

## NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

### Definition

Systematic process to acquire an accurate, thorough picture of the strengths and weaknesses of a school community that can be used in response to the academic needs of all students for improving student achievement and meeting challenging academic standards. Process that collects and examines information about schoolwide issues and then utilizes that data to determine priority goals, to develop a plan, and to allocate funds and resources. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other community members should be included in gathering data.

### Steps in Conducting Needs Assessments

**1. Clarify the purpose of the needs assessment**

What do you know? What do you think you know? What do you want to know?  
Why are you doing needs assessment?  
What are you trying to measure?  
What will you do with the information you collect?  
How will you report the information? Is it user friendly and easy to understand?  
Are all interested groups included in planning and conducting the needs assessment?  
Who will be responsible for the various steps?

**2. Identify the population**

Who—Students, teachers, administrators, other school staff, parents, community members, volunteers, service providers

**3. Determine how you will conduct the needs assessment**

**4. Design a survey instrument or adopt one that already exists (See Appendix A for samples.)**

Are the instruments easy to use?  
Is the format easy to summarize and analyze?

**5. Collect Data (see following section)**

Develop management system for collecting and organizing data  
Determine baseline data  
How do you plan to follow up with those not responding to the collection tools  
Organize the data by key categories  
Use data summary sheets to help determine patterns and make calculations easier

**6. Analyze Data (see following section)**

What are the strengths?  
What are the weaknesses?

**7. Use the results---very important**

Determine short and long term goals—use at least 3 data sources to justify each goal or target area  
Develop a plan  
Allocate resources  
Summarize findings

## DATA COLLECTION

### Need for Data – To Understand

- The current and future needs of the school, students, parents, teachers, and the community
- How well the current processes meet these clients' needs
- The ways in which the school and community are changing
- The root causes of problems
- The types of education programs and expertise that will be needed in the future

### Analyze Data--To

- Improve instruction
- Provide students with feedback on their performance
- Gain common understanding of what quality performance is and how close we are to achieving it

- Measure program success and effectiveness
- Understand if what we are doing is making a difference
- Make sure students “do not fall through the cracks”
- Know which programs are getting the results we want
- Get to the “root causes” of problems
- Guide curriculum development and revision
- Promote accountability
- Meet state and federal requirements
- Use data to determine goals for increased student achievement, benchmarks for progress, and measurable outcomes

Ask yourselves:

- What is the purpose of the school?
- What is the purpose of collecting the data?
- How are the currently collected data used?
- How are you going to report the data—to whom, what format?
- What are the roadblocks to collecting data?
- What are the roadblocks to analyzing data?
- What are the roadblocks to reporting data?
- What more do we need to know?

## Types of Data

Use multiple measures. When just one measure is used, the context of what the data is telling is missed. See Appendix B for sources of data.

- **Demographic**
  - Enrollment, attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates, ethnicity, gender, grade level language proficiency, free and reduced meals, discipline referrals, etc.
- **Perceptions—values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, views**
  - Questionnaires/surveys of parents, teachers, students, alumni
  - Observations by teachers, students, administrators, parents, community leaders
  - Person-to-person interviews
  - Telephone surveys
  - Focus groups
  - Community demographics

Questions to ask:

- ✓ What is the purpose for administering a questionnaire?
- ✓ What information do you want to collect?
- ✓ To whom do you need to give the questionnaires in order to get this information?
- ✓ How do you want the results displayed? i.e. charts, graphs, tables, percentages, comparisons, etc.
- ✓ By what categories will you want to disaggregate the responses?
- ✓ How will you administer each of the questionnaires?
- ✓ How will you get the information from the questionnaires into some form (database) that will allow you to chart the results?
- ✓ Who is going to do the work?

