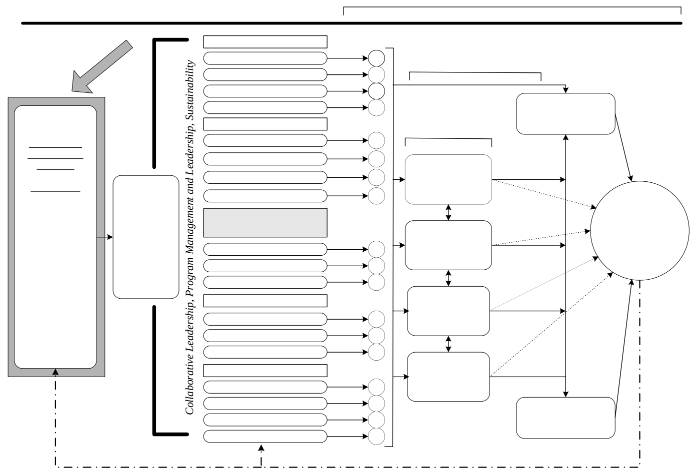
Getting Started: Assessing Conditions and Resources

This chapter is structured to prepare you to do your part in completing valid, useful assessments of local conditions and resources. As the logic model indicates, these assessments comprise the first priority in the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI).



What do we mean by conditions and resources?

ODE justifiably emphasizes the importance of “getting the conditions right” for student learning (see Figure 1.1). In this document, “the conditions” encompass the needs you must address, the problems you must solve and the opportunities available to you—with special reference to unique, important local needs, problems and opportunities.

Resources encompass financial, human and political assets, especially community and family resources that are untapped or under-utilized. One of the model’s most important advantages is that it enables leaders in your school community to tap and utilize formal and informal family and community resources for learning, academic achievement and success in school.

The importance of your school community’s assessments cannot be over-stated. The data you’ll collect will help leaders in your school community pinpoint the local needs you must address, the problems you must solve and untapped and under-utilized resources you have available. These data also will enable you to identify key outcomes you will prioritize, including the progress indicators you’ll use to gauge your progress. Additionally, these data are critical to subsequent partnership and program development.

Unfortunately, these assessments of conditions and resources are typically ignored and neglected. When they are attempted, they are not completed in a thorough, comprehensive manner. We’ve structured this chapter to enable you and other leaders in your school community to initiate this important work.

Obviously, one short chapter cannot prepare you to complete every possible assessment. In this chapter, we emphasize three assessment priorities:

- An assessment of the conditions related to youth, families, schools and the community with an eye toward the barriers these conditions present to optimal learning, academic achievement and healthy development;

- An assessment of potential family, school and community resources that are available to help address the barriers you identify; and

- An analysis of “gaps” between barriers and resources, paying special attention to the resource development strategies your school community can initiate when current resources are scarce.

Using these three priority areas, we then present suggestions and recommendations about how you can craft a conditions and resources assessment process. This assessment process enables you to generate solid planning data necessary for partnership and program development. These data also are centerpieces in your comprehensive evaluation plan.

In short, when your conditions and resources assessment is done carefully and thoroughly, you will build a solid foundation for action in your school and also in your school-community partnerships. Your assessment data will drive your planning, everyday decision-making and evaluation aimed at continuous improvement. Thanks to these assessments, the data they provide and the advantages they yield, your school community will be positioned better to improve school, youth and family outcomes.

Why conduct a conditions and resources assessment?

A conditions and resource assessment is the first step and a common denominator in every theoretically-sound, research-supported planning model (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995; Partnerships for Success, 2002; Chinmann, Imm, & Wandersman, 2004). This kind of conditions and resources assessment serves four basic purposes.

First, the information (henceforth called data) you collect about conditions will help identify and emphasize the uniqueness of your local community. You and other school community leaders thus can be assured that you’re addressing your own needs, problems and opportunities—and that you’re not inheriting those imported from another school community.

Second, the data you collect will guide your deliberations about the types of programs and services you need to engage or develop. The companion resources assessment will help you understand what is available (or not available) in your community to address critical conditions and needs. This information can inform your conversations with potential community partners or support your efforts to develop resources that are found to be lacking in the community.

Third, the data you collect will establish important initial conditions. These initial conditions, in evaluation language, comprise *a baseline*. A baseline is a beginning point - one you can use for multiple purposes as your work proceeds. As you continue to collect assessment data, your baseline data will help you make sense of them. For example, each new assessment and the data it provides can be compared to the baseline you established initially. In this way, you can gauge your progress in meeting needs and solving problems at the same time you determine whether you're achieving important school, youth and family outcomes.

