**Fishbone Diagram**

**Purpose:** The fishbone diagram is a visual aid for identifying potential root causes for patterns and trends in student performance.

Once you have examined the data to identify patterns in students’ performance, you will consider why students are performing in a certain way and how educators can help students achieve those goals. Using the fishbone diagram, educators generate hypotheses of root causes—or contributing factors—based on their professional knowledge and expertise related to the curriculum, instruction, and school supports students are receiving.

For example, teachers might observe, based on multiple data sources, that students are having difficulty writing essays that use textual evidence to support arguments. They might hypothesize several reasons for this, such as teachers not providing model or exemplar papers. A completed fishbone can serve as a starting point for brainstorming and discussion about student learning and instructional changes to address students’ needs.

**Directions:** Using the fishbone diagram in the handout, write the student learning challenge at the “head” of the fish. (Recall that the student learning challenge is your conclusion from the data analysis about where students tend to struggle.)

Then label the fishbone graphic with the following factors (or others that you consider important to the student learning challenge you identified):

- Instruction
- Assessment
- Professional development, coaching
- Curriculum
- Student supports and programs
- School supports and structures

Consider each factor in the fishbone graphic individually. Brainstorm some corresponding causes that fit each factor in the fishbone and that might have led to the student learning challenge that the team identified in data analysis. Write those causes down next to the category along the fishbone.

**Modification:** This diagram can also be used in a “second round” to brainstorm possible action steps to address the identified root causes. However, it is important to remember that a good action plan is focused and targeted—this diagram is best used early in the action planning process for generating ideas, rather than trying to do all action steps that are identified.