Tennessee Consolidated Planning
& Needs Assessment Process
Federal Programs

2003-04

STEPS OF THE PROCESS

Consolidated Planning is mandated. This specific process is not.

The following is a detailed description of Tennessee’s Consolidated Planning and Needs Assessment Process in the context of Federal Programs and NCLB. The process incorporates the necessary steps and guidelines to enable educators in Tennessee’s school systems to effectively accomplish the planning process while also attending to the important requirements of NCLB and, specifically, to the requirements of Tennessee’s Accountability Plan that was approved by Federal Programs at the US Department of Education. [This document, including the resources and a plan template are provided on the web to facilitate the planning process.]

Please Note: For each component of the needs assessment and planning process, a listing of Task Accomplishments is included to provide guidance as to what should be completed for each component and to pace individual school system planning teams through the consolidated planning process. Also along with each recommended component are resources in the form of Worksheets and References. These are provided to give direction to the Core and Total Team in accomplishing that step of planning in a high-quality way. While it is recommended that the team consult these resources, they are optional and not required to be submitted. They may not be needed nor helpful depending on the school system’s current level of and capacity for planning.

Also Note: The Worksheets and References may be applicable to TSIP as well.
Component 1. CONSOLIDATED PLANNING & COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

This component is included to provide guidance in preparing for the process. It addresses considerations about who should be the leaders responsible for accomplishing the planning process. As with any important activity, leadership is the key to getting any task done—and done right. In addition, successful projects usually result from each person knowing clearly what is expected and having a detailed plan.

**Identify Leadership.** It is recommended that the Consolidated Plan Team be comprised of system and school level leaders representing various supervisory roles and various groups of faculty or staff. It is strongly recommended that the Consolidated Plan Team Chair or Leader be an educator who is designated or appointed by the Director of Schools. This individual may also be responsible for Federal Program activities in the district. The rationale for this distinction is to ensure the Consolidated Plan leader is one who is perceived by others as a person with authority and major decision making responsibilities. Additional members of the planning team are individuals with some responsibility for current programs in the system and school and/or with the experience, skills, and knowledge to contribute productively.

Worksheets # 1 and 2 provide guidance in creating the leadership structure at the system level that will enable the Consolidated Planning process to be accomplished with high-quality results. Our planning process is designed with leadership structured in the forms of two teams--a **Core Team** and a **Total Team**. The following suggestions will guide in the selection of members and the structuring of membership.

- **The Core Team** is comprised of the system-level directors (or persons responsible) for the various programs that are the major focus of the plan.

- **Composition of the Core Team:** An initial task before beginning the actual planning is for the Director of Schools to identify members of Core Consolidated Planning Team. As stated above, these individuals are those responsible for the programs involved in Consolidated Planning. There may be no choice involved, but if there is, give special consideration to the six to eight to ten individuals who have the knowledge, skill, and attitudes to be contributing members of the team. The Core Consolidated Planning Team will have the responsibility for accomplishing the planning process that includes organizing, facilitating, and engaging others in the total process.

- **The Total Team** includes the Core Team members, but is expanded to include additional and appropriate representatives from schools and important stakeholder groups. Federal Program Consultants can be members or serve as advisors and/or facilitators to this process.
• **Composition of the Total Consolidated Planning Team:** The Total Planning Team will, in most systems, be a larger group to accommodate the various perspectives in the school system. A key to an effective planning process is the input and collaboration of all important stakeholder groups. Therefore, it is the Core Team’s decision about the size of the team. It may be that specific criteria for membership be identified so that members representing certain important groups are chosen for specific reasons. Worksheet #1 provides guidance in making decisions about team membership.

• **Viable recruitment strategies may be necessary.** After identifying the stakeholder groups to be represented and the specific skills needed, it could be that the Core Team will need to create some approaches to encourage identified individuals to participate.

• **Rotation of members:** For the long term functioning of the Consolidated Planning Team, one structure to incorporate is a strategy by creating a feasible and equitable rotation system for membership on the Core and the Total Teams. Following this rotation will help with smoother transitions year to year for planning and implementing activities. Several members will have the experience and expertise to mentor the more novice members of the team. [See Worksheet #2.]

**Review & Designate Roles & Responsibilities of Core Team Members.** If the school system is at a beginning stage of comprehensive planning, it would be helpful to assign several specific roles and responsibilities to Core Team members.

• Worksheet #3 presents roles that have proven helpful and were recommended by previous planners. Review, discuss, and revise (if necessary) the roles and responsibilities of team members and designate specific and necessary roles to team members who have the ability and expertise to carry them out successfully.

• To make teamwork productive and positive for everyone involved, it is suggested that the team review the Teamwork Guidelines and create a Teamwork Agreement that can be customized to meet each system’s context and situation. Included in the agreement should be designated times for teamwork assessments and recommended procedures for tasks such as decision-making, setting priorities, and creating efficient meeting agendas and summaries.

**Review Goals of Consolidated Planning and Time Requirements.** Once members of the Core and Total Teams are identified and a first meeting is convened, it will be important to gain clarity on the task at hand. The Goals of Consolidated Planning as well as other information and requirements including timeframes has been provided in the Introduction section of this document. Reviewing the specifics of the Funding Application at this point will help the team understand the whole process.

