

PATHWAY EIGHT: ASSESSING PROGRESS AND ASSURING QUALITY

The Ready Schools School-Based Teams assess the progress of students, classroom practices, and school improvement efforts, and the Ready Schools Community-District Teams (Team) assess progress on the Team's Action Plan, short- and long-term goals, and district-wide improvement efforts.



Key Understandings

In order to accomplish its goals, the Community-District Team must have the following key components in place:

- ▶ A concise, agreed-upon vision, mission, and set of goals (see Leaders and Leadership Pathway).
- ▶ A collaboratively developed Action Plan based on data (see Leaders and Leadership Pathway).
 - » Use multiple sources of data to identify community needs and resources, develop comprehensive Action Plans, and assess progress towards short- and long-term goals.
 - One important source of data comes from aggregating, analyzing, and synthesizing individual schools' Ready Schools Assessment results in order to identify district-wide trends and Pathways for future focus.
 - Another key source of data is the Team results from the Community-District Team Self-Assessment Tool.
 - Examples of additional data sources include community, school, and family needs assessments and resource inventories; parent and teacher perception surveys; and attendance records from school events and Community-District Team meetings.
- ▶ A continual cycle of development, monitoring, assessment, and revision of the Action Plan as it relates to a well-defined set of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound) goals.



If done properly, evaluation results should actually help sustain and renew the community initiative. The information gathered in evaluation can be used to obtain resources such as grant money, show how to improve, and offer an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments.

– From the Community Toolbox (University of Kansas, 2011)



The Work

The work of the Community-District Team as it relates to the full cycle of assessing progress includes the following steps:

Complete the Community-District Team Self-Assessment

The Ready Schools Community-District Team Self-Assessment was designed for Community-District Teams at all levels of Ready Schools implementation. Whether the Team is just beginning or fully implementing Ready Schools, the self-assessment helps identify Team beliefs, strengths, areas of growth, and next steps. The results of the self-assessment can be used to complete the logic model and build an Action Plan as well as provide a baseline for measuring Team progress.

Conduct Needs Assessments for Families, Schools, the District, and the Community

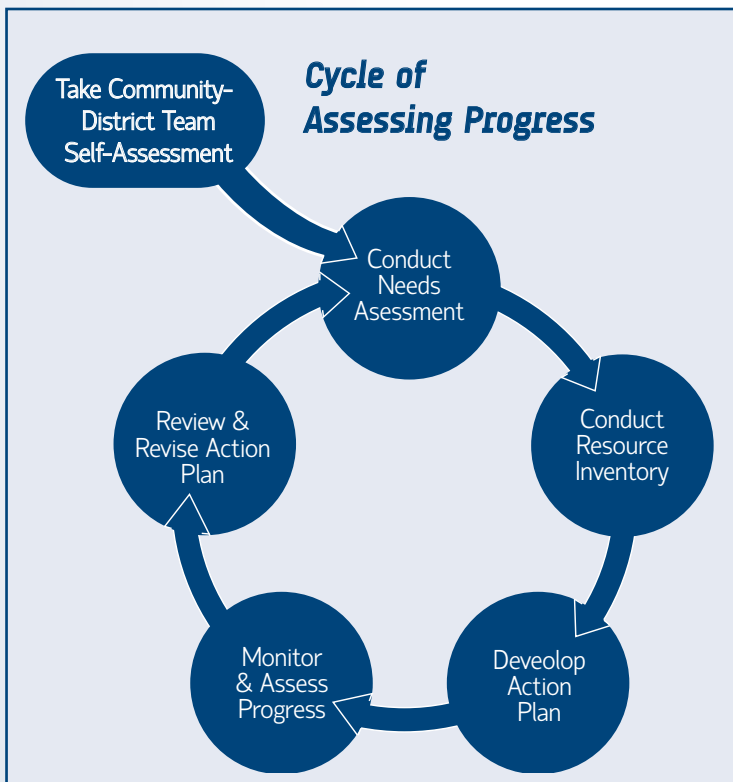
It is important to conduct needs assessments for families, schools, the district and the community. The purpose of these needs assessments is to inform the vision, mission, and goals of the Community-District Team which, in turn, inform the Action Plan.

Conduct Resource Inventories for Families, Schools, the District, and the Community

It is important to inventory available resources from families, schools, the district and the community that can support and enhance the work of Ready Schools, especially during tough economic times. Today's leaders face difficult decisions and must look outside appropriations to identify other resources and additional financial support.

Develop an Action Plan

There is an inspirational adage that says, "People don't plan to fail. Instead they fail to plan." To begin the action planning process, it is helpful to view your Community-District Team's approach to implementing a Ready Schools Initiative through the lens of a logic model (see the Taking Action section of this Pathway for more information on the logic model). This logic model shows the logical relationships among the resources that are invested, the activities that transpire, and the benefits or changes that result (University of Wisconsin-Extension, 2003). Working through the logic model helps Teams develop a comprehensive Action Plan that lends credibility to the Team; makes sure details are not overlooked; saves time, energy, and resources; and increases the chance that people will do what needs to be done (University of Kansas, 2011). A Community-District Team Action Plan Template is included in Appendix K of this Toolkit.



