

2020 Department of Children, Youth, and Families Oversight Board Legislative Report

This report has not been approved by the Office of the Governor or the Office of Financial Management, and is being submitted directly from the DCYF Oversight Board.

Acknowledgements

To inform and guide the work of the DCYF Oversight, we have had many contributions by individuals with lived experience, providers and other professionals who have graciously presented at Oversight Board meetings. These contributions hold the Oversight Board accountable to keeping the children, family, providers and DCYF workforce central to this work. We extend our true appreciation to the contributors to meeting content this year, and hopefully continued partnerships into the future.

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Letter from Co-chairs

Dear Governor Jay Inslee, the Washington State Legislature and the Department of Children, Youth and Families:

On behalf of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Oversight Board, we are honored to present you with this report on the progress in implementation of Chapter 43.216 RCW.

The year 2020, marked by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, an economic recession and the country's racial reckoning, has created tremendous turmoil in the lives of families and in the Department's efforts to serve them. During these times of turmoil and uncertainty, we have been moved by the resilience of families and youth as they adjusted to major changes in services and plans. Major challenges created by these simultaneous crises include:

- 805 licensed child care sites temporarily closed due to reduced demand as parents stayed home and to emergency changes in health and safety standards to keep children and staff safe;
- In person visitation was temporarily suspended due to health and safety concerns;
- Hotel and offices stays for foster youth increased due to reduced placement options and strains on families from the impacts of the pandemic; and
- Youth involved in juvenile rehabilitation have lost opportunities to work and the ability to visit with family members.

In the face of the pandemic, we commend the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and service providers for their responsiveness and commitment to finding innovative solutions to multiple daunting problems. Virtual family visitation has enabled most children and families to maintain critical connections, treatment services were made available through technology, licensing was streamlined to support providers, and child care and service provider reimbursements were changed to provide funding stability to keep critical services in place. In these and numerous other ways, they have worked tirelessly to ensure children and families continue to receive services, stay connected with one another, and have pathways to a healthy and safe future.

Many across our state have been severely impacted by COVID-19, but none as greatly as the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. The pandemic and economic crisis have thrown existing inequities and disparities in outcomes for children and families into stark relief and have exacerbated the challenges system-involved children and families face.

Time is past due to genuinely and comprehensively reject the status quo of racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in child and family services and the juvenile justice system, and work aggressively to address the underlying causes of disproportionality. The deep conversations and strong statement developed on racial equality by this Oversight Board will prove to be significant grounding of our ongoing work in holding DCYF accountable in fighting racism and disproportionality. We are encouraged by the Department's decision, in response to the Oversight Board's recommendation, to align its work and revise its strategic plan to prioritize reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality. The Oversight Board will continue to closely monitor the Department's progress on this most important goal.

Reflecting on this year’s work, and the discussions the board has hosted with DCYF, providers and youth, this report focuses on points of guidance that will achieve progress on the stated outcomes central to DCYF’s founding legislation, RCW 43.216.015. Moving forward into 2021, the Oversight Board will prioritize greater engagement with populations served and stakeholders. We will strive to maintain the voice of the child, young person, parent, caregiver and provider at the center of our work as we seek progress for better outcomes for Washingtonians.

Conducting oversight of a critical service agency in a time of crisis has been a challenge as we have tried to balance supporting DCYF in its efforts to maintain continuity of services in a pandemic and pressing the Department to continue making progress on a number of issues, including eliminating racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities, pursuing culture change and maintaining compliance with laws, rules and policies. Although the year has brought great challenges, we also see the opportunity to seize a moment in which change is not just an option, but an opening to truly transforming how we serve children, youth and families in Washington.

It has truly been our privilege to lead the launch of the Oversight Board. We sincerely thank our talented staff, and each of the Oversight Board members whose commitment, dedication and valuable insights have guided our work. And to those in communities across our state who shared with us personal experiences, grievances and successes, we are honored by your trust in us as you offered your stories as a way to make positive and lasting change for children and families in Washington state.

With gratitude,



Representative Tana Senn
41st Legislative District
Co-Chair of DCYF Oversight Board



Representative Ruth Kagi (retired)
32nd Legislative District
Co-Chair of DCYF Oversight Board

Executive Summary

In 2020, COVID-19 pandemic and the country's racial reckoning not only impacted the work of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), but also the work of the DCYF Oversight Board. Pivoting from a prescheduled year of topics to review during in-person meetings, the Oversight Board launched virtual meetings in April by conducting oversight over newly emerging issues impacting children and family services. The Oversight Board developed a statement in response to the call for racial justice, incorporating the Board's own commitments and expectations of DCYF (page six).

