

## STEP FOUR: IDENTIFY THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CAUSES OF THE WEAKNESSES IN STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



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**Facilitator:** Step 4 requires self-reflection about how teaching and learning can be improved. Initially participants may feel threatened by this process or feel guilty about “blaming teachers.” This is a good time to remind them of the goals of the PIM process. Also remind the group not to focus yet on solutions.

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**N**ow that the team has identified the specific skills and knowledge students lack, it will try to determine why students have been unable to master these skills. It will think critically about the learning experiences that students receive in the school and identify potential barriers to their learning. Step 4 has three distinct parts: (1) Working with each student learning objective individually, the team will brainstorm a number of possible causes that affect students’ ability to master that skill. The team will organize the causes into categories according to whether they pertain specifically to the student learning objective, affect the content area as a whole, or affect student learning across multiple content areas. (2) Once the team has brainstormed causes for every student learning objective, it will consolidate similar causes across the various student learning objectives and across student groups. (3) Finally, the team will prioritize which causes it will address and look for evidence to verify its hypotheses that these causes exist.



























## Worksheet 4-A: Possible causes of students' lack of skills and knowledge

**Guiding Question: Why haven't students in the targeted group learned the skills and knowledge described in the student learning objectives?**

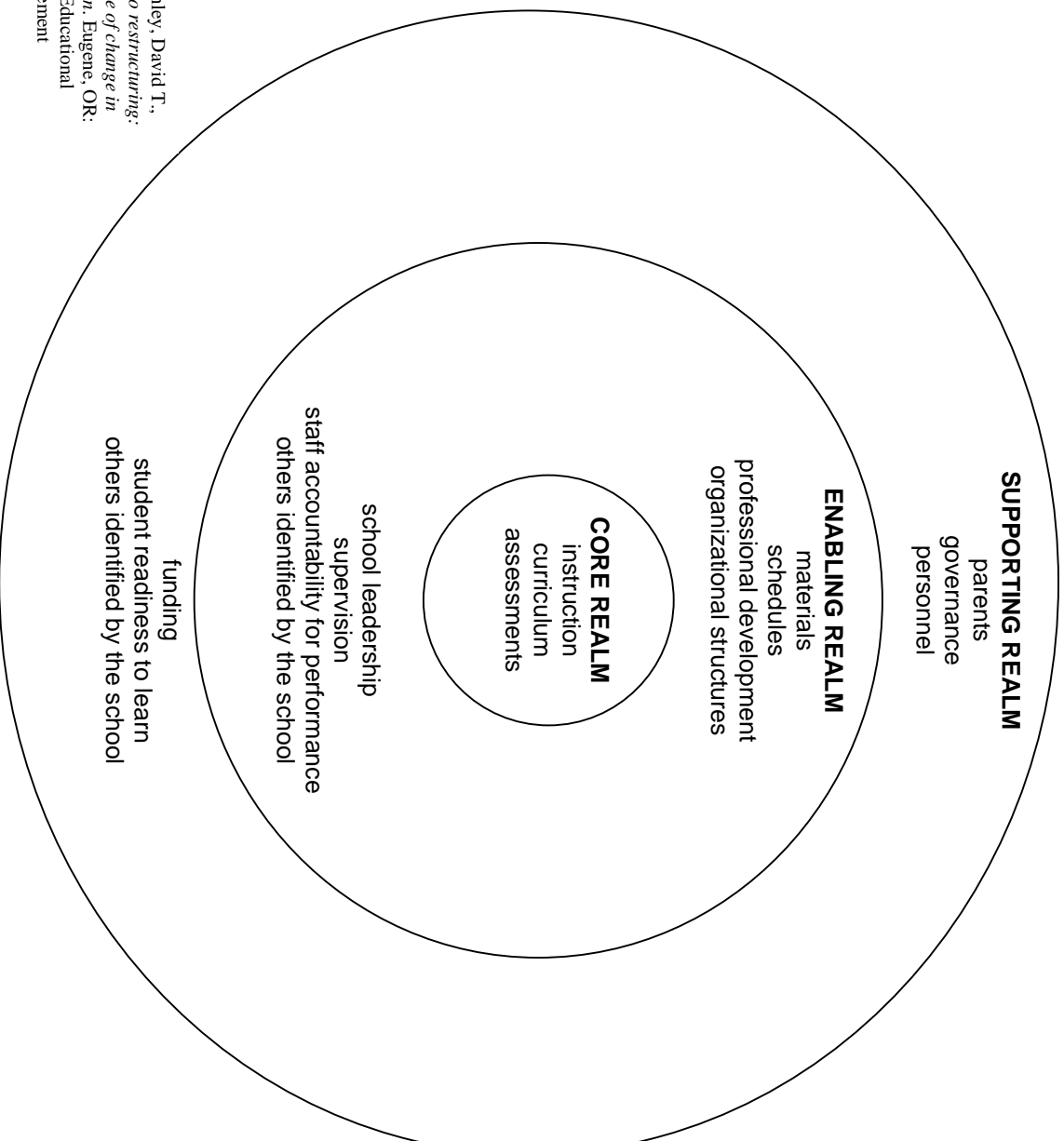
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the content given sufficient coverage in the approved curriculum?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers re-teach material or provide interventions for students who cannot adequately demonstrate the skill or knowledge?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the content taught to all students?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers sufficiently differentiate instruction in order to address the learning needs of all students?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers have and use appropriate materials to teach this skill or knowledge?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do students have adequate opportunities for individualized assistance in class or in extended time?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers have sufficient pedagogical and content knowledge needed to effectively teach the skills and knowledge?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>English language learners:</b> Do teachers effectively shelter instruction for English language learners?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers understand what a demonstration of this skill or knowledge should look like in order to meet the rigor of grade-level expectations set in the State Curriculum Frameworks and MCAS test?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>English language learners:</b> Do teachers understand and use appropriate assessment data to plan and guide instruction for English language learners?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers know and use a variety of strategies for teaching the skill or knowledge?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>English language learners:</b> Are English Language Learners at varying levels of English proficiency and content areas skills placed appropriately?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do teachers assess this specific skill or knowledge?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>English language learners:</b> Do teachers use a standards-based English language development curriculum to plan and deliver instruction for English language learners?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do students receive enough reinforcement of the skill or knowledge over time?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Students with disabilities:</b> Is the content taught to all students with disabilities?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do students have adequate opportunities to ask questions and discuss ideas to clarify and deepen their understanding of this knowledge or skill?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Students with disabilities:</b> Are students with disabilities asked to demonstrate the same level of competence as regular education students on this skill or knowledge?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is sufficient substantive feedback given to students?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Students with disabilities:</b> Are appropriate and effective accommodations for helping students master this skill or knowledge included in students' Individualized Education Plans?</li> </ul>

