

ANNUAL PROGRESS AND SERVICES REPORT

State Fiscal Year 2027



In accordance with this Program Instruction and its definition of “critical updates,” South Dakota incorporates by reference the information and data contained in its prior year APSR as if fully set forth herein. Accordingly, this submission provides only critical updates since the prior year APSR, consistent with the reporting requirements of 45 C.F.R. §1357.16.

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PERFORMANCE: OUTCOMES

SAFETY OUTCOMES

- **Initial Family Assessment (IFA) Coaching:** Every region has now received initial coaching from Action for Child Protection, and South Dakota is transitioning to providing ongoing coaching within our agency. A Train the Coaches session specific to IFA has been completed, and further planning is underway to support statewide, ongoing implementation. A training team is being developed that will help sustain this coaching model long term. This work strengthens supervisory support for IFA practice standards, promotes consistent and high-quality safety decisions through structured coaching at key assessment points, and is increasing specialists’ competency and confidence in SAFE/CSI practices while improving the accuracy of safety assessments and plans.
- **Out of Home (OOH) Safety Plan without Custody and Modified Family Assessment Policy:** The OOH Safety Plan Without Custody policy and practice expectations has been enhanced, and staff were trained on these updated procedures May 11, 2026. Three new documents were developed to support implementation: an Addendum to the Safety Plan providing essential information for providers, a Full Disclosure Statement outlining parental rights and responsibilities, and a Power of Attorney authorizing providers to perform required duties. These documents are now active for staff use. The Modified Family Assessment policy is under active review by the Protective Capacity Assessment (PCA) group, which has identified the need for policy revisions and additional data collection. The Comprehensive Safety Intervention (CSI) Protective Services Program Specialist has begun revising the policy and is collaborating with the FACIS team on necessary system enhancements.

PERMANENCY OUTCOMES

- **Midwest Wellness Institute (MWI) Contract:** Child Protection Services (CPS) entered into a new contract with Midwest Wellness Institute (MWI) Health on March 10, 2026, to strengthen support for youth in CPS custody with significant behavioral health needs. Under the agreement, MWI provides clinical consultation and mental health case management for high-acuity youth, enhancing CPS’s ability to develop and oversee appropriate treatment and discharge plans. MWI’s clinical expertise supports CPS in determining appropriate levels of care, including psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTF) and group care settings, and is expected to improve placement decisions, treatment planning, and permanency outcomes for youth with complex needs. CPS is identifying eligible youth and making referrals to MWI while also developing a streamlined internal referral process and workflows between the agencies. Progress will be monitored through indicators such as reduced hoteling and emergency placements, increased staff confidence in managing complex needs, shorter and clinically appropriate lengths of stay in PRTFs and group care, more accurate level-of-care determinations, increased step-downs to family settings, fewer placement disruptions, reduced reentry into high-level placements, and improved engagement in outpatient services following discharge.
- **Permanency Model:** CPS has begun working with Casey Family Services on a collaborative co-design partnership to focus on bridging the gap between current practice and a transformed permanency model. The goal is to create a sustainable path forward, one that is rooted in South Dakota’s local expertise, informed by data-driven clarity, and operationalized across every level of the organization to ensure lasting impact for children and families.

WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

- **Protective Capacity Assessment (PCA) Development:** The PCA group has convened to review the proposed policy from Action for Child Protection and has determined the need to pilot the PCA process prior to statewide implementation. Revisions to current PCA policy and practice will provide clearer guidance to support staff, strengthen supervisory consultation, and increase meaningful contacts with caregivers. The CSI Protective Services Program Specialist has begun revising the policy and is collaborating with the FACIS team on the necessary system enhancements.
- **Update to CFSP Goal #1:** Revisions to the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Plan are being finalized, with proposed updates focused on using FFPSA funding to strengthen the competency of mental health organizations that provide behavioral health services to children and families. The Family First Program Specialist is in the final stages of preparing the updated plan for submission to federal partners.
- **Healthcare Oversight Plan:** The Psychotropic Medication Workgroup reviewed the 2025 psychotropic medication fidelity review findings and, based on the results, initiated proposed revisions to the child case plan to strengthen medication oversight. These revisions are currently under review and awaiting finalization.