**Plan for Accomplishing the Process.** After the review of the goals and time requirements and after decisions about the roles and responsibilities have been made, one additional task is critical to successful planning. This task is to establish a timeframe for accomplishing the entire Consolidated Planning Process within the one year time constraint. This initial meeting is also a good time to set up a timeframe or schedule for meetings, work sessions, and deadlines for each task. To do the process well, a plan to manage the details is a must. Reference #4 describes a process for effective, time-efficient meetings.
Develop a Plan for Communications. It is strongly suggested that an effective Communication Plan be designed to ensure satisfactory distribution and inflow of important information. There are many new aspects of NCLB that will need detailed explanations. Also NCLB involves mandates to inform certain stakeholder groups, especially parents and guardians. NCLB also promotes the active engagement of families and parents in the educational process. Appropriate and effective communications are an essential part of the process of productive engagement. Worksheets #5 and 6 will be helpful in designing important component of an effective Communication Plan.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

1.1. Appropriate people representing important groups in our district are identified as members of the Core and Total Consolidated Planning Team.

1.2. Team Members are clear about the Goals of Consolidated Planning and the possible challenges to accomplishing it in a way that will make a difference for our students.

1.3. All Team Members are clear about and committed to their roles, responsibilities, and agreements that will ensure productive collaboration and decision making.

1.4. A doable and detailed plan for accomplishing the Consolidated Planning and Needs Assessment Process complete with dates, tasks, responsibility, timelines has been developed.

1.5. An effective Communication Plan that will promote satisfactory distribution and inflow of important information has been developed.

Resources:

Worksheet #1--Selection of Planning Team Members

Worksheet #2--Team Member Rotation

Worksheet #3--Core Consolidated Planning Team Potential Roles, Productive Team Behaviors, Team Agreements, Teamwork Assessments both Team Member Reflection & Team Reflection

Reference #4--Effective, Time-Efficient Meetings

Worksheet #5--Communications Plan Considerations

Worksheet #6--Template for Local No Child Left Behind Communications Plan

Result: Identification of Core and Total Consolidated Planning Team with clarity about purpose, and agreed upon roles, responsibilities, procedures, and timelines. Considerations about effective communications with parents and stakeholders are identified and a formal Communication Plan is developed and ready for implementation.
Component 2. BELIEFS & MISSION

Engaging in as significant activity as Consolidated Planning, it is important to “begin with the end in mind.” Educators create miracles in classrooms everyday, but all too often educators seem to focus on what isn’t working. Our thoughts often move to our current most pressing problems and what we are not able to provide. It also seems that educators are too busy reacting to the greatest need of the moment to look beyond the present and the immediate challenge. Educators are busy people and sometimes it is frighteningly easy to be busy about the wrong things. It is suggested that teams take the opportunity to focus beyond where they are currently operating to revisit their beliefs and mission—their collective expectations for the future.

Review Leadership for School Improvement and Standards for School Leaders. One significant leadership function is guiding planning activities in productive, effective, and efficient ways. See References # 7 and #8 for highlights from Leadership for School Improvement (2001) that was found at mcrel.org (Mid-Continent Regional Education Laboratory).

Review Your System’s Beliefs & Mission. This step at the system level is parallel to SIP Component 2 that focuses on the schools’ beliefs and mission.

- Beliefs are statements of our collective underlying values and principles that guide decisions and actions. That is, beliefs are the school system’s shared values and expectations for our students’ future success. Beliefs address areas such as expectations and conditions for learning; instructional interactions; ways assessments are used to improve student success; the extent of supportive, positive relationships and interactions (“the way we get along”); and ways decisions are made.

- A Mission statement expresses the school system’s purpose for being and existing. It conveys the uniqueness of our school system, what we are doing for our students, and how we are doing it.

There are many compelling reasons for developing both beliefs and mission at the system-level as well. The Consolidated Plan team should determine if it would be helpful to develop these components (if none are stated) or to update (if it is determined that the current ones do not reflect the core values and mission of the district). Worksheet #9 provides some points of discussion about the relevance and current impact of the beliefs and missions.

Review Leadership for Learning: High-Performing Districts & Schools. Moving beyond the beliefs and mission, an additional Team activity that could help everyone involved in planning identify with the desired future state in a different way. The total focus of the Consolidated Planning process is on improving the learning of all students within our districts and our schools.

Many exemplary schools exist. Most educators are very aware of the 90-90-90 schools and understand that truly amazing accomplishments are possible when clear targets and strong commitment to high-performance prevails. It is interesting to note that it is possible to have high-performing schools in districts that are not high-performing. And, it follows that when districts are high-performing, more schools can also be high-performing because many of the typical barriers to high performance are diminished or eliminated.
Worksheets #10 and #11 present the qualities of High-Performing Districts and High-Performing Schools under the title of Leadership for Learning. The resources provided identify key attributes and conditions that promote high student achievement. These include leadership, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and organizational structures, processes, and policies that need to be in place in order to guide and support the kind of change needed to reach our ideal future state. The research supports the extensive and pervasive existence of these attributes and conditions in high-performing systems and schools.

