

County Office Quality Assurance Review

Millbrook County Office, Child Welfare Services

Period under review	April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026
Onsite review	May 11 to 15, 2026
Report issued	July 2026
Program improvement plan due	September 30, 2026

60

cases reviewed: 30 foster care, 18 in-home services, and 12 investigations

170

case-related interviews with workers, supervisors, parents, youth, and caregivers

6 of 25

review items met the 90 percent performance standard

77%

of all applicable item ratings were rated Strength

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Sample data. All names, organizations, and figures are fictional. This report is a portfolio sample that shows the structure and language of a state quality assurance review of a county office. It does not describe any real agency, county, child, or family.

Summary

The Quality Assurance Unit reviewed 60 child welfare cases from the Millbrook County office during the week of May 11, 2026. The review looked at practice during the twelve months from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, and used the state's 25-item case review instrument, case record reviews, and interviews with the people involved in each case.

Millbrook met the 90 percent performance standard on six of the 25 items. The office does well at the front end of a case. Investigations were started on time in 29 of 30 applicable cases, initial safety assessments were completed and matched the facts in 28 of 30, and supervisors documented case consultations in 58 of 60 cases. Investigation cases had the highest share of Strength ratings of any case type (89%).

The results are weaker once a child is in foster care or a family is receiving ongoing services. The lowest-rated items were visits between children in care and their parents and siblings (52%), assessment of and services to parents (53%), concurrent planning (58%), and family involvement in case planning (58%). Placement stability fell from 82% in the 2023 review to 77%, which is consistent with the county's rate of placement moves on the state child welfare outcomes dashboard. Ratings in Foster Care Unit 2, which carried caseworker vacancies for most of the period, were 17 points lower than in Foster Care Unit 1.

The office should submit a program improvement plan by September 30, 2026. Section 7 lists five goals the review team recommends, with action steps, measures, owners, and target dates. The county director and the review team agreed on these goals at the exit conference on May 15.

Outcome area	Cases with applicable items	Substantially achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved	Percent substantially achieved
Safety	60	41	15	4	68%
Permanency	30	5	25	0	17%
Well-Being	60	15	44	1	25%
Case Management	60	46	12	2	77%

An outcome is substantially achieved for a case when every applicable item in that outcome area is rated Strength. Because the permanency area has up to eight items, a single item needing improvement keeps a case from substantially achieving the outcome, so the percentages in that area run lower than item-level results.

1. Purpose and scope

The Quality Assurance Unit reviews each county child welfare office on a three-year cycle. The reviews give county leadership and the state program office an independent look at casework practice, measured against state policy and the outcomes the state reports to the federal government. The reviews are program and practice reviews. They are not financial audits and they do not look at personnel matters.

This review covered child protective services investigations, family preservation (in-home) services, and foster care cases handled by the Millbrook County office. Adoption cases after termination of parental rights and adult protective services were outside the scope of this review and are reviewed separately. The last review of this office was completed in 2023, and its item-level results are shown beside this year's results throughout the report.

2. Review method

Sample

The review team drew a random sample from all cases open at any point during the period under review, stratified by case type so that each program area had enough cases to report on. Sampled cases were replaced when the child was in care for fewer than 30 days, the case transferred to another county during the period, or the case was the subject of an open court-sealed matter. Eight sampled cases were replaced under these rules before the onsite week.

Case type	Cases open during the period	Cases reviewed	Units
Foster care	312	30	Foster Care Unit 1 (15), Foster Care Unit 2 (15)
In-home services	147	18	Family Preservation (18)
Investigation	1,012	12	Investigations (12)
Total	1,471	60	

Review instrument

Reviewers used the state's case review instrument, which has 25 items grouped into four outcome areas: safety (6 items), permanency (8 items), well-being (9 items), and case management (2 items). Each item asks a specific practice question, and reviewers rate it as a Strength, an Area Needing Improvement, or Not Applicable for the case. An item is a Strength for the office as a whole when at least 90 percent of the applicable cases are rated Strength. The instrument and the full set of ratings are provided in the companion workbook.

