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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Recommendations for Measuring Relational Permanency and Child Well-Being Among Children and Families Involved in Washington’s Child Welfare Dependency Courts

Submitted to the Washington State Legislature in Response to SB 6068

July 2025

Prepared by Kaye Implementation & Evaluation, LLC and Data Savvy Consulting under contract with Washington Administrative Office of the Courts, Family and Youth Justice Programs

Executive Summary

SB 6068 set a new standard for Washington state’s dependency system by clarifying that achieving legal permanency for children is not enough—courts and agency partners must also work to ensure relational permanency and well-being for children. In response, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)’s Family and Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) contracted with evaluation consultants who engaged over 80 lived and professional experts in a collaborative effort to conceptualize and strategize how to use data to support relational permanency and child well-being. This report summarizes the engagement process, results, and recommendations.

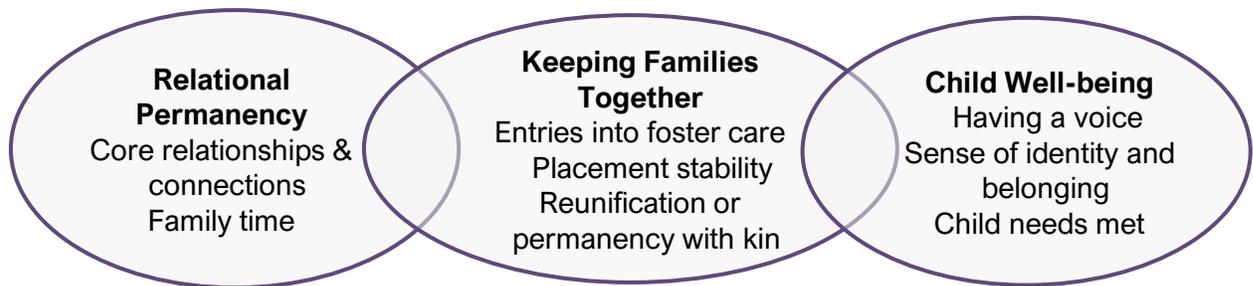
Collaborative Approach (p8)

FYJP consultants facilitated a systematic and collaborative process that:

- Defined 15 conceptual dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being based on a research review and focus groups/surveys with 32 lived experts and 35 professional experts
- Identified data currently collected in Washington based on interviews with 20 data experts in multiple state agencies
- Assessed the strengths and limitations of data that is currently available and identified important gaps in the existing data
- Prioritized eight dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being to measure based on lived and professional experts’ assessments of what data will be most useful and the relative effort required to gather and report these data
- Developed a phased data collection and reporting plan that builds on strengths to fill the identified gaps

Priority Dimensions of Relational Permanency and Child Well-Being (p19)

The eight dimensions identified as first priorities in the measurement plan consider legal permanency along with relational permanency and child well-being:



Recommendations to Advance Coordinated Data Collection and Reporting (p26)

- Assemble a cross-agency workgroup responsible for implementing a state-level dependency data plan based on this report. Require annual updates on data development, reporting, and use.
- Reinstate data sharing agreements to leverage currently available data. Assess and improve reliability and completeness of key administrative data indicators currently being collected.
- Dedicate resources to enhance existing data and co-design new procedures and tools needed to fill critical gaps in understanding of relational permanency and child well-being.
- Facilitate a co-design process with lived experts to develop sensitive and responsive surveys and data collection procedures to gather input from children and parents impacted by the system.

What can be Reported Using Existing Data? (p17) Washington's

Three constructs have statewide data available and are conceptually *aligned* with the definitions of child well-being and relational permanency identified by lived and professional experts. These include:

- **Keeping families together** (*DCYF FamLink**). Current data includes entries into foster care, whether the case is an ICWA case, and permanency timeliness and outcomes.
- **Placement stability** (*DCYF FamLink**). Current data includes placement types, dates, reasons for placement changes, and level of caregiver support.
- **Educational experiences** (*OSPI*). Current data available through OSPI can report on school stability, performance, discipline, and attendance of students.

**Data sharing agreement is necessary to share child-level data between DCYF and AOC*

There are some data for six additional constructs. These data are not fully aligned with needs, but they are conceptually *adjacent*. They represent samples of data (subsets of the population) and may serve as proxies for the dimensions as defined by lived experts.

- Family time (Sprout),
- Core relationships/connections & Safety net (NYTD survey),
- Cultural permanency, Child needs being met, and Child having a voice (DCYF-APSR)
- Hope/future orientation (Healthy Youth Survey)

What Additional Information Should be Collected? (p21)

New efforts must focus on creating and enhancing measures that place the voices of youth and families at the forefront. To collect data on five priority constructs that are currently *absent* from Washington's data landscape, perspectives from youth or caregiver are needed on the following:

- Family time – quantity and quality
- Core relationships/connections
- Having a voice
- Sense of identity/belonging
- Child needs met

Plan for Reporting on Child Well-Being and Relational Permanency (p25 and p35)

1. Leverage existing available data, facilitated by a cross-agency data governance workgroup.
2. Develop a plan for enhanced data collection that includes new measures co-designed with lived experts, and enhanced measures available from administrative data.
3. Implement and monitor plan for enhanced data collection and reporting.

Plan for Tracking and Reporting on Contested Orders (p22 and p33)

Given the administrative burden and limited value data could yield for system improvement, this may not represent a prudent allocation of resources. Plans outlined in the appendix are resource intensive with low return on investment.

How to Make Information Publicly Available (p29)

Develop a public facing interactive dashboard that includes relational permanency and child well-being data from multiple sources. Establish processes for using data throughout the child welfare dependency system for the benefit of children and families. Report progress back to the legislature.

Acknowledgements

This report reflects the collective wisdom and effort of many dedicated lived and professional experts in Washington and beyond.

Administrative Office of the Courts

The vision for this work was led by Kelly Warner-King and Laura Vogel at Family and Youth Justice Programs, with thoughtful partnership with Arina Gertseva, Carl McCurley, and April Kraft-Duley from the Washington State Center for Court Research.

Consultant Team

Alicia Summers of Data Savvy Consulting led the review of currently available data and co-authored this report. Heather Cantamessa of Re-Unify Family Solutions, LLC led efforts to engage community workgroups and individuals with lived expertise as parents or children formerly involved in the child welfare system. Sakara Wages of Kaye Implementation & Evaluation, LLC facilitated multiple community workgroups and analyzed feedback received in focus groups and surveys to capture definitions of relational permanency and child well-being identified by lived and professional experts. Sarah Kaye designed the community-engaged approach, led the consultant team, and co-authored this report. Heather Swope Pinaud helped us all stay on track.

System Partners

Over 80 individuals representing the organizations listed below contributed ideas, shared resources, or provided feedback throughout the process.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)- Akin: Parents for Parents- Center for Social Sector Analytics and Technology (CSSAT)- Department of Corrections (DOC)- Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) including Quality Assurance/CQI and Office of Innovation Alignment and Accountability (OIAA)- Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Research and Data Analysis (RDA)- Family Education and Support Services- Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP)- Girl Scouts Beyond Bars- Health Care Authority (HCA)- King County Department of Public Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mockingbird Society- Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA)- Washington Office of Public Defense (OPD), Parents Representation Program- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)- Passion to Action- Partners for our Children (P4C)- Washington Association for Children and Families (WACF)- Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs (WACAP)- Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR)- Youthnet
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1. SB 6068 Requirements and Opportunities

Washington State Senate Bill 6068 (SB 6068) establishes that legal permanency alone is not enough for children involved in the child welfare dependency system, and dependency courts should work to ensure well-being and relational permanency for children in care. To understand the extent to which dependency courts are ensuring well-being and relational connections, they need feedback and data to monitor these outcomes. The purpose of the legislation was to identify measures of relational permanency and child well-being and facilitate data collection and reporting of these measures. SB 6068 requires a report to be submitted to the legislature by July 1, 2025, that includes the following information:

- A plan for reporting on child well-being and relational permanency;
- What can be reported using existing data;
- What additional information should be collected;
- A plan for tracking and reporting on whether an order or portion of an order was agreed or contested, and if contested, by which party or parties;
- What data-sharing agreements are necessary to ensure an accurate picture of the needs of families in the dependency system;
- How to make such information publicly available;
- How many children in dependency have incarcerated parents.¹

To fulfill the requirements of SB 6068, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)'s Family and Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) contracted with Kaye Implementation & Evaluation and Data Savvy Consulting as consultants to gather, synthesize, and analyze feedback from multiple child welfare dependency system partners—including public agencies, private child and family serving organizations, advocacy groups, and individuals with lived expertise. Through this project, consultants engaged over 80 individuals representing over 20 organizations to identify common goals and develop a shared commitment to working together across agencies to use data in the public interest.

¹ The number of children in dependency with incarcerated parents is not currently available, but it could be possible to link data across the DOC and DCYF. According to the [DCYF Prevention Dashboard](#), in 2023, about 7% of kids ages 2-17 who were removed had parental incarceration flagged as a removal reason, but this is likely an undercount of all children in dependency with incarcerated parents.

System partners share a desire to use data about relational permanency and child well-being to facilitate several objectives—all aimed at using data to improve outcomes for children and families.

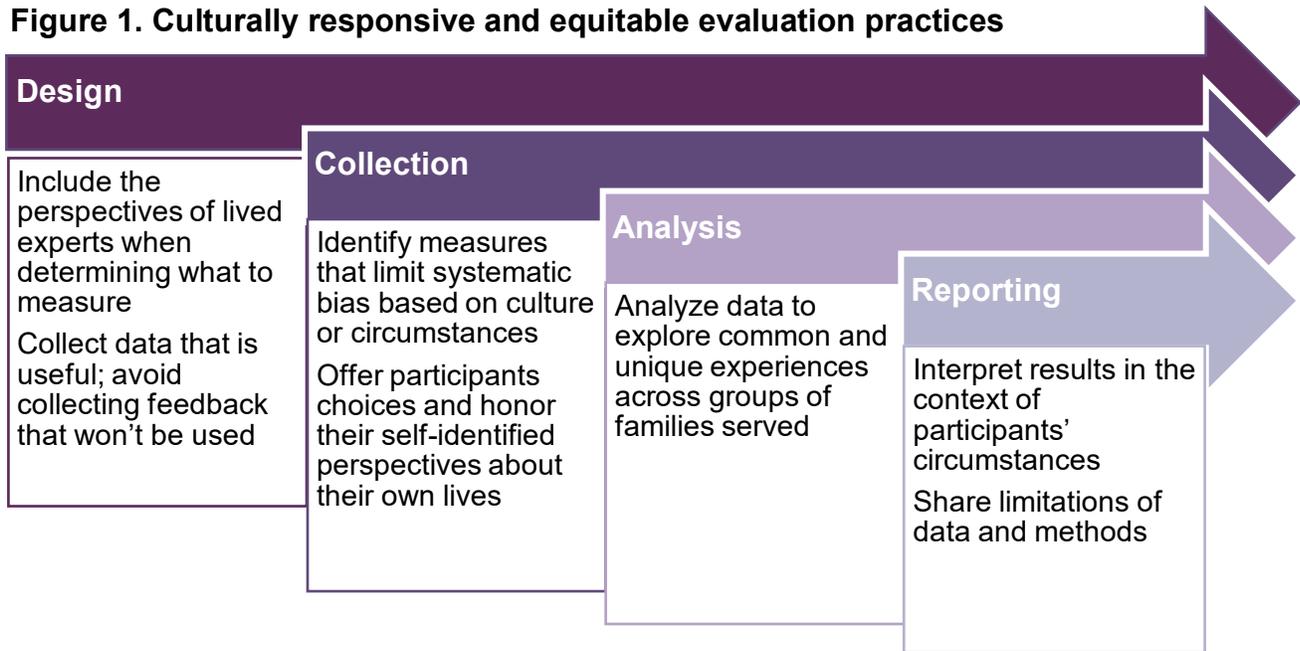
- **Awareness:** To explore the potential harm of system intervention and focus attention on these important outcomes for children and families. Relational permanency and child well-being are meaningful measures beyond the legal outcomes typically measured.
- **Accountability:** To understand system behaviors that promote or hinder relational permanency or child well-being. Courts are required to make decisions that directly impact children’s well-being and relational permanency and they need relevant data for feedback about those efforts.
- **Evaluation:** To examine the impacts of system behaviors on children’s relational permanency and well-being. This requires evaluation of outcomes that go beyond lengths of stay in care and timely hearings using data currently available.
- **Improvement:** To identify system strengths and challenges and assess progress over time. This information can inform and focus improvement efforts (like efforts to better match children and families with programs and services or to allocate resources in areas of greatest need).
- **Equity:** To explore differences in relational permanency and child well-being outcomes for groups of children and families with particular attention to groups that have been over-represented when using conventional outcome measures (e.g., over-representation of Native and Black/African American youth in care).

Together, system partners identified common data elements to support a greater understanding of relational permanency and child well-being in Washington. This report identifies specific priority measures and provides a phased plan for developing reporting on relational permanency, child well-being, and contested orders. The plan includes existing and additional data sources and suggestions about how to continue cross-agency collaboration to accomplish this goal.

2. Approach

As part of FYJP’s commitment to *transforming systems to promote thriving families and equitable court communities*,² the consultants’ approach to designing the plan in this report included culturally responsive and equitable evaluation practices (see Figure 1).³ The process was also guided by consultants’ foundational knowledge of performance measurement design and lessons learned through the development and implementation of the Judicial Court and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP)⁴ and several other state and community initiatives. Throughout the co-design process, consultants leveraged multiple perspectives by engaging lived and professional experts across systems.

