

## **PLANNING AND ORGANIZING BUILDING-BASED I&RS TEAMS**

### **ONGOING PLANNING FOR I&RS TEAM SUCCESS**

Central to the long-term success of I&RS teams is their ability to develop, implement and sustain plans of action that address all essential program planning elements. Formal planning on an ongoing basis helps teams bring into balance program purposes and requirements, school objectives, the strengths and needs of team members, school culture, community values and the unique characteristics of school and community resources.

In addition to being a good practice for supporting long-term program success, administrative code requires teams to review and assess their operations on a regular basis. Program development plans should be based, in part, on the information and priorities established through the following required assessments:

- ◆ Review and assess the effectiveness of the services provided under each I&RS action plan that has been developed for educational problems (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)10); and, in particular,
- ◆ Annually review I&RS actions that result in recommendations to the principal for improving school programs and services (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)11).

The initial program development plan typically takes teams three to six months to complete. The team *should not* accept referrals until the major components (e.g., policies, forms, staff in-service) of the plan, which are described in detail in the section below titled “Program Planning Elements,” are in place. Schools should consider, however, that if circumstances exist which impede implementation of *all* program elements at once, the program can grow over time based on a successful track record and documentation of the need for additional program components and resources.

It is important for schools to develop institutionalized thinking that planning for I&RS program development is not a once and done activity; *continuous planning* for program development is crucial for team success. Teams should engage in formal program planning at least once a year. The proceedings of the program planning process should always be recorded and include, at a minimum, the following information:

**Planning for I&RS Team Success, continued**

- ◆ All priority strategies for program development or improvement that are based on a comprehensive review and assessment of team activities.
- ◆ Action steps/tasks for accomplishing the strategies.
- ◆ Persons assigned responsibility for achieving the tasks.
- ◆ Target dates for task accomplishment.

Schools should be cautioned that it is not uncommon for teams to mistakenly conclude that certain program elements can not be implemented based upon members' *perceptions* of current events or their understanding of available resources. If perceptions of existing supportive resources are the primary determinant of the school's preferred or "ideal" configuration for its I&RS program, there is a significant chance that they will accept less than is possible, which can translate into fewer or inferior opportunities for students.

Decisions on program planning should not be based solely on *currently* available resources. Perceptions of limited resources should be challenged and confirmed. Teams should not assume that a resource that does not exist today can not be provided tomorrow, or that the school is the only resource that is available and interested in providing support (e.g., financial, services, influence) for the I&RS program.

Effective problem solvers and program planners first comprehensively assess the types and extent of their problems, establish goals, research possible solutions, and *then* work toward obtaining the necessary resources for achieving their goals. Once a comprehensive action plan is in place, appropriate resources can be obtained to support the preferred educational innovation(s).

Program planning and development is the practice of the *art of the possible*. The key is not to dwell on what does not exist, but to concentrate on a collective vision for the program and all that is required to attain the vision, and dedicate team efforts and thinking to making as much of the vision a reality as possible, piece by piece, if necessary, over a period of time. Successful people and institutions concern themselves with what they want to have happen, rather than be stifled by factors that appear to limit goal attainment.

## **PROGRAM PLANNING ELEMENTS**

There are a number of tasks that must be completed before a team can become completely operational. There are also a variety of activities that must be engaged in to fully institutionalize and maintain the program. The key elements for planning and developing the I&RS program are described below:

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Each team should develop a *succinct* description of their I&RS program's global purpose, which serves as the cornerstone of the program. The statement should concisely describe: 1) who the team is, and 2) what the team does. The statement should be brief, easy to comprehend and prominently displayed for all to see. The mission statement becomes the guidepost for all I&RS team decisions and activities, as well as the embodiment of the team's identity for those outside of the team. Although the mission statement should be enduring and stable, it may change as the I&RS program or the district's priorities and practices evolve.

### **I&RS FLOW CHART**

Each building should have a flow chart that provides a clear outline of the building-level coordinated system of I&RS services and gives sequential direction for proceeding through the I&RS process. (Sample flow charts are provided in Appendix D.) The flow chart should include the different tasks or steps of the process and the school or community resource(s) responsible for each step, as appropriate, beginning with the request for assistance and ending with problem resolution. The flow chart, or a separate diagram, should also attempt to clarify the relationships among various professional groups who have responsibilities for working with at-risk students.

