

***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS  
AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

**STEP 3.**

**Targeted Interventions**

- **Introduction**
- **A Team to Mobilize & Manage Resources for Learning Supports** (*an emerging practice*)
- **Engaging Students as Learners** (*an emerging practice*)
- **Family Support** (*a best practice*)
- **Literacy and Math Interventions for Struggling Students** (*an emerging practice*)
- **Reconnecting Youth** (*a best practice*)
- **Self-Determination for At-Risk Youth** (*a best practice*)

# ***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **INTRODUCTION\***

When students are unsuccessful at the universal, core instructional level, whether their struggles are academic, behavioral, or both, they typically need additional intervention. ***Response to Intervention (RTI)*** is designed to provide quality instruction through a research-based and scientifically valid curriculum, implemented with fidelity for all students. Continuous monitoring of progress is an integral part of the process to quickly identify those who are not responding and need something specific to effectively address the identified problem. *RTI*, the current term for curriculum-based assessment and measurement, is one way to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. This monitoring is critical to the problem-solving process. Learning rate and level of performance are two response measures used in ongoing decision making.

Rather than the “wait to fail” model, schools embracing *RTI* have a supplemental delivery system for students needing more intensive interventions. Commonly, these are known as secondary or tertiary interventions, although a given *RtI* approach may have more than three tiers (the first tier always being universal instruction.) Under an *RtI* approach, at the building level, decisions to be made include the how and when students will move to their most appropriate instructional setting; who will provide the educational services; and how those services will be monitored for effectiveness. An enhanced level of support may or may not occur in the regular classroom environment, but it is always aligned with the curriculum and behavioral expectations of the classroom. Accommodations and alignment are important to ensure the student’s ability to continue to make progress on grade-level content standards.

When a student receives services at the targeted tier of intervention, the goal is to *accelerate* student learning to close the achievement gap so the student can function within the universal, core group. Ideally, the goal is for the student to function as an independent learner without secondary tier supports.

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\* A *Reference List* for each of the nine Steps, including this Step, can be found in Appendix E.

## What the interventions look like

Often, at the targeted level there will be additional daily time for direct instruction with a more narrow focus than was provided at the universal level. This direct instruction could be academic; teaching strategies; or creating an environment to enhance motivation and engagement; or a combination of these. A sufficient length of time and ongoing monitoring should be provided to determine if the intervention is working. Some have recommended six to eight weeks for the targeted intervention, but there is no set time limit. Careful, frequent monitoring of progress is important.

The intervention should specifically match the needs of each individual student. Targeted interventions are most effective when the problem-solving team clearly identifies the specific problems or barriers to the student's learning prior to prescribing interventions. Typically, it is best to follow the principle of using the most effective but least intrusive intervention needed; i.e., doing what is needed, but no more than that.

For instance, a fourth grade student who is achieving below his/her peers in reading might very well close that achievement gap with more targeted, intense reading instruction alone. If the child does not respond to that intervention, then other interventions can be implemented. A tenth grader who is achieving below peers in reading and has ongoing attendance and discipline issues will need more than targeted, intense reading instruction, and could require third tier (intensive) interventions involving multiple agencies.

In this section, several best practices and emerging practices for targeted interventions are described in detail. Keep in mind, however, that these interventions are not mutually exclusive. Seldom is one intervention used in isolation. They are truly integrated and inter-connected. Furthermore, this list of tools is not inclusive of all best practices shown to be effective. References are included to assist in the exploration of proven and promising programs.

One trait that best practices share in common is they are based on **fully (re)engaging** the student in his/her learning.

- At its most basic level, ensuring students are fully **engaged in their classroom** learning involves capturing a student's attention and focus and creating a positive classroom environment.
- Some struggling students see adult success as more a factor of luck than hard work. Older students especially need to understand the relationship between what they are learning now and their future options. Having a clear sense of possible post-school outcomes can help students see that **relevance**. Additionally, community-based experiences can help a student feel more connected.

