

Activity 2: Conducting a Needs Assessment

Purpose:	This activity moves participants through the stages of conducting a thorough and comprehensive needs assessment to identify professional learning topics for their school.
Length of Time:	60 to 180 minutes, depending on number and type of data sources
Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich assortment of data, possibilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Formal and informal assessments — Assessment results — Teacher or student work portfolios — Peer reviews — Parent surveys — Student surveys/ self-reporting — Teacher discussions/ focus groups — Analysis of school-wide classroom data — Observations — Teacher surveys/ self-reporting • Handbook for Professional Learning, page 15 • Handbook for Professional Learning Needs Assessment template (page 73), one copy per data source
Essential Question:	How do you determine your school’s professional learning needs?

Background on the Importance of Data Analysis in Conducting a Needs Assessment:

HS ABC was focusing on the problem statement: Why are students who are highly engaged, with high attendance rates, who are passing their classes not getting a passing score on the Regents exam? The school called together a cross-discipline multi-grade Professional Learning Community (PLC) to look at their school data. The PLC pulled eight exams each from Global, History and English that were completed by students who fit the focus student profile. They even had one student as a control who had taken all three exams. The PLC split up, two teachers per discipline plus the principal in the History group, to analyze the student essays. Each team had 20 minutes to analyze the exams against the rubric and note what was common. As the principal was handing out the sheets the ELA teacher commented that the issue was that the students didn’t get the mechanics of writing. The history team agreed. The principal noted that he thought it was the

spacing and that most students weren't getting through the exam so they had to practice more timed essay writing to get students ready. The literacy coach reminded everyone to follow the listed protocol and not to come to solutions before they had conducted the needs assessment to surface the actual problem. As teams went through they tracked why each student didn't get a passing grade according to the rubric and made a list. Then teams shared strengths and challenges across content areas. The History team noted a strength which was that only one of the eight students hadn't finished the entire essay and that all of the students had a five paragraph essay structure with a solid introduction and conclusion. The Global and English teams said the vast majority of their students had also finished the exam and had good essay structure with a few mechanical mistakes but none that impeded understanding. The coach noted that even if they had, mechanics was only 1/5th of the points on the rubric and probably not the best place to focus their instructional energy as team. The History team noted that the area where most of their students lost points was in sections one-three of the rubric which had to do with creating and supporting an argument. The Global team said their students struggled with exactly the same sections and English said their students struggled with sections two and three but not section one. The PLC decided to focus on sections two and three of the rubric since all groups struggled there and see what specific skills were listed there that the students hadn't exhibited in every content area. The PLC did three rounds of this until they found two high leverage skills that all the students struggled with: 1) creating an argument using evidence, 2) doing so across multiple texts. The PLC decided to use their next meeting to create three actions steps to implement across disciplines to address this gap.

This school-based example highlights the importance of sticking with the data during a needs assessment *all the way through to solutions*. Please remember to stay embedded in your data as you move through the needs assessment process.

Activity Steps:

1 Gather your staff for a comprehensive review of data.

2 Introduction (10 minutes):

- **What is a needs assessment?**

A needs assessment is the process of identifying and measuring areas for improvement, and determining the methods to achieve that improvement.

- **Why do a needs assessment?**

A thorough and comprehensive needs assessment takes place before any professional learning activity is designed. During a comprehensive needs assessment we look at *all* available data before establishing the content for any professional learning. Often schools select data that supports a preconceived idea of what the professional learning content should be – we should guard against this. We want to keep an open mind as we review *all* available data and look for the story or stories that the data is telling us. The trends that surface from a thorough and comprehensive needs assessment are the raw materials for our professional learning content.

3 Staff Reminders (5 minutes):

- Keep an open mind and refrain from coming to conclusions too soon, or making quick judgments.
- Let the data tell the story.
- Maintain openness to the story the data can tell. This will help teams surface important, relevant, and sometimes surprising content.
- Needs assessments are about evaluation and evidence.

4 Needs Assessment Analysis (flexible depending on number and type of data sources):

Participants read page 15 from the *Handbook for Professional Learning* and familiarize themselves with the question on the template on page 73. After teams go through their data source(s) and complete the template, they should ask themselves the following questions in order to establish professional learning opportunities that match the needs they have identified.

- Where are the gaps (the space between what is and what should be)?
- Are some gaps greater than others? How do we know (evidence)?
- What is the scope and severity of gaps?
- How are we going to translate what we see into what we need to do?
- Will there be barriers? What are the barriers? How will we overcome the barriers?
- What are the needs (based on the evidence)?
- Is there a need for additional research?
- How do we prioritize the needs we've identified?

5 Identifying the PL opportunity (flexible depending on number and type of data sources):

After participants analyze the data, complete the template, and consider the above questions, use responses to create professional learning opportunities for needs they identified. They can start this process with the chart that follows:

Data assessed:	
Need identified:	
Goal:	
Ideas for composition of learning teams:	
Appropriate differentiated professional learning opportunities (see chart beginning on page 81):	