Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement

A TACTICAL GUIDE

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PURPOSE OF TACTICAL GUIDE

This tactical guide is designed to support state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools as they design and complete needs assessments for various purposes.

This guide was created specifically to:

Support schools identified for improvement (due to achievement data for all students or for subgroups of students) and their LEAs.

But *any* school or LEA can benefit from the use of a strong needs assessment (NA).

Provide SEAs and LEAs with information about how the NA connects into a broader theory of action around improvement.

Provide SEAs and LEAs with specific guidance and questions to consider as they develop a NA or hire an external provider to complete an needs assessment, and then utilize its results as part of their planning, implementation, and monitoring processes.

ESSA Requirements

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires SEAs and LEAs to complete a needs assessment (NA) in several circumstances, including:

For schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI), the district must develop and implement a school improvement plan that is based on a school-level NA (Title I, Part A).

An LEA is not required to conduct an NA for schools identified for targeted support and improvement (TSI), but many SEAs may choose to either require or strongly encourage the completion of an NA for those identified schools.

Under ESSA, a few additional Title areas also require an NA. In some cases, the same NA, or a very similar one, can be used to meet more than one requirement.

Some SEAs may also choose to have all schools (and LEAs) that have been identified for improvement complete an NA.

To streamline efforts and lessen the burden on schools and LEAs, some SEAs may choose to develop a template for a comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) that meets of their department-specific requirements for local NAs.

(CCSSO, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2015)

SECTION A

Planning Your Needs Assessment



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

An assessment is an appraisal that estimates, calculates, or rates something. So, what does it mean to assess needs? Basically it means to identify a school's (and to some extent its LEA's) strengths, weaknesses, and the areas in which improvement is called for. Identifying areas of weakness is an essential first step toward identifying and then addressing root causes of poor performance.

Various names and definitions are used to describe needs assessments, including:

- Comprehensive needs assessment (CNA)
- Segmented needs assessment (SNA)
- Consolidated needs assessment
- Needs assessment
- Equity audit
- School quality review (SQRs)
- Diagnostic assessment
- Diagnostic review
- Diagnostic inquiry

What is a needs assessment (NA) for improvement?

- An NA is **a systemic process** that is used to:
  - Determine **strengths and weaknesses** of a school and/or LEA,
  - Understand the **context and constraints** of the school and/or LEA,
  - Perform a **root-cause analysis**, and
  - Develop **an improvement plan** outlining changes considered most likely to bolster or build on strengths and to remediate weaknesses.
- An NA should be part of an **ongoing performance management cycle** that includes both longer-range performance goals and shorter-cycle implementation targets.
- An NA should include **questions at the LEA level**, even if the focus is the school level.
- An NA is **not an isolated tool or practice**, but should be part of a continuous improvement process.

Whole or Part?

A needs assessment (NA) is a point-in-time snapshot that may be:

- Comprehensive, assessing all aspects of the school and its context (including its LEA), and/or
- Segmented, assessing only one or a few aspects of the school and its context.

Any NA should be revisited and updated on a regular basis to ensure alignment to the improvement plan and to check for progress against the original findings.

Comprehensive needs assessments inform:

- Organizational direction, including goals and strategies
- Systemic functions
- Long-range plans (typically multi-year)

Segmented needs assessments inform:

- Improvement to targeted functions or aspects of the school
- Incremental change
- Short-cycle plans (typically less than a year)

Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA)

- A CNA may be used by multiple departments within an SEA. Instead of having several individual departments develop or require their own NA templates for local use, the departments collaborate to develop a single template that will work for all of them.
- The initial amount of time invested in creating a CNA can be large, because it includes developing the necessary tools and processes, as well as planning and coordinating related to implementation. However, this approach can result in resource savings for the SEA, the LEA, and the schools over time.
- As is true for all NAs, the findings yielded through a CNA are only accurate as long as the school and district context remains the same. Thus, CNAs need to be updated as the school and its LEA evolve.
- Developing a CNA would be most beneficial for SEAs that are moving toward implementing consolidated grant applications; are braiding and blending funds; and are breaking down traditional SEA silos.

Segmented Needs Assessment (SNA)

- An SNA is:
  - used by one program or a limited number of programs within an SEA, and/or
  - used by a school to address one functional area or a limited number of functional areas at a time, to inform short-cycle improvement planning.
- An SNA can be conducted relatively quickly, thus allowing for opportunities to capture and learn from the most current data.
- An SNA may be produced by administering each component of a CNA separately so that improvement in each area can be planned and executed as a manageable chunk of work. This approach retains the CNA's advantage of providing a coherent view of how the components fit together.

