



NORTH DAKOTA  
**DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

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# COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

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2025

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# Comprehensive Needs Assessment Toolkit

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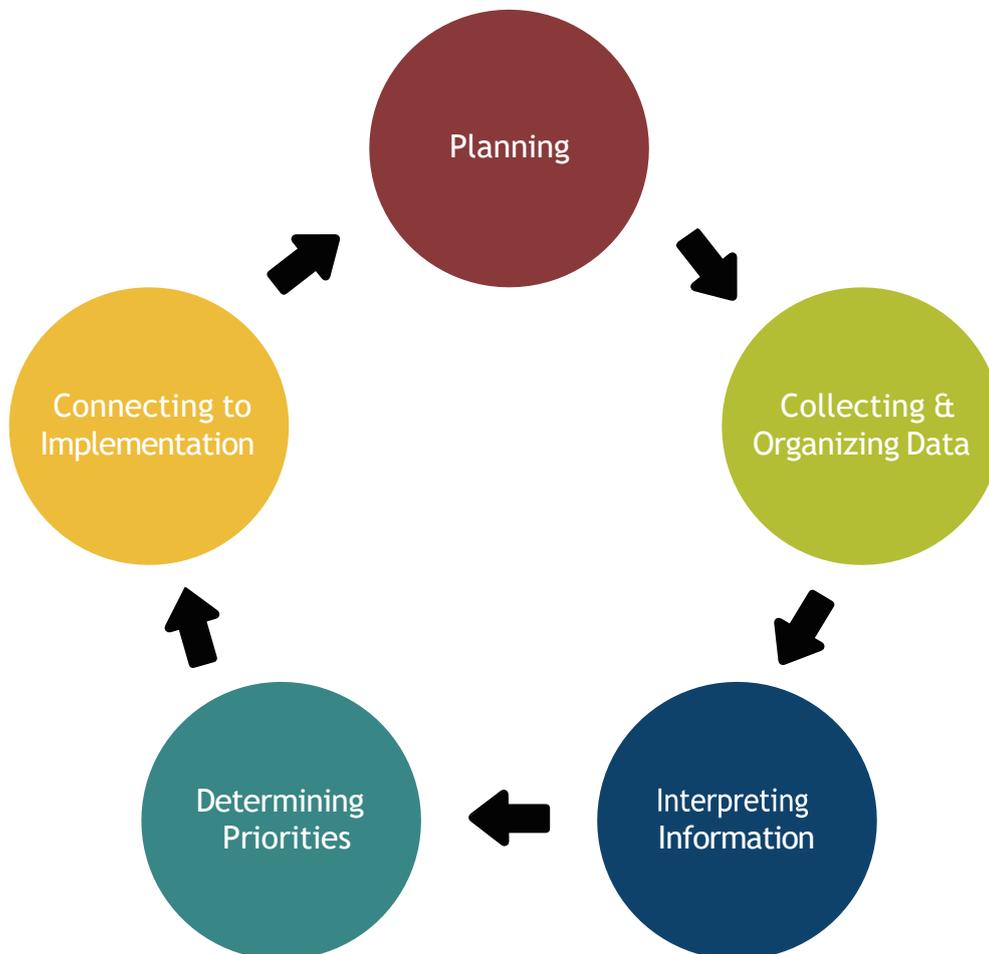
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# Introduction

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A Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) is a process of examining data to help identify, understand, and determine priorities that will inform the implementation of improvement efforts to address the gap between the current state of a school or a district and the desired state.

At the school or district level this process is implemented across five phases. Conducting an effective CNA is the first step in the improvement process as it is designed to inform goals, as well as identify strategies and action steps leading to success across all programs (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018).



## About this Resource

This document is intended to be a guidance resource that can be utilized to meet overlapping requirements found in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) that expect completion of a CNA in several areas across major programs in the law. This resource has been adapted from multiple states, which are acknowledged in the Reference Section (see p. 28). This document is intended to set out the “why” and the “what” to do within the CNA process. The “how” can be tailored within individual programs to meet specific needs and requirements.

### The use of this document is intended to support the following outcomes:

- Guidance for conducting one CNA that meets multiple federal and state program compliance requirements
- Coordination of federal and/or state programs
- Efficient use of time
- Facilitation of a culture of continuous improvement

## Needs Assessment Process

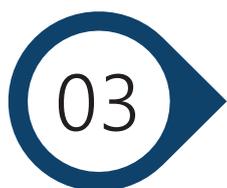
A successful CNA process requires four essential elements:



**Needs-Driven and Context-Specific**—requires the problem, topics, and questions to be addressed to be clearly defined, and the design and data inputs of the CNA must reflect the local context for the work.



**Rigorous Data Analysis**—requires diverse data sets that include multiple data types, reflecting multiple viewpoints, and high-quality data that is collected using valid and reliable methods to be deemed clean and trustworthy (error-free).



**Stakeholder Engagement**—expects the CNA process to be conducted collaboratively with local stakeholders rather than completed by a small group of leaders or an outside agency. This means engaging school staff, parents, a diverse assortment of leaders, and external support providers (even students at the secondary level) during each phase of the CNA process.



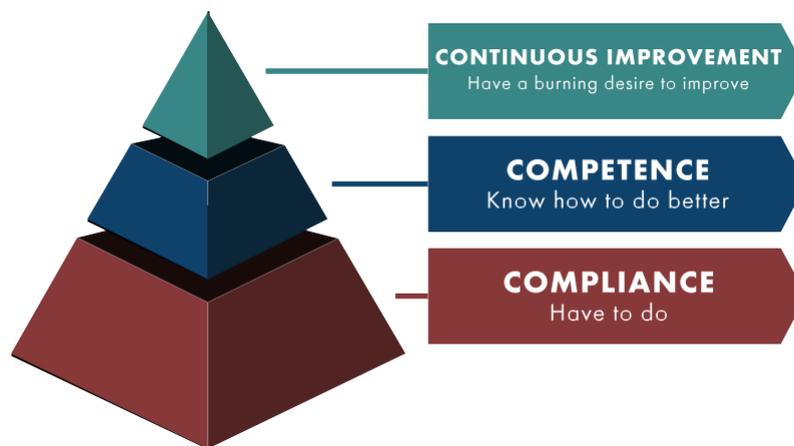
**Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs**—involves stakeholders working collaboratively to identify and prioritize areas of needed focus to inform improvement efforts.

