THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES - STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2021-2026

Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families Strategic Priorities 2021-2026

MISSION: Protect children and youth, and strengthen families so they flourish.

VISION: All Washington's children and youth grow up safe and healthy – thriving physically, emotionally, and educationally, nurtured by family and community.

In this first five-year strategic planning cycle, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) will focus on six Strategic Priorities – one relates to equity, three relate to our intention for children, youth, and families, and two relate to building necessary agency capacity to accomplish our work. The priorities are grounded in the mission, vision, values, and legislative purpose of the new agency. Additionally, the priorities enable the agency to meet its outcome goals for children, youth, and families in Washington, with a specific focus on the populations for which we are responsible.

Agency Priority		Focused Agency Work To Accomplish Priorities
EQUITY	**Eliminate racial disproportionalities and advance racial equity**	• Become an anti-racist organization • Implement liberatory, human-centered, and healing-centered design across DCYF • Ensure assessments and programs are equitable across DCYF
INTENTION	**Safely reduce the number/rate of children and youth in out-of-home care by half**	• Implement and expand effective secondary prevention • Prevent entries into foster care • Reduce length of stay • Improve service availability
	Create successful transitions into adulthood for youth and young adults in our care	• Least restrictive environments • Strengthen therapeutic environments • Enhance availability of services and supports • Enhance stability and quality of adult relationships
	Create a high quality integrated B-8 system	• Expand access to infant/toddler support and services • Expand access to affordable, high-quality child care • Support recovery of the child care business sector • Create a responsive and inclusive integrated pre-K system • Support the early learning workforce
CAPACITY	**Improve quality and intention of our practice**	• Support staff as our most valuable resource • Enhance supportive supervision and management • Evaluate and re-design child welfare practice model • Re-dedication to JR residential therapeutic model
	Improve quality and availability of provider services	• Agencywide implementation of performance-based contracting • Expand access to effective and needed services • Enhance service matching at individual and population levels • Identify opportunities to integrate contracts and management

Prevention

We are charged as an agency with preventing harm to children and youth – getting as far upstream as possible. Threaded throughout this document are investments in services and practices designed to prevent children and families from penetrating deeper into our service array, and to move them out of higher tiers of service as soon as possible.

Building on our legislative mandate, as well as best practice and evidence-based frameworks for prevention, DCYF's role in prevention includes:

- Partnering to ensure communities are supportive for children, youth, and families.
- Providing community-based services that support families and promote healthy development in children and youth.
- Providing effective case management for those children, youth, and families who enter our systems of care.
- Ensuring that we make effective services available for those who enter our systems of care.

DCYF'S ROLE IN PREVENTION

DCYF TARGET POPULATIONS BY OUTCOME GOAL

Category	Outcome Goal	DCYF Target Populations
RESILIENCE	Youth are supported by healthy relationships with adults	B-5, Child Welfare, Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR)
	Parents and caregivers are supported to meet the needs of children and youth	B-5, Child Welfare, JR
	Family economic security	Low-income families eligible for child care and B-5 supports
EDUCATION	Kindergarten readiness	All Washington children
	Youth school engagement	Child Welfare, JR
	High school graduation	Child Welfare, JR
HEALTH	Healthy birthweight	Pregnant women with Substance Use Disorder, teen moms, others at-risk
	Child/youth development	Children at risk of delay, children with special needs B-5, Child Welfare, JR
	Child/youth mental/behavioral health	B-5, Child Welfare, JR

Note: *DCYF Child Outcome Goals were established in 2018, based on requirements in HB 1661. See more on these at DCYF's Agency Performance Reporting page:* ***www.dcyf.wa.gov/prctice/oiaa/agency-performance***