This report consists of the Oversight Board's guidance to DCYF, the Governor and the Legislature, on key areas central to providing holistic, equitable and sustainable services to children and families in Washington state. Guidance provided in this report is summarized as the following:

Continuum of Care Guidance (page eight)

- Urgency to respond to the call for racial justice
- Communications and Provider Relationships
- Equitable and Accessible Visitation across all Systems of Care
- Capitalize on the Adolescent Programs Unit
- Opportunities to Shift Investment to Prevention

In addition to the agency-wide guidance provided above, the DCYF Oversight Board provides the following guidance specific to each program area:

Early Learning (page eleven)

- Immediate implementation of the inter-rater reliability training for child care licensors
- Market the availability of the Internal Review Process for Child Care Facilities Licensing

Child Welfare (page eleven)

- Developing and investing in alternative foster care modeling and expanded placement options
- Continue efforts and report on recruiting a diverse pool of foster parents
- Ensuring night-only foster home stays provide youth with a welcome, supportive and respectful environment

Juvenile Rehabilitation (page twelve)

- Expand gender inclusive educational and employment opportunities to all youth at all facilities
- Develop mechanisms for youth to build financial credit while in residence at facilities to support reentry

Transitioning from 2020 to 2021

Co-chairs Representative Tana Senn and Ruth Kagi completed their terms as the inaugural co-chairs of the DCYF Oversight Board at the end of 2020. The DCYF Oversight Board and staff are grateful to Co-Chairs Tana Senn and Ruth Kagi for leading the effort of this Board's goal to ensure improved outcomes for all Washingtonians touched by DCYF's systems of care. In November, the Board elected Representative Tom Dent and Shrounda Selivanoff as the co-chairs to serve during the 2021-2023 term.

With a new year in an unprecedented world, the Oversight Board is adopting a culture of continuous improvement by seeking to enhance the effectiveness of its foundational work. In 2021, the DCYF Oversight Board will strive to enhance public engagement, to further elevate the voice of children, youth, families, providers and the workforce, and to continue to increase responsiveness to issues raised by stakeholders, members of the public and the DCYF workforce.

Background

In 2017, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) was created with the passage of [HB 1661](#). DCYF administers early learning, child welfare, juvenile justice and juvenile rehabilitation services previously administered by two separate state agencies – the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Department of Early Learning (DEL). The creation of DCYF restructures how the state serves children, youth and families through a continuum of care, with the goal of producing better outcomes in all Washington communities. [HB 1661](#) (2017) also created the DCYF Oversight Board as an independent entity for monitoring and ensuring that DCYF achieves the stated outcomes as intended by the legislation, and to ensure that the department complies with administrative acts, relevant statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to early learning, juvenile rehabilitation, juvenile justice, and children and family services.

2019: Work Progress & Performance Monitoring

The DCYF Oversight Board was fully formed in the spring of 2019. The [DCYF Oversight Board's 2019 Annual Report](#) was published and outlined guidance administered to DCYF to ensure progress on the stated outcomes foundational to the creation of the Department. DCYF has adopted several elements of the [DCYF Oversight Board's guidance](#) in their work developing the agency's first strategic plan. ***The DCYF Oversight Board's Response and Feedback on DCYF's Strategic Priorities 2020-2025*** can be reviewed in Appendix B. The following highlights notable alignment with the Oversight Board's guidance:

- Adding geography, sexual identity/gender expression and ability status to the work aimed at reducing disproportionality and disparities across system outcomes.
- Providing support for the DCYF child and family services workforce that is responsive to the emotional and secondary trauma staff experience.
- Trauma-informed care with a healing-centered approach to addressing the needs of children and families served by the Department.
- A focus on staff satisfaction and retention by shifting towards a supportive management culture, building trust in supervisors and emphasizing coaching methods to enhance staff strengths.
- Continued support for the performance-based contracting strategy pursued by the Department for all direct client services.
- Concerted efforts to increase the service array available to children and families across the state with an intentional focus on rural areas.
- The utilization of the Chapin Hall Baseline Performance Assessment as a guide to strengthen quality improvement (QI) systems by aligning systems and capacity for QI across all services lines and programs.
- A plan to report on all accountability indicators by race, ethnicity, geography and family income based on data availability in the agency's different databases.

