

Implementing the Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education Project Guidebook



*New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities
New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education*

This Quality Indicator Manual developed by NJCIE is based on work supported by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities under contract # 12MZ0R.

Special thanks to Karen Melzer, MA, MED, Year 1 Project Coordinator and to the Year 1 Work Group.

Contact Information:

Paula S. Lieb, Esq.
President & CEO
New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive
Education
9 Auer Court, Suite H
East Brunswick, NJ 08816
(P) 732-613-0400
(F) 732-390-3319
paulaslieb@comcast.net

Orah Raia, M.A.T.
Coordinator, Research & Development
20 East Drive
Edison, NJ 08820
Home: (732) 428-7518
orahraia@gmail.com

This guide was created with material from the following resources:

Institute on Disability (2009). *Brief highlights of research on inclusive education*. Presented as the Inclusive Education Leadership Summit. April 10, 2009. Durham, NH: Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire.

Mollenhauer, L. (2003). *An Inclusive School Culture*. Ontario Community Inclusion Project of Community Living, Ontario.

Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education.

The indicators of program quality resource guide. (1993). Center on Education and Training for Employment, The College of Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Guide for Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education

Introduction

Quality Indicators are statements of specific practices that have been documented through research and/or school-based experiences to promote the creation of inclusive learning communities where all students can be successful. The Quality Indicators listed in this Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education Manual (Manual) have been identified through an extensive review of research literature and examination of similar documents developed by eight states that have successfully used Quality Indicators to advance inclusive education practices in their schools. Input on the New Jersey Indicators was obtained from administrators and teachers across the state and piloted in schools in five New Jersey districts. The final Manual is made up of this Guide, the Quality Indicators Instrument, i.e., 90 Quality Indicators with a rating scale and over 100 clarifying examples from New Jersey schools; and an Appendix.

This Quality Indicators Guide can be used as:

- 1) a rating scale with which districts/schools can assess their current status implementing inclusive education practices;
- 2) to initiate discussions among school personnel to identify priorities for school improvement;
- 3) a framework to guide programming;
- 4) a planning process to delineate and evaluate progress toward achieving specific goals to expand inclusive education. The categories of Quality Indicators are divided into eleven areas. Each area is dependent upon the strength of the other. The categories are all equally important because no one factor in isolation can bring about an inclusive school culture (Mollenhauer, 2003).

Quality Indicators: Eleven Areas of Practice

1. Leadership
2. School Climate
3. Scheduling and Participation
4. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
5. Program Planning and Development
6. Program Implementation and Assessment
7. Individual Student Supports
8. Family-School Partnerships
9. Collaborative Planning and Teaching
10. Professional Development
11. Planning for Continued Best Practice Improvement

Several key changes were made in the Quality Indicators Instrument and Guide as a result of the pilot schools' experiences. The number of Indicators was reduced, terminology simplified, and examples from New Jersey school districts added. In addition, it was found to be considerably more effective to disseminate the Quality Indicators in a forum that will allow proper time and guidance for staff to give thoughtful consideration to each Indicator. Specific suggestions to guide a team in facilitating the completion of the Quality Indicators are provided later in this Guide. One pilot school developed a short PowerPoint presentation to highlight the reasons for obtaining input from stakeholders via the Quality Indicators. A sample PowerPoint presentation has been provided in the Appendix with information regarding the status of inclusive education in New Jersey to help the stakeholders gain perspective on the task.

Purpose of the Quality Indicator Manual:

Quality Indicators are most effectively used in conjunction with a self-assessment process that helps to measure current levels of implementation and guide action planning toward targeted practices. Quality Indicators can be used by school districts and school buildings to assess the current status of inclusive education practices; identify areas of programmatic strength as well as areas in which further development is needed; and generate a strategic school improvement plan for inclusive education. This

Manual is designed to be a technical assistance tool – not a monitoring device. However, districts that have participated in the New Jersey Department of Education monitoring process and found that ensuring least restrictive environment (LRE) is an area requiring attention, will find this tool to be helpful in addressing the varied needs of all students within their schools.

This Manual is designed to be a catalyst for change and can be used in a number of different ways, as:

- An educational opportunity to learn about the key indicators needed to have an inclusive culture and the factors that contribute to them;
- A qualitative self-assessment of a school staff's attitudes, practices, policies and procedures around inclusion;
- A reflective process to examine and challenge underlying assumptions, beliefs and values that influence behavior;
- A resource in action planning toward school improvement plans (Mollenhauer, 2003).

The process of self-assessment should, as a matter of course, generate management information about the overall quality, which, in turn, can then be used to develop goals, objectives and a set of targeted actions to drive improvement in inclusive practices.

Overview of the Steps in the Process

- 1) Get Organized
- 2) Have Stakeholders Complete the Quality Indicators Instrument
- 3) Summarize and Highlight Priority Areas
- 4) Identify Goals and Objectives
- 5) Develop an Action Plan for School Change

Who Should Manage the Process?