DIFFERENTIATION OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The instruments and methods needed for conducting a CNA or an SNA may vary by school types and performance trends.

High school, middle school, elementary school, preschool; typical or special-purpose school (alternative schools, for example)

Trajectory of past performance (using accountability metrics, for example)

DIFFERENTIATION BY PERFORMANCE TRAJECTORY

This is an example of how performance trajectory could inform the needs assessment and improvement process.

Performance	Tools & Infrastructure	Guidance
Consistently high performance	School will be able to apply SEA- and LEA-provided tools, data, implementation infrastructure, and information to its own advantage	Self-directed; will access the resources and supports required for [its] continued growth
Moderate performance/ rapid improvement	School will typically be able to apply the SEA- and LEA-provided tools, data, implementation infrastructure, and information to its own advantage	Self-directed; will access the resources and supports required for [its] continued growth
Moderate performance/ moderate improvement	School will benefit from coached self-assessment, applying the SEA- and LEA-provided tools, data, implementation infrastructure, and information	Guidance of an external consultant would be helpful in diagnosis and planning
Moderate performance/ slow improvement	Coached self-assessment may be supplemented by external reviews to provide an objective view of school's operations, implementation infrastructure, and recommend improvements	Needs coaching and external reviewers for diagnosis and planning
Consistently low performance	School is a candidate for intervention. External review is useful in determining the appropriate intervention and implementation infrastructure model to inform the SEA and LEA about conditions and practices prevalent in the school in order to strengthen the reform efforts	Needs interventionists and external reviewers for diagnosis, planning, and strategy selection

Source: Excerpted from Redding, S., Dunn, L., & McCauley, C. (2015). *School Improvement Grants: Guidance and tools for the 2015 amended regulations: Maximizing the optional planning/pre-implementation year.* San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from http://www.centeronschoolturnaround.org/. Used with permission.

WORKSHEET 1

Planning Your Needs Assessment (NA)

1. Purpose statement for your NA:
    - The purpose of this NA is to . . .
2. What will you call the NA?
    - The NA will be called . . .
3. Who will develop the NA (i.e., SEA, LEA, external partner, or combination)?
    - The NA will be developed by . . .
4. Will the NA be comprehensive or segmented?
    - If a CNA, which SEA departments or areas of school operations are included?
    - If an SNA, what are the separate NAs or the CNA components that will be administered separately? When will they be administered? Which departments will administer them?
5. Will the same NA tools be used for all schools, or will different versions be used for different types of schools? If the latter, which types (e.g., high school, middle school, elementary school, CSI, TSI, alternative schools) will require different tools?
6. How does the capacity of the school and LEA inform the NA tools and/or processes?

SECTION B

Designing Your Needs Assessment



Elements of a Needs Assessment (NA)

Qualitative and quantitative data are the foundation of an NA. The types of data include:

- Context
  - Demographics (e.g., student, community, personnel)
  - LEA policies and practices (e.g., local school board decision-making; presence of and admission policies for magnet programs)
- Students
  - Student outcomes/performance (e.g., assessments, graduation rates, postsecondary success, accountability metrics)
  - Student engagement (e.g., attendance, behavior)
  - Student opportunities (e.g., enrollment/participation in various programs, curricular areas, equity of access)

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Elements of a Needs Assessment (NA)

(Continued from previous slide)

- Personnel policy and procedures, which may be LEA- or school-based (e.g., recruitment, hiring, placement, development, evaluation, differentiation, advancement, termination)
- Professional practice (e.g., leadership and decision-making, and leadership development; planning, curriculum and instruction)
- Climate and culture (e.g., student and adult [including parent] perceptions; stakeholder engagement)
- Stakeholder support
  - Family/community engagement
  - Student support services
- Vendor/partner practices and outcomes (e.g., resource scan of current vendor services; use of performance contracts)

Including the School and the LEA

- While the focus of a needs assessment (NA) may be at the school level, questions about the effectiveness and functionality of the LEA should also be included.
- LEA-level NA topics may address:
  - Operational effectiveness of the central office and local school board in taking care of district functions;
  - Infrastructure for school leadership, teaching, and learning; and
  - Support for the improvement of individual schools (Lane, 2009).