Interviews and other sources

For each case, reviewers read the electronic case record and interviewed the people involved. The team completed 170 case-related interviews with caseworkers, supervisors, parents, youth age 12 and older, and foster parents or relative caregivers. The team also held two focus groups (one with nine foster parents and one with seven community service providers) and interviewed the county director, the four unit supervisors, the family court judge, and the guardian ad litem program coordinator. These conversations are used to explain patterns in the ratings and are not scored.

Quality of ratings

Six reviewers rated the cases. Every completed instrument received a second-level review by the QA lead, who checked that each rating was supported by the documentation and interview notes. Ten cases were rated independently by two reviewers as a consistency check, and the two reviewers agreed on 94 percent of item ratings. Differences were resolved before the ratings were final.

Limitations

The results describe the 60 sampled cases and are not statistical estimates for every case in the county. Items with fewer than 20 applicable cases (concurrent planning had 19) are reported but should be read with caution, because one or two cases move the percentage by five to ten points. Some practice that happened may not have been documented, and reviewers rated what the record and interviews could confirm.

3. County office profile

Millbrook is a suburban county in the Central region with about 75,200 children. The child welfare office has four units: Investigations, Family Preservation, and two foster care units. During the period under review the office had 31 caseworker positions and four supervisors. Foster Care Unit 2 carried two or three vacant positions for nine of the twelve months, and its workers averaged 19 children on their caseloads compared with 14 in Foster Care Unit 1.

The table below compares Millbrook with the state on the federal statewide data indicators for federal fiscal year 2025, using the state's child welfare outcomes dashboard. These are observed values and are shown for context. Millbrook's placement moves per 1,000 days in care ranked 26th of the 30 counties, and its rate of permanency within 12 months of entering care was below the state rate. Recurrence of maltreatment was lower (better) than the state rate.

Indicator, FFY 2025	Millbrook	State	Better when
Permanency in 12 months for children entering care	27.9% (86 of 308)	33.5%	Higher
Placement stability (moves per 1,000 days in care)	6.35	5.24	Lower
Reentry to foster care in 12 months	5.8% (11 of 191)	6.4%	Lower
Recurrence of maltreatment	7.7% (58 of 754)	9.3%	Lower
Children in foster care on September 30, 2025	231	5,816	

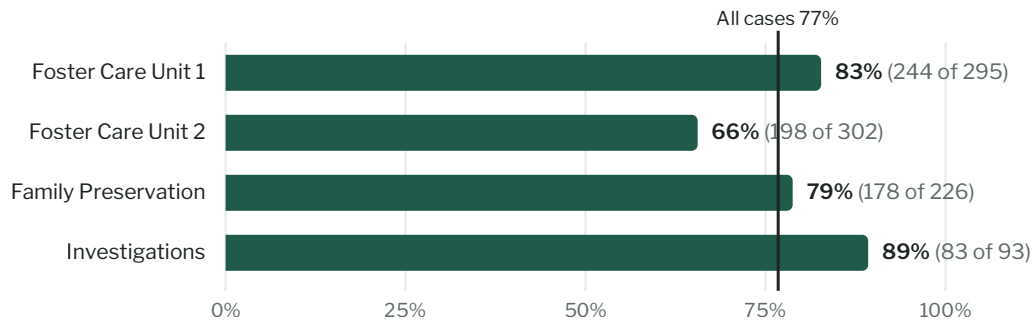
Indicator names and definitions follow the federal CFSR Round 4 statewide data indicators. All county and state values are fictional sample data.

4. Results by case type and unit

Across all 60 cases, 703 of 916 applicable item ratings (77%) were Strengths. Investigation cases had the highest share, and foster care cases had the lowest, mostly because foster care cases carry the permanency and visitation items where the office struggled most.

Share of applicable item ratings rated Strength, by unit

All 25 items combined. The vertical line marks the result for all cases.