### **INFORMATION FLOW**

The team should develop ongoing mechanisms for keeping board of education members, central office administrators, building administrators, staff and the community informed of I&RS team activities, accomplishments and needs.

### **SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(a), district *boards of education* are responsible for establishing and implementing a coordinated system *in each school building* for the planning and delivery of I&RS

**School Policies and Procedures, continued**

services. To assist the board of education in fulfilling this responsibility, it is suggested that the team review its existing policies and procedures; make recommendations for the inclusion of building-level I&RS functions and operating procedures; and help the board of education keep them updated. The team should also ensure that I&RS policies and procedures are distributed to students, parents and school staff on an *annual* basis.

**MEETING  
SCHEDULE**

The team should consider whether to meet regularly or as needed, and establish a meeting schedule, as appropriate, at the beginning of each school year. The faculty should be made aware of the schedule. Sometimes the scheduling of meetings is complicated when *initiating* the program *during* the school year. But with appropriate planning, scheduling problems typically can be resolved for the second year of operations and beyond.

The team should determine a point in the school year when requests will no longer be accepted. There typically is little that can be done for a case that is presented to the team within one to two months of the end of the school year. Additionally, the team needs one to two months to close out or transition existing cases and to prepare for next school year.

The team should also let two to three weeks pass at the beginning of the school year before accepting requests for assistance. A two to three week time period allows staff, students and parents to settle into the new school year; provides the team with the opportunity to review cases from the previous year; affords time for the team to accept and prepare for cases that might have been transitioned to their building; and permits time for the team to make all appropriate arrangements for program start up in the new school year.

**MEETING  
SITE**

The team should secure a permanent location for meetings. The meeting room should hold all I&RS and related forms, policies, procedures, state and federal regulations and statutes (e.g., Pupil Records (N.J.A.C. 6:3-2 et seq.), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (34 CFR Part 99), Protection of Pupil Rights (34 CFR Part 98), Confidentiality of Student Alcohol and Other Drug Information (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-3.2), Confidentiality of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Patient Records (42 CFR Part 2), I&RS code (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7 et seq.), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act), local ordinances (e.g., loitering, tobacco possession or consumption),

**Meeting Site, continued**

information on school and community resources and a *locking file cabinet* for securing pupil records and I&RS action plans. Where possible, the room should be of a construction and in a location that provides a reasonable degree of privacy.

**I&RS FORMS** The team should develop all forms that are necessary to implement the I&RS process. The team should ensure that the forms and information collection system will support program review and assessment (see section on School-wide Planning). (Sample forms are provided in Appendix E.) Each team should consider using the following forms:

- **Request for Assistance Form** - This form is used by staff members to notify the I&RS team of their request for assistance for an educational problem. Some schools choose to use an abbreviated form for making initial requests, with a more detailed information collection form and other information collection methods (e.g., classroom observation, staff interviews, parent interview, student interview) to follow.
- **Information/Data Collection Forms** - These forms are used to obtain information/data from both the staff member requesting assistance and other members of the school and community. It is essential that these forms are designed to collect *specific, factual and observable information* on the presenting learning, behavior and health concerns. The forms should not request narrative or subjective reports. Evaluative or anecdotal information typically is not useful for objectively assessing and resolving problems. Additionally, educators and the school district can be placed in legal jeopardy if unsubstantiated or judgmental comments are recorded on the forms.

The case coordinator collects, tabulates, analyzes and reports the information and any behavioral patterns of concern at the scheduled I&RS team meeting. It may be helpful to develop separate forms for different professional groups, requesting information that is unique to their functions. For example:

- ◆ **Guidance Form** - An information/data collection form for guidance staff might ask questions about standardized test scores, psychological examinations or history of counseling or therapy.

***I&RS Forms, continued***

- ◆ **School Nurse Form** - A form for nursing staff might ask for information on known health problems, long-term medications, visits to the nurse, health assessment and physical appearance.
- ◆ **Assistant Principal Form** - A form for the assistant principal, dean of students or disciplinarian might ask for number of student contacts, number of parent contacts regarding a student's behavior, policy violations and whether a student has been detained in the office, given restricted lunch, kept for recess, given detention or been assigned suspension.
- **Release of Information Form** - Some issues that come before the team call for the assistance of other school resources (e.g., guidance counselors, substance awareness coordinators, child study teams, 504 committees) or community resources (e.g., mental health agencies, substance abuse agencies, health services facilities, law enforcement) which can benefit from information collected by the team. School involvement with some of the issues (e.g., substance abuse, suicide, medical conditions, juvenile offenses) that teams address are governed by statutes or regulations that obligate the school to obtain permission to release certain information related to the case. Therefore, teams should develop appropriate forms and procedures for the release and transfer of information.
- **Follow-up Form** - In general, nonparticipating staff do not have the right to know the details of a case that is before the team. As indicated above, sometimes the release of student information is limited or controlled by statutes or regulations.

