poor outcomes for African American children and families during the early stages of their involvement with the child welfare system and its community partners.

The analysis revealed several processes that provide 'fertile ground for improved practice,' and a foundation upon which the agency continues to build its disparity reduction efforts, including:

- *Family team meetings* that occur within the community in which many families involved with child welfare live.

- *Parent partners* that serve as advocates and mentors for parents working to reunify with their children.

- *Family Advocates* that serve as cultural brokers for African American families involved in the child welfare system.

- *Co-location of DHS staff* at Harambee House, a neighborhood DHS office within a community where many African American families live.

- *Post-removal conferences* that provide DHS with an opportunity to work with a family at the very early stages of a family's involvement with child welfare.

- *Visits within 24 hours* of a child's placement allow the parent, child and worker to understand more about a given child's and family's experiences and needs.

- The African American *family preservation and resource committee*, a group consisting of local African American community members, who also serve as cultural brokers for the Cedar Rapids child welfare community.

The completion of the institutional analysis also highlighted three themes, which have served as a road map for the work in Cedar Rapids:

- A pervasive culture of caution within the Cedar Rapids Child Welfare Community which includes DHS, the courts and legal partners, community providers and community activists resulting in families' experiencing a threat of, or actual excessive state intervention, coercion and monitoring.

- Resources do not meet the underlying and basic needs of families. Families are offered resources that exist in the community, but that do not necessarily support or promote family stability and unity.

- Professionals do not have clarity about the difference between safety of children and risk of future harm. This lack of clarity is further complicated by stigma, labeling and negative inferences drawn based on a family's history, sometimes resulting in decision making that keeps families apart for unnecessarily long periods of time.

Immediately after the completion of the institutional analysis, Linn County officials worked directly with community members, parents, youth and other community partners to develop an action plan to guide the community's continuing system improvement efforts. It should be noted that the themes found within the Cedar Rapids child welfare community mirror the same themes of concern found in other institutional analyses that have been conducted nationally.

OBSERVED CHANGES

Iowa's racial disparity reduction-related work efforts have produced a combination of specific system practice changes, organizational culture changes with respect to race and ethnicity as well as improvements in child and family outcomes. Among the notable improvements and changes are the following:

- One of the most impactful practice changes that derived from the Plan-Do-Study-Act approach has been the pre-/post- removal conferences. This is rapidly becoming a statewide practice and may in return substantially increase relative placement.

- Through the learning exchange featuring *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, workers and community partners have become more comfortable engaging in courageous conversations about race, ethnicity, racial disparity and disproportionality.

- Iowa's efforts to-date have resulted in reduced rates (statewide) of racial disparity for founded abuse and foster care entries for African American and Native American children. Counties participating in this statewide initiative have continuously focused on training, reviewing data, gathering community input and strengthening partnerships, and utilizing cultural lenses to guide and reshape practice.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

The following are among the reflections and lessons learned from Iowa's many years of work:

- *Creative strategies for engaging youth in system reform efforts* – Youth engagement is very important to the work of improving systems, yet tends to be very challenging. Iowa has to be consistent in developing more processes for seeking out youth ideas and reflections on child welfare policies and practices, particularly because most children and youth are still in school and thus cannot participate in related meetings and committees during regular business hours.

- *Continuous opportunities for courageous conversations about race, racism and culture* – It is important to develop the department's capacity to organize and facilitate challenging and "courageous conversations" about race, racism, ethnicity and culture. The workforce is constantly changing, with new workers, supervisors and administrators coming into the workforce.

- *Training must be enhanced by opportunities for culturally responsive modeling and coaching* – There is a tendency among many child welfare professionals to believe that when a change is needed, training must be a primary part of the solution. However, Iowa's experience suggests that training alone does not always result in change. There must be a focus on the ways in which workers are prepared to directly engage and spend time with families. Training can support this, although there must be strategies in place for modeling and coaching the effective and culturally

responsive engagement of workers with families.

- *Shared responsibility for reducing racial disparities* – Iowa must recognize that the child welfare "system" extends beyond general child protective services and is made up of individuals, families, organizations and community-based programs that work together to improve the safety, health, permanency and well-being of children. The responsibility to keep children safe from abuse and neglect is shared by families, community, tribes, helping agencies, educational systems, faith-based groups, law enforcement, courts, DHS and others.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- The Cultural Equity Alliance Steering Committee is considered a long-term, on-going mechanism for strategic planning, promoting and implementing guiding principles/standards and evaluating and assessing data to ensure a feedback loop for future implementation. Iowa is now working with Casey Family Programs to develop a Breakthrough Series Collaborative 101 to assist in engaging new sites and team members and provide a mechanism to learn the basics of PDSA, use of disparity data andthe development of innovative strategies.

- Iowa DHS officials partnered with researchers at the University of Northern Iowa to conduct an evaluation in 2013 that established a baseline for the implementation of policy and practice changes. The researchers are working with the BSC teams to assess recent implementation strategies to determine the potential impact on disparity and disproportionality.

- The *Race: Power of an Illusion* learning exchange continues to be in demand and is being considered as a possible requirement for new workers. Iowa intends to recruit new trainers and expand throughout the state. Also, one neighboring state and the Kansas City regional staff have requested to participate in the training.

- Iowa has worked with the University of Kansas to develop database reports to assist staff in identifying practices which could potentially lead to disparity at decision points within the child welfare system.

Iowa 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	66,913	9.01%	603	9.65%	9.01	1.07	1.33
American Indian	2,576	0.36%	99	1.58%	38.43	4.34	5.40
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	15,311	1.98%	82	1.31%	5.36	0.66	0.82
Black / African American	31,006	4.19%	861	13.77%	27.77	3.29	4.09
Multiple Races	25,387	3.40%	278	4.45%	10.95	1.31	1.62
White	582,724	81.05%	4,076	65.21%	6.99	0.80	1.00
Total	723,917	100.00%	6,251	100.00%	8.63		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

KENTUCKY

Statewide efforts to reduce racial disproportionality and disparity in Kentucky's child welfare system have largely been organized through the Race, Community and Child Welfare (RCCW) initiative. This statewide effort was initially formed in 2007 with the goal of reducing, and ultimately eliminating, racial disparities among children and families involved with Kentucky's child welfare system. The statewide initiative is primarily focused on five participating counties (Daviess, Fayette, Hardin, Jefferson and McCracken) with the highest disparity rates for African American families involved with child welfare compared to their white peers.

<div style="background:#b22222;color:white;text-align:center;padding:4px;">INITIATIVES</div>

Statewide Disproportionality Committee

The **statewide racial disproportionality and disparity reduction committee** was formed in 2009, and supported through a partnership with Casey Family Programs. For several years the committee was coordinated under the leadership of Kentucky Youth Advocates, and is now coordinated through the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The new alignment under the leadership of the AOC made the most sense because the engagement of judges, attorneys and other legal partners is a major focus of the RCCW's work.

The statewide committee's primary function is to facilitate information sharing and learning across the five participating counties, and to support the development and implementation of county disproportionality and disparity reduction plans. The statewide committee is made up of the chairs and co-chairs of the respective county advisory boards, and is staffed by the AOC.

Officials from the Department of Community Based Services (a division within the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services) generate quarterly data trend reports for the statewide committee, and routinely participate in each of the statewide committee meetings. Thus far, data reports include race/ethnicity trends for children and families involved with child welfare at key decision points. Efforts are being made to incorporate education-related data because of an increased focus on educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care, and disparities in suspension rates for children of color.

During the last several years, the committee has typically met in person once annually. These meetings include updates from each of the respective counties, a discussion of successes and lessons learned, and brainstorming ideas about future directions for their work. The most recent meeting of the statewide committee included all of the available members of the local county advisory boards, which allowed for more detailed discussion about the related efforts taking place throughout the state. The committee is looking to convene semi-annual meetings moving forward, one that would include the chairs and co-chairs and one that would include the extended advisory board membership from the respective counties.

The statewide committee also periodically hosts a community forum to discuss the relationship between race and child welfare, and the greater community's role in partnering with the child welfare system in support of improved child and family outcomes. Panelists for the forums have included cabinet officials, judges, attorneys and community members. The committee is considering a plan to convene this type of community forum on a more consistent basis.

County RCCW Advisory Boards

Each of the five counties participating in the Race, Community and Child Welfare initiative began with the development of a **local, or county, advisory board.** The specific size of each advisory board was different for each county, although each included some mix of the following key system partners and community stakeholders: child welfare administrators, supervisors and/or caseworkers; judges; attorneys; mental health officials; education officials; community members; retired professionals.

Each advisory board started with identifying the nature of the racial disparities in their respective counties, and the experiences of children and families within the community who were in-

volved with child welfare. All of the data and perspectives gathered during this initial work informed the development of each local strategic plan.

Examples of County Priorities

Listed below are some of the primary areas of focus prioritized by the five participating county advisory boards:

Daviess County

- Improve court performance through the Best Practice Model Court Initiative, with a focus on reducing disproportionality in child welfare involvement and improving academic achievement of children in foster care
- Improve coordination with family resource and youth service center workers
- Partner with schools to reduce, and eliminate disparities in discretionary school suspensions
- Identify and address housing needs of low-income families

Fayette County

- Improve the referral process for education professionals and child welfare
- Improve the recruitment and retention of African American families interested in serving as foster care families
- Improve supports for natural families and extended families of children who come to the attention of child welfare
- Improve legal representation for children, youth and parents involved with child welfare
- Expand education and training opportunities focused on racial disparities in the child welfare system

Hardin County

- Engage the faith community to create community spaces for supervised visitation between children and their parents
- Provide quarterly data reports and briefings on racial disproportionality

and disparity trends to family court judges
- Expand community education and mobilization efforts with the faith based community, aimed at increasing community supports for families involved with child welfare (i.e. helping with family transportation to support services, mentoring with parents and youth, etc.)

Jefferson County

- Improve family engagement (i.e. family team meetings, parent advocate programs, family reunification day celebration, etc.)
- Develop and pilot 'racial healing' training for DCBS and community agency staff
- Expand training on race and child welfare with judges, attorneys and social workers
- Engage more system and community partners using data and descriptions of committee efforts

McCracken County

- Develop a parent mentor network,

KENTUCKY FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE

(per 1,000 children)

Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	2.02	6.29	6.06
American Indian / Alaskan Native	4.97	4.85	2.63
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	0.88	1.48	0.4
African American	13.7	14.71	9.54
Multiple Races	11.39	13.28	8.85
White	5.82	6.39	6.41

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

with specific attention to improving supports for African American parents who are involved with child welfare

- Develop family engagement training for DCBS and community agency staff, with parent mentors serving as co-trainers

The work of the statewide committee has focused largely on the coordination of training workshops and regular meetings to expand key stakeholders' awareness of the extent and nature of racial disparities in child welfare outcomes. While representatives of the courts, attorneys and child welfare organizations have been consistent participants in this initiative, the efforts of the statewide committee to recommend and monitor improved policies and practices are still in the early stages.

- It is important to pay attention to the racial and ethnic composition of the local committees and advisory boards. In many counties in Kentucky, it is very easy to form an all-white committee or advisory board when drawing on administrators and other senior officials. Officials have to be thoughtful and make deliberate efforts to bring in a diverse group of leaders and community residents, especially from the communities that the advisory boards and committees are focused on.

- For any effort aimed at improving outcomes for children and families, it is critically important that there is a sizable representation of children and families involved in the thinking and planning the work. To facilitate their full participation, meetings have to be scheduled at times and in locations that are convenient for youth and families.

There has been an emphasis to date on training as a way to share new ideas and perspectives with system administrators, staff, and key partners. A primary goal for the statewide committee has been to shift the thinking of key child welfare stakeholders about the major contributing factors to racial disparities in such a way that everyone can identify specific ways in which they can impact improved outcomes for children and families of color. The next goal is to assist local counties in developing specific improved system responses to children and families. Officials are also considering a strategy for going back to participants after local training workshops to find out how they are using the information, whether the information is being integrated into their respective professional roles, and whether any additional efforts have come about as a result of the training.

Kentucky 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	53,989	5.14%	327	4.69%	6.06	0.91	0.98
American Indian	1,523	0.17%	4	0.06%	2.63	0.34	0.37
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	15,123	1.39%	6	0.09%	0.40	0.06	0.07
Black / African American	93,017	9.14%	887	12.71%	9.54	1.39	1.50
Multiple Races	37,070	3.44%	328	4.70%	8.85	1.37	1.47
White	816,628	80.73%	5,237	75.04%	6.41	0.93	1.00
Total	1,017,350	100.00%	6,979	100.00%	6.86	1.00	1.08

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

MICHIGAN

A host of Michigan institutions and partners have assisted in the development of initiatives aimed at reducing racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children and families involved with child welfare, and improving access to opportunities for young adults transitioning out of foster care. Multiple efforts are underway aimed at reducing disparities for children and youth involved with child welfare and the juvenile justice system, including a statewide race equity coalition and an initiative aimed at preventing youth in the child welfare system from moving into the juvenile justice system.

There also exists an exemplary well-being-focused partnership between the state's child welfare system and multiple institutions of higher education to support successful transitions from foster care to college and career success. This post-secondary educational success approach is guided by Western Michigan University's Center for Fostering Success, and includes the Seita Scholars Program for former foster youth, and Fostering Success Michigan, a state-wide strategy to improve educational and life outcomes. Although the efforts aimed at improving educational outcomes for transitioning youth and young adults were not specifically developed to reduce racial disparities, the programs include an explicit focus on improving post-secondary access and success for youth of color.

A more detailed description of each of these efforts is provided below.

INITIATIVES

Michigan Race Equity Coalition

The Michigan Race Equity Coalition in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice (MREC) was formed in September 2011 by a diverse group of Michigan stakeholders to examine and implement strategies to address the root causes of minority overrepresentation. The coalition includes a cross section of Michigan's children and family services leadership, juvenile justice leadership, members of the judiciary, state and local officials, public and private agency leaders, educators, health and child welfare professionals, philanthropic leaders, and advocates for Michigan's children and their families.

An early charge of the coalition was to review previous Michigan reports related to minority overrepresentation in child welfare and juvenile justice, identify the key decision points in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems that contribute to disproportionality, and develop a set of recommendations and action plans to reduce disproportionality in child welfare.

The following are the major state-level findings of the coalition's analysis of key decision points data for 2013:

- Children of color in Michigan are more likely to live in families investigated for abuse/neglect.
- Children of color in Michigan are more likely to be removed from their home due to abuse/neglect than white children.
- Children of color in Michigan are twice as likely as white children to age out of foster care without permanency.

