

Taking an Optimistic Perspective When Improvement Efforts Fall Short of Success

School improvement consultants can use this tool to ask questions and facilitate data-informed discussions that help schools determine if their lack of success was due to the improvement strategy they selected, the degree of effort they exerted, or external circumstances they experienced. These discussions help school and district teams see their lack of success as temporary and specific to a particular effort, which increases their willingness to persevere and believe they can be successful in the future.

Cause	Questions	Possible Data Sources
Strategy	• What strategy did we use? • How well did the strategy match our context? • For which students did the strategy succeed? • For which students did it not succeed?	• Documentation of strategy selection process • Assessment results by grade level and other demographics
Degree of Effort	• Did all the people who were supposed to implement the strategy (implementers) do so? • Did implementers have sufficient initial and ongoing professional development (PD) to be able to implement the strategy with consistency, quality, and frequency? • Was the strategy implemented with the expected consistency, quality, and frequency? • Was the strategy implemented long enough to yield results? • What support did leaders provide to implementers? • Was that support sufficient?	• Classroom observation data • Self-reported teacher implementation data • PD description and schedule • PD evaluation data • Implementation guidance, including rubric or innovation configuration • Implementation timeline and comparison to recommended timeline • Description of leader support • Teacher perception of leader support data
External Circumstances	• Were sufficient funds available during implementation of the strategy? • Did any unusual events happen to disrupt or otherwise affect implementation? • Were there policies that affected implementation? • Was there pushback from the community? • Was there pushback from the union? • Were there other initiatives that competed for teachers' time and attention?	• Funds needed versus funds available • Descriptions of district and school context • Perception of school and district culture data • Policy documents • Community perception data • Communications with the community • Communications with the union • Analysis of the coherence of district and school initiatives