2020: COVID-19 Pandemic, Racial Reckoning & the Future of Children and Family Services

The events of 2020 have forced society to face ongoing inequities and injustices with a new energy to transform how we work together and serve one another. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has upended many ways of conducting business as usual, it is the racial reckoning and the call for justice that received proper attention and exposure in the context of a global pandemic.

A call for racial justice is central to the Oversight Board's focus for DCYF's mission and priorities. The Oversight Board's statement on the call for racial justice is as follows:

Supporting the urgent call for racial justice in our systems of care, communities, and society

We, the [Department of Children, Youth and Families \(DCYF\) Oversight Board](#), embrace an urgent call to action in the pursuit of racial justice. "*Reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in system involvement and across child and youth outcomes*" 43.216.015(3)(a)(viii). The Washington State Blue Ribbon Commission on Service Delivery to Children and Families of 2016, concluded that the creation of a continuum of care state model presents the opportunity to discard business as usual and restructure the commitment to *hold the hand of the child* for the goal of healthy, safe and healing outcomes.

We can no longer ignore the compounding impacts of child welfare involvement that all too often perpetuates the foster care-to-prison pipeline¹, nor the interconnected nature of all DCYF systems of care. The benefits promised by quality early learning opportunities cannot erase the trauma inflicted by removing a child from their families in the first few years of life. These systems need to be reconsidered, redesigned and restructured to repair harm experienced by children and families, while simultaneously supporting families to prevent continued or future system involvement.

To meet this call, as the Oversight Board, we are compelled to hold DCYF accountable for eliminating racial and ethnic disparities across its systems of care. We will prioritize engagement with those with lived experience, young people, families, the DCYF workforce and providers to understand the realities of the state's child and family serving programs, operations and culture. We will engage with DCYF ceaselessly until necessary changes are made that put an end to society's accepted status quo narrative of disproportionality and disparities in child and family services.

This commitment and expectation extends to our partnership with DCYF. We call on the Department to:

- Prioritize prevention and safety efforts. Equity starts prenatally;
- Decrease family separations;
- Re-prioritize funding for in-home services;
- Re-evaluate and restructure all trainings across the state's continuum of care model for leadership, staff and providers alike. These trainings would assist DCYF staff in understanding the importance of viewing the system with a cross-sectional approach that supports equitable outcomes for all engaged with the

¹ Abramo, Allegra. "Washington 'State-raised' Inmates from Foster Care Urge Better Youth Support." *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*, 10 Dec. 2019, <https://jije.org/2019/12/10/washington-state-raised-inmates-from-foster-care-urge-better-youth-support/>. Accessed 20 Jul. 2020.

agency;

- Genuinely provide an “open door policy” in support of the DCYF workforce to provide feedback on programs and policies producing racially disparate experiences or outcomes; and
- Implement guidance in the [DCYF Oversight Board 2019 Annual Report specific to reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities across systems of care](#) (page 12-13).

We expect the DCYF leadership team to embrace the call for racial justice by exercising immediate, exact and transformative actions to change the experience for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) children and families in Washington. This not only includes changes to external-facing policies and programs, but also to intentionally increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the leadership team itself.

History has shown us that system development, design and change, led by an individual or group alone, does not result in equitable and just outcomes. In partnership with DCYF, we commit to this transformation.

“If we want a beloved community, we must stand for justice, have recognition for difference without attaching difference to privilege.” - bell hooks

Guidance for DCYF

The DCYF Oversight Board provides the following guidance to DCYF, the Governor and the Legislature with the goal of improving performance, maintaining compliance with laws and rules, and to make progress towards the stated outcomes central to the legislation that created the Department of Children, Youth and Families (RCW 43.216.015(c)).

CONTINUUM OF CARE MODEL FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

As the Oversight Board engaged providers, youth, families and DCYF throughout the year, striking similarities in areas of improvement across all DCYF systems of care became apparent.

To become a true continuum of care model, as intended in the original legislation creating the agency, DCYF must improve cross-program communication, collaboration and shared management approaches and expectations while serving children and families in Washington state.

There is a need for a more uniform, equitable and consistent approaches to working with families, children and providers across program areas and geographical regions throughout Washington.