**Envision the Possibilities.** To dream of all that is possible is sometimes referred to as looking to the “blue sky.” The intent of this activity is to look beyond all possible and perceived constraints to imagine a “perfect state.” Accomplish the “Blue Sky” Activity as outlined in Worksheet #12. This is a collaborative activity that may be productive in terms of encouraging creative thinking. It guides the team in an exercise to envision a school system with no barriers and all is possible. This might start some productive thinking about possible strengths within our district and schools, barriers to our goal of increased achievement, and potential activities or strategies we may want to explore further.

**The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:**

2.1. Our understanding about the importance of planning from the Leadership Standards will guide our approach.

2.2. The Beliefs and Mission of the System and the Schools reflect current educators’ and stakeholders’ beliefs and serve to motivate and to energize us to high-performance.

2.3. Our understanding of the attributes and conditions in high-performing districts and schools guides our thinking and planning.

2.4. Creative thinking about the possibilities of meeting our students’ needs in different ways is incorporated in our approach to planning.

**Resources:**

Reference #7—Leadership for School Improvement

Reference #8—Standards for School Leaders

Worksheet #9—Beliefs and Mission

Reference #10—Leadership for Learning: High-Performing Districts--Highlights from the research.

Reference #11—Leadership for Learning: High-Performing Schools--Highlights from the research.

Worksheet #12—Collaborative “Blue Sky” Activity is a template to guide team members in a “blue sky” exercise with no barriers to what “could be” possible.

**Result:** Clear expectation of our District as a High-Performing District & our Schools as High-Performing Schools.
Component 3. NON-ACADEMIC & ACADEMIC DATA—
CONDUCT THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Planning is all about the data. An accurate and complete assessment of needs is the foundation of effective planning. Experience shows that this step must not be omitted or given less than complete attention. Student needs become evident when an accurate and comprehensive database is developed and thoroughly examined.

Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment can direct attention to the most critical student achievement needs and the non-academic needs that significantly impact academic performance. Because a needs assessment is a cyclical process, developing a comprehensive needs assessment the first time will save valuable time and resources in the long run. At the system level, the data for the needs assessment are primarily from the individual school improvement plans, any current system plans, and other relevant reports and documents.

Tennessee’s Comprehensive Needs Assessment is accomplished in several important steps:

• Acquire current SIP from each school and other relevant school-level reports and documents;

• Acquire any current system-level plans and other relevant system-level reports and documents;

• Identify the non-academic and academic data within the plans and reports;

• Decide if more data are needed and if so, make decisions about collecting those data;

• Disaggregate data by NCLB required student subgroups;

• Identify accountability subgroups for the school system;

• Analyze data to determine strengths and needs; and

• Set priorities and list needs.

• Acquire current SIP from each school and other relevant school-level reports and documents. At the system-level, School Improvement Plans for each school in the district are a major part of the total database for the needs assessment. The first step is to acquire all School Improvement Plans and any additional current school-level plans (including required plans, any additional reports, grants, or plans for major initiatives).

• Acquire any current system-level plans and other relevant system-level reports and documents. Next acquire all current LEA plans. In addition to the data in all SIPs, the information found in current LEA plans (including required plans, any additional reports, grants, or plans for major initiatives) provides valuable data at the system-level.

• Identify the non-academic and academic data within the plans and reports. [See Worksheet #13.] Planners need to take the time to collect and reflect on both non-academic data and academic data. Non-academic data related to the school and community provide information on important non-performance areas that are shown to have a significant impact on student performance. It is also
suggested that Multi-Year or Longitudinal Data Presentations are important to identify trends or patterns over time. Data should be presented and analyzed for multiple time frames.

- **Non-Academic Data** include:
  - **Student Demographics**;
  - **Educator Demographics** (for administrators, teachers, and educational assistants);
  - **School Demographics** including historical background, facilities, environmental & safety conditions, grade distributions, length of school day, operating budget, and per pupil expenditures; and
  - **Community Demographics** including Size of community; Demographics of the community including those of the parents, guardians, and community members (i.e., race/ethnicity, marital status, level of education, employment rate, income levels); Major employers; and Level of Community Involvement.

- **Academic Data** include:
  - TCAP grades 3-8;
  - TCAP-Alternative;
  - TVAAS;
  - Writing Assessments;
  - End of Course Assessments;
  - Gateway Tests;
  - SAT/ACT;
  - Local District PreK-2 Assessments;
  - any District-required Assessments; and
  - any additional assessments.

- **Decide if more data are needed and if so, make decisions about collecting those data.** A comprehensive Needs Assessment has breadth of data, but it is focused on what is important in terms of local issues and context as well as current and future concerns. That means information should be generated from as many relevant sources as is feasible and would be helpful. Other guidelines include collecting both objective and subjective data sources that are closely related to important educational concerns; making every attempt to collect data that are reliable and valid so that the results can be used to develop meaningful actions; and staying alert to areas where information is limited or lacking, and then developing instruments or procedures to elicit the needed data.

Part of the analysis is to determine if adequate and accurate data are represented. It is the team’s responsibility to make these decisions. It may be that additional data are needed, some of which may be easily accessible, but other important information may take more time and effort to acquire. This is again a decision of the team as to how much additional data can be collected and presented given the timeframe. The team should make some determination about when to collect the additional data—immediately or for a next cycle of planning.

