

Data-Based Decision-Making Protocol

June 2025, Version 2

Purpose

This Data-Based Decision-Making protocol is designed to support the four-step problem solving process (identify, analyze, implement, evaluate) by examining data in a structured manner. The information gathered from completing the protocol is then used to inform decision making and action planning. We know that, as educators, we are inherently problem solvers, but it is imperative to think deeply about why a problem exists in order to effectively solve it. This protocol supports that. As you engage in this protocol, remember to slow down and truly process the data you see without automatically drawing conclusions about why the problem exists. Sometimes, our assumptions can be inaccurate and potentially biased. Digging into the data can illuminate that and make our problem-solving efforts more successful. As you complete the activities, please ground your team in norms that ensure all participants have equal voice.

Procedure

The following activities are designed to surface predictions and assumptions about the data, examine trends and patterns in the data, and determine a root cause. This enables teams to develop a prioritized goal(s) and aligned action plan(s).

Activity 1. Identify an Area of Focused Need (i.e., behavior, academic growth/achievement)

- a. Organize Observations using the [Data Connections Document](#)
- b. Create a [Precise Problem Statement](#)

Activity 2. Analyze the Problem of Practice

- a. Identify Contributing Factors
- b. Root Cause Analysis (Why is this happening?)
- c. Add the “Why” to the [Precise Problem Statement](#)

Activity 3. Write a Prioritized Goal Statement

- a. Use the [Prioritized Goal Statement Document](#) to create a Goal Statement.

Activity 4. Conduct an Initiative Inventory Aligned to the Goal Statement

- a. Brainstorm efforts that are already being conducted that relate to the goal statement

Activity 1. Identify the Problem of Practice

a. Organize Observations using the Data Connections Document

Examine the data for patterns and trends across the system (beyond your individual role) - suspending judgment and assumptions.

Individually or with a partner, review the data set and evidence, recording factual statements (e.g., noticings, patterns, trends) that come to mind, considering:

1. What items stick out?
2. What does the data tell you?
 - a. What differences/patterns do you see regarding:
 - i. Grade level
 - ii. Content Area/Time of day
 - iii. Gifted and Talented/Special Education
 - iv. Gender
 - v. Race
 - vi. Socioeconomic status
3. What is the story within the data?

Team members share their perspectives, noticings, and rationale with the rest of the team that was captured on their [Data Connections Document](#). Some example conversation starters could be:

- The data revealed to me that...
- I believe the data suggests... because...
- Some patterns/trends that I notice are...
- I'm surprised that I see...
- An assumption I realized wasn't true was...

Collectively, create a new [Data Connections Document](#) that captures the combined observations of all team members, leading to the development of 1-3 priority statements about the area of focused need.

b. Create a Precise Problem Statement

Use the questions found on the [Precise Problem Statement](#) document to capture as much detail as you can about the identified area of focused need. For example, what is the problem, how often is the problem occurring, where is the problem occurring, who is engaged in the problem, and when is the problem occurring?

[Return to top](#)

Activity 2. Analyze the Problem of Practice

a. Identify Contributing Factors

As a team, using the 1-3 priority statements that your team generated in activity 1a, create a list of potential contributing factors (considering the story within the data) that explain why the area of focused need exists.

After the list has been generated, collectively decide on 1-2 contributing factor(s) that, if addressed, would result in elimination or substantial reduction of the focused area of need.

b. Root Cause Analysis (Why is this happening?)

With partners or in triads, engage in root cause analysis using the [5 Why's Worksheet](#) to explore the “why” behind current patterns of performance for each decided-upon contributing factor.

As you progress through the “5 whys,” focus on alterable variables within your sphere of influence. Some examples could include:

- Curriculum, instruction, and environment (i.e., classroom, school culture, community partnerships)
- Training and coaching
- Adult actions

Note: If the last answer is something that you cannot control or is “outside of your sphere of influence,” go back up to the previous layer and ask “why” again to come to a different response. The final “why” must be alterable or changeable.

c. Add the “Why” to the Precise Problem Statement

Add the “Why” determined through Root Cause Analysis to the Revised [Precise Problem Statement](#) at the bottom of the worksheet.

Activity 3. Write a Prioritized Goal Statement

Use the [Prioritized Goal Statement Document](#) to record your thinking.

The precise problem statement should drive the creation of your goal statement. For example, who are the individual(s) expected to meet the outcome, what specific behavior or action are they expected to engage in, how much (the metric - criteria for success), and where, by when (conditions under which the outcome will be achieved)?

[Return to top](#)



Activity 4. Conduct an Initiative Inventory Aligned to the Goal Statement

Brainstorm efforts that are already being conducted aligned to the goal statement using the [Initiative Inventory Protocol](#).