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PERFORMANCE: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

INFORMATION SYSTEM

- **Office of Licensing and Accreditation Management Information System (OLA MIS) Interface:** The Office of Licensing and Accreditation (OLA) continues progress on the OLA Management Information System (OLA-MIS) and its interface with FACIS, strengthening shared operations between OLA and Child Protection Services (CPS). OLA-MIS, which includes a Staff Portal for licensing staff and a Provider Portal for foster care providers, improves accessibility, efficiency, and communication by enabling electronic application submission, direct communication with staff, access to licensing documents, and availability of required forms and resources. Multiple programs have collaborated to refine interface requirements and ensure alignment with licensed kinship policy changes. The Bureau of Information and Telecommunications (BIT) has completed all FACIS enhancement work, including new fields, updated screens, and the licensed kinship report, supporting consistent licensing documentation across OLA and CPS. BIT is now focused on final interface development and bug resolution. Ongoing collaboration among OLA, CPS, BIT, and RedMane remains central to ensuring a successful interface launch.
- **BISON:** Work has continued on the state's new payment system, BISON and the implementation date was moved to July 1, 2027. An interface between FACIS and BISON will need to be developed. CPS and BIT staff are currently in a hold pattern as other sections of BIT sort out the requirements for each system interfacing with BISON and what those systems will need back in the interface following payroll.

CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

- **Goal Update:** South Dakota identified three goals to strengthen oversight of Periodic Review and Permanency Planning Review Team (PPRT) timeliness. In addition to existing caseworker compliance reports, CPS partnered with BIT to develop a report that alerts the Permanency Program Specialist and Regional Managers to upcoming PPRTs 180 days in advance. A second report was created to track the percentage of timely PPRTs, capturing both the initial PPRT due after a child enters care and all subsequent reviews. These reports, now in production, include data such as age, race, placement type, time in care, court jurisdiction, state or tribal authority, and permanency goals, enabling the CQI team to identify trends impacting timeliness. All goals have been met, and a CQI Program Specialist provides monthly oversight, including monitoring and distributing updates on overdue 6month and 12month PPRTs.

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

- **CFSP Goal #2 Update:** South Dakota made meaningful progress toward ensuring families involved in the child welfare system receive the least restrictive prevention services needed to maintain children safely in their homes. Regional Assessments were completed and distributed to Regional Managers in December 2025, providing localized data on child welfare trends. Each region is assigned a CQI Program Specialist to analyze assessment findings and support the development of regional CQI plans. Over the past fiscal year, active CQI plans were implemented in three regions and one program area. The Black Hills and Region 3 plans focus on strengthening fidelity to the safety model, Region 7's plan targets supporting staff development/retention as well as improvements in child case planning, and the statewide Diligent Recruitment plan addresses foster parent recruitment strategies. Through this structure, regions are using data to identify challenges, implement targeted strategies, and improve outcomes that support children remaining safely with their families whenever possible.
- **Collaboration Goal Update:** South Dakota continues to strengthen stakeholder and lived experience engagement within the CQI system. The CQI team has collaborated with Program Specialists to incorporate individuals with lived experience into workgroups, including youth participation in Independent Living Services policy revisions and lived experience involvement in the Kinship workgroup. In July 2025, the CQI team provided training on Levels of Engagement to support assessment and improvement of stakeholder participation. To increase parent voice, the CQI team developed and implemented a statewide schedule for in person parent surveys, including outreach to incarcerated parents. Parents who express interest are being included in a growing list for future workgroups.

STAFF TRAINING

- **Update to Staff Training Goals/Training Plan:** Significant progress was made on goals by completing hybrid training materials, standardizing assessment criteria, expanding supervisory training, and strengthening in-service training. A new training software system was purchased to support interactive modules, including an upcoming Basics of Supervision module. The Learning and Development Program Specialist collaborated with CQI to refine training evaluations, reviewed feedback from the revised Foundations curriculum, and ensured CQI principles were embedded throughout. The Specialist also assessed and updated contracted trainings such as IFA and Motivational Interviewing, supported planning and rollout of NTI permanency modules, including a Region 3 pilot, and coordinated updates to the IFA curriculum for the coming year. Additional efforts included planning legal training for certification, contracting with JKM Training for Safety Crisis Management, and cross-reviewing foster parent training for alignment with CPS training. Collectively, these activities strengthened consistency, quality, and accessibility across the statewide training system.