To address these findings, a series of recommendations were developed and approved by the coalition in November 2013. The recommendations, a product of current coalition deliberations and recommendations from previous Michigan specific reports, include a focus on:

- Improved stakeholder oversight and coordination
- Improved data collection by race and ethnicity throughout all of Michigan's relevant state information systems
- Improved data collection on the experiences of Native American/Alaskan Native children and families, as well as improved training and compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- Practice and services improvement
- Reinvestment and expansion of public and private funding to support children and families
- State policies and laws that direct resources to early childhood and community-based services for

families

- Expanded training for policymakers, the child welfare and juvenile justice workforces and other key stakeholders on the difference between poverty and neglect, as well as on the importance of racial and ethnic identity development among children and youth

Analyses of decision points data for Saginaw County mirrored the statewide analysis and findings. **The Saginaw County Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Steering Team** developed additional recommendations in three areas (training, programming and systems change) for reducing child welfare disparities in Saginaw County, including:

Training

- Improved identification and reporting of potential child abuse and neglect for mandatory reporters

- Enhanced law enforcement interactions with youth
- Cultural competence

Programming

- Implementation of parent support partner programs
- Expansion of "Strengthening Families"
- Increasing programs focused on diversion of youth from juvenile justice involvement

Systems Change

- Expanded implementation of "Team Decision Making"
- Establishing the use of objective risk and needs assessments

At the time of this review, recommendations for the state and Saginaw County are still early in their implementation.

The state coalition will continue to review data annually for key decision points, and will monitor the implementation of the report's state and local county recommendations. County advisory committees focusing on the extent and nature of racial disparities at the local level are also being developed, and include representatives from education, child welfare and juvenile justice agencies, as well as direct service organizations.

Crossover Youth Practice Model

Youth in Michigan's foster care system are significantly more likely than their peers who are not in foster care to end up involved with the juvenile justice system, or the criminal justice system in their young adult years. Moreover, the chance of juvenile justice and/or criminal justice system involvement is significantly greater for youth of color in foster care.

MICHIGAN FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
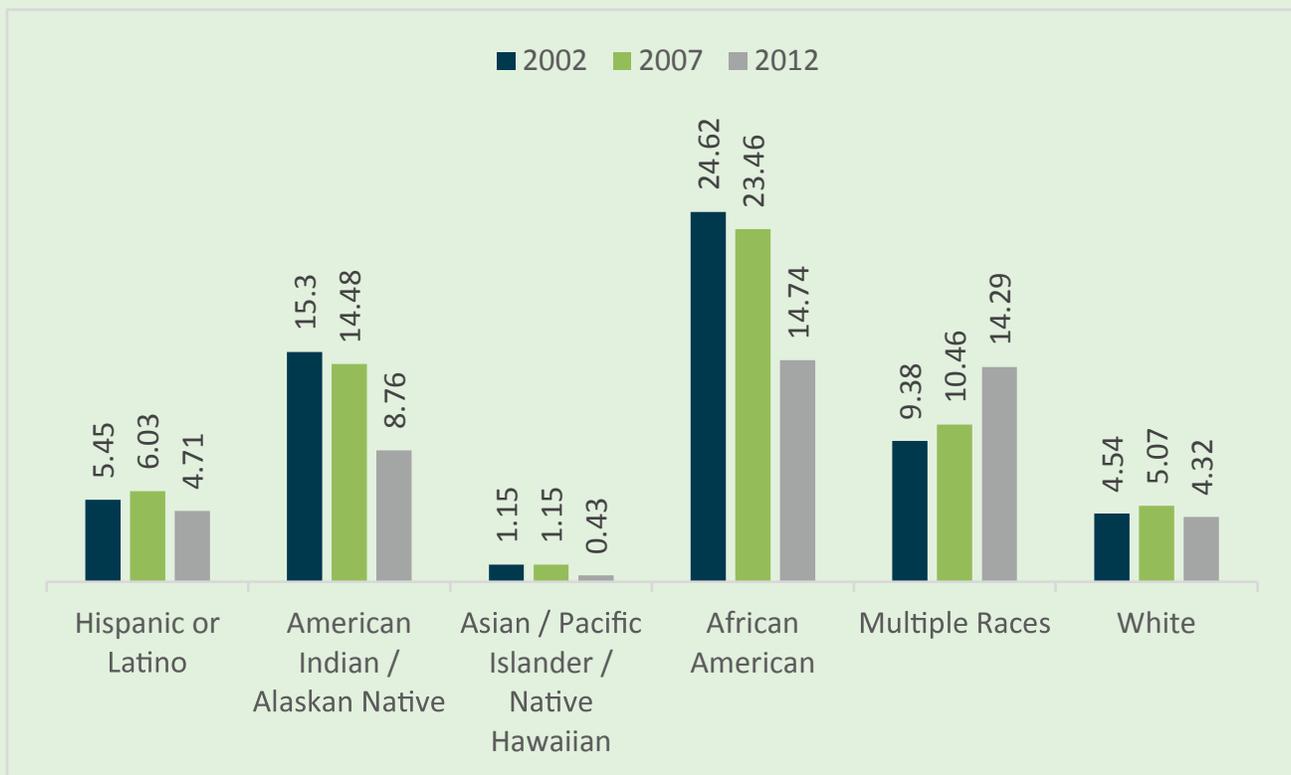
■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	5.45	6.03	4.71
American Indian / Alaskan Native	15.3	14.48	8.76
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	1.15	1.15	0.43
African American	24.62	23.46	14.74
Multiple Races	9.38	10.46	14.29
White	4.54	5.07	4.32

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

The **Crossover Youth Initiative** is a joint project with the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Michigan Bureau of Juvenile Justice (a part of DHS), with a focus on preventing youth in the child welfare system from moving into the juvenile justice system. Participating counties include Genesee, Kent, Macomb, Muskegon, Oakland, and Wayne Counties.

The crossover initiative centers on the implementation of the **Crossover Youth Practice Model**, developed in 2007 by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at Georgetown University, and supported by Casey Family Programs. The crossover youth practice model describes the specific practices that need to be in place within a jurisdiction to reduce the number of youth who cross over between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, the number of youth entering and reentering care, and the length of stay in out of home care.

The practice model for crossover youth includes the following practices:

- The creation of a process for identifying crossover youth at the point of crossing over
- Ensuring that workers are exchanging information in a timely manner
- Including families in all decision-making aspects of the case,
- Ensuring that foster care bias is not occurring at the point of detention or disposition
- Maximizing the services utilized by each system to prevent crossover from occurring

Training for the crossover youth initiative began in October 2014 in Genesee County, and will continue as the implementation of the model expands. Although the crossover youth initiative is not exclusively focused on children of color, it is expected to significantly reduce racial disparities in the rates of crossover involvement among youth of color.

Center for Fostering Success at Western Michigan University

Youth transitioning out of foster care in Michigan are significantly less likely to attend and graduate from college than their peers who are not in foster care. This trend is even more pronounced for youth of color transitioning out of foster care. The Center for Fostering Success was officially established by the Board of Trustees at Western Michigan University in 2012 with a mission to improve college graduation and career achievement rates among youth and young adults (12 to 25 years old) aging out of the foster care system.

A major key to the Center's success is keeping students at the table as equal partners and ensuring their voices guide all aspects of the Center's development and continuing improvement processes. All of the Center's work is student-centered with student advisers providing direct feedback to the center director. Many participating students are also involved in related student organizations focused on community building and raising awareness of foster care on campus. The center has three major units:

1. Seita Scholars Program
2. Outreach and training
3. Research and development

Seita Scholars Program

Launched in 2008, the **Seita Scholars Program** offers a comprehensive array of supports to Western Michigan University students who have aged out of foster care. The program supports up to 160 Seita Scholars annually, and benefits include a tuition scholarship, 24-hour campus coaching support, leadership opportunities, career mentors, support with personal and cultural identity and life skills development, and other transformative strategies. The program provides a strong support system for youth who have transitioned out of foster care, and who face challenges that many of their peers do not. The program works closely with state officials at the Michigan Department of Human Services as well as with county-level child welfare and human service officials.

One observation made by program officials is the declining number of students of color and male students applying to the program. Thus, staff and program participants are placing a heightened focus on increasing diversity and racial and gender equity among the students applying to the program. Strategies to increase diversity include the deliberate development of opportunities to highlight student success stories featuring students (especially men) of color, and ensuring the diversity of images used on outreach materials. Internal efforts have also been made to increase staff diversity. Additional outreach and relationship building is also being coordinated with officials in school districts and schools that graduate large numbers of youth of color who are also in foster care.

Outreach and Training

The Center for Fostering Success at Western Michigan University's outreach and training unit works to resource, network and support partners in education, housing, health and child welfare who insulate the education to career pipeline for students from foster care ages 12 to 25. The outreach and training unit offers two primary services: Fostering Success Coach Training and Fostering Success Michigan, a statewide initiative.

Designed in 2013, the **Fostering Success Coaching Model** provides professionals a practice framework as well as practical student engagement strategies uniquely designed to address students' actions, goals, challenges and progress toward graduation. The model's framework includes seven core elements that articulate the philosophy of action for working with students from foster care, and three core practice steps that give practical guidance for engaging and

partnering with students in the transformation process of their personal and professional development. The **_Fostering Success Coach Training and Certification_** was developed in an effort to teach professionals the Fostering Success Coaching Model. Training provides intense skill development, and effectively equips professionals with practical tools to partner with students. It also provides a network of other coaches to learn from and with, and expert consultation opportunities.

The Center's signature outreach program is **Fostering Success Michigan (FSM)**, an initiative started in 2012 that focuses on building a statewide cross-sector network to support students from foster care as they access and succeed in colleges and universities across Michigan. The effort focuses on making connections between people who are working to improve educational and career outcomes for Michigan's students from foster care between the ages of 12 to 25 years old. Such partners include non-profit organizations, businesses as well as child welfare and education professionals throughout the state. The focus is not only for transitioning foster youth to access and earn a college degree, but also to transform lives through the college experience and successfully start a professional career. Consistent with the student-centered nature of the Center, this program emphasizes students as experts in their own lived experiences and helps develop their skills to be effective decision makers and leaders.

To connect participating schools and community partners, Fostering Success Michigan organizes a variety of information sharing and networking meetings. Regional network meetings are an opportunity for schools to share resources and learn from others in their area. Additionally, an annual statewide summit brings all of the partners together. Campus support programs are also convened three times a year for in-person technical assistance and discussions about challenges and solutions.

The following post-secondary institutions in Michigan provide related campus-based support programs:

- Aquinas College: Fostering Success Scholarship Program
- Baker College-Flint: LINK Program
- Eastern Michigan University: MAGIC Program
- Ferris State University: Ferris Youth Initiative
- Kalamazoo Valley Community College: Campus Support Program
- Lansing Community College: Campus Support Program
- Michigan State University: FAME Program
- Northwestern Michigan College: YourNMC
- Saginaw Valley State University: FAST Program
- University of Michigan-Ann Arbor: Blavin Scholars Program
- University of Michigan-Flint: MPowering My Success
- Wayne State University: TIP Wayne State
- Western Michigan University: Seita Scholars Program

Research and Development

A research component of the Center was developed in 2014 to examine the factors that support successful transition of youth out of foster care, through higher education completion and into successful careers. The research activities aim to contribute to the understanding of the range of supportive partners of how communities can promote healthy transitions that support educational and career goals of young people growing up in foster care. Students contribute actively to the research process and the development of related information resources and guides.

<div style="background:#b01c24;color:white;text-align:center;">OBSERVED CHANGES</div>

Since 2012 there has been an increased focus from Michigan's Department of Human Services on the education attainment of young people who experience foster care. This increased focus has been demonstrated in the awarding of eight grants to established Life Skills Coaches on college and university campuses. Additionally, DHS has become an active partner with the Fostering Success Michigan statewide initiative, connecting caseworkers and education planners to the resources available through FSM.

<div style="background:#b01c24;color:white;text-align:center;">REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED</div>

There are several reflections regarding the early stages of the state's current focus on reducing racial disparities in child welfare, juvenile justice and youth who are involved with both systems.

- Michigan officials have rich access to data related to the involvement of children and youth with the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, and the youth who are involved with both systems. This includes information (using data specific to zip codes) about the larger environment in which children, youth and families live (i.e. poverty, family composition and high risk behaviors among children and youth). This notwithstanding, there remains a greater understanding about the experiences of boys and young men involved with the juvenile justice system than the girls. Efforts are now underway to expand the system's understanding of girls' experiences.
- There also remain resource challenges that impact the full development and implementation of the recommendations that have been produced, both with respect to developing and operating the local advisory groups and with respect to expanding programs and services to support families.

With respect to Michigan efforts to expand educational supports for transitioning youth, several challenges have been encountered in the development of the array of post-secondary educational supports for young adults transitioning out of foster care.

- **Bridging silos between systems** – One challenge has been bridging the silo between the child welfare and K-12 education systems. Both systems are working on behalf of students but there needs to be more collaboration and cross-education to understand all ongoing projects. This important work is happening, and must continue to be a deliberate focus of both systems, both at the state and local levels.

- **Equitable attention to every program** – Another challenge has been ensuring that every postsecondary program is highlighted and promoted in an equitable manner. This approach reduces competition and promotes collaboration to best meet the students' needs.

- **Deliberate and equitable outreach to urban and rural communities within the state** – A third challenge is reaching students from both urban and rural areas. Resources are also often concentrated in more urban areas and university programs must work with two geographically extreme dynamics. Once students enter higher education, they must adjust to an environment that might be more rural or urban than what they are used to.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Current Michigan efforts to reduce racial disparities in child welfare and juvenile justice outcomes are still early in their implementation, and officials will continue to support and monitor the implementation of recommendations developed and approved by the state commission and Saginaw County officials. The state work will be guided by the state commission, and local efforts will similarly be guided by a local advisory council consisting of child welfare and juvenile officials as well as representatives from community service providing agencies.

In the coming years, the Center for Fostering Success will continue to expand the number of postsecondary institutions with campus-based support programs for students from foster care. Ideal circumstances would also allow for the creation of a statewide system to identify students from foster care in middle and high school to ensure that early and informed outreach and resources are delivered. Additionally, those leading this work think that legislation that supports a data sharing agreement between the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services to better track the education outcomes for students from foster care would be desirable. In support of each of these aims, the Center for Fostering Success will seek out opportunities to partner with other like-minded collaborative Michigan organizations to leverage their collective expertise and resources.

MINNESOTA

Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

Minnesota's efforts to improve racial equity in child welfare began well over a decade ago. A high level of commitment from both elected officials and community members has allowed for continuous work with demonstrated results. Through a variety of strategies and partnerships, Minnesota has worked to not only recognize a systemic issue but to address and ameliorate it as well.

<div style="background:#b01c24;color:#fff;text-align:center;font-weight:bold;">INITIATIVES</div>

Statewide Advisory Committee

In 2000, members of the African American community, aware of the disproportionate rate of involvement of African American families with the child welfare system, asked state representatives to take action. Minnesota legislators convened a **series of community hearings across the state** to better understand the concerns of African American families. Upon hearing consistent concerns across various communities within the state, the Minnesota state legislature directed the Department of Human Services (DHS) to form an Advisory Committee to further investigate the extent and the nature of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system.

The **Statewide Advisory Committee** included African American community leaders, child advocacy groups, state and county child welfare professionals, academia, and representatives from the counties with the four largest disproportionality rates: Ramsey, Anoka, Olmsted,

and Hennepin. Dakota and St. Louis Counties joined this statewide initiative during later years. Each of the counties was able to choose who attended their local meetings, with participants frequently including local judges, guardian ad litems, attorneys and officials from the local school system.