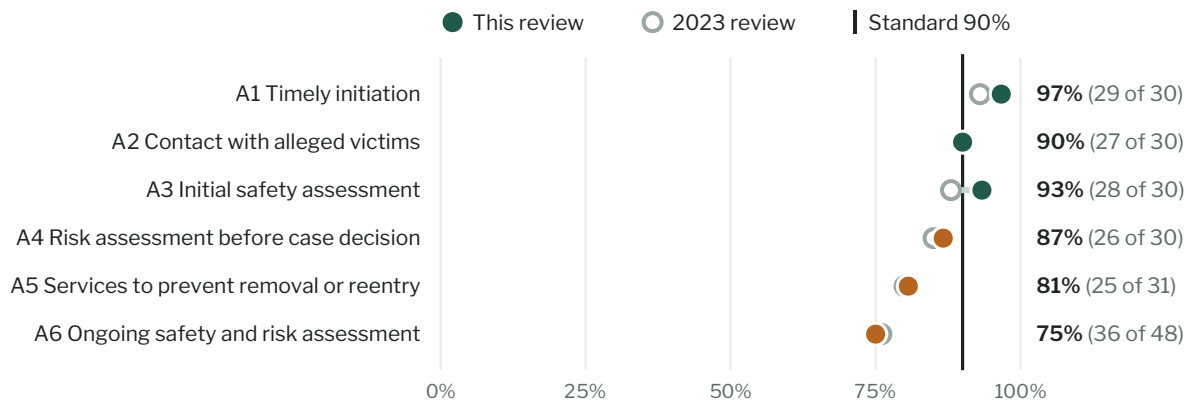
The gap between the two foster care units is the clearest pattern in the review. Foster Care Unit 2 was rated lower on caseworker visits with children and parents and on family visits, which are the items most affected by staff turnover. Workers in that unit told reviewers that visits were the first task to slip when they covered vacant caseloads, and supervisors said they prioritized safety contacts and court deadlines during those months.

5. Findings by outcome area

Safety

The safety items ask whether the office responded to reports on time, saw every alleged victim, assessed safety and risk, and kept reassessing safety as the case moved forward. Three of the six items met the standard. Timely initiation (97%), contact with alleged victims (90%), and initial safety assessment (93%) were Strengths and were at or above their 2023 results.

Safety items: percent of applicable cases rated Strength



Ongoing safety and risk assessment was the weakest safety item at 75% (36 of 48 cases). The office completes a thorough assessment at the start of a case, but reviewers often could not find a reassessment at later decision points, such as a placement change, the start of a trial home visit, or case closure. Services to prevent removal or reentry (81%) and risk assessment before the case decision (87%) were close to the standard.

Case pattern examples

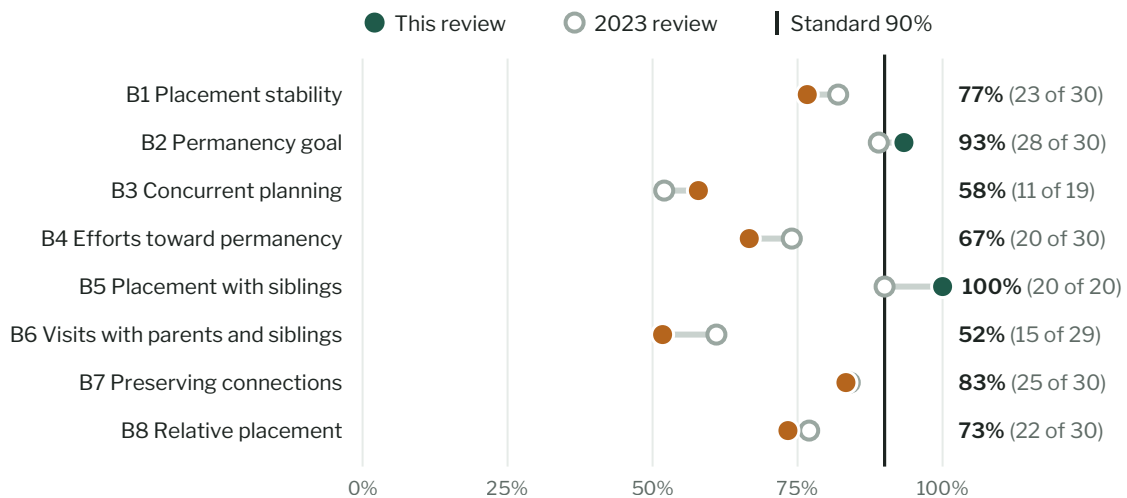
In several foster care cases, a child moved from a relative home to a licensed foster home after the relative asked for the child to be moved. The record documented the move and the new placement's approval, but it did not show that anyone reassessed safety or the reasons for the disruption before the move.

