

DCYF Oversight Board 2.0 Proposal¹

DRAFT

This proposal has been shared with DCYF, but it's not endorsed by the agency.

Executive Summary

The [DCYF Oversight Board](#) is proposing a shift in its oversight approach to better align with statutory intent, adapt to changing agency conditions, and improve outcomes for Washington's children, youth, and families. This proposal seeks to improve the Board's monitoring role, refocus priorities, and strengthen collaboration with DCYF without requesting additional state funds.

Proposal Objectives

1. Restructure the Annual Report

Transition from a broad, resource-intensive report to a more focused, collaborative model that tracks one or two agreed-upon outcome areas annually or biannually. A minor statutory change would be requested to allow flexibility in reporting.

2. Collaborate with DCYF Leadership to Create an Annual Progress Report Which Better Reflects Statutory Requirements and Legislative Intent

Partner with DCYF and stakeholders to identify and track high-priority metrics that reflect legislative intent and statutory outcomes.

3. Create Pathways for Discussion and Analysis

Supplement Board meetings with informal sessions and stakeholder engagement to foster deeper analysis and shared learning.

4. Dedicate Some OIAA Capacity to Support a Shared Accountability Agenda with Philanthropic Support

Propose that DCYF dedicate part of OIAA to support joint oversight efforts and analysis of co-identified priorities. This would enhance public trust and increase the Board's effectiveness. The Board is exploring options for philanthropic support for this proposed objective.

Conclusion

The DCYF Oversight Board is committed to enhancing DCYF's impact through focused, collaborative efforts (e.g., well-facilitated co-design processes), and data-informed practices that reflect the complexity of DCYF's work and the needs of Washington's children and families, without imposing additional costs on the state.

¹ Note that there is only one small statutory change suggested by the three Board subcommittees for 2026: to request greater flexibility from the legislature regarding the contents of the annual report.

DCYF Oversight Board 2.0 Proposal DRAFT

Background and Purpose

Since the inception of the DCYF Oversight Board, the annual report has served as the primary channel for communicating the results of our oversight activities to DCYF leadership, the Governor's Office, the legislature, and to the public. Interviews with Board members, agency leaders, and community stakeholders suggest the need to assess the report's value, given the amount of OB and DCYF staff resources necessary to produce it. The timing of this review is favorable since the OB has several newly appointed Board members; we have new DCYF leadership, and new staff in the Governor's Office. Toward this end, the DCYF Oversight Board Co-Chairs created a Board subcommittee to review the reporting process and to make recommendations to the full Board. After consulting with agency staff, the AAG, reviewing available data, and examining the report structure, the subcommittee identified several ways to improve our monitoring function. This gave rise to a broader discussion about how to create greater alignment between our oversight activities and the requirements of our governing statute.

The purpose of this proposal is to realign the collaborative relationship between DCYF and the Oversight Board, focusing on efforts such as co-creating a few annual outcome priorities rather than pursuing changes to statute. That said, it does include one minor statutory request, which will be made to the legislature to allow for greater flexibility in the annual report. As a result, we offer 4 general discussion points and example areas of focus over the next 4 years. The Oversight Board is well aware of the state's dire financial condition; therefore, we will not be pursuing additional state funds. While not all recommendations can be accomplished without additional resources, we believe significant near-term progress is possible through a more proactive oversight strategy, one that includes forging stronger collaboration with DCYF and external stakeholders, and leverages philanthropic support.

Oversight Board's Annual Report Requirements in Statute

The statutory basis for the annual report is defined in some detail (page 13, [RCW 43.216.015](#)), it reads: "The oversight board for children, youth, and families shall issue an annual report to the governor and legislature by December 1st of each year . . .". The report must review the department of children, youth, and families' progress toward meeting stated performance measures and desired performance outcomes, and must also include a review of the department's strategic plan, policies, and rules" (page 16, [RCW 43.216.015](#)). The annual report also satisfies the Board's mandate to provide "general oversight over the performance and policies of the department and shall provide advice and input to the department and the governor" (page 16, [RCW 43.216.015](#)). Our role as an Oversight Board is to "determine whether the department of children, youth, and families [DCYF] is achieving the performance measures," (page 16, [RCW 43.216.015](#)). The performance measures the Board is required to examine are specified in the statute and shown in Appendix A. If one considers these reporting requirements within the context of the entire statute, the submission of an annual report addressing the metrics in Appendix A is the minimum requirement, not a limitation on the scope of the Board's authority to define oversight. Indeed, the language includes broad authority to address outcomes "stated" by the agency, beyond those listed in statute.