The Statewide Advisory Committee held meetings every month (with very few exceptions) from 2001 until 2011. Meetings were structured to include updates on recent activities from the participating counties, as well as time for work within five action groups, or subcommittees, focused on specific topics. Each of the action groups was charged with identifying consistent barriers and challenges across counties, and making specific policy and practice recommendations. Officials reported these meetings were especially effective because they were highly structured to ensure maximum productivity. The first 20 minutes were spent as a large group discussing general issues and updates, with the remaining 90 minutes dedicated to the work of the subcommittees.

With support from Casey Family Programs, the advisory committee periodically invited representatives from other jurisdictions involved in racial equity efforts to participate in a peer-to-peer learning and coaching model. These mini-convenings provided opportunities for jurisdictions to share lessons learned, as well as strategies that proved effective in their respective places, related to such topics as working

with community partners, and the effective use of data to guide local disparity reduction efforts.

Among the key recommendations made by the sub-committees were to: a) improve child and family engagement practices, b) monitor and evaluate county practices aimed at eliminating disparities, c) expand and enhance culturally competent training, and d) develop targeted and innovative service strategies to support the agency's work within African American communities. An underlying challenge, and thus an aim of the overarching statewide advisory committee, was to expand and enhance the way the state and local counties partnered with the African American community. Consistent across local counties was the need for expanded and relevant supports for African American families to ensure that children grow up in safe and nurturing homes, and that their families are thriving.

Decision Points Analysis & Targeted System Improvement Strategies

At the state's request, researchers from the University of Minnesota led a comparative case study to **track outcomes at key decision making points** for African American and white children involved with the child welfare system. The results of this study demonstrated that at each of the key decision making points along the continuum of a family's involvement with child welfare, African

American children were more likely to enter foster care when compared to their white counterparts, and they were more likely to stay in care for longer periods of time, with fewer opportunities for permanency. The statewide advisory committee was able to use the decision points analysis to demonstrate the need for macro-level changes to child welfare policy and practice.

Structured Decision Making (SDM) – One early focus for the advisory committee was the improvement of the state's **Structured Decision Making (SDM)** tool. The research study found that the questions embedded with the tool disproportionately recommended African American families for a higher risk level. Members of the committee worked with the developers of the SDM tool to review the findings and make adjustments to the assessment instrument.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) – The study also found racial disparities in the use of the **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)**. When reviewing outcomes for families who were involved with FGDM, it was discovered that many African American families were not provided access to FGDM, which is a practice strategy intended to engage family members and other close family supports in a coordinated problem solving and decision making process. With this data, specific counties adjusted their processes to more fully engage with African American families by ensuring that FGDM workers coordinated with child protection workers during the earliest contact with families.

Incarcerated Parents & Relative/Kinship Resources – The research study found that in some counties, large numbers of African American children were placed in out of home care when their parents were arrested on outstanding warrants (unrelated to the care of their children). Legislation was passed requiring law enforcement to work with parents who are being arrested to identify a relative who can care for the children, preventing the need for formal out of home placement.

Data Analysis by Race and Ethnicity

The development of the state's administrative data system was instrumental in allowing state and county directors to collect, analyze and report data by race and ethnicity. Data reports were generated by state and county officials to better understand where within the system racial disparities were more prevalent and at what stage of a family's involvement with the child welfare system the pattern of outcomes were most concerning. This level of analysis was not previously available, and allowed administrators to target their improvement strategies more effectively.

Partnership with Local School Officials

One of the participating counties discovered that the largest source of referrals for African American children who were placed in out of home care were specific schools within the public school system. To better understand the nature of the referrals, and the more general observations and experiences of public school officials, county child welfare officials co-located child welfare case workers in the schools. The partnership was specifically designed to identify and meet the support needs of families before their challenges turned into a crisis necessitating more intensive (child welfare) agency involvement.

Statewide Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council

An **American Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council** has been established to help formulate policies and procedures relating to Native American family services. The council consists of 17 members appointed by the commissioner, and representing each of 11 Native American tribes as well as the three major urban Native American communities in Minnesota. The council also makes grant decisions that direct money to Native American organizations and tribes, as well as tribal social service agencies. Funds are also provided to enhance family preservation and prevention ser-

vices, and to ensure state compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Ombudsperson for American Indian Families

The state of Minnesota joined with Native American partners to establish an **Ombudsperson for American Indian Families**, a designated position within the state's Office of the Ombudsperson for Families. The role is specifically designated to support families in resolving challenges with state's human service system, and to specifically monitor the state's compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA). This position does not have enforcement power, but is charged with making recommendations to the human service system in matters relating to specific cases as well as general policies and practices, and to the state legislature with respect to state policies and practices.

OBSERVED CHANGES

One of the most notable outcomes of the racial disproportionality and disparity-reduction work in Minnesota was a 44 percent reduction from 2003 to 2011 in rates of placement in out of home care for African American children. While reductions in the rates of child welfare involvement have not been the same for Native American children and families, there is an increased focus on the supports available for Native American children and families, and the partnership between the department and Native American tribes. Additionally, and as a result of this long-term effort, the department's administrators routinely analyze data by race and ethnicity and consider the implications for the department's continuing system improvement efforts and potential changes to state policy.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

The following are among the key lessons learned:

- Community participation was critically important to the statewide advisory committee, as well as the local county initiatives. While participation declined toward the end of the formal initiative, community member involvement helped identify major system barriers, and served an important accountability function for the state and for local child welfare systems.

- Commitment from the counties was consistent throughout the duration of the formal initiative. Even with the occasional transition of staff at the county level, county administrators always found a representative to attend the monthly meetings.

- Access to administrative data organized by race and ethnicity was essential in allowing the committee to understand the extent and nature of racial disparities, and where within the system to target system improvement efforts.

- The flexible structure of the statewide advisory committee allowed counties to identify specific barriers to improved outcomes at the local level, while still learning from the experiences – challenges and successes – from their colleagues in other counties.

- Partnerships between child welfare and other child and family serving systems are very important in this work, and become particularly relevant because of the involvement of families with multiple systems and supports.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the formal advisory committee that once guided the department's focus on improving outcomes for African American families no longer meets, there remains a consistent focus within the department on reducing racial disproportionality and disparities, with specific attention to Native American and African American children and families. While placement rates for African American children continue to decline, placement rates for Native American children and families remain high. Similarly, there remain significant disparities between the experiences and outcomes for African American children and families and their white counterparts. While efforts have been underway for several years to reduce this pattern of racial disparities, the department remains committed to analyzing data by race and ethnicity, and identifying specific opportunities for strengthening the agency's responses to and supports for children and families of color.

MINNESOTA FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
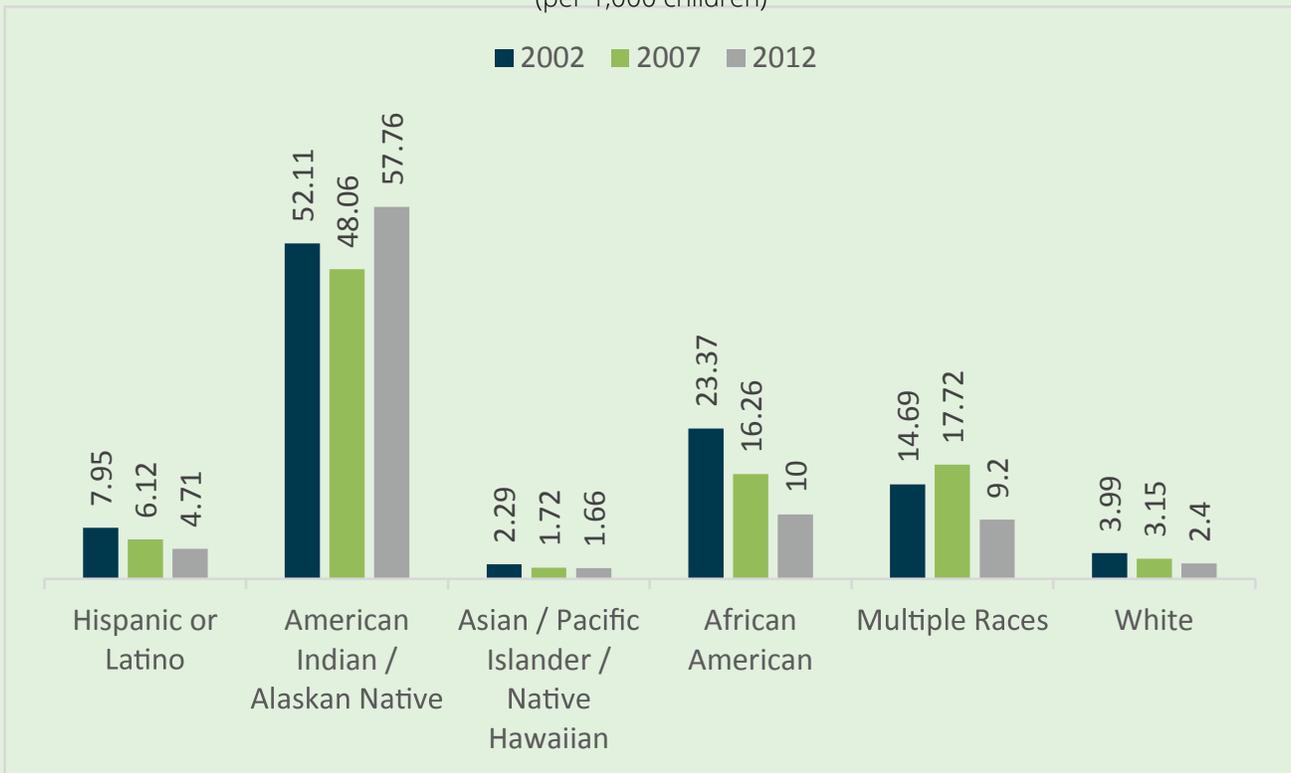
■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

	Hispanic or Latino	American Indian / Alaskan Native	Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	African American	Multiple Races	White
2002	7.95	52.11	2.29	23.37	14.69	3.99
2007	6.12	48.06	1.72	16.26	17.72	3.15
2012	4.71	57.76	1.66	10	9.2	2.4

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

MINNESOTA - RAMSEY COUNTY

Officials within the Ramsey County (MN) Children and Family Services division (CFS) of the Community Human Services Department (CHSD) have developed several initiatives aimed at reducing racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes in the child welfare system. They have set a long-term goal of reducing disparities in client outcomes due to institutional racism by 75 percent so that all individuals and families served by CHSD will survive and thrive. With support from a cross section of executive leaders and other system staff, CFS is in the process of developing shorter term incremental goals. Ramsey County's CFS racial equity goals are largely pursued through the effective analysis and use of data, training, an enhanced community engagement strategy, and cross system partnerships.

Analysis of Data by Race/Ethnicity

Minnesota counties use the statewide administrative data system (SSIS) to collect and analyze data related to the experiences of children and families involved with child welfare. Ramsey County CFS officials use this system to track the race and ethnicity of children involved with the child welfare system, including information about a family's earliest encounter with a child welfare worker, continuing through each of the child and family's subsequent stages of involvement. Agency staff routinely analyze rates of placement in foster care for specific groups of children and families compared to their presence in the general population (racial disproportionality in foster care), as well as comparisons of the experiences and outcomes for one group to those of another (racial disparities).

Ramsey County also uses a *decision points analysis* to review data on the specific stages of involvement of families with the child welfare system. For example, the County analyzes data by race and ethnicity for family cases that receive a traditional versus alternative response, rates of substantiation, rates of out of home placement, numbers of children who become new wards of the county, and numbers of children who are adopted compared to children with the goal of adoption and time and actions from first involvement through to case closure. These data are routinely shared with directors and managers within children and family services, as well as with colleagues in the Research and Evaluation Unit and the general public. Data sharing practices also extend to the department's relationships with specific Native American tribes and social service organizations in the Native American community.

Ramsey County Anti-Racism Leadership Team

The earliest formation of the **Ramsey County CHSD Anti-Racism Leadership Team (ARLT)** began in 2001, with a more formal operational structure and meeting schedule introduced in 2005. The team includes a racially and professionally diverse group of 27 staff members, including executive level leaders. The team meets twice per month. Team meetings are organized around **"transactional" agenda** items (focusing on specific policy and practice challenges, as well as proposed system improvement strategies), as well as the **"transformational" work** of the disparity reduction agenda (focused on changing ideas, attitudes and feelings of participating staff and administrators). The structured and facilitated transformational change discussions are designated for the last 90 minutes of each month's three-hour meeting.

Much of the work of the anti-racism leadership team is advanced through subcommittees. The training action team is responsible for the training curriculum and related staff professional development opportunities. A *hiring and retention* workgroup focuses on workforce diversity, promotion processes, and the development and coordination of employee resource networks. These networks are smaller affinity groups among employees who share a specific 'identity group' affiliation, and advance ideas for strengthening the department's operations and related supports for professionals. Currently a group for LGBTQ staff has been formed. Other subcommittees address *communications, training for formal leaders, public policy* and the agency's *contracting practices*.

Training for Formal Leaders

The REAL Team (one of these subcommittees), provides the tools for **anti-racism education and leadership development** among staff throughout the department. This is coordinated through the periodic dissemination of reading materials and suggested tools for leading discussions on race equity throughout the various offices and units within the department. Representatives from the team routinely share brief updates during each month's departmental managers meeting and conduct a 90 minute overview for managers every three or four months, highlighting trends and tips / tools for advancing this work throughout the department.

County Contracting Practices

The subcommittee focused on **contracting processes and policies** organized a series of listening sessions with private provider agencies that may have submitted contract proposals to the county. These listening sessions were held to discuss barriers to submission – especially for smaller and culturally specific service providing organizations – and to hear feedback on the submission process and the relationship and contracting experience between private providers and the department. Several themes emerged from these conversations including the need for the county to publicize opportunities more broadly and with greater lead time.

Also highlighted was the reality that some organizations have far greater internal capacity for responding to contracting proposals and opportunities than others (i.e. grant writers either on staff or on contract with the agency). The listening sessions made the county aware that additional steps were needed to ensure that private providers were attentive to anti-racism and cultural competence – ideally reflected in both the private provider's operational practices as well as demonstrated in the outcomes of their work with families. Efforts to incorporate these considerations into the department's contracting processes are in the early stages of development and will likely continue to evolve.

Community Engagement

Cultural Consultants – To bridge the gap between the department and the various racial and ethnic communities disproportionately impacted by the department's work, the department contracted with individuals to serve as liaisons between the community and the department. These 'cultural consultants' are members of the various racial and ethnic communities who are familiar with both the human service system and who are actively involved in efforts to improve supports and services to families within their respective communities. The cultural consultants participate in the department's continuing system improvement and planning discussions, serve on key advisory committees, are called upon to assist in specific cases, and help to organize and facilitate community dialogue sessions.

Community Dialogue – From 2008 to 2010, the county conducted community discussions to discuss reducing disparities in the child welfare system. These discussions included the cultural consultants, as well as representatives from law enforcement, public schools, attorneys, judges and other stakeholders. These forums were most helpful in highlighting the challenges faced by children, youth and families, and some of the structural barriers impacting the ability of families to get needed support.