- **Student learning**
  - Standardized tests- CTBS scores
  - Authentic assessments—demonstrates what the student knows and is able to do
    - ✓ exhibitions—students present their knowledge and defend their work before an audience; i.e. written work, visual aids, oral presentations
    - ✓ portfolios
    - ✓ performance assessments
    - ✓ projects
    - ✓ rubrics
  - Curriculum and instruction (expectations about what students can and should learn, instructional activities, programs, or strategies, availability of technology, supplemental use of staff and materials)
  - Teacher observations
  - GPA; letter grade distributions

- Existing studies/reports
- School progress reports
- Report card analysis
- Self study checklists
- Title I assessment tool

- **Teacher Quality**

- Ratio of teachers to students
- Certification and specialization of teachers
- Professional development opportunities

- **School processes**

- Parent and community involvement
- Refers to practices, instructional, educational, and psychological events. What does staff do to achieve the purpose of the school and what do they do that may help or hinder progress.
- Assess processes by flowcharts, rubrics, curriculum mapping, top-down flowcharts, etc. This data is used to predict and draw conclusions about the future based on past performance of the process.

### Databases

- Must determine what fields of data are needed to produce desired reports when the intention is to analyze data over time.
- Software—must be easy to learn and to use.
  - Cross-platform (program files can work on most common operating systems in the same way)
  - Relational (ability to combine two or more databases to make a more comprehensive one)
  - Has a fast learning curve
  - Easily imports and exports data
  - Customizes
  - Can link data with different sources
  - Makes producing reports non-threatening
  - Has good technical support
  - Is able to be secured so that only authorized people can use the database
  - Is not expensive
  - Has understandable documentation

### Hints

- Explain the purpose of each data collection strategy
- Data collection tools should be brief, to the point, and questions should be necessary and phrased appropriately
- Assure confidentiality of survey participants
- Allow enough time for surveys to be returned
- May use information from previously conducted needs assessments if data is current and relevant
- Much information is already being collected—don't collect it again—just analyze the appropriate data
- In analyzing data, look for patterns. For example, chart reading progress reports by monthly averages. Is one month consistently lower than average year after year? Why? Disaggregate data by subgroups. Look for differences and reason for differences

**APPENDIX A**

**OPTIONAL SAMPLES  
OF NEEDS  
ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

## Sample One

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

FOR YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT, HAVE YOU:

\_\_\_ I. **Determined what data you need to collect?**

- What is the question you need to answer regarding student needs?
- For whom is the evaluation being conducted?
- What is the purpose of the needs assessment?
- What information must you get? What is the minimum required by your stakeholders or your program?
- Who can help you determine where to find the information you need?
- Don't forget to document special needs and available resources.

\_\_\_ II. **Chosen several key questions that your needs assessment will evaluate?**

\_\_\_ III. **Decided on your data collection methods?**

- How will you get the information you need to answer your question? What collection methods will you use?
- Are you collecting enough OBJECTIVE data?
- Is it worth writing your own assessment measure?
- Who will you need to talk to regarding needs? Who will be your data sources?
- Are there any assessment measures you can use that fit your needs?
- How often will you need to collect data to get a representative picture?

\_\_\_ IV. **Decided how you will organize your data?**

- Can your collected data answer the questions you asked?
- Is there any missing data?

\_\_\_ V. **Decided how you will analyze your data?**

- Can you define needed services?
- Can the information help you develop reasonable and appropriate program goals?

\*Please note: This checklist is not all-inclusive, but covers some of the basic areas you will want to address.

Eva M Kubinski, M.S.  
Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center – Region VI  
South Dakota Title I Schoolwide Conference  
September 27, 1999

## Sample Two

### MATRIX

Based on the information gathered from the comprehensive assessment, determine the strengths and needs to address the curriculum, instructions, and organizational categories.

The matrix may be used to categorize the strengths and needs in the curriculum, instruction, and organization. The numbers represent a list of strengths and needs in ascending order. Number one would be the most pressing need with the corresponding strength – discovered during the Comprehensive Assessment process. The prioritized results from this comprehension assessment should be the basis to design the Schoolwide program. From the data in the matrix, consider the four components of the program. State which component is primary i.e.: Students, staff and community. Also, state whether it is a curriculum, instructional or organizational strength or need.

