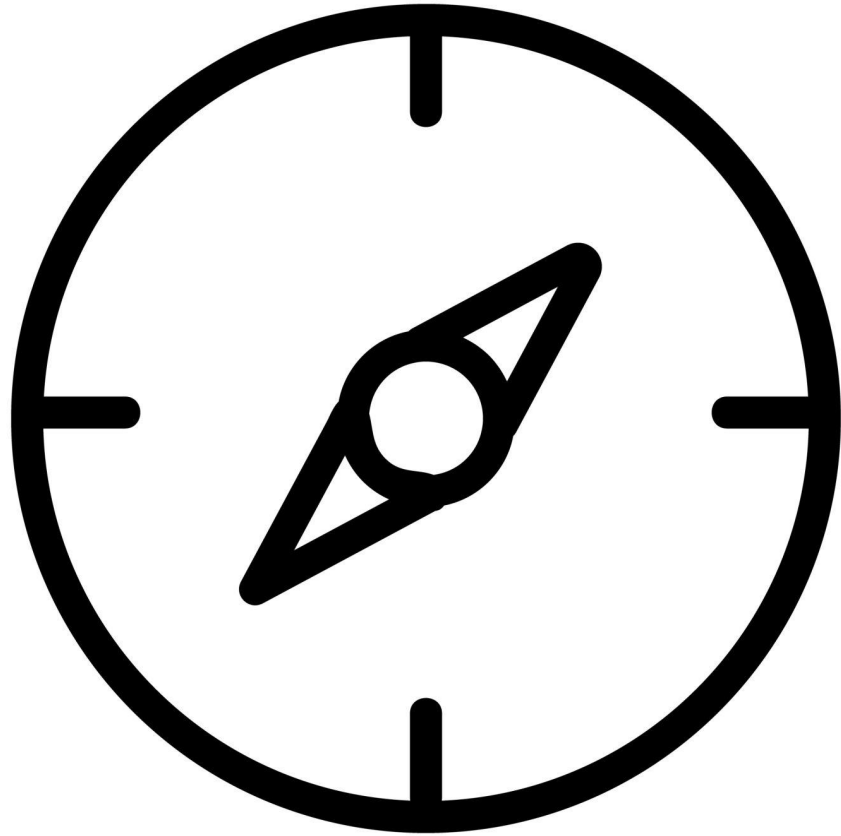


Navigating the State Data Landscape

A Guide to Using the Year in Data: Know It, Use It, Do It!





If data is the
compass, improved
student achievement
is the destination.

Data

A year at a glance



Know It

What is this data, and when does it land on your desk?

Use It

What is it for — and just as important, what is it NOT for?

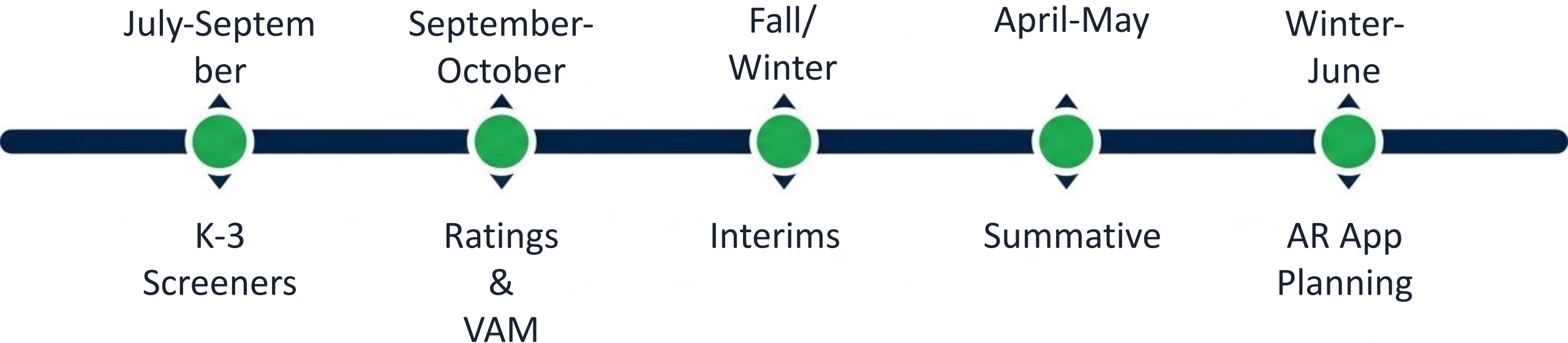
Do It

Practice the call: given a real sample, what's your Notice, Wonder, and Action?

