



## **A Guide for Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

**Prepared for the New Mexico Public Education Department by the Western  
Educational Equity Assistance Center at Metropolitan State University of Denver**

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## What Is a Needs Assessment?

The phrase “needs assessment” is used rather loosely in the educational vernacular. As currently implemented, a needs assessment can mean anything from asking individuals connected with education what they need to close the gap between current status and some desired state, such as all students reaching proficiency, to conducting a comprehensive research project, complete with a specified set of procedures such as statistical analysis, case studies, and student focus groups. In both cases, *there is an attempt to assess or measure a perceived or actual need by collecting data to document a challenge that exists*. For federal programs, typically this means that local staff must collect data that help illuminate the path to improvement.

## Why Conduct a Needs Assessment?

The requirements for program-level needs assessments are connected to the purpose of the program. For example, since Title I exists to help students to reach proficiency and close the achievement gap, the needs assessment requirements are there to discover the challenges related to goals. In this case, the research shows that attendance; parent involvement; school climate; leadership; and students being on grade level on assessments of reading, language arts, and mathematics are all related to students doing well on summative tests such as the NMPED Assessments. Measuring these predictors of test scores shows where some of the needs may lie.

A needs assessment also:

- Provides direction for programs, projects, and activities;
- Allows staff to determine priorities and allocate limited resources to activities that will have the greatest impact;
- Creates cohesion through the alignment of goals, strategies, professional development, and desired outcomes;
- Enables benchmarking and monitoring of implementation and impact; and
- Assists with continuous improvement activities by helping staff identify change, which instructional and other practices are working, and the strategies associated with the greatest success.

## Dimensions of a Comprehensive Needs Assessment

### *Components*

There is no single best way to conduct a needs assessment. Rather, the components in a needs assessment should be determined by local context. The state of Massachusetts (2008) has identified some common or suggested components or characteristics of a needs assessment:

- Considers a range of needs or issues;
- Includes information gathered from a variety of sources;
- Employs the use of valid and reliable data to the maximum extent possible;
- Meaningfully involves many individuals representing a range of knowledge, skills and expertise;
- Results in the development of goals and action plans;
- Used as the basis for resource allocation; and
- Includes regular follow up and evaluation of plans and strategies.

### *Focus*

Assessment of needs should focus on those factors that have the potential to influence the achievement of students. At a minimum, needs assessments should address: test score results in the aggregate and for subgroups, dropout rates, student mobility, attendance rates, and graduation rates. Curriculum and instruction issues should also be examined, including alignment with New Mexico Content Standards. Professional development needs should also be assessed including teacher qualifications, the nature of professional development, and planning time for teachers. Family and community involvement should be explored and should involve communication with parents about student achievement, their involvement in decisions, supports provided to families, and/or business partnerships. School and district organization provide contextual information that is important for framing needs. Vision, mission, decision-making structures, central office support, and budgetary issues are some contextual factors to consider.

### *Information Gathering*

Information in a comprehensive needs assessment is gathered from a variety of sources. Quantitative data sources include NM-MSSA and NM-ASR scores, SAT scores, Alternative Achievement Assessment scores, WIDA scores, Istation, Kindergarten Observation Tools, and CTE Precision exams. Other state indicators include measures such as status and School Accountability Reports. Graduation rates, attendance rates, and demographics should also be included. If schools use other standardized formative or summative assessments, they should be addressed. Qualitative data, such as that collected through focus groups, interviews, written surveys, or classroom observations, are also helpful.

### *Planning Teams*

A formal planning team is a critical part of a comprehensive needs assessment. A comprehensive needs assessment should include stakeholders that represent all parts of the system. Superintendents, central office staff, principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, school office staff, parents/guardians, community members, and students all have important information about the system.

### *Use of Results*

A comprehensive needs assessment results in the development of goals and action plans. After the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data is completed, goals should be identified, and action plans should emerge from those goals. For example, performance targets should be set, and strategies for meeting those performance targets should be clearly articulated with action steps.

Comprehensive needs assessment can be a powerful resource allocation tool. Often schools and school systems are operating with limited resources. Results from a comprehensive needs assessment are a useful tool for prioritizing how resources will be used. To determine whether resources have been allocated in the proper fashion and the strategies used to meet needs are effective, it is important to monitor whether needs, or the gap between what is and what should be, have been impacted. If gaps are not being reduced, evaluation can help determine whether strategies are being executed properly, or whether other strategies should be attempted.



## Planning for Comprehensive Needs Assessment

A series of steps to plan a comprehensive needs assessment includes:

### 1. **Constitute a needs assessment committee.**

The formation of a needs assessment committee (NAC) is a powerful, efficient strategy for task completion. Larger groups are helpful for advising on or reacting to documents, but the dynamics of these larger groups are not always conducive to efficient decision making. A core NAC group may consist of five to seven people. Larger committees are helpful for reacting to drafts of reports. Subcommittees are an alternative if the committee is large. It is helpful to have committee members with expertise in collecting and analyzing data. Constituencies within the district should also be included on the committee, and organizational leadership should be part of the committee structure.

### 2. **Who needs to be involved in data gathering?**

A comprehensive needs assessment involves collecting data from multiple sources and audiences. While it is not necessary to include all stakeholders in every single needs assessment, a plan that is broad enough in scope, yet detailed enough to collect sufficient information, is important. There will always be cost-benefit tradeoffs, but a good mixture of breadth and depth will provide the most comprehensive picture of needs. It is important to have administrators and staff involved in the needs assessment process in order to maintain the kind of momentum necessary to ensure that results are used.