Fourth, you can and should translate your conditions into desired outcomes. For example, if you find that 60 percent of the youth you serve are deficient in basic math skills, you may decide that your desired outcome – what you want to produce through your service or program effort – is to lower that number to 40 percent. Thus, your conditions form an important and essential point for comparison in subsequent evaluation activity.

To summarize, strategic, reliable and valid assessments of conditions and resources are critical components of school community improvement planning. These assessments enable your school community to achieve the four main purposes identified above. You also will find listed below additional reasons to complete strategic conditions and resources assessments.

For example, conditions and resources assessments enable your school community to:

- Identify where (e.g., school, neighborhood, family, etc.) conditions and needs are the most prevalent;
- Identify important groups requiring special attention, groups you will call "target populations;"
- Learn more about established conditions and uncover new conditions;
- Assess whether your school community is ready to respond to key conditions;
- Identify barriers that may be preventing learning and academic achievement and keeping youth and families away from needed programs and services (Chinman, et al., 2004; Ohio Department of Mental Health, 1983); and
- Address several of these barriers simultaneously through the mobilization and leveraging of family and community resources.

Last, but not least, conditions and resources assessments are consistent with the Ohio Department of Education's continuous improvement planning guide (ODE, 2000). In fact, this ODE Guide is useful reading for anyone considering doing a conditions and resources assessment in a school setting. It gives helpful examples of student performance data, of school process and quality learning environment data and community data. The material presented in this section extends ODE's material by looking more broadly at the types of conditions and needs a school must address to effectively impact achievement.

Organizing your needs and resources assessment

All data collection efforts benefit from careful thought, planning and organization. This is especially true in the conditions and resources assessment area. You will find there is an extensive amount of potentially useful data already available.

In other words, you don't have to become a researcher, and you don't have to start from scratch. You have the opportunity to gain access to data that others already have collected and you can use these data to inform your planning process (Bernhardt, 1999).

In fact, by involving key family and community stakeholders, some of which will become lasting partners, you will gain valuable assistance in getting and interpreting data. In return, you will help the stakeholders get access to existing school data and you will help them interpret and use these school data.

Once you gain access to these data, you may be surprised at the breadth and depth of information provided. To prevent "information overload," we strongly suggest that you develop and stick to a structured strategy for determining which data matter most, which data you need to collect yourselves (versus relying on others' efforts) and how you will use these data in your work. Such a plan for data collection, analysis and use will help you maximize the benefits of the recommended conditions and resources assessments, while avoiding problems associated with "collecting data for the sake of collecting data" and not knowing what they mean or how to use them to learn, improve and sustain.

There are a number of general community conditions and resources assessment models available to you (Witkin & Altschud, 1995; Chinmann, et al., 2004; Samuels, Ashan, & Garcia, 1995; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Also, in education, Bernhardt's (1999; 2001) comprehensive model of school improvement relies heavily on a conditions and resources assessment. Remember: The OCCMSI guides you toward both kinds of assessments, including the need to integrate school-wide and community-wide assessments.

The good news is that the best school assessment and community assessment models are wholly compatible. In fact, they identify the same, or similar, steps and procedures. We have summarized basic steps in and components of a conditions and resources assessment and describe them in the following sections.

Step One: Convene a team of people

The OCCMSI framework relies foremost on school and district leadership, as it is designed to build upon continuous improvement processes already in place within schools. It also depends heavily on broad participation and partnerships for its success. The conditions and resources assessment process is an optimal place for schools and districts to begin developing an interest and investment in school improvement by a broad range of stakeholders. As you begin planning your conditions and resources assessment strategy, identify and contact as many people as you can who have an interest in the school and community population you intend to serve. Be inclusive – try to find a broad representation of people who are willing to help such as

- Students
- Parents
- All types of school staff
- Local elected officials
- Public agency leadership
- Civic organizations
- Law enforcement officials
- Clergy and faith community members
- Local media representatives
- University faculty and representatives
- Business leaders
- Others…

Together, these key people and the organizations they represent are called "stakeholders" because each has "a stake in the action." One of the keys to successful school improvement is the ability to recruit and retain the right mix of stakeholders, including the ability to mobilize and leverage the resources they offer. Once "on board," these stakeholders will bring additional data to your school community initiative. Moreover, these other stakeholders will help your team better identify and interpret the conditions and barriers you need to address.

Finally, you will often find the conditions and resources assessment process is both an incentive and a reward for the stakeholders you want and need to recruit. Schools will want and need community data and vice versa. For example, health and social service providers and youth development organization leaders want and need access to data about their clients' and participants' progress and needs in school. You want some of their data; they want some of yours. In short, there's a mutually-beneficial relationship waiting to be developed - one that provides the foundation for sustainable, advantageous partnerships, which will benefit your school community, families and community agencies alike.

