

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF BUILDING-BASED I&RS TEAMS

Collaboration occurs every day in schools across New Jersey. A new teacher might seek the advice of a veteran teacher in dealing with a behavior problem. An experienced teacher might ask a trusted colleague for a perspective or approach for handling a new classroom situation or dilemma. A teacher might consult with a guidance counselor about some emotional problems confided to her by a student. A guidance counselor might approach a teacher to elicit helpful information regarding a counselee. A teacher might approach a substance awareness coordinator about suspected student drug use. A principal might solicit input from a number of staff regarding a new school initiative or a particularly vexing student problem. These and other examples of collaboration are common, appropriate and encouraged.

A school-based *program* of collaboration, such as an I&RS team, however, provides the school with an *institutionalized mechanism* and *comprehensive strategy* for enabling staff and parents to work jointly to resolve problems in a *systematic manner* over a period of time. A program of collaboration requires careful planning and maintenance to become an integral and valued part of the educational program. The fundamental elements for I&RS program planning, development and maintenance are examined below.

TEAM COMPOSITION

The composition of a team may be as fixed or as flexible as necessary to perform the functions required under N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7. It is recommended, however, that the following individuals form the basis of the core group:

- ***The Person Requesting Assistance*** - Requests for help from the I&RS team for educational problems can be made by any individual who works with students on behalf of the school district, as well as by parents. As ad hoc members of the team, persons requesting assistance are bound by all of the same applicable rules of privacy, ethical standards and I&RS procedures as are regular or “core” members of the I&RS team.

Team Composition, continued

- ❑ **Building Principal or General Education Designee** – If the principal does not serve as a member of the core group, his or her designee should be on staff of the regular education program for the building and have the *authority of the principal to make decisions* to fully develop and implement I&RS action plans.
- ❑ **General Education Teacher** – The team should have a representative of the instructional staff for the building. The team may choose to include more than one teacher to represent various grades or disciplines.
- ❑ **Student Support Staff** - One or more representatives from among the following student support titles should be included on the team: substance awareness coordinator, guidance counselor, school psychologist, learning disabilities teacher-consultant, school social worker, speech language specialist or correctionist or school nurse.

The establishment, at a minimum, of a fixed *core unit* of I&RS team members is recommended for the following reasons:

- A core unit ensures sufficient representation of various professional viewpoints, which increases the probability that all appropriate information will be collected and all applicable strategies and insights will be considered.
- A core unit provides continuity from case to case.
- A core unit increases efficiency due to the establishment of a common understanding and practice of the intervention and problem-solving processes, the school's culture, the district's expectations, modes of operation and relationships among core members, team precedents and history.
- A core unit provides essential resources for initiating the problem-solving process.

Team Composition, continued

It is not realistic, however, to expect the core unit to have all applicable information, all answers or all knowledge of all resources for all problems. Therefore, the core I&RS team should practice “ad hococracy.” That is, whether schools choose to maintain a minimum core membership, establish a medium to large standing committee or use a different structure, they should be prepared to invite all appropriate school, home and community resources to participate in the I&RS information collection, problem-solving, and action-planning, development, implementation and evaluation phases of the process, as necessary, to fully resolve the presenting problems for individual cases. In addition to parents or guardians, some of the individuals who might be invited to contribute or participate include representatives from the following groups or organizations:

➤ Social and human services.	➤ Coaches.
➤ Health care.	➤ Transportation.
➤ Clergy.	➤ Administrative support.
➤ Law enforcement or security.	➤ Food services.

Contributions from these representatives can include:

◆ Participating in meetings.
◆ Providing background information and data on observed problem(s).
◆ Suggesting ideas for remediating problems.
◆ Carrying out portions of I&RS action plans.

TEAM MEMBER CHARACTERISTICS

The following characteristics should be considered in the team's makeup:

Team members should have their colleagues' respect.

Staff are more likely to seek or accept input from individuals who have credibility and are held in high esteem.

Team members should be able to apply effective group process skills.