The Ramsey County Community Human Services Department Anti-Racism Leadership Team is in the process of identifying specific goals for reducing client disparities by the year 2030. Although the Department has been successful in hiring and retaining more staff of color at all levels, changes in client outcomes have not been documented. In particular, data show that African American and Native American children remain much more likely to be reported for child maltreatment and enter the child welfare system than Asian, Hispanic or White children.

Efforts to achieve racial equity among children and families involved with the child welfare system in Ramsey County have been underway for over ten years. These efforts have experienced their greatest momentum when they have been not only supported, but explicitly championed and actively engaged, by the executive leaders within the agency.

It has also become clear that processes must be in place to account for staff turnover and to maintain a level of staff awareness and commitment to the mission of overcoming racism. The department's efforts need to be championed across a larger number of staff, rather than contained among a few key leaders or managers. It is also important to orient new staff to the values and ideas that undergird the department's focus on anti-racism and racial equity to ensure consistency in practice and specific strategies for family and community engagement.

- Ramsey County as a whole has now developed a county-wide anti-racism effort and leadership team. Community Human Services will be partnering with other County departments to move the work forward, sharing their experiences with Corrections, Public Health and other institutions.

- The Anti-Racism Leadership Team is developing a set of measures of client outcomes and internal processes for tracking progress. The team expects to put in place a regular reporting mechanism that will be used to hold participants accountable for planned changes.

- Data collection and analysis will continue to provide CFS division staff with an understanding of how internal processes and policies are affecting clients. Recently implemented practices related to increasing the timeliness of permanency and reducing the likelihood of out of home placements will be monitored to see if improvements benefit all clients regardless of race/ethnicity.

NEW YORK

NEW YORK STATE | **Office of Children and Family Services**

New York's efforts to achieve racial equity began with a focus on disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system. During those efforts, officials noticed similar trends with respect to the foster care system. Thus, attention by state officials expanded to include a focus on reducing racial disparities among children and families who come to the attention of child welfare.

Early Focus on Data Analysis

During the early stages of this work, child welfare data were analyzed by race and ethnicity, producing very basic graphs depicting rates of racial disparity and disproportionality. These efforts guided the department's early focus on understanding the extent and nature of the racialized outcome disparities among children and families involved with the foster care system. These efforts were exploratory in many ways, as the department had not previously analyzed data by race and ethnicity for the purpose of guiding system improvement strategies, nor more specifically working to reduce these disparate experiences and outcomes for children and families.

Leadership Commitment to the Work

The early engagement of state and local officials in this work was characterized by a high level of fear and anxiety. Administrators and staff did not have a great deal of experience talking about race, racism, ethnicity and/or culture,

and especially not with a focus on understanding potential system contributors to a long-standing pattern of racial disparities.

Given the pattern of disparities for specific groups of children and families across multiple systems (especially foster care, juvenile justice, and education/schools), however, officials affirmed a commitment to identifying possible systemic factors and contributors, including the possibility of inequitable system responses to different groups of children and families.

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INITIATIVES

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Developing a State-Supported and County-Driven Strategy

A County-Driven Collaborative

In 2009, under the Commissioner's leadership, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) launched a county-driven effort to reduce racial disproportionality and disparities for children and families involved with the child welfare system. This early effort was driven by an analysis of child and family outcomes data, organized by race and ethnicity, with an invitation to participate extended to administrators in those counties with the highest racial disparities in rates of foster care involvement. Five county administrators initially signed on to be a part of this effort. By 2014, 14 counties were involved. Participating New York counties include

Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Orange, Rockland, Dutchess, Albany, Schenectady, Columbia, Erie, Onondaga, Genesee, Monroe and Chemung.

State Coordination, Support & County Planning Grants

It was important from the inception of this state-coordinated and county-led effort that county participation be completely voluntary, and that local strategies respond to the particular needs and experiences of families within the local county. The state OCFS office provided small planning grants to the participating counties, offered guidance and limited technical assistance, organized regular coordinating meetings for county coordinators, and facilitated other information-sharing events across counties. Planning grants specifically supported more detailed data analysis at the county level, the development of stronger partnerships with community stakeholders, expenses related to the convening of local planning meetings, and the organization of technical assistance and training opportunities identified by local planning groups.

Local Capacity-Building – Building Awareness and Understanding

All participating counties began with a focus on building an awareness and understanding of racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes among agency staff and other key stakeholders. In support of this, some counties identified

NEW YORK FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
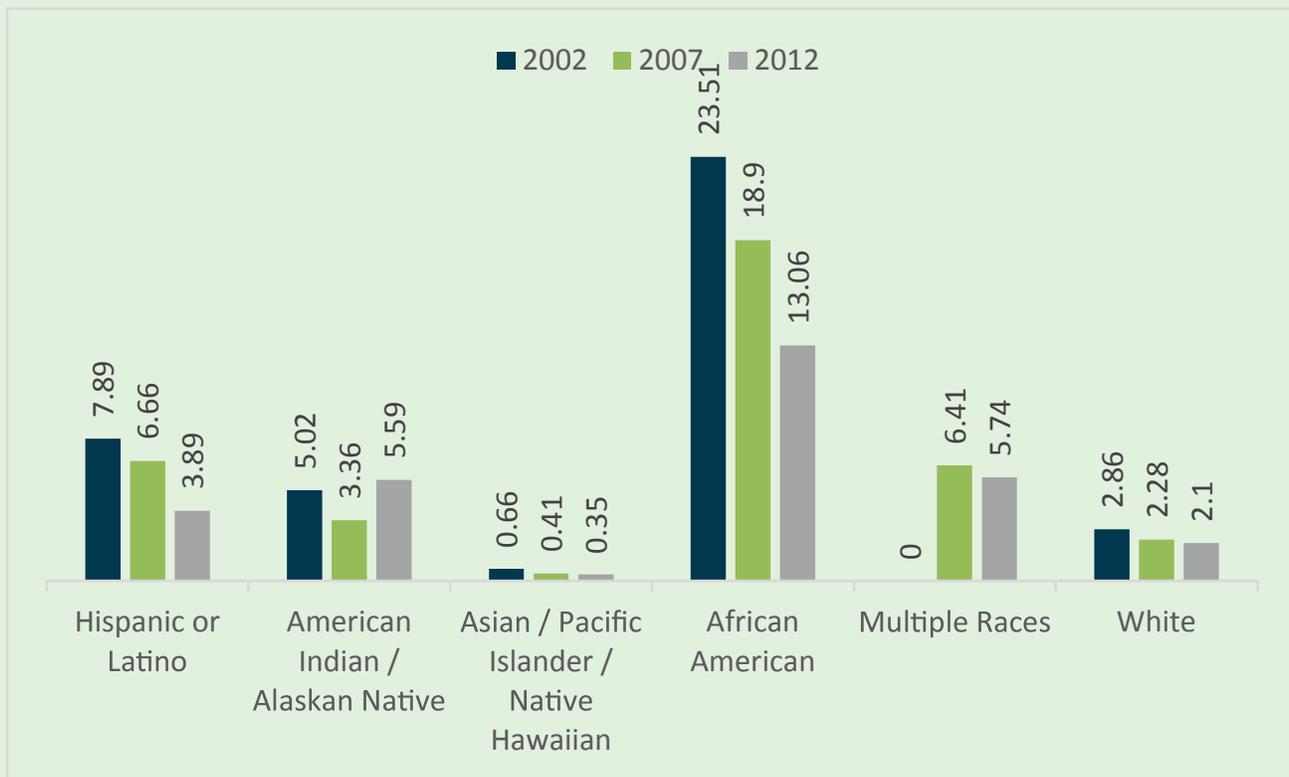
Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	7.89	6.66	3.89
American Indian / Alaskan Native	5.02	3.36	5.59
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	0.66	0.41	0.35
African American	23.51	18.9	13.06
Multiple Races	0	6.41	5.74
White	2.86	2.28	2.1

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

and called upon their internal agency capacity and also linked with other local/community resources to provide cultural competence training. Some counties used the **Knowing Who You Are** video and accompanying training resources, while a few counties also coordinated a series of **Undoing Racism Workshops** led by the Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond. A number of counties also brought in targeted training and technical assistance from specific individuals, including consultants Khatib Waheed and Toni Oliver, as well as several key staff from Casey Family Programs.

Shared Learning Convenings

Over the last three years, a series of shared learning convenings supported by Casey Family Programs have been organized to facilitate in-person information sharing and learning across all of the participating counties. Each of the convenings has focused on understand-ing the extent and nature of embedded inequity within human service systems. Building on this successful strategy, the state office is beginning to encourage a more regional approach that allows for more frequent regional convenings as well as county-to-county peer learning exchanges. The state office also convenes regular conference calls with a steering committee, comprised of partic-ipating county initiative coordinators, to support information sharing and updates on local activities. Regional OCFS office staff frequently join their state office colleagues on Steering Committee calls, and more generally in support of the local county efforts and activities.

Developing an Understanding Race, Racism and Culture

One of the consistencies of this state model is that each of the county initia-tives has been primarily guided by an understanding of: a) the history and con-text of race, racism (structural, systemic, institutional), ethnicity and culture, and b) how systems can use this knowledge in their respective responses to families and their children. Many of the partic-ipating counties received a basic intro-duction to the historical and contextual dynamics of race and racism via a series of workshops led by consultant Khatib Waheed, including a facilitated viewing and discussion of the three-part PBS series, **Race: The Power of an Illusion.** Counties consistently report that these workshops have prepared them to more comfortably talk about the ways in which race and racism influence the experienc-es of children, families and communities, as well as the systems and institutions that are charged with supporting them. Given the effectiveness of this facilitated learning experience, several counties have expanded this workshop into a multi-day workshop series for all of their respective agency staff.

With this foundational work having been done, counties are now beginning to turn their attention to the identification of specific policy and practice strategies. These strategies, still early in their development, include improved assessments of family service needs, timely connection of families to culturally responsive and community-based support services, and improving coordination with the courts.

Embedding a Racial Equity Analysis in University Schools of Social Work

State OCFS officials have begun to explore with schools of social work at several New York colleges and universities how to more fully integrate a racial equity analysis into their school curricula. The goal is to ensure that future social workers enter the workforce with racial equity as a lens through which they understand, and respond to the needs of, children and families.

Several colleges and universities in New York have taken the lead in integrating a cultural competence and/or racial equity lens into some of their courses. Some institutions also coordinate diversity and/or anti-racism dialogue events to engage faculty, students and the broader community in conversations about racial inclusion, racial oppression and the persistent disparity gaps that are similarly present in many institutions and family/community experiences. Several schools have decided to shift from a focus on cultural competence to a focus on anti-oppressive practice and policy. The preliminary priorities identified by participating institutions include the more deliberate and consistent integration of racial equity content into their respective curricula, the inclusion of field placement experiences as a part of this racial equity focus, and ensuring a focus on the implications for both policy and practice.

OBSERVED CHANGES

The following are among the major changes and improvements observed as a result of New York's work to date:

- Greater comfort and confidence engaging in dialogue about racial and ethnic disparities by local department of social services staff and administrators, and other county stakeholders.

- Willingness to develop and attempt locally driven strategies aimed at reducing the disparity rates among African American and Latino children.

- Willingness to publicize efforts through the development of DVDs and other resources designed to articulate the issues and describe efforts underway.

- Reductions in extreme rates of disparities for African American foster care placements in two counties.

- Willingness on the part of OCFS to continue to support the work in collaboration with Casey Family Programs.

- Better use of data to inform the work.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

Counties participating in the state's racial equity initiative have largely focused on building greater awareness and understanding of the ways in which race, racism and culture influence children and families, as well as child and family serving institutions. Having been involved in this work for several years now, the following are among the reflections and lessons learned:

- *Anxiety when talking about race* – Numerous administrators, supervisors and staff are fearful of talking about race and racism. These conversations tend to evoke feelings of guilt and/or anger informed by prior experiences and societal perceptions.

- *Challenge acknowledging institu-tional contributors* – It remains challenging for many professionals to acknowledge institutional contributors to the pattern of racial disparities observed in the experiences of and outcomes for children and families. This is especially pronounced in institutions with staff who are genuinely committed to helping children and families experiencing crisis or other challenging circumstances.

- *Importance of a non-blaming climate* – Professionals and policymakers are far more likely to engage – and stay engaged – in this work when an atmosphere of non-blaming has been created, in which the focus is placed on improving institutional policies and practices, rather than 'individual bad workers'.

- *Data must drive these efforts* – The analysis and understanding of data (related to child and family outcomes and institutional processes) by race and ethnicity must guide the department's understanding of what families are experiencing, and the types of policy and practice changes various institutions should focus on.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

OCFS officials and participating counties are beginning to turn attention to specific policy and practice strategies that are likely to improve the extreme rates of disparity and disproportionality in the experiences and outcomes for children and families involved with the foster care system.

- *Father engagement* – Several counties are beginning to look at the role and relevance of responsible fatherhood strategies, guided by research suggesting that child and family outcomes are improved when fathers are actively involved in the assessment, case planning and other decision making processes.

- *Zip code-focused resource family recruitment* – Some counties are beginning to use a zip code matching strategy to better identify the communities from which children are most likely to be removed, in which more family support services should be developed and in which the number of resource families should be increased.

- *Impact of Family Assessment Response (FAR)* – OCFS has begun to analyze the impact of "differential response" or FAR on improving the patterns of racial disproportionality and disparities in New York State.

- *Engagement of family court judges* – Family Court Judges across the State have begun to embrace this important work. New York State has been fortunate to have support from thoughtful and exemplary judicial leaders in New York City and Westchester County for this work.

New York 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	991,728	22.95%	3,859	16.13%	3.89	0.70	1.89
American Indian	14,486	0.35%	81	0.34%	5.59	0.96	2.58
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	311,029	7.05%	108	0.45%	0.35	0.06	0.17
Black / African American	677,101	16.10%	8,840	36.95%	13.06	2.29	6.17
Multiple Races	131,284	2.96%	753	3.15%	5.74	1.06	2.86
White	2,139,066	50.58%	4,498	18.80%	2.10	0.37	1.00
Total	4,264,694	100.00%	23,924	100.00%	5.61		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

OREGON

DHS
Oregon Department of Human Services

For several years prior to 2009, child welfare officials, community members and other key partners discussed the over-representation of children of color in the state's foster care system. Though there was increased attention and awareness of these disparities, there were no coordinated state efforts to address them. With the 2009 formation of a Child Welfare Equity Task Force, and guided by a comprehensive 2011 report with specific recommendations, Oregon developed and begun implementing a statewide strategy to reduce racial disparities among children and families involved with the child welfare system.

<div style="background:#b02020;color:white;text-align:center;">INITIATIVES</div>

Child Welfare Equity Task Force & Report

In 2009, and with the support of the state legislature, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski issued an executive order to establish the **Child Welfare Task Force**. Comprised of leaders from across the state, the task force was charged with developing and submitting recommendations to significantly reduce and ultimately eliminate racial disproportionality and disparities in the Oregon child welfare system.

