Achieving Excellence in Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Early Care and Education

The Administration for Children’s Services
2011-2013 Strategic Plan

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
Commissioner Ronald E. Richter
The Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) is the City of New York’s agency responsible for child welfare, juvenile justice services, child care and Head Start. Our dedicated team of 6,500 employees, with an annual budget of $2.8 billion, protects and promotes the well-being of our City’s children, youth, and families each day.

**Child Welfare**
Our Child Protective Specialists investigate approximately 60,000 State Central Register (SCR) reports of child maltreatment every year to ensure the safety of our City's children. ACS refers families to preventive services to preserve children’s safety in their homes, but when necessary, ACS also ensures every child has a stable, secure, and loving environment in foster care. At present, ACS provides preventive services to over 22,000 families and has less than 14,000 children in foster care.

**Child Care and Head Start**
Our agency oversees the largest publicly-funded child care and early learning program in the country, serving approximately 120,000 New York City children, which includes child care, Head Start, and Universal Pre-Kindergarten. These services allow working families to maintain their employment, while children receive the lessons and skills to be successful in school, with the benefits following them into adulthood.

**Juvenile Justice**
ACS provides secure and non-secure detention services to approximately 5,000 alleged Juvenile Delinquents and Juvenile Offenders whose cases are pending, as well as post-adjudicated juveniles awaiting transfer to state facilities each year. In addition, ACS offers alternatives to placement such as the Juvenile Justice Initiative and the Family Assessment Program, which provide services to approximately 7,600 youth annually, allowing them to reside with their families in their communities.
December 2011

Dear New Yorkers:

I am pleased to present the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) Strategic Plan. As the City’s new Commissioner, I realize the tremendous responsibility that ACS holds. I am committed to advancing our agency’s mission and to supporting the work that our dedicated staff and partners carry out every day.

During the past five years, ACS, alongside our provider agencies, has made significant strides in strengthening practice and the services we deliver to children, youth and families. For example, ChildStat -- where extensive data regarding child safety is reviewed and randomly selected cases are discussed to understand practice -- has become a routine part of our quality improvement, a critical management tool, and has expanded to include our providers. We have made access to and enrollment in child care easier by moving the “entryway” to care from a handful of government offices to hundreds of neighborhood-based child care programs. The residential foster care census has been reduced by more than 50%, with children being placed in family-based homes and with relatives, thanks to our providers’ efforts. Mayor Bloomberg’s leadership in merging the former Department of Juvenile Justice into ACS has resulted in better coordination of services for young people in the juvenile justice system as we continue to be vigilant about the public’s need for safety. In addition, our Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI) provides proven, intensive, in-home services and supervision for delinquent youth who would otherwise serve time in institutional settings, sometimes far away from their families. These are just a few of the accomplishments to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families that have been achieved by the hard working staff at ACS and our provider agencies.

During the next two years, we must redouble our efforts and build on this foundation so that we continue to meet the challenges that face New York City’s children, youth, and families. When I became Commissioner, I met with staff at all levels in the agency, our providers, experts in child welfare, juvenile justice and child care, elected officials, and those we serve in the public to seek their input to identify areas where ACS needs to focus. As a public child welfare, juvenile justice, and early child care and education agency, we face many challenges and opportunities, with seemingly limitless options for the direction of our work. The input that we received informed this Strategic Plan and provides ACS a defined set of priorities over the next two years. The six priorities in the plan promise to yield the greatest impact on the children, youth, and families that we serve. They are measurable and -- consistent with the Mayor’s philosophy -- we will hold ourselves accountable for achieving results.

We look forward to working with New Yorkers dedicated to protecting our young people and strengthening families to carry out the Strategic Plan. I also know that the challenging work undertaken by ACS requires the assistance and advocacy of our various partners both inside and outside of government.

Our Strategic Plan reinforces our commitment to providing the highest level of service to New York City’s children, youth, and families each and every day.

Sincerely,

Ronald E. Richter
Commissioner
ACS’ Key Priorities

1. Create a Culture of Support and Professional Development for ACS and Provider Agency Staff

2. Enhance Child Safety

3. Expand Services and Planning for Teens to Secure their Futures

4. Improve Quality of and Access to Early Childhood Services

5. Strengthen Placement Stability for Children in Foster Care

6. Reduce Time to Permanency for Children in Foster Care
Priority 1: Create a Culture of Support and Professional Development for ACS and Provider Agency Staff

**Rationale:** ACS’ and provider agencies’ staff carry out extremely challenging, demanding and critical work every day. A supported, prepared and skilled workforce is vital to ensuring stability, safety and permanency for New York City’s children and families. All of ACS’ strategies will be underscored by workforce improvement efforts to advance recruitment, training and supervision for all staff, with the support of the James Satterwhite Academy.

