

Identifying Root Causes that Actually Drive School Improvement

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**Effective school
improvement begins by
understanding the current
state before attempting to
change it.**

Lehmann et al., (in press)

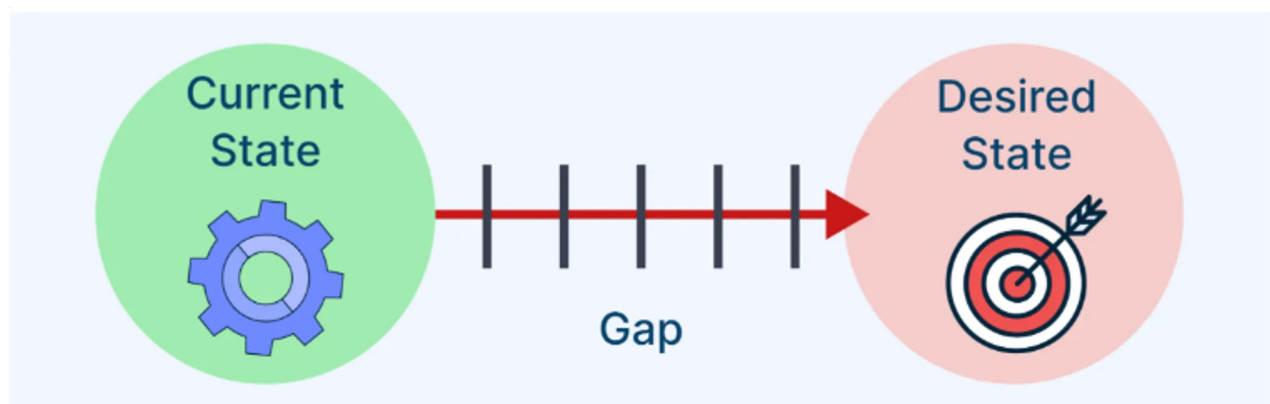
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School Scenario



- State assessment
 - 50% proficient overall
 - 15% proficient for student with disabilities
 - 9% proficient for students receiving Free/Reduced Lunch
- Classroom observations
 - Heavy teacher-talk, frontal teaching, procedural
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Who Needs to Be at the Table?

Students
Families/Caregivers
Classroom Teachers
Special Education Teachers
Multilingual Learner Teachers
Instructional Coaches
School Counselors

Building Administrators
Paraprofessionals
Support Staff
District Leaders
Community Partners
School Board (when appropriate)

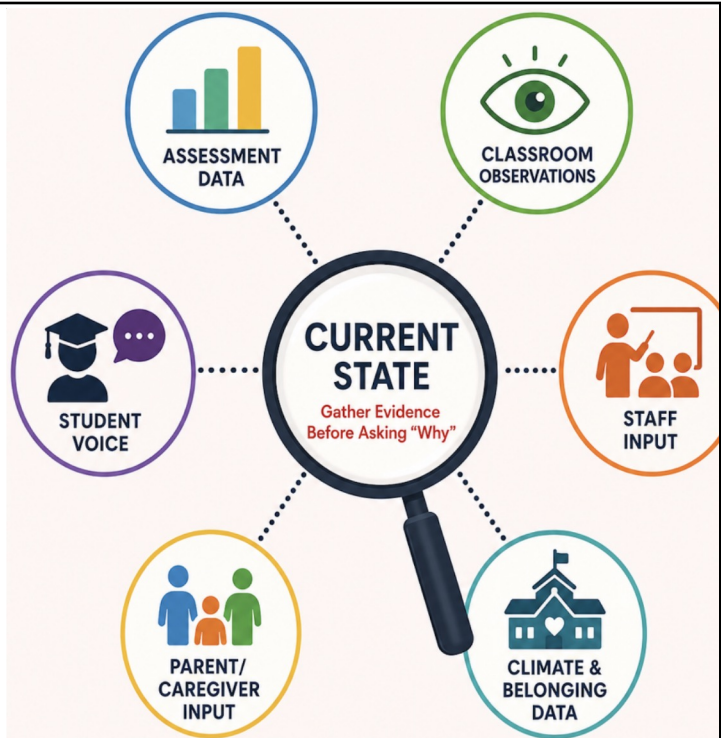
Which voices are often missing?



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Gather Multiple Sources of Evidence

What story do these tell together?



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Multiple Sources of Evidence



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Surveys - AI

Elementary Student Survey (Grades K-5)

1. I feel safe at school.
2. My teachers care about me.
3. My teachers help me learn when I need help.
4. I have at least one adult at school I can talk to.
5. I enjoy coming to school.
6. I have friends who are kind to me.
7. What is your favorite thing about our school?
8. If you could change one thing about our school, what?

