

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT-NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

In this paper, we discussed the manner and process used to inform stakeholders of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations identified through the data collection process for the needs assessment that we conducted to identify the cause of failing reading scores across the district. Additionally, we constructed a plan that provided a forum for distribution of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Within the plan, the following components were addressed in detail: location, stakeholders, means of reporting the findings, method of communication, budget considerations, and proposed timeline.

Introduction

Conducting a needs assessment is a priceless tool for creating a plan to change and improve a learning environment. However, not to underestimate the power of successfully conducting a needs assessment, but this is only the beginning of the process. Knowing where a problem exists is an excellent starting point though. In fact, it is the only logical starting point and is the driving force for the change we want to see. However, a plan to disseminate the information that we gain through analyzing the results of the assessment, and to get that information into the right hands, is the phase where abstract vision is transformed into concrete change.

Summarizing and disseminating the results of a needs assessment is one of the crucial steps in the process of creating a paradigmatic path to achieving educational program goals. We know what we want to accomplish, and this step precedes implementing the detailed plan for improvement.

Summarizing the Results of a Needs Assessment

We have amassed a mountain of data, facts, and detailed information in general. At this point, all the intricate details need to be congested into layman's terms, easily understood by all those who have a stake in the process. "Stakeholders are vital facets in the first phase of the needs assessment process because we need their support to move forward with the project. Their interest should be taken into account to help project leaders and managers know how to prioritize efforts. Additionally, stakeholders have influence with the community members and can provide valuable insight into the needs being assessed. For example, in an educational setting, the interest of the State Department of Education would have an effect on every factor outlining the development of a needs assessment conducted in the elementary school setting. Because the state determines our funding, their interest must be managed appropriately, especially in the initial stage of planning the needs assessment" (Burton, 2022).

As previously stated, stakeholder interest is at the core of the entire needs assessment process. In the case for the needs assessment conducted for the Pine Bluff School District, the primary stakeholder would be funding the entire improvement process. Let's review.

The Arkansas Department of Education determined that two of the school districts under their jurisdiction were no longer capable of conducting daily business without oversight from their higher offices. Their justification was rational; over 50% of the students in both districts scored well below the benchmark level for reading. Prime example, 5th grade reading test results showed that some of the students were reading on a first semester, preschool level. Remarkably, examining the records during the needs assessment, it was determined that a large percentage of the above category of students had been reading on the preschool level since kindergarten. Surprisingly, no one was alarmed until the state took over.

We had to be up front with the findings. 90% of the failure hinged on staff's failure to teach basic phonics skills from kindergarten through third grade. Students could not decode basic one syllable words. We knew that the findings would greatly impact how the state viewed our administrators and teachers, so we worked to devise a plan to minimize the negative impact of released information. See the redacted summary of findings in the next paragraph.

"A needs assessment was conducted for specific elementary schools within the district to identify the cause of severe reading deficiencies as demonstrated across the district. Well over 50% of school aged children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade lack basic phonics skills as evident in standard reading test scores. Data was collected through various methods, with results showing that educators in grades kindergarten through third grade failed to systematically introduce decoding, phonics skills to students, putting students at a disadvantage for developing through the stages that lead to automaticity in reading"(Pine Bluff District, 2020).

The above paragraph was a brief synopsis of the data that was contained in the full report. The report would certainly have a damaging effect on the entire district, so careful consideration went into planning the findings review meeting.

Reporting Findings of the Needs Assessment

We turned our efforts to planning a forum for distributing our findings, sharing the conclusion of the assessment, and for articulating our recommendations. A regular school board meeting was not the time or the place to release such delicate information. We decided that we would ask each concerned group to choose a representative to attend the special call meeting for those invited to represent a concerned group. The various groups represented were, school administrators, staff, state department, community leaders, parents, and students.

We chose a neutral location for the meeting, not holding it at the school office or conference room. We considered a virtual meeting, but decided that a virtual platform was too impersonal for the task.

The findings were shared using individual portfolios with a summary of the data in each packet. The meeting preceded in a casual manner with an introductory power point slide presentation that touched briefly of some of the information in the portfolios. After the introduction, we engaged in a general discussion, with time set aside for questions. We limited the meeting to one hour, and stayed focused on the agenda, setting a date to reconvene for the recommendation session that would include examining the budget considerations and the projected timeline to activate our improvement plan.

We sent out a survey to attendees to determine their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the meeting. If a threshold level of satisfaction was expressed, the same representative was invited for the second meeting, which convened eight days after the review meeting.

The difficult task was accomplished and we could relax a bit. We scheduled the second meeting at the school district conference room, and added a virtual platform open to the attending representative's

group members. Recommendations were put to vote and accepted or rejected. See the list of some of the recommendations that were accepted.

✓ Immediate budget allocations to purchase the nationally used 95 % Phonics Core Program for K-5 grades in the district. To keep cost down, all grades K-5 would use the 3rd Grade Phonics curriculum. Each school in the district was given 12 weeks to purchase the core curriculum program books.

✓ Professional Development Courses for staff, with additional training from state specialist. District scheduled various phonics training for the first semester of the following school year.

✓ Phonics lesson is a nonnegotiable daily 30 minute task, and has been designated as the district's primary mode for teaching fundamental skills for emerging readers. Immediate action.

Based on the results we saw as a response to the application of the principals of the 95 Percent Phonics Core Program, we were able to project end of year grade level in reading. We took those projections and implemented daily interventions to supplement the phonics lessons, targeted at helping students achieve their potential reading levels by the end of the school year.

The meeting agenda was met and the recommendations were accepted and activated.

References

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