***Comprehensive Strengths and Needs Matrix***

|                                    | <b><i>Curriculum</i></b> |             | <b><i>Instruction</i></b> |             | <b><i>Organization</i></b> |             |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
|                                    | <i>Strength</i>          | <i>Need</i> | <i>Strength</i>           | <i>Need</i> | <i>Strength</i>            | <i>Need</i> |
| <b><i>Student</i></b>              |                          |             |                           |             |                            |             |
| <b><i>Staff</i></b>                |                          |             |                           |             |                            |             |
| <b><i>Parents/Community</i></b>    |                          |             |                           |             |                            |             |
| <b><i>Facilities/Materials</i></b> |                          |             |                           |             |                            |             |

## Sample Three

### SAMPLE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

This needs assessment should be filled out by the school principal with input from teachers.

**Part A: Staffing**

1. Indicate the number of teachers in the following areas:  
 Science\_\_\_\_\_ Math\_\_\_\_\_ Reading\_\_\_\_\_
2. Indicate the number of teachers who are certified for the position they are in:  
 Science\_\_\_\_\_ Math\_\_\_\_\_ Reading\_\_\_\_\_
3. Is there an adequate supply of teachers?  
 Math yes no      Science yes no      Reading yes no
4. On the basis of questions 1-3, the greatest need for assistance for our teachers is:  
 CHECK ONE  

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Math  | Science                                       | Reading                                       |
| ___No needs                                   | ___No needs                                   | ___No needs                                   |
| ___Need for in-service                        | ___Need for in-service                        | ___Need for in-service                        |
| ___Need to retrain teachers from other fields | ___Need to retrain teachers from other fields | ___Need to retrain teachers from other fields |
| ___Need for more teachers in this field       | ___Need for more teachers in this field       | ___Need for more teachers in this field       |

**Part B: Professional Development**

Please prioritize the teacher training items listed below by numbering 1-5 with 1 being the highest priority, 2 second highest, and so on.

**Mathematics**

- \_\_\_ New methods of instruction
- \_\_\_ New content information (curriculum)
- \_\_\_ Increased knowledge of technology
- \_\_\_ Current trends in mathematics
- \_\_\_ Innovative programs

**Language Arts/Reading**

- \_\_\_ New methods of instruction
- \_\_\_ New content information (curriculum)
- \_\_\_ Increased knowledge of technology
- \_\_\_ Current trends in language arts/reading
- \_\_\_ Innovative programs

**Science**

- \_\_\_ New methods of instruction
- \_\_\_ New content information (curriculum)
- \_\_\_ Increased knowledge of technology
- \_\_\_ Current trends in science
- \_\_\_ Innovative programs

**Social Studies**

- \_\_\_ New methods of instruction
- \_\_\_ New content information (curriculum)
- \_\_\_ Increased knowledge of technology
- \_\_\_ Current trends in social studies
- \_\_\_ Innovative programs

**Part C: Accessibility of Programs**

Do the following groups have equal access to do the programs listed below? Circle Y – yes or N – no

|                                   | Math | Science | Lang. Arts | Soc. Studies |
|-----------------------------------|------|---------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Minorities</b>                 | Y N  | Y N     | Y N        | Y N          |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | Y N  | Y N     | Y N        | Y N          |
| <b>Girls and Women</b>            | Y N  | Y N     | Y N        | Y N          |
| <b>Disabled</b>                   | Y N  | Y N     | Y N        | Y N          |
| <b>LEP students</b>               | Y N  | Y N     | Y N        | Y N          |

School \_\_\_\_\_

## RESOURCES

Bernhardt, Victoria L. PhD, Data Analysis for Comprehensive Schoolwide Improvement, Eye on Education, Larchmont, NY, 1998.—\$30  
[www.eyoneducation.com/](http://www.eyoneducation.com/)

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, “Nuts and Bolts of Proposal Writing: Developing Needs-Based Proposals”, September 2002.

National Academy Press, Testing, Teaching, and Learning: A Guide for States and School Districts, Washington, DC, 1999—\$20  
[www.nap.edu](http://www.nap.edu)

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Assessment of School Readiness. 1998, Portland, OR.  
<http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/readiness.pdf>.

(This site assesses school readiness to begin comprehensive school reform; however it can be adapted for program needs assessment.)