1. Urgency to Respond to Call for Racial Justice through Action

DCYF announced in September 2020 that it will fully integrate the agency's Strategic Plan with the agency's Racial Equity Plan and will add a strategic priority about eliminating racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionality. DCYF has made observable progress towards integrating systems to measure and address racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities across all systems of care. The guidance provided here further emphasizes the guidance provided in the Oversight Board's 2019 report, that the Department must continue to prioritize actions, strategies and methods for achieving equitable outcomes for all Washington children, youth and families involved with DCYF systems of care.

- In addition to the commitments and expectations outlined in the ***Call for Racial Justice Statement*** above (pages 6-7), DCYF, as a leader, should make immediate and exact commitments and actions to address the racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in early learning, child welfare and juvenile rehabilitation programs. [RCW 43.216.015\(c\)\(viii\)](#).
- Continue work towards measuring and aligning data on racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities across all systems of care ([RCW 43.216.015\(3\)\(a-c\)](#)), as described and started in DCYF's recent Equity Report. DCYF should make this data accessible to the public as described in [RCW 43.216.015\(5\)](#) as part of the published performance data required by this statute.
- Ensure the DCYF Racial Equity and Social Justice Team's work plan expands beyond an internal focus on DCYF workforce, and strategizes how to address racial equity with children, families and providers interacting with DCYF and its programs. This internal and external focus should be reflected in DCYF's Strategic Plan. And in doing so, work closely with the newly formed Office of Equity within the Office of the Governor.

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2. Communications & Relationships with Service Providers and Families

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic required a rapid response across all DCYF systems of care to continue serving Washingtonians. Response times, frequency and clarity of communication, and ability to provide innovative adaptable plans varied by program area.

*The vision for the department is that Washington state's children and youth grow up safe and healthy—thriving physically, emotionally, and academically, nurtured by family and **community**.*

[RCW 43.216.015 \(1\)\(a\)](#)

- Authentically engage with providers early and often in the development of policy and practice. Trust that providers’ primary interest is providing their services well to children, youth and families, and their experience and insight will strengthen policy and practice. Relationships are built on trust, communication and understanding. This is a cornerstone of culture change for the department. [RCW 43.216.250](#) that requires priority attention and action.
- Standardize methods, frequency and expectations of communications with children, youth, families, providers and the DCYF workforce across all agency program units and geographical regions.
- Ensure that technology is not a barrier to engagement with providers and families. This includes providing proper equipment to families and providers when needed, and to assist in providing training on the use of technology to ensure full access and utilization to participate in communication with DCYF.
- Seek provider feedback on what is working well and not working well regarding engagement and communication with the agency. Providers are partners of the agency in service to families and children.

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

3. Equitable and Accessible Visitation across All Systems of Care

In the unprecedented times presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, DCYF worked diligently to connect with providers and families to provide information and ensure the continuation of services. This included providing personal protective equipment and technological equipment to providers, families and children to support Family Time appointments. The Oversight Board sees promise in expanding this expertise to other program areas.

- The effort and solutions arrived at for providing Family Time in-person visitations for families involved in the child welfare system during the COVID-19 pandemic should be shared and expanded upon for youth in the juvenile rehabilitation system in accordance with [DCYF Policy 6.21 Facilitating Visitation for JR Youth](#).

The Oversight Board acknowledges that The Department of Health issued guidance to lockdown facilities, such as juvenile rehabilitation facilities that limit opportunities for in-person visitations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guidance is important for the safety, health and well-being of resident youth and staff. Given this, the Oversight Board believes that all youth and families in locked down facilities should have access to virtual visitation or alternate creative solutions for in-person visitations that are also vital to the well-being of resident youth. The social and psychological impacts of the COVID-19 touches everyone. All children and youth, regardless of specific DCYF system of involvement, should have equitable access to in-person and virtual visits.

- Supplement in-person visitations with virtual visitation when a family chooses to utilize this option. In-person visitation continues to be essential for keeping a family connected, even when opportunities to connect virtually have become more widely available. DCYF must acknowledge and accommodate providers providing services to families who have different levels of technological access, skills and may require additional training to utilize these services.
- Seek to ensure both sides of the virtual visitations – the child and/or youth, and family member – have equipment to fully engage in visitation.