Ensuring Stakeholder Engagement

- Stakeholder engagement is:
  - Necessary for data collection
  - Important for analyzing findings
  - Crucial for implementing an improvement plan
- Which stakeholder groups should be engaged depends on the scope of the needs assessment.
- Stakeholder groups may include, for example:
  - SEA personnel
  - LEA personnel
  - Local board of education
  - Broad community (e.g. enrollment area, business leaders, faith-based organizations, social service providers)
  - Families of students
  - School professional personnel
  - School support staff
  - School volunteers
  - Students

STEPS IN A NEEDS ASSESSMENT (NA)

1. Pre-populate the NA with readily available data (e.g., demographics, student outcomes)
2. Gather survey data
3. Review data and compile into easily digestible format
4. Onsite review to gather more data, analyze existing data, determine findings and initial action items
5. Create summary of findings to inform plan creation

The onsite review process is a crucial component during which data are analyzed, root-cause analysis occurs, and plan development begins.

COMPLETION OPTIONS

SEA-Led	LEA-Led	SEA & LEA Hybrid	External Partner
SEA designs the tools and process; SEA completes the majority of the data collection and analysis; SEA staff or SEA-hired subcontractors facilitate onsite; review team is composed mostly of SEA staff; SEA develops the findings and deliverables.	SEA sets the minimum requirements; LEA or SEA designs the tools and process; review team is mostly LEA staff, school staff, and community members; LEA completes the data collection and analysis; LEA staff facilitate onsite; LEA develops the findings and deliverables.	SEA designs the tools and process; SEA staff or SEA-hired subcontractors facilitate onsite; review team comprises SEA staff, LEA staff, school staff, and community members; the team develops the findings and deliverables.	SEA sets the minimum requirements; partner designs the tools and process; partner facilitates onsite; review team may consist of SEA staff, LEA staff, school staff, community members, and external-partner staff; partner develops the findings and deliverables.

With *all* of the above options, the SEA has the ability to define the scope of work, the process, and the content required for the needs assessment.

Methods of Data Collections

A variety of methods can be used to collect data for the needs assessment.

Compilation of data from available sources (by SEA, LEA, school, external partner)

Consensus compilation by school-based team, arriving at consensus on NA query items

Surveys or questionnaires (paper and pencil; scannable; and/or online)

Guided compilation by school-based team, with LEA, SEA, or external–partner facilitation

Interviews (phone call and/or face to face)

Focus groups (conference call and/or face to face)

Onsite review by team (external, internal, or hybrid)

WORKSHEET 2

Designing Your Needs Assessment (NA) (Part 1)

Which data collection methods do you anticipate including in your NA? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Compilation of data from available sources
  __ SEA __ LEA __ school
  __ external partner
- ❑ Consensus compilation by school-based team
- ❑ Guided compilation by school-based team, with LEA, SEA, or external-partner facilitation
- ❑ Surveys or questionnaires
  __ paper and pencil __ scannable
  __ online
- ❑ Interviews
  __ phone call __ face to face
- ❑ Focus groups
  __ conference call __ face to face
- ❑ Onsite review by team
  __ external (SEA/partner)
  __ internal (LEA/school)
  __ hybrid

WORKSHEET 3

Designing Your Needs Assessment (NA) (Part 2)

Which elements of an NA do you anticipate including? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Contextual variables
  __ demographics (__ student __community __ personnel __ other: _____)
  __ LEA policies and supports (__ operations __ learning infrastructure __ support for school improvement)
- ❑ Student variables
  __ student outcomes/performance (__ assessments __ graduation rates __ postsecondary success
  __ accountability metrics __ other:_____)
  __ student engagement (__attendance __ behavior __ other: _____)
  __ student opportunities (__enrollment/participation in various programs __ curricular areas
  __ equity of access to quality instruction __ other:_____)
- ❑ Personnel policy and procedures (may be LEA) (e.g., recruitment, hiring, placement, development, evaluation, differentiation, advancement, termination)
- ❑ Professional practice (e.g., leadership and decision-making; leadership development; planning, curriculum and instruction; family/community engagement; student support services)
- ❑ Climate and culture (e.g., student and adult [including parent] perceptions; stakeholder engagement)
- ❑ Vendor/partner practices and outcomes (e.g., do contracts include performance management provisions?)