- **Update to Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Goal Continued:** In September 2025, the Department of Social Services (DSS) transitioned to the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) for all prospective foster and adoptive parents as part of its pre-service training program. The curriculum incorporates core NTDC topics along with South Dakota-specific content to provide trauma-informed, competency-based preparation for families. DSS also offers ongoing post-licensure training, with at least one monthly virtual session using NTDC Right Time materials or other approved courses. All sessions are recorded and made available through the Learning Management System for later access. Recent post-service training topics include Vicarious Trauma and Building Resilience, Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others, Grief and Loss in Foster Youth, Trauma-Informed Parenting, Building Belonging, and ICWA and cultural planning for foster care and adoption.

SERVICE ARRAY & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

- **CFSP Goal #3 Update:** A Young Voices member contributed to revisions of the Independent Living Services policy and helped develop tools to support ongoing youth involvement. CPS and community partners hosted two peer-led sessions at ARISE West, where a youth with lived experience shared their story, discussed independent living skills, and promoted wellbeing for youth preparing for adulthood. Interest remains in expanding this model into group care, residential settings, and Independent Living Preparation Programs (ILPP) next fiscal year. Collaboration with Young Voices keeps lived experience central to service planning. Young Voices representatives also participated in community events on family communication and substance-use prevention, and one young adult was selected for a national leadership opportunity through the National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services. These efforts continue to strengthen the integration of youth voice and lived experience across programs and services.
- **Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) Collaboration:** To increase staff awareness of available services, DBH facilitated a virtual resource fair for all CPS staff and provided a presentation to CPS Supervisors and the Management Team on the Systems of Care program offered through Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs). Because all CMHCs operate under DBH oversight, this collaboration supports a coordinated approach to service delivery. CPS staff are now better equipped to connect children, youth, and families to appropriate services, and DBH assists in identifying providers when local services are limited. Statewide CMHC availability allows providers to meet individuals in flexible settings, such as homes, schools, workplaces, and community locations, reducing barriers related to transportation, work schedules, and rural access. CPS and DBH collaboration has increased through ongoing meetings, strengthening a unified, department-wide approach to service delivery while maintaining each division's distinct functions.

AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

- **ICWA Community of Practice Initiative:** The Court Improvement Program (CIP), in partnership with DSS/CPS and ICWA stakeholders, is exploring the development of an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Community of Practice. The initiative was proposed after learning from Montana's successful model and receiving support from the SD ICWA Coalition. A CIP subgroup, including representatives from the judiciary, ICWA Coalition, CPCMC, State's Attorney, and DSS/CPS, began meeting in late 2025 to define the focus and structure. CIP engaged Dr. Ashley Cheyemi McNeil, an experienced facilitator, to guide planning, with virtual and in person meetings held in early 2026. The ICWA Community of Practice will serve as a collaborative network to strengthen ICWA implementation and improve outcomes for Native children and families.

FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

- **Black Hills Recruitment Plan Update:** The Black Hills Recruitment Team has expanded its collective impact through strengthened partnerships with the faith community in Rapid City. Fountain Springs Church provides quarterly trainings for foster, kinship, and adoptive families, including shared perspectives from caregivers, birth parents, and CPS to support reunification. Open Bible Church offers ongoing support through twice-monthly trauma groups, 12 WRAP teams serving families, and annual Hope for the Journey trainings focused on Trust-Based Relational Intervention.
- **Updates to the Diligent Recruitment Plan:** In January 2026, Region 6 launched a monthly Recruitment and Retention Team. Despite having the most foster homes in the state, Region 6 remains a high-need area due to placements from across South Dakota, and ranks fourth in overall need. In Aberdeen, a faith-led effort to host Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot led to the creation of the Foster Friendly Faith Coalition. The coalition supports foster, adoptive, and kinship families while also engaging faith partners as safety plan providers for birth families. In January 2026, Dakota News Now launched a year-long Stronger Families series highlighting foster care across South Dakota, elevating the voices of foster and birth families, community partners, and DSS to increase awareness.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES CONTINUUM

COMMUNITY BASED CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

Strong Bridge SD: Prevention services communication and outreach efforts were strengthened through a statewide branding project aimed at increasing visibility, accessibility, and public understanding of child welfare prevention services. A contract was awarded to develop the Strong Bridge SD brand, with input from parents with lived experience, community partners, and DSS Communications. The brand launched at the Community Response to Child Abuse Conference.