- Promoting a strong sense of **self-determination and self-advocacy** is also at the heart of student engagement. This can help foster a situation where the student is genuinely available for learning.
- Interventions must be specifically designed to close achievement gaps, especially in the areas of literacy and math. **Academic rigor** is a way to achieve engagement. Although sometimes students might benefit just from extended time, often they will need something other than a “longer and louder” version of what they had been getting in the general classroom.
- The importance of **family/community support** cannot be emphasized enough. In attempting to engage struggling learners, it is critical for students to have a sense of belonging and accomplishment and to have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning.
- Finally, the **resources** to provide these interventions must be available. At the building level, teams will decide how best to allocate space, time, and personnel to provide quality interventions, as well as how to support the seamless movement of students through various levels of intervention. Regular reevaluation of decisions, reformulation of plans, and renegotiation of agreements based on mutual evaluations of progress, problems, and learners’ perceptions of how well instruction matches their interests and capabilities is ongoing.

Professional development will be required to support teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies that accommodate individual needs and differences. Teachers may be called upon to teach prerequisite knowledge and skills in order to enhance learning academic content and address academic and nonacademic barriers that may be interfering with student learning and performance.

The interventions in this Step are intended to be secondary tier interventions. Ideally, students who receive these kinds of interventions will successfully progress within the primary, core group. However, when the school’s problem-solving team finds students are not responding positively to the targeted interventions, the team will need to determine if those students will need additional support, including more individualized and intensive interventions (*see, e.g., Step 3*). In that case, the *RTI* framework serves as a diagnostic tool to better delineate intensive interventions and possible eligibility for special education services.

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **A Team to Mobilize and Manage Resources for Learning Supports (an emerging practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

All schools have activities that focus on the prevention and correction of undesirable behaviors, learning, and emotional problems. This work includes programs and services related to substance abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, delinquency, and learning problems. In some schools, as much as 30% of the budget may be used to address such concerns. However, schools often lack the infrastructure to ensure that resources are used appropriately to address all of problems that arise.

Most schools have a team that focuses on individual student/family problems (e.g., a student support team). This type of team frequently addresses referrals, triage, and case monitoring or management. In contrast to a case-focused team, a school team that addresses resource-oriented functions (e.g., a *Learning Support Resource Team*) takes responsibility for enhancing the use of all resources a school has available for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. This type of resource provides a missing link in enhancing use of student/learning support resources to enable more students to have an opportunity to succeed in school.

Resource-oriented infrastructure mechanisms can enhance cost-efficacy by ensuring that programs function in a coordinated, integrated and systemic manner. The functions of such a mechanism range from clarifying priority needs to analyzing how existing resources can best be deployed in building a comprehensive system of learning supports over time. For example, a Learning Supports Resources Team provides ways to:

- (a) map and analyze activity and resources to improve their use in preventing and addressing problems;
- (b) identify the most pressing program development needs in a school;
- (c) make decisions about resource allocation;
- (d) maximize systematic and integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of student and learning supports;
- (e) establish priorities for strengthening programs and developing new ones;
- (f) create formal working relationships with community resources to enhance school

- resources and establish special linkage in the community; and
- (g) upgrade and modernize the approach to providing student learning supports in ways that reflect the best intervention thinking and use of technology.

Properly designed, this mechanism is a formal unit of a school's infrastructure that is fully connected with other infrastructure mechanisms, especially those involved in school improvement planning and decision-making. Having at least one representative from the resource team on the school's governing and planning bodies (e.g., the principal's decision-making team; the school improvement planning team) ensures the type of infrastructure connections that are essential if student and learning supports are to be maintained, improved, and increasingly integrated with classroom instruction.