WORKSHEET 4

Designing Your Needs Assessment (NA) (Part 3)

Check off the roles and responsibilities for each of the stakeholder groups identified:

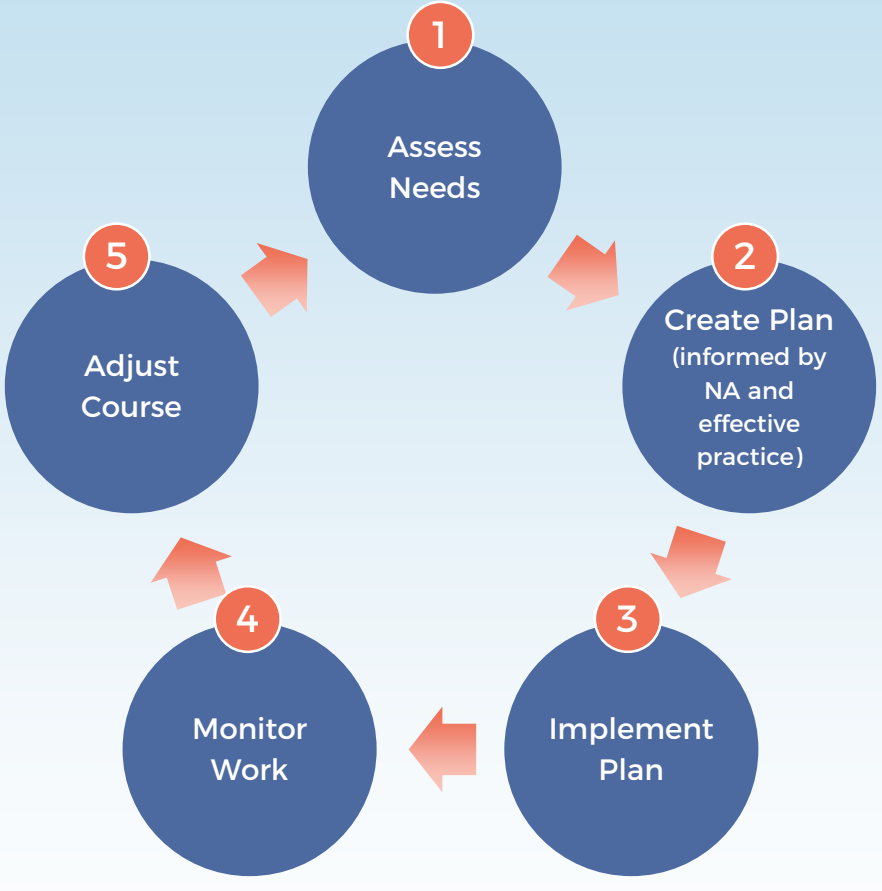
Stakeholder Group	Establishment of Design Requirements	Development of Tools and Processes	Data Collection	Analysis	Onsite Review	Plan Development
SEA Personnel						
LEA Personnel						
Local Board of Education						
Families and Community						
School Personnel						
Students						
SEA-Hired External Partners						
LEA-Hired External Partners						
Other: _____						



SECTION C

The Improvement Process

IMPROVEMENT CYCLE THEORY OF ACTION



An improvement process typically cycles from

(1) an initial assessment of strengths and weaknesses, to

(2) an examination of effective practices most likely to produce results as part of plan creation, to

