



Defining Student Need Guidebook Protocol

Use this five-step protocol during MTSS or problem-solving meetings to sharpen student need and match supports.

Step 1: Describing with Data

Goal: Build an evidence-based picture of the student and classroom context.

Guiding Questions

- What data sources do we have (assessments, classroom work, observations)?
- What does each data source show about student performance and Tier 1 instruction?
- Where do patterns emerge, and what new questions come up?

Record before moving on

A cohesive narrative about student performance and classroom instruction.

Step 2: Error Analysis

Goal: Identify the nature of student mistakes and when, where, and how they occur.

Guiding Questions

- What specific errors does the student consistently make?
- Are the errors conceptual, procedural, or language-based?
- What do the errors reveal about student thinking and current instruction?

Record before moving on

A clear description of the student's errors and the context in which they occur.

Step 3: Skill, Performance, or Context?

Goal: Determine whether the struggle is related to skill, performance, or the learning context.

Guiding Questions

- Can the student perform the skill in any conditions or with support?
- Are attendance, behavior, or engagement affecting performance?
- Is this a skill deficit, performance issue, or contextual factor?

Record before moving on

Consensus on the role of skill, performance, and context.

Step 4: Root Cause Analysis

Goal: Identify the underlying skill gap causing the visible symptoms.

Guiding Questions

- What is the observable problem?
- What missing foundational skill underlies the problem?
- Is the gap related to prior instruction, lack of practice, or misconceptions?

Record before moving on

A root cause statement that explains the need.

Step 5: Finding the Right Intervention

Goal: Align the intervention to the identified skill gap.

Guiding Questions

- What specific skill needs to be taught?
- What intervention is explicit, systematic, and aligned to root cause?
- How will Tier 1 instruction support the plan, and how will progress be monitored?

Record before moving on

A targeted intervention plan with a progress-monitoring strategy.