

SCHOOL-WIDE PLANNING

REVIEW, ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE I&RS PROGRAM

Per N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)10, school districts are required to:

“Review and assess the effectiveness of the provisions of each intervention and referral services action plan in achieving the outcomes identified in each action plan and modify each action plan to achieve the outcomes, as appropriate; and”

Per N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7(a)11, school districts are required to:

“At a minimum, annually review the intervention and referral services action plans and the actions taken as a result of the building’s system of intervention and referral services and make recommendations to the principal for improving school programs and services, as appropriate.”

Review of Team Progress and Effectiveness	<p>The intent of the each code provision described above is to ensure that I&RS teams will regularly take the time to formally review their actions and operations and take appropriate steps to improve the program by reinforcing or modifying current practices and initiatives and increasing members’ skills and repertoire of strategies. It is important for teams to collect <i>information and data</i> based on team actions and operations and periodically analyze these data to make certain that each I&RS action plan and the overall program is as efficient and effective as possible.</p>
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I&RS Action Plans - Since I&RS teams are responsible for assessing progress toward achieving *outcomes*, all I&RS action plans should be based on concrete data and measurable behavioral objectives. Follow-up activities should focus primarily on a comparison of baseline data to data on progress toward achieving the measurable outcomes. Without a core of data, there can be no objective assessment of progress. See the sections in this manual titled *Innovative Strategies* (Life Skills subsection) and *The I&RS Team Process, Phases of the I&RS Team Process* (Phase 2) for suggestions in charting baseline and follow-up data.

Annual Review – Similarly, the I&RS files are a significant collection of comprehensive data on educational issues in the building. An analysis of

Review of Team Progress and Effectiveness, continued

these data can facilitate an objective review of educational concerns. For example, based on a review of I&RS data a team might discover that it was able to review 24 cases out of 63 total requests for assistance in the previous school year. Based on this information, the team might consider examining the following areas: the efficiency of its practices; whether all appropriate resources were appropriately utilized; whether school staff were timely in their responses to requests for information; or whether additional meeting time, added staff or an adjusted meeting schedule is necessary to address a larger portion of the requests for assistance next school year.

Based on further review, the same team might realize that over two-thirds of the requests for assistance came from staff from only two grade levels. As a result, the team might pursue the following: determine whether there are problems associated with the program on the part of teachers in the other grade levels; determine the appropriateness of teachers' requests for assistance of the I&RS team; determine whether the requests for assistance point to staff development or supervisory needs; or consider the development of more than one building team.

School-wide Recommendations	An objective analysis of the trend data from the team's proceedings can also suggest areas for school-wide planning. Some examples of areas that can be influenced on a school-wide basis are described below:
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- ❑ **Building Programs** – The prevalence of certain types of student problems might indicate the need to:

- *Add Programs, e.g.,*

<i>Peer tutoring programs.</i>	<i>Study skills programs.</i>	<i>Transitional programs.</i>	<i>Alternative reading programs.</i>
<i>Peer or adult conflict mediation programs.</i>	<i>Peer leadership programs.</i>	<i>Peer education programs.</i>	<i>Peer or adult mentoring programs.</i>
<i>New formats or options for the professional development of faculty.</i>	<i>Development or purchase of new materials for teachers.</i>	<i>Continuity of care support groups and activities for recovering students.</i>	<i>Intervention education and support groups for high-risk students.</i>

School-wide Recommendations, continued

<i>Parent support groups.</i>	<i>Curriculum-based in-school suspension programs.</i>	<i>Programs that foster cooperation and respect.</i>	
<i>Programs and activities designed to change unhealthy norms by empowering students who do not engage in behaviors related to the unhealthy norms and regular, planned public demonstrations of support for valued behavioral patterns.</i>			

➤ *Expand or Modify Existing Programs, e.g.,*

<i>Practices that clearly and consistently communicate that all children are capable and that all school staff have high academic and behavioral expectations for all students.</i>	<i>Learning centers.</i>
<i>Coordinated implementation of comprehensive programs, services and resources in support of substance abuse and/or violence prevention and intervention.</i>	<i>Increased instructional time for English as a Second Language programs.</i>
<i>Student-centered and activity-based instructional practices for comprehensive health education and other curricular areas.</i>	<i>Alternative education programs for troubled or disruptive students.</i>