Underpinning team operations are the dynamics of group process. The degree to which team members are able to cooperatively work together as a healthy unit (e.g., communicate, resolve conflicts, trust one another, support one another, openly share information, observe privacy rights) will directly affect their effectiveness and longevity.

Team members should be knowledgeable about the school building's program of I&RS and its procedures, as well as related school and community policies and resources.

There should be understanding, agreement and commitment on the I&RS team's mission and operating procedures. Team members should be familiar with all school policies and be able to relate the implications of applicable policies to each request for assistance. Familiarity with available community resources is particularly important for proceeding with students who require assistance from resources outside of the school.

Team Member Characteristics, continued

Team members should possess the requisite skills for assessing and solving problems in a collaborative manner.

Most educators tend not to receive extensive instruction or have experience in the skills of collaborative problem solving in either their preparatory programs or in the workplace. Operating in a structured, collaborative mode involves far more than just “working together.” Skills such as data collection, data analysis, problem assessment, brainstorming, problem solving, consensus building, creative thinking, behavioral observation, program planning, organizational development, as well as the group process skills identified above, are necessary for staff to be effective members of an I&RS team.

Team members should be familiar with the district’s instructional objectives and curriculum.

Knowledge of the required curriculum and standards for instruction are essential in determining appropriate strategies for solving learning problems at all grade levels. This is particularly important for the early elementary years, since primary age students tend to exhibit at-risk behaviors more by way of academic problems, rather than behavioral issues.

Team members should be familiar with traditional, innovative and culturally sensitive instructional practices and other education programs and methods for formulating strategies and techniques helpful to school staff and parents.

Put simply: If school staff do what they have always done with recurring problems, they are quite likely to get the same results. Many of the problems presented by students can be readily resolved with tried and true methods, but many others may require more innovation and experimentation. In either case, once staff members have added the strategy to their supply of instructional or behavioral management practices, they have increased their capacity to address similar problems in the future, without requesting the assistance of the I&RS team. (*Continued on next page.*)

Team Member Characteristics, continued

When problems continue after repeated attempts at correction, imaginative strategies may be the team's most appropriate response. The implementation of an I&RS team does not magically produce innovative or effective solutions to persistent problems. Team members should be selected, in part, because of their proclivity toward creativity or a balance of right- and left-brain thinking; their breadth of knowledge and experience in techniques for individualizing instruction; their specialized skills and information base; and their ability to represent the culture, language and backgrounds of the student population.

Team members should stay current with the research literature on effective instructional practices and actively learn new strategies in order to expand their repertoire of ideas for helping staff and parents who request assistance for problems.

Since school staff often approach an I&RS team after they have attempted a number of correctional strategies, it is absolutely critical that team members expand their repertoire of practices and techniques for dealing with the spectrum of student academic, behavior, social-emotional and health problems. Teams are strongly encouraged to include steps to receive ongoing training in new strategies as part of their plans for developing and improving the I&RS program, which should be developed, at a minimum, on an annual basis.

A variety of funding sources are available to support these professional development and other team activities. Some examples of eligible funds include the following:

Federal Funds

- ◆ Local Educational Agency Formula Funds under the No Child Left Behind Act
- ◆ Special Education funds

State Funds

- ◆ General Education Allocation
- ◆ Comprehensive Educational Improvement Financing Act (where applicable)

TEAM MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.3, school districts must identify the roles and responsibilities of the building and district staff who participate in planning and providing intervention and referral services. It is advised that the leadership roles described below should rotate on a pre-determined basis to avert domination by one person or point of view, in particular the team leader, to fully use or develop team resources and role diversity and to avoid burnout.

Each of the following roles should be assigned to a different member of the “core” I&RS team:

TEAM LEADER The responsibilities undertaken by the team leader are essential for team operations both during and outside of meetings. The team leader is sometimes, but not necessarily, the building principal. Since the demands on building principals can cause frequent interruptions of team meetings (e.g., phone calls, requests from the central office, medical emergencies with students or staff, policy violations, transportation problems, concerned parents, law enforcement operations, student disruptions), having the principal as team leader can unduly disrupt the process, which could result in poor use of I&RS staff resources. For the purposes of program start-up, however, where the team is developing plans for full implementation of the program, it can be appropriate for the principal to serve as team leader.