Recommendations from the Needs Assessment Guidebook (2018).

# Why Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment?

“A successful CNA leads to actionable priorities and meaningful, long-term change. Achieving these results requires more than just one or two people completing a form behind closed doors; it requires the active and meaningful engagement of all concerned stakeholders in a process to examine, identify, and diagnose the challenges that need to be addressed for improvement to occur” (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018, p. 5).

Additionally, the need to equip school district personnel with the tools and skills to complete the CNA process well goes to the goal of moving from mere compliance activities for school improvement to increasing competence for engaging with data and information intentionally, leading to continuous improvement activities that positively impact the lives of all of our students.



The phases of the CNA process outlined by Cuiccio & Husby-Slater are activities that facilitate the examination of data to determine priorities that inform the creation of “plans” that guide the actions that schools will engage into ultimately impact student achievement. Best practice activities that occur within each of these phases are consistent with principles of Improvement Science (Bryk, et. al, 2015). If school systems are to move beyond mere compliance for creating school improvement plans toward creating plans that are substantive and impactful, then learning how to do this process well is crucial for all educators.

Examples of annual federal requirements for engaging in the CNA process include such programs as Title I, Part A for Schoolwide (SW), and Targeted Assistance (TA) schools; Title I, Part C for the education of migratory children; and Title IV, Part A for student support and academic enrichment. Examples of federal programs that strongly recommend periodic review include Title II, Part A for supporting effective instruction, and Title III, Part A designed for English language acquisition and language enhancement. Programs such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the Head Start Act also have CNA requirements. Some of the requirements are explicitly set out and described in detail in statute, while others imply receipt of funding will be dependent upon the identification of existing needs and the strategies that will be implemented to address these needs. Therefore, this resource is meant to provide guidance for a coherent process that can be used for multiple purposes so that data and information gathered and used for one program’s requirements can be utilized for various other program’s requirements.

## Needs Assessment Requirements for Schools/Districts Across ESEA Programs

<b>Program Requirements</b>	<b>School Requirements</b>	<b>ESEA Statute</b>
Title I, Part A Schoolwide	CNA at the school level	ESEA 1114(b)
Title I, Part A Targeted	CNA is Strongly Recommended at the school level; however, the CNA process required to move from a Targeted to a Schoolwide program.	ESEA 1115(e)(2) ESEA 1114(b)(1)(A)
All schools, Schools identified for improvement supports (Tier 3 Plus, Tier 3, Tier 2), Targeted Assistance Schools	Not just schools identified for improvement and Targeted Assistance schools, but ALL schools must complete a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that is "data-driven"	ESEA 1111(d)(1)(B) and
Title II, Part A/Title III, Part A	CNA Strongly Recommended for LEAs to periodically review and revise	ESEA 2102(b)(3) (A-B) and 3115(g)(4)(C)
Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grants	Any school district or consortium of school districts that receive an SSEA award in the amount of \$30,000 or more must complete a CNA before receiving its allocation, once every three years	ESEA 4106(c)(1) & (d)(1-3)
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act	Head Start requirement every few years depending upon the program. CNA required for LEAs with Title I, Part A funds for determining homeless set-aside amount	ESEA 2223(b)(3) and 9102(f)(4)(A-E) ESEA 1113(c)(3)(C)(i)

# Completing the Needs Assessment Process

CNAs are contextual and based on the needs of the learning community. The phases outlined below are recommendations of how to approach the process and outline the big-picture needs for completing a CNA. Each phase is broken down with activities and guiding questions to help guide and support the learning community through the process.

## Phases of a Continuous Needs Assessment (CNA) Process

(Adapted from State Support Network, *Implementation Path Handout*—March 1, 2018)

The needs assessment process, as it is enacted at the school or district level, is implemented across five discrete phases: **plan, collect and organize data, interpret information, determine priorities, and connect to implementation.**



### 1. Planning:

- Determine the purpose and intended outcomes of the CNA process.
- Decide which central guiding questions the CNA should address.
- Identify relevant stakeholders that are needed for the process.

### 2. Collecting and Organizing Data:

- Organize readily available data from existing sources.
- Determine and collect additional data, if necessary.
- Decide on the method of presentation of data.

### 3. Interpreting Information:

- Uncover what individual data sources say about guiding questions.
- Crystalize themes.
- Investigate areas of stakeholder disagreement and causes of disagreement.
- Articulate findings for stakeholders without casting blame.

### 4. Determining Priorities:

- Conclude what findings and themes will have the greatest impact (if addressed).
- Consider if there is additional data that should be reviewed. If so, gather and review additional data.

### 5. Connecting to Implementation:

- Use the results to create meaningful, long-term change.
- Collect additional information about identified priorities.
- Investigate root causes of priorities.
- Reflect on the progress of improvement efforts.