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

4. Capitalize on Adolescent Programs Unit

As a cornerstone of the Blue Ribbon Commission and intent of HB 1661 (2017), the Adolescent Programs Unit has the opportunity to be a leader for all of DCYF by pioneering true integration of agency programs, and to take innovative approaches to providing adolescent services. DCYF is charged with serving children from young childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is a unique developmental period for young people, and

provides a unique opportunity to support successful transition to adulthood. DCYF has embraced an intentional and effective approach to begin building a successful Adolescent Programs Unit.

- Optimize opportunity to exemplify integration of agency programs if provided opportunity to play a lead role in cross-collaboration for child welfare and juvenile rehabilitation strategic planning. [RCW 43.216.015 \(3\)\(c\)\(v\)](#); [RCW 43.216.015\(4\)\(d\)](#).
- The DCYF Oversight Board supports streamlining licensing processes, but the agency must ensure that certain regulations only apply where age-appropriate. Licensing regulations for providers, homes and beds serving adolescents must be appropriate for this age group. The agency should not maintain the same regulations as applied for the safety of children age 12 and under. The Adolescent Programs Unit should play a leadership role in overseeing this work.

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

5. Opportunities to shift investment of resources to prevention

As many challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced this year, it has also highlighted opportunities for system change. DCYF was one of first eight states to receive approval of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) plan, which enables the agency to optimize funding to prioritize prevention services. The following guidance is in support of DCYF’s innovative approach to prioritizing prevention services while obtaining cost-savings required as a result of the pandemic’s fiscal impacts.

*An important role for the department shall be to provide **preventative services** to help secure and preserve families in crisis. [RCW 43.216.015\(1\)\(b\)](#).*

- Invest in prevention efforts. Reference and utilize **DCYF Oversight Board Guiding Budget Principles** (Appendix A).
- Increase capacity at step down facilities and means for youth currently in JR lockdown facilities to return to community settings. Reduce reliance on lockdown facilities.

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Specific Program Area Guidance

1. Early Learning:

In response to the DCYF Oversight Board meeting on September 17, 2020, featuring a child care provider panel, the Board issues the following guidance:

- Prioritize the implementation of statewide **inter-rater reliability training** for child care licensors. The Department is responsible for ensuring all licensors provide accurate, consistent and non-biased assessment of the child care environment and an early learning provider’s performance.
- Market and share information widely with providers about the availability of the **Internal Review Process** for reviewing the validity of DCYF’s issuance of violations. [RCW 43.216.395](#).

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓	✓	✓	✓				

2. Child Welfare:

In response to the DCYF Oversight Board meeting on January 16, 2020, featuring the Office of Children and Families Ombuds 2019 Annual Report, and October 15, 2020 featuring DCYF’s updated strategies for addressing increasing hotel and office stays the Board issues the following guidance:

- **Safely reduce the number of children in out-of-home care as reflected in draft DCYF’s Strategic Plan for 2020-2025.**
- **Increase the menu of alternate emergent placement options** to reduce the reliance on hotel and office stays, as well as minimize the use of night-only foster home stays. Explore alternative foster care modeling including, but not limited to: kinship placements, suitable other adult placements, therapeutic foster homes and treatment foster care beds as piloted by DCYF with SAMHSA grant funding beginning

implementation in fall and winter of 2020. Additionally, coordinate with Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) to ensure appropriate placements and to avoid hotel placements.

- **Continue efforts, and regularly report out on, progress [recruiting a foster parent pool](#) that reflects the identity and specific needs of foster care youth.**
- The DCYF Oversight Board recognizes the potential traumatic experience youth experience when placed in night-only foster homes. DCYF must ensure when these placement options are utilized, that **youth are humanely cared for and welcomed in the home as a member of the resident family** to the extent possible.

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

3. Juvenile Rehabilitation:

In response to the DCYF Oversight Board meeting on August 20, 2020, featuring a panel of youth currently residing in juvenile rehabilitation facilities, the Board issues the following guidance:

- Provide **substance use disorder treatment at all juvenile rehabilitation facilities.** [RCW 13.40.460\(7\)\(a\).](#)
- **Expand the vocational and educational options** provided at juvenile facilities to include post-secondary educational opportunities, as well as expand trades beyond manufacturing to increase gender inclusivity and various interests. Additional options could include, though are not limited to, skill development and training in cosmetology, fitness, mechanics or for college pathways. DCYF should seek private/public partnerships to ensure opportunities are not cost prohibitive for young people in JR facilities. [RCW 13.40.460\(7\)\(b\).](#)
- As part of reentry efforts, **explore mechanisms for resident youth to build financial credit** to further support success upon release. [RCW 13.40.460\(7\)\(c\).](#)

