



## Core Feature 3: Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping

**Ideally, when we feel a need, we recognize it and build the resources to address it. But in our connected world, we know it takes a focused effort to express what we want, compare it to what we have and work to bridge the gaps. Over time, we have developed processes to do just that. Needs assessments and resource maps show us what to consider and where to look. They help us ensure that the voices of the people who need services are heard and included in our planning. They direct us to identify where current investments are operating and how they may be drawn into our shared priorities.**

Needs assessment and resource maps can be inclusive processes that build the connections that will support common goals and shared work. Many agencies and organizations undertake these processes. The challenge ahead is to develop the inclusive practices that help us know the full scope of needs and the array of resources to collectively fill the gaps.

In co-creating this Dialogue Guide on needs assessment and resource mapping, we first look at the cross-sector agreements among national experts. Then we explore those issues with decision-makers, practitioners, and families at state, local and organizational levels. While there is a broad agreement, in co-creating this Dialogue Guide the array of stakeholders identified the issues that are embedded in these common concerns. Consider how

you may use these Dialogue Starters in your setting or in your organization. Collectively, we have a role in bringing attention to the need for comprehensive systems of school-based mental health.

The source document, [\*Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field\*](#), summarizes the expert panel conversations on needs assessment and resource mapping by coming to the following critical agreements:

- Conducting a needs assessment offers a systematic process for identifying programmatic and systemic needs and helps staff determine priorities.
- A school mental health needs assessment, which could include student mental health and school climate surveys, informs decisions about school mental health planning, implementation and quality improvement.
- Resource mapping offers schools and districts a comprehensive view of school and community mental health services and resources available to students and families.
- Having a systematic process that helps individuals better understand specific details

about the types of services offered, and how and when they can be accessed, can improve student follow-through with services and coordination of care.

- Together, needs assessment and resource mapping highlight strengths and gaps in the school mental health system and can inform prioritization of goals and action planning.

The conversation among stakeholders offered a practice-based view and focused on five themes:

- Authentic engagement of families and youth in the needs assessment and resource mapping processes
- Mapping as a living document
- Sharing power in decision-making
- Recognizing common purposes in discrete initiatives
- Inclusive participation in COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding

This Dialogue Guide offers *Reaction Questions* and *Application Questions* from which you can choose Dialogue Starters that will allow you to take these conversations into your work.

## Resources

Resources to inform this content are available at:

- [School Mental Health Quality Guide Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping](#)
- [Assessing Social Influencers of Health and Education](#)
- [Dialogue Guide Response Strategies](#)

# Practice Issue 1

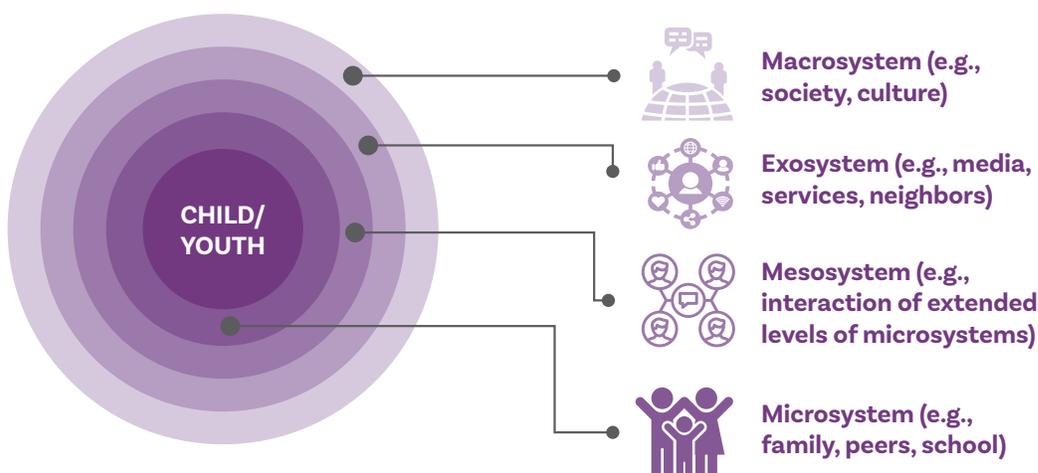
## Authentic Engagement of Families and Youth in the Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping Processes

### Reaction Questions:

1. Why is authentic participation of families and youth important?
  - In terms of programs and service?
  - In terms of trust and engagement?
2. What do you look for (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in assessing whether participation is authentic?
3. Families often talk about “token participation.”
  - What would token participation look like in a needs assessment and resource mapping process?
  - In what ways should families/youth participate in the needs assessment?
4. Consider the Ecological Systems Model pictured in [\*Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field\*](#) (p. 17) and presented here. How does the visual offer help to envision a Comprehensive School Mental Health system?