Step 2: Develop a plan

Once your team is convened, carefully construct a work plan that details how you will conduct the assessment. The plan should include timelines, key tasks, team member responsibilities and anticipated products with deadlines. It is also important to identify a key person who will serve as the facilitator and/or coordinator of the work, as this single point person will "connect the dots" and balance the process and tasks associated with the development of the plan and its ultimate implementation. As with all good plans, this should be your blueprint for action.

Remember that all team members need to be engaged in the assessment process. In projects such as these, it is easy for some members to be become quickly overwhelmed by the process and marginalized in their roles and responsibilities. You need to be sure that all team members have a viable and contributing role. Meetings need to be planned and managed, and designed to ensure that all voices are heard. Develop a context that encourages trust and provide a forum for equally valuable contributions by all members of the team. Build each member's capacity to make important contributions.

Finally, the team needs to agree on some basic issues so that all members are operating out of a common framework:

- Use the OCCMSI framework as the basis for the conditions and needs assessment;
- Be clear that the information generated will inform the development of key programs and partnerships focused on impacting youth, families, schools and the community in ways that reduce barriers to youth academic and social achievement; and
- Be clear the data collected are available to other community initiatives.

Step Three: Identify data sources and collect data from those sources

This is a large and complicated step with a number of important considerations. First, you need to carefully organize your conceptual approach to the types of data you will collect. You must be clear about what you mean by conditions and how those conditions represent barriers to student achievement. You also need to determine how the data will be collected, by whom, and how you will ensure it is collected regularly and deemed reliable and valid. Further, you need to decide how you want to think about resources – how narrowly or broadly you want to define those resources.

Once you have clarified what you mean by conditions and resources, you then need to identify or develop your data sources. It is imperative that you carefully map the data you think you need to represent conditions and resources to potential sources for that data.

Step Four: Conceptualizing conditions

Remember: Your aim is to "get the conditions right" for student learning and academic achievement. To accomplish this aim, you'll need to think through three related tasks:

- You must be able to identify and describe the right conditions, i.e., what students need to learn, achieve and be successful in school—how would you know them if you saw them?
- You must be able to identify the barriers to the right conditions—how would you know them if you saw them?
- Then you must determine how you will remove and prevent these barriers in order to get the conditions right.

In essence, this is the work of "conceptualizing conditions." It's conceptual, to be sure, but it also involves concrete, practical decision-making aimed at school improvement.

You need to consider carefully two things as you conceptualize conditions. First, you need to be expansive in thinking about various conditions that impact student achievement. Using the school improvement framework as a guide, you need to consider an assessment of conditions that cover academics, overall youth development, parents and families, schools and the community. This expansive thinking is important because academics, overall youth development, family characteristics and the conditions of neighborhoods are related, and all influence learning, academic achievement and success in school.

Second, you need to be sure that the conditions that are the focus of the assessment actually link to student learning, achievement and success in school. Remember: One of the most important advantages of this new model is that it enables educators and others at the school to gain influence and control over what happens outside the school's walls during out-of-school time.

The other important advantage is that this new model helps you and other school community leaders address multiple needs simultaneously—without having to do it all, alone. Your conditions and resources assessment should proceed with these two advantages in mind.

Table 2.1 presents a list of important student, family, school and community conditions that have been empirically linked to student achievement. As noted previously, this list of conditions was distilled from a number of studies that have examined risk and protective factors and assets and social and emotional learning (Anderson-Butcher, in press; Benson, 1997; Dryfoss, 1990; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1997; Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000).

The conditions shown in Table 2.1 are written as positive statements, e.g., youth perform at grade level, schools have positive climates, parents have their basic needs met and the community is stable and supportive of families. These positive statements about conditions become barriers to student achievement when they are phrased as negative statements, e.g., youth do not perform at grade level, schools do not have positive climates, parents do not have their basic needs met and the community is not stable and supportive of families.