A well-designed resource-oriented team complements the work of a school's governance body by focusing on providing on-site overview, leadership, and advocacy for all activity specifically used to address barriers to teaching and learning. The team needs to include appropriate members (e.g., those with authority to make decisions) and team members will need to be trained and supported by the administrators and other faculty. This type of mechanism enables the "braiding" of school and community resources, encourages cohesive intervention activities and is the key to developing current student supports into a comprehensive system of learning supports. Further, a resource-oriented mechanism focused on student/learning supports also provides leadership for guiding all stakeholders in achieving the school's vision for learning supports and for enhancing productive working relationships and solving turf and operational problems.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS**

It is conceivable that one person could perform many of the basic resource-oriented functions. However, given the nature and scope of the work, it is preferable to have several stakeholders function as a formal team (e.g., a Learning Supports Resource Team). Establishing and building the capacity of resource-oriented mechanisms are not simple tasks. Therefore, it is important to think in terms of a phase-in process and how to facilitate systemic changes (Adelman & Taylor 2002, 2006a; AED, 2002; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005a; Lim & Adelman, 1997; Rosenblum, et al., 1995; Taylor, Nelson, & Adelman, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Some schools might find the idea of establishing another team difficult. In such cases, an existing team (e.g., student or teacher assistance team; school crisis team; healthy school team; or school improvement team) could be tasked to perform resource-oriented functions. In adding the resource-oriented functions to another team's work, however, it is important that the team have sufficient time to devote to the additional tasks. For small schools, a large team often is not feasible, but a two-person team can still do much of the work. What is most important is to get started and then, over time, build the type of team that fits the setting. The key is to not lose sight of the functions the team needs to undertake and what it needs to accomplish.

The team meets as necessary. Frequency of meetings depends on how ambitious the group's agenda is and time availability. Initially, this may mean once a week. Later, when meetings are scheduled for every 2-3 weeks, continuity and momentum are maintained through interim tasks

performed by individuals or work groups. Because some participants may be at a school on a part-time basis, one of the problems that must be addressed is that of rescheduling personnel so that there is an overlapping time for meeting together. Of course, the reality is that not all team members will be able to attend every meeting, but a good approximation can be made at each meeting, with steps taken to keep others informed as to what was done. Well planned and trained teams can accomplish a great deal through informal communication and short meetings.

Although a resource-oriented team might be created solely around psychosocial programs, the intent is to focus on resources related to *all* major learning supports programs and services. Thus, the team should try to bring together representatives of all these programs and services. Because various teams at a school require the expertise of the same personnel, some individuals will necessarily be on more than one team.

Having an administrator on the team provides the necessary link with the school's administrative decision making related to allocation of budget, space, staff development time, and other resources. Team members might include school counselors, psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, behavioral specialists, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, and union representatives. It also could include representatives of any community agency that is significantly involved with schools. Beyond these "service" providers, the team would benefit from the energies and expertise of regular classroom teachers, parents, older students, and noncertificated staff (e.g., front office; food service workers; custodians; bus drivers; and/or school resource officers).

For the team to function well, there must be a core of members who have or will acquire the ability to carry out identified functions and make the mechanism work (others are auxiliary members). They must be committed to the team's mission. Building team commitment and competence is an ongoing task. The team must have a dedicated leader/facilitator who is able to keep the group task-focused and productive. It also needs someone who records decisions and plans and reminds members of planned activity and products. Whenever feasible, advanced technology (management systems, electronic bulletin boards and email) are used to facilitate communication, networking, program planning and implementation, linking activities, and a variety of budgeting, scheduling, and other management concerns.

A Learning Supports Resource Team forms small work groups as needed to address specific concerns (e.g., mapping resources, planning for capacity building, addressing problems related to case-oriented systems); develop new programs (e.g., welcoming and social support strategies for newcomers to the school); implement special initiatives (e.g., positive behavior supports); etc. Such groups usually are facilitated by a member of the resource team who recruits a small group of other stakeholders from the school and community who are willing and able to help. The group facilitator provides regular updates to the resource team on work group progress and brings back feedback from the team.