# Comprehensive Needs Assessment & the Continuous Improvement Cycle

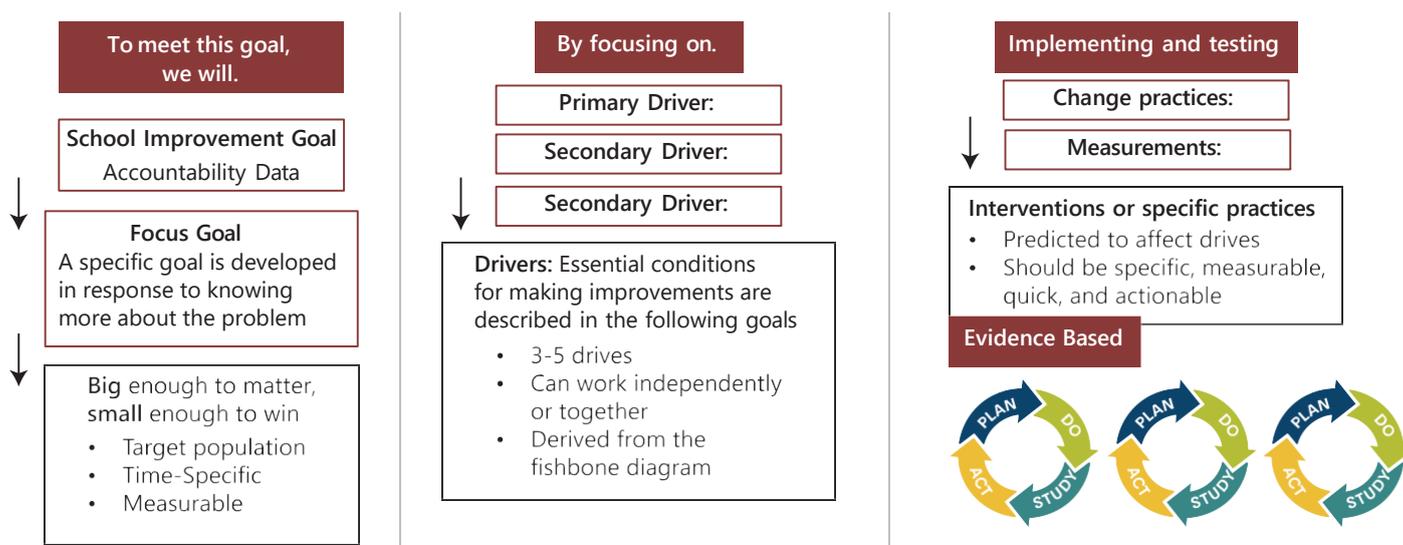
## Connecting the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) Process to Improvement Science Principles within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The continuous improvement cycle is typically signified as the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle (Deming, 1986; Shewhart, 1931, in Metz, 2015). The four essential elements of a continuous improvement cycle are:

1. Specify the plan that helps move service and interventions forward (including selecting evidence-based strategies and regular progress checks to assess implementation).
2. Focus on facilitating the implementation of the plan.
3. Engage in assessment processes to understand and evaluate how the plan is working (including evaluating fidelity of strategy implementation).
4. Make changes to the next iteration of the plan to improve implementation (Metz, 2015).

The findings from the CNA represent the foundation on which to build a sustainable continuous improvement cycle. A CNA, when conducted with the other steps of a continuous improvement process, can lead to improved outcomes for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Within the context of district and school improvement, this includes examination of root causes, selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies, and evaluation of the effectiveness of those strategies at producing desired improvement outcomes. Because effective improvement requires a commitment to action, assessment, and ongoing adjustment, employing the elements of a successful CNA throughout implementation can support periodic data reviews to assess progress (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018, p.21).

The following is a visual example of the above description of the Plan-Do-Study-Act process to help school teams understand how the CNA process fits within the MTSS framework, utilizing Improvement Science principles of data review, root causes analysis, priority goals, and short-cycle implementation and review processes.



Through this short-cycle review process, a school team can monitor the implementation of selected evidence-based strategies, review what was planned and what occurred, and explore why the results obtained were reached to determine how to move forward.

# Getting Started

Data is gathered at the school level and used to create a profile of the school’s successes and areas of improvement, then used to assess the root causes, professional learning needs, and improvement plan priorities.

Note: See Appendix B for optional tools and resources to help gather information and move through the CNA process.

## Planning

The first step in a CNA involves defining desired outcomes and creating a plan to achieve them. The planning phase lays the groundwork for the rest of the process. During this phase, important activities include the following:

1. Define the purpose and intended outcomes of the CNA process within the local context.
2. Determine the guiding questions that the CNA should answer.
3. Establish actions, timelines, and responsibilities for all related activities. Document the process through agendas, meeting notes, and project charters.
4. Identify relevant stakeholders, plan for their involvement, and invite them to participate, beginning with the planning process.
5. Articulate the content (what the CNA will cover), the process (how the CNA will be accomplished), and the presentation (what the school or district will use and how the results will be conveyed).

### Essential Elements: Key Considerations and Actions for the Planning Phase

<b>Needs-Driven and Context-Specific Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a framework to organize the CNA.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop guiding questions to focus data collection on the issues most critical to the CNA.</li> <li>– Ensure that multiple data sources align to each guiding question or framework element, allowing for triangulation of findings.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Rigorous Data Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select and use readily available and relevant data sources. Determine additional data needed. Sources to consider include the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Assessment results, community demographics, student and teacher attendance, and behavior referrals</li> <li>– Data from classrooms, after-school programs, and summer programs</li> <li>– Surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups to gather perceptions from diverse groups, such as parents, educators, students, and community members</li> <li>– Review of relevant district and school policies, plans, and allocation of resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Include a mix of data that describe program inputs and results and demographic or contextual information. Disaggregate data where possible (without revealing individual identity). Include multiple years of data to better identify trends over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve stakeholders in identifying data sources.</li> <li>• Consider ways to gather input and promote ownership for groups of stakeholders and invite them to participate. Different stakeholders may be engaged at different levels during the process.</li> <li>• Communicate with stakeholders to build confidence and commitment. Be intentional and transparent regarding communication.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a statement of purpose with input from stakeholders. The purpose statement will clarify the work as well as foster trust and ownership.</li> <li>• Explain the steps so that stakeholders know what to expect and how they can best participate. Use stakeholder feedback to improve implementation planning.</li> </ul>

## Planning

The first step in a needs assessment involves defining desired outcomes and creating a plan to achieve them. The planning phase lays the groundwork for the rest of the process. During this phase, important activities include the following:

