## **Sample Root Cause Analysis of School Challenges**

**School A**

In School A, an external review revealed that few teachers were using in-class assessments to provide feedback to students and adjust their practice throughout the learning process. Further analysis revealed a few factors that contributed to this:

* The schedule resulted in teachers having course loads of five classes daily and over 150 students daily.
* Teachers were expected to take on administrative or supervisory duties that reduced the amount of time they had available to collaborate and plan for instruction.
* High rates of staff turnover made it difficult to build a strong staff team and get traction with implementing key strategic priorities.

The school decided to shift to a block schedule that reduced the teacher load to three classes and 90 students daily, allowing them to focus more deeply on personalizing instruction and feedback for the students. At the same time the school reconfigured staffing positions to release all teachers from non-instructional duties like hallway supervision, re-allocating that time to focus on instructional planning. The school also launched a number of initiatives to improve teacher retention, which also resulted in greater buy-in to the turnaround plan.

**School B**

School B determined that one significant factor for school-wide low student performance was the lack of a coordinated approach to providing feedback to classroom teachers to inform their practice. The school determined that instructional expectations were not clearly communicated, and were not consistently understood by staff, nor did they have clear and consistent observation protocols or processes. Compounding this challenge was a lack of cohesive assessment practices to promote common understanding about students strengths and needs in the various content areas. As a result of this analysis the school implemented research-based assessment practices, promoted collaborative analysis and reflection of these data, doubled-down on the content instructional frameworks, and implemented a system to ensure all teachers received frequent formal and informal feedback aligned to learning goals and professional practice goals.

**School C**

School C, with high chronic absenteeism, turned to students for insights on why that was a challenge. The school surveyed students identified as having poor attendance, asking questions related to how they get to school, how much sleep they get, how they are treated by their peers and their teachers. Lack of sleep and lack of transportation emerged as the biggest challenges contributing to their poor attendance. As a result the school developed a number of strategies including expanded transportation options, special home rooms, daily touch points for students with specific adults in the school, and strategies for including parents/guardians in the problem-solving.

**School D**

When probing for causation for poor academic performance, School D explored the number of student absences from a class that were related to poor performance in that class. They determined that four class absences per quarter correlated with a D course grade. That number of absences was lower than the threshold in their attendance policies and procedures. As a result they began to flag students for attendance supports and intervention sooner than they had previously been.

**School E**

While root cause protocols are most often used to get at the heart of a problem, then can also help a school identify the practices, policies, and systems that contributed to areas where they are experiencing success. For example, School E noticed that they had made much greater gains with their English learners than with other students at the school. They used the [‘5 Whys’ protocol](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/cp/referenced/5Whys-p24.pdf) to unpack and name all the pieces of work that contributed to those gains. For example, they realized:

* All teachers were provided training on strategies to serve English learners, even if they didn’t have any in their class. The result was that teachers felt better equipped to support English learners throughout the school day. These students felt better supported and more welcome in the school, and therefore took more risks in class
* Teachers used common strategies in all classrooms, making it easier for students to be successful
* Schedules were planned so teachers could collaborate with ESL teachers to continue to refine their strategies and supports for English learners

At the end of this analysis the school realized that these same strategies could be used to provide better support to students with disabilities, which was a student group that as a whole was not seeing academic gains.