Roots of Racial Disparities & Disproportionalities

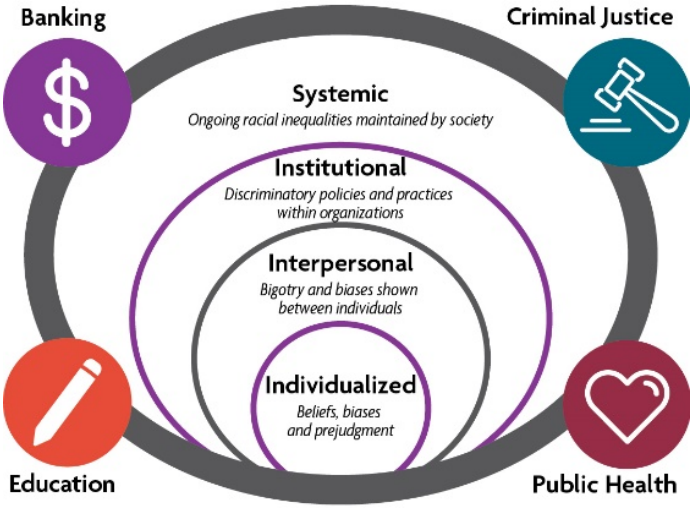
Race has no genetic or biological basis. Racial categories were created and defined over centuries to justify dominance, exploitation, and discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. The concept of race also serves to concentrate power and provide advantage to people who have been categorized as White. The creation of race also came with the idea that a hierarchy exists with blackness on one end as inferior or less than human, and whiteness on the other as superior and the standard for humanity. The purpose of this idea has been to subdue resistance to racial discrimination and the racial disparities that come as a result.

Race has become a social reality, embedded in our identities, institutions, and culture. The process of being racialized influences one's life opportunities, outcomes, and experiences. Racial disparities (unequal outcomes of one group as compared to another group), and disproportionalities (differences in representation according to the presence of racial groups in the population), are present in nearly every aspect of society, from education and employment to health, housing, and policing. Racism has shaped policies, practices, culture, and systems, including approaches to early childhood, child welfare, and juvenile justice. It is now socially acceptable and seemingly natural for segregation, poverty, family separation, and mass incarceration to exist and disproportionately impact BIPOC communities.

Racism in DCYF Systems

In the context of early childhood, BIPOC children are more likely to experience poverty than White children, and barriers to high-quality, culturally- and linguistically-responsive education and care. Undervalued and underpaid positions disproportionately held by BIPOC in the early childhood workforce are rooted in the association between enslaved Black women and domestic work. Racial stereotyping and implicit bias also negatively impact children of color's participation in early childhood programs. BIPOC, particularly Black children, are disproportionately disciplined and are more likely to be suspended and expelled from preschool than White children. This negatively impacts their developmental and educational progress and contributes to the "preschool-to-prison pipeline."

The disproportionate representation of Black and Indigenous children in child welfare is ingrained in historical trauma and racial discrimination. Thousands of Native children were removed from their families and institutionalized in Indian boarding schools from the late 1800s into the mid-1900s. Children were forced to assimilate, stripped of their language and culture, and separated from their land. After Indigenous resistance led to the closure of boarding schools, forced assimilation of Native children occurred through adoption. Programs like the federal "Indian Adoption Project" moved Native children through the child welfare system and intentionally placed them with White adoptive families.



Until 1945, Black families were mostly excluded from primarily privately-run child welfare services. BIPOC children whose families were unable to care for their needs were labeled as "delinquent" and often imprisoned. As child welfare shifted to public agencies, the caseloads and proportion of Black children steadily increased. As the demographics of child welfare cases became increasingly Black and Brown, public funding focused more on out-of-home care and less on in-home services and supports.

The overrepresentation of youth and young adults of color in juvenile rehabilitation is the result of the many inequities that impact BIPOC communities, such as food and housing insecurity, under-funded schools, disciplinary policies, and over-policing. Young people who end up in the juvenile justice system are often acting out of survival or coping with the traumatic and toxic stress in their environment.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Trauma-Informed Approach

Building a trauma-informed system, and weaving a trauma-informed/healing centered approach through all our work are essential to the health and wellbeing of the children, youth, and families we serve, as well as our staff.

