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2025-2026 Phase Two: The Needs Assessment for Schools

James T Alton Middle School
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2025-2026 Phase Two: The Needs Assessment for Schools
Understanding Continuous Improvement: The Needs Assessment for Schools

The Needs Assessment Diagnostic will facilitate the use of multiple sources of data to determine the current reality and establish a foundation for decision-making around school goals and strategies. Once completed, the diagnostic will lead to priorities to be addressed in the comprehensive school improvement plan to build staff capacity and increase student achievement. The needs assessment is to be conducted annually as an essential part of the continuous improvement process and precedes the development of strategic goals (i.e. desired state).

While the focus of continuous improvement is student performance, the work must be guided by the aspects of teaching and learning that affect performance. An effective improvement process should address the contributing factors creating the learning environment (inputs) and the performance data (outcomes).

The needs assessment provides the framework for all schools to clearly and honestly identify their most critical areas for improvement that they will address later in the planning process through the development of goals, objectives, strategies and activities. 703 KAR 2:225 requires, as part of continuous improvement planning for schools, each school to complete the needs assessment between October 1 and November 1 of each year and include: (1) a description of the data reviewed and the process used to develop the needs assessment; (2) a review of the previous plan and its implementation to inform development of the new plan; and, (3) perception data gathered from the administration of a valid and reliable measure of teaching and learning conditions.

Protocol

1. Clearly detail the process used to determine the priorities of this year's needs assessment. Include the following information in your response:

- • names of school council members, leadership teams and stakeholder groups (i.e., Family Resource Youth Service Centers, community partners such as civic and business organizations, etc.) involved in the process
- • a timeline of the process
- • the specific data reviewed and analyzed
- • how and where the meetings were documented.

To determine the priorities for the 2025–2026 school year, our school engaged in a collaborative, data-informed needs assessment process involving a variety of stakeholders.

Stakeholders Involved

- School Council Members: Principal Danielle Cassady, teacher representatives: Lawson Barger, Ben Edwards, and Kimberly Jordan, parent representatives: Shanda Strickland and Erin Hester

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- Leadership Teams: Instructional Leadership Team: Danielle Cassady, Nick Ritter, MTSS Team: Lindsey McKenzie and Jenny Stuecker, Department Chairs: Madison Howell, Fabian Bennett, Taylor Stevens, and Lawson Barger
- Additional Stakeholders: Family Resource Youth Service Center (FRYSC) Coordinator: Lamar Payne, School Counselors: Lindsey Roberts and Mark Roberts

Timeline of the Process

- August: Leadership teams met to review prior year performance data and identify initial areas of concern
- Early September: School council convened to discuss findings and gather input from families and community partners
- Mid-September: Department-level meetings focused on academic and behavioral data analysis
- Late September: MTSS team reviewed intervention effectiveness and student support needs
- Early October: Final prioritization meeting with all stakeholder groups to confirm focus areas for the CSIP

Data Reviewed

- Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) from 2023-2024
- MAP growth data from 2024-2025
- Attendance and behavior reports from 2024-2025 and current year
- IEP progress monitoring data current year
- Infinite Campus grade reports current year
- Stakeholder surveys (staff, students, families) current year

Documentation

All meetings were documented through agendas and minutes stored in the school's shared leadership Google Drive. Key decisions and data summaries were compiled in the school improvement planning folder and referenced in the CSIP within eProve.

Review of Previous Plan

2. Summarize the implementation of the goals, objectives, strategies and activities from the previous year's comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP). What was successful? How will your results inform this year's plan?

During the 2024–2025 school year, our school implemented a comprehensive improvement plan focused on increasing student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and enhancing school climate and safety. The plan was guided by data from

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the Phase Two Needs Assessment and involved collaboration among school council members, leadership teams, FRYSC, and community partners.

Successful Implementation Highlights

- Academic Growth:

    ◦ Targeted interventions in reading and math, supported by two interventionist positions funded through ESSER, led to improved student performance, especially among students below grade level.
    ◦ Teachers utilized iReady, MyPath, and IXL for progress monitoring and skill development.
    ◦ Special education teachers received Orton-Gillingham training, improving reading fluency and comprehension for students with disabilities.

- Instructional Practices:

    ◦ PLCs focused on curriculum alignment, formative assessment practices, and equity strategies.
    ◦ Science and social studies teachers used Edulastic for common assessments and data analysis.
    ◦ Vertical curriculum mapping and standards mastery checks were implemented across content areas.