#### a. **Key district and school personnel**

Depending on the size of the school district, a number of persons are essential to the process of conducting a comprehensive needs assessment. Accountability and assessment staff at the district level have a wealth of information, as do personnel in budgeting offices and planning divisions; curriculum and instruction; administrators of federal programs; and support staff. It is important to conduct an internal scan of the district's resources and staff skill sets so that key personnel can be involved.

#### b. **External stakeholders**

In federal programs, there are a number of external stakeholders to consider, including parents and guardians and the community. Depending on the circumstances, it might be wise to include Elders, business leaders,

members of the Chamber of Commerce, leaders of community organizations, providers of services to families and children, or other public agencies. Many times, these external stakeholder groups will have conducted needs assessments of their own, and those data can be extremely helpful. Moreover, including them in the needs assessment process contributes to stakeholder engagement later in the process.

### **3. Prepare management plan.**

Comprehensive needs assessments can be lengthy endeavors, so it is important to have a management plan to guide efforts and keep the assessment on track. It is also important to consider when results of needs assessment will be made available so that they can be used effectively. Results from a needs assessment are no longer reliable or valid if too much time has passed.

### **4. Identify issues and concerns.**

Using the expertise of the NAC, it is possible to quickly identify major issues and concerns through any number of brainstorming activities. Issues and concerns can be organized by goal areas and then priorities for assessment can be established.

### **5. Identify measures.**

The most common measure used in needs assessments are surveys. Surveys are powerful, efficient, and reliable tools for collecting data. However, a *comprehensive* needs assessment does not rely upon surveys alone. A comprehensive needs assessment uses multiple sources of data that are *triangulated*. Triangulation refers to using three or more sources or types of data to establish the validity of a finding. For example, parents, paraprofessionals, and teachers may all be asked about the reading needs in a school. If their reports essentially agree, then the NAC can be relatively sure that the findings are reliable and valid. However, if there is a divergence of opinion, further investigation is warranted.

### **6. Decide preliminary priorities.**

After needs have been identified, it is time to make preliminary decisions about priorities. Does the NAC have all of the information it needs? Does the NAC have to collect new information? From whom? At what cost? How long will it take? Who should be involved? Answering these kinds of questions will make it easier to decide what really needs to be done.

## **7. Designing a comprehensive needs assessment.**

A comprehensive needs assessment addresses multiple education issues. For example, schools with migrant students could assess the special needs for migrant education by talking with teachers, administrators, district personnel, parents, and the migrant students themselves. The NAC should also examine student achievement disaggregated by migrant status to look for gaps and to pinpoint problems.

For Title II, the NAC should explore needs related to the shortage of high quality teachers (HQTs). Interviews with or surveys of HQTs could reveal some important patterns. Interviews, focus groups, or surveys of teacher training institutions, such as Colleges of Education, might reveal important information about providers of professional development. Principals in school buildings and administrators at the district level who work with teachers can also provide insight.

## **8. Identify measures to use.**

A comprehensive needs assessment involves collection of data from multiple sources. While surveys are the most common measure used, there are many other valuable sources of data that already exist in schools and districts. Table 1 displays some of the more common sources of data that may be used in a comprehensive needs assessment.

**Table 1. Common Sources of Data for Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

Source	Comments
Surveys	Surveys are efficient, easy to administer and provide accessible data.
Interviews	Interviews are an excellent way to explore issues that are not well understood, or to gain critical information from key stakeholders. They provide opportunity for follow-up questions or to allow interviewees to elaborate on issues important to the school or district.
Focus Groups	Focus groups are an efficient way to test ideas with groups and to generate novel thinking and solutions to problems. When participants interact with one another, novel ideas or solutions often emerge.
Observations	Observations of classrooms, after-school programs, summer programs, staff meetings, and community meetings provide excellent information about the functioning of organizations supporting the education of children.
Document Analysis	A wide variety of documents have the potential for contributing to the needs assessment process. These documents include, school improvement plans, district improvement plans, annual reports, budgets, meeting minutes, local media coverage, and school board agendas.
Program Evaluations	Many projects funded internally or externally by the district, state, the federal government, or foundations often require evaluations of their efforts. These evaluations are powerful sources of information for needs assessment. Not only do these reports identify problems being addressed, they also make data-based recommendations for project improvement and the effectiveness of projects and programs.
Tribal Consultations	The Tribal Consultations required for other projects are a rich source of information for identifying needs. Often the results of these consultations provide information and insights that are not available elsewhere.
Budgets	Budgetary documents are an excellent source of information about what the school, district, or organization thinks is important. For example, the percentage of funding allocated to professional development is a good indicator of priorities.
Strategic Planning Documents	Schools, districts, local businesses, public agencies, or community organizations that have engaged in a strategic planning process often have valuable documentation to share. Strategic plans typically look at internal capacity, changing external circumstances, and identify gaps in ways that are particularly informative with regard to the needs assessment process.
Environmental Scans	Environmental scans, or those efforts to locate the important new educational developments, provide valuable information about internal capacity and external conditions relevant to schools, districts, and stakeholders.
Proposals	Many funders require those responding to Request for Proposals (RFPs) to use a data-based approach to identification of needs to be addressed. Quite often, these needs assessments are specific to a particular effort, but can provide valuable information for a more comprehensive approach.
Research Reports	Research reports produced about the school or district are excellent sources of information, particularly if they are contextualized. Many research reports review current literature that pertain to studies conducted locally and can serve as a source of scientifically based research (SBR) related to the schools and districts if they are rigorous.
Census Data	Census data population estimates, monitoring of trends, and tracking of other demographic information are a valuable source of information for determining school or district needs. The Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program produces annual estimates of income and poverty for school districts.
Suggestion Boxes	When internal and external stakeholders are provided the opportunity to suggest improvements, many needs may emerge.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis consists of three parts: collecting existing data, collecting new data to address the gaps not covered by existing data, and analyzing data to identify needs. Each of these activities will be covered in some detail.

