

Root Cause Analysis (RCA): Finding the “Why”

What is an RCA?	An RCA is a problem-solving method that identifies the underlying reasons of an issue, rather than treating only the symptoms of the problem.		
What are common educational issues addressed through an RCA?	An RCA is commonly used to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none">» disproportionality in discipline, student placement, or special education eligibility;» policy and procedure fidelity;» academic performance; and/or» high rates of discipline referrals or suspensions.		
What are the 6 steps of an RCA?			
Phase		Focus	Considerations
1	Define the problem.	What is the problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Be as specific as possible.» Use data to define the problem.
2	Collect the data.	When and where is this happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Collect quantitative data (e.g., risk ratios).» Collect qualitative data (e.g., staff interviews).
3	Identify possible cause(s).	What are contributing factors to the problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Is it a training issue?» Is it a policy issue?» Is it a resource issue?
4	Find the root cause(s).	What patterns are apparent across data sources, and what are possible effects of these patterns?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Look at the patterns that have been identified across data sources and common causes.
5	Develop a plan.	What plans can we develop to address the root, rather than the symptoms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Revise procedures.» Provide training.» Monitor implementation.
6	Evaluate the plan.	What does the data indicate regarding the effectiveness of the plan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Maintain data on goals and programming.



What are the outcomes when using an RCA?	<p>An RCA provides the opportunity to improve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » data-driven decision making, » policy clarity, » better outcomes for students, and » improved equity for students.
What are common root causes found in educational RCAs?	<p>In education, root causes commonly fall under the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » policy (e.g., inconsistent discipline procedures), » training (e.g., unfamiliarity with indicators or best practices), » preconceptions (e.g., misinterpretation of behavior), and » resources (e.g., lack of staff).
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » <u>Root Cause Analysis Worksheet</u>