

USING DATA TO MAKE IMPLEMENTATION HAPPEN

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever approached data collection for a grant project with compliance in mind and then been pleasantly surprised because the process was extremely beneficial? Well, this is exactly what happened in [Guilford County Schools](#).

As part of the Effective Implementation Cohort (EIC) project, participating school districts are asked to complete an annual District Capacity Assessment (DCA). At the start of the EIC, the Guilford County Schools (GCS) district implementation team viewed participation in the District Capacity Assessment process as a required component of the project, just something they had to do for compliance with project expectations. As they started using the tool, they discovered it was much more than that for them...

DISTRICT CAPACITY ASSESSMENT (DCA)

The [District Capacity Assessment](#) is an assessment designed to support school district implementation teams with aligning resources and identifying action steps to strengthen the implementation of a selected innovation or evidence-based practice. District team members score or rate their district and team's functioning on 27 items, using a scale of 0-2 (0=not yet in place, 1=partially in place, 2=fully in place). The items focus on effective implementation practices related to practitioners' competence, improved organization/system-level processes and leadership strategies. The scoring is done by a consensus process that includes simultaneous individual voting. If there are differences in the individuals' scores, the administrator then leads the team in whole group discussions and re-voting to come to a consensus on a score they can all agree to publicly support (Ward, et al., 2015).

ABOUT GUILFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS

3RD Third largest school district in North Carolina	Among the top 60 Largest districts in the United States	Serves approximately 70,000 PK-12 students	Consists of 126 Schools	With 9,900 Employees
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THE IMPLEMENTATION RESET

The Guilford County Schools (GCS) district implementation team is a cross-departmental group of individuals focused on supporting the effective implementation of their selected high-quality math curriculum, Open Up Resources, in the district's 24 middle schools. They are dedicated to providing equitable math instruction to ensure that each and every student is provided with excellent math instruction aligned with grade-level standards.

Guilford County Schools started working toward implementing Open Up Resources in the 2018-2019 school year. But, with the start of the EIC project in 2020, they decided to do a reset, moving from just providing training and materials to schools to developing implementation processes to ensure that schools and teachers were using Open Up Resources with integrity (indicators: curriculum use, lesson structures & terminology, routines, pacing within lesson, and student engagement). GCS wanted to ensure that all schools supported the same vision of effective implementation of high-quality instructional materials and practices. To support them in this work, they partnered with Pivot Learning, now merged with [UnboundEd](#)*, as part of the EIC project.

With the support of UnboundEd, the Guilford County Schools' district implementation team structured itself into two teams: the core implementation team focused on the immediate implementation needs and the full implementation team brought diverse perspectives in the development of practices and processes. Along with the new teaming structure, UnboundEd supported the GCS full implementation team in developing a detailed implementation plan with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals and established regular meetings to check in

on the progress of their work. Partnering with UnboundEd, the GCS team was moving along with implementation. GCS had a group of diverse perspectives on their team and a detailed plan, so what else would be needed to ensure effective implementation? They found this out during their first District Capacity Assessment.

2022-2023 Student Demographics (on the 20th day of the school year)

0.31% American Indian

6.75% Asian

41.97% Black

18.15% Hispanic

5.16% Multi-Racial

0.15% Pacific Islander

27.53% White

121 Languages

9,500+ Special Education
INCLUDES PRE-K

14,000+ Advanced Learners

66.3% Student Poverty Rate

*Note: [Pivot Learning officially merged with UnboundEd in April 2023.](#)

USING DATA TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

The GCS core implementation team first participated in the District Capacity Assessment (DCA) in February 2022. Not knowing what to expect, the team was apprehensive about the assessment and how it would benefit their work. What they found was that the DCA's consensus scoring promoted deep conversations about the different components of implementation, such as data usage and accessibility, coaching structures, and written processes. The team dug deep into answering authentically and identifying the areas of implementation that needed improvement to get the desired results—that is high-quality math instruction for all students.

THE DCA SCORING PROCESS PROVIDED THEM WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS:



