

Digging Deeper: Students with a History of Lower Achievement Questions at the School Level

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Note:

This document specifically addresses the needs of lower achieving students. While many of the examples reference students with IEPs, English Learners, and/or students who are economically disadvantaged, it is important to remember that there are higher achieving students from these same groups of students. See the companion document, "Digging Deeper: Students with a History of Higher Achievement."

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Digging Deeper: Students with a History of Lower Achievement

SYSTEM (District/School) Level Questions

This Digging Deeper Guide focuses on students with a history of lower achievement, including, but not limited to regular and special education students, students with IEPs, English Learners, and students who are economically disadvantaged.

The purpose of this supplemental *Digging Deeper* guide is to provide data teams with specific variables in CIAO (curriculum, instruction, assessment and organization) relative to the needs of students with histories of lower achievement, for the purpose of determining root cause(s) to guide current planning strategies.

This document can be helpful when used in conjunction with the *Digging Deeper into Content Areas* documents, available in Math/Keystone Algebra I, ELA/Keystone Literature, and Science/Keystone Biology. These documents can be accessed by clicking on the Digging Deeper link found on the [PVAAS login page](#).

Effective use of this guide requires collaborative reflection on the variables, and responses to the variables with evidence (rather than a “yes” or “no”). This guide is not a checklist. Rather, it is a listing of issues to explore more deeply, and requires careful selection of where to start and how deeply to probe, discussion about evidence of practice, and honest reflection. The focus and starting point is dependent on the school’s current status and needs. Each question is to be considered and answered with solid evidence.

Note: Each question indicates the related domain(s) from The Framework for Teaching:

PP= Planning and Preparation

CE=Classroom Environment

I= Instruction

PR= Professional Responsibility

Where to Start

It is not necessary to ask all of the questions at one time. Schools may find it more effective to start with a few key questions from each section (Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Organization) to ensure solid, core foundational practices are established in all areas. See the [Appendix](#) (beginning on page 11) for suggestions on which questions may be helpful starting points, especially for schools with a history of lower achievement.

CURRICULUM

*Students with a History of
Lower Achievement*

CURRICULUM



C-1. Do all students with a history of lower achievement have access to challenging curriculum that demands they meet high standards? (PP, I)

C-2. Does the written curriculum include strategies to accelerate the learning outcomes of lower achieving students? (PP)

C-3. Does the curriculum identify materials and resources appropriate to the needs of specific groups of students, e.g. EL, ED, and IEP students? (PP)

C-4. Is the written curriculum for all grade levels accessible to all teachers, including core and supplemental/support teachers? (PP)

C-5. Does the written curriculum provide for vertical views to conduct a skill trace for the purpose of specially designed instruction/remediation/intervention for individual students or groups of students? (PP)

C-6. Is the curriculum culturally responsive in addressing all students' backgrounds and experiences? (PP, CE)

C-7. Does planned curriculum and instruction indicate modifications and accommodations that are appropriate to the content/skills targeted? Are the goals and objectives in student IEPs based on specific academic standards, assessment anchors, and eligible content? (PP, I)

C-8. Does the curriculum address social and emotional learning issues? (PP, CE)

INSTRUCTION

*Students with a History of
Lower Achievement*

INSTRUCTION



I-1. Are all students with a history of lower achievement receiving instruction aligned to the PA Core Standards? (PP, I)

- I-2. Do teachers provide explicit and systematic instruction in the teaching of students who are lower achieving? (I)**
- I-3. Is the use of evidence-based instructional strategies known to be most effective with lower achieving students evident in all classrooms? (I)**
- I-4. Are students appropriately challenged at high levels of cognitive complexity? (I)**
- I-5. Do teachers use multi-sensory instructional strategies to provide instruction that meets the needs of all students? (I)**
- I-6. Is vocabulary instruction prioritized to enhance background knowledge and impact comprehension skills across subjects? (I)**
- I-7. Is the academic and content specific vocabulary used in instruction mirror what is used in core instruction and local and state assessments? (I)**
- I-8. Do teachers use evidence-based instructional strategies for the teaching of vocabulary, focusing on tiered vocabulary research? (I)**
- I-9. Are teachers using flexible student grouping to provide direct instruction, guided, and independent practice on specific learning targets? (PP, I)**
- I-10. Is homework differentiated to provide meaningful and challenging work? (I)**
- I-11. Do teachers use differentiation of content, product and process to address needs of lower achieving students? (PP, I)**
- I-12. Is Universal Design for Learning (UDL) used to design and deliver instruction? (PP, I)**
- I-13. Is personalized learning used to enable students to master a standard set of rigorous competencies while working at their own pace? Are students encouraged to make choices in how they access information and demonstrate their learning? (I)**
- I-14. Do teachers use scaffolding strategies to address the needs of lower achieving students? (I)**
- I-15. Do teachers use task analyses to determine pre-requisite skills needed for students to be successful in a given task/learning target? (PP, I)**
- I-16. Is technology and assistive technology used effectively to address unique needs of specific students? (I)**
- I-17. Are appropriate and evidence-based materials and resources available and used to meet the needs of students receiving intervention/remediation? (I)**
- I-18. Are interventions aligned with the core instructional program and language proficiency levels? (I)**
- I-19. Are students who receive tiered supports provided specific instruction targeted to skill deficits? (I)**