Activities	Guiding questions to consider
Define the purpose and intended outcomes of the CNA process within the local context. Note: There is no one correct CNA model or process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why engage in the CNA (beyond compliance)?</li> <li>• What will this process accomplish?</li> <li>• What are the issues that are most critical to the CNA?</li> <li>• What will the impact be at the classroom, building, and system levels?</li> <li>• What are the gaps between “what is” and “what should be”?</li> <li>• Have guiding questions been developed to focus data collection on the issues most critical?</li> <li>• Have multiple data sources been selected that align with each guiding question?</li> </ul>
Determine the guiding questions that the CNA should answer (if the CNA is not part of a larger project that has already identified central questions or concerns).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the core themes or topics the CNA will cover (student demographics, instruction, assessment, achievement, climate, discipline, etc.)?</li> <li>• What needs to be known or understood about these topics?</li> </ul>
Establish actions, timelines, and responsibilities for all related activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the short- and long-term timelines?</li> </ul>
Identify relevant stakeholders, plan for their involvement, and invite them to participate beginning with the planning process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the key stakeholders who need to be engaged and at what points in the process?</li> <li>• How will multiple stakeholders get involved in the process?</li> </ul>
Train Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The content (what the CNA will cover)</li> <li>- The process (how the CNA will be accomplished)</li> <li>- The presentation (what the school or district will use and how the results will be conveyed)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the purpose been clarified and the steps of the process of the CNA been explained to the stakeholders so they know what to expect and can best participate?</li> </ul>

## Collecting and Organizing Data

Data is a foundational component of any CNA process. However, data collected in the “raw” form are not always useful for making decisions; often, data needs to be organized in a way that is readable and useful for the stakeholders who will be involved in interpreting the data to draw conclusions and identify improvement needs. During this phase of the CNA, data is collected in various forms (qualitative, quantitative, input, output, demographic) and organized and presented for interpretation. CNAs are contextual and based on the needs of the learning community.

In the table below, steps have been outlined to help with the collection and organization of data. These elements are required components that need to be reviewed and addressed in the CNA.

### Potential data sources to consider:

- State Report Card and other current assessment data
- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Observations
- Document Analysis
- Program Evaluations
- Budgets
- Research Reports
- Suggestions Boxes

### Essential Elements: Key Considerations and Actions for the Collecting and Organizing Data Phase

<b>Needs-Driven and Context-Specific Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare data sources to the guiding questions and overarching topic framework to ensure that all included data respond to the CNA purpose and can be triangulated with other data sources.</li> <li>• Include data that describe the climate and culture of the organization and community.</li> <li>• Consider other school districts and/or communities with similar demographics or organizational structures if looking at comparison data.</li> <li>• Identify and consider contextual information needed to understand the data or limitations in the data to avoid spurious or unrelated inferences about the data.</li> </ul>
<b>Rigorous Data Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disaggregate data wherever possible to help identify areas of need that otherwise may not be apparent. Consider the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender)</li> <li>- Exceptional students (e.g., students with disabilities, gifted students, low-achieving students)</li> <li>- Students with additional needs (e.g., students in foster care; those who are homeless or migratory; and/or those whose families are highly mobile, such as military families)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Aggregate observation data by grade level or grade band and perception data by stakeholder group.</li> <li>• Include longitudinal data (when possible) to aid in identifying any trends over time.</li> <li>• Create visuals (charts, tables, graphs) to help the reader digest information presented.</li> <li>• Allow for reflection without assuming cause before data are triangulated across multiple sources.</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build stakeholders’ capacity to make informed decisions by engaging them in data collection, defining unfamiliar terminology, avoiding jargon, and ensuring access to necessary background information.</li> <li>• Ensure that stakeholders understand data used in the CNA, and display data in formats that are easy to interpret and analyze.</li> <li>• Encourage authentic engagement by setting clear expectations for participation, facilitate dialogue rather than presenting information in a lecture-style format, and commit to finding answers collaboratively.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider all stakeholders who will have a role in interpreting information and prioritizing needs, as well as the processes that will be used to complete these later steps when preparing and organizing data to present. It is important to ensure that data presentation is clear and accessible for the intended audience.</li> </ul>

## Collecting and Organizing Data

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Guiding questions to consider</b>
Define the data most useful for making decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What data sources are aligned with the guiding questions and are readily available from existing sources (state databases, program reports, etc.)?</li> <li>• Will qualitative data, as well as quantitative data, be included?</li> <li>• What data will be collected?</li> <li>• What do we want to know?</li> </ul>
Organize readily available data from existing sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which data will be provided to the district or school(s), and which data must be added or collected at the local level?</li> <li>• How are certain types of data are kept confidential?</li> </ul>
Demographics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider students who identify with more than one demographic, and how it may be helpful to look for intersections in demographic data to better understand student identities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the breakdown of students by ethnicity, gender, or another category?</li> <li>• What is the number of students in each special program? What is the breakdown by ethnicity, gender, or another category?</li> <li>• Is there over- or underrepresented in certain groups?</li> </ul>
<b>Data Types</b>	<b>Guiding questions to consider</b>
Demographics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider comparing your local data to state data to see if the district or school has a relatively higher or lower representation of one program or student group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the attendance data tell us?</li> <li>• What are staff demographics?</li> </ul>