➤ *Eliminate Existing Programs or Practices, e.g.,*

<i>Ineffective instructional or disciplinary methods.</i>	<i>Practices that do not involve students in school governance.</i>
<i>Ineffective or inconsistent enforcement of school policies and procedures.</i>	<i>Denial of research-based factors and conditions that place students at risk for school and personal failure.</i>
<i>The use of non-research-based materials or practices.</i>	<i>Duplication of programs or functions.</i>
<i>Practices that exclude or make it difficult for parents and other community resources to actively participate in the educational process.</i>	<i>School health practices, such as selling non-nutritional products, which are in conflict with information taught in the school's comprehensive health education curriculum.</i>
<i>Activities that tend to isolate people, rather than facilitate collaboration.</i>	<i>Activities that are not specifically designed to address documented needs.</i>

School-wide Recommendations, continued

- **School Administrators** – Data and other input from the I&RS team can be used to help make school administrators aware of the needs of students in their buildings and of the necessity for new and refined programs and services. Information from the I&RS team can help stimulate discussion among staff about student needs and how those needs should be best addressed.

I&RS information can be used to inform administrative decisions about school policies and procedures. These data can also help school administrators identify student needs that they did not know existed or that would have gone unnoticed because they are not serious enough to warrant disciplinary action or child study team consideration.

- **Teachers** – The I&RS process not only can help resolve individual student or general classroom problems, but can provide opportunities for professional growth and the sharing of resources.
- **Student Support Staff** – Student support staff can benefit from using the I&RS team as a supplemental resource that works collaboratively with them to assess and resolve student and family problems, as appropriate. For example, information from the team can suggest modifications in the following areas: current practices in student counseling and health instruction, the configuration of student support resources, the assignment of caseloads, the utilization of community resources, the use of forms, the maintenance of records, the preservation of confidentiality or the institution of groups or individual support for students who are in need of continuity of care and aftercare support. When viewed as a partner of the student support services staff, the I&RS team can be of significant help in managing caseloads, and can actually free up time for student support staff to either see more students or address students' issues in a more comprehensive manner.

Program Evaluation	The provisions in the administrative code for program review and assessment affords programs of intervention and referral services with a significant opportunity to assure success in the achievement of the goals specified in I&RS action plans and the missions of I&RS teams. Implicit in the regulations are a charge to assess the conditions and resources that effect the successful implementation of I&RS action plans, the operations of I&RS teams and the outcomes of team activities.
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Program Evaluation, continued

Since the I&RS team collects quantifiable data on all of its cases and maintains records on team interventions, it can readily review all aspects of team operations at regular intervals (i.e., once per year, at a minimum). The review and assessment function provides opportunities to ask and answer important questions about team operations, document priority needs and make recommendations for both team and school-wide improvements. Some issues, which have been adapted from Understanding Evaluation: The Better Way to Prevention Programs, by Lana D. Muraskin, for teams to consider in the performance of their program evaluation duties are described below:

Process Assessment

Process assessment describes and evaluates program materials and activities. Process assessment captures the characteristics of a program. Process information reflects the inputs that go into a program activity; the patterns in which these inputs interact; and the transactions that take place within the program.

Benefits

- Monitoring program activities helps *organize* program efforts. It helps prevent parts of the planned program from being forgotten or neglected. It helps the program use resources where they are needed (e.g., not dedicating all resources to only one activity), and provides information to help manage the program and change or add activities.
- The information from a process assessment provides data for *accountability* to any parties interested in I&RS team efforts.
- A process assessment provides information relevant to *why* the program worked or did not work. By providing information on what was done and who was reached, the reasons for achieving outcomes or not achieving them can be known. All of the information from the process assessment can be used to suggest improvements to or the elimination of the activity in the future.

Process assessment centers around two related issues:

- 1) *Target Populations* - Who were the intended target populations? Was there a priority ordering of target groups or individuals to be influenced by the program?
 - Target populations can be described by position (e.g., staff, parent, student), by demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, race, socioeconomic status) or by psychological or behavioral characteristics (e.g., attitudes, skills, knowledge, health).
- 2) *Intended and Actual Activities of the Program* - There are important questions that need to be asked about activities: *Who* was supposed to do *what* to *whom*, and *when* was it done?
 - *Who* refers to the individuals responsible for delivering the services or carrying out the applicable plans. How many staff? Which staff? What kinds of qualifications, professional development and materials do they need to carry out the services?

