

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

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| 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: » 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? | » Be as specific as possible. » Use data to define the problem. |
| 2 | Collect the data. | When and where is this happening? | » 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? | » 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? | » 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? | » Revise procedures. » Provide training. » Monitor implementation. |
| 6 | Evaluate the plan. | What does the data indicate regarding the effectiveness of the plan? | » Maintain data on goals and programming. |

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| 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"> » Root Cause Analysis Worksheet |