Focus on each circle. Using the model, talk about how each circle is connected to the other circles.

**Figure 1. Ecological Systems Model**



### Application Questions:

1. Using the *Give and Get* response strategy, what does a wider engagement of families and youth give to a needs assessment process? What benefits do families and youth get from acting in a more central role?
2. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), rate the challenge in actively engaging families and youth as equal partners in needs assessment and mapping. Explain the insights behind your rating.
3. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*, what is above the surface in the challenge to engage marginalized groups and families who have been underserved? What is below the surface?
4. Consider the Ecological Systems Model. As a child develops, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex. Choose one of the environments. Describe how promotion, prevention and intervention strategies are implemented in this environment.

## Practice Issue 2

### Mapping as a Living Document

#### Reaction Questions:

1. What does it mean to create a “living document?”
2. If a map of services is “living,” how would it change over time?
3. Why is a living document important:
  - In terms of programs and services?
  - In terms of trust and relationships?
4. What would you look for (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) to determine whether services reflect changing needs?

#### Application Questions:

1. Think about your school’s mental health services. What works? How do you know? What doesn’t work? How do you know?
2. The Schools Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) suggests reviewing data that schools regularly collect including office referrals, expulsion and suspension rates, attendance and truancy records, nursing and counselor logs, crisis referrals, emergency petitions, school climate and behavioral surveys, minor incident reports, homework completion rates, homelessness rates and more. Select one of these data sources. From your perspective:
  - How should data inform decisions about needs issues and services?
  - How should data help schools identify root causes?

3. Just as schools have important data sources available to them, so do communities. What community data should be important to schools?
4. The literature on modern systems often talks about the need for systems to be “nimble.”
  - In your view, what does a nimble system look like?
  - What keeps systems from being more nimble?

# Practice Issue 3

## Sharing Power in Decision-Making

### Reaction Questions:

1. Important work related to mental health is carried out in many places, including schools. Using the SAMHSA infographic, choose one area identified.
  - How does this information relate to school mental health?
  - What role could a community provider addressing this issue play in planning a Comprehensive School Mental Health system?
2. From your perspective, is there a difference between authentic engagement and power sharing? If so, describe the difference.
3. In your view, what would it look like for a comprehensive school mental health system to share decision-making:
  - With communitywide efforts?
  - With other public agencies and private providers?
  - With family advocates?
4. In your experience, is it difficult for school mental health systems to share decision-making? Why or why not?

### Application Questions:

1. Using the *Four Quadrants* response strategy, place the likelihood that school mental health systems will share decision-making:
  - With communitywide efforts
  - With other public agencies
  - With private providers
  - With families and youth

2. Describe the thinking that influenced your placement.
3. Using the *Give and Get* response strategy, what does a school mental health system give in sharing decision-making? What do they get?
4. Using the *If You* response strategy, choose a role of influence in a school mental health system.
  - Which role did you choose and why?
  - In that role, what would be your priorities for sharing decision-making power?
  - What are your concerns?
5. When a system is committed to sharing decision-making, how does it relate to dissenters?

## Practice Issue 4

### Recognizing Common Purposes in Discrete Initiatives

#### Reaction Questions:

1. In your experience, do people doing related work have working relationships?
  - Do school and agency leaders work together regularly?
  - Are community providers well known in schools?
  - From your perspective, how would you describe the working relationships between school and community providers?
2. How can families help systems see which services should be better connected?
3. In your view, what keeps systems from recognizing efforts that should be working together in serving families and youth?

#### Application Questions:

1. In your experience, are system boundaries only between schools and agencies?
  - Are there boundaries across programs within school settings?
  - Are there boundaries within agency and provider networks?
  - What does it take to “span boundaries”?
2. Researchers describe how different vocabulary and funding streams contribute to our challenges seeing common work.
  - How can a resource mapping activity help us identify and find related initiatives?
  - What stands in the way of working across related initiatives?

# Practice Issue 5

## Inclusive Participation in COVID-19 Recovery and Rebuilding

### Reaction Questions:

1. Given the role that families have played over the past year, what do they uniquely add to our ability to define needs going forward?
2. In your view, what roles might families and youth expect to play in needs assessment and mapping?
3. In your view, will families and youth be content to accept what schools and agencies develop in recovery plans?
4. How might system leaders prepare to engage families and youth in new roles?

### Application Questions:

1. Is recovery enough?
  - Is getting back to “normal” sufficient?
  - What is the message in the phrase “building back better”?
2. What gaps has the pandemic revealed?
  - In connectedness between systems and individuals?
  - In relationships and trust?
  - In responsiveness and accountability?
3. How can families and youth uniquely help close these gaps?
4. Given the short timeline to plan for using recovery funding, who has important insights to share? Who has the legitimacy and trust to convene inclusive partners?