After months of meetings, analyses of data by race and ethnicity, and processes for gaining community and institutional stakeholder input, the task force presented a comprehensive report with specific recommendations to the 2011 Oregon legislature. The report analyzed

the major contributing factors to the pattern of racial disproportionality and disparities, and recommended system improvement strategies in the following key areas: Data-based Decision Making, Policy and Practice, Workforce Development, Community Capacity Building and Culturally Specific Practices.

The recommendations were developed to align with the "Safe and Equitable Foster Care Reduction Partnership" between the Department of Human Services (DHS), Oregon's Judicial Department and Casey Family Programs. To ensure effective coordination with county child welfare officials and the other partners involved in the state's system reform agenda, a Cross-systems and Equity Coordinator role was established.

Culturally Responsive Training: Knowing Who You Are

A contributing factor identified in the 2011 task force report was inadequate training on racial and culturally responsive practices. Several task force recommendations called for more continuous and consistent training on cultural understanding and responsiveness and improved family engagement and support. A particular emphasis was placed on training related to understanding and engaging African American and American Indian children and families.

After a lengthy review of training options, the department invested in the statewide training of staff, key community partners and judicial partners using the **Knowing Who You Are (KWYA)** video and training curriculum. The

KWYA video and training helps youth, caseworkers and caregivers to understand the importance of healthy racial and ethnic identity development and offers strategies on how to support a process of healthy racial and ethnic identity development.

DHS piloted KWYA in Washington County beginning with leadership in 2013 and is now developing an implementation plan for statewide rollout. As of December 2014, more than 175 department staff, tribal representatives and community partners had been trained.

Permanency Roundtables

The 2011 report also highlighted that children of color, once placed in foster care, were most likely to stay in care for longer periods of time (two years or more) than their white peers. This pattern was most pronounced for American Indian / Alaskan Native (ICWA-eligible) and African American children and youth. In response, Oregon officials partnered with Casey Family Programs to implement a **Permanency Roundtable** strategy for resolving barriers to children and youth who were in care for two years or longer. The process centers on the development of permanency teams of child welfare supervisors, administrators and permanency experts who are charged with reviewing child welfare cases, identifying the current barriers to permanency, missed opportunities for permanency in years past and the specific steps for resolving the identified barriers. The roundtable process includes the identification of individuals who are potential permanency

OREGON FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE

(per 1,000 children)

■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	7.01	5.81	7.18
American Indian / Alaskan Native	56.09	32.53	35.84
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	2.9	1.46	1.94
African American	41.61	11.61	26.33
Multiple Races	1.04	32.82	22.79
White	8.53	9.39	8.96

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

resources for the child/youth whose case is being reviewed.

The Oregon Permanency Roundtable made an adaptation to the traditional roundtable teams by adding a *cultural expert* role—a community representative knowledgeable about the history and experience of families and institutions within the community over time. The cultural expert helps the roundtable team to identify missed opportunities for permanency, as well as to brainstorm additional creative permanency solutions for children and youth in care. The Permanency Roundtable process was implemented in five of the Oregon counties with the largest foster care populations during 2014, reviewing more than 300 youth and will continue to expand into other counties throughout the state.

Differential Response

Another of the systemwide strategies recommended in the 2011 report was the development and implementation of a statewide differential response system. This initiative was intended to support Oregon's aim to transform child welfare from a system exclusively focused on child rescue to a preventive and family preservation-based system that leverages culturally specific community-based resources to support families. The differential response was to augment the existing fact-finding approach to assessing allegations of child abuse and neglect, with a tiered process to assess for child safety and connect more children and families with supportive services and resources. Oregon's differential response system began in 2014, and the state will assess its impact on child safety, and any potential contribution toward more equitable outcomes for families.

Tribal-State Indian Child Welfare Act Advisory Committee

The Oregon Tribal-State ICWA Advisory Committee includes representatives from all nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon and several other child welfare leaders who convene to discuss child welfare policy and practice, as well as opportunities for cross-training. This committee is used as to assess the experiences and needs of Native American children and families, emerging challenges in providing effective child and family supports, and strategies for developing more effective partnerships between tribal and state child welfare officials.

Designated Indian Child Welfare Positions

During 2014, the state legislature mandated and funded the creation of nine Indian child welfare positions, with a specific focus on supporting the *active efforts* standard for the engagement of Indian children and families. Tribal officials worked directly with local child welfare officials to propose how the positions would operate, all of which were reviewed and subsequently approved by the statewide ICWA Advisory Committee. This process demonstrated the part-

nership and the level of cooperation intended by the creation of the advisory committee. Tribal leadership and Indian community representation has also been incorporated through participation on hiring committees responsible for filling state child welfare leadership positions.

Data Analysis and Targeted System Improvements

Oregon uses its statewide (SACWIS) data system to more fully understand the patterns of outcome disparity for children and families of different racial and ethnic groups. Officials are also examining data – by race and ethnicity – for patterns at key decision making points in a child's and family's involvement with child welfare, especially entries into foster care, types of exits from foster care, and total length of stay in foster care for children and youth.

Results Oriented Management System

Through a partnership with the University of Kansas, Oregon officials have joined several other state systems in the use of a Results Oriented Management data system that allows officials to more easily access case level data as well as summary reports – again by race and ethnicity of the children and youth in care – for specific case workers, supervisory units and aggregated at the county and state level. These detailed reports allow for a more nuanced understanding of patterns of disparate outcomes by race, and where within the system targeted improvements are necessary.

Local Teams Developing and Implementing Strategies

State child welfare officials have acknowledged that they cannot – as a single institution – identify and meet all of the support needs of Oregon's children and families. They have thus developed county teams with child welfare stakeholders who, working together, develop and drive local strategies for achieving a safe reduction in the number of children removed from their families and placed in foster care.

Each local foster care reduction team is co-chaired by a child welfare manager and a local community leader, ensuring equitable levels of input by the public child welfare agency, community members and families that have been directly involved with child welfare, as well as other key institutional / professional partners. These partners include health professionals (physicians, therapists and other mental health professionals), juvenile justice system representatives, Court Appointed Special Advocates, members of the citizen review board, as well as judges. The racial and ethnic composition and focus of each local reduction team varies, reflecting its relative focus on the disparate outcomes of American Indian / Alaskan Native, African American and/or Hispanic and Latino children and families. Similarly, each local reduction team develops and implements its own local strategies in addition to statewide strategies. Local strategies are most frequently informed by community forums convened for local institutional partners, families and other interested stakeholders.

By the end of 2014, 11 county reduction teams had been developed, each of which includes racial disproportionality and disparity reduction as a part of its focus. The co-chairs of each team participate on quarterly conference calls to support the continuous sharing of ideas, challenges and lessons learned across the various county initiatives. Oregon's goal is to have local reduction teams in place throughout all 36 Oregon counties by the end of 2015.

Judiciary/Court Engagement

Court Improvement Project (CIP) officials and judges throughout the state are actively involved in the statewide and local child welfare reduction initiatives. Court officials participate in training aimed at increasing their understanding of the meaning and significance of race, ethnicity and culture for families and with respect to child welfare policy and practice. Additionally, and in concert with the statewide ICWA Advisory Committee, the Oregon judiciary is actively working in partnership with the tribes to implement a strategy (based on a successful approach developed in Minnesota) for ensuring compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act.

RESULTS/OBSERVED CHANGES

State and local officials in Oregon are documenting the strategies developed and implemented by the local reduction teams. Although officials will continue to seek a more detailed understanding of how these strategies are influencing the experiences of children and families, it has become clear that there is shared ownership by many child welfare stakeholders for reducing racial disparities, and more generally improving outcomes for children and families of color who become involved with the child welfare system.

Child welfare administrators and managers are also more informed about the extent and nature of the disparate outcomes experienced by children and families of color, and more consistently use race/ethnicity data to understand the experiences of different groups of children and families as they progress through various stages of involvement with the system

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

One of the major challenges is the discomfort experienced by many child welfare professionals and other stakeholders when talking about race, racism and culture, and the ways in which they shape the experiences of families and systems. With this in mind, Oregon officials sought ways to prepare staff in advance for some of the intensive conversations. The initial KWYA experience in Washington County suggested that the training was more likely to be effective when the participants were aware of, and prepared ahead of time for, the explicit conversations about race and racism that were a part of the training experience. With this early preparation, staff members were more

likely to participate – and to participate more fully – in the self-reflective conversations encouraged throughout the KWYA training.

<div style="background:#c0392b;color:white;text-align:center;padding:10px;">FUTURE DIRECTIONS</div>

The following are among the future directions of Oregon's work, building on their learning to-date:

- To better prepare staff for the KWYA experience and continued conversations, the department provided a KWYA Overview at the statewide supervisor and support staff conferences, reaching more than 300 staff. They also began

presenting "Let's Talk about Race" conversations. Multnomah County, Oregon's largest metropolitan area, is now developing a plan to implement a 'listening circle' strategy where staff will participate in a series of structured and facilitated conversations about the meaning and significance of race in society in advance of the KWYA training. In essence, these sessions will provide an opportunity for participants to 'practice' talking about race with their peers before coming into the KWYA training experience.

- Oregon is developing follow-up steps to support staff after their KWYA experience. Steps will include a follow-up call to discuss

the impact KWYA had on day-to-day practice and within their work environment, discussions with local leadership regarding how they can include conversations regarding racial equity and disparities in their work and identification of resources and on-going technical assistance needs.

Oregon 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	183,602	21.28%	1,319	15.19%	7.18	0.71	0.80
American Indian	10,687	1.25%	383	4.41%	35.84	3.53	3.98
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	36,534	4.17%	71	0.82%	1.94	0.20	0.22
Black / African American	18,076	2.13%	476	5.48%	26.33	2.57	2.90
Multiple Races	48,000	5.63%	1,094	12.59%	22.79	2.24	2.52
White	563,011	65.54%	5,047	58.10%	8.96	0.89	1.00
Total	859,910	100.00%	8,686	100.00%	10.10		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

PENNSYLVANIA - ALLEGHENY COUNTY

For several years the Allegheny County Department of Human Services has actively worked to reduce racial disparities in the rates of involvement with the child welfare system, especially by African American families. These efforts were initially focused on the implementation of a stand-alone model for responding to African American males and their families. A newly forming response draws upon the lessons of the earlier 'model-driven' effort, continues to use administrative data to provide an understanding of the extent and nature of the disparate experiences and outcomes for children and families of various racial and ethnic groups, and seeks to identify the specific policies and practices most closely connected with the outcomes of most concern. This more comprehensive data-driven strategy now informs Allegheny County's aim of reducing disparate outcomes for children and families.

INITIATIVES

Inua Ubuntu

Initially implemented in 2010, *Inua Ubuntu* is a system reform model developed by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services aimed at reducing racial disproportionality in foster care by keeping African American male children safely at home, and reducing the rate of African American males requiring out-of-home placement. The operating premise of Inua Ubuntu is that

"African American children and families are better served when assessed, counseled and treated by people who look like them, live in their communities and understand the unique cultural needs of African American male children."

Cultural Consultant-Based Intervention

The program design featured **cultural consultants** charged with working intensively with families on a variety of goals to prevent formal child welfare involvement and out-of-home placement. The cultural consultants were expected to build the child's/youth's/family's connection to other community based supports while simultaneously building parents' own capacity to meet their children's developmental needs. The program's design assumed that cultural consultants would engage intensively with the family throughout the duration of the department's investigation phase (up to 60 days). As time passed, it was believed that family members would become less reliant on the cultural consultant, taking advantage of new tools and strategies learned and acquired through participation with the Inua Ubuntu model.

RESULTS/OBSERVED CHANGES

Beginning in 2012 and continuing through 2014, department officials and researchers sought to understand the impact of Inua Ubuntu and to identify

any lessons that could guide the department's continuing interest in reducing racial disparities in the experiences and outcomes for children and families. The results of the Inua Ubuntu model's implementation were mixed. Inua Ubuntu was unevenly implemented across the cultural consultants and their respective local community organizations and was ultimately unsuccessful in its primary aim of keeping African American males safely at home, or in reducing the rates of removal from their families, and their placement in out-of-home care.

The model was successful, however, in demonstrating the value of a racially and culturally compatible 'parent partner' approach to supporting African American parents in crisis and/or in need of additional support. Participating caregivers reported feeling supported and less isolated within the broader community as a result of Inua Ubuntu, and also that they could communicate more openly as a result of participation with their assigned cultural consultant. Some caregivers similarly reported an increase in their own parenting skills, as well as their own ability to make decisions for the family, although these reports were inconsistent across caregivers attached with participating community based organizations.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

While the overall results produced by the Inua Ubuntu model were inconsistent, the model was instructive to Al-

PENNSYLVANIA FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
(per 1,000 children)
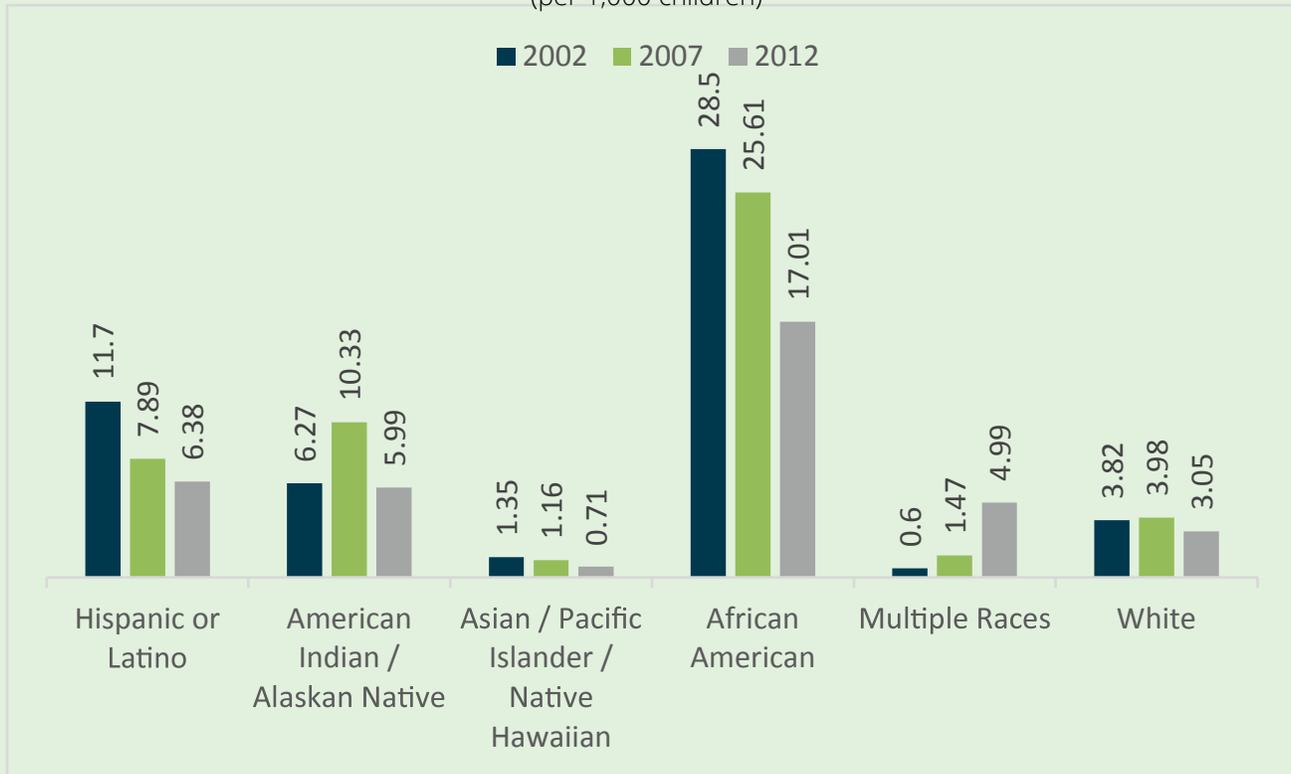
■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	11.7	7.89	6.38
American Indian / Alaskan Native	6.27	10.33	5.99
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	1.35	1.16	0.71
African American	28.5	25.61	17.01
Multiple Races	0.6	1.47	4.99
White	3.82	3.98	3.05

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

legheny County DHS officials. Among the major lessons from this effort are that:

- *There must be a whole-system focus* – Any efforts to reduce racial disparities and improve outcomes for African American males, and children and families more broadly, must be a part of the entire agency's system improvement focus, and not separated and operated as a stand-alone model.