In one in-home case, the family's case was closed after the parent completed a parenting class. The closing summary did not address the domestic violence concern that had been part of the original safety plan, and no closing safety assessment was in the record.

Permanency

The permanency items apply to the 30 foster care cases. They cover placement stability, the permanency goal and the work to reach it, and the child's connections to family, siblings, and community. Two of the eight items met the standard: permanency goals were set on time and fit the case (93%), and every child with a sibling in care was placed with that sibling or had a documented reason for separation (100%).

Permanency items: percent of applicable cases rated Strength



Visits with parents and siblings was the lowest-rated item in the review at 52% (15 of 29 cases), down from 61% in 2023. Foster parents and parents both told reviewers that visits were cancelled when a transport aide or caseworker was not available and were seldom rescheduled. Concurrent planning (58%) improved from 2023 but remains low, and efforts toward permanency fell to 67% because home studies, referrals, and court follow-up were delayed in a number of cases.

Placement stability fell from 82% to 77%. In seven of the 30 foster care cases the child had a move that was not planned around the child's needs. This matches the county's placement stability indicator on the state dashboard, which has been above the state rate in each of the last five years.

Case pattern examples

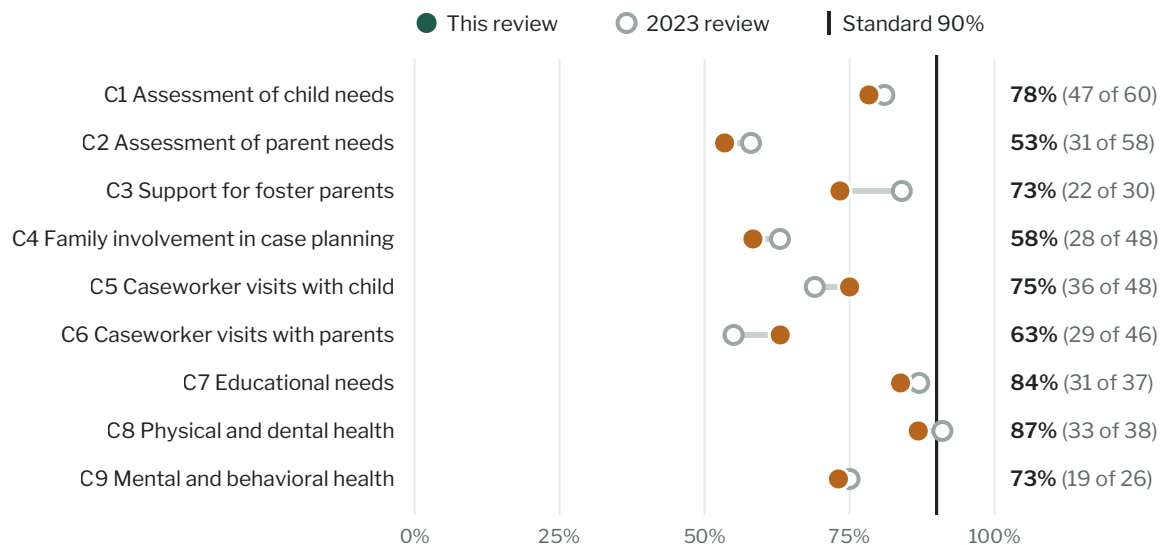
A school-age child moved three times in seven months. Two of the moves followed a provider's request after behavior incidents at home and at school, and the record did not show a placement support meeting or a referral for in-home behavioral support before either move.