The school should consider whether or to what degree the participation of principals and assistant principals pose irreconcilable conflicts of interest, which can interfere with team operations or performance of other duties. For example, certain information obtained about students during the I&RS team process may not be used by school administrators in disciplinary proceedings, per applicable confidentiality regulations or other standards of privacy.

Particularly in circumstances where the principal’s duties either periodically or regularly interrupt the process or pose significant conflicts of interest, he or she may choose to delegate the role of team leader to an assistant principal or to a general education staff member. Whichever position is assigned the responsibilities of the team leader, the leader should have the *authority of the principal to formalize* I&RS action plans

Team Leader Functions, continued

during meetings. In other words, when the team agrees on a plan of action for an individual case, it becomes the school's formal operating strategy for that case, until it is revised or discontinued.

The team leader coordinates the general activities of the program, initiates, facilitates, *shares responsibility* and leads, rather than "rules" or dictates to the team. The team leader, as is the case with other roles on the team, performs specific tasks and functions, which are described below:

- ❑ Logging in requests for assistance.
- ❑ Determining the appropriateness of cases for review by the team.
- ❑ Prioritizing cases.
- ❑ Assigning case coordinators and simultaneously scheduling each case for the first problem-solving meeting and the first follow-up meeting.
- ❑ Convening meetings.
- ❑ Preparing meeting agendas.
- ❑ Serving either as the facilitator for the steps of the problem-solving model and the development of I&RS action plans or assigning the role of facilitator for either the problem-solving process and/or action planning to another team member.
- ❑ Clarifying and enforcing building-level operating procedures and rules.
- ❑ Maintaining an educational focus for resolving I&RS cases.
- ❑ Mediating conflicts.
- ❑ Serving as the liaison to school administrators and case coordinators.

RECORD KEEPER

The record keeper is responsible for the following tasks and functions:

- ❑ Registering and maintaining accurate, written accounts of all meetings.
- ❑ Maintaining all program files in a locking file cabinet.
- ❑ Retaining a supply of forms.
- ❑ Keeping a current calendar for the I&RS team.

TIME KEEPER

This role is particularly important when teams are engaged in the steps of the problem-solving model, since each step of the model is time-limited. The timekeeper helps maintain efficiency in team proceedings by being responsible for the following tasks and functions:

- ❑ Making sure that the team adheres to all time limits.
- ❑ Assisting the facilitator in keeping members on task during meetings to complete tasks in their allotted time periods.

CASE COORDINATOR

Since all team members serve turns as case coordinators or case monitors, the team should establish a pre-determined procedure for having the team leader evenly assign case coordinator responsibilities on a rotating basis.

Case coordinators are perhaps in the most pivotal position for ensuring the success of the I&RS process on a case-by-case basis. When team members serve as case coordinators, they are the primary contact with the staff member requesting assistance. Their job is to lead the requesting staff member through the process, provide support, help them

Case Coordinator Functions, continued

feel at ease and furnish technical assistance to all individuals responsible for implementing the I&RS action plan for the identified educational problem.

Case coordinators perform the following tasks and functions:

- ❑ Distributing all information collection forms.
- ❑ Overseeing the completion of all information collection forms.
- ❑ Collecting all completed information collection forms.
- ❑ Compiling and summarizing all of the behaviorally-specific information on the problem.
- ❑ Conducting observations of the problem, where possible, for information collection, remediation and follow-up purposes.
- ❑ Analyzing trends and patterns of documented behavior.
- ❑ Presenting the compiled information and perceived trends at the pre-scheduled meeting.
- ❑ Overseeing implementation of each component of the I&RS action plan for the identified problem(s).
- ❑ Providing technical support to those responsible for carrying out the I&RS action plan.
- ❑ Coordinating communications and plans for actively involving parents in the development and implementation of I&RS action plans (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)6).
- ❑ Providing insight (due to their close involvement with assigned cases) into decisions for either maintaining the current I&RS action plan, developing a new plan, terminating the existing plan or referring the case to the Child Study Team for further evaluation.