- *Data must guide specific system improvement strategies* – All of the agency's efforts must be guided by an analysis of outcomes and experiences of children and families (by race and ethnicity) and a clear understanding of the system policies and practices that are most directly connected to the disparate outcomes of particular concern.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A Comprehensive and Data-Driven System Improvement / Disparity Reduction Strategy

The fundamental lessons drawn from the experience with Inua Ubuntu now directly inform the department's evolving efforts to reduce racial disparities and more generally improve outcomes for children and families. While still in the formative stage, the department's evolving disparity reduction and system improvement strategies include:

- *Leadership Fellows* – The designation of Leadership Fellows is intended to increase the department's capacity to analyze, report and make sense of data by race/ethnicity, thus focusing the department's

disparity reduction strategy on the specific policy and practice areas most closely associated with the outcome patterns of most concern. Leadership fellows will analyze and provide periodic reports to agency administrators using current administrative data and other information about the timeliness, quality and effectiveness of system responses to families. These reports will guide consideration of the agency's continuing system improvements.

- *Family Placement Resources in Communities of Origin* – The department aims to increase the recruitment and development of more family-setting foster care resources within the communities from which children in foster care enter. This will increase the likelihood of children

and youth maintaining appropriate and supportive relationships with their families of origin while placed in foster care, and will increase the likelihood of children and youth being placed in the least restrictive placement setting.

- *Working with Mandatory Reporters* – A process is being developed to enhance and ensure the more frequent engagement of department officials with mandatory reporters. The goal of these efforts is to: a) increase mandatory reporter familiarity with the range of supports available for children and families within the community, b) ensure more consistent reporting of children and families who meet specific criteria across all mandatory reporter types/institutions, and c) understand the potential risks associated with under-reporting specific groups of children and families (analyses suggest the under-reporting of Caucasian children and families) while over-reporting other groups of children and families (analyses similarly suggest the over-reporting of African American children and families).

- *On the Frontline Initiative* – Allegheny County is participating in a recently launched Annie E. Casey Foundation initiative, On the Frontline: Improving Child Protective Services Investigations. This initiative is intended to give intake workers the tools to make thoughtful, informed and equitable investigation decisions.

- *Expanded Community Partnerships* – The department is thinking through a strategy for convening a series of community forums to share information about the disparate rates of involvement of specific groups of families with the foster care system, and inviting input about the quality of system response. These community forums are expected to identify existing and potentially overlooked gaps between the support/service needs of families and the types of resources currently being made available by the department and other child and family serving institutions.

- *Data Sharing* – County officials are looking to develop appropriate data-sharing policies and practices so that professionals who work in different institutions (i.e., schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, health and mental health, etc.), but with the same children and families, have access to a fuller body of information. The aim is to ensure that child welfare and other institutions have the information most helpful to ensure that families are receiving the most appropriate, responsive, and coordinated services and support from professionals and other community resources.

- *Constituent Engagement* – Strategies are being developed to guarantee the more consistent and deliberate engagement of children and family members who have been directly involved with DHS in the department's continuing policy

and practice improvement efforts. This includes participation on committees and other advisory groups responsible for developing and monitoring the department's evolving systems improvement agenda.

The efforts now underway in Allegheny County are still early. Officials are actively drawing upon the experiences and examples of other state and local systems, and remain committed to the use of data and research about what works best in supporting children and families to guide their evolving improvement efforts.

Pennsylvania 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	278,118	9.68%	1,774	12.24%	6.38	1.26	2.22
American Indian	3,839	0.14%	23	0.16%	5.99	1.13	1.98
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	89,163	3.11%	63	0.43%	0.71	0.14	0.25
Black / African American	356,833	13.01%	6,071	41.88%	17.01	3.22	5.65
Multiple Races	95,082	3.34%	474	3.27%	4.99	0.98	1.72
White	1,914,870	70.72%	5,836	40.26%	3.05	0.57	1.00
Total	2,737,905	100.00%	14,496	100.00%	5.29		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

TEXAS

TEXAS
Department of Family and Protective Services

Several Texas child- and family-serving institutions have focused intensively on the elimination of racial disproportionality and disparities in outcomes for children and families. The current systems-focused work related to reducing disproportionality and disparities has largely evolved out of the early work of the **Texas Department of Family and Protective Services** (DFPS).

For more than a decade, leaders within Texas DFPS used concepts and practices that ultimately were collected into the "Texas Model: A Framework for Equity" for reducing racial disparities and seeking racial equity for people involved with the child welfare and other human services systems. Recognizing the relationship between various child- and family-serving systems and institutions in Texas, this work was expanded to incorporate a focus on collaboration among all of the state's human services institutions.

To support this priority, the **Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities** ("Center"), within the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, was formally established by the legislature in 2011. The Center's mission is to partner with health and human services agencies, external stakeholders, other systems, and communities to identify and eliminate disproportionality and disparities affecting children, families, and disparately impacted individuals.

Complementary efforts to promote

greater understanding of the meaning and significance of race and culture in the lived experience of children and families, and in the development of institutional policies and practices, have also been developed among members of the Texas judiciary. These efforts within the judiciary are primarily focused on *Eliminating Implicit Racial Bias in Judicial Decision-Making*.

<div style="background:#a01e22;color:white;text-align:center;font-weight:bold;">INITIATIVES</div>

Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities

The Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities works to develop and implement the systemic policy and practice improvements necessary to reduce and ultimately eliminate the disparate outcomes experienced by specific groups of individuals and families involved with the state's health and human services programs.

The Center includes three major areas of focus:

- **Texas State Office of Minority Health and Health Equity** – The Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE) coordinates efforts to improve the health of racial and ethnic minority populations through the development of health policies and programs that will help to eliminate health disparities. The

OMHHE also focuses on efforts to improve the delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate health and healthcare services.

- **Office of Border Affairs** – The Office of Border Affairs (OBA) is responsible for the planning and coordination of health and human services (HHS) along the border. Services are coordinated with community based programs, state and federal agencies, and community health workers/promotoras to improve access of HHS services as well as education, employment, housing, transportation and legal services to border communities.

- **Equity and Inclusion** – Equity and inclusion (EI) consists of regional Equity Specialists housed throughout Texas. Equity Specialists build on previous efforts within DFPS, supporting the expansion of race equity work throughout HHS agencies in collaboration with other systems and communities.

The major strategies used by the Center to advance racial equity include.

Regional Structure: Regional Equity Specialists and Advisory Committees

The Center's equity and inclusion mission includes a regional structure for advancing equity initiatives throughout Texas. Each of Texas' 11 regions is assigned a Regional Equity Specialist who is responsible for developing and con-

vening Regional Disproportionality and Disparities Advisory Committees. Each regional advisory committee develops partnerships with individuals, families, key stakeholder groups, faith- and community-based organizations, service providers, and others to provide ongoing guidance for local disproportionality and disparity reduction and improved service delivery efforts.

Interagency Council on Addressing Disproportionality

The Interagency Council was created by Senate Bill 501, 82nd Texas Legislature, Regular Session in 2011, to examine best practices and training, review the availability of funding, and make recommendations to the Legislature to reduce racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes. Council meetings included updates on trends in service delivery outcomes by race and ethnicity within each of the various state agencies, progress toward the implementation of specific strategies as well as consideration of recommendations, and proposals for more effective information sharing and coordination between agencies. Representation on the council included the following state government officials and community leaders:

- Associate Deputy Executive Commissioner, Health and Human Services Commission Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities — Presiding Officer for the Interagency Council

- Executive Director, Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families

- Deputy Executive Commissioner, Health and Human Services Commission

- Senior Policy Analyst, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

- Government Relations Specialist, Texas Education Agency

- Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General

- Director, Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System

- Deputy Commissioner, Department of Family and Protective Services

- Deputy Commissioner, Department

of State Health Services

- Executive Director, Texas Juvenile Justice Department

- Deputy Commissioner, Department of Aging and Disability Services

- Quality Assurance Special-Juvenile Team, Governor's Office Criminal Justice Division

- Former foster youth

- Faith-based community organization representatives

- Community-based organization representatives

- Medical community representatives

The Interagency Council's term, as established by the Texas Legislature, ended December 2013. A similar statewide advisory coalition has now been formed to support community engagement and collaborative multi-system coordination.

Texas Health and Human Services State Advisory Coalition for Addressing Disproportionality and Disparities

The State Advisory Coalition was created by the Executive Commissioner of Health and Human Services to provide an opportunity for partners to gather quarterly to examine data for multiple systems, discuss strategies to identify, address, and eliminate racial disparities from their agencies, and ensure that community members have input on agency practices that directly impact them. The State Advisory Coalition holds meetings quarterly beginning in August 2014. The Advisory Coalition initiated goal-setting and strategic planning on November 20, 2014. Members of the Coalition include representatives from:

- Associate Commissioner - Health and Human Services Commission Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities — Presiding Officer

- Department of Family and Productive Services

- Department of State Health Services

- Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

- Department of Aging and Disability Services

- Texas Juvenile Justice Department

- Texas Education Agency

- Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families

- Faith-based Representative

- Two Community Representatives

- Regional Advisory Committee Members from Lubbock, Abilene, Midland, Dallas, McKinney, Fort Worth, Beaumont/Port Arthur, Houston, Fort Bend, Austin, San Antonio, El Paso, and Corpus Christi.

- Disproportionality and Disparities Advisory Council Chair

Training Opportunities

The Center provides training to Health and Human Services, other agencies, and communities to raise awareness about disproportionality, disparities, poverty, race, racial and ethnic identity, and health equity. These training provides a foundation for understanding and identifying evidence of disproportionality and disparities; how children, families and communities are impacted and experience barriers; challenges and unintended consequences when accessing services; and gives practical tools and resources to advance the achievement of racial equity.

The trainings offered by the Center include:

- *Courageous Conversations on Race Equity* establishes a common language to inform work addressing racial disproportionality and disparities by examining the process of racial and cultural socialization, and reviewing local data as evidence of racial inequities within Texas communities. Participants engage in facilitated courageous conversations about race, consider tools for supporting positive change within their communities, and learn the importance of having community members inform decision making within agencies and systems.

- The *Poverty Simulation* is an interactive experience designed to familiarize professionals and other stakeholders with the day-to-day lived experiences of low-income

TEXAS FOSTER CARE RATE BY RACE
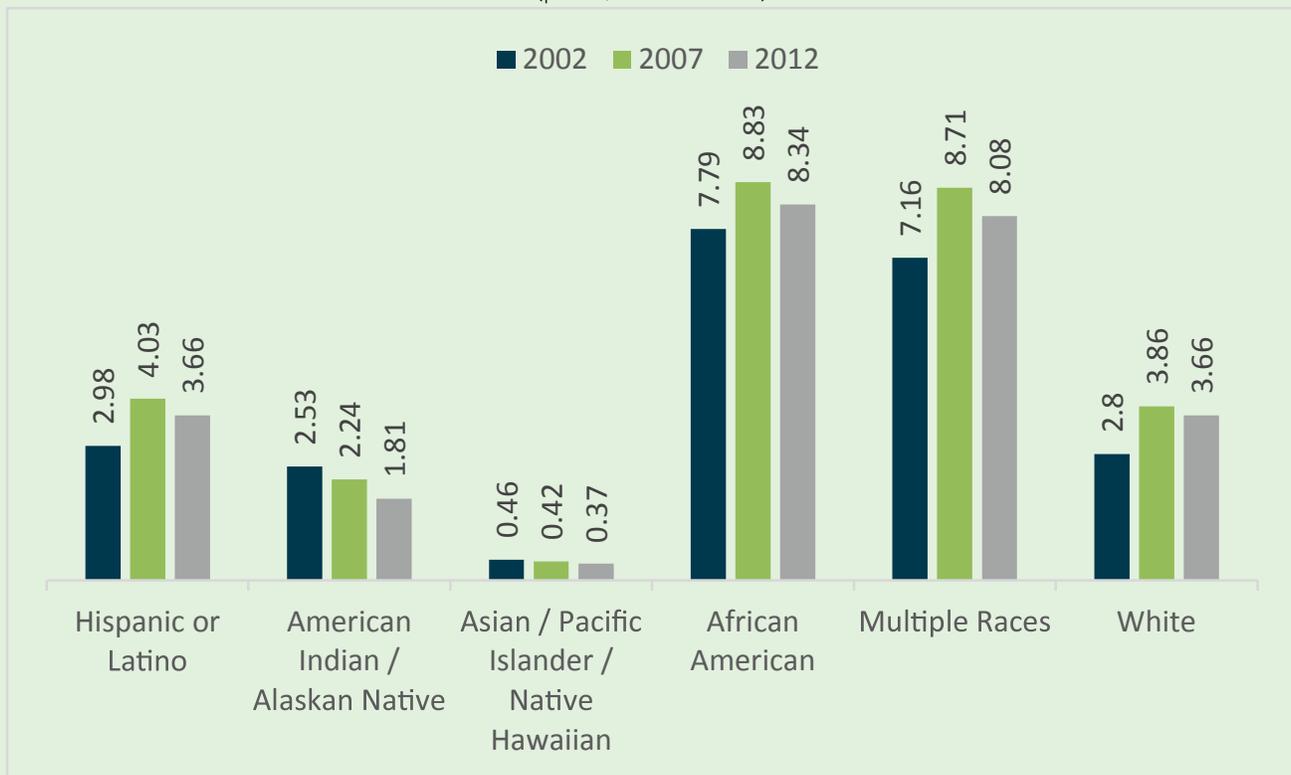
(per 1,000 children)

Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Race	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	2.98	4.03	3.66
American Indian / Alaskan Native	2.53	2.24	1.81
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	0.46	0.42	0.37
African American	7.79	8.83	8.34
Multiple Races	7.16	8.71	8.08
White	2.8	3.86	3.66

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

families, thus preparing them to be more understanding of – and more responsive to – families' daily support needs.