There is nothing, however, to prevent the team from providing general follow-up communication to school staff members who have cooperated (e.g., submitted an information collection form) in the process. For example, a follow-up form could:

- ◆ Indicate the team's appreciation for their cooperation.
- ◆ Acknowledge that the information they provided was received and will be utilized, among other sources of information.
- ◆ Advise them that a determination for future action will be made soon.

***I&RS Forms, continued***

- ◆ Assure them that every attempt will be made to keep them informed, *in conformance with the laws governing confidentiality.*
- ◆ Reiterate the importance and value of their input and assistance.

Appropriate communications from the I&RS team to staff, other than the person(s) requesting assistance, impart only a suitable level of detail necessary for staff to do their jobs, while maintaining the integrity of privacy regulations and standards, reinforce colleagues cooperative efforts and provide an incentive for them to continue their support of the I&RS team's efforts.

- ***I&RS Action Plan*** - The I&RS action plan is the formal record of the team's consensus decisions for remediating the presenting problem(s). (Sample action plans can be found in Appendix E.) The plan, *at a minimum*, should include the following information:
  - ◆ Student's name (if appropriate to the issue).
  - ◆ Date the request for assistance was made.
  - ◆ Date of the meeting.
  - ◆ Names of all participants in the meeting.
  - ◆ Target behavior(s).
  - ◆ Anticipated behavioral outcomes.
  - ◆ Selected strategies for achieving the behavioral outcomes to correct the problem(s).
  - ◆ Resources and support necessary to achieve the outcomes.
  - ◆ Persons responsible for each strategy and for obtaining resources and providing support, with timelines for completion.
  - ◆ Beginning, follow-up and ending dates for the plan or other benchmarks.

**I&RS Forms, continued**

- **Checklists** - There can be a significant amount of paperwork gathered per case, all of which is received from many people at different times. Also, many steps are required to complete the process. Therefore, it can be helpful to develop checklists for different roles to help track the flow of forms, actions and information.

For example, case coordinators might have a form for tracking information collection forms from all teachers, support staff and administrators involved with the case. The checklist can also be used to document when important actions were taken (e.g., tabulated data, reviewed request with counselor, reviewed request with team, reviewed alternatives and options, communicated or met with student, communicated or met with parent).

- **Correspondence** - A personal interview is always the preferred method of contact with parents. If an interview is not possible, however, the team may use a standard letter to correspond with parents. Written correspondence might also be appropriate for some communications with other groups (e.g., health and human service providers, business and industry). (More information on parent communications can be found in the section of this manual titled Coordination of Home, Community and School Resources.)

<p><b>COMMUNITY LINKAGES AND AGREEMENTS</b></p>	<p>Per <u>N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)8</u>, school districts are responsible for coordinating the services of community-based social and health provider agencies and other community resources for achieving the outcomes identified in I&amp;RS action plans. Therefore, the team must establish <i>linkages</i> with community agencies/resources and should keep an up-to-date resource file which includes the following information for each resource (All information on community resources should be retained in the I&amp;RS meeting site.):</p>
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***Community Linkages and Agreements, continued******Resource File***

- Resource name.
- Description of resource and its services.
- Contact persons and their titles/roles.
- Street and postal addresses, as well as electronic mail addresses.
- Phone and facsimile numbers.
- Admission requirements.
- Financial arrangements.

***Agreements***

It is helpful to establish formal, written agreements with community agencies that describe specific understandings and procedures with regard to (More information on these agreements can be found in the section of this manual titled Coordination of Home, Community and School Resources.):

- Initial contact.
- Transportation and arrival of the student.
- Release of information to and from both institutions.
- Communication while a student is receiving services.
- Provision of an educational program to the student while receiving services.
- Aftercare planning.
- Student discharge.
- Continuity of care when the student returns to and remains in school.