Oversight Board's Statutory Responsibilities

The statute references several global agency outcomes subject to the Board's oversight; examples include: 1) an increased emphasis on prevention (page 1, [RCW 43.216.005](#)), 2) all services must be evidence/ science based (page 1, [RCW 43.216.015](#)), 3) contracted services must be "performance based," (page 3, [RCW 43.216.015](#)), 4) when services are provided through a network administrator that entity must have the authority to repurpose funds in order to hold providers accountable (page 3, [RCW 43.216.015](#)), 5) services must be provided in an equitable manner (page 1, [RCW 43.216.015](#)), and 6) the Board has access to all information compiled by the agency not prohibited by law (page 4, [RCW 43.216.015](#)). The statute explicitly authorizes the Board to administer surveys, sample contracts, and initiate administrative "investigations" from the [Family and Children's Ombuds](#)--all of which, taken together, represent the legislature's intent to provide comprehensive, proactive oversight, rather than simply adding another advisory board to the 45 which existed at the time the Oversight Board was created.

Discussion Points

1. Restructure the Annual Report

To make the annual report more impactful, the OB proposes focusing on one or two specific areas identified in collaboration with DCYF. The current report is labor intensive and unlikely to affect practices within the agency since it is largely comprised of information that is already publicly available. Of the 34 performance indicators included in the [2024 Annual Report](#), 28 (82%) came directly from the agency with very little independent analysis. Many of the metrics codified in statute were developed before the legislature created DCYF, so they are effectively frozen in time, either capturing what was once important or restating data elements required by the federal government. Currently, DCYF and the Board are both required to track these redundant metrics, with no clear prioritization. Effective oversight and effective service provision both require current data to respond to a fluctuating environment. New policies are regularly created by the legislature, the federal government, or required by changing agency business practices, and policies. At the same time FamLink, DCYF's required child welfare data system of record, has exceeded its useful life span and has only limited capacity to collect useful data related to individual case outcomes. Because the statute is very specific about which metrics are required in the annual report, **the only statutory change recommended by the three Board subcommittees for 2026 in this document is to request greater flexibility from the legislature regarding the contents of the annual report.**² The 2025 report could serve as a transitional document by including the required metrics while identifying a new approach to tracking outcomes, contingent upon legislative approval.

2. Collaborate with DCYF Leadership to Create an Annual Progress Report Which Better Reflects Statutory Requirements and Legislative Intent

The Board is proposing a collaboration with the Office of Innovation Alignment and Accountability (OIAA), agency leadership, and stakeholders to identify the top priority performance measures and to determine how long each should be tracked. Aligning priorities with DCYF would occur annually or biennially to maintain flexibility and data relevancy. This process should model the values reflected in the enabling statute: openness, collaboration, public participation, while maintaining a focus on

² Note that Secretary Senn has expressed interest in some general cleanup of the statute (e.g., removing annual review of contracts since the Board doesn't engage in this activity).

outcomes. The OB is concerned that the enabling statute may be too prescriptive, but it does highlight recurring themes that could serve as a foundation for measurable outcomes, many of which could be translated into corresponding metrics (i.e., performance measures). **The Board suggests reaching out to private philanthropy to fund a third-party facilitator who would guide the development of the annual/biennial progress report.**

Some possible focus areas referenced in statute are described as examples below. Importantly, the Board seeks to collaboratively identify a few key metrics, not all of those listed below.

