

WHAT'S ONE THING COEs CAN DO TODAY TO IMPROVE DIFFERENTIATED ASSISTANCE?

Go back to the Theory of Change.



The Theory of Change (ToC) for differentiated assistance articulates that the **district is the key lever of change** in the process. Low student performance results from issues beyond a schools control and extends to larger systemic issues within school districts. Therefore, the ToC expresses the belief that low-performing districts need to engage in professional development where each district learns **how to examine the root causes of systemic issues, develop changes to address these issues, and use data to monitor the implementation and outcomes of their improvement efforts**. Essentially, these district teams with the support of COE coaches and facilitators (a) set goals for improvement, (b) implement changes to address systemic issues, and (c) use data to monitor the progress of their efforts.

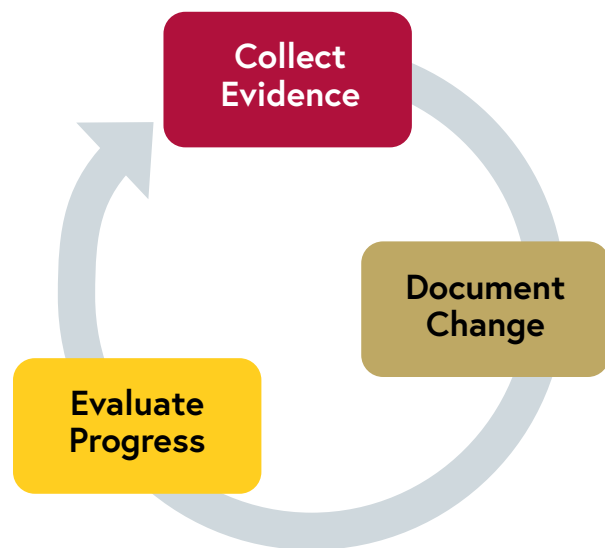
In the near term, developers of DA intended for these efforts to improve district core functions in data use, systems analysis, and equity. In the long term, these efforts are intended to improve academic outcomes, reduce achievement gaps, decrease suspensions and chronic absenteeism, and improve college and career readiness.

Two years after receiving assistance, however, we know there is minimal evidence that students benefit when their school district receives assistance (see [report](#)). To increase the benefits of DA for students, every COE must return to the theory of action and examine whether the assistance it provides supports districts to:

- conduct a root cause analysis on identified systemic issues,
- generate improvement ideas to address adaptive and technical issues in the system with a focus on equity,
- use data effectively to set goals and monitor progress in addressing the identified systemic issues.

Additionally, COEs must create a more formalized process to evaluate the shorter-term outcomes of differentiated assistance using a three-step process:

- 1. Collect Evidence.** What evidence has the district collected that supports its progress in addressing a systemic issue?
- 2. Document Change.** What strategies/change ideas has the district implemented as part of its improvement efforts?
- 3. Evaluate Progress.** What progress has the district made in accomplishing its improvement goals? Is the district (a) "on-track", (b) "off-track with significant progress", or (c) "off track with limited progress" with regard to its improvement progress?



These fundamental modifications to the DA process will allow COEs to understand the relationship between its actions and DA's shorter-term outcomes as well as increase the likelihood of accomplishing longer-term changes in academic and non-academic outcomes.