SUPPORT FOR I&RS TEAM OPERATIONS

Various additional members of the school district should be involved in order for the I&RS team to succeed. A brief description of the involvement of these school district representatives is provided below:

Board of Education Members***The school board:***

- Allocates resources.
- Approves requests for professional development activities required under N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(b)4 and 6A:16-7.1(b)5.
- Establishes and implements the coordinated system of building-based multidisciplinary I&RS teams required under N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(a).

Central Office Administrators***As the intermediaries between the Board of Education, building administrators and the I&RS team, these administrators:***

- Stay informed about the program.
- Back up building administrators' decisions.
- Assign staff support and other resources for team operations.
- Support the continuous professional development of team members and other staff, per N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(b)4 and 6A:16-7.1(b)5.
- Review the results of the team's assessment of its proceedings (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)11) and apply them, as appropriate.

Support for I&RS Team Operations, continued**Building Administrators**

Whether or not principals choose to be actively involved in team meetings, their job is to empower team members to implement the collaborative process (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(b)4 and 6A:16-7.1(b)5).

Building-level administrators:

- ❑ Provide active support by making timely decisions.
- ❑ Obtain support for I&RS activities from the central office.
- ❑ Develop a workable meeting schedule for team operations.
- ❑ Provide back-up staff for “core” team members, ad hoc team members and staff requesting assistance of the I&RS team to fully participate in team meetings and team proceedings.
- ❑ Allocate resources for the professional development of team members and other staff (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1(b)4 and 6A:16-7.1(b)5) in support of the goals, functions and action plans of the I&RS team, as well as training needs that emerge as a result of team operations.
- ❑ Assist the team in communicating and coordinating with parents and actively involving parents in the development and implementation of I&RS action plans (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)6).
- ❑ Consider and, where appropriate, use the results or recommendations of the team’s review of its proceedings for school-wide planning purposes (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)11).

School Staff

While team members and/or other school or community resources may take an active role in implementing components of I&RS action plans, school staff should understand that the I&RS team exists to help *them* with the problems they encounter, rather than assume full responsibility for all problems presented to the team. The obvious role for school staff is to utilize the I&RS team as a resource for remediating educational problems as needed.

Support for I&RS Team Operations, continued**School Staff, continued****Implicit in their role, staff should actively learn about:**

- ❑ The purposes of the program.
- ❑ How the program operates.
- ❑ How to access the program.
- ❑ The scope of the program.
- ❑ The benefits of the program for them, their students and their students' families.

The staff member requesting assistance becomes an *ad hoc member* of the team for the resolution of the identified problem(s), and attends the portions of meetings dedicated to the resolution of these problem(s). They are permitted to see all information and records pertaining to their case.

School staff who request assistance are responsible for the following:

- ❑ Completing all forms and providing all appropriate information/data.
- ❑ Cooperating with classroom or other observations of the problem.
- ❑ Remaining open to new ideas and ways of approaching educational problems.
- ❑ Actively participating in the problem-solving process.
- ❑ Supporting, implementing and evaluating I&RS action plans, as appropriate (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)10).
- ❑ Abiding by all privacy rights, ethical standards and applicable statutes and regulations.

COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING

It is important for team members to agree and school administrators to understand that, in a collaborative model, team members are equally empowered, rather than ranked according to professional titles. That is not to say that members do not contribute from the perspective of their professional training and their roles and experiences in the school system. On the contrary, the reason for diversity in team membership is to ensure broad-based input.

The intention is to assure that each member has only “one vote*.” For example, if a principal and a school nurse have different perspectives on an educational problem, it is expected that each point of view will be given full consideration. When it is time to choose an approach, however, the voice or “vote” of the principal or the principal’s designee is equal to any other member of the team, no more, no less.