First, identify a Quality Indicators Key Team (Key Team) to be the primary group of people who are overseeing the process. They coordinate all of the steps listed above. A Key Team is generally made up of eight to ten people led by an administrator (e.g., principal, Assistant Superintendent, Director or Supervisor of Special Education) and is representative of the stakeholders who will complete the Quality Indicators Instrument, e.g., general and special education teacher(s), a parent, and others. If building-based, the team should include the principal. The key tasks involved in managing the process include:

- Identifying stakeholders groups to fill out the Quality Indicators Instrument
- Assigning one or more Key Team members to oversee each stakeholder group in their completion of the Instrument
- Facilitating the actual completion of the Quality Indicators Instrument and clarifying any Indicators which are confusing to those filling them out
- Tallying and summarizing the results
- Meeting together to developing an action plan based on the results.

The Quality Indicator Planning Form (in the Appendix) can help with these steps.

Detailed Description of the Process

1) Get Organized:

Clarify the purpose

It is important for the Key Team leader and members to be clear about what is to be accomplished. The overall purpose might be described as 'enhancing and improving the practices in the school culture so that it is more inclusive and supports the achievement of all students.'

Articulate the principles and values

Be ready to clarify the objectives of this process. Examples can include:

- To focus on the present and future and not get bogged down in the past
- To provide opportunities for stakeholders to raise, debate, clarify and resolve issues related to inclusion so they have some ownership with the change process
- To ensure a manageable action plan
- To involve stakeholders with their points of view and include those who feel a part of the school as well as those may who feel excluded (Mollenhauer, 2003).

Determine who will participate:

It's important to have a broad range of people with diverse perspectives involved in the process. As many stakeholders as possible, i.e., those people who can influence and/or are affected by inclusion in the school, should complete the Quality Indicators Instrument. Stakeholders may include:

- Administrators: principals, vice-principals, guidance people, department heads, supervisors, etc.
- Teachers: general education, special education, ESL, specials teachers, etc.
- Paraprofessionals, teacher assistants, etc.
- Related services professionals
- Child study team members
- Support staff: office support, custodians, cafeteria staff, etc.
- Students
- Parents/Guardians

Who are the facilitators and what is their role?

The facilitator(s) are member(s) of the Key Team or individuals trained by them. Their primary role is to introduce and oversee the completion of the Quality

Indicators Instrument; to clarify individual Indicators, answer any questions, ensure that everyone participates, and keep people on track and on schedule.

The Key Team will design the process and develop a work plan

The pilot schools found that having stakeholders complete the Indicators in groups, rather than distributing and having them returned individually (e.g., placing in mailboxes), was an excellent way to stimulate discussion about inclusion and best practice. The following are things to consider as you design your process for distributing/having stakeholders complete the Quality Indicators Instrument:

- What stakeholders will participate?
- Who will coordinate the invitation to stakeholders?
- Who will copy the Quality Indicators Instrument?
- Will the stakeholders be meeting as large or small groups? Where can the various groups meet?
- Should the Quality Indicators Instrument be completed during or after school? What are the implications for attendance?
- How will we recruit facilitators if more are needed? What preparation, if any, will they need?
- What resources, if any, are required to complete the process and where will we get the resources?
- How will the results of the Quality Indicators Instrument be tallied and summarized?
- How can we ensure confidentiality for stakeholders completing the Quality Indicators Instrument?
- What is the best way to review the summaries, set goals and develop an action plan?
- How will we communicate the purpose and results of the process to stakeholders? (Mollenhauer, 2003).

2) Have Stakeholders Complete the Quality Indicators Instrument

There are 11 Quality Indicator categories (i.e. the 11 areas identified on page 1 of this Guide) and four ratings next to each Indicator reflecting the status of its implementation, ranging from *fully* to *not yet implemented*. Each individual stakeholder will be given a Quality Indicators Instrument to review and rate each Indicator. All stakeholders may,

or may not complete the Indicators in all 11 areas; this is up to the Key Team. If it is determined that, due to time constraints or other reasons not all participants can complete the Indicators in all 11 areas, stakeholders should at least complete any categories which the Key Team determine directly relate to their area of skill and responsibility in the school. More specific guidelines for facilitating completion of the Quality Indicators are provided below.

3) Summarize and Highlight Priority areas

Next, compile a summary of the ratings assigned to the Quality Indicators. The key tasks are to:

- Count the number of ratings to each statement, for each category.
- Add the columns for a total number of ratings to each statement. A Summary Sheet is available in the Appendix to post all of the totals for each Quality Indicator.
- Calculate the percentage of responses for each statement. The amount of detailed breakdown of the totals is up to the individual schools, e.g., a school may want to get a total of the amount of general education teachers who checked indicators number 1 as partially implemented, versus special education teachers.

4) Identify Goals and Objectives:

The purpose of this step is to identify manageable and specific goals and objectives based upon the stakeholders' input. It is critical that key stakeholders have a role in this step as experience has shown their participation will result in their having a vested interest and greater commitment towards accomplishing the goals.

