

NEW YORK STATE UNIFIED COURT SYSTEM
CHILD WELFARE COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Enhancing The Quality of Permanency Hearings in New York State: Reports and Resources

New York's Child Welfare Court Improvement Program (CIP) began efforts to enhance the quality of permanency hearings in 2012. This project began after the child welfare court data metrics revealed that while permanency hearings are held timely throughout the state, achievement of timely permanency fell below the federal benchmarks set in round two of the Federal Child and Family Services Review. This information led to efforts to leverage existing resources to examine a complex issue and resulted in findings and suggestions for enhancement of current practice. The first step in the project included gathering information through a series of focus groups and surveys on the permanency hearing process and current practice to inform a plan for more robust collection of data. From this, structured court observation and case file review instruments were created and piloted in 12 jurisdictions around the state of varied geography and demographics. The data gathered from each site were analyzed and reported back to the site as part of an action planning meeting to assist in identifying bright spots, areas for improvement and any potential changes to practice. These efforts have resulted in two reports meant to help sites in New York to better understand the current state of practice and identify how enhancing practice might lead to improved outcomes for children and families. Additionally, two resources were developed to help sites think through and implement a process to examine their own practice and make meaningful change and consistently hold high-quality permanency hearings.

Reports

Two reports were issued as part of the effort to enhance the quality of permanency hearings in New York. The reports, described below, provide an overview of the findings from the data collected from the 12 pilot sites. They describe the process of data collection and analyze and explore statewide trends of current practice related to hearing quality and the resultant outcomes.



New York Quality Permanency Hearings: Statewide Findings Report

Data from all 12 jurisdictions were compiled into one report to illustrate statewide trends on hearing quality. This report provides an overview of "statewide" practice including data from the five boroughs in

New York City and seven other sites around the state. The *Statewide Findings* report illustrates trends in practice, describing both what statewide practice looks like, as well as how much variation there is between sites on hearing quality indicators such as presence and engagement of parents and youth, discussion of key topics, and findings on the record. **Review this report if you are interested in learning about statewide trends in permanency hearings.**

Sample of Findings:

- The average time to disposition in cases was 222 days, with 32% of dispositions occurring after the first permanency hearing.
- In 91% of hearings observed, jurists spoke directly to the mother.



Examining The Relationship Between Hearing Quality & Case Outcomes in New York

This report compares hearing quality case file review and court observation data collected from each of the 12 sites with child welfare court data metrics data for each site. It explores the relationship between hearing quality variables of interest (e.g., presence and engagement of parties, topics discussed, findings on the record) with outcomes of interest such as time to permanency, reunification, and children still in care after 24 months. Results indicate statistically significant associations between hearing quality indicators and case outcomes. **Review this report if you want to learn more about how hearing quality is related to case outcomes.**

Sample of Findings:

- Every additional jurist on the case increased the time to permanency by 162 days
- Discussion of key items at hearings was related to timely permanency.

Resources

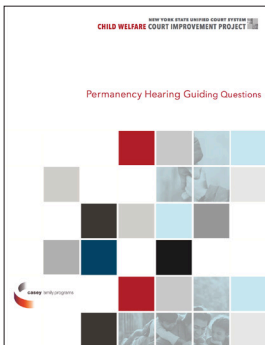
Two resources have been created to help the family courts explore and enhance the quality of their permanency hearings. The first resource is a Toolkit designed to help courts think through how to measure their own hearing quality performance. The second is a Guiding Questions document for family courts who want to enhance their practice, by using a structured set of inquiries to support consistent administration of high-quality permanency hearings.



Assessing Quality of Permanency Hearings: Toolkit

The *Assessing Quality of Permanency Hearings Toolkit* provides an overview of the current hearing quality work in New York and identifies concrete steps to expand this work into more jurisdictions. The Toolkit is predicated upon the necessity of at least one person within the court system who is interested in enhancing the quality of permanency hearings and case outcomes. While a multidisciplinary group would be ideal to conquer this complex issue, individual judges, or court teams could also do this work. Once an individual or team has determined that quality hearings is an important issue in their jurisdiction, this Toolkit provides concrete steps (identified in depth within the document) to assess current practice and make positive systems change. The Toolkit includes multiple tools and methods to

measure performance, ideas for data analysis and reporting, and thoughts on where to focus efforts. It allows for the scope of exploration to be limited or expansive. **Explore this Toolkit if you would like to learn more about how to measure hearing quality in your jurisdiction, including concrete actions and tools to measure performance.**



Permanency Hearing Guiding Questions

The *Permanency Hearing Guiding Questions* document is meant to serve as guidance for courts and practitioners interested in enhancing the quality of their permanency hearings through the use of a series of structured questions that are relevant to individual cases. Drawing from New York statutory requirements and best practices, the document includes a set of questions developed to guide judges, judicial officers and practitioners alike. The questions are designed to maintain a sense of urgency in moving the child towards achieving permanency while at the same time examine whether the needs of the child, and of the family, are being met in a way that will promote permanency. The Guiding Questions are also meant to give greater consistency to the process so that everyone knows what to expect at each

and every permanency hearing and so that all relevant topics are discussed. The goal in developing these questions is that every hearing will be substantive as well as efficient. The questions are organized in a format that includes sections applicable to all permanency hearings and sections that relate to specific permanency goals. This document provides complete hearing guidance, including opening statements and questions, specific goal questions, common issue questions, and closing statements and questions. **Dig deeper into this document if you want to consider implementation of consistent, thorough permanency hearings in your jurisdiction.**

For more information or to request that CIP provide you with technical assistance regarding any of these reports or resources please contact: Christine S. Kiesel, Esq., Coordinator of the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project at ckiesel@nycourts.gov

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