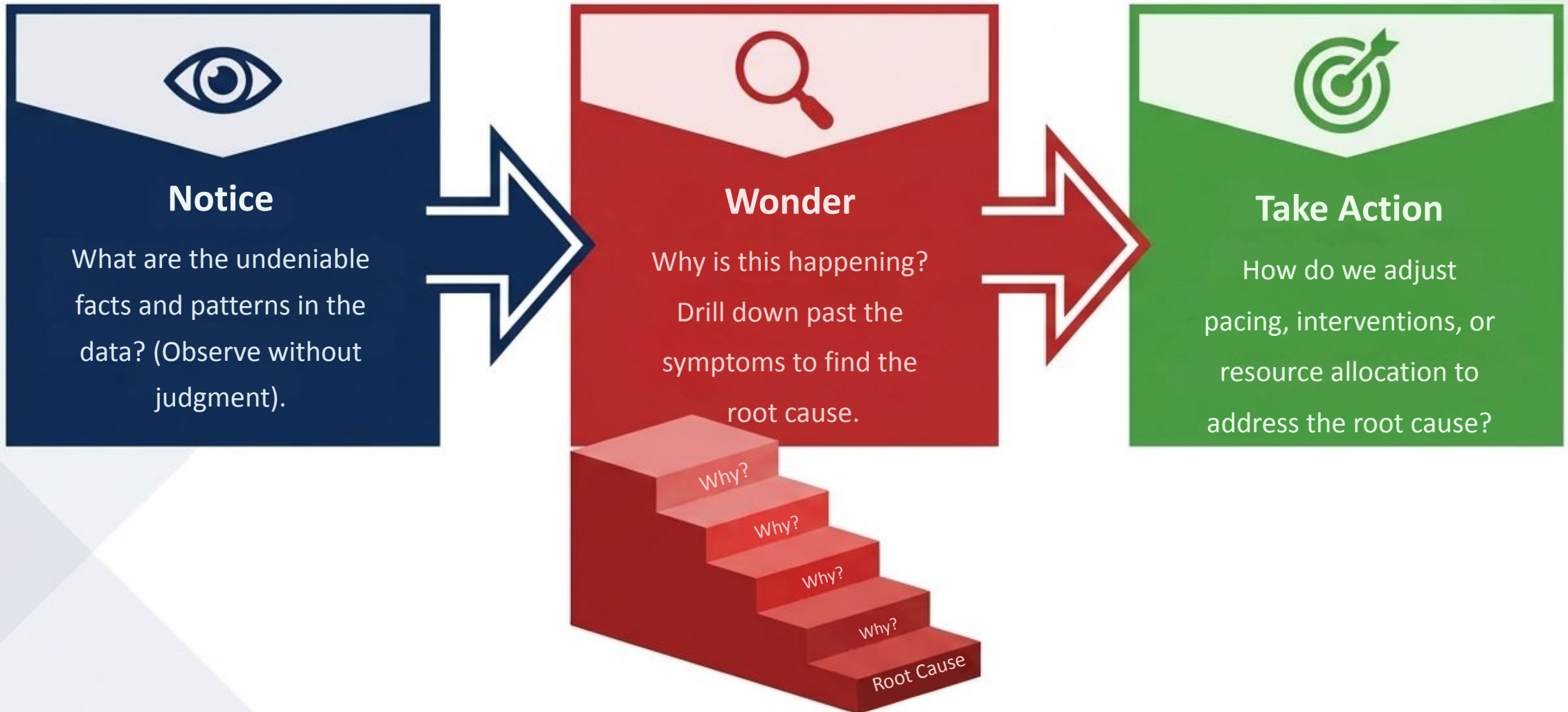
We'll repeat this cycle for five state data milestones this year — by the fifth time, it should feel automatic.