Figure 1. Culturally responsive and equitable evaluation practices



Consultants also reviewed research and resources gathered by:

- Family Well-Being Community Collaborative’s [Harm of Removal Workgroup](#),
- Reports and publications published by [DSHS/RDA](#),
- OIAA and their research partners at the University of Washington ([Barnard Center for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health](#)) and University of Chicago ([Foster Insights](#) at the Center for Radical Innovation for Social Change), and
- OCLA and their research partners at the University of Washington ([Partners for Our Children](#)).

² Washington AOC, Family and Youth Justice Programs website: <https://www.fyjp.org>

³ Hood, S., Hopson, R.K., Kirkhart, K.E. (2015). Culturally responsive evaluation. In Newcomer, K.E., Hatry, H.P., & Wholey, J.S. (Eds.) *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (4th ed., pp. 281-317). Jossey-Bass.

⁴ Gatowski, S., Summers, A., & Fromknecht, A. (2022). *Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP), Volume II: Implementation guide*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Relational permanency and child well-being are complex and multi-faceted outcomes. When developing and prioritizing the specific aspects of relational permanency and child well-being to measure in this plan, consultants engaged lived and professional experts working and living in the system because they are uniquely positioned to provide insights about child well-being and relational permanency for this population. When assessing data availability, consultants engaged data experts across multiple agencies who know their data, its strengths and limitations. The co-design process included the following steps, which are described more fully in the sections that follow:

1. Conceptualizing and defining dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being to consider measuring based on:
 - Review of previous research, including developmentally specific resources developed by the Family Well-Being Community Collaborative.
 - Focus groups with 35 lived and professional experts during Keeping Families Together, Harm of Removal, Coalition of Children of Incarcerated Parents workgroup meetings, and
 - Surveys of lived experts, including 23 who experienced child welfare dependency as a parent, 13 who experienced child welfare dependency as a youth, and 2 who experienced child welfare dependency as a kin caregiver.⁵
2. Mapping currently available data across multiple state agencies based on exploratory meetings with 20 system partners and data experts and review of publicly available reports.
3. Validating and prioritizing conceptual dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being based on reflections and ratings of 5 lived and 17 professional experts during a community engagement meeting.
4. Identifying priority measures to recommend now using an Impact Effort Matrix.
5. Developing a phased plan to implement data collection and reporting.

Recommendations were informed by the perspectives of individuals representing numerous system partners committed to supporting children and families in Washington. The list of organizations is provided in the Acknowledgements.

⁵ Note: several survey participants had experienced the child welfare system from multiple perspectives (e.g., youth and parent, parent and kin)

3. Relational Permanency and Child Well-being

SB 6068 asserts that data collection in Washington should reflect the importance of both relational and legal permanency as well as child well-being. According to SB 6068...

- **Legal permanency** achieved through reunification, guardianship, or adoption is important, but it is not the only way to increase the sense of belonging and meaningful connections.
- **Relational permanency** refers to children’s various secure attachments and lifelong relationships that help them feel loved and connected. This includes relationships with siblings, parents, family members, extended family, family friends, mentors, tribes, and where appropriate, former foster family members.
- **Child well-being** encompasses relational permanency as one component of overall well-being.

Defining Dimensions of Relational Permanency and Child Well-Being

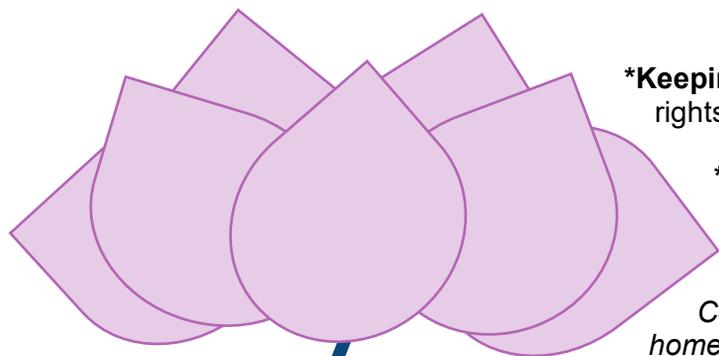
Washington State does not have definitions of relational permanency and child well-being in current statutes, so consultants integrated a systematic process to define them. Crafting conceptual definitions was a critical first step in identifying measures required by SB 6068. In focus groups and surveys, FYJP consultants asked open-ended questions to understand what dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being lived and professional experts felt were important to measure. Then, FYJP consultants with lived and professional expertise conducted qualitative analysis of focus group and survey data by coding and organizing responses across participants to identify common themes. Finally, FYJP consultants shared their analysis with a group of lived and professional experts to validate the constructs and conceptual definitions identified during analysis.

Figure 2 summarizes the conceptual definitions of constructs developed by FYJP consultants based on themes identified by lived and professional experts. As part of the strategy to privilege the perspectives of lived experts, constructs identified by lived experts are indicated with an asterisk. Themes are presented in order of the level of “intensity” of advocacy of lived experts so that the most strongly expressed themes across the most lived experts are presented first. When experts identified cautions or caveats as part of discussions, those are noted alongside the definitions.

Inspired by conversations with lived experts as they described their families’ journeys with relational permanency and child well-being, FYJP consultants chose the lotus flower as a powerful symbol to represent transformation through life experience and the type of healing that is possible for families involved in the child welfare dependency system.

The lotus seed can lie dormant in the thickest of mud and surrounded by darkness--grief, loss, separation, trauma. And yet, even in these murky conditions they hold the potential to rise. Lotus flowers push upward through the water toward the surface, always seeking the light—similar to behaviors that lived and professional experts admire in young people. When it blooms, the lotus brings beauty, balance, and nourishment to its environment, and it inspires those who witness its unfolding.

Figure 2a. Relational permanency and child well-being constructs identified by *lived and professional experts



***Keeping families together.** Avoid severing the family via removal and termination of parental rights. Reunify families timely. *Context: Families value being together even if it's not perfect.*

***Family time.** Quantity includes time spent with family, parents and siblings (e.g., in-person visits, phone and video calls). Quality includes a natural visit setting and doing natural activities in the “least restrictive” environment with access to toys or activities and parents acting in a parenting role. Families celebrate milestones together.

Context: Both quantity and quality of family time matter when children are placed out-of-home. Cautions: Contextual factors and barriers to visiting may limit the ability to visit, but not the desire of parents to spend time with their kids. Professionals must be careful about over-interpreting behaviors during and after visits. Observers of visits may not have training or experience understanding influences on children's behavior in this context.

***Core Relationships/ Connections.** Children have access to relationships with individuals they were connected to before placement: family members including siblings; friend groups and social connections; extracurricular activities. Children should have a village or network of caring adults and identify adults to whom they are attached. *Caution: Systems factors might exclude fathers or under-value contributions of “minority” mothers.*

***Cultural permanency.** Children maintain a connection to culture while placed out-of-home. Placement with kin can help maintain that connection, as well as identifying and practicing traditions of culture and ethnicities. For Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases, this includes maintaining a connection to the tribe.

***Caregivers work together.** All caregivers—custodial and non-custodial—work together to support children's needs. Children have the freedom to relate to important others without any backlash from other caregivers. Opportunities for connections with important others are not withheld from youth as a consequence.

Relational health. Children have positive and nurturing relationships that could potentially include features like stability, consistency, and routine.

Safety net. Children are aware of their personal safety net. They believe someone will stand by them when they need it. They know where to turn when they have a need. Youth are willing and able to explore experiences in the world, and then come back and check in.

Figure 2b. Relational permanency and child well-being constructs identified by *lived and professional experts

***Having a voice.** Parents and youth should be informed and make decisions about their own lives. Children should be able to understand what's happening now, what's coming next, and receive answers questions about "why" things are happening. Professionals talk with youth directly to understand what they see as their own needs. Children should have an opportunity to provide developmentally appropriate feedback about their placement and the extent to which their needs are met. *Caution: Conversations must be conducted in a sensitive and developmentally appropriate way to avoid potentially inflicting trauma or harm when explaining why.*

***Child needs met.** Children's needs are met while involved with the dependency system, including Socioemotional needs: mental health, social, age-appropriate experiences; Material needs: safety, stable homes, nutrition; Health and educational needs; Child-identified and child-centered needs.

***Trust and healing.** When children and parents are separated, families have the opportunity to heal together, building trust and repairing relationships.

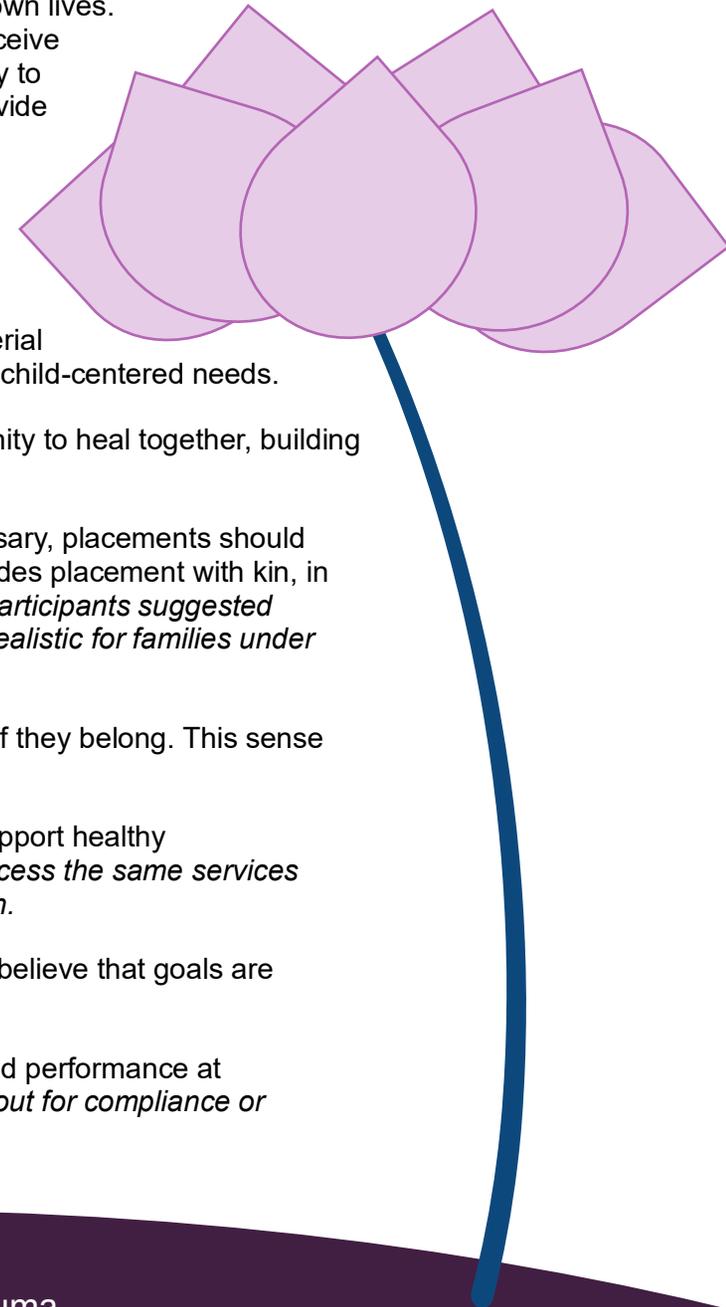
***Placement and placement stability.** Placement is avoided when possible. When necessary, placements should maintain stability and familiarity to minimize adverse impact on child well-being. This includes placement with kin, in geographic community, same school, with siblings, and few placements. *Context: Some participants suggested maintaining consistency, routine, and structure – while others noted routines might be unrealistic for families under extreme stress.*

***Sense of identity and belonging.** Children feel accepted and supported, loved, and as if they belong. This sense of identity results in firmer sense of self.

***Relational skills.** Children demonstrate communication and other relational skills that support healthy relationships, including first romantic relationships. *Note: Bio parents should be able to access the same services that foster parents do in supporting relationships and relational skills for children and youth.*

Hope / future orientation. Children have dreams and goals. They have self-efficacy and believe that goals are attainable. They also have a future orientation and are aware of potential consequences.

Educational experiences. Children experience school stability, have good attendance and performance at school. *Caution: Success at school and elsewhere could be masking other issues; watch out for compliance or "fawn" behavior that could also be a trauma-response.*



Alternative and Expanded Definitions

There was not universal agreement about how to define these concepts. For example, several participants referenced well-documented harms of removing children from their families and argued that child well-being should not be the goal; that well-being should be secondary to keeping children with their families. Some participants were concerned that setting child well-being as a goal opens a door for bias and a slippery slope to separating families. Several participants suggested *family well-being* as an alternative.

Additionally, many participants noted that children who are involved in child welfare dependency cases' behavior must be interpreted and understood in the context of grief, loss, and trauma that occurs as a result of separation from their family. A few participants noted that well-being might be impossible for the population of children separated from their family.

One participant encouraged the group to think broadly because system-level factors could be driving child-level outcomes. They suggested considering caseworker turnover, use of trauma-informed case management, service coordination across agencies, availability of mental health and family services providers across the state. They also suggested considering family-level constructs, which could include caregiver health conditions, access to essential services, employment/income, and housing stability – which are available in administrative data.