### *Gathering Existing Data*

School districts typically have plenty of data that will inform a comprehensive needs assessment. Some of the most useful sources of existing data will be described here. It is important to remember, however, that data have time value—they are sometimes no longer relevant after a certain period of time. Efforts should be made to collect and use the most recent forms of data available for comprehensive needs assessment.

### *Student Demographics*

Changing student demographics is one of the biggest challenges schools face. As neighborhoods change, mature, and are reborn, the populations of students served by schools shift in important ways. The most prominent shifts relate to socioeconomic status and language spoken at home. Family structure is also an important consideration. For example, it is important for schools to know the number and percentage of single parent households. The number of births during the year in a community helps school districts forecast and plan for resource needs into the future. Families and households without children are also important, because extra effort will be needed to ensure that school bond elections are supported when numerous residents in the community do not have children in school.

### *Student Achievement Data*

There are many types of student achievement data collected in schools, and some are more appropriate than others for conducting comprehensive needs assessments. Formative assessment measures are typically collected to improve a program or activity, while summative measures are typically used to compare program approaches to one another, or to make ultimate judgments about an effort's effectiveness. In the classroom, formative assessments are typically used to inform teachers how well their students are doing in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Formative assessments might be administered several times a year. If formative assessment information is made available to teachers in a timely fashion, they have a powerful tool that can help them identify needs. Formative assessments are also an excellent tool for identifying building and district needs since they can reveal patterns of learning strengths and challenges.

Summative assessments from NMPED provide data that can also be used as another source of information for identifying gaps or needs areas if processed correctly. It is important that results from tests like the state assessments be used with caution. Some of these tests have very specific purposes, and it is risky to use them for other purposes without understanding the pitfalls involved. Your district assessment director should be able to provide more information about the use of tests for needs assessment.

Data become more powerful when they are disaggregated. ESSA maintains the requirement for data disaggregation for accountability purposes for the following subgroups: race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and English language learners (ELLs). ESSA also adds three new subgroups for data reporting, but not accountability purposes: homeless status, students with a parent in the military, and students in foster care.

When formative student achievement data from these subgroups are analyzed, gaps in performance can be discovered. With formative assessments, teachers and administrators can identify strategies to address the gaps, and make data-based judgments about which strategies seem to work best with which groups.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Curriculum and instruction are at the core of the schooling process. Some questions that might be asked about curriculum include:

- Is the curriculum aligned with state frameworks and assessments?
- What kinds of instructional approaches are used most often?
- How effective is instruction for all groups of students?
- How are different types of instruction related to student achievement, and under what circumstances?

Curriculum audits have been around for some time and more recently, instructional audits are being performed in many sites. These audits can provide valuable needs assessment data.

### **Professional Development**

When identifying needs, professional development offerings, professional development ratings, and the overall coherence of professional development offered by a school district are important characteristics to examine. Teacher

surveys are the most common way to identify perceived needs for professional development offerings. However, professional development needs should always be linked to achievement goals and reflect the priorities of the school district. If disaggregated data analysis reveals that there are achievement gaps between groups, professional development needs assessment should be targeted to understand the reason for those achievement gaps. If students are not achieving at uniformly high levels across the school district, additional inquiry might be warranted to determine exactly why.

### Technology

Technology needs should be carefully identified, and plans for meeting those needs should be grounded in firm needs assessment data. Many states have teacher and administrator standards for technology. The purchase of major technologies should align with school or district vision, mission, and goals, and technology needs should be directly linked to student achievement.

### Family/Community Involvement Measures

Children who have parents or guardians involved in their education are more likely to be successful. Parent involvement in schooling can take on many forms, and these forms all contribute to the success of students. Epstein (2008) identified six types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community.

- **Parenting** refers to helping families establish supportive home environments for children as students.
- **Communicating** is the design of effective forums for communicating about children's progress and school programs.
- **Volunteering** can be described as recruiting and organizing parent support and help.
- **Learning at home** involves providing information and ideas for helping students at home with homework, planning, decisions, and other curriculum-related activities.
- **Decision making** is the inclusion of parents in school decisions, and the development of parent leaders and representatives.
- **Collaborating** with community occurs through the identification and integration of community resources and services for strengthening school

programs, student learning and development, family practices, and school programs. Tribal Consultations are an example.

A number of measures are appropriate for needs sensing activities with parents or guardians. For example, asking them how many books they have in the home for children to read, how often they read to their children, and how often their children read to them are all useful questions for understanding family literacy patterns. Parents and guardians can also be asked about how much television their children watch, how much time they spend playing video games, how much time they spend on the Internet, how much time they spend engaged in independent reading, or how much time they spend each night on homework. With some careful thought, parents and guardians can be an excellent source of information about needs. They can also be an excellent sounding board for exploring new ideas about programmatic offerings.

### **Early Childhood Assessment Data**

Data from early childhood assessments are becoming increasingly available. Indicators of early childhood development are useful for documenting school readiness. However, these indicators should be used with some caution, because variability in performance of very young children can be quite large. While overall patterns may emerge with groups of students, it is not wise to use these data to document individual student needs.

### ***Gathering New Data***

A determination of data needed to be collected for the comprehensive needs assessment can be made after a compilation of existing sources of information is reviewed. This activity helps identify where essential information is missing and serves as a guide for future data collection.

### **Data Collection Logistics**

After a listing of data needed is created, decisions about who, what, when, where, why and how can be made. Developing a detailed plan or a roadmap of sorts is a helpful strategy before collecting new data. Using a matrix is often a helpful approach to organizing new data collection activities, with targets listed as columns, and measures used listed as rows, for example. A calendar or timeline should also be developed, that takes data collection opportunities into account.