The only instances in which team decision making should be influenced or overridden strictly on administrative grounds are under the following circumstances:

- ❑ ***Financial constraints.***
- ❑ ***Policy/legal requirements.***
- ❑ ***Obvious conflicts with the philosophies or mission of the school board and school administration.***

**(The term “vote” is used loosely, since the I&RS team strives to reach consensus in the development of I&RS action plans, rather than vote to determine a majority.)*

RELATIONSHIP OF I&RS TEAM TO OTHER BUILDING-BASED TEAMS

A variety of collaborative teams and committees historically have been adopted by schools in New Jersey either as a result of regulatory requirements or due to the merits of the program(s). The most common of these problem-solving groups are described below:

School Resource Committees

School Resource Committees (SRC) were undertaken in 1987 as a pilot program supported by the Division of Special Education, New Jersey Department of Education. The program was validated by an evaluation study conducted by the Educational Testing Service. This committee structure, along with consultation by the Child Study Team (CST), was designed to broaden the continuum of educational services to more fully support intervention with regular education programs in order to prevent or remediate learning difficulties before more extensive special education services became necessary.

The SRC was intended as a school-based problem-solving structure to assist general education teachers who had students with mild learning or behavior problems, and who were not learning disabled. The SRC was created to forge a collaborative relationship between special education and general education staff to provide services to students using general education resources wherever possible, quickly and without the need for extensive testing or labeling.

Core Teams

In 1991, the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services established guidelines for training drug/alcohol core teams. Core teams help schools fulfill the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:40A-10 which, in part, require schools to establish a comprehensive program of substance abuse intervention and treatment referral, and N.J.S.A. 18A:40A-15 which requires in-service training programs for public school teachers to respond to student substance abuse.

Core teams are interdisciplinary committees that provide schools with a systematic process for helping students who are having school-related difficulties due to alcohol or other drug use and *associated* health,

Core Teams, continued

behavioral and psychosocial problems. Core teams provide schools with a reliable early identification and intervention strategy, a support system for students and families, intervention services and a treatment referral process for high-risk students and their families.



**Pupil
Assistance
Committees**

In response to the success of the School Resource Committee pilot program and the recommendations of the Educational Testing Service's study, the State Board of Education adopted regulations for the establishment of Pupil Assistance Committees (N.J.A.C. 6:26) in July 1992, which placed responsibility for the mandated functions in the general education program. These rules were repealed in July 1994, and at the same time replaced by new regulations for Intervention and Referral Services for General Education Pupils (N.J.A.C. 6:26).

The retracted Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) regulations were designed to provide schools with building-based teams which would design and monitor the implementation of strategies for educating non-classified pupils who were referred because they experienced difficulties in their classes. PACs were intended to coordinate and/or deliver intervention and referral services for these pupils, and develop an annual Pupil Assistance Committee Report describing the needs and issues identified through referrals to the committee, which would be used to advise school-wide planning.

As explained in the Introduction section of this manual, the regulations under N.J.A.C. 6:26 were replaced by N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7, Intervention and Referral Services, in April 2001. The old regulations (N.J.A.C. 6:26) only required the establishment of procedures in each school building, and limited the scope of I&RS services to general education students. The new I&RS regulations (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7) require a multidisciplinary team approach for the establishment of a coordinated system of I&RS, and permits the provision of services to students who have been determined to be in need of special education programs and services, as appropriate.

NOTE: The functions, tasks and structure described in the original PAC code constitutes an acceptable, but not required, model for implementing the mandated functions under the Intervention and Referral Services regulations.

504 Committees

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (34 CFR Part 104, Subparts A, C and D) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and requires schools to provide accommodations and services to students with applicable medical conditions (e.g., allergies, asthma, Lyme Disease, physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS) and educational problems (e.g., attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, attention deficit disorder).