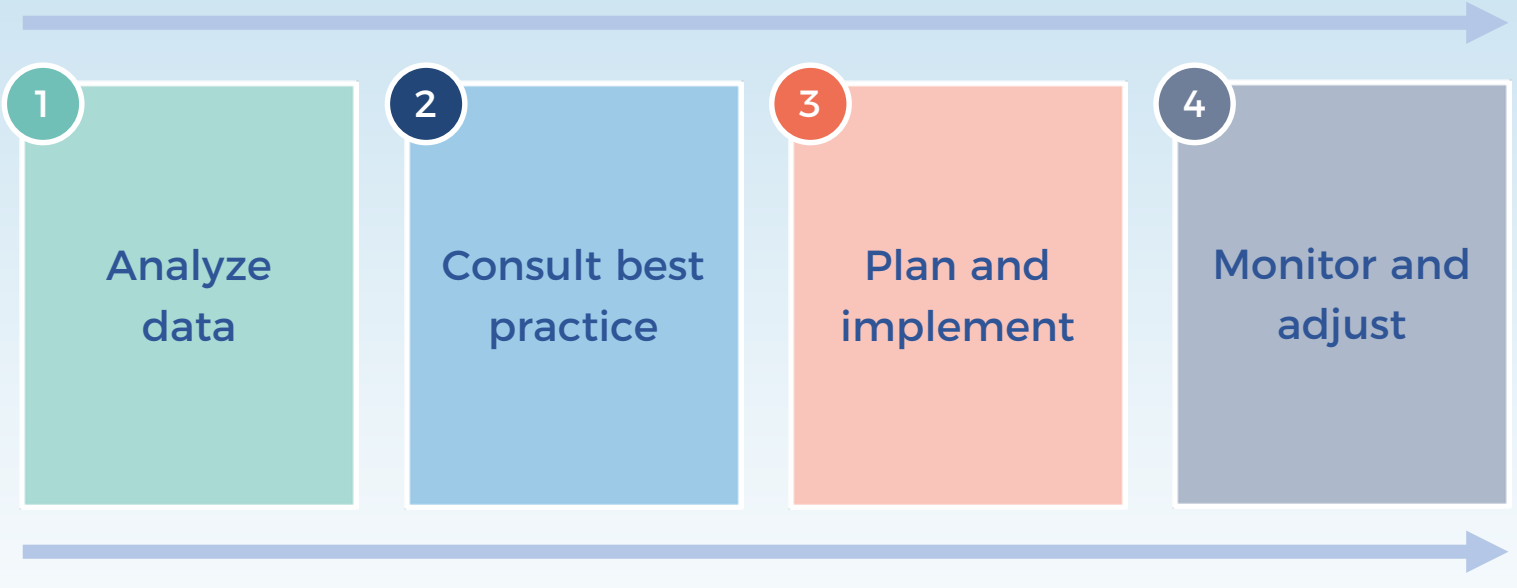
(3) implementation of the plan, to

(4) implementation monitoring, by the school itself and by the LEA and SEA at different points in time, to

(5) course adjustment.

The cycle begins again with a subsequent needs assessment to support the ongoing monitoring process, track progress, and update the improvement plan.

MOVING FROM NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO CHANGE



This process applies to both long-range and short-cycle improvement plans.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING CHANGE
(PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT)

The success of a data-based plan depends on:

1. The quality of the plan (i.e., its likelihood of getting results within its context);
2. The fidelity of the plan's implementation;
3. Appropriate adjustments of the plan, based on experiences and circumstances; and
4. The adequacy of external supports.

The quality of the plan depends on:

1. The data that inform it (including the needs assessment);
2. Its alignment to effective practice; and
3. The logic of implementation actions.

(Layland & Redding, 2017)