**Strategies**

1. Expand availability of tools and training to ACS managers and supervisors to provide quality supervision to staff and improve practice;

2. Partner with provider agencies to develop tools and identify strategies to support workforce improvements at foster care and preventive agencies, including recruitment, retention and training strategies to elevate child welfare work;

3. Enhance staff development through regular performance evaluations for all staff and managers at ACS;

4. Develop procedures to promote well-being and safety of ACS child protective and juvenile counselor staff.

**Expected Results**

- Staff that has the quality supervision necessary to support them in their work and professional development
- Improved staff retention
- Improved access to training and tools to provide quality supervision
- Staff that is skilled and motivated
- Staff that demonstrates improvement in their practice and achieves professional growth
- Staff that is recognized for excellence in practice
- Staff that is safe while carrying out their work responsibilities
Priority 2: Enhance Child Safety

**Rationale:** Many families are cycling through the child protective system without accessing the help needed to protect their children. Approximately one-third of recent investigations involve families that have had three or more prior reports of abuse or maltreatment to the State Central Register (SCR); twelve percent of families with an indicated report have a subsequent, indicated report within six months of the initial SCR report. We are also concerned that under current New York State Law, there are not enough safeguards in place to protect children in informal child care settings.

**Target Outcomes:**
- Reduce the rate of repeat maltreatment
- Reduce the number of families with prior reports
- Increase the percentage of child care settings with comprehensive background checks
Priority 2: Enhance Child Safety

Strategies

1. Support front-line child protective staff to promote quality decision making:
   - Ensure accountability and quality supervision of supervisors and managers through regular performance evaluations;
   - Increase availability of borough-based training designed to address the needs identified by ACS’ child protective staff, the Office of Quality Improvement and the James Satterwhite Academy;
   - Ensure staff has access to appropriate tools and resources (e.g., clinical consultants, investigative consultants, technology resources) and identify opportunities to increase efficiency;
   - Expand system-wide use of a risk assessment tool and implement service assessments that target appropriate, holistic services to families based on their unique needs.

2. Increase use of evidence-based and evidence-informed models and approaches that are proven to reduce repeat maltreatment, and increase positive outcomes for children and families to prevent placement in foster care, and support safe and timely reunification;

3. Partner with stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of background checks for child care providers, and advocate for legislation that requires comprehensive background checks on prospective, informal child care providers to protect children in these child care settings;

4. Continue efforts to protect medically fragile and developmentally delayed populations by strengthening practice around identifying children with special medical needs, and ensuring that they and their families receive the proper services to meet their needs.

Cases with an Indicated Investigation and a Repeat Indicated Investigation within Six Months of the Original SCR Report
Priority 3: Expand Services and Planning For Teens to Secure Their Futures

**Rationale:** Many teenagers come to the attention of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems with complex behavioral challenges, substance abuse and education issues. New York City has successfully diverted youth from the juvenile justice and Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS) systems through the provision of evidence-based, preventive services tailored to teenagers and their families.

The Division of Child Protection encounters teenagers with similar issues and would be better able to serve these youth using evidence-based, preventive services to address family functioning. ACS believes that through the use of these home-based models, family functioning will be significantly improved and youth will be equipped with the tools necessary to be successful in their communities. Parents will also be empowered.

Similarly, on the juvenile justice side, detention and placement offer the opportunity to work with youth and their families to improve long-term outcomes. Juvenile delinquents that require residential placement are placed in facilities outside of New York City, which limits families’ ability to participate in rehabilitation regularly. Youth that return home after placement in these facilities have high rates of recidivism and would benefit greatly from being placed in facilities that are based in New York City, so that their families can be involved in the planning for the young person’s return to their community.

**Target Outcomes:**
- Reduce the rate of maltreatment of teens
- Reduce the number of youth placed in foster care, specifically in institutional-based settings
- Reduce recidivism by juvenile justice youth
- Increase the percentage of youth that achieve educational progress while in detention
- Reduce the number of youth with a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)
- Increase the number of youth that achieve stable adulthood, including educational progress, career readiness and/or employment

![Investigations where All Children are 12 or Older, CY 2006-2010](chart.png)
Priority 3: Expand Services and Planning For Teens to Secure Their Futures

Strategies

1. Continue to improve services for youth in detention:
   - Adopt the Safe Crisis Management Model of crisis intervention;
   - Implement a new staffing model to ensure necessary staffing levels and training;
   - Develop a new behavior management system.

2. Develop high-quality, residential placement facilities and alternatives for NYC juvenile delinquents that are closer to home;

3. Create a comprehensive continuum of in-home, evidence-based models -- similar to those currently available to PINS and juvenile delinquents -- for teens that come to the attention of Child Protection, including those who are voluntarily placed in foster care;

4. Reduce teen foster care pregnancy rates through targeted interventions to support young women and men in foster care and provide parenting youth with the tools they need to become effective parents;

5. Pilot a practice model aimed at reducing the number of youth with a goal of APPLA, and work with providers to invest in programming with comprehensive education and skills training that will better prepare youth for their transition out of care.

