

New Jersey Qualitative Review

The Qualitative Review (QR) process assesses system performance and identifies strengths and areas for improvements to support positive outcomes for children and families. The QR is managed through Office of Quality (OQ) within the Office of Performance Management and Accountability (OPMA). QRs are conducted in sixteen (16) out of New Jersey's twenty-one (21) counties annually.

Sample: Each review has a random sample of 12 children; 8 of whom are in out of home placement settings and 4 of whom receive services while remaining in their own homes.

Evaluation Instrument: The QR examines the status of the child and family in several important areas of life, e.g. safety, stability, health, and family resourcefulness. Key practice performance areas, e.g. engagement, family teamwork, functional assessment, service effectiveness are also examined.

Method: Reviewer teams review select documents in the case record as well as interview parents, child, caseworker, and others who are important to the family, e.g. schools, service providers, and other caregivers. Reviewers assign a 'score' for each indicator based guidance provided in the QR protocol.

Review Team: Each QR Review Team 15 individuals: The Local Site Coordinator (LSC) who prepares the county and cases for review; the Team Lead and Co-Lead, who manage the review process; and 12 Reviewers who are teamed in pairs, with each pair evaluating two cases over the course of the week. Reviewers are experienced staff at the administrative level at participate in three reviews annually.

Team Selection and Preparation: Review Team members include staff from across the Department of Children and Families (DCF) as well as stakeholders from the community. Reviewers participate in at least three reviews per year in order to continually build their skills. Experienced reviewers will be paired with newer reviewers to build capacity. Reviewers do not participate in QRs in Areas in which they work.

Review Prep: Prior to the review week, staff validate the sample, obtain family agreements to participate, create the master schedule of interviews, and secure team space to operate. Reviewers also participate in a conference call prior to the review so logistical information can be shared and questions answered.

Review Week: The review lasts an entire week with opportunities for team debriefing of each case reviewed, as well as an exit conference on Friday where all the results are shared in real time.

Reporting: Final Reports are issued by OQ which outline key themes from the review, and noting the specific strengths, and areas needing improvement that were identified in the review process. All data is maintained by the OQ and submitted as part of New Jersey's Child and Family Services Review, Program Improvement Plan and the Modified Settlement Agreement.

Follow-up: After the review, an improvement plan to address areas needing improvement, and building on strengths, is developed locally for each county and subsequently tracked for implementation.

New Jersey Qualitative Review Process

Summary of Protocol Indicators

Child and Family Domain

Safety of the Child: Is the child protected and safe from abuse, neglect, and exploitation? Is the child free from unreasonable intimidations and fears at home and at school? Is the child free from risk of harm and does he/she avoid high-risk behaviors?

Stability: In-home, in the community and at school. Does the child enjoy positive and enduring relationships with parents/caregivers/teachers/counselors? Are the child's daily living and learning arrangements stable and free from disruption? Are the appropriate services being provided to achieve stability and reduce the probability of disruption?

Living Arrangement: Is the child in the most appropriate placement consistent with the child's needs, age, ability, and peer group and consistent with the child's language and culture?

Family Functioning and Resourcefulness: Is the family, with whom the child is currently residing, empowered and do they have the capacity to take charge of their situation to live together safely and function successfully? Do they strive toward independence and find ways to meet their own needs? Are professional interventions limited? Is there a sustained pattern of successful family functioning?

Progress toward Permanency: Does the child's living arrangement with caregivers lean toward a result of a lifelong commitment? Are relationships enduring and do they provide a sense of family, stability, and belonging? Do the caregivers provide continuous supportive relationships with a level of commitment and affection? Is preparation for adoption or guardianship timely?

Physical Health of the Child: Is the child in good health and are the basic physical health needs met? Are proper hygiene, dental checkups, medical checkups and immunizations being maintained as part of the full physical health?

Emotional/Behavioral Well-Being: Both in-home and at school. Does the child's emotional development seem age appropriate? Does the youth have a sense of self and a feeling a personal worth? Is the child able to accept affection and friendship? Is the child able to recover quickly from upset and frustration? Does the caregiver have the capacity to handle challenges with the child's emotional well-being?

Learning & Development: Is the child's learning appropriate for their age group? Is the child attending school regularly (age appropriate)? Are they meeting the standards for grade level promotions? Are developmental milestones met and the child progressing as he/she should? Are there any identified developmental delays with the child?

Practice Performance Domain

Engagement of the Child & Family: Are strategies for engagement of the family (parents, grandparents, step parents, or substitute caregivers) evidenced and effective? Are special accommodations made for the child/family when needed? Are the child and family active in participating in decisions made about their life? Are collaborative and open trust based relationships being developed?

Family Teamwork: Team Formation: Do the appropriate formal and informal supports for this child/family form a working team that meets and plans together? **Team Functioning:** Does the team work as a unified team with full collaborative problem solving that benefits the child and family?

Functional Assessment & Understanding: Is there an understanding of the child/family strengths, needs, risks? Do all interveners collectively have a “big picture” understanding of the child and family and how to provide effective services for them? Do assessments both formal and informal cover safety, stability, permanency and well-being of the child? Have the caregiver’s strengths and needs been assessed?

Case Planning Process: Does the child/family’s individualized plan reflect the family’s needs, strengths and goals? Does the plan unify the efforts of cross-agency interveners into a coherent uniquely matched set of purposes/processes?

Plan Implementation: Is the plan being implemented as intended? Is the delivery of services being arranged in a timely way? Are necessary supports, services, and resources available to the child and family to meet the needs identified in the plan?

Tracking and Adjusting: Is there proper follow-up to the plan once implemented? Are services modified with the changing needs of the child/family? Are strategies followed for their effectiveness? Is the plan updated to change the strategies when necessary?

Provision of Health Care Services: Is health care for the child enabling him/her to achieve the best attainable health status? Are the child’s care needs being met; with special care requirements in mind? Are the caregivers and professional interveners bearing responsibility for ensuring health care services are provided?

Resource Availability: Is an adequate array of support services available to the child/family? Are these services provided in a setting conducive to the family’s needs? Was the family involved in selecting the necessary support services? Are these supports accommodating to the cultural needs of the family?

Family & Community Connections: To what degree are family and community connections encouraged/maintained? Are significant others to the child able to keep-in-touch frequently? Is quality time available to advance/maintain relationships? If parents are incarcerated or otherwise unavailable; are there efforts to maintain relationships?

Family Supports: Are the parents/resource caregivers provided with supports and resources needed to effectively provide care? Is there an active effort by service providers to encourage, acquire, and maintain supportive connections, both formal and informal? Is there an effort to prepare the child/family for eventual separation from the child welfare system?

Long-term View: Is there an explicit plan for this child/family to safely live independent from the child welfare system? The long-term view answers the question: Where is this case headed and why? Are there specific steps to be taken that lead to success? Does the caseworker envision the plan as successful?

Transitions & Life Adjustments: Are transitions being planned for properly? Are there stages to timely transition to allow for smooth adjustment? Is problem solving assistance available to the family? Is there follow-along monitoring? Was the child/family involved in “teaming” activities to talk about transition plans?