The 2026-2027 Data Timeline

Each milestone below provides a specific system check or process. We will explore the what it is, its purpose, when it lands, how to use it.



Processing Data: The Inquiry Cycle



5 Whys: From Symptom to Root Cause



1ST WHY

Identify the first cause contributing to the problem.

2ND WHY

Dig deeper by questioning why the first cause occurred.

3RD WHY

Continue drilling down to understand deeper reasons.

4TH WHY

Reveal underlying system or process-related issues.

5TH WHY

Reach the actionable root cause and formulate corrective actions

The Rules of Engagement for 5 Whys Protocol



Key Principles & Mindsets

- **Be Curious:** Approach problems with the relentless curiosity of an inquisitive toddler.
- **Rely on Facts:** Base your answers on actual observations and real data, not assumptions or guesses.
- **Process Over People:** Avoid blaming individuals. Focus on systemic factors and areas within your control.
- **Stay Flexible:** You don't have to stop at exactly five. Stop when you find an actionable root cause, or keep going if you need to drill deeper.

5 Whys Protocol



The symptom:
*"My
project
grade was
lower than
expected."*

- **Why?** Because I lost points on the citations.
- **Why?** Because I did not format the bibliography correctly.
- **Why?** I didn't know it was required.
- **Why?** Because I didn't use the formatting rubric while writing.
- **Why?** Because I didn't understand how to read the rubric.

Root Cause: Lack of familiarity with project rubrics prior to starting

5 Whys Protocol Practice

Meet Abbott Elementary. Here's a few of their data milestones to investigate. Choose one data point and run the 5 whys protocol.

Milestone	Abbott Elementary — Data Snapshot
K-3 Screener (BOY)	45% of 2nd graders score “POTENTIAL RISK” in reading fluency — up from 11% last year.
Ratings & VAM	School earned “C” rating; Achievement has increased but VAM growth in ELA bottom-quartile is stagnant from prior year.
Fall/Winter Interims	2nd-grade ELA interim scores flat since BOY screener — no movement despite adoption of new HQIM this year.
Summative (last spring)	4th-grade reading proficiency dropped 9 points year-over-year; no other grade declined.

Your group's job: 1) State the “symptom”. 2) Run 5 whys protocol. 3) Determine probable root cause.

Bonus Name one action that can be taken before September 30 to positively impact root cause

Milestone 1: K-3 Screeners



Know it

What

Beginning/Middle of Year (BOY/MOY) early foundational check in ELA (K-3) and Math (K-2).

Purpose

Identify students who are at the highest risk for reading or math difficulties.

When

BOY: First 30 days of the Fall semester.
MOY: January-April.

Applications

Immediate Tier II/Tier III intervention placement; baseline data for the Inquiry Cycle (Notice/Wonder).

Results

Targeted support for vulnerable early learners before achievement gaps widen.

Milestone 1: K-3 Screeners

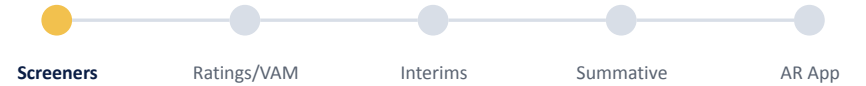
USE IT

USED TO...

- ✓ Identify students for immediate Tier II/III grouping
- ✓ Set a baseline to progress-monitor all year
- ✓ Start building-wide Notice/Wonder conversations early

NOT USED TO...

- ✗ Use as the sole data point for a formal SPED referral
- ✗ Compare results across schools or districts
- ✗ Treat a single screener as a permanent label for a child



Milestone 1: K-3 Screeners



Do it

— Table Talk

THE SCENARIO

Your BOY K-2 literacy screener shows 48% of your kindergarten cohort scoring “Potential Risk” on letter naming — more than double last year's rate at this window.

NOTICE

What pattern jumps out, and what would you want to double-check before reacting?

WONDER

Run the 5 Whys protocol. Can you determine a likely root cause?

ACT

What is the one thing you do in the first two weeks of school or even to prepare for next year?

2 minutes at your table · be ready to share one Action out loud

Milestone 2: School Ratings and VAM



September

Know it

What

Official A-F school ratings and Value-Added Growth (VAM) data via LEA Insights

Purpose

Provide public accountability and measure longitudinal cohort growth.