- **Disaggregate data by NCLB required student subgroups.** The data must be presented in specific ways before strengths and needs are identified. Disaggregating data in the ways described may be the most significant difference from previous planning efforts. NCLB requires that academic performance be assessed according to specific student groups. While this requirement increases the
complexity and comprehensiveness of the Needs Assessment Process, presenting and analyzing disaggregated data will allow planners to look at the “right” data and to look at it in the “right” way.

Data should be presented according to the Required Student Subgroups when applicable, which are:

- Race or ethnicity in terms of numbers of students from specific races (For TN-White, Hispanic, Black, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander);
- SES (Socio-Economic Status) in terms of numbers of students on free and reduced lunch who are considered economically disadvantaged;
- Special Education in terms of numbers of students with IEPs;
- LEP (Limited English Proficiency) in terms of numbers of students who are non-English language background and have not yet been classified as fluent English proficient according to the State’s definition as approved by the Office for Civil Rights.

Data could also be disaggregated by two additional student subgroups, if applicable:
- Migrant, and
- Homeless.

Data must be analyzed according to these student subgroups so that meaningful comparisons can then be accomplished. As stated before, data are the foundation for the needs assessment and when they are presented and disaggregated in meaningful ways, sound decisions can be made.

**Analyze data to determine strengths and needs.** Analysis of data can reveal specific needs and strengths that will require consideration in the planning process. Data are analyzed to bring meaning to the information collected in an organized way. Several considerations should guide data analysis. When data are presented in a concise, straight-forward way or in a format that can be easily understood and interpreted, important facts emerge. These facts become statements or findings about the data (i.e., statements of fact that accurately describe current condition, status, or performance). Some planning processes call for a narrative, these findings about the important strengths and significant needs could be considered the narrative. An important point about identification of needs is that they should be stated as needs—not as activities or programs to be provided. During data analysis, the focus should on the challenges or needs themselves and not on solutions to the challenges or actions to be taken.

Worksheet #14 directs data analysis of each type of data to identify: accountability subgroups for the school system, educators who meet the highly-qualified criteria, trends or patterns and reliable predictions across several years of data, and findings about the important strengths and significant needs.

Data analysis results in a listing of findings about strengths and needs, which are identified in two categories:

1. Non-Academic Needs about School and Community that relate to conditions affecting achievement or academic performance, and
2.) Academic Needs that relate to student achievement or performance about specific student subgroups in specific grades, school levels, or content areas.

It is also advisable to analyze significant findings across data sources to determine the student achievement needs and student support needs of specific student groups.

[An alternative approach to identifying needs is to examine LEA and SIP plans to list the needs reported. Focus on LEA plans to identify the goals and/or potential priority needs that are well supported in the data provided with the plans. Data analysis continues to the school-level by examining current SIP plans to identify needs that are supported by data presented in the plans. A matrix could be developed to systematically look across all plans and identify student needs that may be common to more than one school site. Continue the same data analysis process with any additional system- and/or school-level plans.]

- **Set priorities and list needs.** Using the results of the preceding step, the list of Non-Academic Needs and Academic Needs, begins the setting priorities process. Setting priorities is one way to narrow our improvement focus. As we know, we have more needs than we have resources. One process by which priority needs are identified is a Discrepancy Analysis. There are several ways this is accomplished, but the process is basically identifying the discrepancy, or the gap, between the current state or “What Is” and the desired future state or “What Ought To Be.”

Worksheet #15 is a way to conduct a Discrepancy Analysis to connect to the requirements of NCLB. This approach should result in a clear identification of student needs as they relate to AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) and should reduce the listing of all potential high-priority needs to a ranking of the highest to lowest needs in both categories. The system’s top priority needs in both categories will be reported. No specific number of needs is suggested as appropriate. These needs become specific targets for improvement planning and will be addressed in the Action Plans.

Worksheet #16 is provided as a recommended approach to engage team members in setting priorities of student achievement and student support needs. The actual ranking of needs as to their importance and/or urgency may have been accomplished to some extent through the Discrepancy Analysis. But, giving each person a vote in setting priorities is advised. Following the described strategy will result in a listing of priorities.
The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

3.1 We have identified data sources used in our current LEA or Consolidated Plan and in any other current system-level plans (e.g., 5-Year Plans).

3.2 We have identified data sources used in our current SIP Plans and in any other current school-level plans.

3.3 We are confident that we have adequate and accurate data in all data categories to determine our needs.

3.4 Any additional data needs have been identified and will be collected now or for a future cycle.

3.5 Our data are disaggregated in ways consistent with regulations of NCLB and Federal Programs.

3.6 Our approach to data analysis was effective in identifying our most evident and well-documented student needs. Current LEA and Current TSIP Plans were examined to determine goals and/or needs.

3.7 Student demographic data were analyzed to determine student subgroups for accountability.

3.8 Educator demographic data were analyzed to determine educator needs related to NCLB.

3.9 Student academic data were analyzed to determine subjects and grade levels in the most need of priority improvement and to determine important needs evident for several student groups (i.e., more than one group, more than two student groups).

3.10 Our listings of the most evident and specific Non-Academic Needs and Academic Needs are well supported by adequate and accurate data.

