Chapter 9
Implementing Effective Student Support Teams

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ABSTRACT

Pre-service teachers in a K-12 setting, encounter students in need of academic and behavioral supports. One method of providing supports to struggling students in the general education and special education setting is through the problem-solving process of pre-referral intervention, hence forth referred to as Student Support Teams (SST) within Response-to-Intervention. During the SST process, student's academic and/or behavioral difficulties are considered through a multidisciplinary approach. Research demonstrates the use of a multi-tiered problem solving approach as a means to provide supports for students prior to special education eligibility and placement. Additionally, there are concerns regarding implementation and teacher perceptions (Powers, 2001) on the effectiveness of the intervention and collaboration between general education and special education teachers (Graden, 1989). This chapter discusses historical aspects, purpose and process, best practices, and challenges of SSTs, while presenting strategies for teachers and educators to effectively implement the SST process.

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Lincoln, a first year teacher, referred a student in her 3rd grade class to the SST for reading difficulties. During the meeting Ms. Lincoln was asked to present her concerns. At which time, she replied, 'this student has been referred in first grade to the SST, but nothing to date has happened. This student needs to be tested and placed in special education. Why is this process taking so long?' The school psychologist responded to this question by asking Ms. Lincoln what interventions she has implemented?

Too often across the country teachers refer students to the Student Study Team (SST) as the first step towards special education placement. A study conducted by Powers (2001) noted that 63% of teachers believed that the SST process was a hoop they needed to jump through in order to get the student special education services. At the same time, there is a notion that teacher's must complete a certain number of SST's prior to the student being assessed for, and if needed, placed in special education. Though the data from the SST process can help struggling students, the function of the SST is not to qualify a student for special education services. Student study teams are a multidisciplinary team of individuals working collaboratively to address academic and behavioral concerns of students within a Response-to-Intervention framework (RTI). Response to intervention uses a multi-tiered approach to identify and support students with academic and behavioral needs (RTI Action Network) within the general education setting.

Response to intervention consists of three tiers – Tier 1 includes high quality research based classroom instruction in the general education setting (RTI Action Network). Tier 2 consists of targeted interventions for students who demonstrated difficulty at Tier 1. Students in Tier 2 are presented with additional academic supports in a small-group setting of 3-5 students with increased frequency and duration. Progress monitoring data is obtained from the implemented interventions. Student study teams take place at this Tier. Tier 3 includes intensive interventions with progress monitoring for students who did not respond to interventions at Tier 2. These interventions consist of increased frequency and duration of interventions in a small-group setting of 2-3 students. Special education referrals can take place in Tier 3 if the student does not show progress from the implemented interventions. "RTI is designed for use when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data" (RTI Action network).

Student Study Teams were originally known as pre-referral teams. These teams, examined student difficulties for both academic and behavioral concerns through instructional support in the classroom environment. Pre-referral teams, grew out of a mandate from the Education for all Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (PL. 94-142) requiring the use of these teams in the special education referral and placement process. Pre-referral Intervention Teams were mandated as a form of protection during the special education evaluation procedure suggesting that professionals using multiple criteria would make less biased referral decisions (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1983). Over the years, MDT's have had many names such as, Pre-referral Intervention Teams (PIT; Graden, Casey, & Bronstrom, 1985); Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT; Graden, 1989), Instructional Consultation Teams (ICT; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996), Child Study Teams (CST; Moore, Fifield, Spira, & Scarlato, 1989), Mainstream Assistance Teams (MAT; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990), Teacher Assistant Team (TAT; Chalfant, 1979), and Student Study Team (SST; Chalfant, Pysh, & Moltrie, 1979). Despite the variations in name and some procedural characteristics, the function remains the same - develop interventions for students struggling in the general education setting (Burns, et al., 2005). Student Study Teams are consistent in both general education and special education with the main focus to assist students struggling academically and behaviorally in the general education setting with general education curriculum (District of Columbia State Improvement Grant).

Background

The student body in the United States has grown more diverse and multifaceted over time. As such, meeting the needs of various students' academic and behavioral difficulties has become a major aspect of education, both in the general education and special education settings. Concerned with student

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