Working with Frameworks

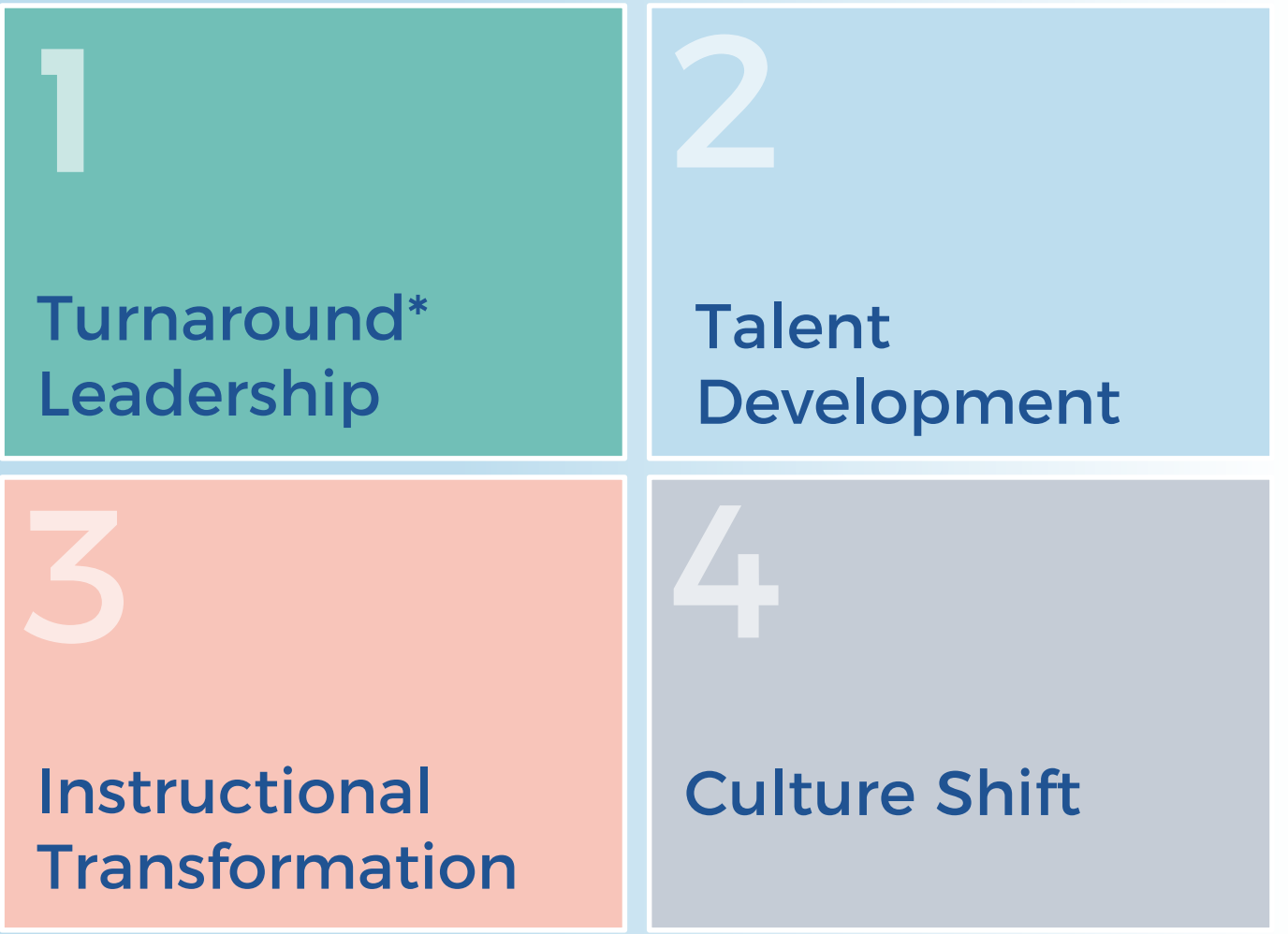
- Frameworks can be used as a foundation for needs assessments and as a broader theory of action for school and district improvement efforts.
- Although it was created to address substantial change in low-achieving schools, *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework* (Center on School Turnaround at WestEd, 2017) provides a set of practices that may also be adopted or adapted for schools experiencing higher performance trajectories. (http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/four-domains/)
- For a description of other practice and evidence-based frameworks, see "Ways to Identify Sound (Best) Practice" in *Casting a Statewide Strategic Performance Net* (Layland & Redding, 2017). (http://www.bscpcenter.org/casting/)

The Center on School Turnaround's Four Domains

An example of a framework

On this slide and the following slides, the domains and practices from the Center on School Turnaround's systems framework are used to structure sets of indicator items as examples for a needs assessment.

(Center on School Turnaround at WestEd, 2017)



* The term "turnaround" implies a sense of urgency in leading necessary change, not a specific intervention approach.

Prioritize improvement and communicate urgency

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- School leaders set a clear vision for the school's direction.
- School leaders make sure everyone understands their role in continuously elevating professional practice.
- School leaders model and communicate the expectation that improved student learning will come from careful implementation of effective practices.
- Leadership is appropriately distributed among several roles, including lead teachers.
- Members of the Leadership Team (e.g., principal and lead teachers) meet regularly.
- The Leadership Team shares in decisions of real substance pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and professional learning.
- School leaders and teachers have high expectations for students.
- School leaders and teachers have high expectations for themselves.

Monitor short- and long-term goals

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- School leadership develops and updates an improvement plan.
- The school's improvement plan includes both short- and long-term goals, with milestones to gauge progress.
- School leadership monitors implementation of improvement strategies and changes personnel, programs, and methods as needed to keep the effort on track.
- School leadership intervenes swiftly if progress on improvement strategies wanes.
- School leadership communicates progress on improvement goals to all constituencies.

Customize and target supports to meet needs

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- The LEA grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to reallocate resources (e.g., personnel, funding, schedule) to address school priorities.
- The LEA grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to make decisions to address school priorities.
- School leaders regularly measure, and report to stakeholders, progress in implementing improvement strategies.
- School leaders regularly measure, and report to stakeholders, progress in meeting student learning goals.
- School leadership regularly and systematically tracks progress toward implementation milestones and recommends necessary changes in course.
- School leadership acts swiftly to make changes when something is not going well.

While many of the example indicator items are school-based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

Recruit, develop, retain, & sustain talent

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- The school operates with a transparent system of procedures and protocols for recruiting, evaluating, rewarding, and replacing staff.
- The school successfully recruits and retains highly qualified teachers.
- The school matches candidate competencies with school priorities and needs.
- The school provides an induction program to support new teachers in their first years of teaching.