Table 2.1: Conditions underlying student achievement

1. Individual and peer behaviors and attitudes	**Data sources**
Youth perform on grade level Youth attend school regularly and on time Youth experience sense of belonging to pro-social institutions or groups (i.e., faith-based organizations, youth organizations, etc) Youth have social competence, self-esteem and self-confidence Youth have effective social and life skills Youth associate with pro-social peer groups Youth have strong relationships with caring adult role models	Primary data sources • Individual student-level data from teachers through a referral process • Psycho-social and/or functional behavioral assessments from school social workers

Youth have values for honesty, integrity, caring and responsibility Youth have a sense of purpose; feel personal control and empowered Youth are easy going, flexible and have a sense of humor Youth feel safe and secure Youth have positive mental and physical health Youth do not have potential or identified learning disabilities Youth have their basic needs met (i.e., food, shelter, etc.) Youth have opportunities for skill-building and learning via participation in pro-social activities (i.e., vocational experiences, extracurricular activities, hobbies, etc.) Youth display pro-social behaviors (i.e., are substance free, abstain from gang involvement and sexual activity, etc.)	• IEP assessments • Student surveys that you design and conduct Secondary data sources • Youth Risk Behavior Survey • PRIDE Survey • PPAUS Survey • EMIS • Other student-level surveys conducted by the school or outside organizations
2. School conditions	**Data sources**
Every student is taught by a qualified teacher Every student has access to services of highly qualified, licensed pupil services personnel Schools offer opportunities for students to be involved in pro-social activities Schools and their staff reinforce student involvement in pro-social activities Schools have positive climates Schools have high expectations for students Teachers and school staff are well trained and supported Schools are safe and conducive to learning Teachers, students and school staff are committed to the school Relationships are strong among teachers and students Schools are bully-free Student turnover is low	District and school-level data • Teacher recruitment, retention and qualifications information • School portfolios including proficiency/achievement data, attendance data, suspension/expulsion data, ESL rates, free and reduced lunch rates, etc.) • PTO/PTA • Effective Schools Survey • School and district records
3. Family	**Data sources**
Families have their basic needs met (i.e., food, shelter, clothing) Parents and/or caregivers are well educated and have English proficiency Parents and/or caregivers have stable housing and employment Family child care needs are met Families and parents and/or caregivers have functional management styles and communication patterns Parents and/or caregivers are engaged in their children's schooling Families are not experiencing grief and/or loss Family members engage in pro-social behaviors presently and in the past Parents and other family members have positive mental health histories Families offer opportunities for children to be involved in pro-social activities Families reinforce children's involvement in pro-social activities	Primary data sources • Family-level data from teachers through a referral process • Family information from psycho-social assessments from school social workers • Family information from various school assessments • Family surveys that you design and conduct Secondary data sources • Community level data from various administrative systems such as child welfare, drug and alcohol addiction, domestic violence, law enforcement, health and vital statistics, etc.

4. Community conditions	Data sources
Residency and housing in the community are relatively stable (low mobility rates) Communities have laws and norms that reinforce pro-social behaviors Communities are substance- and gang-free Communities have accessible, quality services and supports available for families Residents and other stakeholders feel a sense of attachment to the community and experience collective efficacy Communities are stable and supportive of families Communities have informal social support networks embedded within their infrastructures Communities provide opportunities for youth involvement in pro-social activities Communities reinforce youth involvement in pro-social activities Communities see youth as valuable assets Communities have high expectations for youth	Primary data sources • Community surveys that you design and conduct Secondary data sources • Community-level data from planning organizations (e.g., Partnerships for Success, Family and Children First Councils, Health Planning Organizations, Prevention Planning Organizations) • Other community surveys or epidemiological studies

Once again, the special advantage of the OCCMSI is that it provides educators with influence and control over the extra-school factors that influence and determine learning and academic achievement. Your conditions and resources assessments are tools for the realization of this important goal. And, as indicated above, there is a wealth of research that you can access (in part through this guide) to focus and facilitate your school improvement planning.

Step Five: Conceptualizing resources and identifying stakeholders and potential partners

The resource assessment process will produce information about family, school and community resources for learning, academic achievement and success in school. You will need to resist the temptation to focus only on the usual partners (stakeholders) and the resources they provide. Remember, one of the main benefits of this new model is the net new resources it provides to your school community, starting with those resources that are under-utilized or untapped altogether. That is why a resource assessment is so vital to your work.

To reiterate, your main priority is mobilizing and leveraging school, family and community resources to address specific barriers to learning, academic achievement and success in school. Your aim is to get the conditions right through strategic resource development, and this aim should guide your assessments.

As you conduct your assessments, we also urge you to think expansively about potential resources. Too often people doing these assessments limit their thinking about what constitutes a resource. The usual trap is to focus on the traditional public sector service providers – mental health services, substance and alcohol addiction services and family services – as partners. Some assessments extend the resource pool to include faith and private sector services. We want you to think even more expansively by considering virtually any individual, family, school or community entity as a resource for the students and families you serve. For example, businesses and corporations, colleges and universities and youth development organizations offer powerful resources, many of which are under-utilized and untapped.