Comparison of Three Building-based Multidisciplinary Teams

	I&RS Teams	504 Committees	Child Study Teams
Regulatory Authority	State - N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7, Intervention and Referral Services.	Federal - 34 CFR 104, Subparts A, C and D, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.	Federal - 34 CFR 300, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. State – N.J.A.C. 6A:14, Special Education.
Student Population	Required - Regular Education. Permitted - Special Education, coordinated with student's I.E.P. team, as appropriate.	Required - Regular Education Protected Against Discrimination - Special Education.	Required - Special Education.
Team Composition	Multidisciplinary Team -Any certified staff members, and ad hoc members, as appropriate.	A group of certified persons, including those knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data and the placement options.	School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant (Speech and Language Specialist or Speech Correctionist, as appropriate).
Case Management Role	Not regulated. Case Coordinators recommended.	Not regulated. Case Coordinators recommended.	Case Manager required.
Assessment	Functional.	Functional and/or Standardized.	Functional and Standardized.
Written Plan	I&RS Action Plan.	504 Accommodation Plan.	Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.).
Review and Follow-up	Required for each I&RS Action Plan.	A one-year review of the accommodation plan would meet the requirements, but the timeline is to be adopted by the district.	Annual review of I.E.P. Re-evaluation of I.E.P every three years or sooner, if conditions warrant.
Funding	Local.	Local.	Local and State.
Family's Due Process Rights	No.	Yes.	Yes.
Forms	Not regulated.	Not regulated.	Per Regulations.

I&RS Teams and Child Study Teams

Since a program of I&RS and the CST are the primary school-based, multidisciplinary problem-solving and decision-making mechanisms, which address regulated functions in New Jersey schools, it is informative to identify further distinctions between them. Some of the distinguishing features and characteristics of these two multidisciplinary entities are highlighted in the chart below.

<i>I&RS TEAMS</i>	<i>CHILD STUDY TEAMS</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ A general education model that permits the provision of services to special education students, as appropriate. ❑ A collegial, collaborative problem-solving model, rather than a diagnostic model, and a coordinating mechanism that addresses global learning, behavior and health issues. ❑ Addresses students' specific learning, behavior and health needs in the context in which they occur. ❑ Does not classify student problems. ❑ Participates in the development of an intervention and referral services action plan. ❑ Regulated under <u>N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7</u>, and does not fall under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997. ❑ Systematically focuses all school and community resources on the resolution of individuals' educational problems, in particular, and school-wide problems, in general. ❑ An adult-centered program, where direct assistance primarily is provided to adults who request assistance for problems encountered in the general education program. ❑ Schools are required to actively involve parents in the development and implementation of I&RS action plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ A special education model. ❑ A joint decision-making process that identifies, evaluates and determines the eligibility for and the placement of students with educational disabilities. ❑ Provides for appropriate placements in the least restrictive environments. ❑ Determines students' educational disabilities. ❑ Participates in the development of an individual education plan (IEP). ❑ Regulated under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 and <u>N.J.A.C. 6A:14</u>. ❑ Focuses special education, general education and other pupil services on the needs of students with educational disabilities. ❑ A student-centered program, where direct assistance primarily is provided to students with educational disabilities, and support is provided to school staff and parents. ❑ Parents are required to participate in each step of the special education decision-making process.

Choosing an Appropriate Model for I&RS Functions

Schools remain free to adopt an appropriate multidisciplinary team approach for performing I&RS functions. Schools may also use any name they choose to identify their I&RS program. It is essential, however, that schools establish a comprehensive and coordinated system that is appropriately organized to *fulfill the basic I&RS functions* as set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7, and affords staff the opportunity to seek assistance for educational problems in a *safe and collegial manner*. It is also advised that schools carefully consider and apply the research literature on best practices for implementing programs of I&RS.

In some instances, schools have more than one type of problem-solving team or committee in the regular education program, each of which often is unknowingly involved with the same student(s) or unaware of information that each may possess regarding a student's academic performance, school behavior or relevant health status. Many of the same staff frequently serve on a number, if not all, of the various committees.