I-20. Do teachers understand language proficiency levels and use appropriate strategies for differing levels (EL students)? (I)

I-21. Does the amount of “specialized instruction” align with individual students’ needs? (PP, I)

a. Examples:

- Students with IEPs receive appropriate amount of specially designed instruction
- EL students receive appropriate amount of language development support (reading, writing, listening, speaking) in the general classroom and in a language instruction educational program (LIEP) provided by the ESL teacher
- Students receiving tiered support (MTSS) receive appropriate time at tiers 2 and 3

I-22. Are students taught strategies for self-advocacy? (I)

I-23. Are teachers incorporating strategies in instruction to address students who have difficulties with executive functioning (e.g. checklists, self-regulating strategies)? (I)

I-24. Are teachers and support staff able to articulate the concept of growth (belief that all students can grow from their starting points), and evidence that belief in their instructional practice by providing equal opportunities and high expectations for all students? (CE, I)

ASSESSMENT



A-1. Are there screening tools in place to identify students at highest risk? Are PVAAS projections used for that purpose and part of the screening/identification process? (I)

A-2. Are diagnostic assessments (e.g., Core Phonics Survey, CDT) used regularly to determine needs of students? (I)

A-3. Is formative assessment used to closely monitor the progress of students who are lower achieving? (I)

- a. Are formal and informal progress monitoring measures used to inform instruction for students receiving tiered supports?
- b. Is there evidence that acquiring English is monitored regularly, using PA Formative ELD Standards?
- c. Is there evidence that students are meeting IEP goals/objectives, achieving incremental steps to proficiency in a specific subject area or language proficiency level through the

use of formal progress monitoring measures such as CBM (curriculum based measurement, including AimsWeb, Easy CBM, DIBELS, WIDA) etc.?

A-4. Do students have choices on how to demonstrate their learning? (I)

A-5. Are school level PVAAS projections analyzed and used to plan at the school level for meeting the needs of groups of students (EL, IEP, ED)? (I)

A-6. Are growth goals (PVAAS) established at the grade/subject level for groups of students who are lower achieving (using the PVAAS Growth of Student Groups report)? (PP, I)

A-7. Is assessment data disaggregated by subgroups and considered in all related school improvement efforts? (I)

A-8. Do school staff use ACCESS data for student placement and adjusting instructional practice (EL)? (I)

A-9. For students receiving supplemental supports, are diagnostic assessments being used to determine areas of student need to inform instruction? (PP, I)

A-10. For students receiving supplemental supports, is there evidence that attained rate of improvement data are being calculated and being compared to typical rates of improvement of peers? (I)

A-11. Are PVAAS projections used to identify individual student's projections to proficiency on upcoming PSSA/Keystone? (I)

A-12. Are individual student PVAAS projections used in conferencing with students and parents relative to course selection, goal setting, career focus, IEP development, transition planning, etc.? (PP, I)

ORGANIZATION

*Students with a History of Lower
Achievement*

ORGANIZATION



O-1. Does the school model a commitment to high expectations for all students, equal opportunities for meeting high academic standards, and culturally responsive practices? (CE, I, PR)

O-2. Does the school master schedule provide for opportunities for specially designed instruction, tiered supports, or course remediation for individual students/groups of students in need? (I)

O-3. Is there a master schedule in place that ensures that students receiving supplemental and/or tiered supports do not miss core instructional time? (CE, I)

O-4. Are supplemental/support services provided tailored to the unique needs of each identified student, e.g., language instruction educational program (LIEP), special education, tiered supports? (I)

O-5. Are teachers provided with professional learning opportunities that enhance their skills in differentiated instruction and UDL (Universal Design for Learning)? (PR)

O-6. Are teachers, coaches, and support staff provided with ongoing professional learning opportunities to enhance their skills to assess student performance, adjust instruction for students, and make decisions about overall student growth? (PR)

O-7. Are teachers provided ongoing support in understanding the needs of students identified for special education and LIEP programming, and students from backgrounds of poverty? (CE, PR)

O-8. Have professional learning opportunities been provided on the PA English Language Development Standards and the WIDA “Can Do” Descriptors that outline appropriate expectations for students as they move through the language acquisition process? Is there a process that illustrates an understanding of the differentiation between language acquisition and learning disability? (PR)

O-9. Do teachers have scheduled time to collaborate with other teachers who have instructional responsibility for the same students? (PR)

O-10. Are opportunities in place for collaboration between core teacher and teachers providing additional supports (e.g., special education teachers, ESL teachers, tiered support intervention teachers, etc.)? (PR)

O-11. Does the school have a system and process in place to collect, analyze and act on data to improve outcomes for all students? (PR)

Example: data teams, assessment map, scheduled meeting dates

O-12. Does professional development for teachers include strategies for tailoring curriculum and instruction to student needs, in ways that accelerate student progress towards state standards and assessments? (PR)

O-13. Do teachers and staff hold all students to the same high expectations and academic standards? Are those expectations clearly communicated to and embraced by parents/community? (CE, I, PR)

O-14. Does the school address chronic absenteeism and dropout rates systematically and strategically, with awareness of the statistics relative to students with a history of lower achievement, including the specific needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and these support needs? (CE, I)

Appendix: Suggested Prioritization of Key Questions

Highest priority variables are suggested as a possible starting point for a digging deeper discussion. It is important to note that the questions listed below are merely suggestions. These are not the only possible questions to use as a starting point, and they are not intended to be a prescribed order to follow. Each LEA must determine their starting point, i.e., which questions/variables to explore. The starting point and the subsequent choices of which variables to explore is dependent on the context of the LEA/school, and what the LEA/school's data indicate.