3.11 Each need is stated appropriately as a need and not as an action or activity.

3.12 Our analysis and discussion of needs helped us gain insight into the extent of our needs when compared to AYP.

3.13 The process of setting priorities was effective in determining our high priority Non-Academic and Academic Needs.

3.14 All team members provided appropriate representation and had an equal voice in determining high priority needs.

Resources:

♦ Worksheet #13--Data Identification & Disaggregation

♦ Worksheet #14--Data Analysis

♦ Worksheet #15--Conduct a Discrepancy Analysis

♦ Worksheet #16—Set Priority Needs through a Ranking Process

Result: 1.) A comprehensive database presented as required by NCLB and incorporating NCLB accountability areas as well as additional data that impact student achievement; 2.) Identification of all Data-based Student Non-Academic and Academic Needs; and 3.) Identification of High-Priority Student Non-Academic and Academic Needs.
Component 4. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENT, and ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

In school systems and schools, student needs are directly related to significant conditions within the organizations. The abundant literature and research on school improvement is providing many success stories about schools that are exemplary in terms of meeting the academic and support needs of all students. Incorporated in the literature are key strategies helpful in guiding other educators in establishing similar conditions in their schools. In addition, research is recently moving to the study of successful school systems that are showing similar and impressive results.

Thoughtful reflection and analysis of the organizational conditions in school systems and schools can lead to an understanding of organizational capacity to successfully implement improvement actions. The actions identified to address high priority needs—those actions to continue and those to initiate. In Component 2 with Beliefs and Mission, two resources, High-Performing Districts and High-Performing Schools (under the title of Leadership for Learning) were provided to identify key attributes and conditions that promote high student achievement. Conditions relate to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and organizational structures, processes, leadership, and policies. When fully established, these conditions to support optimal academic achievement and personal growth and development of all students.

Component 4 requires an assessment of current conditions in the school system as they impact student academic success and attitudes towards learning. Several options are provided to attend to this component:

- If current conditions have recently been formally assessed through surveys for other means, the team can proceed with their analysis by providing Strengths and Challenges related to each essential topic of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organization. [See Worksheet #17.]

- If current conditions have not recently been formally assessed, two resources are provided to assist in the analysis of organizational effectiveness in meeting students’ needs. Worksheet #18 is a self-assessment related to High-Performing Districts that incorporates research-supported conditions and attributes. [Although not required for Consolidated Planning, Worksheet #19 is a self-assessment in a like format, related to High-Performing Schools.]

Either option will result in the identification of system-level Strengths and Challenges in the four major areas of:

- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment
- Organization

Strengths, but especially Challenges should then be addressed by appropriate activities in the Action Plans.
The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

4.1 Our analysis of School System Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organization lead to valid conclusions about our strengths and challenges supported by evidence about each major condition.

Resources:

♦ Worksheet #17—Data Analysis of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organization

♦ Worksheet #18—High-Performing Districts: Self-Assessment

♦ Worksheet #19—High-Performing Schools: Self-Assessment

Result: Full Understanding of School System Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organizational Strengths, and Challenges
Component 4a. CAUSE-EFFECT ANALYSIS to IDENTIFY POSSIBLE ACTIONS

An additional analysis, cause and effect, builds from the previous one and can be productive in terms of examining high priority needs to discover possible main or root and contributing causes. Cause-Effect analysis is an important step that should occur as the process moves toward planning actions. As the experts tell us, understanding problems is critical to solving them effectively.

Educators are getting better at addressing challenges more effectively. There seems to be movement from a “band aid” approach (“quick fixes” on immediate problems) to thoroughly analyzing the challenges before identifying action. It becomes evident that analysis and problem solving attempts are complicated, mainly because most challenges are complex and cannot be linked to just one cause.

Worksheet #20 will direct the team through an examination of the high priority needs by responding (with evidence) to a series of general and specific questions. The questions provided will begin the process, but most likely will give rise to additional and more specific questions that are probably more important to the local context. The questions will be a way to screen each priority need against the possible root causes that contribute to making the needs such difficult challenges. The process should also provide insight as to our strengths or progress made related to the needs. These are important discussions that will help plans capitalize on these potentially productive conditions.

Worksheets #21 and 22 are Graphic Organizers that may be helpful in systematically looking at the effects and the causes that create the effects. The effects are the needs identified as priorities in the previous step. In our process the effects are the high priority student achievement and student support needs. The steps to follow in conducting a cause-effect analysis using these graphic organizers are: decide on the need to be analyzed (write that need as the Effect), then brainstorm possible causes for each of the major factors of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organizational Processes. These organizers will help promote brainstorming and discussion.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

4a.1 We have adequately analyzed our needs and have a full understanding of them in terms of the main or root, and/or contributing causes.

4a.2 Our analysis and discussion provided insight into important barriers we must overcome to help our students succeed.

4a.3 Our analysis provided insight into important opportunities and current strengths we must capitalize on to help our students succeed.