Since each of the structures described above (i.e., Drug/Alcohol Core Team, PAC, 504 Committee) is compatible with the mission, functions and practices of I&RS programs, it is possible for schools to satisfy all of the functions of typical general education problem-solving teams through the adoption of an I&RS team. Consolidating the various general education teams and committees can produce the following benefits:

- More efficient use of staff time.
- Non-duplication of services.
- Improved communication.
- Improved coordination of school and community resources.
- Improved case management.
- Increased likelihood of comprehensive problem analysis and action plans, thereby increasing the chances of success for educational problems.

Whichever multidisciplinary team approach is used to fulfill the required functions, it is recommended that schools establish simple mechanisms and clear procedures for regular communications among these groups.

Choosing an Appropriate Model for I&RS Functions, continued

The decision to either consolidate the groups or maintain more than one committee should be based, in part, on the following factors:

- **School Size** - Consolidating committees can increase the number and diversity of student cases. In some cases, the existence of only one building team might not be sufficient to accommodate the accompanying increase and variety in the caseload. An option that may particularly apply to larger school buildings is the organization of separate I&RS teams for discreet grade levels or grade level clusters.
- **Intensity of Problems** - Schools should conduct regular needs assessments to determine the intensity of student problems and appropriately configure their resources. Schools should consider whether the relative incidence and prevalence of various student problems (e.g., substance abuse, suicide, violence, physical disabilities) warrant the allocation of resources to one or more dedicated teams (e.g., drug/alcohol core team, crisis intervention team, 504 committee), in addition to the school's program of I&RS. If more than one type of building team is maintained, however, schools should take care to clearly communicate the distinct functions of each team and the precise reasons, procedures and forms for school staff to use for accessing each group.

In cases where there is an inordinately high incidence of student drug and alcohol cases, for example, it may be necessary to maintain a separate team to ensure that the high rates of youth substance abuse problems receive appropriate care, rather than run the risk of them becoming lower priority items in the more broad-brush approach of the I&RS team, or misinterpreted because of a lack of applicable training, expertise or sensitivity to the unique dynamics of youth substance abuse on the part of I&RS team members.

- **Available Programs and Resources** - Any decision on the status of school programs and services is affected by the availability of resources. It is important to note that the most fundamental and important resources required to successfully implement an I&RS team are *a few staff* who are willing to *assist their peers* for the *benefit of students* and their families.

Schools should also consider reconfiguring existing resources, as appropriate, to achieve the broad goals and functions of the I&RS

Choosing an Appropriate Model for I&RS Functions, continued

program. For example, funds under districts' Improving America's Schools Act Consolidated Application to the New Jersey Department of Education can be used in a coordinated manner to support programs of I&RS. Specifically, the New Jersey Department of Education has given schools a significant amount of flexibility in the use of the following funding sources:

- Title I, Part A (Helping Disadvantaged Children Meet High Standards).
 - Title I, Part D (Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At Risk of Dropping Out).
 - Title II (Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Program).
 - Title IV (Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act).
 - Title VI (Innovative Educational Programs and Strategies).
- **Scheduling** - Scheduling accommodations tend to be only necessary for instructional staff members who either serve as team members or who are requesting assistance for an educational problem. The school schedule is most commonly a barrier when the program is initiated *during* the course of the first year of implementation. Schedule adjustments can be readily made in advance to accommodate the program in subsequent school years.

Modifications to the school or staff schedules are only limited by the creativity and support of school staff and administrators. Described below are some common solutions used by schools when scheduling poses a dilemma for I&RS teams:

- Use a "floating" teacher, other staff member (e.g., pupil services staff) or a substitute teacher to cover classes.
- Create two or more teams in each building, so members would attend fewer meetings.
- Schedule meetings during preparation or duty periods.
- Schedule all of a district's I&RS building-based team meetings at the same time to facilitate coverage of classes.
- Limit the number of instructional staff on the I&RS team to avoid scheduling conflicts.

