



Criteria for Narrowing Explanations

After your planning team has generated explanations of the performance data, and before you begin planning next steps, it's a good idea to check your thinking again. Below are indicators and critical questions to help you get to the best possible explanations.

Step 1: Eliminate explanations that are not within our control

First, your team needs to eliminate explanations that do not lie within the control of the school/district and put these explanations aside. The following questions could help with this process.

- ✓ Over what do we believe we have control (e.g., students completing homework, parents supporting their students, etc.)?
- ✓ What factors are beyond our influence?
- ✓ Would others agree? Are we thinking too broadly, too narrowly, or accurately?

Step 2: Evaluate the quality of your explanations (reach consensus on which ones to keep)

The following criteria can be applied by your team to evaluate the current list of explanations and to whittle your list down to the “best” thinking available across the team. Use the questions below each criteria to help check the thinking of your team. Eliminate explanations that fail to meet these criteria.

Criteria: The explanation derives logically from the data

- ✓ Can we articulate the connection(s) we see between the data and our explanation(s)?
- ✓ Does our explanation reflect a genuine situation, but one that is not related to this data?
- ✓ Can we tell the story of how our explanation could lead to the patterns we see in our data?

Criteria: The explanation is specific enough to be testable

- ✓ Is the language specific enough to be clear to someone who was not part of our discussion?
- ✓ Are there any vague terms?
- ✓ Can we describe how we would test the explanation?

Criteria: The explanation is plausible

- ✓ Does any research support this thinking?
- ✓ If we base any planning steps on this explanation, do we anticipate meaningful results?

Step 3: Clarify the language used in your explanations

Consider the following questions to clarify remaining explanations.

- ✓ Do our explanations make sense to someone else reading or hearing them for the first time?
- ✓ Is our explanation complex enough to help us to better understand a complex situation?
- ✓ What other questions do our explanations lead us to in order to make the picture more complete?
- ✓ Does this explanation identify an area of concern?