Work groups may be either ad hoc or standing. *Ad hoc* work groups take on tasks that can be done over a relatively short time period, and the group disbands once the work is accomplished. *Standing* work groups focus on defined programs areas and pursue current priorities for enhancing intervention in a given arena (e.g., helping to design cohesive approaches to provide supports for various student transitions, enhance home and school connections, etc.). Finally,

as discussed elsewhere, where related clusters or families of schools (e.g., the feeder pattern) are working together, representatives from each of the schools meet together periodically (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Adler & Gardner, 1994; Mizrahi & Morrison, 1993; Taylor, Nelson, & Adelman, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The focus on related clusters can lead to strategies for cross-school, community-wide, and district-wide cooperation and integration to enhance intervention effectiveness and economies of scale.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND RELATED REFERENCES**

Available evidence has underscored how vital resource-oriented mechanisms are for enhancing cost-effective use of resources and building comprehensive, multifaceted, and interconnected sets of interventions (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006c, in press; Gardner, 2005; Iowa Department of Education, 2004; Kretzmann, 1998; Kretzmann, McKnight, & Sheehan, 1997; Lim & Adelman, 1997; Rosenblum, DiCecco, Taylor, & Adelman, 1995; U. S. Department of Education, 1996, 2000).

As schools develop teams, ongoing evaluation can be guided by the same standards and quality indicators used to enhance the evaluation of academic achievement. Such standards and quality indicators should be thoroughly incorporated into a school's improvement plan. The accountability framework should support the ongoing development of comprehensive, multifaceted approaches that address barriers and promote healthy development. Specific guidance can be found in resources developed by the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005c,d, 2006).

## **RESROUCES**

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## **BACKGROUND READING\***

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\* *Additional Background Readings are listed in the Reference List for this Step in Appendix E.*

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **Engaging Students as Learners (an emerging practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Students unsuccessful at the universal level (*see* Step 2: Universal Interventions)—whether their struggles are academic, behavioral, or both—typically need to be reengaged in their learning. Student engagement refers to the extent to which students are motivated and committed to learning; have a sense of belonging and accomplishment; and have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning. Engagement with learning is associated with positive academic outcomes, including staying in school. Engagement is higher in classrooms where there are supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and an appropriate structure.

There are various ways for students to disengage from learning. Dropping out of school is the most obvious disengagement from the educational process, but other students disengage by attending irregularly, learning little, and being little more than warm bodies when in the classroom.

Engagement is defined in three ways in the research literature.

- **Behavioral engagement.** Focusing on participation, it includes involvement in academic and social (extracurricular) activities. It is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out of school.
- **Emotional engagement.** This encompasses both positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school. Positive emotional engagement creates ties to an institution and influences a student's willingness to do the work.
- **Cognitive engagement.** Drawing on the idea of having an investment in one's own learning, it incorporates thoughtfulness and a willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

No matter how student engagement is defined, research indicates that higher levels of engagement are linked with improved performance in school. Engagement is a strong predictor of student achievement and behavior in school for all students, whether they come from relatively "advantaged" or "disadvantaged" families.

When students are disengaged in school, there is a strong possibility that they engage in anti-social behaviors. The consequences of disengagement vary depending on a student's background. Students from advantaged backgrounds who become disengaged might learn less than they could, but most eventually graduate and move on to other opportunities. In contrast, students from disadvantaged backgrounds in high-poverty areas attending urban high schools who become disengaged are less likely to graduate and face severely limited opportunities as a result.

One way to think about engagement in the typical classroom setting is at its most basic level – attention and focus. Without having a student's attention, there can be no teaching. Students must be active participants in their learning. More broadly, student engagement is the result of "buy-in" to the relevance of the task and the value of the eventual outcomes.

Engaging students cannot be the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher. Student engagement and learning are directly affected by a confluence of organizational factors and instructional practices in particular schools; family and community influences; and a wide range of national, state, and local policies.

