



# Needs Assessment Process Guide



## Wyoming Department of Education

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## Glossary Of Terms

### Definitions

**Data:** Observations or facts which, when collected, organized, and evaluated, become information or knowledge.

**Need:** A gap or discrepancy between a present state and a desired state.

**Root Cause Analysis:** An approach to problem solving used for identifying foundational faults or the “why(s)” of problems. Ineffective root cause analysis could lead a school or district to misidentify causes, which then leads to the creation of incorrect solutions. It is useful to take deeper dives into the available data in order to accurately identify root causes; this can be done through activities that push staff to continually answer the question “Why is this the case?” until the root cause can be identified. (VanGronigen, Meyers, & Hitt, 2017)

**Qualitative:** Qualitative data is defined as the data that approximates and characterizes. Qualitative data can be observed and recorded. This data type is non-numerical in nature. This type of data is collected through methods of observations, one-to-one interviews, conducting focus groups, and similar methods.

**Quantitative:** Quantitative data is the value of data in the form of counts or numbers where each data set has a unique numerical value. Quantitative data answers questions such as “How many?”, “How often?”, “How much?”. This data can be verified and conveniently evaluated using mathematical techniques.

**Urgent Fact:** A statement summarizing a need for immediate change in practice derived from observations of the data.

**SWOT Analysis:** The intention of SWOT, or strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat, analysis, is to identify those internal strengths and external opportunities that an organization can leverage to accomplish its objectives, while also seeking to mitigate internal weaknesses and external threats. SWOT analysis is relevant to two aspects of performance analysis—strategic planning and needs assessment—as well as to the evaluation of change initiatives. (Leigh 2009)

## Overview

School improvement plans (SIPs) can be created from the information learned during a needs assessment. A needs assessment is critical to the development of a high-quality school improvement plan. (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018) A needs assessment should be part of an ongoing performance management cycle that includes long-range and short-cycle implementation targets. A needs assessment is the foundation of a continuous improvement process. (Corbett & Redding, 2017)

A needs assessment is a process used to plan effectively, identify priorities, make decisions and solve problems. A review of practices, processes, and systems within a school assists school leadership in determining needs, examining their nature and causes, and setting priorities for future action. The needs assessment guides the development of a meaningful school improvement plan and suggests benchmarks for evaluation. (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018)

The school improvement categories below provide a way to structure data into manageable parts:

- Leadership (mission and vision, resources allocation, distributive leadership)
- Culture and climate (positive relationships, communication, safety)
- Data-informed planning (systems to collect academic and nonacademic data, analysis of data, intervention and enrichment)
- Professional development (PLC model, teacher training and practices, use of PD)
- Instruction (standards based quality instruction, deeper learning, student learning practices)
- Learning support (MTSS, expanded learning opportunities, enrichments)

Qualitative and quantitative data are needed to conduct a needs assessment. Data collected should provide information about district and school practices, processes, and systems. A comprehensive needs assessment should include data collected about all aspects of education.

## Needs Assessment Process

### Step 1. Gather data

- Gather quantitative and qualitative data aligned to the six categories of school improvement. This includes WYTOPP, one or many district/campus policies, procedures, programs, and/or outcomes.
- Data can be gathered from:
  - Student information system (SMS or LMS)
  - Websites (Any tools that progress monitor, or have assessment data)
  - Teachers, counselors, staff, school-based teams, parents, community members, etc.
  - Observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, or questionnaires
  - Local and state created reports

### Step 2. Review and organize data

- Create categories and organize data into each category. The six school improvement high impact categories provide a good structure to organize data.
  - Leadership
  - Culture and Climate
  - Data-informed Planning
  - Professional development
  - Instruction
  - Learning Support

### Step 3. Analyze data and determine if additional data should be gathered

- Answer questions about each category of data.
  - What do these data seem to tell us?
  - What do these data not tell us?
  - What else would we need to know?

### Step 4. Analyze data again and determine urgent facts

- If step 3 highlighted a need for additional data, then collect needed data. After sufficient data is collected, answer questions about each category of data.
  - What do these data seem to tell us?
  - What do these data not tell us?
  - What is an urgent fact that needs to be immediately addressed?

### Step 5. Create a summary of findings to inform plan creation

- Use the urgent fact statements from step 4 to conduct a root cause analysis. For each urgent fact, brainstorm why the problem is occurring. Continue to ask "Why is it happening?" until the root cause is found. The root cause must be something that the district or school can influence or control. Summarize the root cause for each urgent fact and use the information to create a plan of action.
  - Use the 5 Whys tool to find root causes for the data that has been gathered.
  - Use the SWOT analysis template to look at strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats for actionable items in your School Improvement Plan.