Strong Bridge SD Continued: As part of this initiative, a series of promotional videos was developed, and an interactive services map was created to help families and professionals more easily identify available prevention resources. Expansion of fatherhood-focused programming and services for toddlers and preschool-age children were key priorities. An RFP was released to secure financial and outcomes management support for the parenting education program, with the goal of maximizing flexibility and expanding access to preventive parenting education statewide. The contract was awarded to Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, and transition activities are underway. The CBCAP Grant Annual Application was submitted on May 26, 2026.

STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM

Critical updates are captured within Well-Being Outcomes.

MARYLEE ALLEN PROMOTING SAFE AND STABLE FAMILIES

IV-B funding continues to expand services provided to children and families working with CPS. State general funds, combined with federal funding, helps support at-risk families with concrete services, so children are able to remain in their home and promotes the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children in foster care.

KINSHIP NAVIGATOR

Kinship Strong: Kinship Strong, a yearlong initiative to strengthen the kin-first approach across child welfare policy, practice, and culture, was launched. The initiative focuses on increasing awareness of kinship care, enhancing supports for kinship caregivers, and expanding staff training on kin-centered values. Throughout the year, CPS delivered supervisor and staff trainings, developed a Kinship Resource Guide for the Kinship South Dakota website, and hosted a four-part Winter Warm Up webinar series featuring statewide providers, with nearly 100 participants including DSS staff, kinship caregivers, tribal partners, and contracted agencies. Additional activities included community outreach, updated kinship materials, caregiver appreciation efforts, and continued work on the revised Kinship Care Policy. The initiative also expanded public visibility through community events and ongoing development of the Kinship SD website. Statewide efforts to increase kinship placements are active and ongoing through region-specific engagement strategies. The Permanency Program Specialist, Family First Program Specialist, and CQI Program Specialist are developing a CQI plan targeted to increasing children placed in kinship care statewide. The plan is in the development stage and will be implemented in the upcoming state fiscal year. Children in kinship placement continues to increase steadily. As of May 31, 2026, 33.6% (590 of 1,754) of children in care are placed in kinship care, which is a 1.4% increase since SFY2025.

MONTHLY CASEWORKER VISIT & FORMULA GRANTS

A Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Program Specialist conducts weekly oversight of child caseworker visit data to ensure children are seen as required and that visit information is entered into FACIS timely. This includes reviewing the report of visits pending entry and the report of visits documented as “not visited.” For pending entries, the Specialist sends targeted follow-up emails staff to promote timely documentation. For Not Visited entries, the Specialist reviews each case weekly to confirm alignment with policy and practice and immediately notifies staff when discrepancies are identified. When broader patterns emerge, the Specialist issues statewide reminders to staff to reinforce policy expectations and support consistent practice. In FFY2025 97.8% (18,802 of 19,266) of child caseworker visits were completed which is a 1.6% increase since FFY2024. From FFY24 to FFY25, not visited entries also decreased from 713 to 458 and not entered decreased from 10 entries to 5 entries.

PROGRESS REPORTING FOR OTHER GRANTS AND REQUIREMENTS COORDINATED THROUGH THE APSR

ADOPTION AND LEGAL GUARDNAHSIP INCENTIVE PAYMENTS

Adoption Competent Mental Health System: The statewide initiative to expand trauma-informed, adoption-competent mental health services continues to progress in alignment with NTI. A multidisciplinary steering team and liaison team meet regularly with support from the National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services. In early 2026, three workgroups, Workforce Development, Cross-System Collaboration, and Access to Services, were established to guide implementation based on the National Center’s assessment and recommendations. Current efforts focus on strengthening coordination, expanding training, and improving access to adoption-competent mental health services statewide.

JOHN H CHAFEE & ETV

- **Goal 1 Update:** An educational-credit fidelity review was completed to identify strengths and barriers within current practice. Policy is being revised to clearly explain expectations related to educational-credit monitoring. Training for new CPS staff emphasized credit tracking, timely Age Meetings, maintaining youth in their home schools, and advocating for youth’s education. Regional training in December 2025 reinforced completing credit checks prior to Age 16 Meetings and implementing early interventions to support on-time graduation. These activities improved consistency in monitoring educational progress and reaffirmed the agency’s commitment to supporting youth in earning a high school diploma or GED.

