

THE COLLABORATIVE TEAM APPROACH

RATIONALE FOR COLLABORATIVE TEAMS

Teachers and other school personnel typically apply their full range of skills and preferred strategies to resolve student academic, behavior and/or health issues prior to seeking assistance from their colleagues or community resources. Educators commonly require supplemental support when educational problems are considered unmanageable, judged especially complex or determined to be beyond the purview of the school. In these cases, the active, cooperative involvement of diverse school and/or community resources frequently is necessary to comprehensively study and *creatively* problem solve the educational issues which place students at risk for school failure.

As the numbers and types of student problems increase in complexity and intensity, schools are being challenged to establish effective mechanisms for addressing these problems to ensure students' academic success. Collaborative multidisciplinary team approaches that feature *structured and collegial* planning, decision-making and problem-solving processes, and that are *fully integrated* into the educational program, have proven to be effective in providing the required intervention and referral services for students' learning, behavior and health problems.

The team approach, designed to support school staff and parents who seek assistance for the resolution of diverse educational problems, is supported by the research literature and the field-tested experiences of schools in New Jersey and throughout the nation as an effective system for organizing and providing intervention and referral services for general education pupils. The school-based preventive intervention team has been used in a variety of configurations in school districts across the country as an approach for providing intervention and referral services for regular education students' learning, behavior and health issues (for examples of these programs, see the section in the manual titled Best Practices for Team Collaboration in Support of I&RS). These teams have had various titles, including teacher assistance teams, student support teams, student success teams, instructional support teams, school consultation teams, peer intervention teams, intervention assistance teams, collaborative intervention teams, core teams, student assistance teams, student assistance programs and classroom alternatives support teams.

Rationale for Collaborative Teams, continued

New Jersey schools have flexibility in naming the building teams designed to perform I&RS functions, and school districts have flexibility in the configuration and performance of I&RS team services. While districts are required to adopt an appropriate multidisciplinary team (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7), *structure* or *mechanism* for their I&RS program, freedom is provided in choosing the team approach that is appropriate for each school building. Schools are encouraged to either build upon or reconfigure their traditional complement of instructional, administrative and pupil services staff.

The print and videotape materials developed by the New Jersey Department of Education in support of the I&RS regulations focus on processes and structures that feature *team collaboration* as the foundation for planning, organizing and implementing I&RS programs. The materials feature best practices for the implementation of team approaches and the delivery of I&RS services as they apply to schools in New Jersey.

Ancillary Student Support Service

The school's program of I&RS is conceived to be an ancillary student support service for helping staff and parents address the complete spectrum of student learning, behavior and health problems. It is not intended to supersede traditional methods or resources for helping students to function effectively in the general education program.

The intended scope of I&RS programs is much broader than the limited function of pre-referral interventions to the Child Study Team (CST). It is possible that a fully institutionalized program of I&RS that targets its resources to the identification and amelioration of problems at the earliest possible stages of problem identification would never or rarely function as a pre-referral mechanism for CST evaluations.

Benefits of Building-based I&RS Teams

I&RS teams have the potential to improve educational practices, programs and services for students who are at-risk for school failure in several ways. Previous field-based studies of I&RS and similar teams in other states have identified the following benefits:

Benefits of Building-based I&RS Teams, continued

- ❑ Virtually immediate attention is given to the needs of the teacher, counselor, other school staff members or the parent(s) or guardian(s) requesting assistance.
- ❑ The structured problem-solving process used by the I&RS team; the follow-up, monitoring and evaluation activities set forth in the I&RS action plan; and the focus on short-term, achievable behavioral goals provides a high likelihood of success in addressing individual student needs.
- ❑ In a substantial number of cases, students at-risk receive interventions designed to accommodate their individual learning, behavior and/or health needs in the context of the general education setting, without referral to special programs and services.
- ❑ Data collection and assessment activities for interventions are focused on the context in which the problem is occurring, rather than on referral for separate diagnosis and possible special education placement.
- ❑ Decreases *inappropriate* CST evaluations and classifications by developing a supportive problem-solving mechanism in the K-12 general education program, and *increases the capacity* in general education to address learning, behavior and health problems.
- ❑ In the event that the I&RS team obtains information that indicates that an evaluation for special education services is warranted, the I&RS process provides a clear trail of data and other information on related issues and concerns (e.g., student performance, records of attempted strategies prior to I&RS involvement, appropriate instructional objectives and instructional strategies designed by the I&RS to bring about meaningful student progress) that are used by the CST to facilitate the evaluation process.
- ❑ Provides a standardized, systematic and non-threatening procedure for providing collegial support to individuals requesting assistance for problems related to the educational process.
- ❑ Provides a vehicle for consolidating or coordinating the functions of various problem-solving teams (e.g., 504 Committees, Drug/Alcohol Core Teams, School Resource Committees, Pupil Assistance Committees).

Benefits of Building-based I&RS Teams, continued

- ❑ For educators, parents or guardians and other community representatives, the program provides opportunities to pool their experience, expertise, resources and individual perspectives on student strengths and vulnerabilities for the precise identification of student problems; a superior match of appropriate remedial strategies with student characteristics and the context in which student problems occur; and opportunities for the development or enhancement of essential skills and strategies to meet diverse student needs.
- ❑ Provides a medium for bringing about changes in school culture and the norms of professional behavior that promote collaborative interactions and relationships, which benefit students, educators, parents and other community members alike.
- ❑ Lowers stress, raises confidence, increases willingness to try new strategies and reduces classroom problems.
- ❑ Provides a tool for solving problems that occur outside of the classroom (e.g., fighting, bullying, cursing, vandalism, substance abuse), as well as inside the classroom.
- ❑ Reduces repeat requests for assistance for similar issues due to increases in staff ability to address diverse educational problems.
- ❑ Broadens the capacity of school staff to work with student problems, in grades K-12, at early stages of identification.
- ❑ Increases general communication among all staff, and specifically increases communication and coordination among staff in special education and general education, and provides a way for them to share their expertise.
- ❑ Increases staff and parent awareness of student needs and available resources for obtaining support and assistance.
- ❑ Increases administrators' awareness of educational needs and program refinements.
- ❑ Provides valuable information for making school-wide changes.