## **Implementation Essentials**

- **Ensure you have a student's attention.**

Instructional group size is an important consideration. Small learning groups can facilitate cooperative inquiry and learning, concept and skill development, problem solving, motivated practice, peer- and cross-age tutoring, and other forms of activity that can be facilitated by peers, aides, or volunteers.

The group size should be smaller than the universal group. Appropriate grouping of students is based on individual interests and needs and diversity. It includes regrouping flexibly and regularly. Grouping that can actually be harmful to students includes putting students in low ability tracks and segregating students with learning, behavior, or emotional problems.

In order for students to be available for learning, the teacher must explicitly teach behavioral expectations. This could include teaching an attention getting signal such as raising an arm, various voice levels that are appropriate for different tasks, and classroom procedures such as how to hand in work.

- **Create a positive environment.**

The teacher must create a positive environment that will foster a sense of belonging. Here are some examples of ways to do that:

- Practice 2 x 10: providing two minutes a day of one-on-one interaction for ten days in a row.
- Greeting students socially at the classroom door as they enter is good modeling of social interaction. It is an overt welcoming into the learning environment. It is also a time for a brief, positive comment and to gauge a student's emotional state.

- Phone a parent and leave a message describing something positive the student has done.
- **Keep learning active (Students learn by doing, listening, looking, and asking.)**
  - **Paired teaching** can be used by asking students to partner with a peer. The pair then decides who will be #1 and who will be #2. Throughout a lesson, the teacher can prompt, "OK, #1, summarize what I just said to #2. Go." Or, "#2, give an additional example of what we're talking about to #1. Go." These exchanges can take only 1-2 minutes.
  - **Partner reading** can consist of each student reading in unison with the other or the partners taking turns. This is most effective for reinforcing short sections of text; i.e., 1-2 paragraphs.
  - **Visible thinking** promoted by the Cultures of Thinking Project is a teaching method that helps teachers follow a student's thought processes in order to discover student misconceptions, faulty knowledge, prior knowledge, reasoning ability, and understanding. Based on seven core routines, it is a way to understand and correct thinking errors.
  - **Write and show** can be accomplished by giving students scrap paper or a small, dry erase whiteboard. During a lesson, a teacher can ask each student to simultaneously respond to a simple question (e.g., a math problem on the board or overhead, a spelling word, or a simple yes/no question). When the teacher asks for a response, each student holds up what they have written. The teacher can assess at a glance whether students are following class instruction.
  - **Giving students choices** whenever possible is a powerful way to engage students in learning. This can be particularly true for tasks that are challenging, authentic, and multidisciplinary.
- **Monitor and evaluate student learning/behavior.**

Teachers consistently and conscientiously monitor to be certain that academic and behavioral expectations are being met. This is not intended to be punitive but rather means the teacher is actively engaged in what students are actually doing, assessing whether a skill or topic needs to be re-taught or if prerequisite instruction is required.

While ideally motivation will be intrinsic rather than extrinsic, external reinforcement can be critical to keeping students engaged in learning. Effective teachers use the lowest level reinforcer that works for an individual student, such as: praise, non-verbal signals, or specific rewards. Continuous group feedback can also be important.

- **Utilize a professionally created curriculum designed to help (re)engage students in their learning.**

One example of a professionally created curriculum is *WhyTry?* The main goal of the program is to help youth answer the question, “Why try in life?” especially when they are frustrated, confused, or angry with life’s pressures and challenges. The *WhyTry* organization creates simple, hands-on tools for helping youth learn important life skills such as anger management, problem solving, dealing with peer pressure, living laws and rules, building a support system, and having a vision of their future. The *WhyTry* program appears to have a positive effect on academic performance, attendance and graduation, based on on-going research.

Regardless of the approaches used, instructional and behavioral progress must be continuously monitored to determine whether the intervention is working. Decisions about interventions should be made on an ongoing basis utilizing data, including student input. Getting students involved in their education program is more than having them participate. It includes connecting students with a sense of ownership in their own education by enabling them to influence and affect their educational program and to become engrossed in their educational experiences.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND AVAILABLE EVIDENCE**

The importance of (re)engaging students in their learning has an established evidence base. Although the strategies suggested above are referenced in the literature, they should be considered as emerging practices because there is no current, scientifically valid effectiveness research.

