

Project Worksheet 3  
*Identifying Variables*

*Identifying Systemic Problems:*

|   | yes | no |
|---|-----|----|
| The problem is chronic and recurring.   |     |    |
| The problem has a history.  |     |    |
| Someone has tried to solve this problem, but attempts did not work at all.                |     |    |
| Someone has tried to solve this problem, but attempts stopped working after awhile.       |     |    |
| No one has been able to identify an obvious reason for the pattern of behavior over time. |     |    |
| This problem is important to our school and is worth spending time and effort on.         |     |    |

*Formulating Systemic Problems*

What is the behavior your project is addressing (e.g., enrollment, diversity, etc.)?

Briefly describe the behavior over time (e.g., enrollment has declined in recent years).

What is the measurement/data of how the behavior has changed over time?

What is the time frame of the behavior (e.g., the last five years)?

Write a clear, succinct statement of the problem. Try to phrase the problem in “Missionspeak” (i.e., articulate why this is problematic given your school’s mission). The more specific and focused the statement, the more accurate your analysis is likely to be.

*Identifying Variables*

Variables are the components of the problem whose value can vary over time.

Variable—number of families

Not a variable—Families

Variable—per pupil costs of education

Not a variable—Importance of funding

| All Reasonable Variables   | Most Important Variables   | Precisely Named Variables  |
|--|--|--|
| List all the variables that could reasonably be included both quantitative (percent decline in enrollment) and qualitative (declining teacher morale). Be sure that your list includes at least one of Mission critical item . | Narrow the list of variables by combining similar variables, removing variables that are not as firmly linked to the central problem. Ask yourself: Which variables are likely to have a relationship to one another we can describe or explore? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use nouns or noun phrases, not verbs.</li><li>• Have it fit a phrase like “the level of...” or “the number of...”</li><li>• Use a neutral or positive term whenever possible.</li><li>• Keep in mind that variables can be concrete or intangible.</li></ul> |
|  |  |  |

If your list of variables generated new ideas about the nature and scope of the problem, revise your problem statement in the space below.