To successfully implement a tiered system of support, schools must cultivate a collaborative school culture in which all staff take responsibility for the success of all students. As part of this collaborative culture, it is important that staff have time, a place, and a process for engaging in collaborative problem-solving. This Quick Reference Guide outlines how Student Support Teams (SSTs) can be used to encourage such collaboration among staff to ensure that all students are having all their needs met in safe and supportive learning environments and are able to be successful in and out of school.

What is a Student Support Team?

Also known as Intervention Teams, School-based Problem Solving Teams, or Child Study Teams, Student Support Teams (SSTs) are a formalized structure for a group of educators, administrators, and other staff to meet regularly to address concerns about individual students or groups of students. SSTs are designed to support students both by anticipating and preventing issues before they occur and by providing interventions and/or resources when issues do arise. At the same time, SSTs support staff members by introducing teachers who bring an issue to the team to new strategies and

> Examples of issues that may be brought before SSTs:
> - Academic struggles
> - Poor attendance
> - Discipline problems
> - Health-related issues
> - Substance abuse
> - Potential for retention
> - Need for enrichment

building their capacity to support a wide range of students; teachers are able to generalize successful new strategies beyond the SST process to meet the needs of other students in their classrooms, including struggling students and students who have already mastered the content being taught. Often, SSTs are also responsible for academic and non-academic whole-school initiatives, particularly those related to positive school culture and climate and academic tiered systems of supports.

Why Build a Student Support Team?

In addition to helping students to achieve both behavioral and academic success in the general education environment, research has shown SSTs to have the following benefits for students, teachers, and administrators in schools that utilize them:

1. SSTs can provide immediate assistance to teachers and students, focused on both prevention and intervention, in contrast to the "wait-to-fail" model.

> Research has shown that effective SSTs reduce the number of retentions, suspensions/expulsions, and inappropriate referrals to special education (Buck, et al, 2003; DC Public Schools, 2006)

2. SSTs can assist educators with problem-solving for individual cases and with building capacity in intervention strategies to support current and future students.

3. SSTs can lead to improved teacher retention rates and higher job satisfaction.

4. Administrators can review types of issues that are repeatedly brought before the SST to direct resources and identify areas of need for professional development.

5. SSTs can significantly reduce the number of inappropriate referrals for special education evaluations (evaluations that do not find a student eligible for services).

6. SSTs can significantly reduce the number of student retentions, suspensions, and expulsions.

7. SSTs can foster stronger, more collaborative relationships among staff, including administrators, helping staff to develop shared expectations for all students and a sense of responsibility for the success of all students.

Common Elements of Effective Student Support Teams

While schools typically customize their SSTs based on the specific needs of their staff and student body, the following are common elements of effective SSTs:

1. The primary goal of SST interventions is increased success of students in the general education curriculum and within the general education classroom.
2. SSTs are tasked with looking at the whole child, taking into consideration a student's academic and non-academic needs, including family needs and medical needs where applicable.
3. SSTs collect and consider both academic and non-academic data.
4. Anyone can submit a problem to or ask for input from SSTs, including school staff, family members or legal guardians, and students.
5. There are no parameters for the issues that can be brought before SSTs.
6. In addition to suggesting classroom-based strategies and interventions, SSTs may recommend school- or community-based supplemental supports.

> Examples of data artifacts:
> - Student work samples
> - Formative/summative assessments
> - Progress monitoring data
> - Universal screeners
> - Student or family interviews
> - Observation data
> - Attendance records
> - Discipline/referral records

7. SSTs may propose student/family-focused or school-focused interventions.
8. The intensity of all supports and/or interventions recommended by SSTs will vary depending on an individual student's or group of students' needs.
9. SSTs have regular communication with students' families and engage them in the problem-solving process.
10. SSTs have regularly scheduled meetings, generally weekly or bi-weekly, to discuss concerns that are brought forth regarding a student (or a group of students facing similar challenges) or to follow up on earlier cases.
11. SSTs are action oriented, and meetings result in assigned next steps.
12. Sending teachers come to SST meetings prepared to share data on the student(s) being discussed, including data collected through the various support strategies already tried.
13. SSTs monitor the progress of students and the effectiveness of interventions over multiple meetings.
14. SST meetings do not automatically result in a referral to special education, though SSTs may recommend a special education evaluation in some cases.

Who should be on a Student Support Team?

SSTs provide a vehicle for staff from across the school community to engage in a team approach to problem-solving. While members may be added to SSTs in certain instances based on the student being discussed or the issue being addressed, there should be a core group of staff that attends regularly scheduled meetings. This core group should always include an administrator, as research has shown that administrator participation is an important factor in an SST's effectiveness (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006). In larger schools, especially high schools, there may be a need for multiple SSTs to support the needs of the student body. These SSTs may be organized by grade level, subject area, or area of expertise. When a school has multiple SSTs, department heads or grade level chairs may take on the administrator role on an SST. Below is an example of the core members of one Massachusetts district's SST, as well as the staff who are often asked to attend a meeting based on a particular student or group of students' needs:

Core SST Members	Additional Members
• Principal or other building administrator	• ESL teacher
• General education teacher(s)	• School nurse
• Special education team chair and/or special education teacher(s)	• Subject area and/or reading specialist(s)
• Interventionists	• Department Head and/or grade level chair
• Guidance counselor or school psychologist	• Central office personnel
• Related service providers (e.g. Speech-Language Pathologist)	• 504 Coordinator
• School social worker	• Personnel from state agencies or community organizations (e.g. DCF; Boys and Girls Club)
• Family member or legal guardian of student(s)	• Student(s) (generally secondary)
	• Translator

In addition to staff members, many districts invite members of community organizations to participate in meetings when appropriate. In some cases, the students themselves, especially from the upper grades, may also be invited or asked to attend an SST meeting to share their perspective on the issue being discussed. In all cases, families should be encouraged to take part in the entire SST process. Family members are often excellent sources of information for the SST and can help to identify and prevent potential problems early.