Resources:

♦ Worksheet #20--Cause & Effect Analysis of Needs

♦ Worksheet #21--Cause-Effect (Fishbone Graphic Organizer)

♦ Worksheet #22--Cause-Effect (Because Graphic Organizer)

Result: Full Understanding of School System Needs through Systematic Analysis of Root or Contributing Causes
Component 4b. IDENTIFICATION OF CURRENT EFFECTIVE ACTIONS TO CONTINUE

Most educators trust their common sense and exhibit a great deal of pragmatism. In general, if there is a solution that is working, we want to continue it. The adage goes something like—if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it! Certain services or programs are working in our districts and schools and should be continued. Another adage serves to remind us to stay alert to our common sense insights. Most educators believe as did Albert Einstein who is usually cited as saying, insanity is continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

This step involves taking a critical look at current programs and services in terms of their effectiveness as well as their connection to or potential impact on our high priority Student Academic and Non-Academic Needs. Primarily because resources are limited, systems must be providing programs and services that have a proven impact on student learning. If there is evidence to show that services and programs are effective and they are focused on identified needs, it is the team’s decision to continue or expand these actions. If the evidence is mixed or negative in terms of impact on learning and the connection to high priority needs is limited, it is again the team’s decision to discontinue, modify, or redesign these actions.

Worksheet #23 will guide the examination of current solutions or actions (i.e., activities, programs, and services) and they relate to High-Priority Needs. The result is a determination of “what works” and “what isn’t working.” Coordination of programs and services are required by NCLB including violence prevention, nutrition, housing, Head Start, adult education, vocational education, technical education, and job training. These services or programs as well as other current programs and services should be included in this analysis of effectiveness.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

4b.1 We identified all actions, programs, strategies we currently provide to address our high-priority needs.

4b.2 We have examined adequate and accurate evaluation data to determine that the actions are currently working as effectively as possible.

4b.3 If evaluation data showed needed changes, we have identified modifications determined to improve the effectiveness of current actions.

4b.4 We have made decisions about the most useful ways to continue the effective programs.

Resources:


**Result:** Identification of Potential Actions to Continue and to Incorporate in Action Plans
Component 4c. IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE NEW RESEARCH-BASED ACTIONS TO INITIATE

The next step in the process is an exploration into actions or strategies at the system level that are intended to address the high priority Student Academic and Non-Academic Needs. Most educators are constantly searching for a better, more effective and efficient way to meet the needs of students. The literature on school reform and improvement abound with effective strategies that are working in particular sites. More recently, the literature is also providing guidance to districts in implementing effective improvement strategies. These recommendations and strategies may have some answers for Tennessee systems and schools.

Worksheet #24 will guide the team in identify possible research-based actions in specific categories which are suggested as strategies to overcome the traditional obstacles or barriers surrounding Student Academic and Non-Academic Needs.

Worksheet #25 is a graphic that might be helpful as potential actions are generated. Reference # 26 is a list of helpful and informative websites that provide useful resources.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

4c.1 We have identified a range of research-based strategies linked to specific root causes and current strengths that have the potential to effectively address our high priority needs.

4c.2 We have identified a range of research-based strategies connected to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and organizational processes including professional development, and parent/community member involvement.

4c.3 We have identified strategies that provide opportunities for all children to meet TN’s proficient and advanced levels of student performance especially those students who are in the most danger of not meeting state standards.

4c.4 We have identified strategies that are based on research and proven to be effective in improving achievement.

4c.5 We have identified strategies determined to be effective in meeting the needs of all children in underserved populations and targeted student groups.

4c.6 We have identified strategies that are allowed under the requirements of the various Federal programs included in the Consolidated Plan.

Resources:
- Worksheet #24--Identify New Research-based Actions to Initiate
- Worksheet #25--Brainstorm Actions
- Reference #26--Internet Resources

Result: Identification of Potential New Improvement Actions to Initiate and to Incorporate in Action Plans
Component 5. ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Consolidated Action Plans present system-level actions that are needed to address the identified high-priority Student Academic and Non-Academic Needs evident across one or more schools in the district. These research-based actions are intended to support and extend the actions identified at the school-level in SIP plans. [Many of these actions may have been identified in the previous step of this process and/or in the Characteristics of High-Performing Districts resource included in the second step.]

At this point in the process, planners should build on the previous thinking and analyses to generate a comprehensive set of actions to address the needs in the critical areas of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organizational Processes. It is also suggested at this point to identify all appropriate potential strategies from each of these major factors before narrowing down to those that are feasible from a budgeting standpoint. It is also important to look at the integration and alignment of actions. With increased demands and limited resources, meaningful educational change and improvement can only occur if all available resources are used in a focused and efficient manner that enables all programs to contribute to the achievement of common goals.

Attending to the required information in the Action Plan in a conscientious way should alleviate the understandable frustration felt by many educators when a plan is written but never carried out. One way to ensure that plans will be accomplished in a timely way is to take the time on the front end to delineate specific actions and tasks, timelines, person(s) responsible, required resources and the source of those funds, and other planning details. Thoroughness in attending to every detail possible will force planners to think through the implementation process carefully making it possible to anticipate and accommodate challenges and barriers before they occur. Because thorough plans are essential and detailed planning takes time and input from many sources, it is suggested that plans be developed in stages including draft, revised, and final. Draft plans should be shared with all stakeholders with the encouragement to provide feedback, then revised based on well-grounded suggestions before finalized. [Note: The format for the Consolidated Action Plan is consistent with the format of the SIP Action Plans.]

There are direct links from the previous components of the planning process to the Action Plans. See Worksheet #27 for the Action Plan template.