## Collecting and Organizing Data

Data Types	Guiding questions to consider
Student Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are student achievement data disaggregated?</li> <li>• What does the data indicate when disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, special program, or another category?</li> <li>• What areas are growing? At what rate? Compared to which standard of achievement?</li> <li>• Which students are making progress?</li> <li>• What does the data reflect within and among content areas?</li> <li>• What does the school's summative data say about how each student group is performing, specifically the identified student groups? Consider intersectional identities and how a summative assessment may not fully evaluate all important information.</li> <li>• What does the local data say about how each student group is performing, specifically the identified student groups? Consider how local data on performance aligns with and diverges from the state summative assessment test data.</li> <li>• What areas are showing growth? Consider where or on which metrics students are progressing and the rate of progress over time.</li> <li>• Consider all content areas</li> </ul>
School Climate and Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider if there is a link between student achievement data and educator perceptions, expectations, and classroom management and organization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the vision, mission, and values of the school? Consider how and how often the vision, mission, and values are shared with staff, students, and parents.</li> <li>• How do students describe the school climate?</li> <li>• How does this compare to the staff's perception?</li> <li>• How do staff members describe the climate?</li> <li>• How do students and staff describe attitudes, respect, relationships, belonging, support, etc.? Consider it may take additional effort to hear from students who are most disenfranchised by school experiences. (These voices may provide more valuable data than those from students who are traditionally more engaged.)</li> <li>• To what degree do students and staff feel physically safe? Consider that safety can be physical or social-emotional and that events outside the school environment can also impact experience in the learning environment.</li> <li>• What does the data indicate regarding classroom management and organization?</li> <li>• How does this compare to classroom achievement data?</li> <li>• What is the culture and climate in the building around the belief that all students can learn? Consider asking educators about fellow educators' beliefs as the personal perception of an educator can differ dramatically from the collective perception of the group.</li> </ul>

## Collecting and Organizing Data

Activities	Guiding questions to consider
<p>Staff Quality, Recruitment, and Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider comparing staffing demographics to student demographics or the demographics of the surrounding community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the qualifications and certifications of our teachers? Paraprofessionals?</li> <li>What is the breakdown of the district's or school's staff by ethnicity/ race, gender, or other category?</li> <li>What is the process of recruiting highly qualified and effective staff?</li> <li>What is the staff attendance/ retention/turnover rate?</li> <li>Are teacher placements strategically based on student needs and teacher strengths?</li> <li>What ongoing support is provided to staff?</li> <li>What systems are in place to build capacity and support continuous improvement?</li> <li>What types of professional development have staff members attended? How is implementation monitored?</li> <li>What impact has it had on performance? What is the follow-up?</li> </ul>
<p>Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is data used to inform curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions?</li> <li>How are instructional strategies and activities aligned with student learning needs and expected outcomes for achievement?</li> <li>How consistent is this across the school/district?</li> <li>What is the impact on specific student groups?</li> <li>Is there evidence that assessments are aligned with clearly specified and appropriate achievement expectations?</li> <li>What policies, practices, and procedures are in place for evaluating the cultural relevance of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes?</li> <li>What criteria are being used to determine that evidence-based best practices are being implemented and measured?</li> </ul>

## Collecting and Organizing Data

Activities	Guiding questions to consider
Parent, Family, and Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the current communication plan that is in place and if it is culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive of the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What evidence exists that families and community members are involved in meaningful activities that support students' learning? What are the activities?</li> <li>Which parents, guardians, and community members are involved? What trends and patterns can be observed?</li> <li>What types of services are available to support students in special programs? What are the results?</li> <li>How do school and community systems interact to assure continuity of support for students?</li> <li>What types of community partnerships exist to support families and students?</li> </ul>
School Context and Organization-Focus on Student Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is adequate time devoted to subjects in which students perform poorly? Consider how content is or is not integrated across subjects, including in non-tested subject areas.</li> <li>What does data reflect about classes, schedules, and student/staff teams? Consider how classes may or may not be relevant to students.</li> </ul>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are some barriers that potentially prevent the effective use of technology?</li> <li>Is the technology user-friendly for students and parents?</li> <li>Is assistive technology used/offered to support students?</li> </ul>
Determine and collect additional data, if needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has the necessary data been collected to answer the guiding questions? If not, what else do we need?</li> <li>How can the data be collected?</li> </ul>

### The comprehensive CNA conducted by the school must address the bulleted elements listed

- Student demographics
- Performance of different student groups on state and local assessments
- Demonstrable focus on student learning and increased learning outcomes
- Supportive learning environment
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned to state standards
- Frequency of monitoring of learning and teaching
- Building capacity of staff for setting high standards and expectations, and establishing support for all students
- Quality professional development aligned to improvement and implementation efforts described in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) that is consistent with best practices for adult learners
- Capacity needs of school leadership relative to high-leverage goals and improvement efforts described in the SIP
- High level of collaboration and communication for shared ownership amongst the learning community
- Engagement of family and community
- Strategic allocation of resources to address existing student academic, social, and emotional inequities, as evidenced in both state and local data sources
- Alternative secondary schools' best practices (Learning Options), if applicable
- Any unique circumstances or characteristics of the school or LEA
- Related Local Education Agency (LEA)/district practices, policies, and collectively bargained provisions

## Interpreting Information

During this phase, educators examine relevant data to create meaningful information by collaborating with multiple stakeholders to ensure that the identified needs are interpreted within the local context. Collaborating with stakeholders who participated in data collection and are responsible for carrying out the next steps that result from the CNA further ensures that data are understood within what is realistic for the local implementation of future actions.

To support this process, data should be organized and presented in digestible formats to facilitate examination of trends across time and data sources. The data presentation and interpretation process should also support triangulation of data points from different sources, voices, or forms of data. Triangulation produces more reliable outcomes and helps participants determine stronger themes within the data.