High School Student Survey (Grades 9-12)

1. I feel physically and emotionally safe at school.
2. My teachers challenge me to do my best.
3. My classes help prepare me for college, careers, or life after graduation.
4. I feel respected by adults in the school.
5. I have opportunities to develop leadership, service, or career skills.
6. I know where to go if I need academic or personal support.
7. What is one thing our school should continue doing?
8. What is one thing we should improve to better prepare students for the future?

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Multiple Sources of Evidence



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Surveys - AI

Certified Staff Survey

1. I feel valued and respected as a member of our district.
2. School leadership communicates openly and honestly.
3. I have the resources I need to be effective in my role.
4. Professional development is relevant and improves my practice.
5. Student behavior expectations are clear and consistently supported.
6. Collaboration among staff is encouraged and productive.
7. What is one strength of our district?
8. What is the highest priority for improvement during the next year?

Classified Staff Survey

1. I feel respected and appreciated for the work I do.
2. Communication from district leadership keeps me informed.
3. I have the tools and resources I need to do my job well.
4. I understand how my work contributes to student success.
5. I feel comfortable sharing ideas or concerns with supervisors.
6. Our district provides a positive work environment.
7. What is something our district does well?
8. What is one thing we could improve to better support employees and students?

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Multiple Sources of Evidence



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Surveys - AI

Parent Survey

1. My child feels safe at school.
2. My child's teachers communicate effectively with our family.
3. The school provides a positive learning environment.
4. My child is challenged and supported academically.
5. School staff treat students with respect and
6. I feel informed about important school even
7. What is one thing our schools do especially
8. What is one area where we could improve?

Community Member Survey

1. I have a positive impression of our school district.
2. The district communicates effectively with the community.
3. The district uses resources responsibly.
4. Our schools prepare students to become responsible citizens.
5. I would recommend our school district to families considering moving here.
6. I feel the district is responsive to community feedback.
7. What is one strength of our school district?
8. What is one opportunity you believe the district should focus on in the coming years?

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Multiple Sources of Evidence

Classroom Walkthrough Data

II. Focus on Instruction

4. Identify instructional practices:

- ☐ Teaching
- ☐ Modeling
- ☐ Discussion
- ☐ Presentation
- ☐ None

5. Identify grouping format:

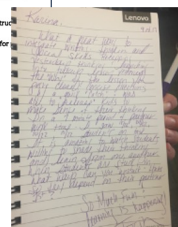
- ☐ Whole group
- ☐ Small group
- ☐ Paired
- ☐ Individual

6. Identify research-based instructional strategies - Teacher:

- ☐ Identifying similarities and differences
- ☐ Nonlinguistic representations
- ☐ Cues/questions/ advanced organizers
- ☐ Homework/practice
- ☐ Generating/testing hypothesis
- ☐ Reinforcing effort/recognition
- ☐ Setting objectives/providing feedback
- ☐ Summarizing/note-taking
- ☐ Cooperative learning

7. Identify research-based instructional strategies - Student:

- ☐ Identifying similarities and differences
- ☐ Nonlinguistic representations
- ☐ Cues/questions/ advanced organizers
- ☐ Homework/practice
- ☐ Generating/testing hypothesis
- ☐ Reinforcing effort/recognition
- ☐ Setting objectives/providing feedback
- ☐ Summarizing/note-taking
- ☐ Cooperative learning



Indicative	Subsquent Effective	Indicative	NO - Not Observed
The teacher consistently provides clear and concise directions to students. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning.	The teacher consistently provides clear and concise directions to students. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning.	The teacher consistently provides clear and concise directions to students. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning.	The teacher consistently provides clear and concise directions to students. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to engage students in learning.



III. Focus on the Learner

8. Identify learner engagement:

- ☐ On task
- ☐ On task
- ☐ On task
- ☐ On task
- ☐ On task

9. Identify learner engagement:

- ☐ On task
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Instructional Planning Tool

Name: [Name]

Room: [Room]

Subject: [Subject]

Unit: [Unit]

Lesson: [Lesson]

Objectives: [Objectives]

Materials: [Materials]

Activities: [Activities]

Assessments: [Assessments]

Reflection: [Reflection]

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School Scenario: What do We Know Now?



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Symptoms vs. Root Causes

Symptoms	Root Causes
Low scores	Misaligned instruction
Low student engagement	Lack of student voice
Poor attendance	Weak Tier 1 practices
High discipline referrals	Inconsistent expectations
Resistance to change	Initiative overload



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Symptoms vs. Root Causes

Are these actually root causes?