Perceptions of their roles in the implementation



The implementation process in Guilford County Schools



Their capacity to sustain effective implementation



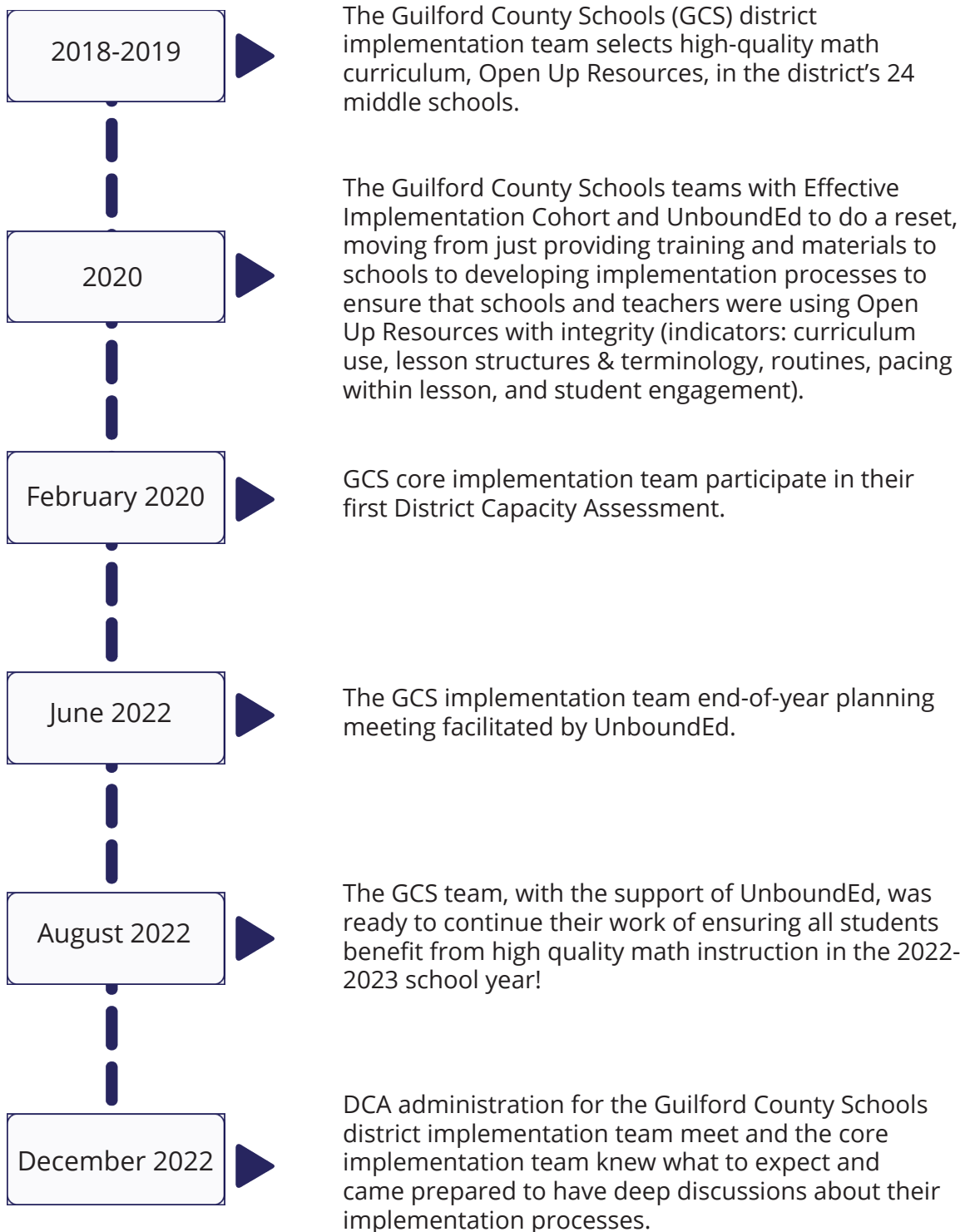
Identification of their relative strengths in implementation, such as resource allocation and the development of a comprehensive implementation plan



Areas of growth in implementation, such as improving meeting processes and their access and use of a variety of data sources for decision making

These areas of improvement were then listed as action items so the GCS implementation team could focus on building the district's capacity (or skills and processes) to effectively implement Open Up Resources.

GENERAL TIMELINE OF DCA PROCESS



They also demonstrated growth with a 35% increase in their decision support data systems DCA score because of their improved use of data in decision making. They did this by focusing on an action item from their February 2022 DCA!

However, the use of the DCA data did not stop there. With the support of UnboundEd, the district implementation team took the results to the next level by using the DCA data to help reflect on their work. In June 2022, the team had their end-of-the-year planning meeting, where they not only reviewed the results from the DCA but also examined data from district and school level surveys and their classroom observations. By drawing upon and discussing multiple data sources, the district implementation team was able to identify next steps and update their math implementation plan for the next academic year.

So what did this process look like? Throughout the meeting, the team was asked to reflect on how they would currently rate themselves on the DCA items, with a primary focus on items they previously scored their processes as not yet in place or partially in place and what they could do to help strengthen those areas. For example, one of the team's identified [executive sponsors](#) was promoted to Superintendent, so they needed to fill that leadership role on the team. At the meeting, they were able to identify additional team members that could take on that role and discuss how they would work on communicating the responsibilities. Team members also shared their concerns about having sufficient time to continue the work. The team identified the need for more support for the district math team and they began planning how they could allocate resources to make this happen. The team also reexamined previously noted areas of strength (i.e., DCA items scored as fully in place) to ensure these processes were continuing and to discuss how to sustain and expand them. For example, on the February 2022 DCA, the team scored themselves as fully in place as it relates to resource allocation. The team reviewed the district's continued budget support and noted this

was still an area of strength due to the ongoing budget allocation that included funding for sustained professional learning, printed materials and additional implementation support.