Program Evaluation, continued**Process Assessment, continued**

- *What* refers to the specific actions these individuals are asked to undertake (e.g., model behavior, provide behavior management, modify instructional practices, provide individual tutoring, refer to treatment program).
- *Whom* refers to the target populations (e.g., student, teacher, counselor, parent, social worker) of the activity.
- *When* refers to the time and setting of the activity (e.g., during class, during study hall, during planning time, before or after school, duration of activity).

Questions to be Answered

The more clearly the following questions are answered, the more useful will be the process assessment. Information or data should be collected to answer the following questions:

- What were the intended activities?
- How many activities were carried out and with which target groups?
- What activities were and were not carried out?
- What did the participants think of their experience with the program? Was it interesting, useful or a waste of time? At what rate have staff accessed the program? To what degree have staff implemented I&RS action plans? To what extent are parents participating in the process?
- What resources were used for program implementation? (e.g., To what extent was professional development provided for staff who were asked to implement new skills? What types of professional development activities were provided? Were all materials and resources arranged for implementers of I&RS action plans? To what extent have all forms been developed and utilized? Where and by whom are students being served? To what degree are students being served within the school or outside of the school?).
- Who was missing or not involved?
- What facilities have been secured? Has adequate, confidential meeting space been obtained? Is a locking file cabinet used to maintain confidential I&RS team records?
- How have decisions been made on I&RS action plans? How have decisions been made regarding team operations?
- What are the communication patterns among team members? What are the communication patterns among team members, school staff and administration? What are the communication patterns between the team and parents? What are the communication patterns between the team and community resources?

Program Evaluation, continued**Outcome Assessment**

The “bottom line” of program assessment often is a determination of the effects of the program. Outcome assessment measures the short-term, immediate or proximal effects of the overall program or an individual I&RS action plan on the recipients of the service. It attempts to determine the direct effects of the program or action plan, such as the degree to which the measurable behavioral objectives identified in the I&RS action plan were achieved.

In outcome assessment, evidence is obtained regarding the extent to which the outcomes were achieved. Examples of evidence that can be collected by the I&RS team includes the following: increases or decreases in the number of referrals for a particular problem area and positive changes in student performance subsequent to receiving outside services, an increase in a student’s level of participation in an activity, improved behavior, improved grades, improved time on task, improved attendance or punctuality, improved submission and satisfactory completion of assignments and improved scores on a self-esteem or behavioral measure.

Some of the issues that should be considered when choosing a measure are described below:

- *Validity* – Construct validity is the extent to which a particular measure assesses the concept or outcome you wish to measure. For example, to what extent does Brand X self-esteem actually measure self-esteem? Predictive validity assesses the degree to which a particular measure can predict a future outcome. For example, does the Brand X self-esteem measure predict target behavior one year later?
- *Reliability* – Reliability refers to the stability of a measure. If you weighed yourself on a scale and then weighed yourself five minutes later and found that your weight was twelve pounds higher (and you had not changed anything about yourself), you would call that scale unreliable and not useful. Similarly, if a measure is not reliable (not reasonably stable), it also would not be useful.

For standardized instruments, the reliability coefficient is an index of stability and consistency. A reliability coefficient can range from zero (0) to one (1.0). The higher the reliability coefficient, the more stable the measure. Generally, a reliability coefficient between .6 and .9 is considered good. If a commonly used measure is available for an objective that you want to measure and it has acceptable reliability and validity, then it is usually better to use that measure than to make up one of your own. The absence of an acceptable measure, however, should not deter the I&RS team from thoroughly evaluating its activities.

Program Evaluation, continued**Outcome Assessment, continued****Outcome Measures**

Described below are several potential sources of information for outcome assessment:

- *Questionnaires* – Questionnaires are a commonly used measure of outcomes. The particular questions used to measure an outcome must be chosen with care.
- *Archival Data* – Archival data are those that have already been collected, such as health records, grades, attendance records, discipline records and guidance records.
- *Ratings by Others* – For certain purposes, it may be useful to obtain information from other sources about participants, such as ratings of a student by a teacher, ratings of a teacher and student by a case coordinator or ratings of a child by a parent.

