

# CAUSE EXPLORATION PRACTICE

**Directions:** Work with a small group at your table to identify root causes of your problem of practice using a Cause Category Chart and Cause Exploration Cards. Then prioritize identified causes to prepare to dig more deeply.

## Part 1: Prepare for Cause Exploration

1. Brainstorm your assumptions about why you believe your problem of practice exists.
2. Write your Why Question (based on your problem of practice) at the top of your small group's Cause Category Chart.
3. Cut apart the Cause Exploration Cards so that each cause is on a separate, small slip of paper and then divide the cards among the members of your small group.
4. Each team member silently reads their cards and makes a preliminary decision about the statement on each card (yes, it is a potential cause for our problem of practice; no, it is not a potential cause for our particular problem; or it might be a cause).

## Part 2: Examine and Assess Cause Exploration Cards

1. Each small group member reads their cards aloud one at a time.
2. The group considers each card, briefly discussing if the cause reflected on the card could be contributing to the problem of practice.
3. If the group decides the cause is contributing to the problem, place that card in the appropriate block on the Cause Category Chart.
4. If the cause might be contributing to the problem, place it in a "Maybe" pile. If it isn't contributing to the problem, place it in a "No" pile.
5. Continue the same process with the rest of the cards.
6. If there are any contributing causes that are not reflected on any of the printed cards, write them on post-it notes, and place them on the chart.
7. Go back and discuss the cards in the "Maybe" pile. If the team has sufficient information to make a decision, place them either in the appropriate categories on the chart, or place them in the "No" pile.

## Part 3: Prioritize Causes

1. Determine which category(s) on your chart have the most cards.
2. List the causes reflected on the cards placed in those categories on chart paper.
3. Give each team member 4 dots.
4. Ask each team member to use the 4 dots to prioritize the causes on the list. No one can use all 4 dots on one cause.
5. Allow team members time to distribute their dots on the cause list.
6. Circle the causes with the most dots. These are prioritized causes for that category. Look at other categories and decide together if there are high priority causes reflected in them. There may be a diamond in the rough!
7. Select at least one of the prioritized causes to analyze more deeply.

## Cause Category Chart

<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>Instruction</b>	<b>Professional Learning</b>
<b>Organizational Structure and Culture</b>	<b>System Processes</b>

The district/school lacks the capacity to develop and support high performing teams focused on student learning.

Students are not provided timely, systematic, data-driven interventions to support their learning needs.

The strategies/activities listed in the improvement plan have not been implemented and/regularly monitored for impact on student learning.

Some policies and organizational processes impose obstacles or barriers to student learning.

Critical stakeholders are not involved in making decisions about teaching and learning.

Staff do not receive accurate, helpful or descriptive feedback related to their performance beyond required evaluation.

The district/school does not maximize its use of available fiscal resources to focus on supporting the achievement of student- learning goals.

Common formative assessment results are not used to inform lesson planning and next steps in instruction.

The district/school does not use multiple sources of student-learning data to identify priority student learning needs and set goals.

Professional development is not aligned with student-learning goals and expectations.

Classroom assessments are not rigorous and/or are not tied to state standards in both content and student expectations.

Teachers do not collaboratively and/or regularly analyze student work to inform classroom curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Classroom instruction does not adequately address the student performance expectations outlined in the state standards.

Communication with families is not frequent or focused on student learning goals.

Leadership is limited to a small circle of people at the district/school level.

Data are not used regularly and continuously to improve student learning.

Students with high cognitive ability are not working or achieving at their potential.

The improvement plan lacks specificity which makes it difficult to implement, monitor, and adjust.

Students feel physically and/or psychologically unsafe in their learning environment.

The expectations for proficient student work at each grade level are not consistent from one school to another and/or from one teacher to another.

Instruction lacks evidence of clear learning targets and success criteria aligned to the state standards.

Staff members do not have a commitment to equity for all students regardless of race, gender, class, culture or exceptionality.

Teams lack the trust to engage in healthy conflict necessary to tackle challenging student learning issues.

Teachers are trying to sort through and make sense of a number of initiatives or programs that may be competing/distracting from a focus.

Subgroups of students, particularly minority students, are visibly absent from higher level/more rigorous classes or courses.

The culture is not characterized by collaborative teams, trust, and internal responsibility for student learning.

Effective collaborative planning does not occur across all grade levels and content areas.

Performance expectations are not clearly and consistently communicated to students or parents.

Formative assessment items limit student responses to one word or short answers rather than requiring them to explain their thinking in writing.

The district/school has become complacent in its work and/or satisfied with current achievement levels.

There is limited evidence of the use a variety of high impact teaching strategies in classrooms.

Students lack strategies for comprehending more complex text.

Disaggregated student-learning data are not effectively analyzed and used to address any inequitable learning opportunities and achievement gaps.

Content area teachers are not sure how to address student reading/writing/ language deficiencies in their classrooms.

We do not know how to close instructional achievement gaps.

The district/school works in isolation as it seeks to address problems of practice.