Target professional learning opportunities

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- The school provides professional learning that is appropriate for individual teachers and staff with different experience and expertise.
- The school aligns professional learning with identified needs, based on staff evaluation and student performance.
- The school provides all staff high-quality, ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated professional learning.
- The school provides learning opportunities for teachers so that they are always getting better at professional practice.

Set clear performance expectations

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- School leadership communicates clear goals for employees' performance that reflect the established evaluation system.
- School leaders facilitate swift exits of underperforming employees to minimize further damage.
- Professional learning for teachers is aligned with classroom observation and teacher evaluation criteria.
- School leaders expect a lot of teachers so that students get the best education possible.

While many of the example indicator items are school-based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

Diagnose and respond to student needs

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- Teachers assess student progress frequently, using a variety of evaluation methods, and maintain a record of the results.
- Teachers individualize instructional plans, in response to individual student performance on pre-tests and other methods of assessment, to provide support for some students and enhanced learning opportunities for others.
- Instructional teams and teachers use fine-grained data to design learning paths tailored to each student's prior learning, personal interests, and aspirations.
- Teachers demonstrate the value of the teacher-student relationship by engaging students and their families in order to reach each student in the most effective way.
- The school's teachers know what each student needs and do their best to provide it.

Provide rigorous, evidence-based instruction

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- Teachers are guided by a document that aligns standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- Teachers develop, and submit for feedback, lesson plans based on aligned units of instruction.
- Teachers use a variety of instructional modes (whole-class, teacher-directed groups, student-directed groups, independent work, computer-based, and homework).
- Students are well prepared for each next step through the school system.

Remove barriers and provide opportunities

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- The school provides all students with opportunities to enroll in and master rigorous coursework for college and career readiness.
- Teachers teach and reinforce positive social skills, self-respect, relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions.
- Teachers are attentive to students' emotional states, guide students in managing their emotions, and arrange for supports and interventions when necessary.
- The school assists students and their families in accessing needed community resources.

While many of the example indicator items are school-based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

Build a strong school community focused on learning

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- School leadership celebrates successes while keeping the focus on longer-term learning goals.
- The school creates opportunities for members of the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning.
- The ongoing conversation between school personnel and families is candid and supportive, and flows in both directions.
- Professional learning programs for teachers include assistance in working effectively with families.
- The school communicates regularly with families about learning standards, their children's progress, and the families' role in their children's school success.

Solicit and act upon stakeholder input

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- School leaders provide teachers with ample opportunity to voice their opinions.
- School leaders provide parents with ample opportunity to voice their opinions.
- The school uses surveys, focus groups, and suggestion boxes to gather stakeholder input on the current operations of the school and its programs, and on suggested improvements.
- School leadership reports to stakeholders the input they have provided, their suggested improvements, and the school's response to that input.

Engage students and families in pursuing education goals

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

- The school intentionally builds students' personal competencies to pursue goals and persist with tasks.
- The school intentionally builds students' skills in appraising their progress, applying learning strategies, and directing their learning.
- The school systematically engages parents with their students in reviewing their students' educational progress, setting college and career goals, and planning the students' education future.
- The school helps students and parents understand and use a variety of data sources about student progress and interests.
- The school utilizes community resources and provides community-based learning experiences to help students understand career and education options.

While many of the example indicator items are school-based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

These categories and indicators are not part of the Center on School Turnaround framework; they are examples of needs assessment (NA) components that may be added to supplement the NA framework categories and indicators. A framework is a foundation for the needs assessment, but additional components may be necessary.

Resource allocation and management

- A comprehensive resource asset scan has been completed and used to make decisions pertaining to resource allocations.
- Assessments of programs and practices are regularly reviewed.
- Resources are prioritized for students and schools with the greatest needs.

Use of external partners

- All external partners work under performance contracts.
- All external partners operate with clear performance expectations.
- Contracts with external partners are renewed or continued only upon review of performance.

Community engagement

- The local school board and the community receive regular updates about schools and their progress.
- The local school board works efficiently and effectively.
- The LEA and the local school board communicate about school and LEA needs.
- The community is engaged in and committed to the improvement process and work.