Residential Care Placements*

*Includes children from Article 10, PINS, voluntary placements and step-ups from family foster care
Priority 4: Improve Quality of and Access to Early Childhood Services

**Rationale:** Research demonstrates that high-quality early care and education produces dramatic and positive gains for young children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, and that these gains continue throughout children’s school careers and into their adult lives. ACS is currently in the process of procuring new contracts for EarlyLearn NYC, which will create a universal, high-quality early care and education system with high program standards.

**Target Outcome:**
- Improve program and classroom quality by reducing the number of contract programs with poor and fair evaluations of programmatic quality and financial performance.

![Overall VENDEX Scores, Child Care and Head Start Contracts, 2010-2011](chart.png)

- **Good:** 54%
- **Excellent:** 23%
- **Fair:** 19%
- **Poor:** 4%

Total Number of Contracts, 306
Priority 4: Improve Quality of and Access to Early Childhood Services

Strategies

1. Implement EarlyLearn NYC to create a high-quality early care and education system for families eligible for subsidized care, with higher program standards to improve program quality and better support working parents;

2. Improve eligibility and quality control processes for child care services to ensure that only eligible families are receiving and/or appropriately utilizing child care services to maximize the use of limited resources and reduce incidents of fraud;

3. Increase child welfare staff awareness and understanding of early childhood development and mental health to ensure that families are receiving the appropriate resources to meet their children’s developmental needs.
**Priority 5: Strengthen Placement Stability for Children in Foster Care**

**Rationale:** Many children experience movements in foster care that are harmful and may cause trauma. Moves can compound the trauma that children have already experienced. This instability has been linked to lower rates of permanency and well-being for children.

**Target Outcome:**
- Reduce the number of placement moves children experience in foster care

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**Placement Moves by Length of Time in Care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Placement/Time in Care</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Jan-Aug 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>w/in 30 days</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 6 months</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 1 Year</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 30 days</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 6 months</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 1 Year</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 30 days</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 6 months</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/in 1 Year</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- **Green**: 3 or more
- **Red**: 1-2
- **Blue**: 0
Priority 5: Strengthen Placement Stability for Children in Foster Care

Strategies

1. Redesign the placement process to improve the appropriateness of the match for both the foster parent and the child;
   - Identify factors that would reduce disruptions, such as improved information sharing and support of foster parents, and implement policy and/or operational changes consistent with these findings;
   - Track placement and disruption rates by agency to develop appropriate capacity to meet the needs of children entering foster care.

2. Improve foster parent recruitment efforts to expand the recruitment pool of families that can provide loving homes to children and address the particular needs of certain populations such as LGBTQ, developmentally disabled children and parenting teens;

3. Establish models of foster parent supports to maintain dedicated and loving foster parents;

4. Adopt innovative models of therapeutic family foster care that respond to the needs of children and teens, such as multi-dimensional treatment foster care (MTFC)*.

Number of Transfers for Children in Foster Care in December 2011
Total Children in Care, 13,858

*Multi-dimensional treatment foster care is a foster boarding home alternative to group or residential treatment, incarceration, and hospitalization for adolescents who experienced chronic antisocial behavior, emotional disturbance, child welfare issues and delinquency.
Priority 6: Reduce Time to Permanency for Children in Foster Care

**Rationale:** New York State has one of the longest times to adoption in the country at a little over four years compared to the national median of two and one half years. Over one-third of foster children in New York City have been in care for three or more years.

**Target Outcomes:**
- Reduce the time to adoption
- Reduce the number of youth aging out of foster care

**Percent of Children Who Reached 18 Months in Care Without a Petition to Terminate Parental Rights Filed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Jul 2011</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Median Length of Stay to Adoption, First Spell Placements**

[Graph showing median length of stay from 1992 to 2005]
Priority 6: Reduce Time to Permanency for Children in Foster Care

Strategies

1. Establish, monitor and incentivize clear accountability standards for foster care agencies to meet Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timelines:
   - Link Scorecard measures for achievement of ASFA targets to financial incentives;
   - Refocus Foster Care ChildStat to review foster care cases that are not meeting ASFA timeframes to better understand system challenges.

2. Implement strategies to increase Family Court efficiency:
   - Develop and pilot a predictive model with the Office of Court Administration that will offer judges a model to improve scheduling of child abuse and neglect cases by taking into account the complexity of the case and the likelihood of settlement;
   - Expedite the time to “issue joined”* through a centralized diligent search unit;
   - Streamline adoption paperwork to support foster care agencies;
   - Incorporate case progress and foster care agency practice observed in Family Court into agency performance measures;
   - Explore and expand options so that foster care workers may attend certain court appearances by phone or video conference;
   - Identify methods of notifying families of future court hearings in order to increase the number of productive court appearances.

3. Identify ways to streamline administrative requirements so that case planners have more time to work directly with children and families;

4. Establish a model of practice and aftercare across the system to strengthen families and support reunification;

5. Identify cases that are appropriate for Kinship Guardianship, and counsel families on the process.

*Issue joined is when service of the petition on the respondent parent is complete, thus allowing the court to proceed