A Simple Decision-Making Framework for Teachers

ADVANCED COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS Achievement Teams

Here's a clear, practical framework teachers can use to help select instructional strategies based on assessment results, not preference or habit.

Core Principle

Assessment results don't tell us what students *are*, they tell us what students *need next*. The purpose of assessment is instructional decision-making.

Clarify What Students Are Struggling With

Before jumping to strategies, teams must identify the type of learning need, not just the score.

Use these guiding questions:

- ☐ Is the issue knowledge, skill, reasoning, or application/transfer?
- ☐ Is the error conceptual or procedural?
- ☐ Is the challenge accuracy, fluency, complexity, or independence?

Categorize the Learning Need

Place students into one of these instructional need categories:

Learning Need - What the Data Suggests

- ☐ **Surface Learning Gaps**

Students lack vocabulary, facts, or basic understanding

- ☐ **Procedural Skill Gaps**

Students know what but not how

- ☐ **Conceptual Understanding Gaps**

Students can perform steps but don't understand why

- ☐ **Reasoning & Thinking Gaps**

Students struggle to explain, justify, or analyze

- ☐ **Transfer Gaps**

Students succeed in practice but fail in new contexts

Match Instructional Strategies to the Need

This is the most important move. *Scan code for expanded view of strategies.*

Hint: If the strategy doesn't directly address the need revealed by the data, it's the wrong strategy.

Strategy Matching Guide

Identified Need	High Impact Instructional Strategies
Surface Learning	Explicit instruction, modeling, worked examples, vocabulary routines
Procedural Skills	Guided practice, error analysis, gradual release
Conceptual Understanding	Visual models, representations, discussion protocols
Reasoning	Sentence starters, academic discourse, justification tasks
Transfer	Application tasks, non-routine problems, multiple contexts

How the Strategy Will Be Implemented

Avoid vague plans like "We'll reteach".

- ☐ Teams specify:
- ☐ What students will do?
- ☐ What the teachers will do?
- ☐ What success will look like?
- ☐ How progress will be monitored?

Example:
"Students will use sentence starters to justify their answers during guided practice, and teachers will monitor for use of evidence and reasoning."

Decide How You'll Know If It Worked

Close the loop.

Ask:

- ☐ What evidence will show improvement?
- ☐ When will we check again?
- ☐ What will we adjust if students don't improve?

This reinforces formative evaluation, not one-and-done reteaching.

Big-Picture Reflection Prompts

- [ ] Which step feels the most natural for our team? Why?
- [ ] Which step will require us to slow down or rethink our usual approach?
- [ ] Where do we tend to jump ahead instead of following the sequence?

How will focusing on the learning need (not the score) change our thinking?

- [ ] What assumptions do we have to let go of during this process?
- [ ] How might this framework help us be more intentional with strategy selection?

Sustainability & Transfer Prompts

- [ ] How could this framework replace or streamline what we already do in meetings?
- [ ] Which step would we want to protect the most if time is limited?
- [ ] How might this process help new team members or substitute teachers understand our instructional priorities?

Identified Need	Definition	What Student Do	What Teachers Do	High-Impact Strategy Example
Surface Learning	Students develop initial understanding of new content, vocabulary, or skills. Focus is on clarity and accuracy.	☐ Listen, observe, and follow modeled thinking ☐ Practice identifying key facts or steps ☐ Use academic vocabulary correctly ☐ Respond to checks for understanding	☐ Practice identifying key facts or steps ☐ Use academic vocabulary correctly ☐ Respond to checks for understanding ☐ Explicitly model thinking and procedures ☐ Clearly state learning intention & success criteria ☐ Provide worked examples ☐ Check for understanding frequently	☐ Build on What You Know ☐ Graphic Organizers ☐ Link & Learn ☐ SQ3R ☐ Three-Column Note-Taking
Procedural Skills	Students learn how to accurately perform a process or strategy with increasing fluency.	☐ Practice steps with guidance ☐ Apply procedures consistently ☐ Analyze and correct errors ☐ Self-monitor using criteria	☐ Scaffold practice (I do → We do → You do) ☐ Provide immediate feedback ☐ Monitor for accuracy, not speed ☐ Adjust scaffolds as needed	☐ Feedback ☐ Practice and Challenge by Choice ☐ Scaffolding ☐ Success Criteria ☐ Try It–Talk It–Check It
Conceptual Understanding	Students explain why concepts work and how ideas connect across different representations.	☐ Explain relationships and patterns ☐ Use models or visuals to show thinking ☐ Compare strategies ☐ Participate in structured discussion	☐ Use probing "why" questions ☐ Provide multiple representations ☐ Facilitate academic discussion ☐ Press for meaning, not answers	☐ Card Sort ☐ Concept Mapping ☐ Multiple representations ☐ Post Then Prove, Square Then Compare ☐ Yes/No Sorting
Reasoning	Students justify thinking, explain decisions, and use evidence to support claims.	☐ Use sentence starters to explain reasoning ☐ Cite evidence ☐ Defend answers orally or in writing ☐ Revise explanations based on feedback	☐ Model strong explanations ☐ Provide reasoning prompts ☐ Listen for evidence and logic ☐ Give feedback on quality of reasoning	☐ Accountable Talk ☐ Jigsaw / Jigsaw II ☐ Reciprocal Teaching ☐ Socratic Seminar ☐ Teammates Consult
Transfer	Students apply learning independently to new, non-routine contexts and problems.	☐ Select appropriate strategies ☐ Apply learning in unfamiliar situations ☐ Reflect on strategy choice ☐ Persist through productive struggle	☐ Design non-routine tasks ☐ Reduce scaffolds ☐ Ask metacognitive questions ☐ Evaluate application, not recall	☐ Contracts / Independent Projects ☐ Menus ☐ Problem-Solving Teaching ☐ Project-Based Learning ☐ R.A.F.T.S.