## **RESOURCES AND BACKGROUND MATERIALS**

### **Further information about the interventions highlighted above.**

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- TeacherVision.com. <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods/classroom-management/6706.html?detoured=1>
- The Art of Teaching: Meeting and Greeting Students at the Beginning of Class.  
<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods/classroom-management/6706.html?detoured=1>
- UCLA School Mental Health Project, Center for Mental Health in Schools.  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
- Visible Thinking resources.  
[http://www.pz.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/06\\_AdditionalResources/06a\\_AdditionalResources.html](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/06_AdditionalResources/06a_AdditionalResources.html)
- *WhyTry?* website. [www.whytry.org](http://www.whytry.org)

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **Family Support (a best practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

All students benefit when they have strong, positive family and community support. Family and community provide a web of social relationships that supports learning and is essential for student success. The best learning emerges within the context of supportive relationships that bolster student strengths and prevent problems.

Many factors that affect student behavior in school stem from out-of-school experiences. Especially when students are struggling to be successful at the universal, primary level of instruction, it may be helpful to look closely at their family and community relationships.

Educators today focus on “family” involvement not just “parent” involvement because the significant adults in the lives of children have broadened beyond the nuclear family. Moreover, schools today are seeking to broaden family involvement beyond the traditional roles of volunteer, homework helper, and fundraiser.

Families provide the primary socializing force for youth. Families care about their children and want them to succeed. However, they may not always know how to effectively interact with schools or how best to provide the support their children need. Some families, especially those stressed by the daily demands of life and those caring for children who have learning or other disabilities, may need external help to meet all the needs of their children. Providing them with additional supports can help reduce the likelihood that their children will drop out of school or come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

The challenges that students face today cannot be solved by families or educators alone. Epstein’s *Six Types of Involvement* is a research-based model that recognizes three overlapping spheres of influence on student development: school, family, and community. This model is the basis for the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement* developed by the National PTA and the National Coalition for Parent Involvement. Based on years of research, it identifies six types of school-family-community involvement important for student learning and development:

- **Parenting.** Fostering parenting skills to establish home environments that support children as students.

- **Communicating.** Establishing effective forms of regular and meaningful two-way communication between home and school.
- **Volunteering.** Valuing and recruiting parental support for school activities.
- **Learning at home.** Helping families to know how to support learning at home.
- **School decision making.** Prepare families to participate in and include families in school decision making.
- **Collaborating with the community.** Using community resources and services to strengthen schools, families, and student learning and development.

## IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Accepting family involvement as an important factor in helping to improve the quality of schools does not always translate into implementation. It cannot be assumed that families instinctively know how to most effectively involve themselves in their children's education, or that teachers naturally know how to promote effective family involvement.

Although there is overwhelming research attesting to the value of family and community support for student learning, it can be daunting to know where to begin. One suggestion is to start by evaluating what a school currently provides.

Schools can use a simple self-assessment survey based on Epstein's six types of involvement: *Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision-making, and Collaborating with Community* (see *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, available online at <http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/Measurepartner.pdf>). It measures how a school is currently reaching out to involve parents, community members, and students. When completing this survey, school leadership should include a range of school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, support staff, custodial staff, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers). Using this self-assessment tool provides information about the strengths of a school's current practices as well as possible future directions for improvements. The data obtained can be used to better inform the school improvement plan. Rather than trying to address multiple issues simultaneously, it is preferable to select a few, such as: targeting staff development; hosting parenting classes; providing transportation and child care to facilitate families attending school events; etc.