When

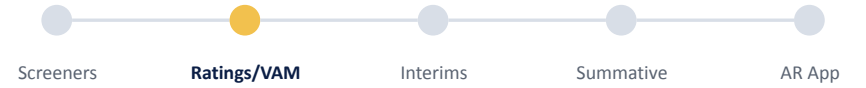
September/October

Applications

Analyze district, building, or classroom level trends; a data point for placement, targeted professional development, resource allocation.

Results

Broad structural adjustments to school improvement plans based on validated growth metrics.



Milestone 2: School Ratings and VAM

USE IT

USED TO...

- ✓ Read growth and achievement as two separate stories
- ✓ Spot grade/subject teams for targeted professional learning
- ✓ Use multi-year VAM trends to see systemic patterns

NOT USED TO...

- ✗ Judge one teacher's effectiveness off a single year of VAM
- ✗ Assume a low letter grade means low growth (or the reverse)
- ✗ Over-read small-n subgroups — small samples swing widely

Milestone 2: School Ratings and VAM



Do it

— Table Talk

THE SCENARIO

Your school earned a "C" rating this year — achievement is in the bottom 20% in the state, but the VAM data shows students are meeting growth expectations.

NOTICE

Two data points seem to conflict. What does each one actually measure? Why might achievement and growth tell different stories for the same grade band?

WONDER

Run the 5 Whys protocol. Can you determine a likely root cause?

ACT

What might you plan for summer PD or back to school to begin to address the root cause?

Milestone 3: Interim Checkpoints



Know it

What

Grade-level standards check-points for Grades K-2, 3-10 and EOC (ELA, Math, Science).

When

Interim I- August-November
Interim II-December-March

Purpose

A systems check to monitor progress toward grade-level expectations; evaluate pacing, rigor, and curriculum fidelity.

Applications

Identify need for acceleration or intervention mid-flight. Adjust instructional pacing, models, content.

Results

Real-time course correction to maximize student achievement before the spring summative assessment.



Milestone 3: Interim Checkpoints

USE IT

USED TO...

- ✓ Check pacing-guide fidelity against actual standards taught
- ✓ Fuel data reflection conversations with a mid-year checkpoint
- ✓ Catch a reteach need while there's still time to act

NOT USED TO...

- ✗ Treat results as a final grade or high-stakes placement tool
- ✗ Skip reviewing it because "it doesn't count"
- ✗ Use it to predict summative scores with precision

Milestone 3: Interim Checkpoints



Do it

— Table Talk

THE SCENARIO

Your Fall ATLAS interim shows 7th-grade reading proficiency down 10 percent from where last year's 7th-grade cohort landed at the same checkpoint.

NOTICE

Is this one class, one standard, or building-wide? Pacing guide? New HQIM rollout? A staffing change?

WONDER

Run the 5 Whys protocol. Can you determine a likely root cause?

ACT

What's the pacing or PD adjustment you make before the Winter Interim?

2 minutes at your table · be ready to share one Action out loud

Milestone 4: Summative Assessments



Know it

What

Comprehensive end-of-year assessments aligned to Arkansas Academic Standards and Blueprints.

Purpose

Measure progress toward grade-level standards and support state/federal accountability. The summative provides a “systems check”.

When

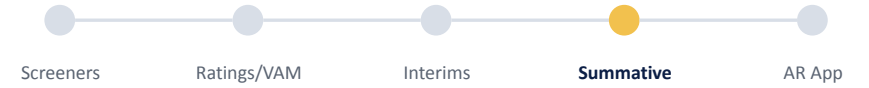
April/May

Applications

Review curriculum alignment; evaluate instructional strengths and areas for systemic improvement.

Results

Final performance levels (1-4) that reset the strategic baseline for the following academic year.



Milestone 4: Summative Assessments

USE IT

As a principal, this data is FOR the following — and NOT for what's on the right.

USED TO...

- ✓ Review curriculum alignment
- ✓ Identify PD needs for instructional teams
- ✓ Evaluate instructional strengths
- ✓ Consider advanced opportunities / acceleration

NOT USED TO...