Consistency with Previous Research

Despite its potential for long-term impact on system-impacted children and families, the evidence base about relational permanency is limited. Most studies of child well-being are focused on minimizing or avoiding adverse outcomes rather than promoting well-being in the ways described by lived and professional experts. Washington's efforts to systematically collect and report relational permanency and child well-being data have the potential to make significant contributions to better understanding of this important topic nationwide. Nonetheless, most of the constructs identified by lived and professional experts are also represented in research literature, including:

- Resources developed by the [Family and Child Well-Being Harm of Removal workgroup](#), which provide a robust review of developmentally-specific impacts of child welfare system involvement on child well-being and relational permanency.
- Research and theory supporting the [Promoting First Relationships Program](#) that supports young children's well-being—particularly social-emotional development—through their relationships with nurturing and supportive parents/caregivers.
- Evaluations of [extended foster care in Washington State](#) that identify the need for relational permanency, peer and community support networks, and relational skills for young adults in extended foster care.
- Research supporting the inclusion of youth voice and the perspectives of youth and families, which grounded the development [JCAMP](#) performance measures.

Mapping the Current Data Landscape

To document data that Washington can immediately use to fill relational permanency and child well-being data needs, FYJP consultants met with data experts and reviewed data reports from multiple agencies. The data mapping process revealed that Washington has a robust and diverse array of existing data from multiple data sources that could contribute to an understanding of child well-being and relational permanency. While there is much potential in the available data, additional data are needed to measure the multidimensional constructs identified by lived and professional experts. Furthermore, available data are not currently being maximized to their full potential to improve relational permanency and child well-being outcomes.

The current data landscape includes data from multiple agencies. Appendix A summarizes data sources, samples, and relevant variables.

Strengths and Limitations in Current Data

To better understand strengths and gaps in existing data, FYJP consultants conducted a content analysis to assess reliability and validity of available data. FYJP consultants assessed:

- *Reliability* by inquiring about data quality and completeness in conversations with data experts, and
- *Construct validity* by examining the extent to which existing data measured the desired concepts by comparing (a) variables defined in current systems to (b) experts' qualitative descriptions of relational permanency and child well-being.

The content analysis revealed several strengths and important gaps in the data available that are illustrated in Figure 3 and detailed in Table 1.

Reliability Concerns

Several data experts identified potential data quality concerns about some variables. Utilizing administrative data relies on information that is primarily used to document practice or payments and does not necessarily include checks on consistency of data entry across hundreds of individuals entering information. Variables without structured data entry guidance and oversight are vulnerable to poor data quality that can lead to misinterpretation. Administrative data that are used in public reporting have often gone through additional data quality checks and are likely more reliable.

Validity Concerns

Sampling Limitations. Some data sources are collected on samples that may not be representative of the entire state and may not provide sufficient data to disaggregate to better understand the experiences of different groups of families. Different sampling strategies raise different challenges when interpreting the data. Skewed samples, such

as providing data for a limited age range, including data only for formal contracted services that are also provided informally, self-selection into voluntary surveys without understanding who opted in and who did not could limit the ability to generalize findings.

Missing Perspective. Every focus group with lived and professional experts noted the importance of getting feedback directly from children, youth, and parents about their experiences. Yet, few data sources include the perspectives of the individuals most impacted by the system. This appears to be a critical gap in the available data. Washington’s ability to measure, track, and more fully understand relational permanency and child well-being in Washington using its current data will be limited without these firsthand accounts and perspectives.

Conceptual Differences. The data variables and sources currently available overlap with some of the constructs conceptualized by lived and professional experts but not others. For example, the outcomes related to *keeping families together* (i.e., reunification, placement stability, TPR) are currently measured similarly to the way it was conceptualized by the lived and professional experts. In contrast, the construct of *having a voice* is conceptualized and measured quite differently. Lived and professional experts stressed the importance of centering the youth’s own perspective in their life/case while the available data focuses on whether judges invite youth to speak in their hearings or caseworkers include youth in case planning. Figure 3 illustrates conceptual differences and gaps in available data by categorizing data as:



Washington has data sources in place for **three** constructs of interest that are measured in ways that are conceptually aligned with descriptions provided by lived and professional experts.

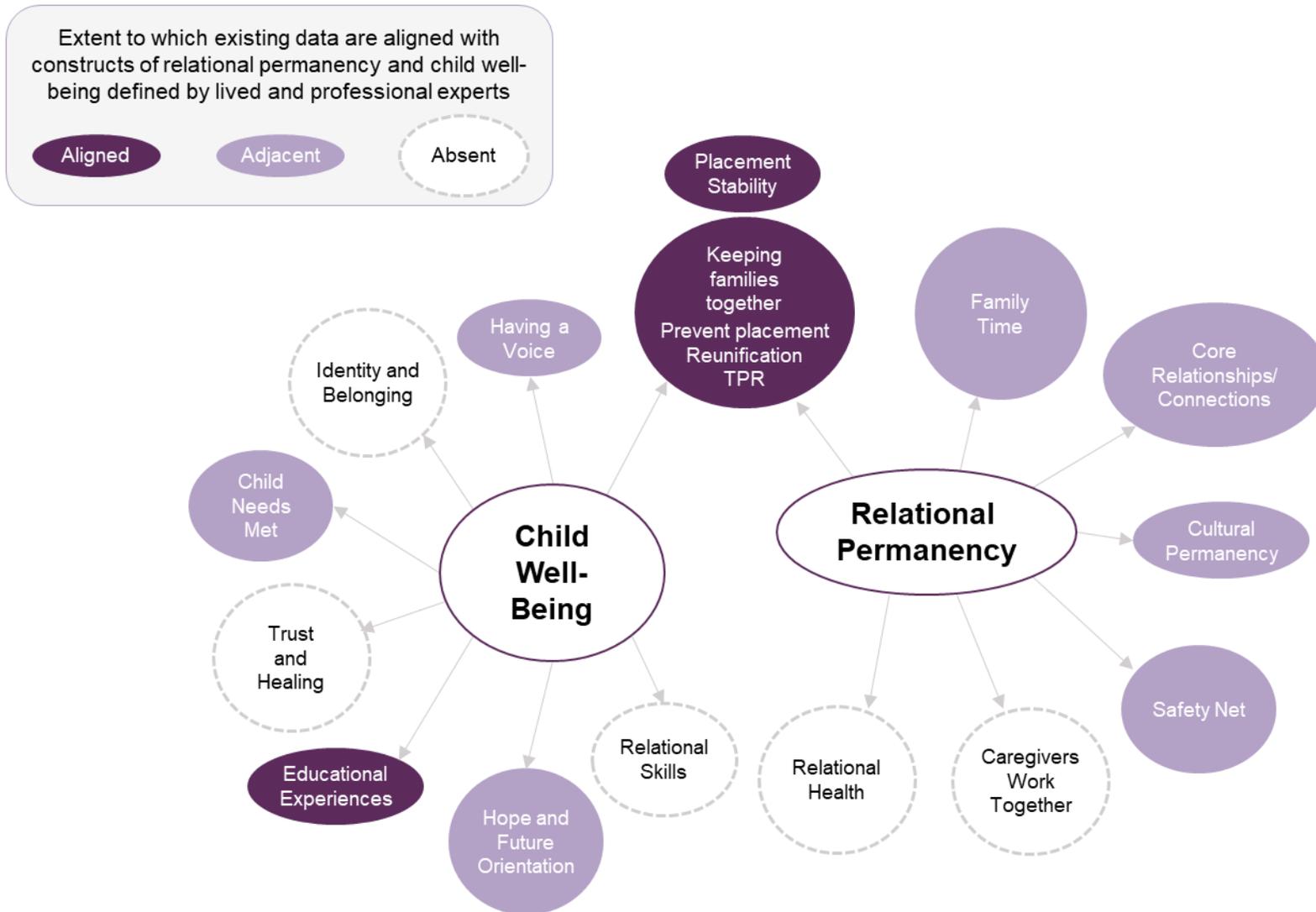


Seven constructs have data sources could serve as starting points for additional development to resolve conceptual differences to enhance validity, improve reliability of data collection, and expand the sample of children and families.



Five constructs are not captured in the currently available data, often because the available data are missing perspective.

Figure 3. Mapping current data to dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being identified by lived and professional experts



For a more comprehensive review of currently available data in relation to the dimensions identified by lived and professional experts see Table 1.

What Can be Reported with Available Data

Table 1. Level of alignment between available data and dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being identified by lived and professional experts

Level of Alignment	Construct *Identified by lived experts	Current Data
Aligned	*Keeping families together	FamLink (DCFY) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Permanency type - Time to permanency - ICWA identification - Entry into care rates (rate per 1000) - Rates of voluntary placement compared to protective custody
	*Placement and placement stability	FamLink (DCYF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Placement types (e.g., kin, congregate), - Number of placements - Reason for placement changes - Dates of placement - Adverse placements - Level of care - ICWA identification
	Educational experiences	OSPI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enrollment - Current school and district - Current grade - Discipline - Attendance - GPA - Graduation - Special education utilization - Kindergarten readiness OSPI (linked with FamLink) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School stability – number of school changes since entering foster care
Adjacent	*Having a voice	APSR (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efforts to engage child in case planning Court observation (AOC): Judges' engagement of children during hearings
	*Keeping families together	APSR (DCYF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efforts to achieve permanency

Level of Alignment	Construct *Identified by lived experts	Current Data
Adjacent	*Child needs met	FamLink (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of caregiver support (proxy for child needs) - Consider the Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET) report- whether needs are assessed, when/how administered APSR (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child needs met
	*Family time	FamLink (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visitation plan for children with supervised visits Sprout (CSSAT): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of supervision of visits; number of hours for children with contracted supervised visits APSR (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efforts to support visits with parents and siblings DOC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incarcerated individuals who receive visits from children
	*Core Relationships/ Connections	NYTD (RDA): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section 4 asks about supportive relationships - Someone to turn to when feeling sad or depressed APSR (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efforts to preserve connections; supporting relationships between child and parents Court observation (AOC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of relative resources identified
	*Cultural permanency	APSR (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efforts to preserve connections FamLink (DCYF): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ICWA identification
	Safety net	NYTD (RDA): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section 4 asks about supportive relationships
	Hope / future orientation	Healthy Youth Survey (OSPI) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hope (measured by 4 scale items)
	Absent	*Caregivers work together
*Relational skills		None
*Trust and healing		None
*Identity and belonging		None
Relational health		None

Prioritization Process and Results

The FYJP consultants invited all the lived and professional experts who had participated in focus groups, surveys, and system partner meetings to an interactive virtual meeting to (a) verify accuracy and completeness of the information gathered, and (b) reflect on and prioritize which dimensions to prioritize as part of the recommended plan. The goal was to collaboratively calibrate the **impact** of having identified data as well as the level of **effort** it would require to collect and report on the data. FYJP consultants used the ratings from lived and professional experts and data experts to produce an Impact Effort Matrix to guide the identification of priority constructs and develop a phased plan for implementing recommendations.

Calibrating Impact



After sharing the comprehensive list of relational permanency and child well-being constructs and current data landscape, consultants engaged lived and professional experts in discussing which constructs to prioritize. Experts provided individual ratings to prioritize the identified constructs based on the conceptual relevance to the outcomes of relational permanency and child well-being, and potential impact of using data in practice. Consultants considered expert ratings and the intensity with which individuals impacted by the system endorsed the construct in the initial round of information gathering to establish an overall rating of the Impact of each construct, illustrated on the vertical axis in Figure 4.

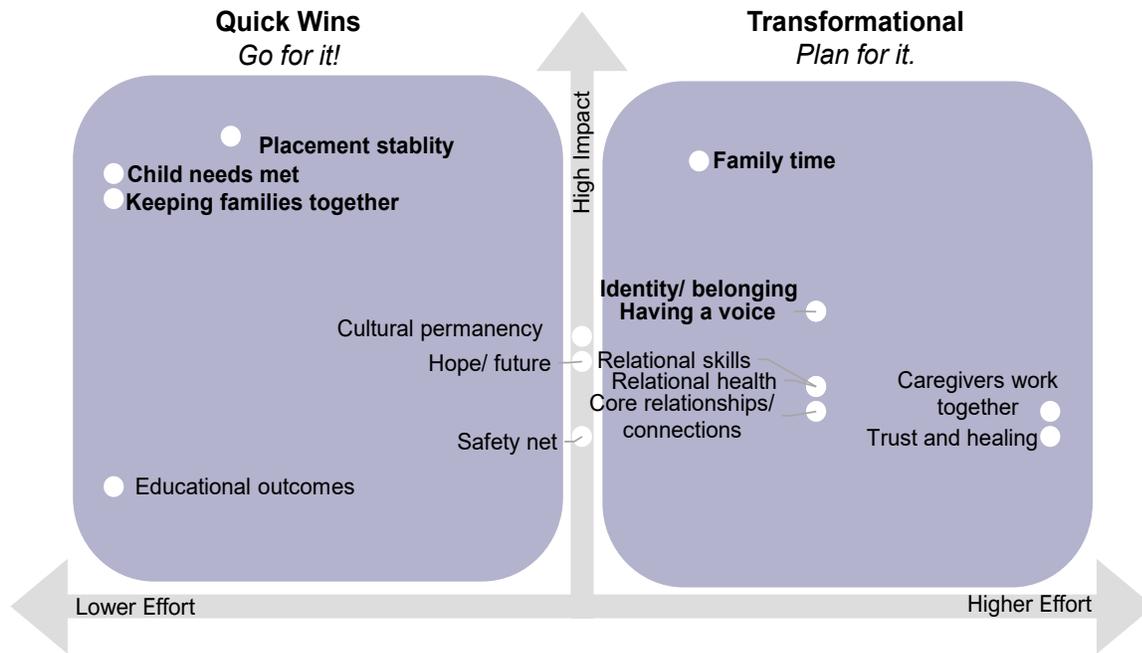
Calibrating Effort



In addition, FYJP consultants considered the additional level of effort that would be required to gather and report data on the identified constructs by taking into account the considerations listed below. FYJP consultants produced a rating of the relative Effort required to produce data on the construct as defined by lived and professional experts based on the current data landscape. The relative Effort is summarized on the horizontal axis in Figure 4.