### Essential Elements: Key Considerations and Actions for the Interpreting Information Phase

<b>Needs-Driven and Context-Specific Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the organizational components of the framework to look for trends within the data.</li> <li>• Once themes have been identified within the major components of the framework, conduct triangulation across the framework components to identify cross-cutting themes.</li> </ul>
<b>Rigorous Data Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify both quantitative and qualitative data sources, include the stakeholder perception, that can be triangulated across sources and methods of collection.</li> <li>• Include diverse data that highlights student outcomes as well as contributing factors:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attendance, discipline, and graduation and dropout rates</li> <li>- Classroom observations, professional learning opportunities, and access to effective educators</li> <li>- Budget analysis and resource allocation, including funding sources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include key internal and external stakeholders to represent diverse experiences and viewpoints. Consider the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Educators</b> (teachers, school/district leaders, specialized instructional/support personnel, collective bargaining associations, two- and four-year colleges and universities, early learning providers)</li> <li>- <b>Parents, Families, and Students</b> (parent–teacher association/parent–teacher organization, secondary students, parent and family volunteers)</li> <li>- <b>Community, Business, and Economic Development Organizations</b> (school board members, health/social services agencies, faith-based institutions, youth recreational centers, workforce programs, mayors, legislators, libraries)</li> <li>- <b>Philanthropic Groups</b> (foundations and advocacy groups)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider individuals, groups, and organizations that have not been engaged in the past and/or those that could offer unique perspectives.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select a skilled facilitator (external or internal) who has the knowledge, skills, and disposition to lead collaborative processes and is committed to meaningful results.</li> <li>• Given that facilitators can play a key role in implementing the CNA consider the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Select protocols for efficient and effective use of time.</li> <li>- Promote equitable participation of stakeholders to ensure that all voices are heard.</li> <li>- Provide focus and direction while remaining flexible to the needs of the group.</li> <li>- Prompt deep thinking by challenging assumptions, discouraging groupthink, and asking probing questions.</li> <li>- Build consensus and resolve conflicts without marginalizing participants.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Interpreting Information

Activities	Guiding questions to consider
Examine relevant data to unearth meaningful information. Allow time for reflection without assuming cause for the data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do the individual data sources say about the guiding questions that the CNA is trying to answer?</li> </ul>
Triangulate data points from different sources, voices, or forms of data to determine themes within the data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What themes emerge when multiple sources are cross-referenced or triangulated across a given topic?</li> </ul>
Identify areas of strength and develop three to five areas of strength summary statements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the strengths and needs of the school/district and its representative groups?</li> <li>• What evidence supports the strengths and needs?</li> <li>• How will the summary process be followed and refrained from identifying solutions in this step?</li> </ul>
Articulate findings for stakeholders without casting blame.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the learned information be articulated in a language that is specific to the community yet does not cast blame?</li> </ul>
Investigate areas of stakeholder disagreement and causes of disagreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there places in which the various stakeholder voices disagree with one another or present a different perspective? How can the underlying causes of these differences be explored?</li> </ul>

## Determining Priorities

Achieving successful outcomes from an improvement process requires directing improvement efforts toward a manageable set of priorities. In the course of the CNA, it is likely that multiple needs or issues will emerge. However, it is important to narrow this list of needs to a key set of priorities for action. Further, stakeholders who will be responsible for carrying out the work resulting from the CNA must ensure that the priorities identified are authentic and specific to the CNA framework and local context.



### Essential Elements: Key Considerations and Actions for the Determining Priorities Phase

<p><b>Needs-Driven and Context-Specific Approach</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that priorities reflect areas that, if addressed, will have a measurable and lasting impact on implementation (system inputs) and outcomes. It can be tempting to focus on issues that contribute to system challenges but are outside of stakeholder control (including student demographics or local politics) rather than those elements that can be addressed to drive meaningful change.</li> <li>• In determining priorities, consider the following:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can the school or district control this issue?</li> <li>– Are the voices responsible for carrying out the identified work involved in helping determine priorities?</li> <li>– Do the school/district and the voices represented have the capacity to realize the changes necessary to address this issue?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Rigorous Data Analysis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine priorities that are supported by strong data (i.e., multiple data points derived from multiple data sources or voices), which is cross-referenced or triangulated to create a fuller picture of the issue.</li> <li>• Consider (rather than prioritize) findings or themes based on a single source or data point.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stakeholder Engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather input on determined priorities from stakeholders responsible for <b>identifying needs and carrying out the work that results from the CNA.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how identified needs impact one another, and determine which needs represent short-term goals and which are related to long-term goals.</li> <li>• Determine the effort that is required to address each need, and consider prioritizing those that are “low-hanging fruit” or that would represent a quick win to build momentum toward tackling the more challenging needs.</li> <li>• Use a voting process to prioritize identified needs for action; encourage conversation regarding the number of improvement priorities that any one plan can effectively tackle.</li> <li>• Identify any critical needs that are cross-cutting, or most closely related to the reason that <b>the CNA was undertaken.</b></li> </ul>

## Determining Priorities

Activities	Guiding questions to consider
<p>Narrow and prioritize the list of needs to a key set of priorities for action that, if addressed, would have the greatest impact on student outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strengths and needs have emerged from multiple data sources? What findings or themes have emerged that, if addressed, will have the greatest potential for impact on student outcomes?</li> <li>• What identified needs impact each other?</li> <li>• Which needs represent short-term goals, and which needs represent long-term goals?</li> <li>• What needs represent “low-hanging fruit” that, if addressed, would represent a quick win and build momentum toward confronting more challenging needs?</li> <li>• How many priorities will a given school or district address simultaneously?</li> </ul>
<p>Consider if there is additional data that should be reviewed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there additional data that should be considered to make informed decisions about priorities and capacity for implementation?</li> </ul>
<p>If additional data are needed, gather and review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat the data review process.</li> </ul>
<p>Develop three to five priority statements. Draft these priority statements into SMART goals. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the SMART goals contain each of the needed elements? Specific and Strategic, Measurable, Action Oriented, Realistic, Time-bound</li> </ul>
<p>Create an action plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have stakeholders who are responsible for carrying out the work resulting from the CNA ensured the priorities are authentic and specific to the local context?</li> <li>• Are improvement efforts directed toward the identified set of priorities?</li> <li>• Can timelines/responsibilities for monitoring implementation fidelity be set?</li> <li>• Will fidelity be measured by ongoing evaluation data?</li> </ul>

## Connecting to Implementation

The final phase of the CNA takes the results of the CNA and turns those results into something actionable. Educators dig deeper into the prioritized needs to understand root causes or further break down the priorities so they can be connected to relevant goals and incorporated into an improvement or action plan. Priorities established through the process of identifying needs and interpreting their causes drive the selection of appropriate strategies or interventions, how they will be implemented, and how improvement will be evaluated and measured along the way. Connecting with implementation is critical to realizing change as a result of the CNA process.