- ✗ Draw conclusions about student growth (that's VAM's job)
- ✗ Use as a sole source for intervention or SPED placement
- ✗ Punish individual students or teachers
- ✗ Check standard-by-standard achievement for individual students

Milestone 4: Summative Assessments



Do it

— Table Talk

THE SCENARIO

Summative results show Level 3/4 proficiency up 5 points school-wide — but a 15-point gap between your English Learners subgroup and their peers.

NOTICE

What's true at the building level, and what's hidden inside that average? Think resources, pacing, teacher efficacy, enrollment shifts, etc.

WONDER

Run the 5 Whys protocol. Can you determine a likely root cause?

ACT

What's the one structural/system change this data justifies changing next year?

2 minutes at your table · be ready to share one Action out loud

Milestone 5: AR App

Know it



January/June

What

A single, consolidated strategic plan and federal funding application replacing 17 redundant grants and plans.

Purpose

Systematically align district priorities and financial resources to identified student needs.

When

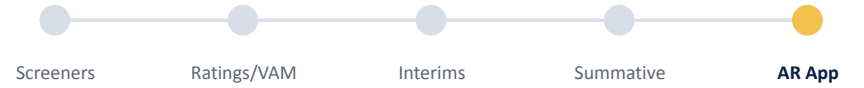
Planning begins in Jan/Feb; Final Submission due June 30, 2026.

Applications

Form a cross-functional team to target funding toward Academic Outcomes, Safe & Healthy Schools, and Quality Workforce.

Results

A cohesive, fully funded district strategy for the 2026-2027 school year.



Milestone 5: AR App

USE IT

As a principal, this data is FOR the following — and NOT for what's on the right.

USED TO...

- ✓ Fund the root causes the year's Notice/Wonder work surfaced
- ✓ Build one coherent strategy instead of scattered mini-plans
- ✓ Decide as a cross-functional team, not solo

NOT USED TO...

- ✗ Treat it as a paperwork exercise finished in isolation
- ✗ Fund a wishlist unconnected to this year's data
- ✗ File it away in June and not revisit it until next spring

Milestone 5: AR App



Do it

— Table Talk

THE SCENARIO

ELA scores are low across the district. In the review of your AR App the team recognized weak Tier I HQIM implementation.

NOTICE

Are low scores present across the grades? What HQPL has been provided? What do walk throughs tell you about implementation of HQIM?