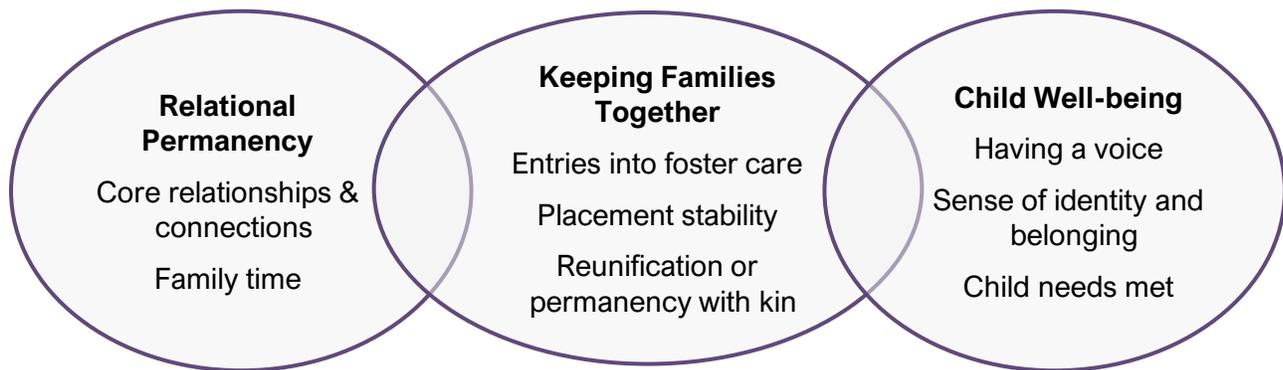
Lower Effort	Moderate Effort	Higher Effort
Data collection and reporting infrastructure already in place	Some existing research and practice elements to build on	Requires new data collection and reporting procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data already exist for the focus population Data sharing agreements are in place Data collection is integrated into current practice (e.g., administrative data) Data are shared in aggregate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data already exist for a subset of focus population Data sharing agreements to be enhanced One or more measures have been identified Current practice can be leveraged as meaningful data collection opportunities (e.g., court review hearings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New measures need to be identified and refined Data collection logistics would introduce new procedures (e.g., youth engagement specialist) Construct is best measured from multiple perspectives Data linked across systems at a child or family level

Figure 4. Impact Effort Matrix summarizing results from the prioritization analysis



Identifying Priorities

As noted in Figure 4, each of the constructs were identified as having relatively high impact, which speaks to the importance of relational permanency and child well-being data among this community. The constructs indicated in bold were the highest performing constructs across one or more considerations of impact, and therefore were selected as the priority constructs to include in the recommendations.



The priority constructs selected acknowledge the overwhelming importance among lived and professional experts of keeping families together as often as possible as a primary strategy of reducing the harms of separation while promoting relational permanency and child well-being. The relational permanency constructs selected focus on strength of core relationships that are important to children as well as system behaviors to support those connections through family time. Core elements of child well-being that are directly tied to relational permanency were prioritized by assessing children’s sense of identity and belonging while also assessing system efforts to engage youth in decisions about their case/lives and meet children’s needs while they are in out-of-home care.

What Additional Data Should be Collected

The Impact Effort Matrix helps to identify “quick wins” that may be more readily available in the short term along with “transformational” efforts that are worth investing higher levels of effort for high impact. FYJP selected priority measures to allow for more immediate reporting of some constructs and intentional and collaborative planning to work toward measuring additional constructs in culturally responsive and equitable ways. As is further detailed in 5. Data Collection and Reporting Plan, additional data should include efforts to measure the priority constructs of:

- Core relationships and connections,
- Family time,
- Having a voice,
- Sense of identity and belonging, and
- Child needs met.

For most of these new measures, the best informants will be children and parents served through standardized assessments or surveys.

4. Contested Orders

In addition to its provisions focused on relational permanency and child well-being, SB 6068 requires a plan for tracking contested orders or partially contested orders and the party or parties who contest them. A subset of focus group participants, child welfare and legal professionals with technical knowledge and experience with dependency cases and legal proceedings in Washington, were asked questions about contested orders. Responses were varied and included wanting a better understanding of when the judge disagrees with the agency's recommendations around placement, exploring attorney accountability, and using this as an extra opportunity to better understand safety.

Defining Contested Orders

Child welfare cases are complex with high stakes. Participants viewed questioning and challenging decisions as a normal and important part of the legal process. Among legal and agency professionals who participated, there was no agreement on a clear definition of what "contested" means beyond the shared understanding that a party disagrees with some aspect of a proceeding or decision. Instead, experts raised more questions, inquiring for example about the difference between a contested issue, a contested hearing, and a contested order. Some professionals appeared to use the terms contested hearing and contested orders interchangeably while others made a distinction between them. A contested order indicates that parties did not agree with some or all of the decisions about their case either during or at the conclusion of a hearing.

Professionals gave different reasons for why tracking contested matters might be useful, but they didn't have a shared opinion. Data about contested hearings were most often referenced as information that if tracked prior to the hearing could be used to estimate how much time on the docket would be needed to hear arguments and testimony when a party was expected to argue a key case issue (e.g., placement). Orders, however, are the results of hearings. While professionals suggested that data about contested hearings could provide them with a better understanding of how and when there is disagreement on a specific issue, some believed that the basic tracking of contested orders and contesting parties would not provide enough information to answer their questions. Others felt that tracking contested orders would not provide much in the way of useful information.

Despite consensus not being reached about the definition of "contested" or the utility of data about contested orders, everyone agreed that simply knowing whether something was contested is insufficient to make a judgement about the fairness of the action or appropriateness of the decision to contest it.

Mapping the Current Data Landscape

There are some data that may be helpful to contribute to the topics mentioned by child welfare and legal professionals. While some data are available that could contribute to a better understanding of contested orders, Washington does not currently have a system in place or administrative dataset that can report contested orders and contested parties.

Court Case Management Systems

The court case management system has one code related to contested hearings. The Shelter Care hearing can be entered as contested or non-contested, but the system does not identify which party contested the hearing. Washington does not currently have a quality assurance process in place to explore how often this data is entered into the case management system or to determine its accuracy. Missing or unreliable data could be a barrier to reporting how often shelter care hearings are contested at the state level.

Washington Court Template Forms for Dependency Cases

Washington has developed pattern court forms available on the AOC's website for dependency proceedings, including Shelter Care and termination of parental rights. The majority of these template order forms include a space on the form to indicate whether the order is contested, however this space does not always include the same information. For some forms, including orders for Review and Permanency hearings, this includes a checkbox that indicates if (a) the parties agree or (b) the hearing was contested. For the Shelter Care, Adjudication, and Disposition hearings, the form includes a space to indicate if the order is contested and which party contests, typically offering the options: parent 1, parent 2, or an unspecified other.

Strengths and Limitations in Current Data

Despite the inclusion of this checkbox on the template forms, several challenges are likely to prevent the effective use of these forms as a data source. The information collected is not the same across forms. Not all template forms include a space to identify the party that contested, and when included, the contesting party is often limited to parents. Not all counties in Washington use the template forms, and for those that do, it is unclear how often this checkbox is being completed or how professionals are trained to complete this section. This increases the risk of missing or unreliable data. Furthermore, because the data are in paper forms scanned electronically with no matching datapoint in the case management system, the only way to extract this information would be through a structured case file review process, which could be very resource intensive if attempting to achieve sufficient statewide sampling.

What Additional Data Should be Collected

Currently, the contesting party is only collected on specific forms and is primarily limited to the selection of parent 1 or parent 2 (with some options for “other”). Efforts to improve data collection could identify all parties that can contest a hearing and ensure a plan to collect all of them on the forms. In addition, the current forms do not have an option to indicate that an order has been partially contested, nor do they collect data on the issue that is being contested. If Washington seeks to better understand not only the frequency but the substance of these disagreements, capturing data about the specific issue being contested could be important.

Recommendations

Responsibly collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data about contested orders in child welfare proceedings requires an awareness and nuanced understanding of the data’s purpose, accuracy, completeness, and utility. It not only requires specifying questions of interest and assessing the appropriateness of the data for exploring answers, but it also necessitates establishing a shared definition of what it means to be a “contested” order among the child welfare and legal professionals involved, identifying which hearings should be subjected to contested order tracking, and determining who qualifies as a “party” for reporting purposes. Additional data elements may also be necessary to comprehend contested order issues, such as what issue is being contested. Making a commitment to producing accurate and meaningful reports on contested orders could require multiple steps and substantial resources.

Conversations with multiple stakeholders, alongside a review of current data systems and current practices, indicate that while it is technically possible to implement a process for tracking contested orders through the enhancement of existing data collection, doing so would require a substantial investment of time, coordination, training, and system resources. Given the anticipated administrative burden and the limited value such data could yield for informing meaningful system improvement, this effort may not represent a prudent allocation of resources at this time. The potential return on investment appears low relative to the costs of implementation. However, if Washington wanted to pursue this further, Appendix B outlines steps that could be taken to improve data collection and reporting.

5. Data Collection and Reporting Plan

The purpose of gathering and reporting relational permanency and child well-being data is to use that information to better serve the children and families who are involved in the child welfare dependency system. Yet, important dimensions of relational permanency and child well-being—like children’s sense of belonging, core relationships, and having a voice—are absent from current data systems. Despite broad consensus about the importance of these dimensions among a diverse group of experts, Washington does not have the tools to measure them well.

Achieving the goals of SB 6068 and the many experts who participated in this process will require new tools, procedures, and active partnerships. Developing and administering measures that are inclusive and family centered will require dedicated time, staffing, funding and partnerships between researchers and people with lived experience who can help shape the work from the beginning. Agencies are not currently funded for this type of ongoing data collection and reporting, so additional investments are necessary to actualize the potential of this legislation to impact positive change.

Cross-Agency Dependency Data Governance Workgroup

Moving the vision of SB 6068 and this report forward will benefit from sustained commitment from multiple agencies and active involvement of lived experts with firsthand experience of system impacts. To continue to advance this effort, FYJP recommends developing a workgroup within the Washington Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care to steward the next steps of this plan. Cross agency governance bodies that include community voices and representation from partner agencies—including DCYF, OSPI, DOC, HCA, RDA, DSHA, AOC, and tribal and community partners—can contribute to a better understanding and use of child well-being and relational permanency data. Workgroup members should include:

- legal experts to navigate any relevant laws related to access of data,⁶
- technical and data experts to discuss infrastructure and data standards, including common identifiers, ways to standardize formats, and interoperability platforms,⁷
- program, policy, and court experts with the ability to influence changes to change practice and improve outcomes,
- lived experts to inform data collection protocols, analysis questions, and interpretation of results and their implications.

⁶ Office of Policy Management (2020). *Legal issues in interagency data sharing*. Report for Public Act 19-153; OPRE-Office of Policy, Research, and Evaluation.; Gabay, M., Pickett, D., Bennici, F., Krenzke, T., Machado, J. (2021). *Confidentiality toolkit (OPRE Report 2021-175)*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/confidentiality-toolkit>

⁷ Early Childhood Data Collaborative (2011). *10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State Early Care and Education Data Systems: Inaugural State Analysis*.

The Dependency Data Workgroup will provide a structure to review, interpret and use data for creating awareness, ensuring accountability, contributing to evaluations of systems practices and processes, identifying areas of opportunity for improvement, and exploring equity of systems outcomes for children and families with different identities. Primary charges of this workgroup will include (but are not limited to):

- Fostering buy-in and promoting ethical and effective use of data.
- Identifying data sharing needs for systemic improvement as well as contributing to public reporting and assessing the data pipeline across agencies to maximize efficiency and protection of privacy.
- Identifying needs for root cause analysis or other continuous quality improvement strategies as part of collective action planning.
- Periodically re-assessing the utility of relational permanency and child well-being measures and recommending adjustments to better meet current and emerging data needs.

The Children's Representation Workgroup, established through 2SHB 1219, and workgroups created by the Commission's Family Well-Being Community Collaborative, provide successful examples and precedents for this type of cross-agency workgroup.

