Assemble a Needs Assessment Team

The first step in *Preparing for Collaborative Inquiry* is to assemble a group of diverse stakeholders to collaborate with. According to the Education Quality Standards (pg. 14) the continuous improvement plan shall be developed with the involvement of school board members, students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members. By inviting all stakeholders to participate, you establish a unified understanding of your schools, identify goals that reflect the vision of the entire learning community, and promote buy-in for improvement efforts. Keep in mind that not every member of the diverse stakeholder group needs to be involved with every single step of the process. Various stakeholders can be involved throughout the process in several ways including, developing a shared vision Statement, participating in Integrated Field Reviews, and participating in surveys.

Develop or Revise a Shared Vision

A shared vision is a written statement of your team’s common beliefs and goals for school and student outcomes. If your school or district already has a shared vision, this step might involve introducing it to your stakeholders, checking for agreement, and possibly making minor revisions. If a shared vision doesn’t exist, beginning a comprehensive needs assessment process is a good reason to write one. The shared vision can then serve to steer your needs assessment towards those priorities.

*Example:*

“In the White River Valley Supervisory Union, a world-class education is built upon strong relationships between and among students, teachers, families, and communities. All students are supported, challenged, and engaged with a personalized education.

Learning is rigorous and relevant to student interests while preparing every child for

college, career, and active citizenship.”

*~White River Valley Supervisory Union, Royalton, Vermont*

“Miller’s Run School is a welcoming and supporting community. Students learn in a positive and respectful school that meets their diverse academic, social, and emotional needs resulting in motivated and dynamic life-long learners.”

*-Miller’s Run School, Sheffield, Vermont*

Organize and Conduct a Broad Data Overview

Having assembled a diverse team united by a shared vision, the process of identifying specific goals and change ideas for improvement begins by assembling a broad overview of LEA or school data that represent a wide range of practices and outcomes. This will lead to the identification of broad academic area(s) of focus to explore further.

Most schools and LEAs collect four types of data (Bernhardt, 2003). See Appendix 1 for more examples of each data type:

1. **Demographic** data, including enrollment rates, retention rates, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, income, graduation and dropout rates
2. **Student Outcomes** data, including results of state and local assessments, curriculum- based measures, demonstrations of proficiency, formative measures, behavior and social- emotional health
3. **School Process** data, including measures of instructional practices, continuous improvement, curriculum alignment, professional learning, staff evaluation, resource availability, technology integration and program effectiveness
4. **Perceptions** data, including climates surveys, communication data, parent and community involvement data and focus groups

Collecting, presenting and analyzing data can be daunting for staff members with limited experience in these areas. Teams should consider supplementing the data literacy of their staff using traditional and digital resources. The Education Quality and Continuous Improvement Framework lists some potential supports, such as:

* + Data Wise Process and Free Online Course
  + The Data Informed District: Research on Using Data to Inform Practice
  + A Practical Framework for Building a Data-Driven District or School
  + Guide for Conducting a Comprehensive Needs Assessment
  + School Reform Initiative Data Protocols

Shared Vision Worksheet

| **Purpose:** To develop or revise a shared vision representing the common beliefs, values, and goals of all stakeholders (school board, students, teachers, administrators (principal, curriculum director, special education director) parents, and other community members). | |
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| **Directions:**   1. Individuals should record their personal ideas in response to the guiding questions provided. 2. Small groups should convene to develop a shared response on a separate worksheet or large piece of paper. 3. The full group should assemble to merge small group work into a single, unified shared vision Statement that is written in the present tense. | |
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| Activities and Guiding Questions | Ideas and Responses |
| **Brainstorm Core Values and Beliefs**   * What do we value in our students, our schools, our communities, and ourselves? * What do we believe are the factors that support effective learning and positive outcomes for all? | curiosity, diversity, problem-solving, independence, citizenship, lifelong learning |
| **Brainstorm Core Purposes**   * What is the purpose of our work with and on behalf of students? * What are we committed to providing to our students and stakeholders? | high-quality instruction, challenging curriculum, opportunities for personalized differentiated learning, equity |
| **Brainstorm Goals**   * Based on our core values, beliefs and purposes, what are our goals for our students and school(s)? * What would the successful implementation of our core values, beliefs and purposes look like / what would the outcomes be for our students? | every student prepared for middle and high school, healthy life choices, contribution to community (both local and beyond) |
| **Draft a Vision Statement**   * With consideration for your team’s shared core values and beliefs, core purposes and common goals, write a narrative or statement(s) that captures your vision for your students and school(s). | “Apple Orchard School fosters a spirit of lifelong learning and independence by celebrating the natural curiosity and diversity of our students. Through high-quality instruction and opportunities for personalized learning for all, our graduates are prepared to achieve a range of life goals and become positive contributors on local, national, and global scales.” |