We have embraced the community-building philosophy of Kretzmann and McKinght (1993). They make two important suggestions. First, look for strengths and opportunities, especially in places where it is customary to see only problems and deficits. Second, develop strategies aimed at finding and mobilizing all of a community's resources and blending them into a coherent, cohesive improvement strategy.

Table 2.2 presents a way you might organize your approach to a resource assessment. This organization helps you identify many types of resources in your community and the various services they make available for your students and families. (Please note that the list you create will be much more extensive than that shown in the example. If you really think expansively, communities have a tremendous variety of possible resources for you to approach as partners).

Table 2.2: Resource categories
Individuals, parents, entire families and other local resident leaders
Youth- and family-serving neighborhood organizations
Colleges, universities and adult education organizations
Faith-based organizations
Social and health service agencies
Businesses and corporations

Each of the above entities offers resources, some under-utilized and some untapped, that can be mobilized and leveraged to improve learning, academic achievement, healthy development and success in school. You will find relevant details in the chapters that follow.

Step Six: Gaining access to and collecting primary and secondary data

Once you have decided how you want to approach conditions and resources, you then need to develop a data collection strategy that gets you the best information in a format you can use to plan.

Some of the most important data you want and need are already collected. These data are called secondary data because they are "second hand" (you did not collect them). Your job is to access these data, and then you will need to interpret and use them.

However, in some cases, you will find gaps in the data. When these gaps are present, you will need to collect your own data, securing help from others as needed. When you collect your own data, you will be gaining primary data.

Your best data strategy will be a combination of primary and secondary sources. In other words, you will want and need to rely on the efforts of others in as many instances as possible. At the same time, others often do not share your interests and priorities, and this is why you will often need to collect your own (primary) data.

Primary data on the conditions

You can obtain information directly from students, parents, school staff and community members in a variety of ways. Samuels, et. al. (1995) have identified three methods for gathering primary data, and they have listed the advantages of each. These methods and advantages are listed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Primary information-gathering strategies

Strategy	Definition	Advantages
Focus groups	Series of public meetings to solicit opinions, anecdotes, experiences and impressions from community residents	• Are relatively easy to arrange • Can be more efficient than other needs-assessment methods • Build community identity by initiating discussion on community issues • Develop community consensus through priority setting
Key informant interviews	Interviews with public official, administrator or staff member of health or welfare organization, health care provider, etc.	• Allow for detailed responses to questions • Require minimal expenditure of resources • Lend focus on specific issues to needs assessment effort • Allow for clarification of questions and answers • Ensure high response rate • May establish communication lines among human service agencies represented
Community surveys	Formal, systematic surveys of defined populations in specified geographical areas to gather information on residents' health, social well-being and pattern of service utilization	• Provide anonymity to respondents • Provide up-to-date data • Have considerable design flexibility • Can provide data on individuals with unmet needs and barriers preventing their access to services • Can be broadly and inexpensively distributed by mail

It is important that you understand each of these methods. Table 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 therefore provide further information about each, documenting the steps necessary when planning for using each type of data collection method.

We begin with focus groups. Focus groups have become a popular method for collecting data directly from targeted groups. They are relatively easy to organize and provide an opportunity to explore perceptions in some depth.

Key informant interviews tap the opinions and knowledge of people who are good sources of information about conditions and barriers. Individuals from local social service agencies, schools, planning agencies and local government often have detailed experience with various conditions and barriers that can help frame responses.

Table 2.4: Planning for a focus group

Prepare for the session
- Identify the major objectives of the meeting
- Carefully develop five or six questions (see next step)
- Plan your session
- Call potential members to invite them to the meeting

Develop questions
- Develop five or six questions
- Focus questions on conditions and barriers
- Remember that focus groups are basically multiple interviews

Plan the session
- Schedule – focus groups are typically one-and-a-half hours long
- Plan for comfort and refreshments
- Set up ground rules
- Develop an agenda
- Plan for recording the dialogue

Facilitate the session
- Introductions
- Explain purpose
- Carry out the agenda
- Ensure even participation
- Close the session with gratitude

Analyze and summarize
- Listen to tapes – review notes
- Summarize major findings – conclusions
- Provide feedback to group members, if promised

Table 2.5: Planning for a key informant interview
Contact key informant ▪ Explain the purpose of the interview ▪ Explain how information will be used ▪ Be sensitive to busy schedules and time constraints ▪ Schedule a time to meet Ensure reliability and validity ▪ Field test your questions ▪ If you use more than one interviewer, ensure they ask the same questions in the same way Conduct the interview ▪ Stay within time limits ▪ Follow script and procedure carefully ▪ Allow for broader discussion, if warranted ▪ Keep careful notes – record discussion, if possible Analyze and summarize ▪ Listen to tape – review notes ▪ Summarize major findings – conclusions ▪ Provide feedback to key informant, if promised

Community surveys provide the most extensive view of conditions and barriers from the perspectives of people who live in the community. Done correctly, results from a community survey can be disaggregated so the views of sub-groups or targeted groups are revealed.