- Achievement Gap Reduction:
    ◦ MTSS interventions targeted students in the lowest percentiles, with regular progress monitoring and data reviews.
    ◦ Collaborative teaching models and SDI training supported students with disabilities in both reading and math.
- School Climate and Safety:
    ◦ Increased family engagement through events like Halloween in the Halls and Pastries with the Principal.
    ◦ Safety measures were enhanced with additional cameras, window wrappings, and improved signage.
    ◦ PBIS initiatives and student council involvement contributed to a more positive school culture.

Data Used for Evaluation

- KSA and iReady assessment data
- Behavior and attendance reports
- Progress monitoring logs
- PLC and committee meeting minutes
- Stakeholder surveys

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Informing the 2025–2026 CSIP

The results from last year's implementation have directly shaped this year's priorities:

- Continued focus on progress monitoring and data-driven instruction
- Expansion of MTSS supports and intervention tracking
- Ongoing professional development in evidence-based instructional strategies
- Strengthening family and community engagement
- Refinement of safety protocols and climate improvement strategies

This year's plan builds on the momentum of last year's successes while addressing areas where growth is still needed, particularly in science, social studies, and writing.

Trends

3. After analyzing data trends from the previous two academic years, which academic, cultural and behavioral measures remain significant areas for improvement?

Example of Trends

• Behavior remains an area for improvement, as referrals have increased in the last two years from 204 in 2023-2024 to 288 in 2024-2025.
• Reading for students in our gap groups remains an area for improvement because the district saw an 11% increase in novice scores in reading among students with achievement gaps from 2024-2025.

Reading & Math (KSA Data)

- 2023–2024 Combined Reading & Math Status: 55.1 (Low)
- Change from 2022–2023: Decreased by 3.5 points (from 58.6 to 55.1), indicating a significant decline
- Performance Level Breakdown (2023–2024):
    - Reading: 32% Novice, 28% Apprentice, 31% Proficient, 8% Distinguished
    - Math: 24% Novice, 17% Apprentice, 43% Proficient, 12% Distinguished
- Subgroup Gaps (Reading & Math):
    - African American students: -10.4 point decline
    - Economically Disadvantaged: -3.4 point decline
    - Students with Disabilities (IEP): +3.0 point increase

Science, Social Studies, Writing

- 2023–2024 Combined Status: 53.6 (Low)
- Change from 2022–2023: Decreased by 8.1 points (from 61.7 to 53.6), a significant decline

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- Subgroup Gaps:
  - African American students: -9.6 point decline
  - Economically Disadvantaged: -5.2 point decline
  - Students with Disabilities (IEP): +12.2 point increase

Cultural Measures

School Climate & Safety

- 2023–2024 Status: 63.1 (Medium)
- Change from 2022–2023: Decreased by 3.6 points (from 66.7 to 63.1), indicating a decline
- District Comparison: JTA lags behind the district average (70.3) and other middle schools like East Hardin (74.7) and West Hardin (68.3)

Behavioral Measures

- Discipline and referrals continue to show racial and gender disparities, with African American students and male students disproportionately represented in both referrals and suspensions.
- Attendance has declined over the school year, with ADA dropping below 94% in later months, especially during winter.

Overall Accountability Rating

- 2023–2024 Overall Rating: 49.0 (Low)
- 2022–2023 Overall Rating: 61.7 (Yellow)
- Change: -12.7 points, a substantial drop in overall performance

Key Areas for Improvement

1. Close Achievement Gaps for African American and Economically Disadvantaged students.
2. Address Declining Performance in Science, Social Studies, and Writing.
3. Improve School Climate and Safety through targeted SEL and restorative practices.
4. Reduce Discipline Disparities through equity-focused professional development.
5. Boost Attendance with proactive interventions and family engagement.

Current State of Academics and Climate and Culture

4. Describe in narrative form the current academic state of the school using precise numbers and percentages as revealed by multiple sources of your most recent outcome data. Cite the source of data used. Consider the following data sources:
• Kentucky Summative Assessments

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- Benchmark assessments
- Formative assessments
- Graduation rate
- Progress in achieving English language proficiency
- Student access to high quality instructional resources, advanced placement courses, dual credit courses, career and technical education courses, before/after school and summer programs, preschool, full day kindergarten

Example of Current Academic Narratives:

- Thirty-four percent (34%) of students in the achievement gap scored proficient on Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) in reading. Local benchmark data indicates that 32% of all students receive Tier II intervention in reading.
- Fifty-four percent (54%) of our students scored proficient in math on the KSA compared to the state average of 57%. Local formative assessments show 53% of students are on grade level in math.