Star Center, San Antonio, TX. A Toolkit for Assessing and Revising the Integrated Campus Improvement and Title I Schoolwide Plan.

<http://www.starcenter.org/pdf/toolkitpart2.pdf>

(A comprehensive assessment of strengths and needs.)

U.S. Department of Education. Program evaluations

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/index.html>

U.S. Department of Education. Process of program evaluation

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/primer1.html>

U.S. Department of Education. Frequently asked questions about program evaluation

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/faqmeth.html>

Wilde, Judith and Sockey, Suzanne, PhD, Evaluation Handbook, 1995

<http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/eacwest/evalhbk.htm>

(This site is written for Bilingual Education; however, it can be adapted for any program.)

**APPENDIX B**

**OPTIONAL SOURCES  
OF DATA**

## **Options for Comprehensive Needs Assessment Data Sources**

Adapted from the Indiana Department of Education

### **Student and Program Achievement**

- Analysis of CTBS and other test data (NCE comparisons, trend data)
- Achievement comparisons for subgroups (e.g., boys/girls, LEP/non-LEP, free and reduced lunch/non)
- Analysis of classroom testing that is done schoolwide (e.g., basal reader unit tests, math chapter tests)
- Analysis of promotion and retention rates; achievement results for retained students
- Analysis of kindergarten screening data and profile of Kindergartners' preschool experience (e.g., Head Start)
- Analysis of special services (# & % of students, identified needs, special services student progress)
- Analysis of report card grades (compare to achievement results on CTBS)
- Summarized assessment results by grade levels and/or programs (e.g., after-school tutoring, summer school)

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

- Review of teacher's familiarity with & use of curriculum guides (survey)
- Review of school curriculum alignment to state standards
- Review of class schedules- what is taught and time allotted to subjects
- List of instructional materials used at each grade level/content area (check for continuity across grades)
- Analysis of student progress in extended time activities and support services
- Analysis of student progress reports
- Technology assessment- availability, frequency of use at each grade level, how technology is integrated with curriculum and instruction, list of hardware and software available
- Use of paraprofessionals and special program staff; continuity of services for students
- Field trip logs (analysis of benefits of instructional purpose)

### **School Organization and Management**

- Administrative Leadership
  - Analyses of staff meeting agendas, memos, etc.
  - List of school committees, responsibilities, activity
  - List of options for staff and parent input in decision making
  - Schedule of classroom observations and feedback samples
- Professional Development
  - Evaluation of professional development plan- integrated and focused or sporadic activities?
  - Summary of professional development participation levels
  - List of professional subscriptions to school's library
  - List of "voluntary" & "required" professional development options
- School Personnel Issues
  - List of general (across staff) concerns and resultant professional development to address
  - Strategies and practices available to provide direct help to teachers with difficulties
  - Summary of staff reflections regarding usefulness of teacher evaluation process and professional development opportunities

### **School Climate**

- Mobility rate during school year- where students come from & go to
- Review effectiveness of transition activities and other specific ways student belonging is fostered
- Monitor grade-level & schoolwide patterns (for 3+ years) re:
  - Recognition events for staff and students
  - Citizenship programs and efforts
- Analysis of student behavior:
  - # & % of referrals by grade level
  - Identified "high risk" behaviors
  - Attendance and punctuality data
  - Suspension/expulsion rate
- Analysis of school discipline policy and how it is applied in classrooms
- Summaries of staff & student "school attitude"

### **Family and Community Involvement**

- List of types & numbers of parent involvement events/options for last 3 years
- Analysis of grade-level and schoolwide patterns for
  - #/% of parents who participated in various parent involvement events
  - Types of information disseminated to parents (# and frequency)
  - Summary data on parent volunteers (#s, %s, activities)
- List topics & frequency of parent training re:
  - Parenting issues
  - Support for learning at home
  - Parents' evaluations of any training sessions
- List specific input from parents and students regarding school decisions during past 3 years
- Summary of PTA meetings and activities during past 3 years (#s, %s, results)
- Analysis of effectiveness of home-school communication tools
- List of community speakers in the classroom & their purposes for last 3 years
- Types and purposes of school involvement with local businesses & community organizations