STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER

PREVENTION FIRST
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse

Student Support Teams - an Intervention That Succeeds

Educators have been able to identify struggling learners throughout the history of education. Just as a variety of reasons exist for why learners struggle, a variety of approaches to working with struggling learners is needed. Mental health problems, substance use (both family and student use), relational violence (family, school, community and other), early sexual engagement, gender issues, family dysfunction or disintegration, poverty and other issues take attention away from learning leaving the best academic and behavior interventions ineffectual.

"Much of the attention currently given to improving students' academic achievement addresses issues of curriculum, instructional strategies, and interventions or services for struggling learners, and rightfully so. However, even after addressing these issues, barriers still remain for some students. An estimated one-third of students fail to learn because of psychosocial problems that interfere with their ability to fully attend to and engage in instructional activities, prompting a call for "new directions for addressing barriers to learning."[1]

Nonacademic Student Support Teams as an Effective Strategy
Student support teams (SST) first emerged in the 1970's, and have become widely accepted as an effective approach in helping students. The American Institute for Research, National Association of School Psychologists, American School Counselors Association, and the US Department of Education promote the non-academic student support team as an important component of an effective school.[2]

While there have been a variety of models of student support teams, the primary structure is the use of a problem-solving approach. The student support team's focus is to strengthen and support students who are experiencing academic, behavioral, family, and/or emotional difficulties that interfere with learning. SSTs develop and implement intervention plans through the problem-solving process using classroom, school, family, and/or community-based strategies. Student support teams in multi-tiered systems of support most often center on changing instruction to increase academic and behavior skill development.

Student Assistance Programs are an Effective Student Support Team Framework
Student Assistance Programs have demonstrated success throughout both the nation and in Illinois. SAPs utilize an evidence-based, low-cost, effective student support team model as one component of the SAP framework. While many SSTs focus on academics and behavior by changing instruction and moving students through tiers prior to formulating individualized interventions, Student Assistance Programs work directly with students with individualized interventions at the point of need.

The individualized point of need interventions utilized by Student Assistance have been shown to be an effective approach in addressing psychosocial problems allowing students to take advantage of curriculum and behavioral skill development. Student Assistance provides support interventions most often directly with the student, rather than having instructional strategies changed.

Student support teams typically initiate problem-solving through staff referrals. the problem-solving process is implemented when a staff member brings a concern to the team. The process identifies strategies to be utilized by the concerned adult. Although Student Assistance also initiates problem-solving when a staff member identifies a concern, a unique feature of SAP is the use of self and friend referral to get help through the SAP. Students receive information about the SAP that helps them know how to connect themselves and others to caring adults when a problem arises.

Student Assistance Programs encourage evidence-based approaches to build success and foster positive youth development. Student Assistance emphasizes the use of protective factors, positive youth development principles, and the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets in formulating interventions to address student needs. These may also include connecting and coordinating professional services and community support programs for both students and families.

Integration as a Balanced Approach
Integration of Student Assistance as a student support model coordinated with other multi-tiered systems of support strategies can provide a more comprehensive framework for addressing student needs.

[1]*Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom, published by the Institute of Educational Sciences, U.S.D.O.E. What Works Clearinghouse, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/4.*

[2]*Dwyer, K. and Osher, D. (2000). Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, American Institutes for Research, American Institute for Research, February 27, 2013, Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee Hearing on "Protecting Students and Teachers: A Discussion on School Safety", Alternatives to Grade Retention, http://www.nasponline.org/resources/ principals/Retention%20WEB.pdf, American School Counselor Association. (2003). The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs. Alexandria, VA, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged.*

http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html