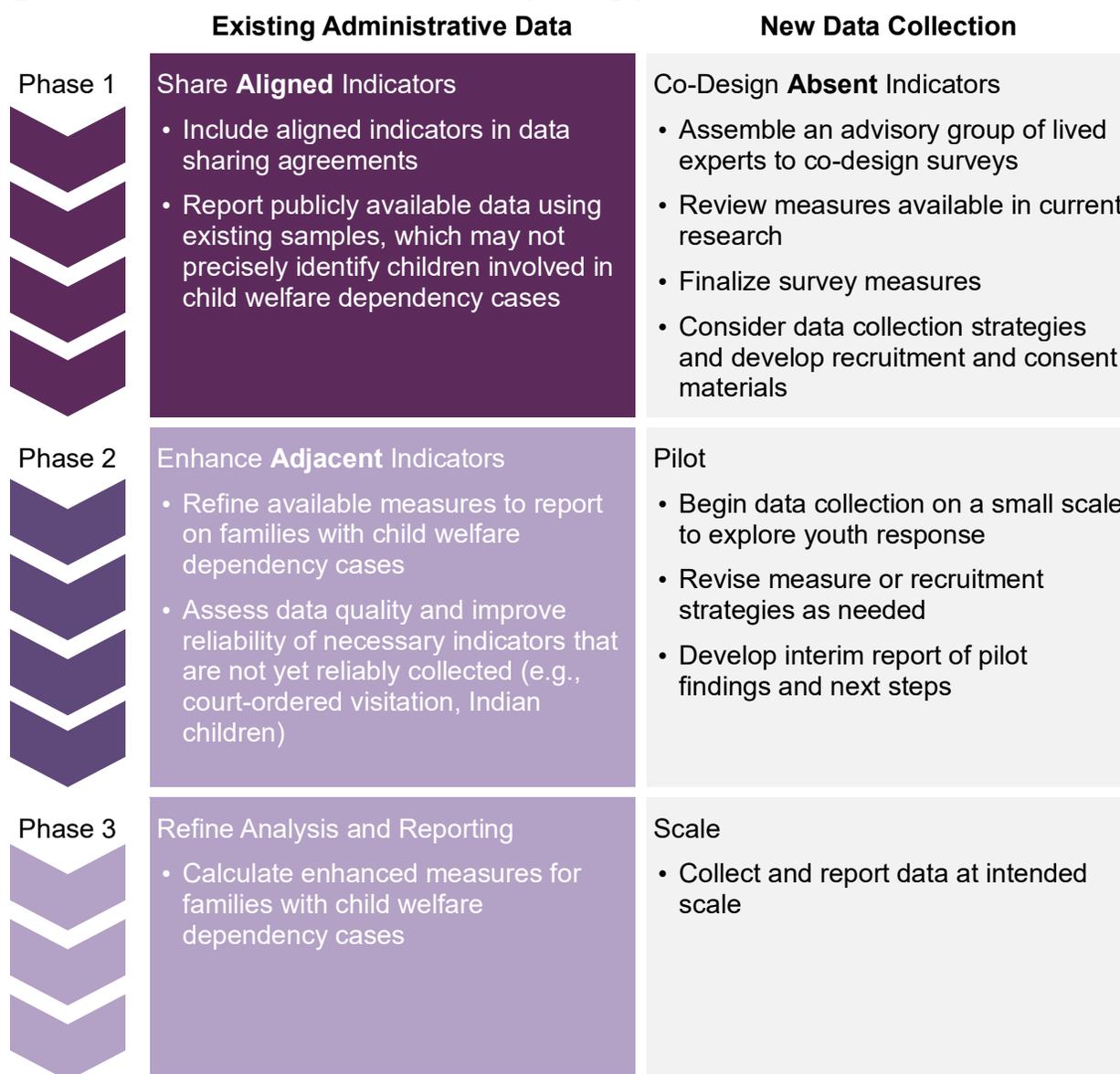
Phased Plan

The phased plan outlined below responds directly to the concepts, data sources, gaps, and priorities that emerged from the responses of lived and professional experts. While several measures relevant to relational permanency and child well-being currently exist in Washington's data landscape, many of those data sources privilege the system's perspective rather than the perspectives of individuals impacted by it.

The proposed approach acknowledges that the inclusion of child, youth, and family voices are vital to understanding relational permanency and child well-being, and that they are largely absent in the available data. The plan identifies high priority data that should be leveraged from state data sources while also recommending enhancements to existing data collection and reporting efforts to center child and family perspectives when possible and appropriate. The plan attempts to honor and leverage the knowledge and experiences of the experts who participated in this process, and it is consistent with best practices in culturally responsive and equitable evaluation.

As Washington embarks on systematically gathering complex and multi-dimensional outcomes like relational permanency and child well-being, data collection instruments and procedures will need to be developed, tested, refined, and thoughtfully implemented. Understanding that these steps will take sustained effort over time, the plan capitalizes on existing data as "quick wins" while also systematically developing the infrastructure for "transformational" data in the near future. Appendix D details specific strategies for leveraging current data and outlines recommended enhancements for reliable and conceptually valid measures of relational permanency and child well-being.

Figure 5. Phased data collection and reporting plan



Necessary Steps Toward New Data Collection

Phase 1 decisions for the Dependency Data Workgroup to make collaboratively with researchers, practitioners, and individuals with lived expertise include: which survey instruments to use, who will be an appropriate individual or organization to gather feedback from children and parents, what consent procedures should look like, whether or how to incentivize individuals to participate, whether or how to attempt to integrate data collection into standard practice. Each of these decisions have implications for data collection burden and efficiency, response rates, the experiences of children and families invited to participate, and the trustworthiness of information gathered. Phase 2 will offer opportunities to pilot and improve procedures before scaling in Phase 3.

Necessary Data Sharing Agreements for Existing Data

Washington has a legal precedent in place for data sharing with House Bill 1541 (2016) which identifies the need for data sharing for research purposes and to improve educational outcomes for youth. It requires the education data center to develop data sharing and research agreements with several agencies, including DSHS, OSPI, and the courts. Washington has several cross-agency data sharing agreements to support service delivery, timely understanding of youth needs, and monitoring practice and outcomes on children and families served. Even though there are some data sharing structures already in place, they may be limited in scope and are not currently being utilized to identify and report on child well-being and relational permanency. At the time of this report, AOC and DCYF are in the process of reestablishing a data sharing agreement, which will be critical for the courts to be able to report on high priority measures of child well-being and relational permanency that are aligned with data currently collected by DCYF.

From the existing data sharing structures that are already in place in Washington, there are several models that provide a strong foundation for this work. A key role of the cross-agency Dependency Data Workgroup will be to critically evaluate the data pipeline across agencies to optimize collective effort while protecting sensitive data. Examples of potential data sharing structures include:

- *Agency-Agency Individual Level Data:* Agencies directly share child-level data that are connected using common identifiers (e.g., DCYF + Sprout) or probabilistic matching based on identity characteristics (e.g., DCYF + OSPI). The receiving agency conducts the analysis of interest to produce aggregate reports.
- *Agency-Central Repository:* Multiple agencies share child-level with a central repository who does cross-system linking and analysis to produce aggregate reports (e.g., (DSHS/FFA/RDA).
- *Aggregate Report:* Agencies analyze their own data and provide aggregate reports to other agencies. This model may not require robust data sharing agreements, but rather memorandums of understanding about what data are needed at an aggregate level, how these data should be reported, and how these data should be shared. AOC, DCYF, and OSPI already share aggregate reports on their websites that include information relevant to SB 6068.

Each of these models could be used to advance data sharing on relational permanency and child well-being. Choices about which model(s) to use should consider what level of detail and disaggregation is necessary to achieve goals. Appendix D provides a more comprehensive description of best practices in data sharing.

Dissemination and Utilization of Data

A strong dissemination plan goes beyond simply sharing results—it ensures that data are presented clearly, responsibly, and with purpose. The purposes for collecting and reporting data identified through this project center around supporting children and families' relational permanency and well-being through awareness, accountability, evaluation, improvement, and equity. The recommended dissemination plan includes features that build upon existing FYJP efforts to use data in intentional ways to support system improvement.

Community-Engaged Data Interpretation and Action Planning

Dissemination should foster opportunities for communities and system professionals to come together, interpret the data collaboratively, and use it to guide action, accountability, and improvement. Each group brings unique insights that help explain trends in the data from different angles. FYJP will share results with Family and Child Well-Being Collaborative workgroups to gather multiple perspectives about what might be contributing to observed data and identify and prioritize system needs. In addition, FYJP will leverage their existing court improvement infrastructure by providing training and other support to local Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Programs (FJCIPs) to facilitate collaborative data interpretation sessions with dependency court coordinators and key dependency partners (e.g., DCYF, OPD, OCLA, AGGs). Those conversations will focus on local trends in practice and outcomes and community-based action planning to support improved practice and outcomes.

FYJP will use several additional strategies to focus dissemination efforts on achieving the purposes identified through increasing awareness, promoting accountability, exploring equity, enhancing evaluation, and promoting improvement.

Increasing Awareness

Using accessible formats to communicate key findings to the public will help to promote awareness of relational permanency and child well-being outcomes for children involved in the child welfare dependency system. FYJP plans to update data at least quarterly on a reenvisioned Court Improvement Program dashboard. The current dashboard⁸ is available to the public. It is widely used by professionals across the state and is an ideal location to illustrate trends in practice.

Best practices in data visualization will help ensure that complex information is clear, accessible, and meaningful to a wide audience—not just data experts. Any public reporting of data should be transparent about measurement, including relevant details of who is and who is not included in the sample and any noteworthy limitations. This will reduce the risk of misinterpretation and support informed decision-making.

⁸ At the time of this report, AOC and DCYF do not have an active data sharing agreement. AOC will not be able to update the data dashboard until DCYF reinstates a new data sharing agreement.

Promoting Accountability

Several of the relational permanency and child well-being measures prioritized as part of this effort will offer data about legislation that has been in place for a while without feedback about impact. Appendix E summarizes legal requirements related to the constructs identified through this effort by identifying where these concepts are explicitly implicated in the law. Developing data collection and reporting that tells dependency courts and judicial officers more about the experiences of children and families can ultimately help to shape system outcomes.

Exploring Equity

Whenever possible, data will be disaggregated by race/ethnicity to continue to examine differences for American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American children who have been historically overrepresented in Washington's child welfare dependency system.⁹ With any disaggregated data, it is important to interpret any trends in the context of families' circumstances.

Enhancing Evaluation

In addition to producing aggregate reports for broader use, child-level data will also be made available to research partners where appropriate, including researchers at Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR). With child-level data, researchers can match data across agencies for more nuanced and multifaceted analyses to enhance understanding about how the system is performing for children and families. These data can support understanding of how practices relate to outcomes and answer new questions about the impacts of system behaviors on relational permanency and child well-being.

Informing Improvement

FYJP is developing a new format for interactive reporting which will allow select users in family-serving roles to see big picture trends and zoom in to access family-level data that could support case practice improvements. This format will create opportunities for court practitioners to review and reflect to highlight key insights about how their cases contribute to statewide trends.

* * *

Together with other system partners and lived and professional experts, FYJP will maintain momentum developed through this process through collaborative data collection, reporting, and using data to fuel systems improvements that will ultimately enhance relational permanency and child well-being for children and families.

⁹ DCYF has the most robust race/ethnicity data for the children in foster care and should provide child-level race/ethnicity data in data sharing agreements to allow for disaggregated analysis.

Appendix A. Data Sources and Relevant Variables Identified by Data Experts

Data Source	Relevant variables
Children’s Bureau	
Statewide data indicators: Aggregate reporting of all child welfare cases	Placement stability
National Youth in Transition Dataset (NYTD): Survey of sample of youth who turned 18 while in foster care	Young adult positive connection with adults Young adult material needs met Young adult positive connection with adults
CSSAT – Center for Social Center Analytics and Technology	
Sprout: Administrative data used by professionals providing visitation services	Level of supervision of visits; number of hours for children with contracted supervised visits
DCYF – Department of Children Youth and Families	
FamLink: Administrative data for all cases in child welfare; aggregate data reported in several publicly available dashboards; child-level data shared with several state agencies	Placement types, numbers, dates, adverse placements, level of care Permanency data (type, timeliness) Level of caregiver support (proxy for child needs) Visitation plan for children with supervised visits ICWA identification
Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) case record review and interview process: Statewide structured sampling of cases reported at aggregate level	Efforts to engage child Efforts to meet educational, mental, and physical health needs Efforts to place with relatives Efforts to support visits with parents and siblings Efforts to achieve permanency Efforts to preserve connections; supporting relationships between child and parents
Agency Performance Dashboard: Sample of youth in the state	Someone to turn to when feeling sad or depressed
DOC – Department of Corrections	
ONE offender needs assessment*	Names and ages of incarcerated parents’ children and other information about parents’ social connections
Administrative data about visits to incarcerated individuals*	Names and birthdates of individuals who visit incarcerated parents—including children
*Note: It could be possible to identify whether the children of incarcerated parents are involved in the child welfare dependency system with a data sharing agreement between DOC and DCYF that allows linking based on names and birthdates	
Program participation	Incarcerated individuals’ participation in programming (including programs for parents) is decentralized, but could be more systematically gathered with additional effort
DOH – Department of Health	
Healthy Youth Survey: statewide survey youth in grades 6-12 (biennially); select items reported on OIAA Agency	10 th graders asked two relevant questions: (1) adult to turn to when feeling depressed, (2) level of engagement with family. Also asked 4 questions from Children’s Hope Scale

Data Source	Relevant variables
Performance Dashboard, Resilience Outcome Goal	Youth self-identify whether they live with their parents/guardians or not.
DSHS – Department of Social and Health Services	
Linked Medicaid and FamLink data reported in aggregate reports such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics and Service Use of Young Adults in Foster Care • Dashboard Children’s Behavioral Health • Opportunity Youth Report 	Young adult parenthood, health problems, substance use, suicidality (DSHS) Child diagnoses (Health Care Authority/DSHS) Medical service utilization data (HCA/DSHS) MH prescriptions filled; Poly-pharmacology (HCA/RDA)
Caregiver Survey: Annual survey of a sample of caregivers	Caregiver feelings about support available from DSHS
HCA- Health Care Authority	
Medicaid administrative data	Child diagnoses (Health Care Authority/DSHS) Medical service utilization data (HCA/DSHS) MH prescriptions filled; Poly-pharmacology (HCA/RDA)
ICWA Court Data	
Data collected by Pierce County about effectiveness of their ICWA Courts	Tribal involvement in case Reason to know ICWA case
OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	
Administrative education data; Child-level data that can be accessed by caseworker aggregated in state reports	Enrollment, current school and district School stability – number of school changes since entering foster care Current grade, Discipline, Attendance, GPA Graduation, Special education utilization Kindergarten readiness (WaKIDS)
WSCCR- Washington State Center for Court Research/Administrative Office of the Courts	
Structured court observation of hearings: Sample of court hearings; case level data	ICWA; Judges engagement of children during hearings Discussion of relative resources identified

Appendix B. Detailed Plan for Tracking Contested Orders

Sample Steps for Improved Collection and Use of Contested Order Data

Step 1: Specify questions of interest. Prior to embarking on an effort to strengthen existing data collection systems or develop new ones, the first step is to clarify and confirm the reasons that contested data will be collected. Specifying the questions that stakeholders intend to answer can clarify purposes for the data, prompt initial questions about alignment and feasibility, and guide next steps.