While it is always better to have objective, uninvolved parties administer surveys, hold interviews, or conduct focus groups, this is not always possible. The needs assessment committee should be aware of the kinds of bias that



might be introduced through a self- assessment convenience sample. For example, although surveying the parents who show up at “back-to-school” night might be easy, this approach will not capture those parents who do not attend evening meetings at school for any number of reasons.

### **Collecting Valid and Reliable Data**

Collecting valid and reliable data is a concern in comprehensive needs assessment. Some practices that contribute to reliability include the use of consistently worded survey items, development of focus group scripts that are followed carefully, and using trained interviewers who do not intentionally introduce bias into the data collection process. The use of surveys with pre-established reliability and validity should be considered whenever possible. A number of good measurement tools exist, and many are easily accessible. Also, collecting data from multiple sources and including multiple stakeholders in the analysis process contribute to the reliability and validity of the data that are collected.

### **Data Analysis**

Once data are collected there are a number of statistical strategies that can be used for analysis. For example when investigating how migrant students are doing in comparison to their peers, the NAC may administer a survey for all students to complete in a certain set of schools, then add a question about whether the students participated in the migrant program. That item can be used to create two groups and to look at differences statistically. Some very simple statistics, such as the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with an item, can be calculated and compared for two groups using statistical tests, like a *z* test for proportions. If there are more than two groups of students, techniques such as Chi-square tests can be used. For the mean or average responses on items rated on a 5-point scale, the *t* test for independent groups can be used for two groups. If there are more than two groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) can be used, with post-hoc *t* tests if results are statistically significant. One word of caution is warranted here, however. These statistical tests have complex assumptions, and it is easy to misuse them. When in doubt about the use of these statistical techniques, always seek advice from colleagues in the central office who have the appropriate expertise.

### **Prioritize Needs**

Once needs assessment data are collected and analyzed, it is important to follow through with the results of needs assessments and determine which are the most important.

*Simple approaches* entail procedures such as rank ordering the needs, without any particular formal procedure. This approach is used in situations that are not complex. The *multiple criteria approach* is used when needs are more complex and are judged against criteria that address importance and feasibility. Weighted total priority scores can then be created. *Disaggregated prioritization* involves rank ordering the criteria to be used. Then a need is judged by each of the criteria, beginning with the highest-ranked criteria first. This technique simplifies the prioritization process, because criteria are addressed one at a time. *Risk assessment* is done by examination of the needs relative to the risk of not addressing them. This is particularly useful in situations where not addressing a need is related to a risk of major importance, such as child abuse.

### Identify Root Causes

Identification and analysis of root causes is not a simple task. Using the expertise of the NAC, it is possible to employ a number of techniques, such as the “6 Whys” to discover root causes. The idea behind the technique is to ask “why” several times, until the cause of a problem is identified. For example, consider the high school drop-out problem.

*Why are students dropping out? Because they are not accumulating enough credits to graduate. Why? Because they are failing their classes. Why? Because they report that going to class is boring, so they do not attend class. Why? Because teachers lecture too much. Why? Because no one has shown teachers how to make their subject matter more interesting. Why? Because the district has not provided the supports necessary to help teachers develop new skills for working with adolescent learners.*

While this is a contrived example, it does help us understand how the NAC can get at root causes once they have identified an issue.

### Summarize Findings

A summary of findings is a useful tool for disseminating results and for generating action plans. Brief summaries are easy to digest and make for excellent talking points when presented in bulleted or numbered form. A one-page executive summary can be useful for communicating with the media, parents, superintendents, school boards, or funding agencies.

### Making Decisions

When districts use a variety of data sources to make focused decisions that have implications for student achievement, student performance improves.

Comprehensive needs assessment is a form of this structured decision making that allows for allocating limited resources in ways where they will have the most impact. Processing the data collected, communicating the results found, and using what is learned for planning and taking action will be detailed in this section.

### ***Reporting Needs Assessment Results***

Needs assessment results can be reported in a number of ways, depending largely on why the needs assessment was conducted in the first place and the audiences for the reports. When discussing tools used, it is often useful to provide a general description of what they were designed to measure. It is also important to explain how they were administered, and how many people responded to them out of the targeted population. If sampling techniques were used, they should be documented. If convenience samples were used (parents at a back-to-school night, for example), that should be noted too. Descriptions of focus group and interview results should include information about who participated, their roles, how many participated, and how long the activities were. Student assessment information should be described with careful mention of grade levels, subject areas, and years of testing administration. External documents should be referenced. No student names should ever be used in reports.

### ***Comprehensive Planning***

Two steps are essential for comprehensive planning: articulation of measurable goals, and devising strategies to meet those goals. Strategies for both have already been covered. A good comprehensive needs assessment should easily be usable as a basis for comprehensive planning. The “what” has been decided, and the planning process leads us through the “how”, or the devising of strategies to meet needs. Strategies to meet needs are identified, priorities for meeting needs are identified, and the best strategies to meet the needs are selected.

### ***Unified School Improvement Planning***

Unified planning is a strategy being promoted by many organizations to make better use of limited resources. Success is more likely when district improvement strategies are in alignment and school improvement efforts are reflective of district strategies. The SEA reports that the quickest way to acquire consolidated grant and schoolwide resources is to engage in planning that is clearly connected to a needs assessment and needs analysis using SMART goals.