**Professional Development Programs, continued****PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMS**

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)4, school districts are responsible for providing *support, guidance and professional development* to school staff who identify learning, behavior and health difficulties.

Additionally, under N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)5, school districts are responsible for providing *support, guidance and professional development* to I&RS team members.

Teams are encouraged to seek traditional, as well as innovative methods (e.g., school visitations, phone consultations with “experts” or officials, internet queries, hiring consultants to determine strengths, areas for improvement and a plan of action, consulting with professional associations or services, in-services, conferences, workshops, seminars, college courses, bibliographies) for the professional development of staff. Whichever professional development strategies are used, the team should ensure that new information is shared with all members. The team should consider ways to ensure that the skills or information will be applied in appropriate cases.

Special attention should be given to imparting the new information, as appropriate, to staff who request assistance of the team. Teams should help requestors of I&RS services make appropriate applications of the information and ensure that training is provided for staff, particularly for those who are asked to implement strategies with which they are not familiar or for which they lack sufficient mastery to achieve success. Professional development needs should be a component of each I&RS action plan, as appropriate.

**TEAM  
MAINTENANCE  
AND WELLNESS**

In addition to lack of administrative support, the most common difficulties teams experience center on *how* they work together as a group. It is often the team members’ *work relationships* and *patterns of operation* that interfere with their effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction with helping staff, parents and students. Therefore, the subjects of group development, group dynamics and member wellness are as legitimate for regular team discussions, as are the various requests for assistance with educational difficulties.

Team maintenance meetings should be regularly scheduled (e.g., at a minimum, one per six months) to address these concerns. Team maintenance meetings and activities are specifically designed to improve

**Team Maintenance and Wellness, continued**

team functioning, and address team members' relationships as they influence the I&RS process, rather than to explore student cases. They can also be used to develop the I&RS program, but not at the expense of attending to group process and relationship issues. The primary intent for maintaining healthy deliberations among team members is to ensure that poor communication and other forms of impaired group functioning do not interfere with teams' abilities to *optimally* help staff, students and parents.

Teams should also engage in wellness activities, either as a component of their maintenance meetings or as separate health promotion functions. Healthy teams strive to spend time together on occasion when not discussing cases. Teams might consider conducting a meeting in a different format, location or time. For example, teams might meet for breakfast one morning, go out to dinner together, share dinner or at someone's house, go bowling, see a movie, support a charity or enter a contest together. Teams should be creative in devising activities where members can socialize, build camaraderie, have fun and develop strong bonds without discussing educational problems.

Healthy teams celebrate successes. Since on occasion the nature or volume of I&RS cases and periodic obstacles and delays in anticipated progress toward achieving objectives can prove to be stressful and frustrating, it is important to reward and acknowledge incremental successes as well as dramatic ones to reinforce the hard work of team members. Effective teams also value and acknowledge members' strengths, contributions, diversity and commonalities. Sound teams support one another when members are in pain or distress. (Extensive information on team maintenance and wellness can be found in the section of this manual titled Team Wellness/Maintenance.)

<b>SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY</b>	
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	Local groups, such as service or fraternal organizations (e.g., Lions Club, Elks Club, Masonic Lodge, Moose Lodge, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Jaycees, University Women, League of Women Voters, Rebeccas, Eastern Star) and businesses
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and industries frequently are motivated to help with efforts that assist at-risk students and improve the local education program. Members of these groups generally have children in the public schools, and often have representatives whose job it is to support worthy causes.

***Service Organizations and Business and Industry, continued***

Teams should consider approaching and developing relationships with these resources, as appropriate, to request their help in supporting the I&RS concept and I&RS program needs. Some examples of activities that can be supported in whole or in part by outside resources are provided below:

- ❑ In-kind services (e.g., donate facilities, equipment, meeting space).
- ❑ Professional development.
- ❑ Office equipment.
- ❑ Team calling cards.
- ❑ Flyers, manuals, journals/periodicals, resource texts, pamphlets and other publications.
- ❑ Distribution of documents to parents.
- ❑ Materials.
- ❑ Establishment of ancillary support programs for students.

Even a nominal donation can build support and awareness for the program and help students who are at risk by:

- ❑ Contributing to some component, activity or service of the I&RS program (e.g., equipment, texts, materials, substitute teachers, training consultants, training or conference expenses).
- ❑ Supporting the development of a new initiative that was identified through the I&RS process.
- ❑ Developing a sense of good will and ownership on the part of the contributor.
- ❑ Affording free positive public exposure for the contributor and the I&RS program.