- **Goal 1 Update Continued:** The agency is preparing for Young Voices to present at an upcoming statewide educational training attended by educators. Youth will provide firsthand perspectives on barriers experienced in foster care, including school transitions, loss of academic credits, limited access to credit-recovery options, and challenges transferring online-school credits from group and residential settings.
- **Goal 2 Update:** CPS and the Department of Labor (DLR) met regularly to improve referral processes to Career Launch, address barriers to follow-through, and expand employment resources. DLR is developing streamlined tools, including a QR-code referral form and business card, to increase self-referrals, particularly for older youth who have become disconnected from services. CRPs continued assisting youth with employment exploration, Career Launch applications, job-shadowing and internship opportunities, and obtaining documentation needed for work or postsecondary programs. Career Launch and Job Corps will also present at upcoming ILS workshops to expand awareness of employment pathways. Since the start of the DSS–DLR partnership, 16 youth have been referred to Career Launch, with 4 fully enrolled and funded. These efforts collectively strengthen employment readiness and expand opportunities for youth transitioning from foster care.
- **Services Provided to Indian Youth:** Partnerships with Tribal Nations continued to strengthen access to ILS, Chafee, and Education Training Voucher (ETV) services for Native American youth. The Independent Living Program Specialist and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) provided ongoing consultation and presented to the Oglala Sioux Tribe on the ILS Program, CRP services, ETV, and the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) initiative. Information on upcoming ILS workshops and conferences was shared with all nine Tribes to ensure accurate communication and coordination. CRPs continued direct service delivery through regular reservation visits to Standing Rock, Rosebud, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Sisseton Wahpeton, and Oglala Sioux communities, supporting youth with obtaining identification documents, completing Casey Life Skills Assessments, applying for ILPP and Job Corps, accessing Chafee funding, preparing for employment, planning for graduation, and securing housing resources. Engagement in the ILS program increased during the reporting period, with youth contributing feedback through exit surveys and encouraged to join Young Voices to further strengthen youth leadership. Tribal caseworkers were encouraged to access CRP support, and Tribes began actively registering youth for statewide ILS events.
- **Consultation and Coordination Between States & Tribes:** Collaboration continued with Tribal Nations to support ICWA compliance and ensure tribes are actively engaged in placement decisions, diligent relative searches, and good-cause discussions. Good-cause meetings were held, and the HB1232 Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council convened with participation from multiple tribes. DSS–CPS leadership maintained quarterly check-ins with each tribe to address case-specific issues, identify supports, and discuss ICWA-related concerns. Onsite visits occurred with Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate and the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe to better understand program needs. Oglala Sioux Tribe staff attended IFA training, and CRPs continued supporting tribal youth and caseworkers through regular visits, information sharing, and connections to ILS, Chafee, and ILPP services. CPS shared certification training schedules with Tribal CPS programs to support staff development and facilitated communication between local offices and tribal ICWA offices to advance permanency approvals and relative searches. These efforts demonstrate a sustained commitment to meaningful tribal engagement, partnership, and ICWA compliance across all levels of practice.

CAPTA STATE PLAN UPDATE

CJA funding continues to be utilized to strengthen the investigation, assessment, prosecution, and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases. The program's primary objective is to enhance multidisciplinary responses to child maltreatment while reducing additional trauma to child victims and their families. Funding also supports fairness within the judicial process and improves coordination among child welfare professionals, law enforcement, medical providers, prosecutors, tribal representatives, and the courts. South Dakota's current priorities as it relates to CJA initiatives include enhancing out-of-home investigations, improving forensic interviewing practices, reinforcing multidisciplinary team collaboration, and expanding specialized training for professionals involved in child protection and criminal investigations. Recent grant funding supported sexual-abuse investigation training and the continued operation of the state's Centralized Intake phone system to ensure timely reporting and response to safety concerns. \$92,000 was received in federal CJA funding in recent grant periods. Funds are administered in accordance with CAPTA requirements and support training, multidisciplinary coordination, investigative improvements, and ongoing system-enhancement efforts. South Dakota aims to ensure that child abuse investigations and judicial proceedings are effective, coordinated, trauma-informed, and responsive to the needs of vulnerable children and families statewide. The application for the 2026 funding cycle was submitted on May 29, 2026 and is estimated \$92,514.07 will be received in CJA funding.