As a review, SMART means:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Timely

Here is an example of a SMART goal:

*During the 2006-2007 school year, students at Arroyo Middle School will improve their math computation skills as measured by an increase in the percentage of students scoring in the “proficient” and “advanced” levels on the state math computation assessment. (Adapted from: [http://quality.cr.k12.ia.us/documents/SMART%20Goal%20samples/math\\_Goals.doc](http://quality.cr.k12.ia.us/documents/SMART%20Goal%20samples/math_Goals.doc))*

This goal is specific because it addresses math computation skills. It is measurable because it uses the percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced. It is likely attainable because there is room for improvement. It is realistic because if the school focuses on it and helps students improve their computation skills, it is likely that achievement scores will improve. It is timely because it will happen during one school year.

To measure the attainment of this goal, two pieces of information are needed. First, a baseline must be established. It is most reasonable to collect the numbers of students who scored “proficient” and “advanced” on the state math computation subtest in 2005-2006. Second, data must be available to determine how this same group of students did in 2006-2007. To examine goal attainment, compare the percentage of “proficient” and “advanced” students in 2005-2006 to the percentage of “proficient” and “advanced” students in 2006-2007. If there is an increase, this goal has been met.

What strategies can be used to meet this goal? The school could provide instruction and practice through an after-school program. Students who did not score proficient along with those who just barely scored proficient might be asked to participate in these after-school activities. After a beginning of the course “pre-test” the instructors might discover that some of these students know their math facts, but do not know how to apply them to a variety of contexts, and they have particular difficulty with story problems.

During this after-school program, students who are having difficulty might be asked to use their computation skills in a number of diverse settings. Hands-on games where teams of students compete with one another might be used. The use of manipulatives such as unifix cubes might be employed. Students could be asked to solve story problems, and then enact the answers through role-playing activities. Throughout the program, frequent formative assessments would help instructors determine whether students are making progress as a result of the strategies being used. When there is success, it is important to celebrate with the students and instructors. Progress in these kinds of interventions may take a long time to demonstrate, so incremental, authentic progress should be rewarded.

### **District Improvement Planning**

Many states support a process for district improvement that can be used as part of a comprehensive needs assessment. A district may contract with a state to have an external team appraise the district on nine different standards related to improvement, or a district may choose to complete an appraisal themselves if they have sufficient resources. A district is then given rubric-based feedback in the following areas kinds of areas:

- Curriculum;
- Evaluation/assessment;
- Instruction;
- District culture;
- Student, family, and community support;
- Professional development, professional growth, and evaluation;
- Leadership;
- Organizational structure and resources; and
- Comprehensive and effective planning.

A number of these kinds of rubrics focus specifically on using information to make good decisions. These categories provide a useful framework for reporting needs assessment results.

### ***Taking Action***

Now that needs have been identified and prioritized, and that strategies have been devised to meet the needs, it is time to take action. First strategies to meet needs are implemented. The implementation of these strategies needs to be monitored in order to ensure that they are working. If they are not, they should be modified, or different strategies should be implemented after the results have been evaluated. It is also critical to celebrate successes. Improving schools and districts is hard work. It takes sustained, focused efforts to be successful. Stakeholders in the process can easily become discouraged if successes are not

acknowledged and celebrated along the way.

This guidebook has presented a lot of complex information, and it may be challenging to see how the pieces may fit together. One tool that may help organize the process has been placed in the Appendix. The Needs Assessment Checklist is helpful for organizing efforts. Two examples have also been provided here to help with understanding the comprehensive needs assessment process. The first is an example designed to address low achievement in reading. The second is an example that relates to retaining HQTs in schools.

### Implementing Strategies to Meet Needs

After needs have been identified and prioritized, it is time to take action. Far too many needs assessment reports sit on shelves after so much meticulous effort has been made to determine what should be done.

Where do we go to find strategies to address the needs? Altschuld and Witkin (2000) identified four approaches to selecting solutions that may apply to educational settings.

- **Reviewing the literature.** The relevant research-based literature can be examined to identify strategies that may address the need. Generalization across contexts may not be possible, so readers need to compare their settings with those in the studies.
- **Benchmarking.** Benchmarking refers to directly examining how similar organizations or groups have implemented solutions to handle comparable needs. This involves direct observations of strategies as they are being implemented and discussions with people who are experienced in their implementation. This approach may be costly due to site visits, and the solutions may not always be generalizable.
- **Multi-Attribute Utility Technique (MAUT).** This technique involves the development of criteria against which each solution strategy is rated. It results in a summary of ratings for each solution strategy, which is then translated into a list of those with the highest potential for addressing the need. This approach compels the NAC to identify the criteria that are most important.
- **Quality Function Deployment.** Quality Function Deployment is used to identify the essential or key components of program design features and determine the likelihood that they will resolve the needs that have been identified. It results in a determination of which design features might be emphasized that are summarized on a one-page figure or chart. This also

allows for displaying positives and negatives in one place.

### Example Needs Assessment: Low Achievement in Reading

Need: Low achievement in reading

The Arroyo School District has been notified that it has failed to make progress in reading for 2 consecutive years at the elementary school level. While some of the schools in the district are successful, others are not. A Comprehensive Needs Assessment process was undertaken to examine the gap between progress targets and students' current reading performance.

A NAC was formed to explore the issue. It consisted of elementary school teachers, principals, and parents from schools in the district. The reading issue was explored at length. The NAC identified the possible reasons for the gap in reading performance in the school district. Through several brainstorming activities, interviews, focus groups, examination of documents including teacher evaluation reports, curriculum guides, district policies, professional development agendas, surveys of teachers and parents, visits to successful elementary schools serving the same kinds of students, and classroom visits, the NAC identified the following reasons for the gap in reading performance:

- Reading curriculum was not coordinated across grade levels;
- Instructional quality varied considerably between classrooms;
- Outdated curriculum materials did not reflect current thinking and practice; and
- Parents did not read to children at home.

