

# Bridging the Gap Through Continuous Improvement: Effectively Utilizing a Comprehensive Needs Assessment

March 13, 2023  
ESSA Academy

# AGENDA

- Review of SCDE Vision & Improvement Model
- Definition & Purpose of Needs Assessment
- Elements of Needs Assessment
- Phases of Needs Assessment
- District Opportunities through Needs Assessment
- Resources



The vision of the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is that **all** students graduate prepared for success in college, careers, and citizenship.





# Needs Assessment and ESSA

ESEA, as amended by ESSA, requires states and districts to complete a needs assessment for both state and federal programs such as

- District Strategic and School Renewal Plans
- Title I, Part A
- Title II, Part A
- Title IV, Part A
- Title V, Part B

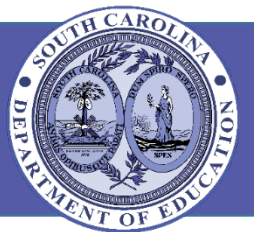


# South Carolina Improvement Model



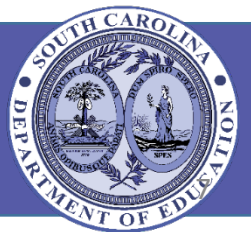
# South Carolina School Improvement Model

- **Needs Assessment** - Identify and assess key deficiencies and provide prioritized recommendation to support improvement
- **Differentiated Intervention** - Tiers of technical assistance designed to tailor support to the specific needs of the school or district
- **Focused Improvement** - Diagnosing deficiencies, identify clear and effective improvement strategies, implement **evidence-based practices**, and monitor



# South Carolina School Improvement Model

- Innovation - Provide research-based innovative practices & design frameworks to scale the innovations
- Increased State Capacity - Increased collaboration around school improvement. **Focus on more than just compliance**
- State Stakeholder Participation - Including all the necessary stakeholders





# Why Conduct a Needs Assessment?

- An effective needs assessment helps stakeholders and system leaders understand how the pieces of a complex educational system interact.
- The goal of a needs assessment is to help educators identify, understand, and **prioritize** the needs that districts and schools must address to improve performance.





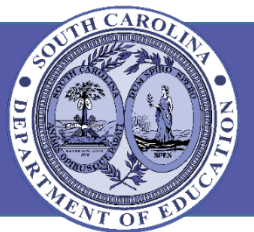
# What is a **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**?

- Needs assessment is, first and foremost, a **process**—a process that can help educators at all levels successfully identify, understand, and better address education challenges.
- Needs assessment is generally defined as a systematic examination of the **gap** that exists between the current state and desired state of an organization and the factors that can be attributed to this gap.



# Key Challenges to a Successful Needs Assessment

- Lack of Time
- Insufficient Tools
  - A **description** of what a needs assessment could look like – but no concrete tools
  - A data **spreadsheet** and questions about school issues, with no help connecting the two
- Asking Wrong Questions - Are you asking the “tough” questions?
- Jumping to Solutions - School and district leaders often jump to the task of brainstorming solutions before understanding the problems to be solved.



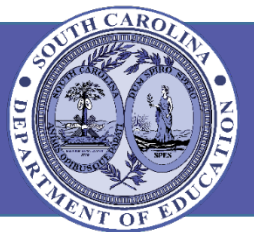
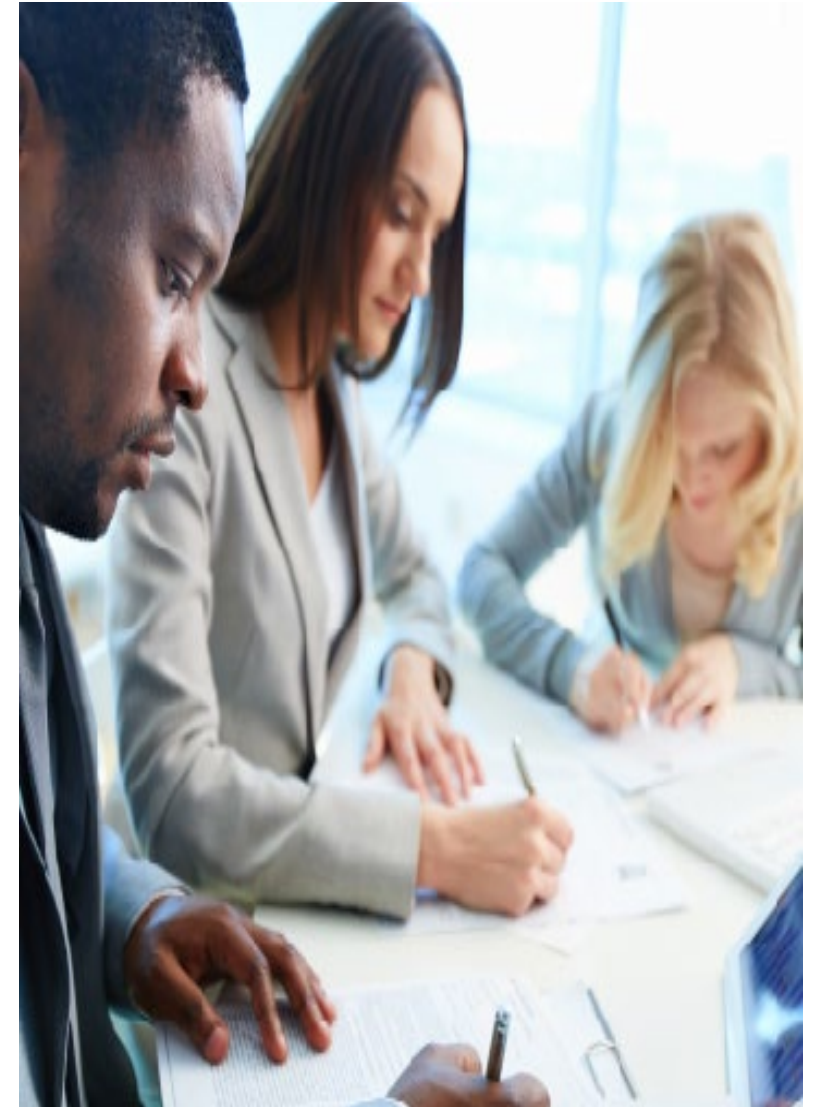
# Four Elements of a Successful Needs Assessment