Ideally, you will use all three methods - focus groups, key informant interviews and community surveys - in one way or another to collect conditions data. Such a strategy will allow you to capitalize on the combined strengths of the methods and would minimize the bias and short-comings of each.

For example, you might use a series of focus groups to obtain information about conditions and barriers from groups you especially want to understand (e.g., diverse cultural or racial perspectives). You could use a series of key informant interviews to tap the perceptions of key professionals who have an intimate understanding of both general conditions that affect youth and families and more specific conditions that are particularly an issue for sub-groups. Finally, your community survey would be designed to assess the wider views of the community residents about important conditions and barriers that affect them and their neighbors.

Table 2.6: Planning for a community survey
Decide what information you want to obtain through the survey ▪ Conditions and barriers ▪ Respondent demographics for analyzing sub-groups ▪ Attitude questions about schools, education, parent responsibilities, etc. ▪ Knowledge about the community – problems, issues, resources, etc. Choose a survey method ▪ Mail survey ▪ Telephone interview ▪ Face-to-face interviews ▪ Drop-off survey Select a sample ▪ Determine sample size ▪ Develop a sampling strategy – random or purposive ▪ Obtain rosters, lists or records from which you can sample Develop instruments ▪ Write questions that represent information needed ▪ Decide on question structure – true-false, Likert scale-type, open-ended, etc. ▪ Design and construct instrument and pilot – revise if necessary Conduct the survey, as designed ▪ Put system in place to ensure good returns ▪ Develop incentives to participate (if need be) ▪ Construct instrument and pilot – revise if necessary Analyze and summarize ▪ Develop and conduct analysis plan and procedures ▪ Summarize major findings – conclusions ▪ Develop reports

Collecting secondary data on the conditions

Most communities collect, manage and analyze an extensive array data that can inform your conditions assessment. These data are generally not as “flexible” as your primary data; in other words, they are usually collected and reported for specific purposes that may or may not fit your needs. Often, however, secondary data provide important insights into the prevalence of conditions and barriers and how those conditions and barriers are distributed in the community. When coupled with your primary data, stable patterns of conditions will begin to appear.

Potential sources for secondary data are listed in Table 2.7. This list is a slightly modified version of a list developed by Samuels, et. al. (1995).

Table 2.7: Potential secondary data sources

Source	Description
Public health	The public health system is charged with maintaining vital statistics – birth rates, death rates, birth weights, infant mortality, etc. The health department also collects and reports on morbidity and mortality information for special populations. These data are reported in aggregate form and may be analyzed by small area.
Public safety	Local police and fire departments and 911 lines keep information on the incidences of crime and crisis. These entities sometimes map this data to identify patterns of troubled areas. These agencies also may have building inspection data that can provide useful information on housing and the age and safety of local facilities.
Economic development/ Chambers of Commerce	The local department of economic development and/or Chamber of Commerce may have a plethora of "conditions" data. Since one of their primary functions is to market the local community to outside businesses, they are a useful source for positive indicators of community well-being. Working through the Chamber of Commerce may open up large amounts of privately collected data that is currently used by banks, insurance companies, marketing firms and other local businesses.
Religious institutions	The potential impact of religious institutions on their communities is enormous. Not only are they a resource for volunteers, monetary assistance and community meeting space, but their spiritual and philosophical beliefs often coincide with the beliefs espoused by the providers of support to children and families. Religious institutions are a valuable resource as a partner in community initiatives or perhaps as a provider of services themselves. Many are already a provider of services and may have useful data to contribute.
State and local planning departments	Planning departments have access to an abundance of census information on the number of children (organized into age categories), composition of families (listed by head-of-household), poverty status of families and children, employment status of adults, housing conditions (stock and value), adult educational attainment, earnings, family structure and ethnicity patterns in the community. This information is available in table form, organized by block, block group, census tract, as well as city and county-wide aggregates.
Schools	Local schools districts keep and collect data about student academic and school behaviors, attendance, discipline, suspensions and expulsions, and proficiency and achievement tests, etc.
Service providers	In every community, nonprofit organizations provide an array of services to families. Many of these service providers already possess an understanding of the challenges and concerns facing families of youth. Further, many maintain administrative information systems that collect and report on various characteristics of people served (Children's Services, Job and Family Services, Mental Health, Alcohol and Substance Abuse, etc.)
Other sources	State and community organizations may collect data concerning children and family well-being that could be included in the conditions assessment. Planning bodies, task forces and agencies' strategic planning units often collect data either periodically or to inform specific decisions. Additionally, organizations such as the local United Way and the state Kids Count data collector compile detailed, community specific data.