Since the NAC carefully identified these needs, it was a relatively straightforward matter to generate possible solutions to the problem and address the gap:

- **Consistency.** Instructional quality will be consistently monitored across classrooms, grade levels and buildings to ensure that research-based practices are being implemented.
- **Curriculum guidelines.** A district level committee with representatives from all grade levels and all school buildings will be formed to revise curriculum guidelines to be coherent and clear. Benchmarks will be established at each grade level, and progress will be monitored.

- **Adopt new reading series.** Based upon current thinking and practice in the district, a new reading series will be adopted. It will also be aligned with the revised curriculum guidelines, and supporting materials will be made available to all elementary teachers in the district. Instructional audits will be conducted to verify the appropriate use of the materials.
- **Professional development.** All of the elementary school teachers in the district will be trained in the implementation of the new curriculum and the use of the new reading series. The impact of this professional development will be carefully monitored, and follow up will be provided as necessary to ensure that teachers have developed the necessary skills to become successful.
- **Take home a book program.** The district will take steps to ensure that appropriate reading materials are made available to all families in the school district. At the beginning of each quarter, every student will be provided with leveled reading selections to keep. Information about how to read with children will be provided to parents and guardians. Parents and guardians will be surveyed to determine how reading materials are used in the home.
- **Family reading nights.** Across the school district, family reading nights will be conducted once every month while school is in session. Parents and guardians will be instructed in how to effectively read to their children, and will also be given hints and tips for providing feedback to their children when they read to the adults. These practices will be modeled, and coaches will be available to help participants understand the process. Logs will be kept to track the number of minutes per week that children are read to, and the number of minutes per week that children read to their parents or guardians. Silent reading by children will also be logged, and parents and guardians will be surveyed about their participation in the program.

#### **Needs Assessment Activity: Needs Assessment for Use of Title II, Part A Funds**

Your colleagues in the Arroyo School District need your help. They are considering applying for Title II, Part A funding as part of their consolidated application to the NMPED. They know they are required to do a needs assessment but are not sure where to begin. Below is a description of the information they already have.

The Arroyo School District has 100% HQTs in all but one of its middle school buildings. This school, in which only 85% of teachers are highly qualified loses approximately 40% of its teachers within 5 years of hiring. Paraprofessionals are



another story. Across the district, only 65% have met the requirements for being highly qualified. One school in the district, Pine, Elementary School, has not made significant progress for 2 consecutive years in reading. Coincidentally, the school has had a recent large influx of ELL students and has the largest average class size in the district.

**General Questions:**

- Identify district staff to participate in the needs assessment. What is the rationale for selecting these individuals?
  
- Identify sources of information. From which data sources and individuals will you collect data? For each source or person, what is the rationale for your choice?
  
- Select methods to collect information (e.g., student achievement data, evaluations of teacher performance, evaluations of principal performance, etc.). How will you use each of these methods in your needs assessment? What is your rationale for selecting these methods?
  
- Imagine that the district has now collected and analyzed data. What means will you use to rank-order the various needs you have identified? What is your rationale for prioritizing this way?

- Based on the previous description of the Arroyo School District and its *apparent* needs, brainstorm recruitment, professional development, retention, and class size reduction strategies that could address these needs. What is your rationale for selecting these strategies?

Recruitment

Professional Development

Retention

Class Size Reduction

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## Appendix

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Sample Agenda: Needs Assessment Prioritization Meeting  
Indian Education Act (HB 250) Needs Assessment  
Recommendations  
Checklist of Essential Needs Assessment Steps

**APPENDIX: SAMPLE AGENDA**  
**NEEDS ASSESSMENT PRIORITIZATION MEETING**  
**June XX, 2020**

Meeting Purpose: To analyze Gap Analysis data collected for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and prioritize Need Statements

8:30 Overview and Purpose of the Meeting

- Explanation of how Needs Statements fit into the overall CNA process

8:45 Presentation of Data Collected

- Data leader will present summary of the data organized by Gap Analysis
- Facilitator will conduct whole group discussion on the following questions
  - Do the data make sense?
  - Are there sufficient data to validate the needs of Indigenous students?
  - Do the data relate to Needs?

10:00 Break

10:15 Instruction and Practice Prioritizing Needs

- Provide members of each work group a summary of Need Indicator pertaining to a goal area or topic:

“what is,” “what should be,” and “need statement” for each Need Indicator.

- Group Activity: Provide instruction and examples

Have small groups work together to practice prioritizing needs, process with whole group, discuss challenges, clarify the task.

11:00 Convene Small Groups to Prioritize Needs

- Facilitator provides criteria for prioritizing Needs and asks if these feel “right” or if there are other criteria to consider.

Group agrees on criteria.

- Needs on chart paper posted around the room; NAC members provided 10 sticky dots to place by Needs they rate as highest priority.

Review of Prioritized Needs

- Facilitator conducts discussion of rankings of Needs by noting the top 10 and asking:
  - Are there any concerns that should be saved for a future CNA?
  - Are there any low ranking concerns that can be grouped with those on a similar topic?
  - Are there any Need Statements that should be revised or made clearer?
  - Do the highest ranked Need Statements provide a good foundation for exploring solutions?

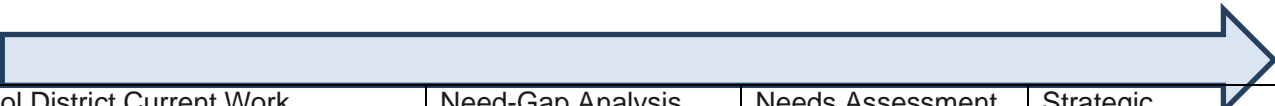
12:00 Next Steps and Adjourn

## INDIAN EDUCATION ACT (HB 250) NEEDS ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Revised Indian Education Act (House Bill 250) requires Indian impacted school districts to conduct a needs assessment to determine what supports are needed in the public school, community and at home to help Indian students succeed in school, graduate, and be prepared to enter post-secondary education or the workplace. To conduct a needs assessment, an analysis of gaps in student achievement, public schools, community and at home is an important first step. The result of a “gap analysis” will assist in determining needs assessments in these areas, as well as inform action plans.