- Needs Driven and Context-Specific Approach
- Rigorous Data Analysis
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs



# Needs Driven & Context-Specific Approach

- ***Needs Driven:*** The needs assessment design and scope should be built around an organizing framework that defines the problems, topics, and questions to be addressed.
- ***Context-specific:*** The design and data inputs of the needs assessment must reflect the local context for the work.



# Examine Educational Factors

The data analysis should include educational factors that matter for student learning:

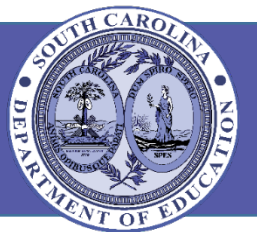
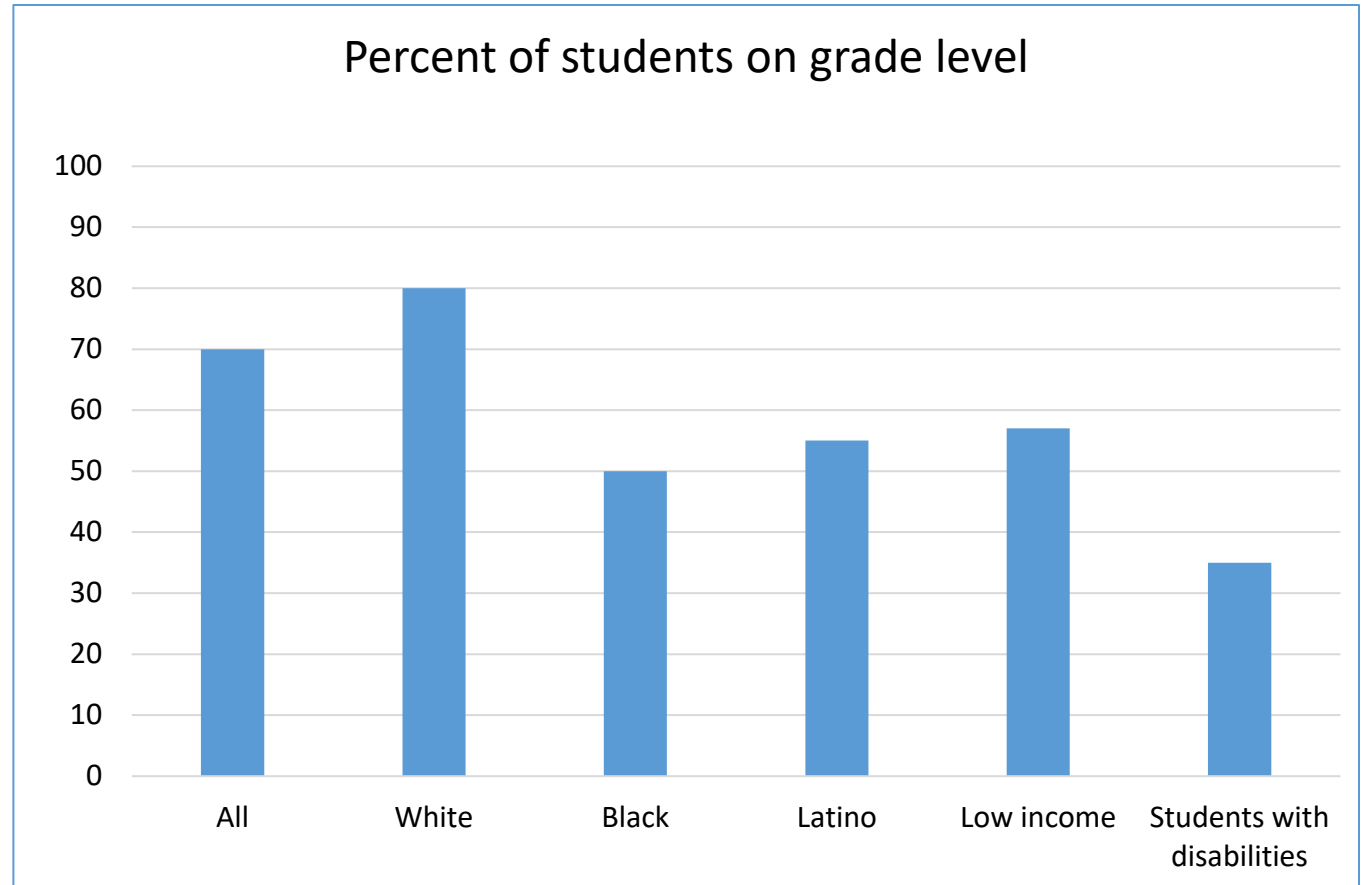
- Aligned curriculum
- Effective instruction
- Strong leadership
- Supports for students and teachers
- A safe and positive climate
- Family and community engagement
- Equitable access to resources