You can see from this list the amount of secondary information available to you is staggering. In fact, the primary challenge in collecting and analyzing secondary data is to decide what is important and to focus your effort on getting those data. That task is made easier by your team composition.

Linking primary and secondary data

We have linked both primary and secondary data collection strategies to the various categories of conditions underlying student achievement in Table 2.1. For example, in the individual and peer behavior and attitude category there are both primary and secondary sources available to you. For primary data, you may choose to conduct a student survey of your own design that measures various student-level conditions, or, instead, you may access secondary data through a survey administered by another organization such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. If an alternative data source has already measured and reported conditions of interest to you, it is certainly more efficient to use that secondary source.

For each area – youth, family, school and community – we provide suggestions about data sources. These suggestions, however, are not meant to be exhaustive. As you consider your data collection strategy, think creatively – you may find other sources that are viable and helpful.

Collecting primary and secondary data for the resources assessments

Data sources for your resource inventory can be quite diverse. There is seldom a single organization or entity that has the responsibility to collect, manage and make available all the potential resources you might consider.

Resource and referral agencies come the closest to having that responsibility and should be your beginning place in the resource assessment. Local trade organizations, professional associations and clubs – e.g., church associations, hospital associations, unions, specialized clubs, etc. – also can be helpful in locating resources. Local planning and coordinating organizations such as the Family and Children First Council and Partnerships for Success also should have rosters of potential resources, especially resources from the public agency sector. Finally, be clever in developing resources. Think expansively and consider any “gift” that an individual, family or organization might have to offer as a legitimate potential contribution to the success of the youth and families you serve.

For each partner or stakeholder you identify, be sure to get specific information about what each has to offer and under what circumstances these services or programs will get offered.

Samuels, et. al. (1995) suggest the following information is important to have about a resource (these questions are typically fit better for a formal service provider, but can be modified slightly for any potential resource):

- Whom (broken down by gender, race and age) do they serve?
- What services do they provide?
- How many youth (and families) do they serve?
- When (which hours and days) do they provide services?
- At what site(s) do they provide services?
- What geographic areas do they serve?
- What is the composition of the staff (in terms of gender, race and training and education)?
- What are eligibility requirements for services?
- What is the cost of services for those served?
- What is the provider’s maximum capacity?

In the end, two questions should guide this process:

1. Do the resources offered by a potential stakeholder (partner) promise to improve learning, academic achievement, healthy development and success in school?

2. What data do we need to mobilize and leverage these resources in support of school improvement?

Step Seven: Assessing matches and gaps

Your step in this “getting started process” is to determine if there are gaps between the conditions and the possible resources available to address those conditions. Matching these two areas to make sure there are no gaps is not an exact science. As you work through the entire process you will find yourself re-examining conditions and discovering new resources. This is especially true as you conduct the process over time; that is, conditions and resources may shift or change periodically. The essential point to keep in mind is that you must make sure the most prevalent conditions faced by youth and their families are addressed by solid partnerships and responsive programs and services.

Table 2.8 presents an example of the process of matching resources to conditions. The conditions assessment in this example suggested that the youth in school had mathematics and reading deficits, limited adult role models, some mental health issues and poor connections to the community and needed general youth development. The school identified a set of individual, faith-based, private sector, public sector and other resources in the community that had an interest in the youth served, were available, and were willing to establish a partnership with the school. In this case, there were not any gaps in resources available in the community to help in the program.

Table 2.8: Matching conditions and resources

Resource	Service provided	Available	Willing to partner
Individual or family			
1. Jennifer Jones	Mentoring	Yes	Yes
2. The Smith family	Reading tutoring	Yes	Maybe
3. Kim Bean	Quilting: applied mathematics	Yes	Yes
Faith-based			
1. Rev. Boone	Mentoring, counseling	Yes	Yes
2. United Baptist Church	Field trips	Yes	Yes
3. UCC Women's Club	Mentoring	Yes	Yes
Private sector			
1. George's Chevrolet	Transportation	Yes	Yes
2. Kroger	Making sense of prices	Yes	Yes
3. CVS	Pregnancy prevention	Yes	Yes
Public sector			
1. Mental Health	Depression counseling	Yes	Yes
2. Substance and Alcohol	Prevention	Yes	Yes
3. Family Services	Family counseling	Yes	Yes
4. Directions for Youth	Youth development	Yes	Yes
Other			
1. Kiwanis	Field trips, mentoring	Yes	Yes
2. Chamber of Commerce	Reading assistance	Yes	Yes
3. Harley Club of America	Mentoring	Yes	Yes