In developing the goals and objectives, keep in mind that goals are more general and can be derived from the 11 areas of practice. The objectives are steps to the goal, are measurable and prioritized based on the results of the Quality Indicator Summaries. For example, the Quality Indicator category #10 reveals that the IEPs for students with challenging behaviors generally do not include positive behavioral support strategies. In this example, the goal will be to improve supports to individual students and the objective may be to decrease the number of students who face disciplinary action by 10% in Year 1. An example of an action could be to provide

training and support to teachers on positive behavior supports. A second action may be to train CST staff on how to develop a functional behavioral assessment. It is very important for the objective to be written in a manner that is clear, observable and measurable so that stakeholders will know if and when the objective has been achieved.

5) Develop an Action Plan:

The purpose of developing an action plan is to ensure that steps are being taken to strengthen the inclusive school culture. The Key Team is responsible for developing the action plan, expanding the Team to include individuals needed to move the effort forward. The plan should include: the prioritized goals and objectives; actions/resources; timelines (by when); assigned responsibilities (by whom); and, status of progress (there is an Action Planning Form in the Appendix of this guide, along with an example). In addition to the goals and objectives, discussions should include what is feasible within one school year, or what may be targeted as Year 2 or Year 3 goals.

Directions for Facilitators: Stakeholder Completion of the Quality Indicators Instrument

Welcome Participants

Ask people to introduce themselves if they do not know each other.

Introduce the Purpose of the Session

Explain that the purpose of the session is to get a present read on inclusive practices in the school. Tell them the summary of all the ratings will allow the school to highlight what they are doing well and make improvements in the other areas.

Take a minute to discuss what is meant by inclusion, (e.g., students with disabilities attend general education classrooms with the appropriate supplemental aides and services). Highlight the information regarding the state's present status, the benefits and the need to provide more effective inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities in the public schools (information pertaining to this is included in the Appendix). A summary of the research put together by the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire is also attached. In addition, it is important to identify specific reasons your particular school is using this Manual and what you hope to achieve. If time allows, you can show them a short Powerpoint presentation to highlight this information. (A sample Powerpoint is provided for you in the Appendix.)

Take the time to point out that:

- The Quality Indicators will draw out discussion about areas in which the school is inclusive as well as identify practices that can be improved. Participants shouldn't feel that this is a test at which they can fail. The school will have areas to celebrate and areas which need to be addressed.
- The Quality Indicator statements that participants will be asked to reflect on and rate describe effective practices and no school will be equally strong in all the areas.
- The summaries generated by completing the Quality Indicators will not be a perfectly accurate reflection of the school culture. It is intended to be a snapshot as well as provide an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon the school's culture

(Mollenhauer, 2003).

Participants are now ready to complete the Quality Indicators Instrument. The following describes the steps the facilitator needs to take to move participants through the Quality Indicators Instrument.

Provide an Overview

Explain that there are 11 sections beginning with *Leadership*. (Note: let participants know that some of the questions may not pertain to their roles. Ask them to be patient through those sections.)

Describe the Steps in Detail

The facilitator will explain:

Each section has specific indicators that pertain to that area of practice. For example, in the *Leadership* category, the first indicator states: “The district’s mission statement reflects the philosophy that ALL children can achieve.” If a participant is unsure of what that Quality Indicator means, the facilitator can give an additional example to the one(s) provided. If it is still unclear, the facilitator should direct the participant(s) to place a question mark (?) next to that Indicator number to indicate that they are unsure of its meaning.

Status of Implementation column:

Participants are asked to check off ONE box regarding the status of implementation in the school for each Quality Indicator. Explain what each rating means and post the explanation of the ratings so that people can check them if needed. The choices are:

- **Fully** - there is much evidence that the statement is true; it would be difficult to find ways to improve
- **Substantially** - there is much evidence that the statement is true, but there are a few practices that could be strengthened
- **Partially** - some evidence can be given that the statement is true, but there are a number of practices needing improvement or opportunities for strengthening
- **Not yet** - there is very little or no evidence that the practice presently exists.

What if an Indicator does not apply to that person's scope of knowledge?

If the participant feels that he/she is not in a position to rate the implementation of an Indicator, then direct them to draw a line across that specific or group of indicators to indicate their lack of knowledge in this area.

Completed by:

Participants will be asked to check off the description that best fits them, please ask them to check it off on the first page of the Quality Indicator Instrument they fill out.

Start the Process

Participants are now ready to rate the Quality Indicators Instrument. Even if completed in a group setting, each person should fill out his or her own individual form.

Wrap Up the Session

At the completion of the process be sure to collect all the Quality Indicator Instruments and give them to the person responsible for tallying the results.

Describe the next steps to participants. For example, 'summaries will be generated by the Team from the information collected and used to prioritize goals for an action plan.' Indicate that people will have an opportunity to review the summaries and will be kept in the loop as the process unfolds. Thank the participants for their time and careful consideration in taking part in this important process to improve their school's inclusive practices.

Congratulations on taking the first steps toward change.