Strategies for Fostering Family Engagement in the Student Support Team Process
To encourage family engagement with SSTs, schools can*:

1. Inform families of the SST process
2. Have a team member speak with the parent ahead of time so they know what to expect at the SST meeting
3. Hold meetings at convenient times for parents and provide accommodations, such as translators
4. Make the parent an equal member of SSTs and state this explicitly at meetings
5. Avoid using acronyms or jargon (for example, RTI, DIBELS, etc.)
6. Use child-first language and never label a child

7. Set a positive tone by asking all team members, including the parent, to describe the student's strengths
8. Ask the parent to share with the team about their child's life outside of school
9. Provide families with regular updates on the implementation of the decided-on supports/interventions
10. Ensure that any request from the family for an evaluation for special education is honored

*Adapted from District of Columbia State Improvement Grant

SSTs do NOT:
- Assume any issue is the fault of the student and/or their family
- Act as pre-referral teams or automatically refer students to be evaluated for special education services

Suggestions for Getting Started

1. Identify a place and time for regular SST meetings and ensure that members are given release time to attend; keep a calendar of regularly scheduled SST meetings and decide on a way to track requests and data.
2. Consider assigning roles to help the SST to function smoothly. These roles may include chairperson (often the administrator), recorder, timekeeper, and a point person for each case.
3. Have a confidentiality agreement that SST members sign at the beginning of the year or as they join the team.
4. Identify the sources of academic and non-academic data that are available to the SST and sending teachers.

Conditions that support SST effectiveness:
- Staff awareness of the SST and its purpose
- Support from administration
- Release time for SST core members and invited members to participate
- A clearly defined problem-solving process

5. Identify the resources within the school and district, as well as in the community, that are available to the SST for supporting teachers, students, and/or students' families.
6. Develop or adapt a protocol for collaborative problem-solving that the SST will follow to 1) concretely define the problem being brought before the team, 2) brainstorm solutions, and 3) design an action plan, assign action items, and identify next steps.
7. Develop or adapt protocols and accompanying forms for teachers or families to bring an issue to the SST and for notifying families of upcoming SST meetings involving their children.
8. Outline a process for working with the staff member or family member who requested support to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention that was implemented.
9. Inform staff and families about the formation of the SST, its purpose, and the process for requesting help.

Choosing Interventions and Monitoring Student Progress

Once an SST has reviewed all relevant data, heard from the sending teacher and/or family member, identified available supports and resources, and brainstormed potential interventions and/or extension activities, the team develops an action plan. Action plans include recommended interventions or activities, how they will be implemented (by whom, how often, in what setting[s], and for what period of time), and how they will be evaluated, including what data will be collected.

When the SST has agreed on a strategy or course of action for addressing an issue, a follow-up meeting is scheduled to assess the effectiveness of the chosen intervention or activity, preferably within 4-6 weeks. At these meetings, SST members give updates on action items from previous meetings, look at multiple sources of data regarding student progress, and decide on next steps.

> Sample SST interventions/supports:
> - Connect family with community-based mental healthcare provider
> - Give student options for demonstrating knowledge
> - Assign staff member to daily check-in with student
> - Pair student with a younger child as a "Big Buddy"
> - Enroll student in after-school program
> - Give student frequent and specific feedback on schoolwork and/or behavior

At follow-up meetings, SSTs may decide to 1) continue the current intervention with the same or increased frequency and intensity and monitor the student's or students' progress; 2) try a new intervention if the current strategy is not having the desired effect; 3) bring the SST process to a close if the issue has been resolved to the team's satisfaction; or 4) refer the student for a special education evaluation if there is evidence that a student is struggling as the result of a disability. The first three options also apply when assessing extension activities.

Questions that an SST may ask when reviewing data to choose an intervention or evaluate its effectiveness:

1. Does the intervention match the student's or students' needs?
2. Is the intervention evidence-based and does it have proven results with students with similar issues?
3. What types of evidence were collected to measure the effectiveness of the intervention?
4. Did the student(s) experience academic and/or behavioral success as a result of the intervention?
5. Was the intervention implemented for a sufficient amount of time?
6. Is there evidence that suggests they should continue with the same intervention or try a new intervention?
7. Are there resources available to support the student or his or her teacher that have not been considered?

Student Support Team: Tools and Resources

District of Columbia Public Schools SST Manual: http://www.dcsig.org/sstresources.htm

National School Reform Faculty – Materials and Protocols:
http://www.nsrfharmony.org/protocol/a_z.html

San Francisco Unified School District Sample SST Forms:
http://www.healthiersf.org/Forms/index.php#sst

Student Support Center: http://www.studentsupportcenter.org/services/SST.shtml

Additional References

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