# Rigorous Data Analysis

**Patterns in Student Performance - A** needs assessment should begin by examining patterns in student achievement data – both overall and for groups.





# Sources of Information

***Needs Assessment:*** Should rely on many sources of information to get the fullest possible picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses:

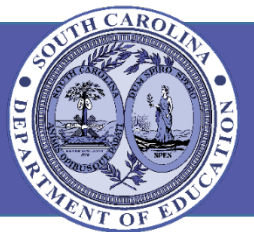
- State and district data systems
- Master schedules
- Self-assessment rubrics
- Student work samples
- Teacher, student, and family surveys
- On-site diagnostic reviews
- Focus groups
- Interviews



# Stakeholder Engagement

A needs assessment is a process that should be undertaken with **local stakeholders** rather than completed entirely by a small group of leaders or an outside entity.

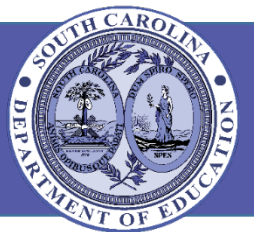
- Engaging school staff, parents, a diverse assortment of leaders, and external support during each phase of the needs assessment ensures that the planning, data collection, identified needs, and consideration of underlying causes incorporate the input of a **broad knowledge base**.
- By developing trust in the process, participating stakeholders are more likely to be **invested in the outcomes** and actively engaged in the selection, development, and implementation of improvement plans and strategies that create lasting change.



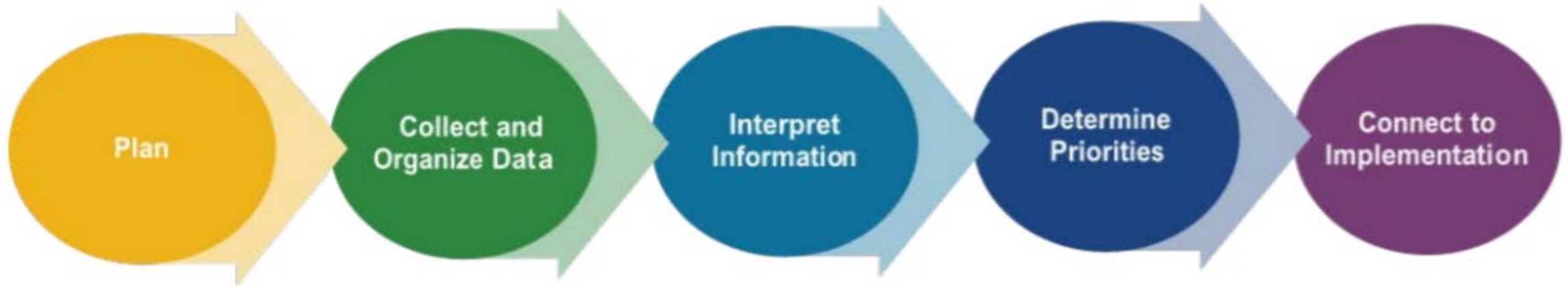
# Collaborative Identification of Improvement Needs

The primary outcome of the needs assessment process is a set of needs, or **prioritized areas of focus**, that will inform improvement efforts.