### Essential Elements: Key Considerations and Actions for the Connecting With Implementation Phase

<b>Needs-Driven and Context-Specific Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the implementation of improvement initiatives or interventions connects to existing work when appropriate, aligns with district priorities, and responds to the concerns of the larger community. Moving from CNA results to implementation requires many of the same contextual considerations as conducting the CNA, particularly related to organizational and system health, initiative implementation, and external conditions, including social context, local context, and best practices.</li> <li>• Focus the CNA on a core set of guiding questions or driving principles (a framework) that ties the needs assessment to overarching priorities and clearly defines the scope of what is considered as part of the process.</li> </ul>
<b>Rigorous Data Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for further examination of data and research on the identified priorities, including the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Internal data on previous implementation of programs and initiatives related to action areas</li> <li>– Resource allocation considerations and trends (especially if these were not included as part of the input data collected for analysis)</li> <li>– Additional context or stakeholder information related to rollout and implementation of action areas</li> <li>– External research and data to support implementation of action areas</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage stakeholders in identifying strategies, timelines, and available resources because those responsible for carrying out the work of improvement have a unique perspective on what has been—and what can be—successful. Communicate the results of the CNA and engage stakeholders in defining the next steps in response to those results. Engaging in two-way communication that is responsive to stakeholder needs creates buy-in and sets the stage for sustainability of improvement efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that action plans informed by the CNA include strategies for progress monitoring. Identify opportunities for stakeholders—both those involved in implementation and those external to it—to engage in utilizing data to reflect on progress.</li> </ul>

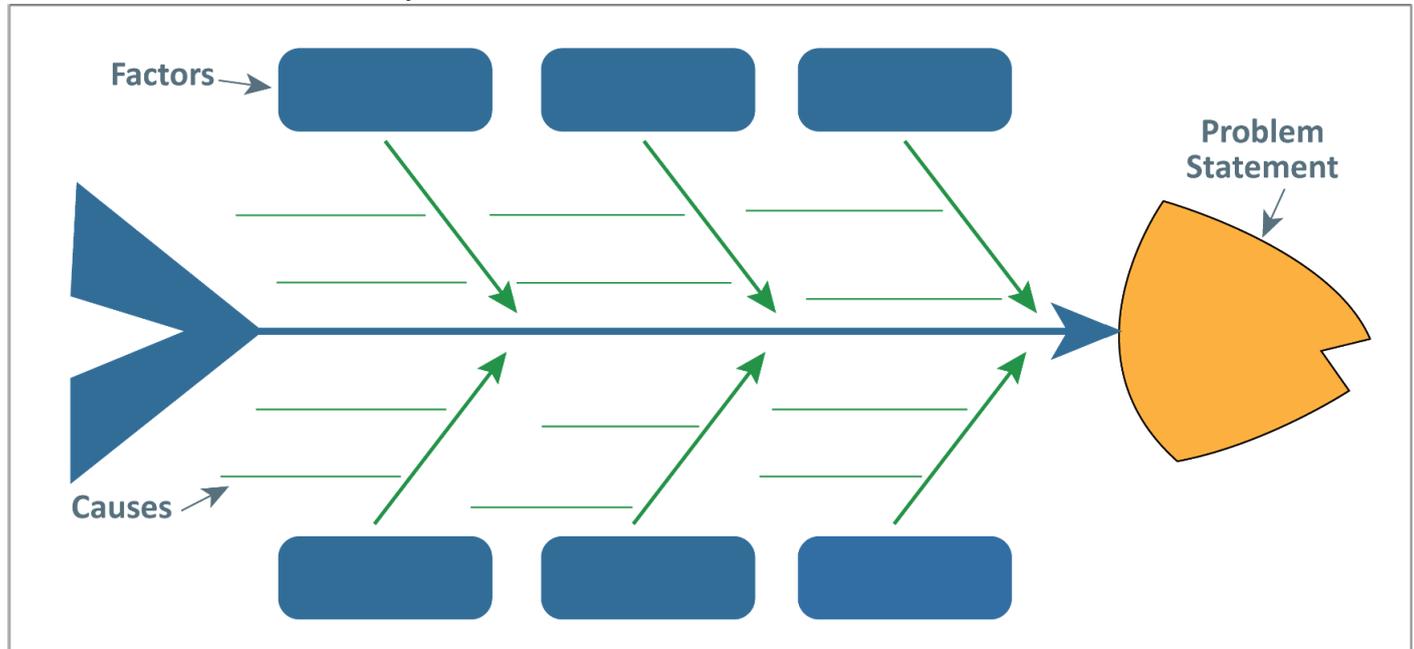
## Connecting to Implementation

Activities	Guiding questions to consider
Dig deeper into the prioritized needs to understand root causes or further break down the priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the potential underlying root causes of the needs or issues the team has prioritized?</li> <li>• What additional information is needed about the CNAs results or their potential underlying causes to create meaningful, long-term results?</li> </ul>
Use the identified priorities to drive the selection of appropriate strategies or interventions, how they will be implemented, and how improvement will be evaluated and measured along the way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will school or district teams connect CNA results to the selection of evidence-based practices for implementation?</li> </ul>
Set criteria for judging the merits of strategies/ solutions such as effect on causes, acceptability, and feasibility (including resources).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will we know if identified solutions are positively impacting student achievement?</li> </ul>
Review and document research and evaluation data that supports the merits of possible solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some possible solutions? Which solutions are best for the local context? Why?</li> </ul>
Articulate findings for stakeholders without casting blame.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the learning be articulated in a language that is specific to the community yet does not cast blame?</li> </ul>
Select one or more solutions for each area of need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider whether each of the high-ranking solutions will result in the desired outcomes, or whether they will push in the opposite direction, preventing change.</li> </ul>
Connect priorities to relevant goals and incorporate them into an improvement or action plan. Propose an action plan that includes descriptions of the solutions, rationale, proposed timelines, and resource requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What processes will be created to ensure regular opportunities for utilizing data to reflect on the progress of improvement efforts?</li> </ul>
Prepare a written report to communicate the methods used and the results of the CNA process to decision-makers and key stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will be responsible for preparing written reports and possible oral briefings?</li> </ul>
Reflect on the progress of the improvement efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will be responsible for monitoring progress?</li> <li>• How will progress be recorded and communicated?</li> </ul>