For the purposes of this document, Digging Deeper for Students with a History of Lower Achievement, the following are offered as suggestions for “where to start.”

Curriculum

Start with:

C-1. Do all students with a history of lower achievement have access to challenging curriculum that demands they meet high standards? (PP, I)

C-4. Is the written curriculum for all grade levels accessible to all teachers, including core and supplemental/support teachers? (PP)

Rationale

These two questions address access to a challenging curriculum by both students and teachers. It is important to determine/assure that all teachers are implementing the challenging written curriculum, and that all students have access to that challenging written curriculum. Once access by students and teachers is confirmed, the next steps are to go deeper to look at specific variables that make a curriculum truly effective with populations of lower achieving students.

Instruction

Start with:

I-1. Are all students with a history of lower achievement receiving instruction aligned to the PA Core Standards? (PP, I)

I-3. Is the use of evidence-based instructional strategies known to be most effective with lower achieving students evident in all classrooms? (I)

I-4. Are students appropriately challenged at high levels of cognitive complexity? (I)

I-8. Do teachers use evidence-based instructional strategies for the teaching of vocabulary, focusing on tiered vocabulary research? (I)

Rationale

These variables represent fundamental practices in the delivery of an effective instructional program, and therefore, represent an effective starting point to “dig deeply” to determine root causes of the data observations and patterns.

Once these key variables are addressed, the following items represent additional questions for probing even further:

I-17. Are appropriate and evidence-based materials and resources available and used to meet the needs of students receiving intervention/remediation? (I)

I-18. Are interventions aligned with the core instructional program and language proficiency levels? (I)

I-21. Does the amount of “specialized instruction” align with individual students’ needs? (PP, I)

a. Examples:

- Students with IEPs receive appropriate amount of specially designed instruction
- EL students receive appropriate amount of language development support (reading, writing, listening, speaking) in the general classroom and in a language instruction educational program (LIEP) provided by the ESL teacher
- Students receiving tiered support (MTSS) receive appropriate amount of time at tiers 2 and 3

Assessment

Start with:

A-1. Are there screening tools in place to identify students at highest risk? Are PVAAS projections used for that purpose and part of the screening/identification process? (I)

A-2. Are diagnostic assessments (e.g., Core Phonics Survey, CDT) used regularly to determine needs of students? (I)

A-3. Is formative assessment used to closely monitor the progress of students who are lower achieving? (I)

- a. Are formal and informal progress monitoring measures used to inform instruction for students receiving tiered supports?
- b. Is there evidence that acquiring English is monitored regularly, using PA Formative ELD Standards?
- c. Is there evidence that students are meeting IEP goals/objectives, achieving incremental steps to proficiency in a specific subject area or language proficiency level through the use of formal progress monitoring measures such as CBM (curriculum based measurement, including AimsWeb, Easy CBM, DIBELS, WIDA) etc.?

Rationale

These three variables represent starting points for discussion about the health of your assessment system within the context of students with a history of lower achievement. These three variables speak to the importance of having system-wide/school-wide assessment tools in place to continually diagnose the needs of students and monitor progress from starting points

and along the way. These three (3) key questions/variables allow for changes in incremental steps in the instructional program for students in a proactive manner.

Organization

Start with:

O-2. Does the school master schedule provide for opportunities for specially designed instruction, tiered supports, or course remediation for individual students/groups of students in need? (I)

O-9. Do teachers have scheduled time to collaborate with other teachers who have instructional responsibility for the same students? (PR)

O-11. Does the school have a system and process in place to collect, analyze and act on data to improve outcomes for all students? (PR)

Example: data teams, assessment map, scheduled meeting dates

O-14. Does the school address chronic absenteeism and dropout rates systematically and strategically, with awareness of the statistics relative to students with a history of lower achievement, including the specific needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and these support needs? (CE, I)

Rationale

While there are many important variables in the organizational structures of a school, these four questions may represent good starting points for discussion. A master schedule that meets the needs of all students is a fundamental building block, along with time and processes to collaborate among educators. Addressing chronic absenteeism issues and dropout rates are common areas of concern in schools with high numbers of students who have a history of lower achievement.

Note: Again, these are merely suggestions for starting points, representing fundamental practices and structures typically needed in order to move forward in enhancing the learning outcomes for all students. Choosing the questions to discuss, and the order in which to discuss them, is an important local decision to arrive at the best plans of action for current students.