- **Knowing Who You Are** is a three-part curriculum designed to familiarize professionals and caregivers with why race and ethnicity matter, and the importance of forming a healthy racial and ethnic identity. The three parts of the curriculum (video, e-learning and in-person training) provide tools and helpful strategies for adults who work in child and family serving institutions.

- **Advancing Health Equity in Texas through Culturally Responsive Care** is an online training module developed to provide health care providers and other health care professionals with practical guidance about how to promote health equity through the adoption and implementation of the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Texas' health care and

health-related systems.

- A newly developed **Equity in Health and Human Services Curriculum** introduces the basic language, terminology, and definitions associated with an understanding of race, racism, cultural competence and provides tools and techniques for implementing racial equity principles within organization. The curriculum also provides an understanding of why data is important in race equity work and how data analysis can be used to identify outcome disparities. The curriculum supports the development of leaders who are culturally competent and proficient and who can demonstrate how a race equity lens can be embedded throughout a department's policies and practices.

Statewide Advisory Committee on Promoting Adoption of Minority Children

This statewide faith-based committee was originally created in 1995 by the

State Legislature, but was more recently reinvigorated with the support and coordinating function of the Interagency Council. Its purpose is to address policies and practices that promote the recruitment of resource families and the adoption of children of color. The committee consists of 12 members, at least half of which are always designated for clergy.

The original focus of this committee was the promotion of adoption (and permanency in general) for children of color, groups of children who were most likely to stay in care for long periods of time. This included more traditional adoption recruitment and awareness activities within the faith community. Over time, the focus has evolved to include the various ways of supporting children, youth and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system. This includes all of the service strategies along the continuum of family involvement, from providing prevention services so that children can remain at home with their

family (preventing the need for foster care) as well as promoting permanency and/or successful transitions to adulthood for children and youth in foster care.

The statewide committee serves as a strategic planning group. Their role is guided by a consistent review of child welfare system data, organized by race and ethnicity, to better understand where children, youth and families are in need of more support and attention. Several regions of the state are identified each year for more intensive support. Once a specific region is selected, the advisory committee then selects a specific church institution within that region to lead a local community based effort in support of children and families. Churches are identified based on their local standing in the community, and their relationships and connections to local networks of community officials, residents and other organizations. Selected churches must be committed and have the capacity to lead a local initiative aimed at meeting some of the unmet service needs of children, youth and families.

Local initiatives all begin with the convening of a local "adoption forum". In the local communities identified for "adoption forums", the lead church works in partnership with the Commission and DFPS. The regional Equity Specialists work hand in hand with the church pastor and other key officials to work through all of the details for an initial community forum. They work collaboratively on identifying the date and time, the kind of data and other information to be shared during the forum, the structure for the subsequent community input discussion, and in developing the invitation list and other outreach strategies. The important point here is that the HHS Commission, the Center and DFPS liaisons serve as contributors to and supporters of this church/faith-driven process, and not as the key drivers or final decision makers.

Through these forums the pastor shares information, gets community input and feedback. Together, the church and community participants identify the most important priorities and unmet service needs for families, and begin to organize the church congregation and broader community in support of the agreed upon priority area(s) of focus. Examples include the formation of local advisory committees, developing transition centers for transition-age males (ages 18-21), providing backpacks and other supplies for youth, respite programs for parents, traditional resource family recruitment campaigns aimed at increasing adoptions, etc.

This strategy is guided by a firm belief that churches and other religious institutions have an intimate understanding of a local community's needs, assets, resources, challenges and ways of operating. Religious institutions are also likely to have an open and trusting relationship with families in the community, allowing for more constructive engagement – even serving in a liaison or facilitator role – between DFPS workers and children and families.

This is a very different strategy than standing up in front of a congregation and asking for foster parents. This strategy engages families in a more comprehensive way such that they can participate with transportation, respite care, child care, and bringing food to families and/or for events. Using this intensive approach, the whole church gets engaged in some way.

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Texas' efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate racial disproportionality and disparities among families involved with the state's child and family serving institutions began with the development of the "Texas Model" within the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Based on these early successful efforts, and recognizing that the pattern of racial disparities was common across systems, the state expanded the Texas Model into a coordinated and comprehensive effort to eliminate racial disproportionality and disparities across **all** of the state's health and human service-related agencies (through the Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities).

While the cross-systems coordination efforts of the Center have developed, it is important to note that the racial disproportionality and disparity reduction efforts **within** Texas DFPS continue to expand. Further description of the expanded and continuing DFPS efforts is shared below.

CPS Take Action Forums
The *Take Action Forums* are a series of structured conversations designed to advance an understanding of racial disproportionality and disparity reduction efforts within DFPS. These one-hour-long conversations are held monthly at the state office, and are open to all interested staff and external stakeholders. The discussions are structured around current events or other emerging issues related to race and culture within Texas. The topic during each session is intended to spur discussions about race and racism in the experiences of families and in the shaping of institutional policies and practices. Take Action Forums are organized and facilitated by the statewide manager responsible for disproportionality efforts within DFPS.

Monthly Leadership Meetings
Monthly Leadership Meetings are held in each of the regional offices and feature a strategically identified topic for discussion, or the screening of a video or other resource followed by a facilitated discussion. These meetings are led by the regional disproportionality specialists and are open to all interested staff. The meetings are a part of the department's effort to build leadership at all levels on issues related to racial equity, and inform the continuing efforts to more effectively embed the Texas Model in policy and practice. Recognizing the challenge of getting individuals to share personal perspectives about race and racism openly and honestly with other colleagues, considerable attention is given to the development of thoughtful guiding questions and the facilitation of courageous conversations.

DFPS Training Resources
In addition to the training workshops and experiences coordinated through the Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities, additional training resources are made

available directly through Texas DFPS. A description of these additional training opportunities follows.

- DFPS recently launched an online *Indian Child Welfare Act Training* aimed at increasing worker and supervisor familiarity with the Indian Child Welfare Act, with a focus on helping workers understand what questions to ask, when, and how to proceed when engaging Indian children and families. DFPS is also working with tribes to make the training available on an external website. This online training for caseworkers and supervisors is a part of the certification program; thus, workers and supervisors must take the training to advance. Preliminary steps are also being considered to ensure that some of this information is available in the basic skills training for workers.

- *Working with Latino Families,* a professional development course currently in development, supports a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Latino children and families in Texas, and describes effective strategies for engaging Latino children, youth and families in the assessment, case planning and decision-making processes. When completed, this multi-media continuing education course will be open to all staff, and will include a combination of materials for review (readings and resources) as well as a computer-based training experience. A similar course, *Working with African American Families*, is also in the early developmental stages.

Data Dashboards
All DFPS staff currently have access to a "data warehouse" where they can access data organized by race and ethnicity, and that summarizes outcomes for children and families with respect to investigations, placement in out-of-home care, family preservation, and permanency. Data on key decision points are used consistently by regional disproportionality specialists and system administrators to inform the continuing system improvement and strategic planning processes of the state and regional offices.

Recognizing and Eliminating Implicit Bias in Judicial Decision Making

The Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families is a multidisciplinary executive-level group, led by judges, created by the Supreme Court of Texas in 2007. The Commission is chaired by a justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, and includes officials from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and Child Protective Services (CPS), non-profit foundation and state bar leaders, private attorneys, legislators, judges and other elected officials, and other child welfare stakeholders. The Commission's structure includes an advisory group comprised of former foster youth, foster families, parent advocates, attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), and representatives from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and several community and provider organizations.

The Commission's mission is to strengthen court practices and the court-related experience for children, youth and families in the Texas child-protection system and thereby improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. This mission is advanced primarily through the work of three standing committees: Basic Projects, Technology and Training.

Although the Commission was not created for the explicit purpose of reducing racial disproportionality and disparities, it actively advances this agenda through their judicial education and training functions. The Commission convenes an annual *Implicit Bias in Judicial Decision-Making Conference*, aimed at educating judges about the effect of cultural biases on decision making and how these biases have contributed to disparate outcomes for African American, Native American and Hispanic youth and families involved in the judicial system. They also coordinate and promote other periodic training sessions and workshops related to racial equity, including support for the Texas CASA training series structured around the PBS documentary series *Race: The Power of an Illusion,* focusing on the idea of race as it has evolved in biology, science, law and history.

The following are among the results achieved as a result of the Texas Model implementation within the Department of Family and Protective Services:

- During the early implementation of the Texas Model, DFPS officials achieved a reduction in foster care placement rates for all children. While placement rates declined for White children, African American and Native American children during this period, the most significant decline was experienced for African American children. Moreover, evaluators found no corresponding increase in rates of repeat maltreatment, suggesting that children were being safely maintained within their families of origin rather than being placed in foster care.

- When the removal of children and placement in foster care was necessary, the implementation of improved and culturally responsive family engagement strategies within the DFPS resulted in a significant increase in rates of relative placement.

The following are among the observed changes resulting from the work of the Center for Elimination of Racial Disproportionality and Disparities:

- The Center's Equity and Inclusion initiative continues an ongoing collaboration with Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), a program within the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. After ECI staff were exposed to race equity work through workshops, ECI and the Center have nurtured a meaningful and sustained partnership. With support from both the Center and the DFPS, ECI staff have participated in ongoing race equity trainings and incorporated these principals into their daily practice. ECI recently

received national recognition for the cultural sensitivity of trainings they offer to their contract providers.

- The Center's Office of Border Affairs has coordinated with the Computers for Learning Program within the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to deliver and install more than 800 computers with Internet access in colonias and rural communities along the Texas-Mexico border. The computers are utilized for online eligibility application to programs, and access to educational, health, and employment information and resources. This systems change provides technology-based access for families to services in their community centers, schools, and faith based organizations, eliminates the barriers families face in accessing services due to limited or no transportation and allows families access to needed resources to meet their social service needs.

- The Center's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity worked with Medicaid Programs Operations in the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to include eight items in their client survey tool [Healthcare and Research and Quality (AHRQ) Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS)] to capture the experiences of racial and ethnic populations during access and use of Medicaid services.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

The work of eliminating racial disproportionality and disparities in individual and family outcomes in Texas has evolved over time, and continues to reflect the state leaders' continuous learning about the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on the experiences of families, as well as the systems charged with supporting them. The following are among the key reflections and lessons learned over the several years of advancing these efforts.

- *Leadership presence and communication about priority* – Systems are comprised of multiple complex bureaucratic agencies and institutions.

The workforce takes its mandate from executive leaders within the institution, with additional policy and practice guidance provided by managers and supervisors also informing their understanding of their respective job functions. Individuals in leadership positions throughout an agency are critical in clarifying and reinforcing the vision and values that must drive the institution's work with individuals and families, and specifically articulating how the vision and values should translate in their respective job functions. Thus, the important role of leadership in setting a tone for this work, and articulating the critical importance of a racial equity lens cannot be overstated.

- *Legislative support and dedicated resources* – Legislation has been critically important in that it has allowed for the allocation of significant staff and capacity-building resources, has created an operational infrastructure, and created an accountability mechanism to guide and monitor system progress toward achieving racial equity.

- *Data-driven system improvement focus* – All efforts to improve the system's functioning must be guided by data and a clear understanding of what is currently happening in the system's response to individuals and families, why these things are happening (to the best extent possible), and the specific policies and practices that are most responsible.

- *Dedicated time and space for "courageous conversations"* – Opportunities for administrators and front line staff to participate in "courageous conversations" about race, racism and culture are very important. Staff must have opportunities to reflect openly and honestly about, in essence to make sense of, what they are observing, perceiving and experiencing in their day-to-day work. Creating time and space for these courageous conversations among staff is critically important, and can significantly (and positively) transform the culture of the institution into one focused on improved understanding, innovation and

problem solving.

- *Understanding 'why' a focus on race and racism is important* – There is a tendency for many leaders and other professionals to focus on the 'what' and 'how' of systems improvement. For this work, however, it is unlikely to be effective without a firm and consistent focus on the 'why' for this work. People must understand the subtle and often unseen ways in which their assumptions about race and culture influence our engagement of individuals and families. It is thus imperative that everyone involved understand the complex history of race, racism and culture, and their influence on both family and system functioning.

- *Collaborative systems improvement partnerships* – The depth and breadth of this work within the context of child welfare would not have been possible without close working relationships with other key partners, including the other child and family serving systems, CASAs and Casey Family Programs. All of the partners who share an understanding of the experiences of children and families, and especially those that shape the experiences of children and families, must be directly involved in the efforts to improve system policies and practices.

- *Resources to support this work* – The state's perspective and analysis has been especially grounded in the principles of the Undoing Racism Workshop (developed by the Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond) and in the importance of understanding racial and ethnic identity development as described in the Knowing Who You Are video and training process (developed by Casey Family Programs). Resources to support these training activities were important.

- *Connecting an understanding of ideas to practice* – CPS must continue to expand efforts to assist direct service delivery staff with strategies to connect the concepts to the data to day-to-day work with children and families. This is done through the integration of disproportionality into all aspects of training, practice

Texas 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	3,410,991	48.87%	12,492	42.18%	3.66	0.86	1.00
American Indian	18,747	0.29%	34	0.11%	1.81	0.40	0.46
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	259,186	3.56%	95	0.32%	0.37	0.09	0.10
Black / African American	818,742	11.72%	6,832	23.07%	8.34	1.97	2.29
Multiple Races	156,257	2.16%	1,262	4.26%	8.08	1.97	2.30
White	2,321,884	33.41%	8,503	28.71%	3.66	0.86	1.00
Total	6,985,807	100.00%	29,613	100.00%	4.24		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

guides, and the development of new initiatives.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although many of the efforts described above are ongoing, the following are among the key directions the work in Texas is also expected to evolve.

- Developing plans for evaluation of the completed Equity in Health and Human Services Curriculum to ensure its effectiveness. Once this is achieved, plans will be underway to develop an implementation plan for train-the-trainer model for certification of facilitators whose role it will be to provide the curriculum to individuals throughout the state.

- Efforts are underway to improve access to system data across all of the various state agencies and institutions that support individuals and families. This is part of the state's continuing focus on the use of data to connect individuals and families with the specific types of services and other supports needed to be safe and healthy, and the availability of those supports and services when and where they are most needed.

- The Center's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity is currently reviewing 21 cultural competency plans of Medicaid managed care organizations to identify consistencies and/or gaps in meeting components of national standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Recommendations are being compiled for improvements to these plans that will meet these national standard requirements and to ensure equity in the delivery of health and health care services through

Medicaid providers statewide.

- The Center's Office of Border Affairs is currently exploring opportunities for expansion of coordinated efforts to improve access to health and human services by persons residing in Colonia-like communities throughout Texas. Colonias are communities along the Texas-Mexico border that lack some of the most basic living necessities, such as water and sewer systems, electricity, paved road and safe and sanitary housing.

UTAH

The Utah Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) has developed a targeted strategy for reducing the disproportionate number of children and families of color involved with the state's foster care system, especially Latino and Native American children and families. Through these efforts, DCFS also documented a high underrepresentation of Latino and Native American families in its pool of foster and adoptive resources. A primary focus for Utah DCFS has thus been placed on the recruitment and retention of resource families who match the cultural backgrounds and meet the language needs of children in care. This has largely been pursued through a partnership with the Utah Foster Care Foundation (UFC). Utah DCFS is also focusing on identifying and eliminating the broader barriers to permanency for children and youth in foster care, which is expected to reduce the over-representation of and longer length of stay for children of color in foster care.