- **Progress Toward Becoming More Prevention Oriented with Parents, Caregivers, and Providers.** The general provisions in [RCW 43.216.015](#) (page 1) state “an important role (for DCYF) shall be to provide prevention services to preserve families in crisis.” This emphasis on prevention provides a foundation for collaborative efforts to shift upstream, reducing the need for crisis intervention and strengthening families.
- **Building a Data-Informed, Accountable, and Innovative Culture.** General provision 1 in [Chapter 43.216.005](#) states unambiguously that services to children and families were previously not organized and delivered in a way to achieve optimal outcomes, implying that substantial change was necessary. General provision 7 reiterates that DCYF, must be anchored in a culture of innovation, transparency, accountability, rigorous data analysis, and reliance on research and evidence-based interventions. **We would like to partner with DCYF to explore effective ways to measure, support, and strengthen this type of culture.**
- **DCYF Workforce Well-being.** General provision 9 (also in [Chapter 43.216.005](#)) reads: “the legislature finds that the work of the department of children, youth, and families will only be as successful as the workforce—both the agency employees and community-based providers.” Increased support for the professionals working with children, youth, and families is critical to improving outcomes. It is a known principle in the organizational development field that an organization is only as strong as its workforce. In human services, positive outcomes are largely determined by the skill and commitment of those directly interacting with children and families. On any given day there are thousands of interactions between DCYF front line staff and families statewide. **If a change in DCYF workforce well-being is expected, the Board recommends beginning by examining existing data about the challenges faced by frontline staff, if this has not been done recently.** The OB seeks to partner with DCYF to understand frontline staff challenges, improvements, and ideas for change, with the goal of co-creating recommendations for the Department.
- **Disparate Outcomes for Children and Youth of Color.** General Provision 6 ([Chapter 43.216.005](#)) reads in part: “the legislature finds that children and youth of color are disproportionately impacted at every key decision point in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families must prioritize addressing equity, disproportionality, and disparities in service delivery and outcomes, and provide transparent, frequent reporting of outcomes by race, ethnicity, and geography...” The Board believes that measuring outcomes of services provided to individuals in specific racial and economic categories would better inform efforts to reduce disparities. **The Board is particularly interested in revisiting how disparities are examined in early learning access, kindergarten readiness, and culturally relevant supports for families of color.**

- **Building Supportive Relationships with Providers including those in Early Learning, and Licensed Caregivers.** In Washington, most services to children and families, other than case management, are provided by contracted providers and /or licensed caregivers. Creating a supportive, collaborative environment, and accurately assessing provider and caregiver capacity is critical for a well-functioning public child welfare agency. The DCYF OB statute (page 5, [RCW 43.216.015](#)) requires the Board to engage providers and caregivers to better understand the extent to which they are supported in their very challenging roles. Despite the reduction in prevention funding, **we would like to think creatively with DCYF about how to assess the quality of supports provided to early learning providers**, who are critical partners in prevention, family engagement, and child development. We further propose to examine how these ongoing efforts align with and support quality improvements in early learning and prevention.

Implementing New Initiatives. One of the greatest challenges facing DCYF leadership is the implementation of new practices and initiatives while staying focused on existing organizational requirements. Each year the legislature enacts new laws affecting the agency and the federal government redefines budgetary requirements, and many emerging service delivery issues require immediate attention. Since 2018, DCYF leadership has created a new agency, struggled to maintain services through a global pandemic, overseen unprecedented reductions in the number of children in care, aimed to protect children from the opioid epidemic, implemented new standards for child protection, addressed the needs of an older, more challenging population in JR facilities, and planned for an expansive new data system, while continuing to prioritize services for children in state custody and historically underserved communities. Much of this work continues during the most acute financial crisis in Washington's history. All of this notwithstanding, the enabling statute which governs DCYF requires external confirmation of the progress made toward reaching stated goals affecting the public.

3. Create Pathways for Discussion and Analysis

The Board has relied heavily on public televised presentations from DCYF staff, which seem less conducive to in-depth conversations or inquiry. Complementing these with less formal information sessions involving key agency staff, as well as independent discussions with stakeholders, could provide Board members and the public with a deeper understanding, while remaining aligned with the Open Public Meetings Act ([RCW 42.30](#)).

4. Dedicate Some OIAA Capacity to Support a Shared Accountability Agenda with Philanthropic Support

As a practical matter, the Board's broad oversight capacity is not commensurate with the resources allocated to the Board. As a result, there is tension between the level of oversight the public expects and what the Board can reasonably provide with limited resources. We believe the Department would benefit from a collaborative effort to analyze critical issues and incorporate OB perspectives to help develop creative solutions to endemic challenges. To enhance the value of this work, we propose that DCYF allocate some OIAA capacity, using philanthropic funding, to establish a meaningful monitoring process. This work will not be possible without philanthropic support, and the Board is exploring options in this area.