# Appendix A: Planning Templates

## Fishbone Diagram

The purpose of the fishbone diagram as a continuous improvement method is to guide school renewal teams in developing a shared and deeper understanding of the problem that the team is looking to address. This is a root cause analysis tool that is utilized within the [School Renewal Guide](#). Instructions and guidance on how to develop a Fishbone Diagram can be found in Phase One: Root Cause Analysis of the School Renewal Guide.



## PDSA Tracker

The PDSA process is intended to test small-scale practice changes to build confidence in efficacy prior to full implementation and scale. When small-scale changes are tested via a PDSA cycle before a broader schoolwide implementation, school renewal teams can avoid common implementation barriers. The PDSA Tracker is a tool designed to assist schools with implementing and tracking their PDSA Cycles. Guidance on implementing PDSA Cycles can be found in Phase III: Testing Change Practices Through Rapid Cycles of Inquiry of the [School Renewal Guide](#).

Test #	PLAN		DO	STUDY	ACT
	<i>What theory will you test?</i>	<i>Prediction: Prior to testing, what do you think will happen?</i>	<i>What do you see?</i>	<i>How did what you see match your prediction?</i>	<i>What now? Adapt, adopt, or abandon?</i>
<b>Sakakawea High School Example</b>	If we develop and implement lesson plans to incorporate 'student discussions' as part of daily practice teacher's frequency in implementing this evidence-based practice to support student outcomes in algebra will improve.	Through classroom observation protocols we will observe 50% of ninth grade teachers implementing evidence-based practices (e.g. student discussions) at least one time per observed lesson.  Through classroom observations we will observe 50% of ninth grade teachers not implementing evidence-based practices (e.g. student discussions) at least one time per observed lesson.	Through teacher observation conducted over 3 class periods for each 9th grade teacher, principals noted that implementation of evidence-based practice (e.g. student discussions) to support student outcomes in 9 <sup>th</sup> grade algebra were observed 5 times in 3 ninth grade classrooms and 0 times in one ninth grade classroom.	It didn't match the prediction;  9th grade teachers exceeded predicted outcomes.	Adopt  Consider continuing to test the theory to 100% participation from teachers implementing the change practice and study to learn more about impact on student outcomes.

## Plan-Do-Study-Act Worksheet

This is a tool designed to systematically walk teams engaged in the PDSA process through each phase. This resource has been designed to explain and provide detailed guidance for each section.

School:

Change to practice Test:

Focus goal:

Test date and timeframe:

### PLAN

Briefly describe the test here:

How will you know that this change practice is an improvement? What do you predict will happen?

### Implement Change Practice

Tasks necessary to implement the change practice (What)	Person Responsible (Who)	When	Where
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

### Data Collection

Data Type: What data will be collected, and what tool will be used for the measurement?	Person Responsible (Who)	When will data be collected?	Where will raw data be located?
1. Driver:			
2. Process:			
3. Balance:			
4. Outcome:			

# Appendix B: Resources

While there is much flexibility in how an individual school or school district gathers information and captures the decisions made while engaging in the process of a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA), the following are some resources and tools that may be helpful as a team engages in the CNA process.

## Sample Needs Assessment Templates and Worksheets

- [Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. School Improvement: Needs Assessment](#)
- [Rubric to Assess the Quality of Schoolwide Program](#)
- [Sample Title I Annual Review](#)
- [TITLE I TARGETED ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SUMMARY & NEEDS ASSESSMENT](#)
- [Setting up a Targeted Assistance Program](#)
- [Title IV, Part A LEA Needs Assessment Tool | National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments \(NCSSLE\)](#)

## Evidence-based Practices

- What Works Clearinghouse
- Institute of Education Sciences. Washington, DC.
- [OSPI Continuous School Improvement Resources](#)
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Continuous School Improvement Resources.
- [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments](#)
- United States Department of Education. (September 16, 2016). Non-regulatory guidance: Using evidence to strengthen education investments. Washington, DC.
- National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) has EBP charts for behavior and academics. ([intensiveintervention.org](https://intensiveintervention.org))

## Root Cause Analysis

- US Department of Education Root Cause Analysis, Purpose, and Approaches
- Office of Elementary & Secondary Education.

(September 15, 2020). Purposes of root cause analysis in school improvement planning. Washington, DC.

- U.S. Department of Education Approaches to Root Cause Analysis
- Office of Elementary & Secondary Education. (September 15, 2020). Purposes of root cause analysis in school improvement planning. Washington, DC.
- OSPI Data Inquiry Guide. Section 2.4: Pursuing Root Cause and Problems of Practice
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2020). Data inquiry guide.

## Web Based Resources

- [Continuous School Improvement | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [Comprehensive Support and Improvement | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [Targeted Support and Improvement | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [ND FIRST | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [Comparability & Supplement, not Supplant Guidance](#)
- [Schoolwide Program Components: Comprehensive Needs Assessment | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [Schoolwide Program Components: Schoolwide Program Plan | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [Schoolwide Title Report Template](#)
- [Schoolwide Record Keeping](#)
- [Targeted Assistance Record-keeping](#)

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**600 E. Boulevard Ave., Dept. 201, Bismarck, ND 58505-0440**  
**701-328-2260 | [www.nd.gov/dpi](http://www.nd.gov/dpi)**

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