Next Step: Create an Implementation Plan ([Action Plan](#)). NOTE: Activities listed in your action plan should address the root cause and contributing factors.

[Return to top](#)



Data Connections Document

Use your data set to inform your answers.

<p>What connections do you notice? What patterns do you see?</p>	<p>What needs do you see? What gaps exist?</p>
--	--

Prioritize two or three items to begin your action planning considerations. Think about:

- Which items would lead to the greatest gains?
- What need would it meet?
- What overlaps/gaps need to be addressed?
- What outcomes would you like to see?

[Return to top](#)

Activity 1c) Identify the Problem of Practice (Create a Precise Problem Statement)

Primary problem area identified:

What is the problem?	
How often is the problem occurring?	
Where is the problem occurring?	
Who is engaged in the problem?	
When is the problem most likely to occur?	
Other pertinent information:	

Precise Problem Statement:

Example of Precise Problem Statement

Problem identified: Teachers are writing more discipline referrals.

What is the problem?	Discipline referrals
How often is the problem occurring?	Consistently
Where is the problem occurring?	Classrooms
Who is engaged in the problem?	70% of teachers (no trends seen by grade level or content area)
When is the problem most likely to occur?	No trends seen
Other pertinent information:	Behavior referrals are often categorized as minor offenses that could be managed in classrooms

Precise Problem Statement: 70% of teachers (who) consistently (how often) send students (what) to the office (where) for behaviors that could be managed in the classroom (other).

[Return to top](#)



Activity 2a) Analyze the Problem of Practice

Identify Contributing Factors: Identifies group conclusions based on the data

What are some of the contributing factors that the team can identify about why the prioritized problem statements exist? (What are some factors that contribute to why the scores are what they are?)

Precise Problem Statement:

Brainstorm Contributing Factors That Are Alterable:

Select 1-3 Factors from the List That If Targeted Would Lead to Greatest Change:

[Return to top](#)

Activity 2b: Root Cause Analysis (Why is this happening? What factors within instruction, curriculum, and environment contribute to the problem?)

“5-Whys” Non-Example

List the Precise Problem Statement:

70% of teachers consistently send students to the office for behaviors that could be managed in the classroom

Why is it happening?

Identified contributing factor (1) from above:

1. Behavioral referrals come predominately from the classroom.

Why is that?

2. Kids are less respectful these days.

Why is that?

3. Staff feel pressure to get to content because of testing.

Why is that?

4. Administrators let kids get away with it.

Why is that?

5. Staff have too much stress to deal with student behavior.

[Return to top](#)

"5-Whys" Example

List the Precise Problem Statement:

70% of teachers consistently send students to the office for behaviors that could be managed in the classroom

Why is it happening?

Identified contributing factor (1) from above:

1. Behavioral referrals come predominately from the classroom.

Why is that?

2. Staff isn't sure how to manage disruptive behavior, especially for students who are frequently disruptive

Why is that?

3. (add the final why to the precise problem statement)
Staff haven't been trained in how to build relationships with students and manage disruptive behavior.

Why is that?

4.

Why is that?

5.

Precise Problem Statement with the why: 70% of teachers consistently send students to the office for behaviors that could be managed in the classroom **because** staff haven't been trained in how to build relationships with students and manage disruptive behavior.

[Return to top](#)

5 Whys Worksheet

Precise Problem Statement:

Why is it happening?

1. Identified contributing factor (1) from above:

Why is that?

2.

Why is that?

3.

Why is that?

4.

Why is that?

5.

Note: This process may not take “5 whys” or may take more than five. As you progress through the “whys,” focus on alterable variables (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and environment). If the last answer is something that you cannot control or is “outside of your sphere of influence”, go back up to the previous layer and ask “why” again to come to a different response. As you complete this activity as a team, ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute to achieve consensus.

Revised Precise Problem Statement with *why*:

[Return to top](#)

Activity 3. Write a Prioritized Goal Statement

(How will you know the problem is resolved? What student outcome do you want?)

Based on your precise problem statement and five why's, write a prioritized goal statement.

Revised Precise Problem Statement including the “why”:

Who? Individuals expected to meet the outcome	
What? Specific behavior or action	
How much? Metric/Criteria for success	
Where? By when? Conditions under which the outcome will be achieved	

Prioritized Goal Statement:

Example Prioritized Goal Statement

After training and coaching support from **2023-2026 during the school year (when)**, **90% of teachers (who)** will feel more confident managing disruptive student behavior **in their classrooms (where)** and **decrease the number of discipline referrals they write (what) by 10% by the end of the year, each year (how much)**.

[Return to top](#)