James T. Alton Middle School serves students in grades 6 through 8. Based on spring benchmark and diagnostic assessments, a significant portion of students are performing below grade level in both mathematics and English language arts (ELA).

Mathematics (IReady Data)

- Scale Scores ranged from 395 to 531, with most students scoring between 430 and 560.
- Grade Level Placements:
  - A large number of students were placed 1 to 3+ grade levels below expectations.
  - Only a small percentage achieved "Mid or Above Grade Level" status.
- Quantile Measures varied from 160Q to 1390Q, with higher quantiles correlating with better performance.
- Percentile Rankings were generally low, with many students scoring in the 1st to 5th percentile, indicating significant gaps in foundational math skills.

English Language Arts (ELA) - IReadyData

- Scale Scores ranged from 408 to 610, with most students scoring between 430 and 570.
- Lexile Levels spanned from 300L to 1390L, with typical ranges for grade-level readers being 800L–1050L.
- Grade Level Placements:
  - A majority of students were placed 1 to 3+ grade levels below in reading comprehension.
  - Only a minority of students achieved "Early On Grade Level" or "Mid or Above Grade Level" designations.

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- Percent Progress to Annual Growth Goals was often low, with many students achieving less than 20% of their expected growth.
- Students flagged with "Red Rush" or "Yellow Rush" indicators were frequently those with chronic absenteeism and low academic performance.

Attendance Trends

Attendance data from the 2024–2025 school year reveals that James T. Alton Middle School maintained an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rate that was slightly above the district middle school average in most months.

- Monthly ADA Rates:
  - August: 95.18%
  - January (lowest): 92.44%
  - April: 94.33%
  - Year-to-Date (YTD) ADA: 93.98%, compared to the district-wide average of 93.61%.
- Enrollment declined from 613 in August to 583 in May, mirroring district trends.
- Despite relatively strong attendance, individual student attendance varied widely.
- Students with chronic absenteeism were more likely to be placed multiple grade levels below in academic assessments.

Access to High-Quality Instructional Resources and Programs

James T. Alton Middle School offers a range of academic and enrichment opportunities:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses such as Career Choices and Work Ethic Certification are widely available.
- Gifted and Talented (GT) and Enrichment programs are offered, though participation is limited.
- After School ESS is offered to students who are below grade level in reading or math
- Summer Programs are are offered to every student

Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency

- Students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) were present in the data, though their performance varied.
- Some ELL students achieved "Early On Grade Level" placements, while others were 2–3 grade levels below, indicating a need for targeted language support.

Conclusion

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James T. Alton Middle School demonstrates a commitment to maintaining strong attendance and offering diverse instructional programs. However, the school faces challenges in academic achievement, particularly in math and reading, with a significant proportion of students performing below grade level. Chronic absenteeism and low growth rates further compound these challenges, underscoring the need for continued intervention, targeted instruction, and support services.

5. Describe in narrative form the current climate and culture conditions of the school using precise numbers and percentages as revealed by multiple sources of your most recent data. Cite the source of data used. Consider the following data sources:
• Educator and school staff retention rates
• High-quality professional learning opportunities
• Chronic absenteeism
• School climate
• Behavior
• Staff and student access to mental healthcare
• Family and community involvement

Example of Current Climate and Culture Narratives:
• Teacher attendance rate was 84% for the 2024-2025 academic year. 2023-2024 Impact survey data shows that 71% of staff feel like they belong at our school.
• Fifty-eight percent (58%) of families participated in a family engagement activity during the 2024-2025 school year.

James T. Alton Middle School continues to foster a supportive and collaborative environment, though several key indicators suggest areas for focused improvement.

Educator and Staff Retention

Staff retention remains stable, with the majority of certified and classified staff returning from the previous year. Participation in school-wide events and professional learning days is consistently high, indicating strong morale and engagement.

High-Quality Professional Learning

Over 90% of teachers participated in at least two professional learning opportunities during the 2024–2025 school year, including sessions on equity, data-driven instruction, and co-teaching models. Feedback from staff surveys indicated that 87% found the PD offerings relevant and applicable to their classroom practice.

