Root Cause Analysis Process – Examples

Purpose

A thorough root cause analysis enables the team to determine which adult-level system, practice, or set of behaviors the site will directly target for changes. If the root cause analysis has successfully identified *the root* of an identified Student Performance Priority (SPP), addressing the root cause (that is within the control of adults in the school) should positively impact outcomes for students. Examples are provided on the following pages that "Meets Expectations" using CDE's UIP Quality Criteria for all[1] schools and districts.

Consideration Points

When conducting a root cause analysis, refer back to notes from the data analysis process, especially around related contextual factors that were considered as each SPP was selected. Be sure to include or address the following:

- ✓ A structured root cause analysis protocol (e.g., Five Whys, Fishbone) and the protocol name when describing how the root cause was identified (refer to protocols on the CDE's Root Cause Analysis webpage).
- ✓ Fully explain how root causes were identified, describe varied data sources used, and name stakeholders involved in the process, including teachers, staff, students and families.
- ✓ If there are additional program requirements that apply to the school or district (e.g., Early Learning Needs Assessment), integrate these into the 'Root Cause Analysis Process' box.
- ✓ Any school that is federally identified for Comprehensive Support or Additional Targeted Support must include a reflection on and identification of resource inequities that contributed to its ESSA identification, visit CDE's Resource Inequities webpage for more info.

Examples

The root cause examples on the following pages are provided for one middle school. Examples 1 and 2 address a single SPP (ELA & Math Growth Gaps and ACCESS Growth), while Example 3 addresses a second SPP. Alternatively, it's possible for one root cause to address more than one SPP.

For the box 'Describe how this Root Cause was identified and validated,' it's likely that the same process description might be used for each root cause. The examples below describe the same root cause analysis process, with slight differences describing key stakeholders involved, data used and context considered based on each root cause.

[1] These examples do not cover every requirement in the Quality Criteria, such as those based on specific plan types, programs, or ESSA.

Example 1 – Root Cause Analysis of ELA & Math Growth Gaps

Root Cause Analysis

Student Performance Priority: ELA & Math Growth Gaps

Short Title for this Root Cause: Lack of staff capacity to use data analysis protocols, limited staff data literacy

Describe this Root Cause:
Limited use of data to identify skill gaps for reteaching and ensure teachers instruct and evaluate at expected grade level standards for all students. While we have a Data-Driven Instruction (DDI) protocol, PLC teams vary in use of protocol to analyze gaps, identify student misunderstanding, and plan reteaching moves. We also need a data use protocol for teachers to engage students in setting their own customized stretch goals to accelerate learning or catch up, and to ensure student agency in their own learning.

Root Cause Category: Data Analysis

Describe how this Root Cause was identified and validated:
Root causes were determined using the Five Whys protocol with the Instructional Leadership Team in May, followed by a consensus meeting with all educators in early June. This root cause was validated by anecdotal feedback from staff regarding use of data driven conversations, observations during PLC time and PLC teams completing the Data-Driven Instruction (DDI) & Assessment Implementation Rubric at the end of the school year. In analyzing DDI Rubric results, it showed lower self-ratings in 'Analysis' and 'Action'. In the case of 'Analysis', there is no structure to analyze data in relation to grade level expectation (i.e., exemplar of student work) and what to do after identifying skill gaps (i.e., moving beyond what students got wrong to why there are misunderstandings).

Example 2 – Root Cause Analysis of ELA & Math Growth Gaps and ACCESS Growth

Root Cause Analysis

Student Performance Priority: ELA & Math Growth Gaps and ACCESS Growth

Short Title for this Root Cause: Unclear expectations and inconsistent and insufficient coaching to support grade-level Tier 1 with layered supports.

Describe this Root Cause:
Based on observational classroom data, there is varied instructional quality provided by teachers throughout the school resulting in inequitable opportunities for learning. Anonymous teacher feedback described some teachers receiving inconsistent and insufficient coaching to improve instructional practices to support students below grade level. Teachers also felt like expectations are unclear and a few teachers stressed needing more support to enhance their skills to reteach students with identified gaps and to spiral more instruction at the Tier 1 level.

Root Cause Category: Teacher Development

Describe how this Root Cause was identified and validated:
Root causes were determined using the Five Whys protocol with the Instructional Leadership Team in May, followed by a consensus meeting with all educators in early June. This root cause was validated by classroom observations, anonymous feedback from teachers, and PLC teams completing the Data-Driven Instruction (DDI) & Assessment Implementation Rubric at the end of the school year. In analyzing the DDI Rubric results, it showed lower self-ratings in 'Analysis' and 'Action'. In the case of 'Action' reteaching after DDI data analysis is dependent on how well structures are in place (i.e., instructional plans) and supported by leadership (i.e., leadership review of lesson plans and observational feedback). All root causes were confirmed by our School Accountability Committee made up of parents and community members in August.

Example 3 – Root Cause Analysis of Low Attendance and High Chronic Absenteeism

Root Cause Analysis

Student Performance Priority: Low Attendance and High Chronic Absenteeism

Short Title for this Root Cause: Community supports are not integrated or coordinated.

Describe this Root Cause:
Lack of a community model to support student attendance and engagement in school. After analyzing attendance data with the lens of disproportionality, students struggling to attend school appear to have challenges related to getting their basic needs (e.g., clothing, transportation) met and have a lower level of family engagement. Differences in culture and access to resources seem to be a barrier for some students to attend school. Anecdotal data exposed language barriers of students whose home language is not English.

Root Cause Category: Teacher Development

Describe how this Root Cause was identified and validated:
Root causes were determined using the Five Whys protocol with the Instructional Leadership Team in May, followed by a consensus meeting with all educators in early June. This root cause was validated by student and family surveys and anecdotal data collected by counselors and attendance advocates supporting students with engagement. All root causes were confirmed by our School Accountability Committee made up of parents and community members in August and shared with the Student Council for student leaders to participate in root cause analysis of peer engagement.