- Teachers do not care.
- Parents do not support education.
- Students are not motivated.
- Kids just do not want to learn



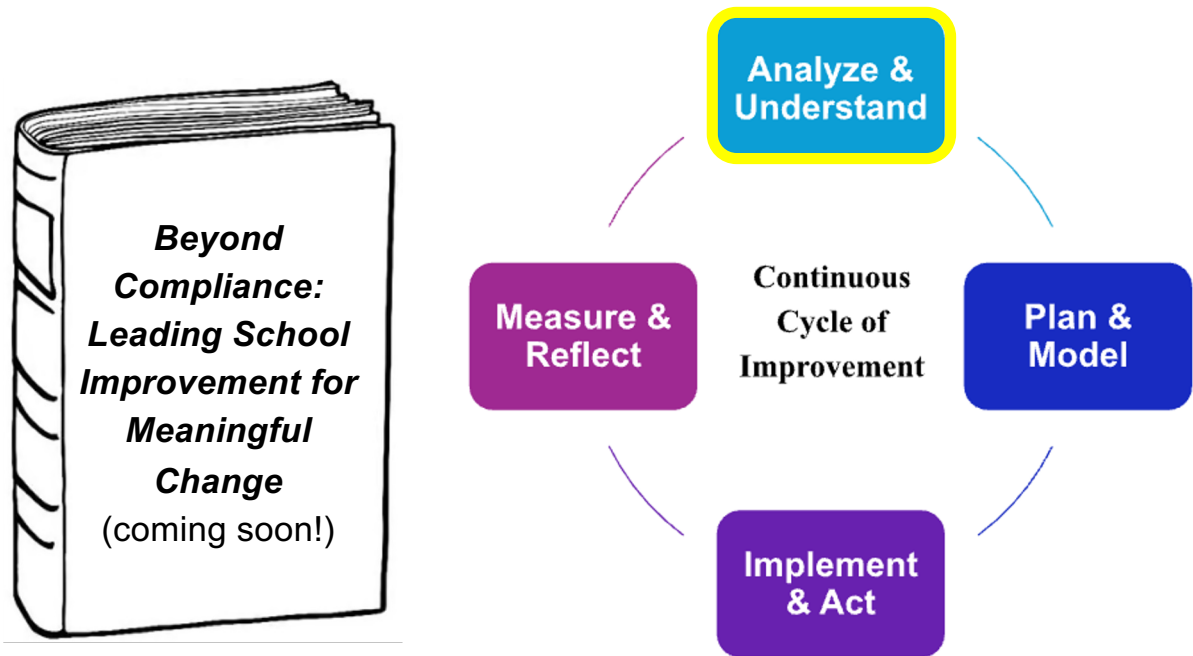
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! Common Pitfalls !



- Leaders/teams feel pressure to act quickly.
- Leaders/teams confuse assumptions with evidence.
- Leaders/teams stop asking “why” too soon.
- Leaders/teams focus on people instead of systems.
- Leaders/teams fail to engage the right stakeholders.

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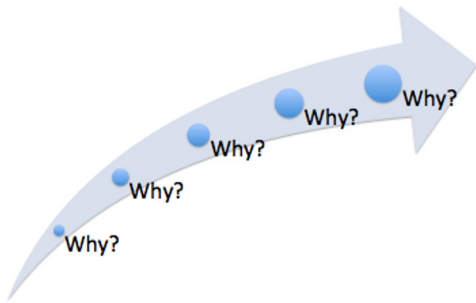
Perform Needs Assessment & Root Cause Analysis

	Assess & Analyze Needs Assessment 	Interpret & Connect Root-Cause Analysis 	Plan & Strategize 
What	Gain insight into your school's current status using available data Begin envisioning the desired state for your school	Ask questions to explore potential causes that led to the gaps identified in the needs assessment	Determine strategies that best address root causes Plan for how to monitor implementation of strategies
Why	Based on the gaps identified, generate questions to inform root-cause analyses	Agreement among team on which root causes are within the school's control Inform planning of strategies that target and remove root causes	Specific plans are more likely to be implemented Planning for monitoring increases a sense of accountability and facilitates feedback processes

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Major Concern: There is a significant gap in math performance on multiple assessment measures with our Multilingual Learners compared to students overall.

Root Cause Analysis The Five Whys



Root Causes:

- Teachers are not comfortable utilizing scaffolds and cueing systems to appropriately support students. **(Instructional)**
- Teachers may have implicit bias that Multilingual Learners are not ready to engage in productive struggle or have the ability to engage in higher order tasks. **(Cultural)**
- Leaders do not have consistent structures in place to provide staff with coaching and feedback regarding instructional practices to support Multilingual Learners. **(Structural)**

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How Do You Know You've Found the Right Root Cause?

Before moving to solutions, ask yourself...

- ✓ Is it supported by evidence?
- ✓ Is it within our control?
- ✓ Does it explain a problem (not describe a symptom)?
- ✓ Does it focus on adult actions?
- ✓ Will addressing it improve outcomes for students?

If you answer "no" to any of these, keep asking "Why?"

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Beyond Compliance



Instead of asking:	Ask:
Did we complete the school improvement plan?	Did we understand the problem before writing the plan?
Did we submit the paperwork?	Did we change teaching and learning?
What strategy should we use?	What evidence tells us this strategy addresses the root cause?

Instead of fixing symptoms.... improve the system.

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Thank you!



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