Essentially, a gap is the difference between what is and what should be. This can take several forms. One of the simplest is to look at how well Indigenous students perform in comparison to their peers in their own school districts or in comparison to other similar peers at the state level. For example, the percentage of

The following table shows the progression from the various sections from HB 250, through the current data (or situations) in New Mexico schools, to the needs assessment based on the current status, and what elements are missing from the current status. Finally, the strategic framework and action plans (could be fleshed out even more) to provide resources to close the gap between what is currently available and what services, etc. are lacking.



School District Current Work	Need-Gap Analysis	Needs Assessment (from Gap Analysis)	Strategic Framework- (Possible Examples)
Tribal Education Status Report <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student Achievement                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Math Proficiencies</li> <li>b. Reading Proficiencies</li> <li>c. Science Proficiencies</li> <li>d. Graduation Rates</li> <li>e. Early childhood (ECOT data)</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. School Safety</li> <li>3. Dropout Rates</li> <li>4. Attendance</li> <li>5. Parent and community involvement</li> <li>6. Education programs</li> <li>7. Financial reports</li> <li>8. Indian Policies and Procedures</li> <li>9. School District Initiatives</li> <li>10. School Calendars</li> <li>11. Consultations</li> <li>12. Indigenous Research</li> </ol>	Current Status: Student Achievement – look at past <u>three years</u> of data to determine gap in achievement levels: Demographics- SWD, Disadvantaged, Homeless, Foster, Military, EL, and ethnicities Compare previous elements of school grading for past three years- (see 1, 4, from Current work) Comparison of ethnicities, poverty rates, Native majority schools (50% Native pop) vs. Native non-majority schools Differences of Native proficiencies and non-Native proficiencies Use ECOT data – for Pre-K information  Parent committees	Results of Need-Gap Analysis – Based on data results from the Need-Gap Analysis, ask questions as to what is missing from the district to determine the Needs Assessment. Ex: Have NA student math and reading proficiencies improved in the past three years? Have dropout rates declined in the past three years? What education programs, parent and community involvement programs are currently or not currently in your district?  Questions: Are there	Best Practices – Action Plans – provide schools with large numbers of Native American students, educators, parents and the community with resources and support they need to fulfill HB 250. Ex: Include programs, services, culturally relevant activities and professional development to be provided to improve Indian Education.  Create action plan – if there are no Indian Education committees, or parent

	<p>Special Ed categories Indian Education Committees</p> <p>PED website – Accountability Division: Math Proficiencies Reading Proficiencies Science Proficiencies Graduation rates TESR 2-12 look at Pathways document on PED website for locations of data availability.</p>	<p>parent, as well as Indian Education committees in your district?</p> <p>What information (based on the individual district TESR reports) is missing, which will assist in answering questions of the needs of the district based on the TESR report. For items 2-12 consult individual District TESR Reports for determining disparities in resources.</p>	<p>committees</p> <p>Create action plan to address lack of educational programs for NA and other disparate populations. Input from tribes on educational program development for districts.</p>
<p>ESSA Tribal Consultation – Covered Programs</p> <p>1) Title I, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged</p> <p>2) Title II, Preparing, Training and Recruiting High-Quality teachers, Principals, and other School Leaders</p>	<p>Part A-Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged (PED Accountability Achievement Data) Part C- Education of Migrant Children (PED Achievement Data) Part D – Prevention and Intervention Programs for children and youth who are neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk</p> <p>Part A – Supporting Effective instruction (Look at Teacher Evaluations- possibly look at last three years to determine effective teachers) Look at # of 520 teachers – compare 3 years to determine retention of teachers. Examine current professional development on culturally responsive</p>	<p>Budget allocations for covered programs Programs provided under funding. Equity and Access to programs for AI students ESSA consultation for covered programs</p> <p>Current professional development programs available in districts.</p> <p>What high-quality professional development currently available to attract high-quality teachers and maintain them in</p>	<p>Action plans for developing culturally relevant curricula and instructional materials, innovative programs designed for educationally disadvantaged populations in NM, which includes input from tribes on curricula development</p> <p>Action plans for developing high- quality professional development programs for teaching professionals and paraprofessionals Plans for Cultural Competency training required for teachers and</p>

<p>3) Title III Language Instruction for English learning and Immigrant Students</p>	<p>and instructional practices</p> <p>Part A – English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement (PED Accountability Achievement Data – ELL proficiencies – ACCESS for ELL data for NA students and Immigrant Students)</p>	<p>districts where they are needed Get input from Tribes on teacher quality-qualifications.</p> <p>What English Language learning programs/systems are in place in each district for NA and Immigrant students? What systems are lacking in districts?</p>	<p>para-professionals.</p> <p>Action plan for development of curriculum to address lack of ELL systems/programs</p>
<p>4) Title IV, 21<sup>st</sup> Century School</p>	<p>Part A –Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants What before &amp; after school programs available in districts? (data available EOY of 2019-2020 in STARS) What courses and curriculums available in districts?</p> <p>Part B – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (See NM PED website about 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Community Schools in NM) Part B; Subpart 2 – Rural and Low-Income School Programs Data available about rural schools in STARS, low income areas (See pathways document on web)</p>	<p>Currently only a few districts have before and after school programs. What questions can be raised about improving these sites, and adding to them? Specifically for NA students and disadvantaged students. What is available about tribal histories – in curriculum</p>	<p>Action plans for partnerships with tribes to include tribal histories, partnerships with higher education institutions, businesses, non-profits and community based organizations</p>
<p>5) Title V, Flexibility and Accountability</p>	<p>Part B; Subpart 2 – Rural and Low-Income School Programs Data available about rural schools in STARS, low income areas (See pathways document on web)</p>	<p>Questions: what defines rural schools, low income area schools? Programs that specifically address rural and low</p>	<p>Action plan: Find out which grants are available through DOE for Title V, rural and low income school</p>