In a case with a reunification goal and more than a year in care, the paternal grandmother asked to be considered as a placement in month two. The home study was requested in month seven and was still pending when the case was reviewed, and no concurrent plan was documented.

Well-being

The well-being items look at whether the needs of children, parents, and caregivers were assessed and met, whether families took part in planning, and whether caseworkers saw children and parents often enough to make progress. None of the nine items met the standard. The two health and education items were the closest: physical and dental health was 87% and educational needs was 84%.

Well-being items: percent of applicable cases rated Strength



The pattern across the well-being items is about engagement with parents. Assessment of and services to parents was 53% (31 of 58 cases), family involvement in case planning was 58%, and caseworker visits with parents was 63%. Fathers were the parents most often left out: reviewers found several cases in which the father's address was known but he had not been contacted or assessed. Caseworker visits with children (75%) and with parents (63%) both improved from 2023, which the county attributes to a monthly contact report that supervisors began using in 2025.

Support for foster parents fell from 84% to 73%. In the focus group, foster parents said they often received a child's medication history and school records weeks after placement, and several said they did not know whom to call after hours.

Case pattern examples

In an in-home case, the case plan listed services for the mother only, although both parents lived in the home and the safety concerns involved both of them. The father told the reviewer he had never been asked to attend a planning meeting.

A teenager in foster care was referred for a trauma assessment in the second month of placement but did not have a first appointment until the seventh month. The record showed two follow-up calls by the caseworker and no escalation to the supervisor.

Case management

Supervisory review was a clear Strength at 97% (58 of 60 cases), up from 86%. Case plan timeliness declined from 81% to 71%. Most late case plans were six-month reviews in Foster Care Unit 2 that were completed between 30 and 60 days late.

6. Strengths and areas needing improvement**Strengths**

- Investigations are started on time and every alleged victim is seen, with timely initiation at 97% and contact with alleged victims at 90%.
- Initial safety assessments are completed and match the documented facts (93%).
- Permanency goals are set within policy timeframes and fit the child's situation (93%).
- Siblings in care are kept together whenever possible (100%).
- Supervisory case consultation is documented consistently (97%), which gives the office a base to build on for the improvement plan.
- Caseworker visits with children and parents improved by 6 and 8 points from 2023, although both remain below the standard.

Areas needing improvement

- Family visits with parents and siblings (52%) and caseworker visits with parents (63%).
- Assessment of and services to parents, especially fathers (53%), and family involvement in case planning (58%).
- Concurrent planning (58%) and timely efforts toward permanency (67%).
- Placement stability (77%) and ongoing safety and risk assessment at placement changes and case closure (75%).
- Case plan timeliness (71%) and support for foster parents at placement (73%).

7. Program improvement plan

The office will submit a program improvement plan by September 30, 2026. The plan below shows the goals the review team recommends, based on the findings and the exit conference with county leadership. Progress will be measured with a targeted review of 30 cases in April 2027, using the same instrument, and with the county's results on the state child welfare outcomes dashboard. The state program office will check progress with the county each quarter. Owners are listed by position, and targets will be revisited at the April 2027 targeted review.

