

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF TEAM COLLABORATION IN SUPPORT OF I&RS

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER STATES

School-based teams are used in a variety of configurations in school districts across the country as an approach for providing supportive services for regular education students' learning, behavior and health issues. Research data and field experiences from a variety of states clearly support the efficacy of the I&RS team approach. The names and structures of the programs differ, but the concepts, characteristics and operating principles are the same. Described below are similar programs in two states:

Pennsylvania

Instructional Support Teams and Core Teams

Over a five-year phase-in period, all 501 Pennsylvania school districts implemented the Instructional Support Team (IST) program in grades K-6, and the Student Assistance Program Core Team program in grades 7-12. These programs are designed to assist any student who is experiencing difficulty in the classroom due to consistent academic, social-emotional or behavioral problems. The IST and Core Team models help create a seamless system of support within schools for students and teachers, where assistance is provided in the regular classroom for the student who is at risk for school failure.

Some of the most extensive research on building-based collaborative processes has been conducted in Pennsylvania. Highlights of the reports on Pennsylvania's experience with the multidisciplinary team approach for solving problems in the general education program are described below:

- ❑ As much as a 67% decrease in the use of retention in grade, which can be seen as a predictor of fewer dropouts in subsequent grades.
- ❑ Up to 46% fewer students referred for special education evaluations, than in schools not using the IST process.
- ❑ An 85% or more success rate for students receiving IST services (i.e., students who were successful in regular education programs and not referred for special education evaluations).

Pennsylvania Instructional Support Teams and Core Teams, continued

- On average, about 10% of a school's student population are served each year by an IST.
- Students involved in the IST process are placed in special education at the rate of 1% or less of the school population. In an average school of 500 students, five or fewer students are being identified annually for special education as a result of the general education support provided by the IST to staff, students and family.
- School staff from all teams received training in the following subject areas to perform their functions:
 - Collaboration, problem solving, team building and team maintenance.
 - Instructional assessment.
 - Instructional adaptation.
 - Effective interaction patterns, student discipline and behavior management.
 - Student assistance for at-risk issues.
- Schools that demonstrated high levels of implementation of the elements of the IST program produced better results for students' learning than schools with low levels of implementation. That is, *students profited from involvement in IST only when schools used the IST process as it was designed*. Specifically, when schools had a low implementation of the IST training components, their results on student achievements were negligible, as compared to schools that had not initiated the IST program.
- In schools that fully implemented the IST program, students receiving services displayed better time on task, task completion and task comprehension than students in schools that had not yet implemented IST or in schools where implementation was less thorough.

Rhode Island

Classroom Alternatives Support Team

Rhode Island's Classroom Alternatives Process (CAP)/Classroom Alternatives Support Team (CAST) is a system that provides support to general education teachers as they develop alternatives for students experiencing learning or behavioral difficulties in the classroom. The CAP/CAST provides schools with a mechanism for addressing the needs of students who do not require special education services, but who would benefit from some other type of intervention. Described below are highlights of information reported on this program:

- The most significant problems addressed by CAST were in the academic areas (45%), followed by behavior (33%).
- There was a 2% reduction in referrals to special education.
- Engaging educators in collaboration and providing support is an effective way to strengthen the capacity of general education teachers to educate and accommodate students exhibiting educational and behavioral difficulties.

**RESEARCH RESULTS OF NEW JERSEY'S
SCHOOL RESOURCE COMMITTEE PILOT PROGRAM**

A study of the New Jersey Department of Education's School Resource Committee (SRC) pilot program was conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The report of ETS' study, which was submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education in 1990, includes the following findings:

- 44% of staff requesting assistance said they sought help for students they would not have considered sending to the CST.
- 87% of SRC members and 73% of staff requesting assistance believed that the SRC process increased the capacity of regular education to serve non-classified students with learning and/or behavior problems. The following areas of impact were identified:
 1. District Programs - Several districts added programs as a direct result of the needs of students referred to the SRC (e.g., an alternative reading program, a transitional K-1 program, a homework club, a peer tutoring program, development of new materials for teachers) *or* expanded existing programs (e.g., learning centers, basic skills, increased time for English as a Second Language programs).
 2. School Administrators - The SRC made school administrators more aware of the needs of the students in their buildings and of the need for new and refined programs and services. It helped stimulate discussion among staff about student needs and how these needs should be addressed. The process also helped building principals identify student needs that they did not know existed, or that would have previously gone unnoticed because they (e.g., disaffected youth) were not serious enough to warrant CST consideration.
 3. Teachers - The SRC not only helped teachers deal with individual student problems, but provided an opportunity for professional growth.

Results of New Jersey's School Resource Committee Pilot Program, continued

- ❑ Inappropriate referrals to CST were reduced by an average of 24% over the two-year period of the pilot program.
- ❑ 84% of SRC members, 70% of staff requesting assistance and even 53% of teachers who had not used the SRC indicated that the SRC had helped to serve students who would have been inappropriately placed in special education. Nearly half of the teachers requesting assistance felt that they were meeting the needs of their non-classified students with learning and behavior problems better than when their school did not have an SRC.
- ❑ The time CST members saved by doing less “formal” evaluation (i.e., testing) was spent conducting *more “informal” assessments* (e.g., observation, records review, review of documented accomplishments) and *consulting* with teachers and administrators.
- ❑ The *annual building-level* costs for the pilot program ranged from \$0 to \$2,000, with the average cost being \$591.00.
- ❑ 81% of SRC members and 64% of staff requesting assistance believed that the SRC increased teachers’ repertoire of both instructional and behavioral techniques.
- ❑ 90% of SRC members and 81% of staff requesting assistance believed the SRC provided an effective way for teachers to share expertise.
- ❑ No teachers indicated that they avoided the SRC because others would think them poor teachers. Most of the teachers who did not use the SRC reported that they did not seek assistance because they had no students who required this type of assistance (50%) or because other sources of assistance were available (18%). Other reasons cited for not using the SRC were lack of familiarity with the process (10%), the time it took to get assistance (10%) and thinking the service would not be useful (13%).

Results of New Jersey's School Resource Committee Pilot Program, continued**Other findings of the SRC program include:**

- ❑ The building-based teams were most likely to continue in districts where there were *commitment* and *support from the central office administration* and in schools where there were *commitment* and *leadership from the principal*.
- ❑ Increased communication among regular education and special education teachers.
- ❑ Provided teachers with modifications learned from the CST members and other special needs staff.
- ❑ Gave teachers a place to go for support and assistance and streamlined interventions for students.
- ❑ Provided teachers with the opportunity to brainstorm new classroom strategies and techniques and brought different points of view and areas of expertise to problem solving.