Chronic Absenteeism

Attendance data from August through May 2025 shows a district-wide ADA decline from 95.2% in August to 93.77% in May. JTA's ADA followed a similar trend, starting at 95.18% in August and dropping to 91.44% by January, with a slight recovery to

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93.3% in May. Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent in the winter months, with several students missing more than 10% of instructional days.

School Climate

Climate and culture surveys conducted in spring 2025 revealed that 78% of students feel safe at school, while 82% of staff report feeling supported by administration. Participation in PBIS initiatives such as the Trojan Store and trimester rewards increased by 15% compared to the previous year, contributing to a more positive school environment.

Behavior

Referral data indicates that 42.4% of students received at least one referral in 2024–2025, up from 39.5% the previous year. Disproportionality persists, with 60.6% of Black students and 56.7% of students with disabilities receiving referrals, compared to 43.1% of White students. Suspension rates also increased slightly.

Mental Health Access

The school continues to partner with community agencies to provide mental health services. The FRYSC facilitated over 120 student referrals for counseling services, and the school counselor reported a 25% increase in student check-ins compared to the previous year.

Family and Community Involvement

Family engagement has grown, with events such as Halloween in the Halls, Trojan Family Forum, and Title I Nights drawing over 300 attendees collectively. Parent survey responses show that 76% feel welcomed and informed about their child's education.

Strengths

6. Plainly state, using precise numbers and percentages revealed by current data, the strengths of the school.

Example:

• We have active partnerships with twelve community organizations and businesses.
• Eighty-three percent (83%) of certified staff have participated in high-quality professional learning through the Kentucky Reading Academies.

- Student Attendance

  ◦ James T. Alton Middle School maintained an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) above 93% for most of the 2024–2025 school year, peaking at 95.18% in August and ending at 93.3% in May. This reflects strong student engagement and consistent attendance.

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- Academic Achievement in ELA

  - A significant number of students in grades 6–8 scored on or above grade level in their end-of-year ELA diagnostics.
  - A few students scored in the Grade 8–10 range, with Lexile levels exceeding 1300L, placing them in the top 10–15% nationally.

- Academic Achievement in Math

  - Several students demonstrated mid to late grade-level mastery in math, with Quantile scores above 1000Q, indicating readiness for high school-level math.
  - Students in accelerated math courses consistently performed at or above grade level.

- Family and Community Engagement

  - Over 300 family members participated in school events such as Halloween in the Halls, Trojan Family Forums, and Title I Nights, showing strong community involvement.

- Professional Learning Participation

  - More than 90% of educators engaged in multiple professional development sessions, with 87% reporting that the training was relevant and improved their instructional practices.

- Positive School Climate

  - 82% of staff reported feeling supported by administration, and 78% of students indicated they feel safe at school, based on climate surveys.

- Mental Health Support

  - The FRYSC facilitated over 120 student referrals for mental health services, and the school counselor reported a 25% increase in student check-ins, showing proactive support for student well-being.

Leverages/Assets

7. Explain how the district will utilize its strengths and leverages, including community resources and assets (i.e., colleges, community partnerships, businesses, industry, etc.) to improve areas for improvement listed above.

Examples:
• We will coordinate efforts with our community partners to meet the behavior needs of more students.

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• We will utilize the knowledge gained from the Kentucky Reading Academies to develop a reading action plan to target students in our achievement gap groups.

James T. Alton Middle School will strategically utilize its existing strengths and partnerships to address key areas for growth identified in recent data.

1. Strong Attendance Foundation

With an average daily attendance (ADA) consistently above 93%, the school will build on this strength by:

- Expanding attendance incentives through PBIS, such as monthly recognition and rewards.
- Partnering with FRYSC to support families facing barriers to consistent attendance.
- Engaging local businesses to sponsor attendance initiatives (e.g., gift cards, event tickets).

2. High-Performing Students in ELA and Math

With a growing number of students performing on or above grade level in both ELA and math:

- These students will be invited to participate in peer tutoring programs, helping to support classmates who are struggling.
- The school will collaborate with local colleges (e.g., ECTC) to offer enrichment opportunities, such as STEM workshops and writing clinics.
- Gifted and talented programming will be expanded to challenge high-achieving students and model excellence.

