

Unified Improvement Plans and the Early Learning Needs Assessment

A Guide for School and District Leadership



COLORADO
Department of Education

Overview

An early learning needs assessment supports schools and districts in analyzing the needs and learning of children birth through age 8. This process can strengthen relationships between schools, districts and early childhood partners to more accurately identify needs within the community, monitor trends, and inform the implementation of preventative strategies.

The CDE encourages all schools and districts serving K-3 students to assess their needs related to early childhood as a part of the improvement process. Similarly, the Colorado General Assembly expanded accountability requirements to establish minimum early learning needs assessment requirements and to require the identification of related improvement strategies for specific schools and districts ([1 CCR 301-1](#)):

- Public schools and charters operating under a priority improvement or turnaround plan, and who serve students in grades K-3 (§22-11-405; §22-11-406)
- Districts that have a school serving students in grades K-3 and is operating under a priority improvement or turnaround plan (§22-11-305; §22-11-306). *Please note this is unique statute requiring districts to act based on the school's plan type.*

Who to Involve in the Process

To gather the data most effectively and efficiently, school and district leadership are advised to include early childhood administrators.

For school level assessments this may include:

- District or school Early Childhood administrator, Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) Coordinator, Early Childhood Special Education administrator
- Community program directors, other local early childhood resources, *i.e., libraries, local mental health agencies and human services*

For district level assessments this may include:

- District Early Childhood administrator, CPP Coordinator, Early Childhood Special Education administrator, BOCES or Child Find Coordinator
- Local Early Childhood Council Coordinator
- Local Head Start Grantee
- Other Early Childhood resources, *i.e., library system, family resource centers, mental health and human services departments*

Please refer to the [Early Learning Needs Assessment Data Sources Guide](#) to see the connections with each data source. The CDE recommends collaboration with the district and school in involving local partners. Some schools may also need to consider involving those listed for district leadership depending on their location and/or the size of their district.

Early Learning Needs Assessment Minimum Requirements:

Measures the extent to which:

- Quality early childhood programs exist within a school's or district's geographic boundaries
- Students are enrolled in early childhood programs that receive either state funding (CPP/619) or School Readiness Quality Improvement funds prior to Kindergarten entry
- A public school or district works with their local Early Childhood Council and other EC community Agencies
- A public school or district collaborates with EC programs on Preschool-Kindergarten transitions
- K-3 teachers have EC teaching credentials
- Professional Development provides joint learning opportunities and collaboration between EC providers, teachers and principals
- Family Engagement plans provide opportunities for Preschool-3rd grade
- Availability of other Early Childhood Resources

For details in analyzing the required data sources listed, the CDE has created additional resources.

Embedding Early Learning Data Sources in Unified Improvement Planning (UIP)

Data sources can be embedded within the existing UIP process.

Prepare to Plan

With the early childhood administrator and other relevant stakeholders, identify and gather data using the [Early Learning Needs Assessment Data Sources Guide](#).

Review Current Performance

Review available Early Learning performance data using the appropriate sources.

Describe Notable Trends

Identify performance trends over time based on data available. Consider comparison points (e.g. state average) that will give perspective to data. Identify those trajectories that stand out as either positive or concerning trends.

Prioritize Performance Challenges

Based on the performance trends in the context of your community, identify patterns where there is agreement on priority. Data from the early learning needs assessment may add clarity to priorities apparent in state assessments (e.g. literacy needs beginning in K, as well as grades 3-5).

Identify Root Causes

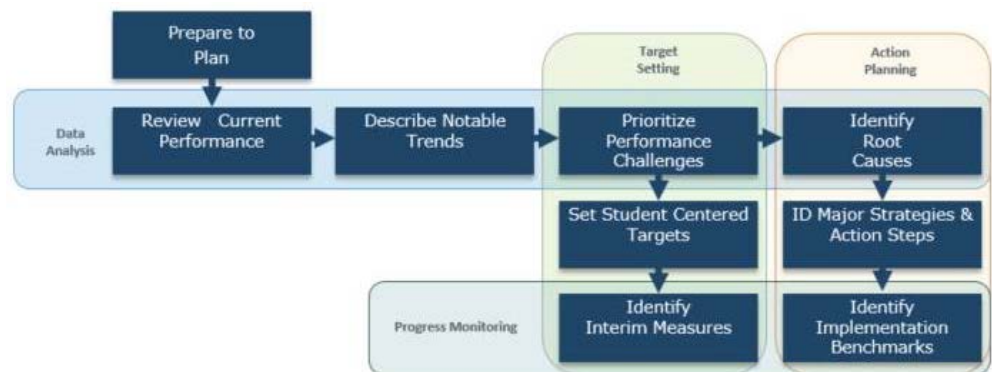
Determine why the challenges are occurring within using demographic, process and perception data. Data from the School Data Sources Guide may be used to validate root causes and add precision to early learning needs.

Identify Major Improvement Strategies/Action Steps

Participate in identifying strategies for responding to identified root causes. This may include research-based strategies focused on Early Learning and Development to address needs identified within the Early Learning Needs Assessment data. Consider action steps that may focus on early learning within a broader school wide strategy (e.g. early literacy professional development targeting preschool and Kindergarten teachers).

Documentation and Submitting within the Unified Improvement Planning Online System

Add summary and analysis within the *Root Causes* of your school and district UIP (under: *Provide a rationale for how these Root Causes were selected and verified*). If appropriate, document research-based Early Learning and Development strategies within the *Major Improvement Strategies*. See the [UIP Quality Criteria Rubric](#) for more information.



WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Visit the [CDE website](#) for the [Early Learning Needs Assessment Data Sources Guide](#) and the [P-3 Data Sources Glossary](#)

For UIP support: Erin Loften, Technical Supports and Planning Manager: loften_e@cde.state.co.us

For early learning support: Megan Prior Rogers, Kindergarten School Readiness Consultant: rogers_m@cde.state.co.us