WORKSHEET 5

Outlining Your Improvement Process

1. Will you work with a framework of effective practice? If so, which one(s)? (You may incorporate portions of more than one.)
2. How does the needs assessment (NA) fit into your overall theory of action for improvement?
3. How do the results from the NA inform the creation of a plan?
4. How do the results from the NA inform immediate next steps for the school, the LEA, and the SEA?
5. How do the monitoring processes (by the school, LEA, and/or SEA) connect back to the NA?
6. How do the results from the monitoring processes inform future NAs and subsequent improvement plans?

WORKSHEET 6

Designing an Effective Onsite Review Process

1. Who participates in the onsite review process?
2. Who facilitates the onsite review process?
3. What data analysis should be completed in preparation for the onsite review process?
4. How can the onsite review process be a safe space to discuss issues that may be controversial or politically sensitive?
5. How can the onsite review process be structured to complete root-cause analysis (e.g., fishbone diagrams; five whys)?
6. How do the results from the onsite review process inform creation of improvement plans for the school and/or the LEA?

SECTION D

Key Decision Points



Decision Points

A number of decision points come up while designing a needs assessment (NA). Here are some of those points and suggested practices.

"I could complete the needs assessment by myself in my office in a few hours, or I could do it correctly by getting out into the field and working with others."

— Devon Isherwood, Arizona Department of Education

- Who participates in the NA?
  - Broad stakeholder engagement is important for completing a strong, accurate, and useful NA. SEA staff or contractors, LEA leaders, school leaders, school staff parents, community members, and/or external partners could participate in the data collection, analysis, and plan development.
- Does the needs assessment occur off site, on site, or in a combination of both?
  - Much of the data can be gathered remotely, but it is important to have an onsite discussion to interpret data, develop findings, and move toward plan creation.
- If the NA is on site, how much time is required?
  - Based on the scope of the NA, time requirements can vary greatly, from a few hours to several days. At a minimum, one full day should be set aside for onsite analysis and discussion.
- If the NA is on site, what is the cost?
  - Cost can vary depending on a number of factors. Travel, for example, can be expensive, especially for SEA staff, so it is important to keep travel costs in mind for members of the review team.
- What training/capacity building is needed for anyone participating?
  - While in-person training is very effective, it can be costly and logistically challenging. In lieu of in-person training, an online webinar could be used to train and familiarize everyone participating with the needs assessment, including the actual tools and process. Additional training would be required for anyone facilitating the onsite process.

(Continued on next slide)

Decision Points

(Continued from previous slide)

- Is there pre-work to be done (e.g., information gathered, compiled, distributed, and reviewed)?
  - Pre-work can require a significant commitment of resources (time and money), but usually results in an overall cost savings with a more efficient onsite review process. Gathering data and then putting the data into an easily digestible format for members of the review team are the two largest pieces of pre-work. To save time and encourage rich discussions during the onsite review, it is helpful for members of the review team to have access to the data before the review.
- What is the format for the deliverables/results of the needs assessment (NA)?
  - The formats for the deliverables will vary, but will often include a summary report of the prioritized key findings, as well as suggestions or recommendations for possible goals and action steps to include in the improvement plan.
- What is the total cost of developing and administering an NA?
  - Cost varies greatly, depending on the NA platform, technology, staff hours, and travel. Hiring an external partner to conduct the NA can also increase costs significantly, but may be the right fit for some schools and LEAs.

(Continued on next slide)

Decision Points

"The needs assessment is a critical piece of work, but the results must be continually surfaced through ongoing conversations in the work moving forward."

— Debbie Montoya, New Mexico Public Education Department

(Continued from previous slide)

- What is the follow-up process for engaging stakeholders about the results and findings from the needs assessment (NA)?
  - The findings of the NA should be shared with a broad group of stakeholders, including the local board of education and the SEA. The local board could request a workshop about the findings, and the SEA could regularly follow up on progress on the findings.
- How will the results be used?
  - Completing an NA is the first step in the cycle of improvement. The real work begins with using the findings to develop an improvement plan (including immediate next steps, milestones, goals, and timelines) and then implementing that plan. Short-cycle and longer-range plans are ideal, with periodic review of progress and plan adjustments.
- How are the results connected to improvement plans and funding applications for school or district improvement work (e.g., CSI or TSI grants)?
  - The findings of the NA could be referenced when reviewing and approving improvement plans and applications for funding. All proposed actions and strategies should connect to the initial findings or to those in subsequent NAs.
- How can the results inform ongoing monitoring processes?
  - SEAs could use the NA findings in subsequent monitoring processes for the school and the LEA.

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