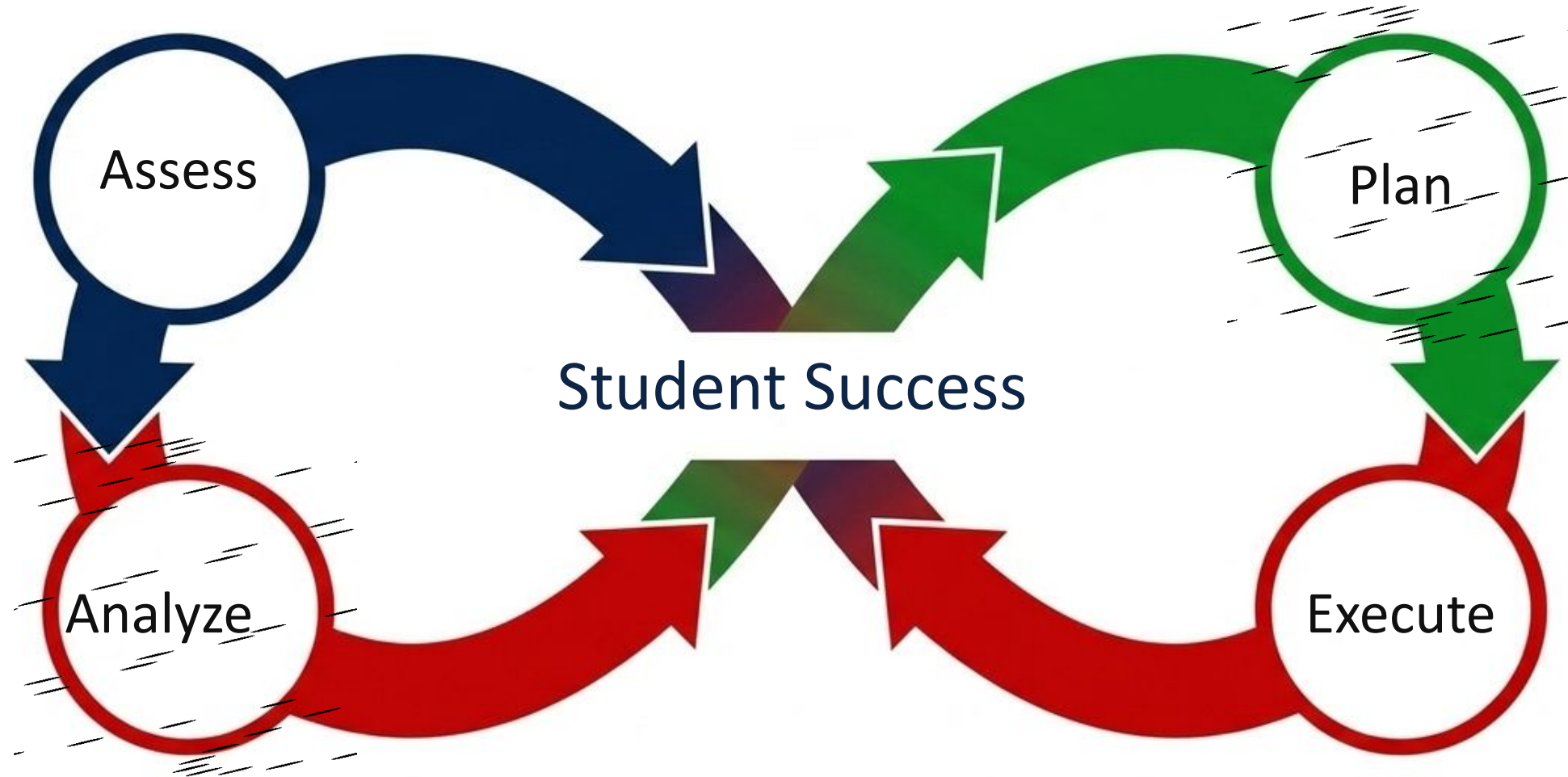
WONDER

Run the 5 Whys protocol. Can you determine a likely root cause?

ACT

What goal might you write in the AR app around HQIM implementation and how might you monitor progress?

The Data-Driven Culture



The year in data isn't a compliance checklist; it's the engine of continuous improvement. By standardizing how we utilize data and prioritize resources, we ensure every Arkansas student receives a best-in-class education.

The Principal's Data Playbook

Milestone	When It Lands	Things to Check	One Conversation to Have
K-3 Screeners	Jul–Sept	Which students need to be prioritized for tier II, tutoring, focused instruction?	Interventionist / K-3 team
Ratings & VAM	Sept–Oct	Growth vs. achievement — what story do they tell?	Grade-level teams, leadership
ATLAS Interims	Fall & Winter	Pacing-guide, fidelity of implementation of curriculum, which standards taught, ALDs and rigor of classroom assessments	Instructional coach / content and/or grade level teams
Summative	Apr–May	Subgroup gaps, grade, content or teacher anomalies, big systems check	Leadership team
AR App	Jan–Jun	Do goals and resource allocation map to a root cause from this year's data?	Cross-functional planning team

By standardizing how we view, question, and fund our priorities, we ensure every Arkansas student receives a best-in-class education.

Additional Resources



Resource	Description	Link
ATLAS 101 Presentation (Summit 2025)	Explanation of the suite of assessments	https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jt9ONbx4X8UU0wZ_i7QJ5ZM2HBTCfp3Q/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=114426604802629790998&rtpof=true&sd=true
Final Testing Calendar	Assessments by Chronological Order	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SF46NA6EPlcrhEnRoNWZnfH3itAKop41ckbBHSHOmnk/edit?usp=sharing
Data Training Series	Bite-sized data training	https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/public-school-accountability/data-training-series/atlas-video-series-using-data-to-drive-instruction
Analyzing Achievement Data	Digging into achievement data presentation	https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1vPV7sCFnG9Zk6esLjVJbaTUV5LyRLCv3Xe_eTesrfMU/edit?usp=sharing