Finally, your gap analysis may produce information helpful to community planning and organizing organizations. You may expect to make at least five possible discoveries in this gap analysis:

1. There is just the right match between the conditions and needs of schools, youth, families (i.e., the optimal scenario);

2. There is just the right match between the conditions and needs of schools, youth and families and community resources available to meet those needs; the main problem is they are not connected in a coherent, effective and systematic way;

3. There are not enough of the right kinds of programs and services to meet school, youth and family conditions;

4. There are enough programs and services; the main problem is they are fragmented and inefficiently and ineffectively duplicative;

5. There are too many programs and services available in relation to actual use; the main problem is in getting people in need to start using the available programs and services; and/or

6. The available programs and services are not linked systematically and effectively to schools and, more specifically, to experiences in classrooms.

The second discovery – there are service deficits – identifies a key gap. This gap should drive your school community toward mobilizing and developing resources in support of adequate programs and services. This discovery may prompt the difficult discussion about how to re-deploy resources or actually cut back on a particular program or service.

The third discovery indicates the need to convene community providers of programs and services and educators. They need to reach consensus on program planning, linkages and referral mechanisms, addressing the gaps and preventing fragmentation, duplication and unnecessary competition.

The fourth discovery requires leaders in the school community to get people in need into programs and services. After-school programs provide a prime example (as indicated in the youth development section of this guide). Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of youth have needs for these programs, but they can't or don't access them. Meanwhile, the programs' futures are imperiled because they do not have enough participants. This is a huge, important gap that needs to be addressed. You will no doubt find others in your school community.

Finally, the fifth discovery will focus your attention on a critical gap – namely, the mechanisms and processes whereby family and community resources are connected to the school and especially how they improve the essence of the school-life in classrooms. This discovery requires attention to resources in support of intermediaries and connective mechanisms that bring together educators (and their resources) with both families and community leaders (and their resources). These mutually beneficial resource exchanges among schools, families and communities are a centerpiece in Ohio's new school improvement model.

Final thoughts

As the preceding discussion indicates, assessments of conditions and resources are vital to school improvement. These assessments identify needs and problems – conditions – that give rise to barriers to learning, academic achievement and success in school. The resource assessments identify people and organizations – stakeholders and potential partners – that can help your school community with two related tasks. These stakeholders and partners enable the identification of gaps, including opportunities to close and bridge them, and also offer resources that can remove and prevent these barriers to learning.

The data provided by these assessments are vital to your school community. They are also important to the community and family stakeholders you will want and need to recruit, including some who will become formal, lasting partners. The good news is that much of the data you want and need already have been collected; they are waiting for you to access them. The same can be said of school-specific data you have; your community and family stakeholders want and need access to them.

In brief, both schools and their family-community stakeholders are able to benefit through the assessment process and the data they yield. The conditions and resource assessments thus set improved program and service designs and lasting, effective school-family-community partnerships. They enable your school community to get strategic about which local conditions you need to emphasize and how your local solutions get crafted in relation to these conditions.

In this fundamental sense, the Ohio Community Collaboration Model is merely a guide and not a “cookie cutter improvement model” that force fits problems and solutions on your school community. Rather, this improvement model guides your school community toward the identification of conditions and gaps and, subsequently, the mobilization and leveraging of family and community resources needed to get the conditions right for learning, academic achievement and success in school. With this approach, districts will vary, and so will some schools within the same district. In this approach, one size fits few.

Conditions and resource assessments are vital to the effectiveness of this new improvement model because they identify and accentuate *local* conditions, resources and solutions. These data pave the way for the development of important baselines against which you can gauge your progress. They also help you identify the outcomes you want and need for your school, families, youth and community agencies.

We close with two suggestions. First, figure out how you can make these conditions and resource assessments a regular part of how you do your school improvement business. For example, embed these assessments in your evaluation planning and in your continuous improvement planning. (We’ll return to this point in the evaluation section of this guide.)

Second, we urge you not to make the conditions and resources assessment too cumbersome or unwieldy. Set realistic goals for the initial effort with the expectation that you will revisit conditions and resources on a regular basis and will make changes based on new data, if need be. For example, while it appears in our school improvement framework (refer again to Figure 1.3) that conditions and resources assessment happens once and starts the design process, we would like to emphasize the point that both student and family conditions, and school and community resources are dynamic. Therefore, each should be monitored periodically to increase the chance of a good match, addressing barriers to student learning, academic achievement and success in school.

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