Goal	Action steps	Measure of progress	Owner	Target date
1. Reduce unplanned placement moves	• Hold a placement support meeting before any non-emergency move, with the caregiver, worker, and supervisor. • Call each new caregiver within 72 hours of placement to confirm records and supports. • Review every disruption request at the weekly foster care supervisors meeting.	Item B1 from 77% to 85%. County placement moves per 1,000 days from 6.35 toward the state rate.	Foster care program manager	March 31, 2027
2. Increase family visits and contact with parents	• Set a visit plan at the first court hearing and reschedule any missed visit within seven days. • Add family visits to the monthly contact report supervisors already use. • Fill the vacant Foster Care Unit 2 positions and assign a second transport aide.	Item B6 from 52% to 75%. Item C6 from 63% to 80%.	County director; foster care supervisors	March 31, 2027
3. Engage both parents in assessment and planning	• Complete a diligent search for both parents within 30 days of case opening. • Hold a family team meeting within 30 days and before each six-month review. • Train workers on engaging fathers, with coaching from supervisors on two cases each.	Item C2 from 53% to 75%. Item C4 from 58% to 75%.	Family preservation and foster care supervisors	June 30, 2027
4. Make concurrent planning routine	• Document a concurrent plan at the 90-day case staffing for every child with a reunification goal. • Hold permanency roundtables for children in care 12 months or more. • Track home study requests and escalate any pending more than 60 days.	Item B3 from 58% to 80%. Item B4 from 67% to 80%.	Foster care program manager	June 30, 2027
5. Keep safety assessments and case plans current	• Use a safety reassessment checklist at placement changes, trial home visits, and closure. • Send supervisors a weekly report of case plans due in the next 30 days.	Item A6 from 75% to 85%. Item D1 from 71% to 85%.	Unit supervisors	March 31, 2027

Appendix. Item-level results

Each row shows how many applicable cases were rated Strength, the percent for this review and for the 2023 review, and the item rating for the office against the 90 percent standard.

Item	Outcome area	Strength	Applicable	This review	2023	Change	Rating
A1 Timely initiation	Safety	29	30	97%	93%	+4	Strength
A2 Contact with alleged victims	Safety	27	30	90%	90%	+0	Strength
A3 Initial safety assessment	Safety	28	30	93%	88%	+5	Strength
A4 Risk assessment before case decision	Safety	26	30	87%	85%	+2	ANI
A5 Services to prevent removal or reentry	Safety	25	31	81%	80%	+1	ANI
A6 Ongoing safety and risk assessment	Safety	36	48	75%	76%	-1	ANI
B1 Placement stability	Permanency	23	30	77%	82%	-5	ANI
B2 Permanency goal	Permanency	28	30	93%	89%	+4	Strength
B3 Concurrent planning	Permanency	11	19	58%	52%	+6	ANI
B4 Efforts toward permanency	Permanency	20	30	67%	74%	-7	ANI
B5 Placement with siblings	Permanency	20	20	100%	90%	+10	Strength
B6 Visits with parents and siblings	Permanency	15	29	52%	61%	-9	ANI
B7 Preserving connections	Permanency	25	30	83%	84%	-1	ANI
B8 Relative placement	Permanency	22	30	73%	77%	-4	ANI
C1 Assessment of child needs	Well-Being	47	60	78%	81%	-3	ANI
C2 Assessment of parent needs	Well-Being	31	58	53%	58%	-5	ANI
C3 Support for foster parents	Well-Being	22	30	73%	84%	-11	ANI
C4 Family involvement in case planning	Well-Being	28	48	58%	63%	-5	ANI
C5 Caseworker visits with child	Well-Being	36	48	75%	69%	+6	ANI
C6 Caseworker visits with parents	Well-Being	29	46	63%	55%	+8	ANI
C7 Educational needs	Well-Being	31	37	84%	87%	-3	ANI
C8 Physical and dental health	Well-Being	33	38	87%	91%	-4	ANI
C9 Mental and behavioral health	Well-Being	19	26	73%	75%	-2	ANI
D1 Case plan timeliness	Case Management	34	48	71%	81%	-10	ANI
D2 Supervisory review	Case Management	58	60	97%	86%	+11	Strength

ANI means Area Needing Improvement. Change is shown in percentage points. The full instrument, the ratings for all 60 cases, and the formulas behind every figure in this report are in the companion workbook (County QA Case Review Workbook.xlsx). Sample data. All names, organizations, and figures are fictional.