The final result? With UnboundEd's guidance, the GCS team updated the implementation plan outlining the vision and steps for the team to continue high quality math implementation into the next school year. They were ready to continue their work of ensuring all students benefit from high quality math instruction in the 2022-2023 school year!

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“[The DCA] helped us go back and think about what we may be doing right and what things we can solidify in the district, not only as part of our implementation process but also internal to the district. Because, the goal is, if we build great implementation for math, the district should be able to take this same model and implement anything.”

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JAMAHR MCDANIEL

Senior Director of Curriculum Services at UnboundEd

MAKING & SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The next DCA administration for the Guilford County Schools district implementation team occurred in December 2022. This time, the core implementation team knew what to expect and came prepared to have deep discussions about their implementation processes. Since the last administration, there was district turnover in their team's executive leadership and the Math Director position—both vital roles in the math implementation. As the team embarked on the DCA process, they discovered that even with the district level turnover, they made progress with implementation. The GCS team was able to keep the implementation of Open Up Resources moving due to their commitment to maintaining implementation processes and addressing internal barriers.

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Discussing their perspectives on the math implementation also provided time for the GCS team to have deeper discussions about their coaching systems and plans. Now, with a better understanding of implementation and a clearer perspective on the district's needs, the team decided to take a step back and reexamine their math coaching service delivery plan and the best methods to collect and use coaching effectiveness data. As a result, the team is working on creating a written coaching service delivery plan that strengthens the coaching services outlined in their implementation coaching action plan. outlined in their implementation plan. The identification of the need to strengthen coaching was a direct result of the DCA consensus scoring discussions.

After the December 2022 DCA administration, the GCS team again decided to continue to use these data and worked to incorporate their identified DCA action items into their regular core implementation team meetings as a progress monitoring tool. The GCS team is also working on using this data as a reflective practice in their core implementation team meetings to identify areas of celebration and action steps. For example, the team now has a Word document that includes links to all their EIC implementation data, which allows the full team easy access to this information. They also design their meeting agendas based on the team's identified DCA action items (e.g., using different types of data, supporting school use of a fidelity/integrity measure, and continuously improve the use of the implementation plan).

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“By using the DCA results and action items as a lever for progress monitoring, the tool moves from a yearly review to a standard part of the improvement cycle and provides ongoing discussions on how the district can scale and sustain their implementation efforts across the system.”

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KAT STEVENS

Director of Curriculum Services at UnboundEd

Throughout the meetings, the full team reviews the data, reflects, and discusses what the data are telling them, and then generates the next steps based on their data-based discussions. Team members have expressed that this method has helped strengthen their teaming and implementation by continuously monitoring the progress of the implementation plan action items and keeping the team grounded in their implementation and data.

THE RESULTS

So, what were some direct results from this district level teaming work? As shared, the GCS team continues to use the DCA and additional data measures to strengthen their teaming structures and implementation efforts at the district level. Emily Hare, GCS Math Director, noted that the DCA discussions made the team more aware of the need to have another person on the math team to support implementation, which then led to funding a part-time support position for the upcoming school year. Jimmy Leak, GCS Research Analyst, shared that the collaborative effort of reflecting on the DCA as an implementation team helped the team develop their data collection and analysis processes through the creation and use of an app and dashboards for classroom walkthrough observations. GCS also shared that they have seen improvements in student outcomes since the 2020 implementation reset.

Of the twelve middle schools in year two of the EIC project, eight of them met or exceeded growth targets on their 2021-

2022 end-of-year state tests. This is a marked improvement from only four of those schools meeting/exceeding growth targets prior to the EIC project in 2018-2019 (pre-pandemic) and Guilford County Schools' increased implementation efforts with Open Up Resources. While the team is still in the process of determining how much (if any) of this growth is a direct result of their implementation work in the EIC project, the preliminary improvement numbers are heartening, nonetheless.

THE TAKEAWAYS

One important takeaway for the GCS team about the District Capacity Assessment is that it is not just about the DCA score—it is about the reflections and the process. The DCA is a tool that can help the development of teaming and building district and school level capacity, which is vital to support the messy work of implementation. Other key takeaways are

- Develop a clear action plan to address the areas highlighted in the DCA scoring.
- Use the DCA items as a guide to improve implementation processes.
- Refer to multiple data sources at team meetings to determine progress and reflect on the implementation work.
- Use the DCA results and other data sources to support updating the implementation plan.

REFERENCE

Ward, C., St. Martin, K., Horner, R., Duda, M., Ingram-West, K., Tedesco, M., Putnam, D., Buenrostro, M., & Chaparro, E. (2015). District Capacity Assessment. National Implementation Research Network, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.