

Community Schools Needs Assessment Toolkit



New York State
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
Technical Assistance Centers
Central/Western Region,
Binghamton University



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Overview

Needs assessments are a powerful process designed to align and expand resources to optimize family engagement, student success, and community partnerships.

There are many pathways to connect with stakeholders and discover assets, but the initial work should begin at the school level – identifying risks and opportunities in the school environment.

- Identify resources within the school and community
- Observe interactions and processes within the school setting
- Consider how implicit bias may impact individual perceptions of needs and pain points
- Be mindful that deficit thinking could influence responses to needs assessment data
- Consider which elements of the feedback process should be anonymous (e.g., focus group comments)
- Consider power structures and who should solicit input, with a goal of creating an environment of trust and open dialogue

This toolkit provides guidance on the needs assessment process, as well as valuable resources and templates to support implementation. Please be sure to review the sample tools included in the "**Resources**" section, which can be customized and adapted to meet individual needs.

“ A community school recognizes the power of working together for a common good. ”

-Ira Harkavay & Martin J. Blank, *Education Week*

Implementation Guidance

WHAT

What is a needs assessment?

The implementation of needs assessments may look different across various settings, but there are foundational components to include when aligning with Community Schools initiatives.

A needs assessment is:

- A **data collection** process conducted by school and/or community leaders
- A **careful** and **comprehensive** review of student, school, and community strengths and areas in need of investment and support
- An **opportunity to analyze school and community needs** in an effort to support or **leverage Community Schools initiatives**
- Core elements of a needs assessment/data collection process may include:
 - Self-assessments
 - Surveys
 - Focus groups
 - Documented observations
 - Informal communication
 - Resource/initiative inventory
 - Stakeholder feedback



Implementation Guidance

WHY

Why is it important to conduct a needs assessment?

Engaging in a needs assessment process can:

- Provide a snapshot of the school and community environment
- Shed light on people or groups that are impacted by programs and services (or lack thereof)
- Help **identify needs, gaps, assets and opportunities**

Needs assessment data and analysis can support these three key initiatives:

Alignment



- Determine a shared vision – school and community partners can leverage partnerships to better serve the whole child
- Discover ways that Community Schools strategies can address specific barriers and gaps
- Use the process as a catalyst to strengthen existing initiatives or drive change within systems

Sustainability



- Support continuous improvement efforts and ongoing stakeholder engagement
- Generate ideas for leveraging new or existing community partnerships
- Develop recommendations and action plans for key partners (e.g., CS implementation team)

Equity



- Center the perspectives of all stakeholders, to ensure voices are heard and drive decision-making
- Understand the strengths and needs of students, families, school staff, and communities
- Build relationships and foster trust by collaborating with community members

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WHO

Who should be involved in a needs assessment?

The needs assessment process is most effective when district and community leaders collaborate. Planning and implementation may include the following roles:

Planning Partners



- Community Schools Coordinator
- Principal
- School Administrator
- Parent/Family Liaison
- Technical Assistance Partner (e.g., The NYSED C/W Community Schools Technical Assistance Center)

For comprehensive data collection, consider **ALL stakeholders** when doing needs assessments. The following groups should be part of the process and have opportunities to share feedback:

Voices to Elevate



- Students
- School staff
- Teachers
- Custodial and support staff
- Paraprofessionals
- Administrators
- Parents, guardians, families
- Community partners

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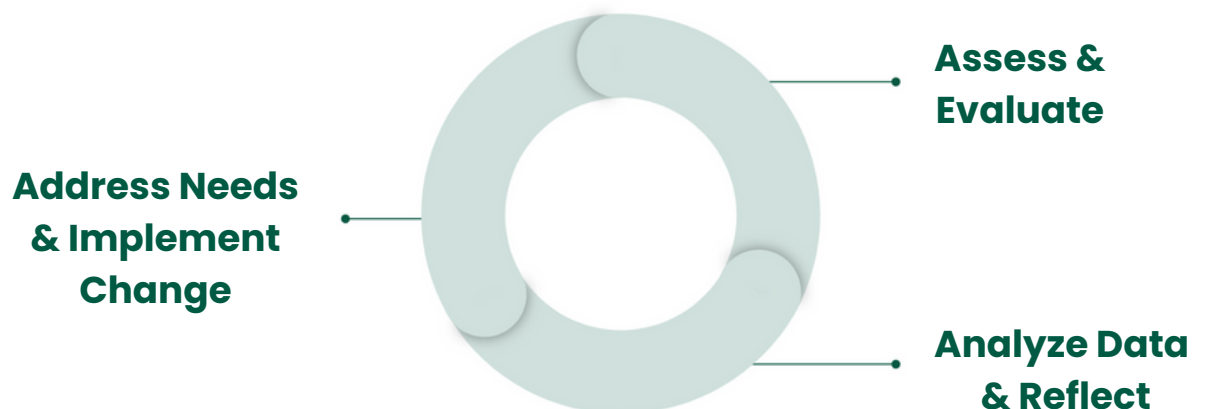
WHEN

When is the appropriate time or stage to complete a needs assessment?

Needs assessments can be completed any time, but are most effective when staff can designate resources and time to the process. While circumstances and timelines vary, consider the following insights about engaging in a needs assessment process:

- Prior to hiring a Community Schools Coordinator/Director, to ensure efforts are aligned with the pillars and the needs of the district and community
- When a Community Schools Coordinator is hired (or within 3 months), to guide implementation of the Community Schools strategy
- Conduct the process annually, to ensure consistent collection and analysis of data, noting any changes in needs or feedback

For meaningful engagement and impact, the needs assessment process should be considered as an ongoing cycle:



Implementation Guidance

HOW

How can a team plan and implement a needs assessment?

Consider the following steps to create a roadmap for planning and implementation:

- Convene key partners invested in Community Schools initiatives (e.g., implementation team/Community Schools Advisory team)
 - Reference the list of "Planning Partners" on page 6
- Define key goals and timeline for implementation (e.g., planning meetings, survey distribution and deadlines, focus group dates)
- Map out roles and responsibilities of each partner (e.g., survey development, note-taking, participant outreach)
- Identify key stakeholders to participate in feedback process (e.g., focus group participants, student interviews)
- Utilize relevant needs assessment tools (e.g., family surveys, student meetings)
- Analyze data and document any trends or key takeaways
- Brainstorm solutions, opportunities, and action steps

For additional planning insights and guidance, explore the **Needs Assessment Implementation Checklist**.

Resources

Additional resources for exploration:

- [The NYCDOE Assets and Needs Assessment](#), NYC Department of Education
- [Community and School Resource Mapping](#), The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism
- [Needs Assessment Toolkit](#), The National Center for Community Schools at Children's Aid
- [Community School Strategy Implementation Roadmap](#), NYSED CS Eastern Technical Assistance Center (ETAC)
- [How Do Community Schools Identify Their Priorities?](#), United Way Erie (video)
- Sample Tools:
 - [Initiative Inventory](#), National Implementation Research Network
 - [Focus Group Guidance and Template](#), Binghamton University Community Schools
 - [Needs Assessment Implementation Checklist](#), Binghamton University Community Schools
 - [Needs Assessment Design Packet](#), The National Center for Community Schools at Children's Aid



For more information or support, please contact us:

NYSED C/W TAC: cstac@binghamton.edu
Binghamton University Community Schools (BUCS):
cscenter@binghamton.edu