- **Goals:** Goals reflect significant educational aims--of worth. In addition, to some degree, they should be feasible in terms of available human and material resources, and accomplishing them should have a widespread and positive impact on student learning and development. Goals are stated in terms of outcomes or desired results rather than in terms of programs or activities to be offered. It is critical to differentiate between outcomes and activities (which are the means to attend to the outcomes). The goals have a direct link to identified needs and give direction to the action steps or activities. Goals often remain the same from year to year as many cannot be accomplished within a given year.

Goals are statements of desired student performance outcomes with the amount of expected, measurable growth and a reasonable end date. Therefore, they are measurable, specifically based on identified needs, linked to a reasonable timeframe, and express desired outcomes.
One example is:

Our goal is to ______ (desired student performance outcome) ______ by ___(amount of expected, measurable growth)____ by ___(end date)______.

The gap identified through the discrepancy analysis process is the difference between current levels of performance the “what is” and the desired performance, AYP or “what ought to be.” The greatest gap(s) become the goals of the Action Plans.

- **Priorities Addressed:** The Student Academic and Non-Academic Needs are the priorities identified through the needs assessment process in Component 3. Each action plan will be addressing at least one high priority need, but more than likely, several high priority academic and/or non-academic needs.

- **Elements of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organization Addressed:** Important needs related to each major area were identified in Step 4. It is advised that actions be considered from each area, if feasible. The rationale is that high priority needs warrant a comprehensive approach in improving them.

- **Action Steps:** These are the actions to be taken to address the identified goals, priorities, and needs. They may be considered interventions, activities, programs, and/or strategies, but could be continuing actions or new actions, but they should link to Components 4a & b. The major criterion for high-quality interventions is that they are research-based. Additional and important criteria such as cost-effectiveness are presented for consideration in Reference #28.

Additional guidelines are provided in Worksheet #29. It is provided to highlight several important considerations that can influence decisions on action steps. The idea conveyed is that the selection of activities must be purposeful, strategic, and sometimes quite complex.

- **Timeline:** The beginning and ending dates should be specified for each activity. Think realistically about when each action could and should be implemented. Some activities need to be implemented at certain times, while others may have more flexibility. In addition, some activities may require more preparation time than others or some may have certain prerequisite conditions or actions.

**Person(s) Responsible:** Also think realistically about who should have responsibility for the activity, and should one or more persons be responsible. In order to implement actions smoothly and successfully, remember that too many assignments and changes at the same time could cause undue strain on people and other resources.

- **Required Resources & Source of Funds:** Budgeting may possibly bring the most challenging decisions. The Consolidated Action Plans are to budget all available federal program funds adhering to program funding guidelines, but also capitalizing on the flexibility within the guidelines. There is no best way to reconfigure allocation of funds and resources. The local context and resources available will determine your approach. Some factors that may influence the decisions include system’s and school's specific needs, characteristics of the student population, the school's families and communities, the location of school (i.e., urban, rural, remote, inner city), district budgetary constraints, union agreements, and actual availability of resources.
The best suggestion is to start by taking an inventory of all available resources and how they are currently used. It might be useful to break the funds out by categories such as federal (Title I, Title IX), state, local, grants, and so on. Then, list all the equipment and other materials available. Once the funds available are known, it is then easier to determine where to best allocate these resources. Now list all the costs needed to implement (programs, activities, and tasks) and match resources to activities.

If gaps appear between available resources and what is needed to accomplish the activities, then the search for additional resources begins (e.g., district or community agency resources, grants, etc.). If gaps still exist, consider the following questions:

- Have all funding sources and options been considered?
- Have all programs or activities been examined closely (even those that may be considered "off limits" by tradition)? If the programs or activities do not fit into the action plan, they are up for discussion.
- Are some staff involved in tasks that do not support or fit with the action plan?
- Are there some activities that can be eliminated or scaled down without a negative impact on the overall plan?
- Have spending guidelines been consulted? Or are assumptions being made about how certain resources may be used and thereby, limiting the options?
- Has "outside the box," creative thinking resulted in some new possibilities (or are the same, familiar activities and options reflected in the plans)?
- Can any activities be redesigned to be more cost-effective?
- Can any activities be linked in order to share resources?
- Which activities can be delayed until additional funds become available?
- Has technology been incorporated where appropriate to facilitate activities or reduce costs?

(Adapted from Reference Guide to Continuous Improvement, Ohio State Department of Education)

**Professional Development Plan (Steps or Strategies) to Support Action Steps (if applicable)**

Many of the action steps in the plans related to Curriculum Instruction, Assessment, and Organizational processes, policies, and practices are complex and will require varying levels of professional development and training. This component of the Action Plan is to direct specific steps or strategies to meet the professional development needs of administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and possibly, board members. Worksheet #30 presents the standards for Professional Development as advocated by National Staff Development Council. These will provide guidance in designing opportunities that will most likely have the anticipated and desired result. An additional reference (Worksheet #31), Possibilities for Professional Development, is provided to suggest some possible, productive structures for professional development. In addition, Reference #32 is a summary of suggestions for developing a comprehensive approach to teacher quality.