Monitor and Assess Progress

Monitoring and assessing the Ready Schools Initiative helps the Community-District Team weigh actions against results to determine the amount of progress towards identified goals. Through monitoring and assessment, Teams can understand how well the initiative is functioning and pinpoint where the actions are not producing the desired results. When teams monitor and assess their progress, they are better able to promote awareness of accomplishments, recruit support, and secure funding (University of Kansas, 2011). Assessment should be done on a regular basis throughout the life of the initiative.

Review and Revise the Action Plan

To complete the cycle of assessing progress, the Community-District Team must review and revise their Action Plan in light of the information and data obtained through monitoring progress. This process ensures that the Action Plan is a living document that guides purposeful work.



Who is Involved: Why and What are Their Roles?

Community-District Team Leader(s): The Community-District Team leader(s) must initiate needs assessments and resource inventories for families, schools, the district, and communities. Informed by the data, the Community-District Team leader(s) recruits a cross-section of the Team that reflects the diversity of the community (see Respecting Diversity Pathway) in the exploration of the logic model and the development of the Action Plan. The Community-District Team leader(s) should facilitate frequent and ongoing review and revision of the Action Plan to monitor progress towards the goals.

Families: Individuals representing families must join and participate on the Community-District Team. As a key stakeholder group, families ought to communicate their needs to schools and community organizations and participate in decision-making in schools and community forums to the greatest extent possible.

District and School Leaders: The involvement and support of district and school leaders on the Community-District Team enhances the likelihood that Team efforts will align with district and school needs and goals. Additionally, when these leaders work with the Community-District Team (e.g., administering needs assessments and resource inventories on behalf of the school district), it communicates a collaborative effort that yields increased feedback and higher response rates.

Community Organizations: Members and leaders of community organizations can engage with the Community-District Team by sharing their perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. Furthermore, to eliminate redundant efforts, other community organizations engaged in similar work can be asked to share the results of their own data collection when appropriate.

Business Leaders: As Level 1 members of the Community-District Team (individuals who attend regular meetings) or as Level 2 members (individuals who are involved in specific, intermittent projects), business leaders must share their experience and expertise in the private and public sector with the Community-District Team. Business leaders have important information and knowledge to share regarding gathering data, using data to inform decisions, and monitoring the progress of initiatives.



Sustainability

Conduct Periodic Needs Assessments and Resource Inventories for Families, Schools, the District, and the Community

The following components are required for sustaining needs assessments and resource inventories: development and deployment of the instruments, participation of the target population, analysis of the results, meaningful use of the data, and on-going monitoring for revision as needed.

Surveys are one of the best ways for organizations to collect quantitative data. They can be written, face-to-face, online, or done by telephone. The Down East Partnership for Children developed several survey tools that assess stakeholders' perceptions of key Ready Schools topics (see Appendix C, Resources for Pathway Two: Family, Schools, and Community Partnerships).

The Community-District Team collaboratively decides what populations to assess and when. There are several ways to increase participant response rate. The following list provides some recommended strategies for increasing the number of responses:

- ▶ schedule the timing strategically (avoid school breaks, holidays, and weekends),
- ▶ send out an advance notice of the assessment,
- ▶ provide online and hardcopies of the assessment,
- ▶ send out at least three reminders, and
- ▶ offer an incentive for completion.

Develop, Monitor, Review, and Revise Action Plans

Once data has been collected, the next step is to organize and analyze the data in a meaningful way, and then summarize the findings and share the results with stakeholders (University of Kansas, 2011). The data should drive the creation of the Team's Action Plan. Here are several strategies that the Community-District Team can use to sustain a data-based, collaboratively developed, well-timed Action Plan:

- ▶ Start by viewing your Ready School Initiative through the lens of the logic model.
- ▶ Identify gaps in your Initiative logic and clarify assumptions so success may be more likely.
- ▶ Clarify what is appropriate to evaluate, and when, so that evaluation resources are used wisely.
- ▶ Develop your Action Plan based on the information generated through the logic model and data analysis.
- ▶ Include responsibilities for developing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing, and revising the Action Plan in job descriptions for specific Community-District Team members.
- ▶ Design the Action Plan so that more than one person is responsible for the actions to promote shared accountability.

- Discuss and acknowledge potential barriers for each action included in the plan and brainstorm strategies for overcoming the barriers prior to implementing the plan.
- Discuss and assign the resources needed to accomplish each action item.
- Include a timeline and completion date for each action.
- Send out periodic reminders to motivate individuals who are responsible for specific actions.
- Schedule a time to review the Action Plan and write it on a shared calendar. This should be done at least once a year if not more often.
- Make revisions to the Action Plan based on data, not assumptions.