All staff, especially those interacting with children, youth, and families, should receive professional development on trauma-informed care.

Staff support, including building a better understanding of how our staff experience secondary trauma, will help to increase workforce wellbeing and retention — a component of providing consistent, high-quality care that we are challenged with today.

Improving staff retention will help us reduce the number of unnecessary interruptions or transitions in care, which we know have negative impacts on educational outcomes and mental/behavioral health of children and youth.

Integration and Alignment

HB 1661 directed DCYF to integrate and align services to achieve the best possible outcomes for children; we were not envisioned to remain three separate administrations within one large agency. This includes the very visible and necessary integration of client-facing services, as well as integrating our back-office functions.

Examples:

- De-silo services. All externally-provided services will be available to clients across the agency as legally allowable.
- Develop common contracting approaches and ensure consistent performance of providers.
- Build an agency approach to facilitate and support transitions of children, youth, and families within and across agency services.

Additionally, we will remove barriers and increase supports so that staff in different parts of the agency can learn about the work of their colleagues and develop new ways of working together.

Quality Improvement (QI)

Building a system that supports improvement in quality that is intentional, continuous, and incremental is necessary to accomplish our priorities throughout the agency.

We will strengthen quality improvement systems across the agency and establish agencywide standards for quality improvement and minimum resource requirements as well as build an agencywide QI community of practice.

Sustainability

As we implement new programs and services and modify existing ones, we will ensure that they are focused, sustainable, and resilient. This includes:

- Stable budget models.
- Scalable implementations.
- Cross-agency infrastructure utilization.

Agency Partnerships

To deliver services at the population level, we work closely with other agencies. Effectively delivering services in conjunction with other agencies, like the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Health Care Authority (HCA), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Commerce, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and our contracted partners, requires intentional collaboration, coordination, and aligning our work and priorities. We will continue to focus on measuring and improving the quality of our partners' work in these collaborations, intervening to improve outcomes for those we serve.

Eliminate Racial Disproportionalities and Advance Racial Equity

DCYF is one component of a complex system that contributes to disparities and disproportionalities. DCYF will identify areas where the agency has the power, influence, and responsibility to enact disruptive and transformative changes. DCYF must build capacity and take the time and intention necessary to engage in this work meaningfully and authentically.

Become an Anti-Racist Organization

- Adopt racial equity and social justice as core agency values.
- Perform an organizational assessment engaging employees in all roles to help identify and implement actions the agency must take to live these values.
- Staff participation in training from the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ), conversations, and other knowledge and skill development opportunities.
- Convene RESJ learning and implementation cohorts to build the skill and capacity for employees to facilitate these processes successfully to avoid unintended consequences and surface strategies that do not address deeper causes.

Implement Liberatory and Healing-Centered Design Across DCYF

- Partner with BIPOC communities with lived experience to co-create a new framework and agencywide approach to co-design that supports all children, youth, and families to thrive.
- All DCYF divisions and programs will develop and implement plans to advance racial equity in their respective work in partnership with BIPOC communities impacted by their services and supports.
- Intentionally center the experience of BIPOC children, youth, and families in current and future program and system design, starting with:
    - Re-designing foster care and juvenile rehabilitation with young people.
    - Transitioning youth from secure facilities to community settings.
    - The integrated pre-school project.
    - The child welfare practice model.
    - Solutions to prevent child abuse and Child Protective Services (CPS) system involvement.
- Generate community-level data to inform efforts to eliminate disproportionality, and to help identify partners with lived experience for co-design processes.

Ensure Assessments and Programs Are Equitable Across DCYF

- Change the use of assessments in child welfare and juvenile rehabilitation where they are known to contribute to disproportionate outcomes.
- DCYF will stop using biased assessments that contribute to racial disproportionalities and will revise or replace them with tools that support positive outcomes for all communities.

Safely Reduce the Number of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care by Half

DCYF will safely reduce the number and rate of children and youth in out-of-home care by half. Data from other states show that it is possible to significantly decrease removal rates of children without compromising safety.