Improves performance on the following stated outcomes:

Reduce racial & ethnic disproportionality	Improve child development & school readiness	Prevent child abuse & neglect	Improve child and youth safety, permanency & well-being	Improve reconciliation of children and youth with families	Improve adolescent outcomes	Reduce demand for mental health & substance use treatment	Reduce criminal justice involvement & recidivism
✓					✓	✓	✓

DCYF Oversight Board Future Work

Thank You to Co-Chairs Representative Tana Senn and Ruth Kagi

Beginning in November 2018, Representative Tana Senn and Ruth Kagi were elected to serve as the DCYF Oversight Board's first co-chairs. Together, they embraced the new venture leading efforts to ensure DCYF stays on track with its development to meet the expectations first devised in the Blue Ribbon Commission for Children and Family Services in 2016, and in 2017 codified in [Chapter 43.216 RCW](#). Their knowledge, expertise, relationships and experience have set the foundation for the Oversight Board to partner with DCYF to ensure improved outcomes for children, youth, families, providers and the workforce across the state. The DCYF Oversight Board and staff thank Ruth Kagi and Representative Tana Senn for their service in these roles.

On November 5, 2020, the DCYF Oversight Board elected Representative Tom Dent and Shrounda Selivanoff to serve as the Board's co-chairs during the 2021-2023 term.

Oversight Strategy Subcommittee

Embracing a culture of continuous improvement, the DCYF Oversight Board established a subcommittee in October 2020 to revisit the Board's strategy for effectively conducting oversight for DCYF. The subcommittee will continue to meet on a regular basis to consider and develop recommendations to the full board on topics such as enhancing public engagement, scope of topics considered, frequency and use of full board meetings and subcommittee meetings, as well as Board deliverables, among others. The subcommittee will regularly report out to the full Board during meetings.

2021 Coming into Focus

As the Board looks towards 2021, a new way of doing business is paired with a new way of considering areas of focus. In an effort to balance between structured oversight and increasing flexibility and responsiveness, the Oversight Board will consider such topics as listed below, as they align with legislatively mandated performance metrics (RCW 43.216.015(c)):

- Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparities Regular Review & Monitoring
- Kinship caregivers supports with a focus on family reunification and reduced separations
- Family First Preservation Services Act Implementation and cultural responsiveness
- Behavioral Rehabilitation Placements - reducing hotel, office and emergency night-only foster home stays

Conclusion

2020, more than any year in recent memory, has marked the importance of partnership to achieve better outcomes for everyone. In times of uncertainty, instability, and perpetual change, the best path is one of acknowledging where we could do better, and working together to get there. The DCYF Oversight Board embraces this truth as we seek to ensure that DCYF stays the course of the original intent behind the creation of the agency, while also seeking partnership to support and aid in achieving success where opportunity presents itself. Although 2020 is coming to an end, the events and realities of our society – particularly racial injustice and long-standing inequities - that have come to light this year will be sustained into 2021 and beyond, if we continue to work together to arrive a solutions that ensure success for the children, families, providers and colleagues who are all in this with us.

Appendices

Appendix A:

The DCYF Oversight Board's Guiding Budget Principles for the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)

In response to COVID-19 pandemic financial impacts on the state budget for SFY21

The DCYF Oversight Board acknowledges the tremendous task presented to state agencies to conduct 15% budget reduction exercises, as requested by the Office of Financial Management (OFM), in light of the mounting financial impacts presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this is a daunting task, the DCYF Oversight Board sees this as an opportunity to return to the basics that serve as the original foundation for creating DCYF, as well as an opportunity to champion the value of family voice, nurture and grow community partnerships, and optimize shared resources with other state agencies.