***Service Organizations and Business and Industry, continued******OTHER EDUCATIONAL AND SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES***

The types of problems that come before the I&RS team can be diverse: from reading or task comprehension to attention problems; from substance abuse to spelling problems; from attendance to fighting and violence problems; from self-esteem to medical problems; from use of improper language to physical disabilities; or from classroom disruption to health problems.

Effective teams are proactive in anticipating potential needs and continuously seeking relevant educational resources for addressing existing conditions. The team can also be instrumental in encouraging the various human, social and health services communities to simplify procedures for accessing their services and making appropriate referrals.

## QUALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

### **Program Coordination and Integration**

An emerging body of research strongly suggests that although schools may have in place a significant array of innovative educational strategies, resources, programs and practices, the mere existence of numerous educational components is not sufficient for producing effective educational programming and desired educational outcomes. The establishment of a fully coordinated and integrated program of instruction and student support requires concerted effort on the part of all school staff and administrators to understand and access all appropriate resources that will improve students' abilities to perform to their highest levels of academic achievement and human potential.

As explained in a study titled Preventive and Social Competence Programs in Use in New Jersey Schools: Findings from a Statewide Survey, which was reported in 1993 by Dr. Maurice Elias of Rutgers University, "... there is no coherent or consistent policy or implicit practice in the way in which students are provided preventive programs ... it is striking that children receive little continuity in prevention programming within and across communities." "Further, the programs that are used are not necessarily those supported by a "track record" of empirical evidence for success, or even a history of ... positive impact in districts ..." Dr. Elias goes on to explain that what appears to be missing "... is a careful process of planning and implementing programs, monitoring how they are carried out and their impact on various populations of children they are intended to help, refining programs to improve their effectiveness, and continuing this monitoring and refining process."

While I&RS teams are not responsible for schools' overall educational programs, they have significant input into the effective implementation of educational strategies developed under their I&RS action plans, and they can they are *required* to make recommendations for school programs or school-wide changes based upon the experiences and information they collect while fulfilling their mandated functions.

I&RS action plans are designed to ensure that educational strategies are carefully planned based upon a complete review of comprehensive data, monitored to support implementers, evaluated to determine effectiveness and refined, as needed, to ensure success. I&RS teams are positioned to fully utilize existing school programs and make recommendations regarding their improvement, as well as the addition of research-based programs and educational practices that will address documented needs.

***Program Coordination and Integration, continued***

Dr. Elias' report sets forth that, "Careful teacher training, program organization, administration, and parent/community involvement are part of the basic mix of features that go into a program perceived by school-based implementers as successful ... special consideration must be given to factors promoting coordinated, sustained programs integrated with the full academic curriculum of the schools. Isolated, sporadic, add-on, and short-term programs, and programs lacking in systematic skills-building components, not only do they not appear to be effective, but can be harmful in that their existence perpetuates a myth that these serious problems are being adequately "addressed" by the schools."

For example, it is necessary under N.J.S.A. 18A-40A-1 and 3 for teachers to receive training in order to competently implement the district's alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse instructional program in each grade. An in-service program on just the curriculum, however, is not sufficient for the establishment of a coordinated and comprehensive program of substance abuse prevention and intervention. To play their part in a comprehensive program in this scenario, teachers must also be trained to identify classroom indicators of substance abuse and related problems, particularly during lessons on substance abuse; apply appropriate intervention and referral skills; provide appropriate classroom support; understand appropriate supportive resources; and be well-versed in how and when to access these resources.

School administrators must ensure that the ATOD curriculum is well-articulated across the comprehensive health and physical education curriculum and other content areas and consistent with Core Curriculum Content Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education set forth by the New Jersey Department of Education; ensure support for ancillary programs which support identified problems; and promulgate policies and procedures that provide clear direction to school staff, balance consequences with support and remediation and are consistently enforced.

I&RS teams should strive to build a base of information among all staff that increases awareness of available programs, strategies, practices and resources and includes clear ideas and procedures for connecting with them. I&RS teams are key mechanisms for ensuring the quality of implementation of I&RS action plans and increasing the integrity of their schools' educational program by fully utilizing, coordinating and integrating school and community resources, programs, policies and goals, as they are consistent with the research literature and best practices in education.

