



Structured Brainstorming: Fishbone Diagram

A fishbone diagram is a structured approach to brainstorming the cause(s) of a problem. Within the context of Unified Improvement Planning, this strategy can support team brainstorming about explanations for their priority performance challenges.

Materials

- Group writing space (e.g., chart paper, projector and screen, Jamboard)
- Appropriate tools (e.g., markers, sticky notes, computers)

Pre-Work

CLARIFY THE FOCUS OF THE BRAINSTORM

Write one priority performance challenge in the far-right arrow of the diagram. Then, pose one or more questions to help participants focus on brainstorming possible causes of that challenge. Example questions: Why do we have the performance challenges we have identified as a priority? What adult actions help to explain this pattern of performance?

IDENTIFY CATEGORIES TO ORGANIZE IDEAS

The categories give a starting place for brainstorming. Consider using CDE's Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement to help guide this work: (1) Talent Management; (2) Instructional Transformation; (3) Culture and Climate Shift; and (4) Leadership for Rapid Improvement.

SET UP THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

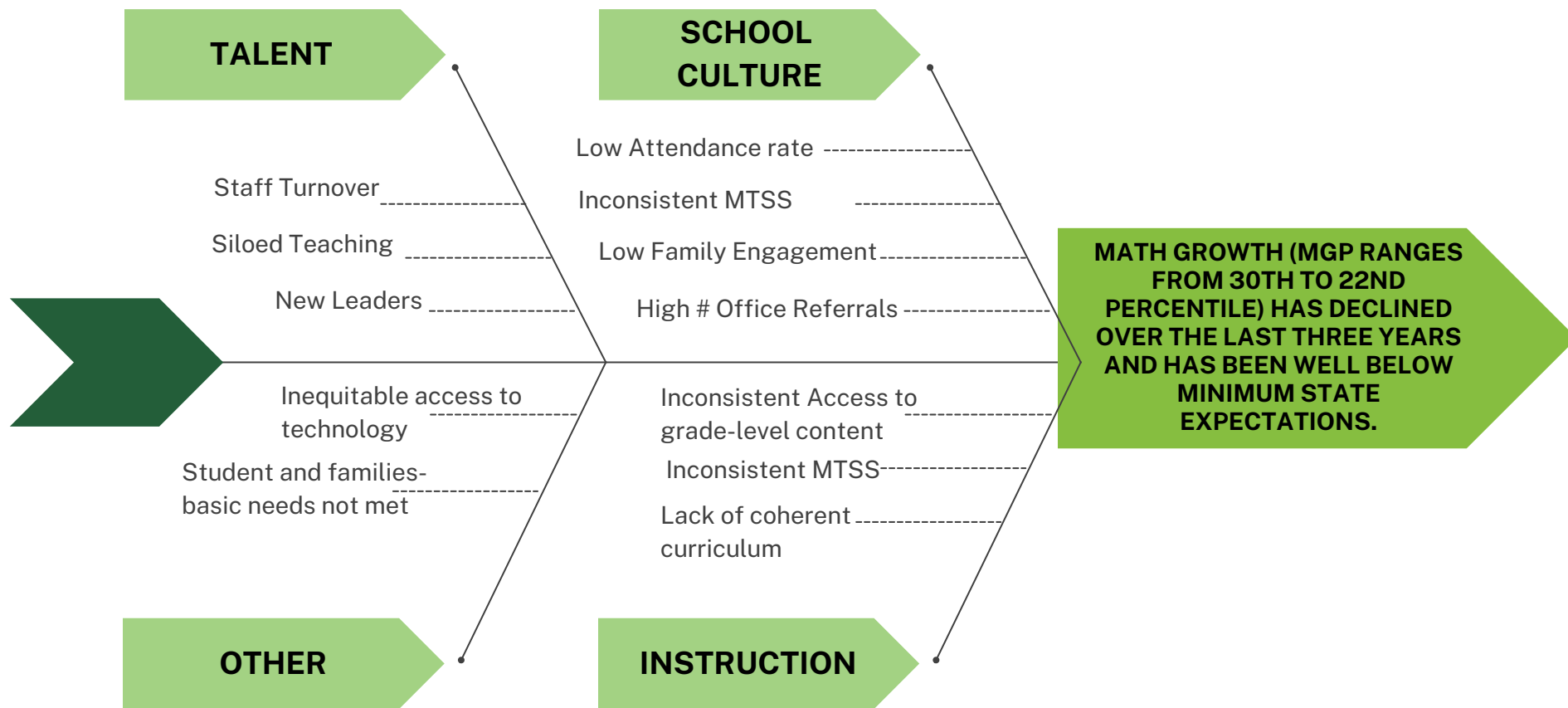
Once categories have been determined, create the fishbone diagram where all brainstorm participants can access and add to it. Each category is added to a branch on the diagram. One branch should be reserved for “other” in order to capture ideas that may not fit into a category.



Protocol

1. REVIEW PROTOCOL AND POSE QUESTION- Preview the process and outcomes with the team. Ensure that all participants understand what to focus on while brainstorming.
2. INDIVIDUAL BRAINSTORMING- Each team member independently captures their ideas and posts them under the relevant category. As this is a brainstorm, do not edit out ideas; that can be done during prioritization (Step 4). Note: an idea may fit in multiple categories; team members can determine whether to include the idea in multiple places on the diagram.
3. WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION AND FURTHER INVESTIGATION- After each team member has placed their ideas within the categories, allow for group discussion. Possible guiding questions to frame this discussion:
 - a. What trends or commonalities are there across the brainstorm?
 - b. Are there ideas that need further development? If so, build another fishbone to dig deeper into each of those ideas.
4. PRIORITIZE- As a group, determine which possible root cause(s) to focus improvement efforts on addressing: As defined by Preuss, a cause is a “root” cause if:
 - a. The problem would not have occurred if the cause had not been present,
 - b. The problem would not reoccur if the cause were corrected or dissolved, and
 - c. Correction or dissolution of the cause would not lead to the same or similar problems.

Sample Fishbone Diagram



Fishbone Diagram Template