Teams should take the time to celebrate short-term wins and communicate progress with families, schools, the district, and the community to garner ongoing support of the Ready Schools Initiative.

After climbing a great hill, one finds there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk has not yet ended

– Nelson Mandela





Ready Schools in Action: Data-Based Decision Making In Carteret County

The Down East Partnership and Carteret County Schools both initially thought that family events should be held in the evening. But after surveying families, they learned that both families and staff preferred to attend events during the school day.

Armed with the data, the school administrators made the decision to plan family events during the school day. As a result, they experienced an increase in family involvement and staff attendance.

The Down East Partnership for Children and Carteret County Schools also stressed the need to determine which type of school events have the highest attendance rate by certain target populations.

For example, a school might host a Reading Night designed to communicate the importance of families reading with their children each day and provide strategies for reading at home. However, after the event, when the school leaders collect the attendance data, they might learn that the families who already read with their children daily were the only attendees. Thus, their intended positive impact did not reach the population of families for which it was intended. By tracking family attendance rates by type of family at school functions, schools can tailor events to attract and meet the needs of targeted family types.



Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

1. How does the Community-District Team assess the needs and resources of families, schools, the district, and the community?
2. How are the goals of the Community-District Team developed to meet the needs and use the resources of families, schools, the district, and the community?
3. What aspects of the Ready Schools Initiative are currently implemented successfully? How do you know?
4. What Pathway(s) should the Community-District Team focus on next to build on strengths and have the greatest impact?
5. What Pathway(s) presents a challenge for your Community-District Team?
6. How does the Community-District Team monitor progress towards achieving goals?
 - » Does the Community-District Team use relevant, district-wide data to make informed decisions?
 - » Does the Community-District Team use a variety of tools to measure progress?
 - » Are data and results presented in concise, user friendly-language?
7. How does the Community-District Team plan for sustainability of the Ready Schools Initiative? Are there opportunities to celebrate accomplishments?
8. What is the availability of resources (e.g., time, expertise, funding) for conducting the work of Ready Schools?
9. How does the Community-District Team respond to feedback and shifting conditions?



Taking Action

Key Strategies

Employ the Logic Model

The University of Wisconsin-Extension has developed a comprehensive website devoted to a logic model. This logic model helps teams identify inputs, outputs, and outcomes/impact while taking into consideration the situation, priorities, assumptions, and external forces. In other words, the logic model provides a framework for teams to use their existing resources in order to accomplish their goals in their specific context. The logic model provides an opportunity to brainstorm prior to developing the Action Plan. Community-District Teams can find templates and trainings for how to complete templates at the following address:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html>

Transition from the Logic Model to the Action Plan

After completing the logic model process, use the following address to make the jump from the logic model to the Action Plan: http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~pbd/pdfs/Action_plan.pdf

Develop an Action Plan

This informational section, "Section 5. Developing an Action Plan," is part of the Community Toolbox developed by the University of Kansas as a vehicle for promoting community health and development by connecting people, ideas, and resources. Use the following address to access pertinent information, examples, and training materials for developing Action Plans:

http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1089.aspx



Issues/Challenges/Barriers

A lack of personnel, time, and money are barriers faced by most initiatives. Related to assessing progress, Community-District Teams may have difficulty engaging stakeholders in order to access and collect data to use for decision-making. Additionally, Teams may not have the capacity to analyze and use the data to make informed decisions.

The Importance of Assessing Progress

On Administrator Resistance:

If we [the Community-District Team] could somehow give him [a resistant principal] some hard data...then we could show him... and we don't have that as a group...we haven't collected any...and that's part of the resistance.

- A Community-District Team Leader



Strategies for Overcoming Issues/Challenges/Barriers

Using Event Logs

The event log form is designed to help Teams collect data and record major activities of the Ready Schools Initiative. An event log can also be used to record any changes in the community facilitated by the initiative. In this manner, participants who are already attending events collect data for the Team to analyze. A sample template for an event log can be found at:

http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_tools_1364.aspx#tool1

Collaboration

Before conducting needs assessments (community, district, schools, families), the Community-District Team should check with community organizations, the district, and the individual schools to see if they have already conducted their own needs assessment(s) and would be willing to share the information with the Team. Always be sure to check if assessment results are up-to-date.

When Teams do not have the capacity to analyze and use data to make decisions, they may be able to reach out to local universities, community colleges, research organizations, and/or professionals for help with these tasks.

For more resources see Appendix I, Resources for Pathway Eight: Assessing Progress and Assuring Quality at the end of the Toolkit.

Pathway References

University of Kansas. (2011). **The Community Toolbox**. Retrieved from http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1089.aspx

University of Wisconsin-Extension. (2003). **Program Development and Evaluation**. Retrieved from <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html>