This work will be done in partnership with our court partners, the Attorney General, tribes, parents, and local communities.

Implement and Expand Effective Community-Driven Secondary Prevention

Build community capacity to nurture and support children, youth, and families before they become involved with our child welfare system. To do this DCYF will:

- Implement innovative community-based strategies for child maltreatment prevention.
- Invest in high-quality implementation of evidence-informed services in high-need communities around the state.
- Targeted universalism: identify and provide needed services in the highest need areas of the state.
- Develop community-based supportive alternatives for mandated reporters.

Prevent Entries Into Foster Care

- Re-work our child welfare practice model, initially focusing on high-fidelity and consistent implementation of the safety assessment.
- Assess and improve the effectiveness of Family Assessment Response (FAR) and Family Voluntary Services (FVS) models.

Reduce Length of Stay

Reducing the length to meet legislative permanency timeframes will also reduce caseloads, improving our ability to do quality work.

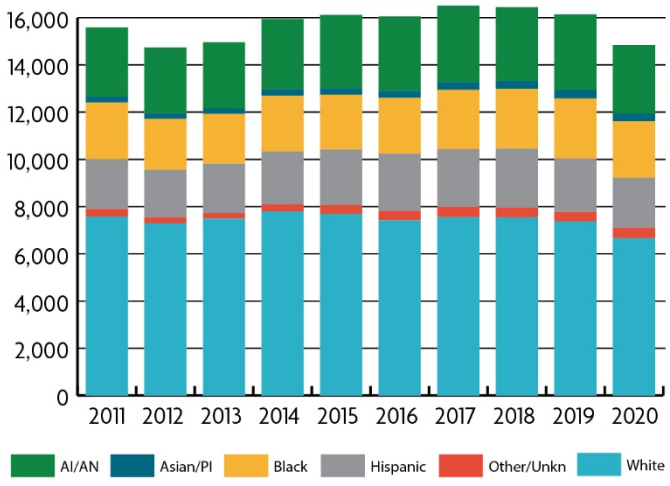
- Reduce unnecessary delays in court processing.
- Fully license kinship foster parents.
- Reduce adoption/guardianship backlog.
- Speed up home studies to 90 days.

Improve Service Availability

Availability of high-quality services prevents children and youth from entering care, strengthens families to avoid removal, addresses children's needs related to trauma, supports the culture and identity of children and youth, and speeds reunification.

- Universal Family Time service availability.
- Behavioral health, including substance use disorder treatment.
- Early intervention and attachment supports for infants and children in out-of-home care.
- Expansion of placement options for high-need youth, including Child Long-term Placement (CLIP) and Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) capacity.
- Expansion of placement options for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth that affirms their culture and identity.
- Expand and improve the quality of evidence-informed in-home services, including the array of services available in our Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) plan.

CHILDREN EXPERIENCING OUT-OF-HOME CARE SFY 2011-2020

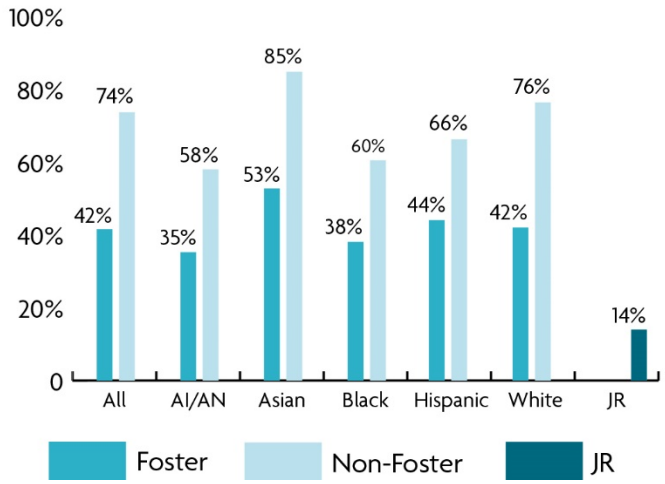


Create Successful Transitions Into Adulthood for Youth and Young Adults in Our Care

DCYF will promote the education, economic security, and behavioral health of youth exiting foster care and incarceration in order to ensure youth successfully transition to adulthood.