<div style="background:#a01c1c;color:white;text-align:center">INITIATIVES</div>

Recruitment of Latino and Native American Resource Families

Through analysis of administrative data, Utah officials became aware of a significant mismatch between the racial and ethnic composition and background of its foster care population, and the background of the parents who have been recruited to care for – and provide permanent families for – children who have been removed from their families. To address this disparity, and to increase the responsiveness of resource families to the needs of children in care, the department and other state leaders developed a strategy focused on diversifying the pool of resource families to care for children placed in foster care.

Legislative Mandate

The development of foster and adoptive resource families in Utah is largely supported through a partnership with a private nonprofit organization. The Utah Foster Care Foundation was created by the state legislature in 1999 to increase the number and diversity of foster and adoptive families to meet the needs of Utah's foster care population.

The mission of the Utah Foster Care Foundation is to find, educate and nurture Utah families who are willing and able to provide a nurturing home for children who have been neglected or abused. Their work includes the recruitment of foster and adoptive resource families, training for interested and existing families and additional assistance in completing the foster care and adoptive parent licensing process. They also provide continuing support for foster and adoptive parents.

Culturally Responsive Resource Families

While Utah Foster Care actively seeks families of all backgrounds who are interested in supporting children and youth in care, it also focuses on developing resource families that understand and reflect the specific language and cultural backgrounds of the children in foster care. Given the large proportion of Latino and Native American children in care, UFC has invested significantly in its capacity to identify and develop Latino and Native American resource families.

Culturally Responsive Staff and Volunteers

UFC has prioritized the identification of staff and volunteers who understand and reflect the language and cultural backgrounds of children in care. These staff are particularly effective at identifying the types of community events and celebrations that serve as effective venues and occasions to share information about the needs of children in foster care, and to recruit foster and adoptive resource families. UFC has found that families are more likely to engage and follow up when the recruitment staff and volunteers look like them and share their language and cultural background.

Data-Driven Recruitment Strategy

UFC also collects and analyzes information about referral sources for the resource families that actually follow through and complete the foster care licensing process. Thus, they prioritize outreach and information sharing with specific and 'high-interest' audiences. For example, UFC analyses revealed

UTAH FOSTER CARE RATE
(per 1,000 children)
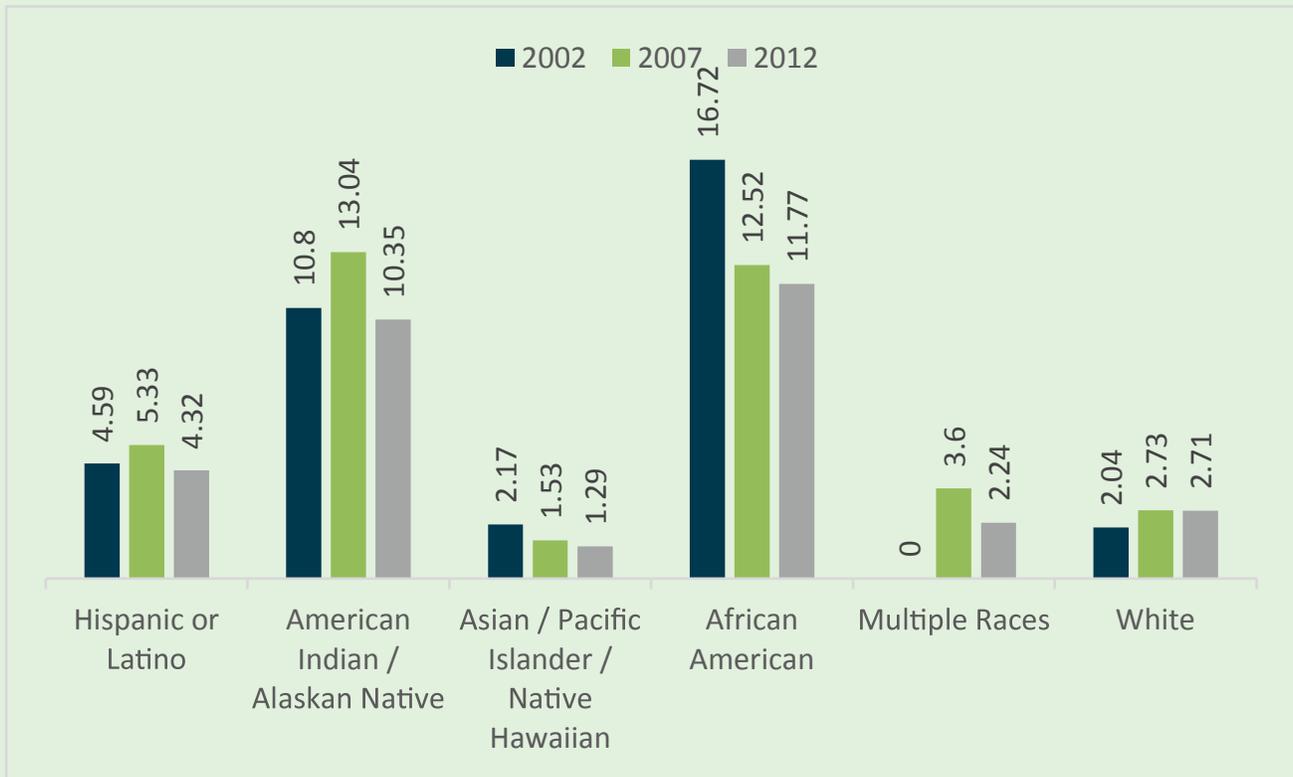
Legend: ■ 2002 ■ 2007 ■ 2012

Group	2002	2007	2012
Hispanic or Latino	4.59	5.33	4.32
American Indian / Alaskan Native	10.8	13.04	10.35
Asian / Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	2.17	1.53	1.29
African American	16.72	12.52	11.77
Multiple Races	0	3.6	2.24
White	2.04	2.73	2.71

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

that a greater percentage of Latino families responded to local radio advertisements than other media outreach strategies. Thus, UFC invests more resources in local radio outreach and advertisements than television ads when targeting this specific group/community.

UFC also has access to Utah's statewide SACWIS system, through which they enter and track information about resource family characteristics, geography, resource family referral sources, their respective stage in the licensing process and the extent of training they have received over time.

Focus on Tribes and Native American Families

UFC has more recently dedicated specific attention to the development of Native American resource families, again because of the disproportionate number of Native American children who become involved with the foster care system. Similar analyses of resource family

referral and engagement data revealed that Native American resource families are far more responsive to information about specific children in need of foster and/or adoptive families. Thus, efforts to recruit Native American families are likely to highlight the background, interests and needs of specific children who are in care.

UFC also works directly with the Indian Child Welfare Act resource person within the Navajo nation. This active partnership has been effective in ensuring that tribal resource families are able to timely access the kinds of supports they need. This partnership also allows for ongoing negotiation and problem-solving between UFC, DCFS and tribal officials. Similar partnerships and engagement strategies have been developed with each of the tribes in Utah.

Language Matters

Given their experience with targeted outreach and recruitment, both the DCFS

as well as Utah Foster Care Foundation are deliberate about hiring staff who are fluent in multiple languages, and who can effectively translate for families and professionals within the context of resource family training workshops and other meetings.

Strategic Geographic Placement of Staff

Utah Foster Care staff are located strategically in various regions of the state, with a focus on the regions with greater concentrations of Latino and Native American children and families. This decentralized approach allows recruitment staff and other volunteers to be more responsive to inquiries and other requests from interested families, and also more accessible to participate in community events and programs.

Resource Family Mentoring Program

Utah is piloting a mentoring program among Latino resource families. Offi-

cials found that it was not uncommon for placements to disrupt and/or for Latino families who did receive a placement to not continue after that first placement. Upon further investigation, two primary causes were observed for this. First, there was a lack of knowledge of resources available to help families meet the needs of the children in their care and to address difficult behavioral and emotional issues (or a lack of knowledge of how to access these resources). Second, there were cultural differences with respect to bureaucratic expectations as compared to expectations shaped by the families' background and country of origin. In short, families often struggled with the state bureaucracy and expectations for documentation, follow up with doctors, therapists, dentists, etc., and in particular the related deadlines established for each of these.

Utah is currently piloting a program in which long-time successful Latino foster families are paired with new Latino foster families at the time of first placement. The mentor helps the new family access the supports and services available to meet the needs of the children placed in the home. Often these have been identified by the agency, but the family just doesn't know how to access them. Thus the mentor accompanies the family and introduces them to the various service providers. Mentors are also able to help new families identify agency expectations as it relates to visits, documentation, etc., and teach them what needs to be done beyond simply caring for the child.

Enhanced Focus on Permanence for Children in Care for More than 24 Months

In addition to its resource family recruitment efforts, Utah officials are also actively working to identify other barriers to permanency for children in foster care. Utah DCFS has developed and implemented a **Permanency Roundtable** process for identifying and resolving barriers to permanency for children and youth who have been in foster care the longest periods of time. This strategy has included the training of staff across the state on the value and critical importance of permanency for children, and

familiarizing staff with the most frequent system barriers to timely permanence. This strategy also includes a quarterly review of cases for children and youth who have been in care for 24 months or longer, with a primary focus on identifying and resolving the barriers that are presently preventing permanence. This enhanced focus on permanency includes a deliberate and exhaustive process of identifying and engaging relatives who may be available to care for the child.

While the immediate goal of the permanency roundtable process is to achieve permanence for each child whose case is reviewed, they are also critically important processes for identifying the major and frequent system barriers. Barriers from all of the cases that have been reviewed are compiled and reviewed by supervisors and other administrators throughout DCFS, as well as with judges and attorneys who work closely with the department. These directly inform policy changes and other practice improvements.

The following are among some of the observed improvements resulting from these efforts thus far.

• Increase in the number of Latino and Native American families identified as resources for children involved with Utah's foster care system, and who have completed the licensing process to become foster and/or adoptive parents. It is not known whether this has also increased the rates of same-race placement, as the goal was explicitly about increasing the diversity of resource families who are available to care for children and youth in care.

• UFC officials report that the coordination efforts between UFC, DCFS and tribal officials have led to a significant increase in permanency for Native American children, and a corresponding reduction in the number of Native American children in care.

REFLECTIONS/LESSONS LEARNED

• *Language* – Not all of the state and local child and family serving institutions have strategies in place to meet the language needs of families. Large numbers of families continue to experience challenges communicating with and understanding how to engage some of these institutions (i.e. health, mental health).

• *Child welfare system capacity* – Utah Foster Care has been successful identifying and engaging bilingual and Spanish-speaking families for children and youth in foster care. This success, however, has highlighted a broader and more systemic challenge of moving this larger and more diverse group of interested families through the licensing process, and ultimately utilizing the families as placement resources for children in care. Utah Foster Care continues to work through these challenges alongside the DCFS and the Office of Licensing.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Utah DCFS has been very deliberate in its focus on developing resource families to care for children while they are in foster care. DCFS is now increasing its focus on the achievement of permanency for children in foster care. By expanding and institutionalizing its quarterly review of cases for all children and youth who have been in care for more than 24 months, DCFS will continue to identify and resolve barriers to permanence. Although this intensive permanency focus does not have an explicit focus on race, Utah officials believe this increased attention will also reduce the disproportionately longer stays in foster care for children of color.

Utah 2012 Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Data Profile

	Child Population		Foster Care Population		Foster Care Rate (per 1,000)	Disproportionality Rate	Disparity Rate
	#	%	#	%			
Hispanic or Latino	149,206	16.88%	644	23.28%	4.32	1.38	1.58
American Indian	8,402	1.01%	87	3.15%	10.35	3.12	3.58
Asian/ Native Hawaiian	23,194	2.59%	30	1.08%	1.29	0.42	0.48
Black / African American	10,198	1.19%	120	4.34%	11.77	3.65	4.18
Multiple Races	28,516	3.24%	64	2.31%	2.24	0.71	0.82
White	669,062	75.09%	1,811	65.47%	2.71	0.87	1.00
Total	888,578	100.00%	2,766	100.00%	3.11		

Foster Care Data Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. **Child Population Data Source:** Population Division. U.S. Census Bureau. Data accessed via Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org. Foster care rate calculations completed by Center for the Study of Social Policy.

State & Local Strategies
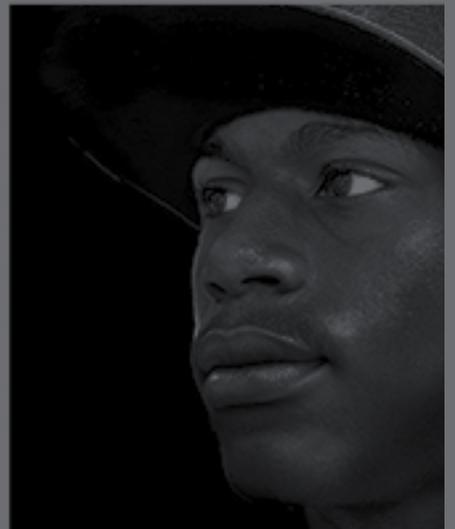
Public Systems, Professionals and Other Institutions Involved in Child Welfare-Related Racial Equity Efforts

Systems or Institutions Involved	Allegheny County (PA)	Connecticut	Idaho	Illinois	Iowa	Kentucky	Michigan	Minnesota	New York	Oregon	Ramsey County (MN)	Texas	Utah
Public Child Welfare	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Education / Schools	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
Courts / Judges			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Higher Education (colleges/universities)		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
Juvenile Justice	●	●		●			●		●	●	●	●	
Law Enforcement	●			●	●	●		●		●	●	●	
Faith	●			●	●	●	●			●	●	●	
Mental Health	●			●		●			●	●	●	●	
Attorneys / Legal				●		●	●	●		●	●	●	
Health	●		●	●	●					●	●	●	
Tribes / Tribal Child Welfare Systems			●					●		●			●
Housing				●		●				●		●	

Summary Table of Features of State and Local Efforts to Reduce Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare

Specific Types of Strategies	Allegheny County (PA)	Connecticut	Idaho	Illinois	Iowa	Kentucky	Michigan	Minnesota	New York	Oregon	Ramsey County (MN)	Texas	Utah
Highlighting and raising awareness about racial disproportionality and outcome disparities	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Analysis and use of data by race/ethnicity	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Community engagement / Constituent involvement	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Cross-system partnerships, workgroups (i.e. child welfare, juvenile justice, schools, courts, mental health, etc.)		•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Identification / Implementation of specific system strategies	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Expansion / Improvement of services and supports	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
System assessments / Identification of major contributing factors	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Agency / Organizational policy changes	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•		•	
External funding and resources to support the effort or initiative	•		•		•	•			•	•		•	
Tribal child welfare practice			•		•		•	•		•		•	•
Partnerships between Tribes and public systems			•		•		•	•		•			•
Research / Evaluation	•			•			•	•				•	
Legislation / Executive order								•		•		•	•
Dedicated internal funding to support the effort or initiative				•					•	•		•	

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