**Parent and Community Member Involvement (Steps or Strategies) to Support Action Steps (if applicable)**

Numerous research studies suggest that the support of parenting adults, guardians, and community members is important to school and school system improvement. In addition, the research overwhelmingly advocates parental involvement as a critical influence on the academic success of their students (Blank & Kershaw, 1998). This component of the Action Plan is included to
specifically focus attention on any appropriate or needed activities to promote the type of involvement needed for successful improvement. To that end, two additional resources are provided to stimulate creative thinking about strategies to engage others in promoting maximum student learning. NCLB mandates the engagement of families and parents and encourages the involvement of community members who represent businesses in the district. These suggestions may spark some potentially productive actions to be included in the action plans.

Reference #33 is a resource that presents suggestions for developing connections with businesses and Reference #34 has suggestions about involving parents and community members.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

5.1 We have developed action plans to address our high-priority needs.

5.2 Our action plans are detailed specifying all required components.

5.3 We have identified a range of research-based strategies connected to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and organizational processes including professional development, and parent/community member involvement.

5.4 We have identified strategies that provide opportunities for all children, especially those most at-risk, to meet TN’s proficient and advanced levels of student performance.

5.5 We have identified strategies that are based on research and proven to be effective in improving achievement.

5.6 We have identified strategies determined to be effective in meeting the needs of all children in underserved populations and targeted student groups.

5.7 We have identified strategies that are allowed under the requirements of the various Federal programs included in the Consolidated Plan.

Resources:

♦ Worksheet #27--Action Plan Form
♦ Reference #28--Resource Allocation: Targeting Funding for Maximum Impact
♦ Worksheet#29--Considerations Before Deciding on Actions
♦ Worksheet #30--Standards of Professional Development
♦ Reference #31--Possibilities for Professional Development
♦ Reference #32--Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Teacher Quality
♦ Reference #33--Potential Actions--Eight Things the Business Community Can Do
♦ Reference #34--Potential Actions--Building Partnerships with Parents and Community
Result: Action Plans Reflecting Best Practice linked to High-Priority Needs

Component 6. EVALUATION

Each action plan must have an accompanying evaluation plan. With all significant improvement efforts and growing pressures for accountability, an increased emphasis is on well-planned and useful evaluation methods. Evaluation is increasingly being used as a way to understand how schools and school systems function and what is effective, rather than just being viewed as a form of judgment. Continuously improving learning organizations use evaluation specifically for several important purposes: to gauge the effectiveness of its actions as they are being implemented (formative evaluation) to determine if implementation is according to guidelines and what adjustments are needed; at the end of implementation (summative evaluation) to understand the impact and overall results of the actions; to ensure the alignment and synergy of beliefs, mission, decisions, and actions. Evaluation is necessary for making judgments about the quality of the activities and programs. Information from evaluations provides direction for ongoing program modification and future program planning toward improvement goals.

Most educators will endorse evaluation as a critical element in continuous progress and improvement. But many will admit that evaluation is traditionally an area that is not implemented in the most effective and efficient ways. The recommended format for the Evaluation Plan is presented as Worksheet #35. Reference #36 is provided to give a detail explanation of the Evaluation Plan components.

Basically, the Evaluation Plans will specify what (sources of data), how (procedures of collection and analysis), when (time frames), by whom (responsibility), utilization of results (how the results will be used to modify the plan), and communication strategy (how evaluation results will be shared with key stakeholders). These are all critical components of an evaluation strategy that will ensure continuous improvement.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

6.1 We have developed evaluation plans aligned with our action plans.

6.2 Our evaluation plans are detailed specifying all required components.

6.3 We have identified a range of appropriate formative and summative evaluation activities that will help ensure effective implementation and will provide information about overall impact.

Resources:

- Worksheet #35--Evaluation Plan Format
- Worksheet #36--Evaluation Plan Guidelines
- Worksheet #37--Evaluation Data Source Matrix
Result: Detailed evaluation plans with formative and summative measures.

Component 7. CONNECT CONSOLIDATED PLANNING AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO THE FUNDING APPLICATION

In attending to each step of this planning process will result in all the necessary information to complete the funding application.

Component 8. ACT, EVALUATE, & ADJUST

As with most complex projects, it is difficult to tell when planning ends and implementation begins. When planning is viewed as part of the process of continuous improvement, it actually never ends. Successful implementation does not have a definitive beginning and end; nor is it typically a linear process. It depends a lot on the comprehensiveness and soundness of the plans, the motivation of the individuals involved, and the accuracy of the needs assessment. Implementation is a continuous cycle--planning, taking action, evaluating, and making adjustments (which are almost always necessary)—which is evident in any successful improvement effort. Implementation is driven by the action plans. As progress is made as documented by the evaluation plans, the continuous cycle continues in directing future actions.

To that end, Worksheet #38 is presented to serve as a summary of the results from evaluation activities.

The leadership of the planning team and the involvement of the entire school community are essential to successful implementation of comprehensive changes and improvements. All change efforts will encounter adjustments, bumps, unexpected events, and other obstacles. Personnel may change, a major funding source may be readjusted or reallocated, or the school district may be required to adjust to unpredictable developments in schools. Committed leadership can work quickly to make needed adjustments and push through obstacles to successful implementation.

The tasks that need to be accomplished to the Team’s satisfaction at this point are:

8.1 We have summarized our evaluation data to determine progress on goals

Resources:

♦ Worksheet #38--Evaluation Summary: Assessment of Progress on Goals

Result: People, processes, and structure in place to support continuous improvement.