- The stakeholders represented in the data collection also have a stake in **identifying** and **prioritizing** needs.
- When **key indicators** are determined at the local level, ownership and understanding increase.
- Research suggests that genuine collaboration requires a shift from a cooperation mindset in which ideas and actions are “mutually agreeable” to ideas and actions that are “mutually beneficial” (Hord, 1981).



# Phases of Implementation



The needs assessment process is implemented across five discrete phases: plan, collect and organize data, interpret information, determine priorities, and connect to implementation.

# Plan

- Define the purpose and intended outcomes of the needs assessment process within the **local context**.
- Determine the guiding questions that the needs assessment should answer.
- Establish actions, timelines, and responsibilities for all related activities.
- Identify, invite, and engage all relevant stakeholders.
- Articulate the content (**what** the needs assessment will cover), the process (**how** the needs assessment will be accomplished), and the presentation (how the results will be conveyed).





# Collect and Analyze Data

- Data are a foundational component of any needs assessment process.
- “Raw” data need to be organized in a way that is useful to draw conclusions and identify improvement needs.
- During this phase of the needs assessment, data are collected in various forms.

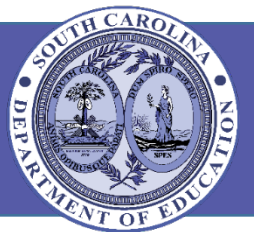






# Interpret Information

- During this phase, educators examine relevant data to create **meaningful information** by collaborating with multiple stakeholders.
- Collaborating with stakeholders further ensures that data are understood within what is realistic for the local implementation.
- Data should be organized and presented in digestible formats to facilitate examination of trends across time and data sources.





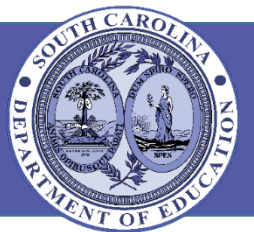
# Determine Priorities

- Narrow the list of needs to a key set of priorities for action. Achieving successful outcomes from an improvement process requires directing improvement efforts toward a **manageable set of priorities**.
- Stakeholders must ensure that the priorities identified are **authentic** and **specific** to the needs assessment framework and **local context**.



# Connect to Implementation

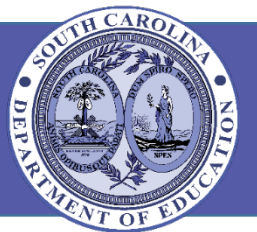
- The final phase of the needs assessment takes the results of the needs assessment and turns those results into something **actionable**.
- Educators need a deep understanding of the **root causes** so they can be connected to relevant goals and incorporated into an improvement or action plan.
- Priorities drive the selection of **evidence-based strategies** or interventions, how they will be implemented, and how improvement will be evaluated and measured along the way.
- Connecting with **implementation** is critical to realizing change as a result of the needs assessment process.



# Collaboration and Support - I

## Actions to Ensure a “High-Quality” Needs Assessment

- Set goals at the district level and provide autonomy to schools to use the process to develop strategies and actions to achieve their established goals.
- Work with schools to prioritize their needs according to the assessments.
- Facilitate sharing and presentation of district-level data.
- Support the inclusion of a variety of data sources.
- Bring schools together to focus on related concerns or priorities.



# Collaboration and Support - II

## Actions to Ensure a “High-quality” Needs Assessment

- Identify resources and strategies that can work across schools.
- Provide assistance with communications to stakeholders and community members.
- Provide professional learning and support.
- Connect schools with available statewide systems of support.
- Participate in and listen to the conversations related to individual building-level needs assessments.



# Collaboration and Support - III

## Actions to Ensure a “High-Quality” Needs Assessment

- Determine how school-level data may be aggregated.
- Create opportunities for networking and collaboration.
- Model the use of the needs assessment as a lever for change rather than an instrument of compliance.





# Bridging the Gap Through Continuous Improvement

## RESOURCES

### [South Carolina Department of Education: \*South Carolina School Improvement Framework Version 2.0\*](#)

This document provides the plan and process adopted by the South Carolina Department of Education to ensure high-level learning for all students at all schools in South Carolina.

### [South Carolina Department of Education-\*Using Evidence Based Interventions & Practices: A Process Guide for Improvement\*](#)

This document provides an overview of an evidence-based school improvement planning process and helpful tools to use during each phase of the needs assessment and planning process.

### [State Support Network- \*Needs Assessment Guidebook\*](#)

This document provides an overview of the needs assessment process with numerous resources and references to support districts and schools to develop a successful school improvement plan.



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