## Worksheet 4-A: Possible causes of students' lack of beginning reading skills

**Guiding Question: Why haven't students in the targeted group learned the skills and knowledge described in the student learning objectives?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Does the core curriculum provide explicit instruction in the five components of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Is students' progress on the major indicators of early literacy acquisition/reading skills (key indicators - phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency) regularly monitored?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Is the core curriculum taught in a sequenced way with ample review and practice activities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Does the school provide additional time on reading for students who are not making adequate gains toward grade-level reading proficiency?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Are students taught using an evidence based program specific to their identified skill deficits?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Does the school have a system in place where teachers and specialists regularly meet on grade level to: solve problems, look at data on student performance, make instructional decisions (e.g., grouping changes), and establish short-term goals for students?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Does the school provide uninterrupted instruction in reading for an adequate length of time?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Does the school have a sufficient library of decodable text, expository text, and leveled fiction and nonfiction text, and do teachers know how to select from these choices?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Do teachers understand how to structure activities to effectively use a reading block?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adolescent learners:</b> Are struggling readers given additional time during the school day to focus on reading and writing with a trained reading teacher?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Are teachers able to identify within the core curriculum the essential instructional activities that meet the needs of their students?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adolescent learners:</b> Are struggling readers provided with a variety of explicit comprehension strategies for understanding texts across content areas?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Are students receiving flexible, small-group, or individual instruction in the classroom targeted toward remediating skill deficits?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adolescent learners:</b> Do content area teachers have access to ongoing training and support for working with struggling readers?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Is adequate time provided for students in reading connected text at their instructional level?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adolescent learners:</b> Are students asked to read diverse texts at an appropriate reading level?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Are teachers providing students with effective strategies for word identification, as opposed to strategies that encourage guessing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adolescent learners:</b> Do teachers have access to formative and summative assessment data about students' reading skills?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Elementary learners:</b> Are teachers adequately trained in the use of core curriculum and program materials, including diagnostic assessments?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adolescent learners:</b> Are struggling readers provided with frequent opportunities to write?</li> </ul>

## Worksheet 4-B: Dimensions of school improvement



Adapted from: Conley, David T., (1997). *Roadmap to restructuring: Charting the course of change in American education*. Eugene, OR: Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management

**Worksheet 4-C: Causes related to a student learning objective**

**Guiding Question:** Which causes have the greatest impact on student achievement? Which causes do the school and/or district have the most immediate control over? **What evidence do you have to verify your theories about why students lack this knowledge and/or these skills?**

Student group:

Content area:

Student learning objective:

Cause	Impact on student achievement 1 = minimal 2 = some 3 = substantial	School's control 1 = very little 2 = some 3 = a lot	District's control 1 = very little 2 = some 3 = a lot	Evidence

### Worksheet 4-D: Causes related to one content area

**Guiding Question:** Which causes have the greatest impact on student achievement? Which causes do the school and/or district have the most immediate control over? What evidence do you have to verify your theories about why students lack this knowledge and/or these skills?

Student Group:

Content area:

Cause	Impact on student achievement 1 = minimal 2 = some 3 = substantial	School's control 1 = very little 2 = some 3 = a lot	District's control 1 = very little 2 = some 3 = a lot	Evidence

**Worksheet 4-E: Causes related to all content areas**

**Guiding Question: Which causes have the greatest impact on student achievement? Which causes do the school and/or district have the most immediate control over? What evidence do you have to verify your theories about why students lack this knowledge and/or these skills?**

Student group:

(All content areas)

Cause	Impact on student achievement 1 = minimal 2 = some 3 = substantial	School's control 1 = very little 2 = some 3 = a lot	District's control 1 = very little 2 = some 3 = a lot	Evidence