The Basics

Designing Your Needs Assessment

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CSLX
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
LEARNING EXCHANGE

What's Inside

Key Takeaway:

Good news! You likely have so much data and information at your fingertips. Start there. Then, use that data to drive discussion in new, deeper ways to better understand the range of experiences of the people connected to your school. In doing so, you'll start to see unique strengths and priorities that will guide your community school strategy and where you need to learn more.

What is The Basics?

Welcome to The Basics by CSLX! In this series, we'll cover foundational elements of community school development by answering the questions we see most from practitioners like you. Have a question you don't see covered here? Please **get in touch**.

Now, let's get down to The Basics, shall we?

What is a needs assessment? What is an asset map?

A needs assessment is a **systematic process** of collecting focused information to better understand the priorities and challenges of students, their families, and the community.

Similarly, an asset map focuses on the unique strengths, resources and expertise in the school and community that might contribute to addressing identified challenges and priorities.

Taken together, the needs assessment and asset map are used to guide community school development.

Keep in mind: A needs assessment is **not** an inventory of programs or a list of data points. Program inventories can come later on in the process, and can be a part of the asset map as a way to help community school teams and stakeholders understand what's already in place to support students and families.

Why do we need a needs assessment?

It is essential that your community school team comes together to talk about what data is needed, analyze data and look for patterns, develop shared understanding, and use it to guide decision making. The needs assessment process can help you and your team:

▶ **Develop a clearer picture** of your school, district, and community, as it relates to whole-child, whole-family success.

▶ **Generate engagement and buy-in** from community stakeholders (e.g., students, families, staff, board members) you invite to be part of the process.

▶ **Gain more insight into particular successes and/or challenge areas**, including learning from the people "closest to the issue."

▶ **Build consensus around goals and priorities** for community school development.

▶ **Identify expertise** to tap into within the school, district, and community.

Additionally, a needs and asset mapping process is one of the "promising practices" identified in the CCSPP Framework and explicitly required by the CCSPP planning grant. So, make it a worthwhile endeavor!

What kind of data should we be collecting? Where and how do we get it?

Your school or district probably already collects a *ton* of data that can be used to *start* the needs assessment process. We strongly recommend starting with the data that you already have.

Be sure to engage a range of different *types* of data sources[1], including:

▶ **High-level data** (Satellite data): broad-brush quantitative measures like test scores, attendance patterns, and graduation rates; as well as teacher retention, principal attrition. Satellite data can illuminate trends and point us toward groups of under-served students; however, satellite data can often be lagging (e.g., last year's test scores), and lack nuance and context. Satellite data can be useful to help us identify what areas to explore further.

▶ **Medium-grain data** (Map data): hovers closer to the ground, and often refers to site-specific data such as culture-climate surveys, classroom assessments (e.g., iReady, DIBLS), program participation rates, and/or student services referral data. Medium-grain data is often richer in picture, but still can lack the specificity required to understand the root causes and complex factors contributing to a particular pattern.

▶ **Granular data** (Street data): brings us "down to the ground" and face-to-face to listen to, observe, and gather artifacts from the lived experiences of stakeholders — students, families, teachers, staff, community-members. Granular data can include empathy interviews, fishbowl focus groups, shadowing a student, community walks. In essence, granular data helps reveal what, *specifically*, is part of (or is not part of!) learning and well-being, making visible students' and other stakeholders' experiences and centering their voices.

Each of these different types of data are critical for identifying broad patterns in student learning, well-being and school success, as well as unpacking some of the *whys* and *hows* behind those trends. For example, administrative data (high-level) can tell us that chronic absence has increased in the district over the last two months, and that one cluster of schools in particular has seen substantive dips in attendance. But to understand *why* students are not attending school (and how we can interrupt that), we would need to talk with the students, families, and staff at those schools… and maybe some of the partners in the community (e.g., a community-serving organization) (granular data).

"Without having a diversity of voices and experiences reflected in your advisory council, you will only be guessing at the nature of the experiences and priorities of students and families, and you risk missing out in learning about or accessing new resources."

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[1]. This framework draws directly from *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* by scholars Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan. A succinct overview can be found **here**.

You and your staff are likely already familiar with the high-level and medium-grain data points in your school, district, and community. In the needs assessment process, leverage this existing high-level and medium-grained data, but be sure to also invest in granular data gathering and analysis. Whereas the high-level and medium-grain data can help illuminate areas for further exploration, the granular data — actually talking to the stakeholders closest to the issue you are trying to understand — is essential to informing meaningful community school planning and development.

Can you give me some examples?

Sure! The matrix below gives some examples of the different types of data you might have available across the core areas of community school development.[2] **Keep in mind: This is NOT a comprehensive or exclusive list of all the data you should have and use.**

There may also be data points relevant to issues in your community that are not explicitly referenced here. That's okay! If it matters to the people in your community, try to find data about it.

Keep in mind: ALL of the high-level data should be disaggregated by student subgroups — that is, broken down into more detailed, specific groups. Some subgroups to consider are: socio-economically disadvantaged (SED), English Language Learners (EL), students with learning differences/a Specific Learning Disability (SPED), grade-level groups (especially around transitions or key years), geographic subgroups (e.g.,particular neighborhoods within the district).

Lastly, much of this data you already have! For example, take a look at your school/district's **California School Data Dashboard, California Healthy Kids Survey** (CHKS) reports, school/district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) report or School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (SIPSA) goals.