One possible explanation for the misalignment between expectation and resources may be found in [43.216.035](#), which describes OIAA's duties and responsibilities. These responsibilities include leading research and data collaboration with **external entities** and higher educational institutions. While there is no specific reference in the statute to the intended relationship between OIAA and the OB, the legislature gave the Board wide access to information, while giving OIAA the responsibility of collaborating with external entities in their research and data collection efforts. Further development of the relationship between OIAA and the OB could benefit the agency and the Board while increasing the public's trust in the oversight process.

Proposed Next Steps

- Discuss rationale and draft proposal with DCYF Leadership by 9/08/25
- Send draft proposal to the full Oversight Board (OB) by 9/15/25
- Present and discuss draft proposal to the OB at the 9/22/25 Board meeting
- Solicit comments from the full OB by 9/25/25
- Solicit comments from DCYF Leadership by 9/26/25
- Develop legislative proposal for the law change(s) by 10/30/25
- Oversight Board drafts a funding proposal for private philanthropy by 11/05/25
- Oversight Board completes a transitional annual report that includes the required metrics and a summary of the proposed direction, for submission to the Governor's Office by 11/07/25
- Convene a joint Progress Report Work Group and assign group membership from OB and DCYF (contingent on funding) by 12/10/25
- Finalize the agreed-upon metrics that were jointly selected by Feb. 1, 2026

Appendix A

Outcome Measures Specified in the Statute³ ([RCW 43.216.015](#))

(b) In addition to transparent, frequent reporting of the outcome measures in (c)(i) through (viii) of this subsection, the department must report to the legislature an examination of engagement, resource utilization, and outcomes for clients receiving department services and youth participating in juvenile court alternative programs funded by the department, no less than annually and beginning September 1, 2020. The data in this report must be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and geography. This report must identify areas of focus to advance equity that will inform department strategies so that all children, youth, and families are thriving. Metrics detailing progress towards eliminating disparities and disproportionality over time must also be included. The report must also include information on department outcome measures, actions taken, progress toward these goals, and plans for the future year.

(c) The outcome measures must include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Improving child development and school readiness through voluntary, high quality early learning opportunities as measured by: (A) Increasing the number and proportion of children kindergarten-ready as measured by the Washington kindergarten inventory of developing skills (WAKids) assessment including mathematics; (B) increasing the proportion of children in early learning programs that have achieved the level 3 or higher early achievers quality standard; and (C) increasing the available supply of licensed child care in child care centers, outdoor nature-based child care, and family homes, including providers not receiving state subsidy;
- (ii) Preventing child abuse and neglect;
- (iii) Improving child and youth safety, permanency, and well-being as measured by: (A) Reducing the number of children entering out-of-home care; (B) reducing a child's length of stay in out-of-home care; (C) reducing maltreatment of youth while in out-of-home care; (D) licensing more foster homes than there are children in foster care; (E) reducing the number of children that reenter out-of-home care within twelve months; (F) increasing the stability of placements for children in out-of-home care; and (G) developing strategies to demonstrate to foster families that their service and involvement is highly valued by the department, as demonstrated by the development of strategies to consult with foster families regarding future placement of a foster child currently placed with a foster family;
- (iv) Improving reconciliation of children and youth with their families as measured by: (A) Increasing family reunification; and (B) increasing the number of youth who are reunified with their family of origin;
- (v) In collaboration with county juvenile justice programs, improving adolescent outcomes including reducing multisystem involvement and homelessness; and increasing school graduation rates and successful transitions to adulthood for youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems;
- (vi) Reducing future demand for mental health and substance use disorder treatment for youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems;
- (vii) In collaboration with county juvenile justice programs, reducing criminal justice involvement and recidivism as measured by: (A) An increase in the number of youth who successfully complete the terms of diversion or alternative sentencing options; (B) a decrease in the number of youth who commit subsequent crimes; and (C) eliminating the discharge of youth from institutional settings into homelessness; and
- (viii) Eliminating racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in system involvement and across child and youth outcomes in collaboration with other state agencies.

³ Please see [RCW 43.216.015](#), pages 12 to 13.