3. Engaged Families and Community

With over 300 family members attending school events:

- The school will increase family education nights focused on literacy, math strategies, and digital tools to support learning at home.
- Community partners such as local churches, civic groups, and businesses will be invited to participate in mentoring, career days, and volunteer opportunities.

4. Committed Educators and Professional Learning

With 90% staff participation in professional development:

- The school will continue to offer job-embedded PD focused on equity, trauma-informed practices, and data-driven instruction.
- Teacher leaders will facilitate PLCs that focus on analyzing student data and refining instructional strategies.

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- Partnerships with GRREC and KDE will be leveraged to bring in expert trainers and resources.

5. Mental Health Supports

With over 120 student referrals for counseling:

- The school will continue to collaborate with local mental health agencies to provide on-site services.
- FRYSC and the school counselor will expand small group sessions focused on anxiety, grief, and social skills.
- Staff will receive ongoing training in mental health first aid and de-escalation strategies.

Evaluate the Teaching and Learning Environment

Consider the processes, practices and conditions evident in the teaching and learning environment as identified in the six Key Core Work Processes outlined below:

KCWP 1: Design and Deploy Standards
KCWP 2: Design and Deliver Instruction
KCWP 3: Design and Deliver Assessment Literacy
KCWP 4: Review, Analyze and Apply Data Results
KCWP 5: Design, Align and Deliver Support Processes
KCWP 6: Establish Learning Environment and Culture

8a. KCWP 1: Design and Deploy Standards

Schools continually assess, review, and revise school curricula to support the assurance that all students have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for future success.

Will this be a focus? **If yes, describe in the Comments. If no, write N/A.**

○ No

● **Yes**

COMMENTS

The school will continue to refine curriculum alignment through regular PLC meetings focused on reviewing Kentucky Academic Standards. Teachers will engage in vertical and horizontal curriculum mapping to identify gaps and ensure consistent delivery of grade-level content across subjects.

8b. KCWP 2: Design and Deliver Instruction

Instructional programs include consistent implementation of evidence-based instructional practices essential for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional competencies that are aligned to Kentucky Academic Standards and current research.

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Will this be a focus? **If yes, describe in the Comments. If no, write N/A.**

- ○ No
- **● Yes**

COMMENTS

Instructional practices will be strengthened through ongoing professional development in evidence-based strategies such as Orton-Gillingham for literacy and high-yield math practices. Teachers will implement differentiated instruction and co-teaching models to better meet the needs of students performing below grade level.

8c. KCWP 3: Design and Deliver Assessment Literacy

Schools have a comprehensive, balanced assessment system that provides a variety of evidence to support educational decision making and includes four primary assessment purposes: formative, diagnostic, interim/benchmark, and summative.

Will this be a focus? **If yes, describe in the Comments. If no, write N/A.**

- **● No**
- ○ Yes

COMMENTS

NA

8d. KCWP 4: Review, Analyze and Apply Data Results

Schools communicate and implement a sustainable system for reviewing, analyzing, and applying data results to ensure a uniform way to elicit, interpret, and act on meaningful evidence of student learning.

Will this be a focus? **If yes, describe in the Comments. If no, write N/A.**

- ○ No
- **● Yes**

COMMENTS

The school will enhance its use of data through quarterly reviews of iReady, KSA, and formative assessments. PLCs will use data protocols to identify trends, monitor progress, and adjust instruction. MTSS teams will use data to target interventions and track student growth.

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8e. KCWP 5: Design, Align and Deliver Support Processes
Schools establish a framework that organizes systems, data, and practices to promote positive, equitable and inclusive learning experiences for all students.

Will this be a focus? **If yes, describe in the Comments. If no, write N/A.**
- ● **No**
- ○ Yes

COMMENTS

NA

8f. KCWP 6: Establish Learning Environment and Culture
Schools intentionally design the learning environment to be inclusive and accessible for all students within a culture where learning and continued growth is the primary focus and foundation for all actions.

Will this be a focus? **If yes, describe in the Comments. If no, write N/A.**
- ○ No
- ● **Yes**

COMMENTS

The school will continue to build a positive climate through PBIS initiatives, student recognition programs, and increased family engagement. Staff will receive training in trauma-informed practices and mental health awareness to support student well-being and reduce behavior incidents.

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Attachment Summary

Attachment Name	Description	Associated Item(s)