Impact Assessment

Impact assessment looks beyond the immediate results of policies, instruction or services to identify longer-term, as well as unintended program effects. Impact assessment explores the aggregate effect of activities. For example, in alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) prevention programs, the ultimate effects (or the areas one would like to impact) include: reduction in overall drug use (prevalence); reduction in the rate of new students starting drug use (incidence); decrease in school disciplinary actions for drug and alcohol offenses; or reduction of risk factors related to ATOD use, such as school absences and school dropouts. Evidence can be obtained from surveys and archival data.

Costs and Concerns Associated with Program Assessment

Program assessment sometimes seems an impossible task given the perceived limits in availability of time, budget and knowledge. Program assessment often is frightening because it can seem like a mysterious, nebulous, judgmental, academic or unproductive activity; however, evaluation can be easier and more beneficial than feared. In essence, assessment is an organized way to answer the following questions:

Program Evaluation, continued

- *Did the program or activity do what it was planned to do?*
- *Did it give the kind of help it intended to the people it had in mind?*

Some common fears and complaints about program assessment and evaluation are discussed below:

“I just don’t have the time to evaluate a program and run it, too.”

Everybody is busy and “time is money.” The assessment process should facilitate program management by shortening the time it takes to find out how the program is working and what changes need to be made through the provision of information that will facilitate program planning (e.g., pointing out potential obstacles, identifying nonproductive activities, summarizing trends and patterns).

Program assessment does not have to be a cumbersome process. There are four basic steps that can be built into the development and implementation of the I&RS action plan:

Step 1: Identifying Goals and Objectives *Step 3: Outcome Assessment*

Step 2: Process Assessment *Step 4: Impact Assessment*

“What if the assessment shows that the program or activity was not effective?”

While this could be the result, it is just as likely that the assessment would pinpoint effective areas and suggest ways to revise the program activity to be more effective. It is unjust to tie up scarce resources for ineffective program activity. It also is a disincentive for professionals to repeatedly participate in nonproductive activity.

“I was never good at math or writing.”

The techniques described in the four-step approach to program assessment keep math and writing skills to a minimum.

Program Evaluation, continued***“My boss says services are what the public wants!”***

Since the provision of services is a priority, every effort must be made to ensure that the I&RS team’s services are effective and efficient. Not assessing activities to determine degree of success and not measuring appropriate use of limited resources suggests a willingness to maintain the status quo, regardless of whether or not the public’s needs are being served or whether or not desired outcomes are being produced.

“But it’s so BORING!”

It is true that, for some, it can be tedious to plan and collect data; however, the conclusions can be extraordinarily exciting and useful: increased school attendance, fewer school dropouts, reduced tardiness, less fear, school environments that are more conducive to learning and growth, fewer substance abuse problems, less violence and vandalism, decreased discipline problems, improved test scores, better grades, more time on task and increased community support for the educational process. Remember, if program assessment does not stimulate you, there are people in your school and community who love to do it.

“We don’t have the expertise.”

Most schools do not have access to the amount of money, outside professionals and computer hardware and software that are typically necessary to conduct a sophisticated randomized and controlled evaluation study. But all it takes to come up with solid assessment information is a pencil, paper, a telephone, a calculator and consideration of the right questions:

- ❑ *What did our target group or individual look like before we aimed our program at it or him?*
- ❑ *What does it or the individual look like now?*

Program Evaluation, continued

It can be that straightforward. If you feel that you need additional resources, you might consider the following:

- Members of the team or other staff may have taken courses or had relevant evaluation experience in another job. Perhaps someone in a professional network (e.g., spouse, friend, community agency, retired educator or businessman) can help out. Maybe an ex member of the I&RS team, or a prospective member of the team would be interested in assisting with the assessment function.
- Institutions of higher learning have faculty and students who are eager to provide assessment help, as well as other services, especially if the information desired is also of interest to them.
- Community members with expertise in program evaluation might be willing to volunteer their services to support these activities.
- Many expert consultants are available to help conduct program assessments.