## 5D's for making Decisions Using Data and Evidence

Wyoming Data Literacy Professional Development - Summer 2022

Wyoming Department of Education \* Marzano Research \* Buros Center for Testing

<b>DEFINE</b>	Define a focus for inquiry using data or evidence based on the need or problem to be solved. Formulate questions within the focus area whose answers can be informed by data and evidence.
<b>DIG</b>	Dig for data and evidence. Take inventory of available data and evidence that are related to your defined need or question. If you do not have data related to your need, you may need to develop a tool or process to gather the data.
<b>DISTILL</b>	Find the data and evidence that are most relevant to the need or question. Your initial search will likely result in more data, or evidence that you can reasonably process or may yield data that need to be cleaned, prepared, or displayed in particular ways based on the need or question. Prioritize spending time with studies or data sources that are most useful in making decisions.
<b>DISCOVER</b>	Discover patterns and findings in the data and evidence you are using. This requires both analysis and interpretation. Analysis is defined in this context as noticing and defining patterns or findings that are in the data. Interpretation is applying experience and professional judgment to make sense of those patterns and finding.
<b>DECIDE</b>	Data interpretation should ultimately yield decisions about next steps - either for action or for further inquiry. When decisions have been made, systematic change processes can be used to act on those decisions.

## Asking Powerful Questions

### 5 Whys Worksheet

Define the Problem:

Why is it happening?

1.	Why?
2.	Why?
3.	Why?
4.	Why?
5.	Why?

**Caution:**

- If your last answer is something you cannot control, go back up to the previous answer.
- Final answers cannot be because of a person.

**Reminder:**

- List only 1 reason and dig deep. Stay away from listing 5 different reasons.

<b>Identified Root Cause:</b>	
Action/ Plan to Address the Problem:	

<b>Action Plan Double Check:</b>
1. Does your action plan state who is responsible for each action element?
2. Does your action plan involve a plan for communicating to relevant stakeholders?
3. Are the various elements of your action plan connected to a time frame? When will each piece be accomplished? Are deadlines set?
4. How will you assess whether the changes brought about within your plan have made a difference? How will you know if you solved the problem? Be sure to build in reflection in your action plan and make sure to incorporate a method to manage data.



## Dimensions Bullseye of Improvement<sup>2</sup>

### Core Realm:

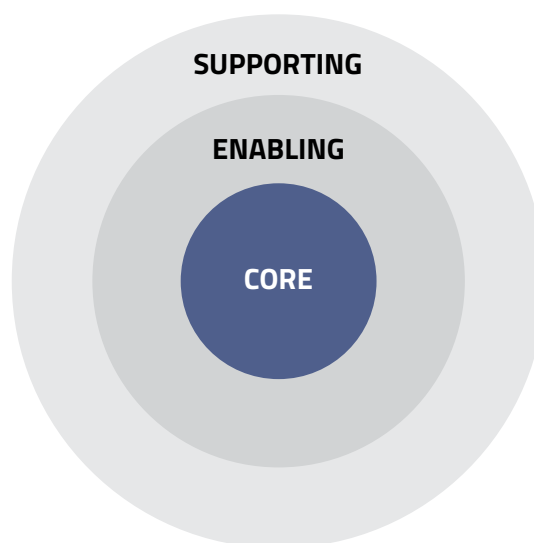
Contains factors that most directly affect students outcomes.

- Instruction
- Curriculum
- Assessments

### Enabling Realm:

Contains conditions that must be in place in order to make the core elements successful in affecting students outcomes.

- Materials
- Schedules
- Professional development
- Organizational structures
- School leadership
- Supervision
- Staff accountability for performance



### Supporting Realm:

Contains conditions that are helpful toward making the core elements successful.

- Parents
- Governance
- Personnel
- Funding
- Community resources
- Student readiness to learn

Realm	Sphere of Implementation	Amount of School and Teacher Control	Amount of District Control
Core	Classroom	School and teachers have a great deal of control	District has responsibility, but less direct control
Enabling	School	School has some control	District has significant control and leverage
Supporting	District/Community	School has little control	District has some control and Leverage

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: Conley, David T. (1997). Roadmap to restructuring: Charting the course of change in American education. Eugene, OR: Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management

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