<p>6) Title VI, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Native Education</p>	<p>Part A: Subpart 1 – American Indian Education Formal Grants to LEAs Data about Native language revitalization programs, culturally related activities, childhood and family programs supporting school readiness, career preparation activities, dropout prevention, violence, suicide and substance abuse programs can be found on the PED website, and in STARS. Consult the Pathways document on the PED website.</p>	<p>income area schools –what is needed, do programs currently exist? - What personnel an resources are available What grants are available through DOE?</p> <p>Questions: What Native language revitalization programs, culturally related activities, childhood and family programs supporting school readiness, career preparation activities, dropout prevention, violence, suicide and substance abuse programs are needed as a result of data analysis if these programs exist.</p>	<p>programs.</p> <p>Action Plan: Determine needs from existing data, and initiate plans for improving and lessening the gaps in these programs.</p>
<p>District/School Staff</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Administrators</li> <li>2. Teachers</li> <li>3. Language and Culture Teachers</li> <li>4. SP Ed Teachers</li> <li>5. Education Assistant</li> <li>6. Counselors</li> <li>7. Paraprofessionals</li> <li>8. Indian Education Coordinators/Liaisons</li> <li>9. Other staff supports</li> <li>10. Resource Mapping</li> <li>11. School Resource Officers/Dean of Students</li> <li>12. Teacher Prep Programs</li> <li>13. Professional Development</li> </ol>	<p>Teacher evaluation results for the past three years of NA teachers vs non-NA teachers, by school and district District school staff vacancies, how many NA Teachers, appropriate credentials, retention rates. Restorative Justice training and policies TESR Results by district should provide information about current programs and staff at each district</p>	<p>Questions to ask for Needs Assessment: How many NA teachers, administrators and staff are in the district/school, and how does that compare with student success: achievement scores, teacher evaluations, appropriate credentials?</p>	<p>Action plan: provide resources for teacher prep, professional development of teachers, administrators and other staff of schools, 520 certification to acquire more language and culture teachers,</p>
<p>Home</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Tribal home</li> <li>2) Urban home</li> <li>3) Resource Mapping – access</li> </ol>	<p>Family literacy services. Cultural Awareness – what resources families</p>	<p>Needs assessment based on lack of resources for families, tribal</p>	<p>Action Plan: Collaborate with tribes and urban entities to develop</p>

to WiFi (librarys)	(Tribal/urban) have access to. Examine current district TESRs to determine availability of resources for families.	members.	resource maps. Does the school/district have cultural relevance practices to support students and families
Community 1. Tribal Community 2. Urban Community 3. Resource Mapping (ex: WiFi access –libraries)	Data on access to: Transportation Community Health Centers Libraries Educational Centers Non-Profit Organizations Local Governance Parent Committees Indian Education Committees WiFi (TESR Reports, district websites)	Based on analysis, what areas need improvement for access by tribal and urban communities?	Action Plan:
What does it mean to graduate with a diploma of excellence?  a) NM Graduate Rates	Graduation requirements, Next Step Plan, required coursework, Math, English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Phys Ed, Health Ed, Required Assessments (standard based assessments on ELA, Math and Science) (a) advanced placement or honors courses;(b) dual-credit courses offered in cooperation with an institution of higher education;(c) distance learning courses;(d) career-technical courses; and(e) pre-apprenticeship programs. career pathways College and workplace ready assessments, Credit recovery Academic intervention	Questions: Are NA students meeting all graduation requirements? Are they passing required standard based assessments for graduation? CCRB requirements for advanced placement? (Ex: ACT, other tests for college prep) Academic success in course requirements as well as college prep, credit recovery, dual credit courses. What pre-apprenticeship programs, career pathways, or academic intervention programs are available for students?	Action Plan: Resources for parents, students, tribes on graduation requirements, CCRB requirements for advanced placement, apprenticeship programs, career pathways, intervention programs, advanced placement programs.

	programs.		
Post-Secondary Education	College entrance exams ACT, SAT, College ACCU-Placer exams, achievement gap data – remedial class enrollment, graduation rates, dropout rates – college access programs, ie: GEAR UP and Upward Bound.	Questions: Results from college entrance exams, ACCU Placer. Examine deficiencies in exams, graduation rates, dropout rates (Achievement data – past A-Z School Grading reports from districts)	Action Plan: Resources on how to improve graduation rates, prep for college entrance exams, reduce dropout rates.
Career – Workplace-	Employability skills, Workforce solutions data, CTE programs. Labor Market data	Question: Workforce solutions data results – follow students from high school to labor force and determine success or failure in the labor force. How many NA students in labor force following HS graduation?	Action Plan: Training for students in employment strategies. Collaborative partnerships with businesses and organizations and tribal entities

### New Mexico Public Schools Guidelines for Implementing HB 250



## Checklist of Essential Needs Assessment Steps

For your needs assessment, have you:

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

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

\_\_\_\_\_ 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?

\_\_\_\_\_ Decided how you will organize your data?

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Decided how you will analyze your data?

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

(Kubinski, 1999, ND, Region VI CC)