## 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. An RCA is commonly used to identify: a disproportionality in discipline, student placement, or special education eligibility; a policy and procedure fidelity; a cademic 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><li>» Be as specific as possible.</li><li>» Use data to define the problem.</li></ul>                                       |
| 2     | Collect the<br>data.              | When and where is this happening?  | <ul><li>» Collect quantitative data (e.g., risk ratios).</li><li>» Collect qualitative data (e.g., staff interviews).</li></ul> |
| 3     | ldentify<br>possible<br>cause(s). | What are contributing factors to the problem?  | <ul><li>» Is it a training issue?</li><li>» Is it a policy issue?</li><li>» Is it a resource issue?</li></ul>                   |
| 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<br>identified across data sources and<br>common causes.                                   |
| 5     | Develop a<br>plan.                | What plans can we develop to address the root, rather than the symptoms?                         | <ul><li>» Revise procedures.</li><li>» Provide training.</li><li>» Monitor implementation.</li></ul>                            |
| 6     | Evaluate the plan.                | What does the data indicate regarding the effectiveness of the plan?                             | » Maintain data on goals and programming.   |



| What are the outcomes when using an RCA?                           | An RCA provides the opportunity to improve:  » data-driven decision making,  » policy clarity,  » better outcomes for students, and  » improved equity for students.  |
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| What are<br>common root<br>causes found<br>in educational<br>RCAs? | In education, root causes commonly fall under the following categories:  » 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  | » Root Cause Analysis Worksheet   |