One team, one plan: A successful transition is focused around a youth-centered planning process that prepares youth for adulthood through education, employment, housing, life skills, strong relationships, and appropriate behavioral health treatment.

Four-Year High School Graduation Rate



Least Restrictive Environment

- Serve youth in the least restrictive environment possible.
- Expand community capacity instead of institutional.
- Introduce electronic monitoring paired with parole services.

Strengthen Therapeutic Environments

We know that youth, on average, experience worse behavioral health the longer they are in our systems.

- Provide effective substance use treatment for all JR and foster youth with SUD diagnosis.
- Refocus on improving adherence to residential therapeutic models in JR.

Enhance Availability of Services and Supports

- Build adequate education and vocational programming for young adults now in the JR system to match graduation and post-secondary participation rates of non-system-involved youth.
- Ensure youth exiting foster care and JR have safe, affordable, supportive housing plans.
- Provide youth with independent living skills training and supports.
- Ensure contracted services are more widely available to youth and families served by DCYF, regardless of the system they entered.

Enhance Stability and Quality of Adult Relationships

Promote healthy relationships with adults for system-involved youth by increasing school engagement, decreasing the number of absences from school, and eliminating needless placement changes.

- Expand education advocates for foster youth program statewide to cover all middle and high school youth.

Create a High Quality Integrated Birth to Eight System

Expand Access to Infant/Toddler Supports & Services

Support critical brain development in the earliest years with a portfolio of community-based approaches that support safe, stable, and nurturing relationships for infants, toddlers, and their families.

- Link families to services and supports with an effective screening and referral system.
- Build a system of "light-touch" home visiting in all birthing hospitals in Washington.
- Expand access to intensive home visiting programs for expectant families and families with young children.
- Expand early supports for child welfare-involved families to prevent further system involvement and to address children's needs related to early trauma.
- Expand access to high-quality Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) early intervention services to support healthy child development.

Expand Access to Affordable, High-Quality Child Care

Affordable, high-quality child care should be available in all geographic areas, meet family needs, and be culturally and linguistically relevant.

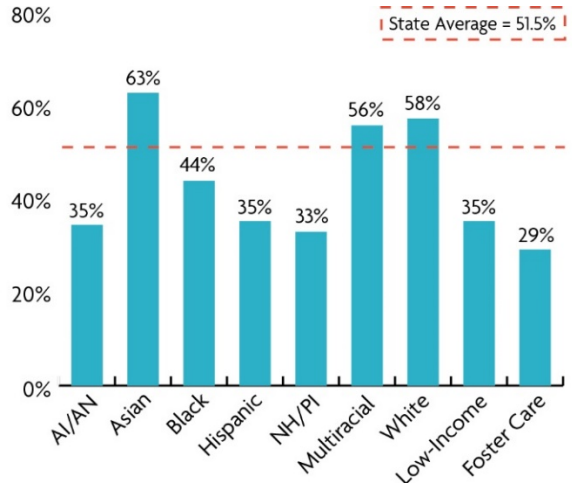
- Prioritize infant and toddler care to meet family and community needs.
- Eliminate benefit cliff with co-pay model based on 7%-10% of family income.
- Establish monthly rates to more closely align with the private pay market.
- Increase investments in child care licensing and Early Achievers to support access and availability of high quality child care to families.
- Expand access to infant and early childhood mental health consultation and other trauma-informed strategies.

Support Recovery of the Child Care Business Sector

The child care business sector has been hit hard by the pandemic and the economic recession, and is a vital component of the state's economic recovery.