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[2] Please note this list is not all-inclusive, nor do you need to get data for everything here! Also, there may be data relevant to your school/district/community that is not mentioned on this list. We recommend starting with the data you already have, and then — as you discuss what you are learning with your team — you can see where there are gaps and where you need to expand.

TABLE 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA TABLE

	Student learning	Student health & well-being	Family/ Community well-being	Staff, School, & District well-being
High-level data (Satellite data)	State-mandated testing results (e.g., CAASPP) Student graduation rates Student *a-g* course completion and/or credit recovery rates Student promotion/ retention rates Student grades and/or grade distributions (e.g., number of D's, F's, etc. by student sub-groups) **Early warning indicator** data (e.g., graduation/ drop-out, course completion, chronic absence) Reclassified Fluent English Proficiency (RFEP) rates Advanced Placement (AP) & enrichment class availability and participation	Student demographics (by subgroups—e.g., by specific geographic area) Student attendance & **chronic absence** rates, student tardies/on-time Student suspension/ expulsion rates (by subgroup)	Family/parental demographics Community demographics Community health indicators Housing and/or school mobility rates	Teacher/leader transitions Principal/staff retention rates Equity audit reports Change in student indicators over time (e.g., CA Dashboard improvements) Disproportionality by student sub-groups
Medium grain data (Map-level data)	Reading & math proficiency levels. Academic assessment data (e.g., iReady, DIBLS) Classroom or instructional observation assessments (e.g., site observation protocols) Service & program availability (e.g., enrichment opportunities, summer learning options) Instructional minutes	Student culture/ climate data (e.g., **CHKS**, **Youth Truth Survey**) Service & program availability (e.g., mental health counseling, restorative practices) Universal screener data (e.g., health/wellness, "happiness" screeners) Student referral data (e.g., from Student Success Teams, Multi-Tiered System of Support teams, or Coordination of Service Teams) Student program participation data (e.g., enrichment/ expanded learning program participation, drop-in tutoring records) Service use/uptake data (e.g., glasses distributed, dental visits completed).	Family culture/ climate survey results Family resource center use **Community partner inventory** Partner meetings & engagement (e.g., # of parents to attend conferences, meetings) Student/family use of food resources Student use of Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM)	Staff culture/climate survey results Staff workplace satisfaction surveys Staffing allocations (e.g., counselor to student ratio, counselors, librarian) Availability/frequency of common planning hours (e.g., departments, grade-level teams, faculty meetings)

	Student learning	Student health & well-being	Family/ Community well-being	Staff, School, & District well-being
Granular data (Street data)	Shadow a student for a day Classroom observations Student fishbowl interviews Student empathy interviews	Empathy interviews with service provider staff Student empathy interviews	Home visits Parent/family focus groups Empathy interviews with parents/families	Empathy interviews

Who should be a part of the needs assessment process?

The needs assessment process at the district level should be led by the district lead (e.g., Community Schools Director), anyone else in the district's ad hoc community schools planning team, and the community school **advisory council**. At the site-level, you can similarly include the principal or assistant principal, the site's Community School Coordinator, and the site's advisory council (or, ad hoc community school design or planning team, if the advisory council is not yet established).

"The needs assessment isn't just about the product that you create, but about the process of collaboratively looking at data and engaging in conversation with the people impacted by community school development."

In each case, a diverse group of stakeholders should be brought into the process. Why? So you can ensure that the needs assessment includes well-rounded data that is gleaned from a variety of sources and is reflective of multiple voices. Also in both cases, the ad hoc team and/or the **Community School Director or Coordinator** can play a key role in staffing the needs assessment process — for example, tracking down data, and ensuring a wide range of stakeholders are included and heard.

We're completely short-handed. Can I outsource or contract out the needs assessment?

The short answer? NO, *please do not do this*! We STRONGLY discourage you from contracting out the needs assessment to an outside entity. The needs assessment isn't just about the product that you create, but about the process of collaboratively looking at data and engaging in conversation with the people impacted by and holding the responsibility for community school development.

The relationships that districts and team members have with labor, parents and caregivers, community partners and other stakeholders are crucial in gathering clear, accurate and informative data. An outside consultant will likely not have the relational trust, nor contextual knowledge needed to do this work well. Additionally, the needs assessment process itself contributes to strengthening relationships among team members — creating a strong foundation for the many *years* of work ahead.

Directly engaging with data gives you critical and comprehensive insights into your school community's unique and complex experiences — a perspective that simply cannot be gleaned by reading a report or interview summaries conducted by a consultant. If you outsource the process, you are short-changing yourself and your team!

That said, doing a meaningful job with the needs assessment *does* require dedicated staff time. You will likely need at least one designated point person to support/staff the needs assessment process — ideally, a district-level community school director, manager, or coordinator — who will collaborate with the community school advisory council to facilitate a meaningful engagement process. If you don't currently have a staff member who can be the needs assessment point person and if you have the resources, we encourage you to hire one.

What other resources can I use to help with the needs assessment?

The CSLX team has found the following tools to be helpful in our work with other schools and districts. Have a great resource to share? Please **get in touch**.

"Rock Your Needs Assessment" Webinar Recording (CSLX & Public Profit)

Rock Your Community Needs Assessment Webinar Handout (CSLX & Public Profit)

The NYCDOE Assets & Needs Assessment: A Tool for Supporting the Whole Child in New York City Schools (NYC Department of Education)

Needs Assessment Toolkit (National Center for Community Schools)

We Know Us: Guide to Participatory Meaning Making with Young People (Hello Insight)

Sharing Data with Your Community Webinar & Tip Sheet (Public Profit)

Supercharge Your Averages with an Equity Gap Score (We All Count)

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