Step 2: Identify and define the variables. To align the questions of interest with the data being collected and make sound measurement decisions, the next step is to achieve consensus or near consensus from professionals on what must be tracked and why. Legal and child welfare agency professionals should be convened to establish what is meant by “contested,” discuss the differences between contested hearings and orders, and come to an agreement on what is meant by a “party” to the case. Additional decisions may be needed about whether there needs to be a distinction between contested and “partially contested” orders and whether the specific issue that is being contested must be tracked. Once defined, all data variables to be measured must be operationalized, including the hearings for which these data points need to be tracked.

Step 3: Assess the feasibility of data collection options: Currently, the most comprehensive way Washington tracks information about contested orders is through its template court forms. However, the data collected across forms varies and the utility of this information is limited. Court template orders could be revised to include the variables on updated template forms. Alternatively, Washington could explore the feasibility of adding variables to court case management systems across the state. This may require working with the vendor(s) to determine how time and cost intensive it would be to add necessary data variables. Each of these options would present opportunities that would need to be carefully weighed against costs, including the investment necessary to implement the changes, provide training, perform quality assurance, and routinely extract and analyze the data necessary for a sufficient sample of cases to answer the questions of interest.

Step 4: Pilot changes in data collection: Update forms or work with case management vendor(s) to implement changes. Pilot forms in select jurisdictions that vary in size and geography and test system changes with users to understand any challenges related to collecting the data in a meaningful way. This will likely require training of all professionals involved. Use new data elements in practice for a designated timeframe sufficient to ensure a sample of all applicable hearing types. Gather feedback on usability, completeness, accuracy, and challenges.

Step 5: Revise forms or fields as necessary. Review feedback from pilot sites or users to determine how much missing data and unreliable data were present. Develop a

plan to revise the forms or fields (if needed) or training protocols to ensure new sites or users will sufficiently understand the necessity of the fields and how to complete them.

Step 6: Stage statewide implementation and training. Develop and execute a plan to roll out (and potentially stage) implementation of data collection statewide that includes training for all professionals involved in the system on the form templates or data system fields. Ensure that attorneys, judges, and court staff are familiar with the forms or fields and have a sufficient understanding of how and when they should be completed and how the data will be used.

Step 7: Perform quality assurance. Create a sampling procedure to select random cases from around the state to explore data quality on forms. Work with any sites with missing or unreliable data to enhance form completion. Alternatively, check on data entry to include missingness and reliability of entry. Work with sites with challenges to identify barriers and enhance data entry.

Step 8: Perform data analysis and reporting. Execute plans for sampling and data analysis based on the questions of interest and data variables being tracked. New data tracked in template court forms could require implementation of a structured case file review process to report on the percentage of cases that are contested (or partially contested), at which hearing type, and by which party. By contrast, after working with vendor(s) to develop a standard reporting template, new data captured in local court case management systems could allow for reporting on percentage of cases that are contested, at which hearing type and by which party for each county or judge.

Developing and executing a plan to revise template court forms to collect additional data about contested orders within existing structures to make modifications and train personnel on them. This would allow for case level data on all cases to be available in the forms on the files. However, extracting that data would likely remain resource intensive. Because the data would live on an electronic document uploaded to the system, data cannot be extracted for systematic reporting unless someone opens each document and extracts the data manually.

The potential alternative to update all local court case management systems in Washington would allow for easier statewide reporting, but the process would likely be slow and costly. Washington doesn't have a single unified system, so each county would have to make the changes individually. This plan would allow for statewide reporting and the possibility of disaggregating the data by judge or site. However, it may not be feasible with the current systems. It will require large-scale revisions across all counties for their data systems.

In both of these scenarios, Washington faces the potential for multi-year implementation efforts in addition to the risks of high burden and potentially prohibitive costs.

Appendix C. Detailed Plan for Measuring Relational Permanency and Child Well-Being

Keeping Families Together Measures

In response to E2SHB 1227 and other efforts to reduce family separation, Washington has robust reporting measures related to Keeping Families Together already in place. These present opportunities for several “quick wins” in data collection and reporting.

Construct	Leveraging Current Data - Measure (source)	Recommended Enhancements
Entries into out-of-home care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of voluntary placements, protective custodies, court approved placements, and family voluntary (FamLink; publicly available on DCYF's HB 1227 webpage) - Placement rates by race/ethnicity (FamLink; publicly available on OIAA's prevention dashboard) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > DCYF to share child-level placement data (e.g., placement types, dates, addresses, level of caregiver support, reasons for change) and race/ethnicity at a person level with AOC so that AOC can identify where a child is (in-home vs out-of-home) when a dependency is filed and at other points in the life of the case.
Placement stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Placement moves per 1000 days - Percent of children placed with kin (FamLink; publicly available on OIAA Child Welfare Supplemental Dashboard) - School changes since placement (OSPI + FamLink) - Distance from home (AOC can calculate distance if provided placement addresses) - Court practices to support children’s return home (AOC: court observation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DCYF: Reliably identify Indian children with ICWA cases to track placement with kin or Indian family - DCYF: In the process of finalizing a new measure of the percent of children in “adverse placements” in collaboration with the University of Chicago > DCYF: Share child-level ICWA and placement stability data with AOC > DCYF: Share child-level data about school changes and adverse placements
Reunification or permanency with kin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % cases who achieve reunification and other types of permanency (FamLink; publicly available on Dependency Dashboard-Permanency Outcomes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AOC: Expand the analysis of FamLink to include all children in dependency in the sample that is publicly reported by adding the group of children “still in care” who have not yet achieved permanency. Consider indicating whether the children “still in care” have experienced Termination of Parental Rights. - AOC: Explore reunification rates by race/ethnicity (see APSR p53 as an example)

Relational Permanency Measures

Maintaining children’s and youths’ connections that are important to them is central to relational permanency, and Washington has limited data currently available to measure these connections. Lived and professional experts identified family time as an important priority, but comprehensive visitation data do not exist at this time. New data collection efforts gathering feedback directly from system-impacted children and families are necessary to better understand these important outcomes.

Measure	Leveraging Current Data	Recommended Enhancements
<p>Core Relationships/ Connections</p>	<p>- Limitations: A sample of youth turning 17 in foster care are asked two questions about their connections and supports (NYTD), which provides important, but limited, insights about children and youth’s connections and relationships.</p>	<p>- Ask parents or kin caregivers questions to identify key individuals of significant connection to the child in the beginning of the case.</p> <p>- Design and conduct surveys or assessments with children/youth to gather their perspectives about who is important to them, the strength of those relationships while in care, and how the system is helping them stay connected.</p> <p>- Ask Indian children about maintaining connections with their tribe.</p>
<p>Family Time</p>	<p>- Number, dates, and lengths of visits facilitated by contracted providers offers insights into the quantity of contact between parents and children with supervised visits (Sprout)</p> <p>- Visitation plans for children whose visits are facilitated by contracted providers (FamLink)</p> <p>- Limitations: Comprehensive visit data do not exist. Unlikely to get single-source data about different types of visits; particularly visits in more natural settings that may be most conducive to relational permanency and child well-being.</p> <p>> Data sharing: DOC and DCYF or DOC and AOC can identify children visiting incarcerated parents by linking DOC’s visitation records with AOC’s children in dependency or DCYF’s children in foster care</p>	<p>- Design and conduct surveys to gather feedback about visits from parents and children who may be the best informants for the most comprehensive data about family visits and other types of contact (e.g., phone calls, video calls). Gathering data directly from system-impacted individuals is also an opportunity to center their perspectives about what is going well and what needs improvement. Ask parents how often they saw their child(ren), where visits took place, what activities were available, any barriers they experienced to participating in the visits, and their suggestions to enhance visits.</p> <p>- AOC: Implement a process to enhance court’s capturing of detailed visitation plans in court orders resulting from hearings. This data will provide family-specific benchmarks to assess whether sufficient visits were provided.</p>

Child Well-Being

With cautions and caveats in mind about interpreting child behavior or symptomology in the context of grief, loss, and separation, lived and professional experts prioritized child well-being measures that examine children’s sense of identity and belonging after being separated from their family, and system efforts to understand children’s perspective and meet children’s needs.

Measure	Leveraging Current Data	Recommended Enhancements
Sense of identity/ belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limitations: This outcome is not yet systematically gathered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-design and administer a survey to gather youth’s perspectives about their own sense of identity and belonging. Draw from surveys that have been used in previous research in collaboration with experts with lived expertise to finalize questions and data collection strategies in Washington. - Ask Indian children about their sense of cultural connection to their tribe.
Having a voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child and family involvement in case planning (DCYF: APSR item 11). - Judge gives youth opportunity to be heard during the court hearing (AOC: court observation) - Limitations: Currently available data do not center children’s feedback about how supported they felt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-design and administer a survey to gather youth’s perspectives about who is representing their interests in court (e.g., CASA, GAL, children’s attorney), and the extent to which those individuals are accurately representing their interests.
Child needs met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment and services for children, to meet educational needs, for physical health, and for mental health (DCYF: APSR items 12A,16,17,18) - Caregiver Support Level provides a proxy for child needs (DCYF: FamLink) - Limitations: Currently available data do not center children’s feedback about what they perceive as their needs and the extent to which the system is supporting them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-design and administer a survey to gather youth’s perspectives about the extent to which system representatives (e.g., courts, workers) understand what their needs are and are working to support them.

Appendix D. Data Sharing Best Practices

In today's increasingly interconnected service landscape, children and families involved in the child welfare system often engage with multiple public systems—education, healthcare, courts, and more. Yet, despite shared missions and overlapping populations, these systems frequently operate in silos, unable to access or integrate critical information that could improve coordination, outcomes, and efficiency. When it comes to understanding and promoting child and family well-being, data sharing is especially critical. No single system—whether the courts, child welfare agency or service providers, has a complete picture on its own. Each holds important but partial information. Without coordinated data sharing, opportunities to identify needs, coordinate supports, and track outcomes across systems are lost.

Well-being is inherently multi-dimensional, and advancing it requires a full view that only cross-system collaboration can provide. This is the importance of data governance – the framework of policies, processes and roles that ensure data is managed consistently, responsibly, and securely across an organization or set of partners.

Environmental Scan

To examine the use of and need for data sharing agreements, consultants conducted an environmental scan across child welfare and related human services fields including health, education, and court systems. The scan reviewed national research, state initiatives, and cross-sector models to understand how agencies structure data exchanges, safeguard privacy, and establish shared accountability. Of particular note, the Office of Policy, Research, and Evaluation (part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)) had compiled a resource directory related to data sharing.¹⁰ The environmental scan revealed an array of resources with focuses on data governance, data analysis, community engagement, and technical guidance for logistics of data sharing and agreements. The documents included documents from multiple related organizations, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ACF, Casey Family Programs, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Early Childhood Data Collaborative.

In addition, consultants gathered information and sample data sharing agreements from Washington state systems partners who were integral to the relational permanency and well-being conversations. Together, these resources were combined to explain the need for data sharing, identify best practices in data sharing efforts, explore Washington's current data sharing landscape, and to make recommendations for successful future data sharing efforts.

¹⁰ SRI International, AnLar, Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. (2024). Data Linkage and Integration for Research and Statistical Purposes: an Annotated Bibliography (OPRE Report 2024-355). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Need for data sharing for the benefit of children and families

The review of data governance documents revealed several key benefits of data sharing including:

- **Promoting data-driven decision making**, which can improve the quality of programs, workforce and improve outcomes for children.¹¹
- **Helping communities understand areas of strength and need** to enhance approaches to improving outcomes for children and families.¹²
- **Increasing efficiency and efficacy of programs**, by improving service delivery and reducing administrative time on tasks.¹³
- **Supporting coordination of access to treatment.** By providing both agencies with additional tools and resources to support coordination, data sharing can support improved health outcomes.¹⁴
- **Ensuring appropriate services can be delivered timely.** Sharing information could improve outcomes, increase efficiencies and reduce redundancies.¹⁵
- **Improving outcomes for children and families.** Nearly all resources reviewed indicated the result of better data sharing was an opportunity to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

¹¹ Early Childhood Data Collaborative. (2011). *10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State Early Care and Education Data Systems: Inaugural State Analysis*.

