

Questions to ask about...

Students

- Was last year's group of students particularly low in reading ability? Attendance? Was there an unusually large number of students with IEPs?
- Were their scores low in all curricular areas?
- Were there any events/situations that may have negatively impacted student learning?
- Did students with special needs receive appropriate accommodations during instruction as well as on assessments?

Curriculum

- Is the curriculum aligned to the Frameworks?
- Are the Standards being interpreted and taught correctly?
- Was the curriculum taught?
- For the usual amount of time?
- At a different time of the year?

Resources

- Are textbooks, literature sets, science equipment, etc., sufficient to teach the content?
- Are the resources appropriate (require higher order thinking, emphasize application, use a balanced assessment)?
- Have teachers been trained in the correct use of the resources?

Instruction

- How was the content or process taught?
- Are students being taught how to formulate strategies to solve complex problems?
- Are students taught and required to regularly use the writing process?
- Are students writing in all content areas?
- Are students required to explain reasoning and show work in all content areas?
- Are higher order thinking skills embedded in the daily instruction? For all students?
- Are regular classroom assessments balanced in question type and level of thinking?
- Are process skills taught and practiced explicitly?
- Are assessment questions frequently written with "cold literature" and new examples so that the questions assess application and not just recall?

Note:

- Never stop at the "student" section of questions!
- There may be multiple reasons for low performance in a content area.
- Correctly "fixing" a problem depends upon correctly identifying the root cause.