

Support for School Improvement Efforts Through Needs Assessments

ESSA specifically requires needs assessments in a number of circumstances, including when a school is identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) by their SEA due to their performance on the state's accountability system, and must use a school-level needs assessment to develop and implement a school improvement plan. (Schools identified for targeted support and improvement (TSI) may be required or strongly encouraged to complete a needs assessment as well.) In addition, needs assessments are required when schools use their Title I funds to operate a schoolwide program, and LEAs that receive at least \$30,000 in funding from the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) program must complete a needs assessment each year.

Needs assessments are an opportunity for schools to examine factors outside the classroom that impact academic achievement and are a key tool to mobilizing resources schools need in order to address these issues. And, because needs assessments are linked to indicators in the accountability system and/or school report card, there is a clear path for incorporating questions that can uncover health and wellness issues. For example, if chronic absenteeism is an accountability measure, then the needs assessment should help schools identify the root causes of chronic absenteeism specific to their student population, which likely will include chronic and acute health issues. The needs assessment will thus help schools identify the correct set of evidence-based practices to address their issues and create coordinated interventions that include essential school and community-based resources.

This has important equity implications, given that the schools likely to be identified as needing comprehensive support and improvement disproportionately serve low-income students and students of color, populations that are already at risk for poor health and education outcomes.

Best Practices

- SEAs offer needs assessment guidance that explicitly supports or requires school districts to incorporate health and wellness data into their needs assessments, and collaborate with other state agencies, such as state health and public health agencies to design and support implementation of this guidance.
- SEAs support or require school districts to collaborate with community partners, including local nonprofit hospitals and health departments, to develop and conduct needs assessments.
- SEA staff or partners provide technical assistance on health-related needs assessment.
- SEAs provide school districts with a well-researched list of evidence-based practices to address the needs identified, as well as guidance on selecting interventions, and creating school improvement plans that include these interventions.

Resources

HSC and Alliance for a Healthier Generation's [Needs Assessments to Connect Learning + Health: Opportunities in the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) includes important background information, data sources, and sample health and wellness questions that can be included in needs assessments.

State Spotlight: Colorado

The Colorado Department of Education, with assistance from the Southwest Comprehensive Center of WestEd and in partnership with RMC Research Corporation, developed [A Guide for Comprehensive Needs Assessment](#) related specifically to NCLB-required needs assessments. Tools and resources on their website include links to data systems, needs assessment tools and survey templates. Their tools encompass a full array of educational issues and consider such wide-ranging factors as student data analytics, healthy youth, school climate and family feedback surveys on school improvement.