Many family involvement programs expect parents to conform to the school culture, a school-centric approach, rather than solicit parental input to better define involvement. It is particularly important to be aware of and sensitive to the diverse cultural needs of the community. Not understanding or honoring cultural differences can result in less than positive outcomes. Failing to recognize diverse styles of interaction may lead to a culture clash. Cultural understanding requires more than awareness. Understanding and respect for cultural differences is critical when attempting to engage family and community support.

There are specific programs that educators could choose to implement to support families and create effective family involvement in school. Selecting a program must be based upon the individualized needs of the families, teachers, students, and community members involved. Two examples of programs designed to strengthen family and school relationships are described for illustrative purposes.

## Example #1: Families and Schools Together (FAST)

FAST is a multifamily group intervention designed to use existing strengths of families, schools, and communities in creative partnerships to reduce risk factors related to problem behaviors for children 5 to 12 years old. It uses program activities designed to build parental respect in children, improve intra-family bonds, and enhance the family-school relationship. It applies research on family stress theory, family systems theory, social ecological theory, and community development strategies to achieve four goals: enhanced family function; prevention of school failure; prevention of substance abuse by children and family members; and reduced stress from daily life situations for parents and children.

A collaborative team of parents, trained professionals, and school personnel recruit then deliver FAST program components to 5-25 families at a time during 8-12 weekly meetings, depending on the age of the designated youth. Team members do not lecture but structure highly participatory activities using experiential learning and parent support. A conflict-free family time is provided in a safe environment during which parents rehearse multiple requests for compliant behavior and being "in charge" and practice "responsive play" with their children.

Program implementation requires: a space large enough to host 60 to 80 people, a separate play area, a parent meeting, and an eating area. FAST training is purchased from the FAST National Training Center. The training package includes five visits with a certified FAST trainer who provides technical assistance. For program fidelity, certified FAST trainers are required to conduct three site visits for new programs.

FAST has been proven effective with low- and middle-income, rural and urban, African American, Asian American, Hawaiian, Hispanic/Latino, Indian American, and White families. Experimental studies show statistically significant reductions in childhood aggression and anxiety and increases in academic competence and social skills. However, in order to implement the program with fidelity, FAST training is required.

FAST has been designated a "model" program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (*see* [http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template\\_cf.cfm?page=model&pkProgramID=39](http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template_cf.cfm?page=model&pkProgramID=39)); the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Dept. of Justice (*see* [http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5//TitleV\\_MPG\\_Table\\_Ind\\_Rec.asp?id=459](http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5//TitleV_MPG_Table_Ind_Rec.asp?id=459)) and the Strengthening America's Families (*see* [http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs\\_1999/06\\_SFP.html](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs_1999/06_SFP.html)). It has been designated an "exemplary" program by the U.S. Department of Education (*see* <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/exemplary01/exemplary01.pdf>).

For more information about FAST, see:

- FAST National Training and Evaluation Center. <http://www.fastnational.org/>
- McDonald, L., & Frey, H.E. (November 1999). *Families and Schools Together: Building Relationships*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Retrieved August 11, 2006, from [http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/9911\\_2/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/9911_2/contents.html).

## **Example #2: Strengthening Families Program (SFP)**

SFP is a family skills training program designed to increase resilience and reduce risk factors for substance abuse, depression, violence and aggression, delinquency, and school failure in high-risk children ages 6 to 12. There also is a youth ages 10 -14 version and an early adolescent version (ages 12-14). It is taught in 14 two-hour periods. During the first hour, parents and children participate in separate classes, each led by two co-leaders. Parents learn to increase desired behaviors in children by using attention, clear communication, effective discipline, problem solving, and limit setting. Children learn effective communication, understanding feelings, coping with anger and criticism, stress management, social skills, problem solving, resisting peer pressure, and compliance with parental rules. During the second hour, families practice structured activities, therapeutic child play, family meetings, communication skills, effective discipline, reinforcing positive behaviors in each other, and planning family activities.