In this document the DCYF Oversight Board provides guiding budget principles to DCYF as the department makes decisions to accomplish the 15% budget reduction exercises. This guidance is provided in partnership as we all face the immediate and long-term impacts presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority Budget Principles

1. **Prioritize resources to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionality across all DCYF systems of care.** The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief the disparate impacts any crisis has on families and communities of color. See this as an opportunity to achieve the social justice reforms and goals identified as essential for administering state services and achieving outcomes equitably.
2. **Where possible, support community-based interventions and solutions to keep children and youth safe in their community instead of in institutions.**
3. **Continue to prioritize those children and youth most at risk of neglect, physical harm, and other adverse childhood experiences known to damage their long-term physical and behavioral health and perpetuate intergenerational poverty.**
4. **Optimize matching dollars, administrative savings, technological advances and streamlining of processes to reduce needs for direct service cuts.** Examples include:
 - Leverage state funding to maximize federal matching funds (FFPSA, Medicaid, Title IV-E, and others) and encourage existing and new private/public partnerships, such as the network administer model.
 - Streamline processes including reduction of duplicative work conducted between DCYF and community partners, for example background check processes, by leveraging the capabilities of those partners.

- Continue effective technological advances explored during pandemic including, but not limited to tele-treatment options, videoconferencing visitation supervision options, etc.²
 - Coordinate resources from other departments to support the needs of children and families.
5. **Preserve DCYF’s core ability to gather and analyze data on outcomes for children, youth and families, racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities, including disparities among other identity groups, and service effectiveness.**
 6. **Maintain resources to support an anticipated increase in children’s and families’ needs as they return to daily activities once the Stay Home, Stay Healthy order is lifted.** With reduced observation by mandatory reporters during the COVID-19 pandemic, plus increased economic and emotional stress placed on families, we anticipate an increase in child welfare referrals. In addition, as parents return to work, child care will play a critical role in ensuring economic recovery for the family and the economy. The DCYF Oversight Board strongly encourages DCYF to maintain funding to address this anticipated increase in need for services and supports to help families stay whole and intact.
 7. **Utilize a cost-benefit approach to identify and sustain effective programmatic responses that are geared towards reducing deeper and/or future system involvement, like dependency, incarceration, and homelessness.** At the same time, the Board encourages DCYF to ensure some flexibility in programs and funding to address new and intensified needs emerging because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 8. **Prioritize funding for programs and policies that have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving outcomes as identified in the WA State Blue Ribbon Commission on Service Delivery to Children and Families Report from 2016, the original legislation creating the Department of Children, Youth and Families (HB 1661 of 2017 or as codified in RCW 43.216.015(2)(c)), as well as in DCYF’s Strategic Plan.**

The DCYF Oversight Board commends the leadership and transparency DCYF has demonstrated during the unprecedented new world brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Oversight Board encourages DCYF, as difficult as it first appears, to embrace the opportunity presented by the budget reduction exercises. In doing so, we believe this process can work in the Department’s favor to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionality through all systems of care, ensure the safety and well-being of all of Washington’s children and youth, and maintain a laser focus on achieving the stated outcomes central to the creation of DCYF.

² *The Oversight Board understands that certain services such as in-person visitation are considered essential and savings may only arise from offered supplemental support services. The Oversight Board also acknowledges that some services will need to be evaluated for effectiveness when administered in a virtual format.*

Appendix B

DCYF Oversight Board Response & Feedback on DCYF Strategic Priorities 2020-2025

The Oversight Board is encouraged by the direction DCYF has outlined in this plan and its obligation to fulfill the mandate as envisioned in the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on the Delivery of Services to Children and Families and House Bill 1661 of 2017. In particular, the DCYF Oversight Board was supportive and pleased to see the following in DCYF’s Strategic Priorities 2020-2025 plan:

- Adding geography, sexual identity/gender expression and ability status to the work aimed at reducing disproportionality and disparities across system outcomes.
- Support for the DCYF workforce that is responsive to emotional and secondary trauma experienced as a result of working in child and family services.
- Trauma-informed care with a healing-centered approach to addressing the needs of children and families served by the Department.
- A focus on staff satisfaction and retention.
- Continued support for the performance-based contracting strategy pursued by the Department for all direct client services.
- Concerted efforts to increase the service array available to children and families across the state with a particular focus on rural areas.
- The inclusion of the Chapin Hall Baseline Performance Assessment as a guide to strengthen quality improvement systems.
- A plan to report on all accountability indicators by race, ethnicity, geography and family income where available.

The Oversight Board does want to offer additional guidance to strengthen the direction of DCYF over the next five years. The following feedback from the DCYF Oversight Board aligns with the order and organization of the current document.

