Tool 6b: Root Cause

Purpose

This tool provides a template for teams to use so that they can identify root causes that address strengths and challenges to successful SIP implementation.

A root cause is the most basic explanation for a problem. A team should start by summarizing key trends in their data and brainstorming hypotheses for why these results may be happening. After identifying key contributors, teams move through a chain of contributing causes to arrive at a root cause. The root cause is a cause that, when removed or addressed, eliminates or substantially reduces the contributing causes all the way up to the first potential cause.

Effective teams remain focused on identifying root causes that are within their control and do not waste time by identifying factors that they cannot control. Examples of variables that may impact results that teams cannot control include ELL or IEP status, class size, mobility, and family circumstances.

Because root causes should focus on adult actions, it may be somewhat uncomfortable for your staff to discuss and embrace the root cause. This discomfort is normal and should not stand in the way of your team identifying high-leverage actions to enhance great teaching and learning.
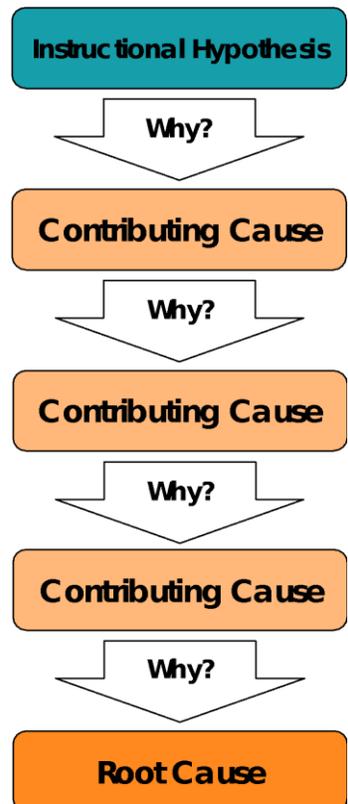
When to Use

Tool 6B: Root Cause can spark deeper discussion of root causes that emerge as you work through Tool 6A: Data Analysis protocol or in other conversations you have had specific to student or systems-level issues.

How to Use

Download the *Root Cause Worksheet*, available as a Word document online at mmsd.org/sblttoolkit.

Work through the question posed on the worksheet as a way of guiding the conversation. However, do not let the worksheet constrict the conversation. A skilled facilitator will let rich conversations develop and continue while using the written protocol to record conversations "in the right box."

When brainstorming hypotheses, focus on what is within your school's locus of control and connected to the ICEL domains (Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, and Learner). Instruction refers to instructional practices and their impact on student learning. Curriculum refers to the skills students are expected to master. Environment refers to factors in students' surroundings that enable or hinder success. Learner includes students' unique capacities

Instructional Hypothesis

Why?

Contributing Cause

Why?

Contributing Cause

Why?

Contributing Cause

Why?

Root Cause

and traits.

After brainstorming a range of factors, narrow down your list to those that have sufficient evidence to suggest they might be a primary contributing cause. For each cause, work through the process of identifying contributing causes by looking at your first potential cause and asking why it is happening; in essence, describe what caused that cause. Then, look at your answer for what caused the first potential cause, and ask what caused *that* cause to happen. Continue this chain of questioning, asking "why" at each level until you reach a root cause.

Your team will know you have identified a root cause when you identify a cause that is centered around adult actions; when you can concretely define, support with evidence, address, and resolve the cause; and when it no longer makes sense to ask what caused the cause you are discussing. If you cannot reach this point yet, keep asking why and digging further. Deciding when to stop digging and identify a cause as the root cause is often a judgment call that teams will become more comfortable with given time and practice.

Once you have completed the "Root Cause Grid," identify action(s) that can be taken based on the root cause analysis. Consider actions that would make instructional practice or student learning different in some way. Also consider how resource allocations (e.g., time, people) could be used to address these needs. The information filled in the "Potential Actions" box should jumpstart the discussion of "Consider Actions" in *Tool 6a: Data Analysis Protocol*.

The following is a list of sample causes that may contribute to the results we see in our data:

Teacher Actions:
Instructional strategies
- Lack of rigor: What students are being asked to do is not aligned with lesson plan expectations
- Classroom management
- Appropriate student work time
- Questioning techniques
- Lack of knowledge of ELL/SPED strategies

Curriculum Materials
- Lack of backward planning
- Lessons that are not aligned to CCSS
- Spending too little or too much time on material

Assessment
- Alignment
- Infrequent administration
- Analysis and grading cycle

Interventions
- Ineffective progress monitoring

- Inconsistent implementation of intervention

School-Wide Actions:
- *Curriculum alignment*
- *Lack of training in curriculum*
- *Professional development alignment*
- *Allocation of resources*
- *Lack of knowledge of high quality strategies to use with specific focus groups*

Root Cause Worksheet

Current Reality: Where are you at now?	

Desired Goal: Where would you like to get?	

Goal Analysis: Brainstorm and then prioritize factors within your sphere of influence (e.g., curriculum, instruction, environment) that may be increasing or decreasing the difference between your current reality and desired goal.	Brainstorm all possible factors/ causes: Identify most likely factor / cause 1: Identify most likely factor / cause 2: Identify most likely factor / cause 3:

Root Cause Grid

Using your most likely factors/ causes, ask why these factors/ causes are occurring. You have reached a root cause when it no longer makes sense to ask why.

	Factor/Cause 1	Factor/Cause 2	Factor/Cause 3
Why?			
Why?			
Why?			
Why?			
Why?			

Potential Actions

School adult actions that move you closer to your desired outcome.

specific action steps	to be done by whom?	by when?	resources needed?	review date?