¹² Casey Family Programs. (2022). *How can data sharing across child- and family-serving systems be implemented effectively? Strategy Brief: Transforming Child Welfare Systems*.

¹³ The US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. (2018). *Data sharing: Courts and child welfare*. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/data_sharing_toolkit.pdf

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). (n.d.). *Toolkit: Data sharing for child welfare agencies and Medicaid*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/data-sharing-and-medicaid-toolkit.pdf>

¹⁵ Gabay, M., Pickett, D., Bennici, F., Krenzke, T., Machado, J. (2021). *Confidentiality toolkit (OPRE Report 2021-175)*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/confidentiality-toolkit>

Best Practices in Data Sharing

Data sharing agreements with government agencies are essential for ensuring that data is shared responsibly, securely, and in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. Below are some best practices for establishing such agreements.¹⁶ Necessary components in data sharing agreements are indicated with **.

1. Define the Purpose of Data Sharing**

- Clearly state the objectives of data sharing (e.g., research, public policy development, service delivery).
- Ensure data sharing is aligned with the intended outcomes and legal requirements.

2. Clarify Data Ownership and Usage Rights**

- Specify who owns the data and any intellectual property rights.
- Define how the data can be used and any restrictions on its use (e.g., linking with other data systems).
- Determine whether data can be shared with third parties, and under what conditions.

3. Ensure Compliance with Legal and Regulatory Requirements

- Adhere to relevant data protection laws (e.g., GDPR, HIPAA, FOIA) and industry standards.
- Establish protocols for data access that comply with national and international legal frameworks.

4. Design a Clear Process for Secure Transfer and Use of Data**

- Define security measures to protect sensitive data (e.g., encryption, secure storage, access controls).
- Set out responsibilities for safeguarding data and preventing unauthorized access or breaches.
- Identify any confidential data and specify confidentiality obligations.

¹⁶ The US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. (2018). Data sharing: Courts and child welfare. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/data_sharing_toolkit.pdf; Apprenticeship Data Alignment and Performance Technical Assistance Center. The Council of State Governments. (n.d) *Understanding Data Sharing Agreements*; Mauzy, D., & Bull, B. (with Walsh, S., & Harmon, G.). (2022). *The DaSy Data Linking Toolkit*. In DaSy Toolkits and Guides Series. <http://dasycenter.org/data-linking-toolkit>

5. Agree on Data Sharing Format and Interoperability

- Agree on standardized data formats that enable easy integration and use (e.g., CSV, JSON).
- Ensure compatibility with the government's existing systems and platforms.

6. Minimize Data Shared

- Share only the minimum amount of data necessary for the specific purpose.
- Redact or anonymize data where appropriate to reduce privacy risks.

7. Ensure Data Quality and Accuracy

- Specify the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of the data being shared.
- Establish procedures for data validation and verification, if necessary.

8. Set Clear Data Retention and Disposal Guidelines**

- Set clear guidelines for how long the data will be retained and when it should be destroyed.
- Implement data disposal protocols to ensure data is securely deleted when no longer needed.

9. Define Roles and Responsibilities**

- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the data sharing (e.g., who will manage the data, who is responsible for data security).
- Assign a point of contact within each organization for the duration of the agreement.

10. Audit and Monitor Regularly

- Include provisions for regular auditing to ensure compliance with the agreement.
- Specify mechanisms for monitoring data access, usage, and security.

11. Outline an Exit Strategy

- Outline the conditions under which the agreement may be terminated.
- Address how data will be returned, destroyed, or transferred upon termination of the agreement.

12. Create Transparency and Accountability**

- Establish mechanisms for transparency in how data is used and shared.
- Provide clear reporting requirements, particularly if the data is used for research or public policy analysis.

13. Specify a Dispute Resolution Process

- Specify the process for resolving disagreements or disputes related to data sharing, including escalation procedures.

14. Review and Update

- Include a provision for periodic review and updating of the data sharing agreement to accommodate any legal, regulatory, or operational changes.

15. Ensure Personnel are Trained and Aware

- Ensure that all relevant personnel involved in data handling are trained in data protection laws, security practices, and the terms of the agreement.

By following these best practices, both parties in a data sharing agreement can ensure that data is shared responsibly, ethically, and securely, with all necessary protections in place.

Data Sharing Agreements in Washington

Washington already has several cross-agency data sharing agreements in place. FYJP consultants conducted a content analysis of several data sharing agreements in Washington and beyond to assess the extent to which they include best practices in data sharing. For this report, the parties in the data sharing agreements have been de-identified and the agreements have been labeled A-E. Table 2 provides results of a review of data sharing agreements between five organizations who would be involved in the well-being and relational permanency work in Washington (e.g., DCYF, AOC).

Most of the agreements that are in place include multiple best practices. Of the five agreements reviewed, two of them include all of the necessary components of data sharing identified above (denoted in Table 2 with **). The others include the majority but not all of the necessary best practices identified but also include additional best practices. This indicates Washington has strong data sharing template agreements to build from.

Table 2. Prevalence of best practices in data sharing agreements among agencies in Washington

Data Sharing Agreements Among Washington State Agencies

Best Practices in Data Sharing Agreements	A	B	C	D	E
1. Define the purpose of data sharing**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Clarify data ownership and usage rights**	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3. Ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4. Data security and confidentiality**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Data sharing format and interoperability			✓		
6. Data minimization	✓		✓	✓	✓
7. Data quality and accuracy	✓				✓
8. Data retention and disposal**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Roles and responsibilities**	✓	✓			
10. Audit and monitoring	✓	✓	✓		✓
11. Exit strategy	✓	✓		✓	✓
12. Transparency and accountability**	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13. Dispute resolution		✓	✓	✓	✓
14. Review and update	✓		✓	✓	✓
15. Training and awareness					

Recommendations to Strengthen the Feasibility and Likelihood of Data Sharing Success

While Washington already has a good foundation on which to build, several recommendations may strengthen the feasibility of data sharing and likelihood of success.

Establish legal and policy clarity up front. Develop legislative or executive orders that clearly authorize data sharing for a defined purpose. This reduces ambiguity and accelerates implementation.¹⁷

Allocate time and resources for data integration. Dependency courts may not have the infrastructure for data sharing or case management system capable of linking with other state agencies. Additional steps may be needed, including data matching protocols or application programming interface (API) developed by specialized information technology professionals.

Demonstrate mutual benefit. Frame the data sharing initiatives around shared goals and outcomes (better well-being and relational permanency for youth).¹⁸

Develop protocols for sharing information. Include data elements needed to meet the needs of all programs, data quality assurances, and plans to maintain and enhance any ongoing data exchange.

Include necessary data sharing components identified above. Several organizations already have strong data sharing templates in place that can be built upon and enhanced to meet everyone's needs.¹⁹

¹⁷ Zanti, S., Jenkins, D., Berkowitz, E., Hawn Nelson, A., Burnett, T., & Culhane, D. (2021). *Building and Sustaining State Data Integration Efforts: Legislation, Funding, and Strategies*. Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. University of Pennsylvania. <https://aisp.upenn.edu/resource-article/building-sustaining-state-data-integration-efforts-legislation-funding-and-strategies/>

¹⁸ Health Resources and Service Administration: Maternal and Child Health (n.d.) *Coordinating Data Sharing Across Agencies: Strategies to Address Common Challenges*.

¹⁹ Supra note vii; The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems. (2014). *Data sharing agreement checklist for IDEA Part C and Part B 619 Agencies and Programs*. DaSy The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems. Privacy Technical Assistance Center.

Appendix E. Relevant Statues for Relational Permanency and Child Well-Being Constructs

REUNIFICATION

[RCW 13.34.062 Note: Finding-Intent-2009 c 477](#)

"The legislature finds that when children have been found dependent and placed in out-of-home care, the likelihood of reunification with their parents diminishes significantly after fifteen months. **The legislature also finds that early and consistent parental engagement in services and participation in appropriate parent-child contact and visitation increases the likelihood of successful reunifications.** The legislature intends to promote greater awareness among parents in dependency cases of the importance of active participation in services, visitation, and case planning for the child, and the risks created by failure to participate in their child's case over the long term."

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(c\)\(ii\)\(A\)\(IV\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing the court shall inquire whether there are any relatives or other suitable persons who are willing to care for the child. This inquiry must include whether any **relative or other suitable person supports reunification** of the parent and child once reunification can safely occur.

[RCW 13.34.065\(9\)\(a\)](#)

Early, consistent, and frequent visitation is crucial for maintaining parent-child relationships and allowing **family reunification.**

[RCW 13.34.136\(2\)\(b\)\(ii\)\(A\)](#)

Early, consistent, and frequent visitation is crucial for maintaining parent-child relationships and making it possible for parents and children to **safely reunify.**

[RCW 13.34.136\(2\)\(b\)](#)

...a specific plan as to **where the child will be placed, what steps will be taken to return the child home, what steps the department will take to promote existing appropriate sibling relationships and/or facilitate placement together or contact in accordance with the best interests of each child, and what actions the department will take to maintain parent-child ties.**

[RCW 13.34.136\(2\)\(b\)\(i\)](#)

The department's plan shall specify **what services the parents will be offered to enable them to resume custody, what requirements the parents must meet to resume custody, and a time limit** for each service plan and parental requirement.

HAVING A VOICE

[RCW 13.34.065\(c\)\(ii\)\(B\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing, when the court orders a child to be removed from the home, they must give **great weight to the state preference of the parent, guardian, legal custodian, and the child.**

[RCW 13.34.100 Notes: Findings—2010 c 180\(2\)](#)

“The legislature recognizes that when children are provided attorneys in their dependency and termination proceedings, it is imperative to provide them with well-trained advocates so that their legal rights around health, safety, and well-being are protected. Attorneys, who have different skills and obligations than guardians ad litem and court-appointed special advocates, especially in forming a confidential and privileged relationship with a child, should be trained in meaningful and effective child advocacy, the child welfare system and services available to a child client, child and adolescent brain development, child and adolescent mental health, and the distinct legal rights of dependent youth, among other things. Well-trained attorneys can provide legal counsel to a child on issues such as placement options, visitation rights, educational rights, access to services while in care and services available to a child upon aging out of care. Well-trained attorneys for a child can:

- (a) **Ensure the child's voice is considered in judicial proceedings;**
- (b) Engage the child in his or her legal proceedings;

- (c) Explain to the child his or her legal rights;
- (d) Assist the child, through the attorney's counseling role, to consider the consequences of different decisions; and
- (e) Encourage accountability, when appropriate, among the different systems that provide services to children."

CORE RELATIONSHIPS

[RCW 13.34.025 Notes: Intent-2002 c 52](#)

"It is the intent of the legislature to recognize that those **sibling relationships** a child has are an integral aspect of the family unit, which should be nurtured. The legislature presumes that nurturing the existing sibling relationships is in the best interest of a child, in particular in those situations where a child cannot be with their parents, guardians, or legal custodians as a result of court intervention."

[RCW 13.34.060 Notes: Finding-1999 c 17](#)

"The legislature has found that any intervention into the life of a child is also an intervention in the life of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian, and that the **bond between child and parent** is a critical element of child development. The legislature now also finds that children who cannot be with their parents, guardians, or legal custodians are best cared for, whenever possible and appropriate by **family members with whom they have a relationship**. This is particularly important when a child cannot be in the care of a parent, guardian, or legal custodian as a result of a court intervention."

[RCW 13.34.130 Notes: Intent-2003 c 227](#)

"It is the intent of the legislature to recognize the importance of emotional ties formed by siblings with each other, especially in those circumstances which warrant court intervention into family relationships. It is the intent of the legislature to encourage the courts and public agencies which deal with families to acknowledge and give thoughtful consideration to the quality and nature of **sibling relationships** when intervening in family relationships. It is not the intent of the legislature to create legal obligations or responsibilities between siblings and other family members whether by blood or marriage, step families, foster families, or adopted families that do not already exist. Neither is it the intent of the legislature to mandate sibling placement, contact, or visitation if there is reasonable cause to believe that the health, safety, or welfare of a child or siblings would be jeopardized. Finally, it is not the intent of the legislature to manufacture or anticipate family relationships which do not exist at the time of the court intervention, or to disrupt already existing positive family relationships."

[RCW 13.34.136\(6\)](#)

In ordering a permanent plan, the court shall consider the child's relationships with the child's siblings...Whenever the permanency plan for a child is adoption, the court shall encourage the prospective adoptive parents, birth parents, foster parents, kinship caregivers, and the department or other agency to seriously consider **the long-term benefits to the child adoptee and his or her siblings of providing for and facilitating continuing postadoption contact between the siblings**. To the extent that it is feasible, and when it is in the best interests of the child adoptee and his or her siblings, contact between the siblings should be frequent and of a similar nature as that which existed prior to the adoption. If the child adoptee or his or her siblings are represented by an attorney or guardian ad litem in a proceeding under this chapter or in any other child custody proceeding, the court shall inquire of each attorney and guardian ad litem regarding the potential benefits of continuing contact between the siblings and the potential detriments of severing contact...

[RCW 13.34.145\(5\)\(b\)\(i\)](#)

In permanency planning, the court's assessment of whether a parent who is incarcerated maintains a meaningful role in the child's life may include consideration of the parent's efforts to communicate and work with the department or other individuals for the purpose of complying with the service plan and **repairing, maintaining, or building the parent-child relationship**

RCW 13.34.200(3)

An order terminating the parent-child relationship shall include a statement addressing the status of the child's **sibling relationships** and the nature and extent of sibling placement, contact, or visits.