- Continued access to business coaching.
- Implement shared services hubs focused on business supports for early learning providers.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS, 2020



Create a Responsive & Inclusive Integrated Pre-K System

Create a system to provide equitable access to high-quality, integrated Pre-K to 3- and 4-year-old children and their families.

- Achieve Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) entitlement according to statutory timelines.
- Support continued growth of a mixed delivery system of providers available in K-12, child care, and community-based settings.
- Build the integrated Pre-K system on the quality foundations of Early Achievers, professional development, child care licensing, and ECEAP.

Enable providers to use varied streams of funding, including ECEAP, Head Start, Part B Special Education Preschool, Transitional Kindergarten, local governments, and grants and co-pays.

Early Learning Workforce

- Support early learning workforce stability, growth, and professional learning.
- Implement flexible ways to count experience towards staff qualifications in early learning settings.
- Implement recruitment and retention strategies that prioritize a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce.

This work builds on Washington's Early Learning Coordination Plan (ELCP). The ELCP is a system-level plan, and a resource to all those working with children and families prenatal to age eight. DCYF facilitated plan development with many tribes, stakeholders, partners, and families.

Improve Quality and Intention of Our Practice

Since many children and youth in the DCYF system have an assigned caseworker, much of the success we will have in improving outcomes depends on the capabilities of our caseworkers. It is our responsibility to train staff to deliver effective services, provide them the support they need to do their jobs, and foster a culture that is supportive and not based in fear. For the services that we deliver directly, we are going to improve the intentionality of our work. Having clear, precise models of how we run programs and deliver services, and monitoring our fidelity to the model with formal quality assurance processes will help us achieve our top three priorities.

Evaluate and Re-Design Child Welfare Practice Model

Our child welfare practice model has many effective components, but needs refreshing so we can safely reduce the number of children in out-of-home care.

- Evaluate and assess our practice model and refine it incrementally to achieve clearer intention, starting with examining our safety framework and assessment.
- Incremental implementation of a new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS).
- Policy reduction and simplification.

JR Residential Therapy Model

The therapeutic model in JR is several decades old and needs refreshing.

- Build on previous and forthcoming evaluation reports to strengthen staff capability of improving youth mental health outcomes in our JR facilities.
- Revise the Quality Assurance (QA) plan and prioritize high-level implementation in the acute mental health units.
- Improve training and staff resources dedicated to each unit to ensure a consistent standard across units.

Enhance Supportive Supervision and Management

Creating a supportive environment for staff must involve an intentional focus on supporting our supervisors' ability to provide quality oversight and support to their staff, and an understanding that a fear-based culture is a barrier to quality improvements in our practice.

- Shift to a supervisory model that enhances supervisors' capacity to provide clinical supervision and coach their casework staff to strengthen their skills.

Support Staff as Our Most Valuable Resource

DCYF recognizes that our 4,000+ staff are the most valuable resource we have for creating the improvement in outcomes we seek for the children, youth, and families we serve. Supporting employees means:

- Adequately staffing both JR and child welfare using research-based staffing models.
- Provide training and supervision aligned with our practice model and expectations, including trauma-informed/healing-centered approaches.

Improve Quality and Availability of Provider Services

Many DCYF services are provided by external partners and third-party providers. We will focus on the quality and availability of providers, and making appropriate referrals will help us deliver the most helpful services to children, youth, and families in need. Doing this work in a way that furthers the agency goals of advancing racial equity and becoming an anti-racist organization will require that we examine and challenge how our systems and funding for contracted services currently operate. We must also intentionally build capacity to better serve BIPOC and marginalized communities.

Agencywide Implementation of Performance-Based Contracting

DCYF's Performance-Based Contracting (PBC) initiative will support ongoing focus and incentives for contractors to meet and exceed performance expectations, and support all contractors to continually improve their services.

- All DCYF contracts for client services will meet service, quality, and outcome standards.
- Early Achievers, DCYF's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in child care, will continue to drive practice improvements and consistency.
- Require all Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS) facilities and non-family group homes to meet Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) requirements.