Mission, Vision and Introduction Statement

❖ Embed a specific plan to reduce racial and ethnic disparities throughout the main DCYF strategic plan

The Board applauds the attention drawn to reducing racial and ethnic disparities early on in DCYF’s strategy priorities document, and the expansion of that focus to reducing disparities based on family income, geography, sexual identity/gender expression and ability status. Though the Oversight Board would like to see the department:

- (1) Clearly state specific actions connected to this commitment; and
- (2) Enmesh this work throughout this strategic plan document and not treat it as a separate plan to be produced later in the year after this plan is finalized.

By prioritizing reducing these disparities and disproportionality, the Department must commit to making it a part of every program, policy or operation administered by the agency. Without seeing this formally memorialized in the strategic plan, the Oversight Board is concerned that these efforts will continued to be siloed and perceived as additional or separate work from the main mission of the Department.

DCYF Agency Priorities

1. Safely reduce the number/rate of children in out-of-home care by half

- ❖ **Expand this goal to reduce youth involved in the juvenile justice and juvenile rehabilitation systems.** As DCYF seeks to de-silo its work and provide a continuum of care, the Oversight Board believes this should be attributed to efforts to reduce the number of youth in care across the child welfare system, juvenile justice and juvenile rehabilitation system. This would require prioritizing DCYF’s leadership role in strengthening partnerships with local governments to increase diversion options for youth touched by the juvenile justice system.
- ❖ **Address youth in BRS placements that are returning home from out of state placements, as well as increasing hotel stays and other emergency placement stays.** With the focus on safely reducing the number of children in care, the Oversight Board would like to see commitment to strategies and actions in this plan that address the in-state placement of youth returning from out-of-state BRS placement, as well as what strategies that will mitigate the pattern of increasing hotel stays and other emergency placements.

2. Create successful transition into adulthood for youth and young adults in our care

- ❖ **Expand specificity around mental health and substance use disorder treatment, both in the description of the current state of these issues and what will be addressed within that landscape.** Additional information on the realities of this issue and how DCYF will address it is desired.
- ❖ **Include higher education access, in addition to vocational education, as an option for creating successful transition into adulthood for youth and young adults in care.**

3. Create high quality integrated B-5 system

- ❖ **Parent and caregiver supports should be central to creating a high quality integrated B-5 system.** Parents and caregivers are cornerstone to ensuring better outcomes for our youngest Washingtonians and essential for building and maintain a quality holistic B-5 system.

4. Improve quality and intention of our practice

- ❖ **Highlight new innovative programs – such as the Family Connections Program and the Certificates of Parental Improvement** - that enhancing caregiver relationships, resources and opportunities produce better outcomes for children, youth and families in our state.

5. Improve quality and availability of providers services

- ❖ **Identify and prioritize strategies on strengthening partnerships with communities, providers and local governments.** The Blue Ribbon Commission identified that the expectations to improve outcomes for children and families that are touched by DCYF systems, is an expectation that cannot be achieved by DCYF alone. The Department must take a leadership position in forging and supporting partnerships with communities, providers and local government entities including local courts.
- ❖ **Acknowledge the success of the Network Administrator model in Region 1, administered by Empire Health through the Family Impact Network,** and address its relationship to the strategy for achieving a robust service array, particularly in rural areas.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- ❖ **Add the commitment to reducing disparities and disproportionality across all DCYF systems.**

Additional indicators of interest to monitoring plan

The Oversight Board acknowledges that this plan is in early stages of development, but the Board is glad to see a clearly defined commitment to reduction of youth in care by a designated factor. The Oversight Board expects that similar target will be set across all priority areas identified in the plan, including the commitment to obtain 90% kindergarten readiness for all children entering kindergarten.

Additionally, the Oversight Board believes the following indicators would be insightful for monitoring performance for strategies laid out in this plan:

- ❖ **For *create successful transitions into adulthood for youth and young adults in our care*** – add driver indicator on stable placements
- ❖ **For *create high quality integrated B-5 system*** – add (1) stability of child care to ensure children are not being moved from center to center; (2) higher Early Achievers ratings, and (3) capacity growth of providers over time.
- ❖ **For *improve quality and availability of provider services*** - add capacity growth of providers over time.

Again, the Oversight Board is encouraged by the plan the Department has put forth as its main areas of focus over the next 5 years. The Board believes with the additional guidance provided here, DCYF is moving on a strong foundation towards achieving the stated outcomes central to its mission.