FAMILY TIME

[RCW 13.34.025\(1\)\(a\)](#)

The Department must coordinate and integrate services to children and families, using service plans and activities that address the children's and families' multiple needs, **including ensuring that siblings have regular visits with each other**.

[RCW 13.34.060\(2\)](#)

The proposed placement must be **willing to facilitate the child's visitation with siblings**, if such visitation is part of the department's plan or is ordered by the court.

[RCW 13.34.065\(4\)\(k\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing the court shall examine the need for shelter care and inquire into the status of the case. The court is required to inquire into **terms and conditions for parental, sibling, and family visitation**.

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(c\)\(ii\)\(A\)\(III\)](#)

At the Shelter Care Hearing the Court shall inquire whether there are any relatives or other suitable persons who are willing to care for the child. This inquiry must include **whether any relative or other suitable person is willing to facilitate the child's sibling and parent visitation** if such visitation is ordered by the court.

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(i\)\(E\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing, if the court places into licensed foster care the petitioner shall report to the court **whether the location of the proposed foster care placement will impede visitation** with the child's parent or parents.

[RCW 13.34.065\(7\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#)

If the court previously ordered that visitation between a parent and child be supervised or monitored, there shall be a **presumption that such supervision or monitoring will no longer be necessary** following a continued shelter care order (30 days). To overcome this presumption, a party must provide a report to the court including evidence establishing that removing visit supervision or monitoring would create a risk to the child's safety, and the court shall make a determination as to whether visit supervision or monitoring must continue.

[RCW 13.34.065\(9\)\(a\)-\(e\)](#)

If a child is placed out of the home of a parent, guardian, or legal custodian following a shelter care hearing, the court shall order the petitioner to **provide regular visitation with the parent, guardian, or legal custodian, and siblings. Early, consistent, and frequent visitation is crucial for maintaining parent-child relationships and allowing family reunification.**

The court shall order a visitation plan individualized to the needs of the family with a **goal of providing the maximum parent, child, and sibling contact possible.**

Visitation under this subsection **shall not be limited as a sanction** for a parent's failure to comply with recommended services during shelter care. Visitation under this subsection **may only be limited where necessary to ensure the health, safety, or welfare of the child.**

The first visit must take place within 72 hours of the child being delivered into the custody of the department, unless the court finds that extraordinary circumstances require delay. If the first visit occurs in an in-person format, this first visit must be supervised unless the department determines that visit supervision is not necessary.

[RCW 13.34.130\(7\)\(a\)-\(b\)](#)

At disposition, if the court has ordered a child removed from his or her home, the court shall consider whether it is in a child's best interest to **be placed with, have contact with, or have visits with siblings.**

There shall be **a presumption that such placement, contact, or visits are in the best interests of the child** provided that:

1. The court has jurisdiction over all siblings subject to the order of placement, contact, or visitation pursuant to petitions filed under this chapter or the parents of a child for whom there is no jurisdiction are willing to agree; and
2. There is no reasonable cause to believe that the health, safety, or welfare of any child subject to the order of placement, contact, or visitation would be jeopardized or that efforts to reunite the parent and child would be hindered by such placement, contact, or visitation. In no event shall parental visitation time be reduced in order to provide sibling visitation.

(b) The court may also order placement, contact, or **visitation of a child with a stepbrother or stepsister...**

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(i\)\(A\)](#)

If the parent is incarcerated, the [permanency] plan must address how the parent will participate in the case conference and permanency planning meetings and, where possible, must include treatment that reflects the resources available at the facility where the parent is confined. The plan **must provide for visitation opportunities**, unless visitation is not in the best interests of the child.

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(ii\)\(A\)](#)

Visitation is the right of the family, including the child and the parent, in cases in which visitation is in the best interest of the child. **Early, consistent, and frequent visitation** is crucial for maintaining parent-child relationships and making it possible for parents and children to safely reunify. The department shall **encourage the maximum parent and child and sibling contact possible**, when it is in the best interest of the child, including **regular visitation and participation by the parents in the care of the child while the child is in placement**.

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(ii\)\(B\)](#)

Visitation **shall not be limited as a sanction** for a parent's failure to comply with court orders or services where the health, safety, or welfare of the child is not at risk as a result of the visitation.

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(ii\)\(C\)](#)

Visitation may be limited or denied only if the court determines that such limitation or denial is necessary to protect the child's health, safety, or welfare. Visitation must occur in the least restrictive setting and be unsupervised unless the presence of threats or danger to the child requires the constant presence of an adult to ensure the safety of the child...

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(ii\)\(D\)](#)

The court and the department should rely upon **community resources, relatives, foster parents, and other appropriate persons to provide transportation and supervision for visitation** to the extent that such resources are available, and appropriate, and the child's safety would not be compromised.

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(ii\)\(E\)](#)

If the court previously ordered that visitation between a parent and child be supervised or monitored, there shall be a **presumption that such supervision or monitoring will no longer be necessary when the permanency plan is entered**. To overcome this presumption, a party must provide a report to the court including evidence establishing that removing visit supervision or monitoring would create a risk to the child's safety, and the court shall make a determination as to whether visit supervision or monitoring must continue.

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(ii\)\(F\)](#)

[F]ailure to provide court-ordered visitation may result in a finding that the petitioner failed to make reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan. The lack of sufficient contracted visitation providers will not excuse the failure to provide court-ordered visitation.

[RCW 13.34.136\(b\)\(iii\)\(A\)](#)

The department, court, or caregiver in the out-of-home placement may **not limit visitation or contact between a child and sibling as a sanction for a child's behavior or as an incentive** to the child to change his or her behavior

[RCW 13.34.136 Notes: Intent—2013 c 316](#)

"The Washington state legislature recognizes the importance of frequent and meaningful contact for siblings separated due to involvement in the foster care system. The legislature also recognizes that children and youth in foster care have not always been provided adequate opportunities for visitation with their siblings. It is the intent of the legislature to encourage appropriate facilitation of sibling visits."

PLACEMENT STABILITY

[RCW 13.34.065\(4\)\(e\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing, the court must inquire into whether the placement proposed by the department is the **least disruptive and most family-like setting** that meets the needs of the child;

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(c\)\(i\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing, if the court does not release the child to his or her parent, the court shall order **placement with a relative or other suitable person**, unless the petitioner establishes that there is reasonable cause to believe that...

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(j\)\(i\)](#)

If the court places the child in licensed foster care at the shelter care hearing, the petitioner shall report to the court, at the shelter care hearing, **the location of the licensed foster placement** the petitioner has identified for the child and the court shall inquire as to whether:

- (A) The identified placement is the **least restrictive placement necessary** to meet the needs of the child;
- (B) The child will be able **to remain in the same school** and whether any orders of the court are necessary to ensure educational stability for the child;
- (C) The child will be **placed with a sibling or siblings**, and whether court-ordered sibling contact would promote the well-being of the child;
- (D) The licensed foster placement is able to meet the **special needs** of the child;
- (E) The location of the proposed foster placement will **impede visitation** with the child's parent or parents;

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(j\)\(ii\)](#)

The court may order the department to:

- (A) Place the child in a less restrictive placement;
- (B) Place the child in a location in closer proximity to the child's parent, home, or school;
- (C) Place the child with the child's sibling or siblings;
- (D) Take any other necessary steps to ensure the child's health, safety, and well-being;

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(j\)\(iii\)\(B\)](#)

Placement moves while a child is in shelter care will be considered when determining whether **reasonable efforts** have been made by the department.

[RCW 13.34.065\(7\)\(a\)\(i\)](#)

No child may be placed in shelter care for longer than **thirty days** without an order, signed by the judge, authorizing continued shelter care.

[RCW 13.34.090 Notes: Findings—Intent—2021 c 210\(2\)](#)

“The legislature further recognizes that **appointing attorneys to provide standards-based legal representation** for children and youth in dependency proceedings has been shown to result in more timely permanency for children and youth, increased school and **placement stability**, and increased contact with parents and siblings.”

[RCW 13.34.100 Notes: Findings—2010 c 180\(2\)](#)

“Well-trained attorneys can provide legal counsel to a child on issues such as **placement options**, visitation rights, educational rights, access to services while in care and services available to a child upon aging out of care.”

[RCW 13.34.130\(3\)](#)

At disposition, the court shall consider the **child's existing relationships and attachments** when determining placement.

[RCW 13.34.130\(6\)](#)

Placement of the child with a **relative or other suitable person shall be given preference** by the court.

[RCW 13.34.136\(2\)\(b\)\(iv\)](#)

A child shall be **placed as close to the child's home as possible, preferably in the child's own neighborhood**, unless the court finds that placement at a greater distance is necessary to promote the child's or parents' well-being.

[RCW 13.34.145\(1\)\(b\)](#)

Every effort shall be made to **provide stability in long-term placement, and to avoid disruption of placement**, unless the child is being returned home or it is in the best interest of the child.

[RCW 13.34.145\(7\)\(b\)](#)

No child who is placed with a **relative or other suitable person may be moved**, unless, the court finds that a change in circumstances necessitates a change in placement.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

[RCW 13.34.030 Notes: Findings—2013 c 182](#)

"The legislature believes that youth residing in foster care are capable of achieving success in school with appropriate support. Youth residing in foster care in Washington state lag behind their nonfoster youth peers in educational outcomes. Reasonable efforts by the department of social and health services to monitor educational outcomes and encourage academic achievement for youth in out-of-home care should be a responsibility of the child welfare system. When a youth is removed from his or her school district, it is the expectation of the legislature that the department of social and health services recognizes [recognize] the impact this move may have on a youth's academic success and provide the youth with necessary supports to be successful in school. The legislature believes that active oversight and advocacy by an educational liaison and collaborations will encourage youth to reach their fullest academic potential."

[RCW 13.34.045\(1\)](#)

The department must identify an **educational liaison for youth in grades six through twelve**.

[RCW 13.34.045\(2\)](#)

If a child is placed in the custody of the department at the shelter care hearing, the department shall recommend the identified **educational liaison at the shelter care hearing and all subsequent review hearings** for the given case. The purpose of identifying the educational liaison at each hearing during the dependency case is to determine if the identified educational liaison remains appropriate for the case as youth change placements.

[RCW 13.34.045\(3\)](#)

It is **presumed that the educational liaison is the youth's parent**. If a youth's parent is not able to serve as the educational liaison, the department must identify another person to act as the educational liaison. It is preferred that the educational liaison be known to the youth and be a relative, other suitable, or the youth's foster parent. Birth parents with a primary plan of family reunification may serve as the educational liaison. The identified educational liaison should be a person committed to providing enduring educational support to the youth. If the department is not able to identify an adult with an existing relationship to the youth who is able to serve as the educational liaison, the court may appoint another adult

as the educational liaison, such as the court-appointed special advocate if applicable, but may not appoint the youth's caseworker. In the event that any party disagrees with the department's recommendation, the court shall determine who will serve as the educational liaison based on who is most appropriate and available to act in the youth's educational interest.

RCW 13.34.046(1)

Unless otherwise directed by the court, the responsibilities of the educational liaison for a youth subject to a proceeding under this chapter include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) To attend educational meetings and dependency hearings;
- (b) To meet with local school personnel at regular intervals regarding the youth's educational performance and academic needs;
- (c) To seek to understand the youth's academic strengths, areas of concern, and future life goals;
- (d) To advocate for necessary educational services;
- (e) To join in decision-making processes regarding appropriate school placements, school coursework, personal future, and educational planning;
- (f) To explore opportunities and barriers for youth to participate in extracurricular activities;
- (g) To involve youth in educational decisions as developmentally appropriate;
- (h) To keep all information regarding the youth confidential except as required pursuant to lawful order of a court; and
- (i) To provide a written or verbal report to the court during each dependency hearing. The report must include information about the youth's educational progress, experience in school, and the educational liaison's and youth's recommendations regarding needed services in school or the community.

RCW 13.34.046(2)-(5)

- (2) The educational liaison may serve as the surrogate parent or educational representative under federal law.
- (3) The educational liaison may have access to all educational records pertaining to the youth involved in the case, without the consent of a parent or guardian of the child, or if the child is under thirteen years of age.
- (4) The educational liaison is a volunteer and not compensated for services.
- (5) The educational liaison must complete background checks as required by the department.

[RCW 13.34.065\(4\)\(f\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing, the court must inquire into whether it is in the best interest of the child to remain enrolled in the school, developmental program, or child care the child was in prior to placement and what efforts have been made to maintain the child in the school, program, or child care if it would be in the best interest of the child **to remain in the same school, program, or child care;**

[RCW 13.34.065\(5\)\(i\)\(B\)](#)

At the shelter care hearing, if the court places the child in foster care it must inquire into whether the child will be able to remain in the same school and whether any orders of the court are necessary to ensure **educational stability** for the child;

[RCW 13.34.130\(8\)](#)

If the court has ordered a child removed from his or her home and placed into licensed foster care, the court shall order a placement that **allows the child to remain in the same school** he or she attended prior to the initiation of the dependency proceeding when such a placement is practical and in the child's best interest.

[RCW 13.34.136\(2\)\(b\)\(vi\)](#)

Unless it is not in the best interests of the child, whenever practical, the plan should ensure the **child remains enrolled in the school** the child was attending at the time the child entered foster care.