Expand Access to Effective and Needed Services

DCYF must curate an array of providers to ensure that critical services are geographically, culturally, and linguistically available.

- Regularly assess the population-level needs of the children, youth, and families we are serving, identify effective services, map the availability of services, and work with local communities to build new providers in service access deserts.
- Evaluate telemedicine, video, and other non-place-based technological service delivery methods to improve service in rural parts of the state.
- Coordinate referral systems for families available in all 39 counties. Ensure that families can find needed services (e.g., childcare, help with family issues, developmental screening, and early intervention/prevention services) and that there are effective, warm handoffs between services statewide for those families who need it.

Enhance Service Matching at Individual and Population Levels

Ensuring that services offered to children, youth, and families across DCYF are well-matched to their needs is a vital step in meeting the needs of families. All service matching should start with high-quality individualized assessment, and rely on an adequate service array to ensure appropriate service availability. This is true across DCYF's early learning, child welfare, and juvenile justice divisions. To accomplish this task, DCYF will:

- Systematically evaluate the extent to which individualized child, youth, and family assessments across our system are performing in identifying needs.
- Assess the extent to which available services are meeting demonstrated family needs.
- Develop strategies to fill targeted service gaps and right-size service availability in local areas.
- Monitor and report progress.

De-Silo Agency Services

Eliminate unnecessary barriers and implement supportive structures, so that staff are able to effectively refer children, youth, and families they serve in one part of the agency to helpful services in another part of the agency.

Monitoring Plan

As a part of its accountability function, DCYF's Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA), in collaboration with DCYF program leaders, will establish targets and metrics for measuring and reporting on each of the six agency priorities. OIAA envisions that each agency priority will have a primary outcome indicator, one or more balancing indicators to help monitor potential unintended consequences, and a set of indicators associated with the drivers that lead to the outcome. Although much work remains to develop the actual indicators, this division of indicator type is illustrated in the table below. To the extent possible, all indicators will be reported as trends over time, and will be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, geography, tribal status, and family income.

	Agency Priority	Outcome Indicators	Balancing Indicators	Driver Indicators (Potential)
EQUITY	Eliminate racial disproportionalities and advance racial equity	Racial disparity and disproportionality in kindergarten readiness, child welfare decision points, and juvenile justice participation	(TBD)	High-quality, culturally- and linguistically-appropriate service availability
INTENTION	Safely reduce the number/rate of children and youth in out-of-home care by half	Number/rate of children in out-of-home care, by age (through age 16) Disaggregated for JR/crossover youth	Re-entry rates (safety) Extended foster care utilization Reunification rates	Number/rate of children referred for maltreatment Placement rates Ratio of entries into care to exits from care Time to permanency
	Create successful transitions into adulthood for youth and young adults in our care	High school graduation rates Workforce participation following exit Disaggregated for child welfare, JR, and crossover youth	Five-year graduation rates Rates of homelessness following exit	Improvements in behavioral health Consistent high-quality transition planning
	Create high-quality integrated B-8 system	3-year old development [TBD] Kindergarten readiness 3rd-grade inclusion measure [TBD] Disaggregated for child welfare-involved children	Quality ratings of new expanded preschool Provider diversity	Percentage of 3-4 year olds participating in high-quality preschool Improvement in access to high quality child care
CAPACITY	Improve quality and intention of our practice	Practice indicators (TBD)	Balancing practice indictors (TBD)	Caseload Staff Turnover Employee Engagement Quality of supervision
	Improve quality and availability of provider services	Client outcome metrics from PBC Improvement in access to high quality services	Serving most vulnerable (avoid skimming)	Provider quality metrics from PBC

The initial outcome and balancing indicators will be developed and finalized in CY 2021, and will be posted as a part of our Agency Performance Page externally with the December 2021 revision. As OIAA develops and validates the driver indicators, those will be posted as well.

Resources

For more information related to DCYF Strategic Priorities, go to: **www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/strategic-plan/resources**.

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 | 360-902-8060, ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov)

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