

Research Brief

Needs Assessment

Question: What are the purposes of a needs assessment?

Summary of Findings:

Since implementing NCLB (No Child Left Behind), raising of test scores and making AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) have been paramount in the schools and the search has been on to find “THE” answer in the schools’ quest to attain these goals. When hunting for appropriate methods to reach these objectives, needs assessments are often designed in hopes of gaining information, often about what is not working. Prior to sending out a needs assessment, there are several questions to consider:

- What information is needed/wanted?
- What is/are the purpose(s) for a change?
- What is/are appropriate strategies and/or instruments to utilize in order to obtain valid and reliable data?
- Is the data being collected both objective (i.e. test scores) and subjective (i.e. surveys, opinionaires)?
- How is/are data currently being used to inform the instructional program? How will this information be used to bring about change?
- How trained are teachers in interpreting, using and evaluating the data?
- What are the barriers to accessing the data?
- What are the attitudes of the staff regarding the use of data and to change?
- What will the staff be expected to do and deliver?

Making change for the sake of change is ineffective, which has been proven repeatedly. In establishing a workable plan to ascertain how effective programs are and where the matches and gaps are, it is highly recommended that the stakeholders have input into it. In devising a needs assessment, it is suggested that the school work with an expert in the field who is well-versed in designing effective instruments. In order to effect substantive and meaningful change, the following steps are advised:

- Identify the goals and objectives of the program
- Prioritize the goals and objectives

- Assess the actual status of the program
- Research and design an appropriate assessment tool/strategy
- Distribute and collect the data
- Evaluate the data
- Examine the discrepancies
- Prioritize the needs that emerged from the data
- Establish a realistic plan that includes a timeline, budget, responsibilities and assessment
- Provide time for on-going staff development to help staff better interpret and utilize the data
- Reassess, readjust as necessary, continue plan implementation

Online Resources:

- Data 101: Going back to school
A description of what information a teacher and district need to have in order to access data then correctly interpret it in order to use it effectively is provided in this article.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4002/is_200610/ai_n17195933
- Educational needs assessment: A systematic method for determining educational need for compensatory programs
This is a summary of an article about the reasons for and components of an effective needs assessment.
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED120304&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_accno&objectId=0900000b800f2830
- Professional Development Pathways model: From policy to practice
Descriptions of successful components of professional development programs established through the use of school improvement plans and needs assessments are given in this article.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4009/is_200604/ai_n17171385
- School improvement planning

A list of critical questions for the principal to answer prior to embarking on the school improvement process are supplied.

http://mdk12.org/process/developing/evaluating/self_eval.html

- What does your staff need to know and be able to do to carry out your school improvement strategies?
Important questions that need to be asked and answered before beginning an effective staff development program are provided in this piece.
<http://mdk12.org/process/developing/create/needtoknow.html>
- Why some teachers resist change and what principals can do about it
This is an extensive article on the change process and provides ideas on ways in which leaders can provide positive guidance and direction throughout the process.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_200609/ai_n17197283

Assessment tools:

- ASCD survey
This is a survey given by ASCD on the different aspects of professional development and student achievement.
http://webserver3.ascd.org/ossd/survey_questions.cfm?question=assessment
- Epstein's six types of family involvement
This is a survey for the six types of family involvement that can be used to determine the extent of parental involvement there is in school.
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/initiatives/familycommunity/files/epsteinframework.pdf>
- Making good choice: Sustainable school improvement
“This guide includes comprehensive, relevant tools to help you plan and put into place suggested strategies. It also provides an Additional Resources section (located at the end of the book) by topic to alert you to other practical tools, software, and guidance in sustainable improvement.”



<http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/mgcSustainableSchoolImp.pdf>

- Planning a comprehensive guidance and counseling program
Guidance and counseling program needs assessment, high school
<http://pscm.wikispaces.com/March+22,+2007>

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