The SFP curriculum includes Parent Skills Training, Children's Skills Training, and Family Life Skills Training. Courses are taught using a set of six SFP manuals (English and Spanish versions): Family Skills Training; Children's Skills Training; Parent Skills Training; Children's Handbook; Parents' Handbook; and Implementation Manual. For information on trainer costs, see [www.strengtheningfamilies.org](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org).

SFP requires a part-time site coordinator and family recruiter and four trainers (two parent trainers and two children's trainers) to deliver the program. Typically 14 families take the course together as a group. The program costs vary depending on whether existing staff is used as part of their regular job. If not, trainers can be hired hourly to run the groups one evening a week. Program costs include \$300 to purchase a best set of six newly revised SFP manuals including a Spanish version. After purchasing a single set, the site can copy the manuals for trainers and the handbooks for families. It is recommended that funds be budgeted for childcare, family meals, and transportation, as well as incentives for homework completion and graduation. General supplies are needed such as toys and minimal paper supplies.

Developed in 1982 with research funds from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), SFP is recognized by many federal agencies (e.g., NIDA; OJJDP; Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP); Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS); the U.S. Department of Education (DOE); the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCIP); and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)) as an exemplary, research-based family model. Positive results from over 15 independent research replications demonstrate that SFP is effective in increasing assets and protective factors by improving family relationships, parenting skills, and youth's social and life skills. Culturally-tailored versions also have been evaluated as well as a rural school model.

SFP has been designated a "model" program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (see [http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template\\_cf.cfm?page=model&pkProgramID=179](http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template_cf.cfm?page=model&pkProgramID=179)); an "exemplary" program by the U.S. Department of Education (see <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/exemplary01/exemplary01.pdf>), and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Dept. of Justice (see [http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5//TitleV\\_MPG\\_Table\\_Ind\\_Rec.asp?id=696](http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5//TitleV_MPG_Table_Ind_Rec.asp?id=696)); and an

“effective” program by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (see <http://www.drugabuse.gov/prevention/examples.html>).

## RESOURCES

- **Contact for more information:**

Karol L. Kumpfer, PhD,  
University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, UT  
801-581-8498  
E-mail: [karol.kumpfer@health.utah.edu](mailto:karol.kumpfer@health.utah.edu)  
Website: [www.strengtheningfamilies.org](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org)

- OJJDP Fact Sheet (2002). [http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/2000\\_8\\_1/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/2000_8_1/contents.html)

## PROGRAM EVALUATION AND AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

The importance of nurturing family support has an established evidence base. A research synthesis (Henderson & Mapp) found the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing. Many forms of family and community involvement influence student achievement at all ages. Programs and initiatives that focus on building respectful and trusting relationships between school, families, and community are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that support student achievement. A National Education Association (NEA) report cites a review of studies examining the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. It identified the most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school as a home environment that encourages learning, expresses high (but not unrealistic) expectations for children, and where parents are involved in their children’s education at school and in the community.

## RESOURCES

- An instrument designed to measure how a school is reaching out to involve parents, community members, and students in a meaningful manner:

Karen Clark Salinas, K.D., Epstein, J.L., et al. *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships* National Network of Partnership Schools. Available online at <http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/Measurepartner.pdf>.

- Strategies used by 20 local Title I programs to overcome barriers to parent involvement are described in:

Janie E. Funkhouser, J.E., & Gonzales, M.R. (Oct. 1997). *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches. An Idea Book*. Office of Education Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve/index.html>.

- Information about cultural competency in designing and implementing family supports:

Bronheim, S., Goode, T. & Jones, W. (Spring 2006). *Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Family Supports*. National Center for Cultural Competence. Retrieved 9-11-06 from <http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/documents/FamilySupports.pdf#search=%22%22cultural%20and%20linguistic%20competence%20in%20family%20supports%22%22>.

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- National Education Association (NEA). (Undated). *What the Research Says, Parent Involvement Helps Students Succeed in School and in Life*. Retrieved 9-11-06 from <http://www.nea.org/parents/research-parents.html?mode>.
- *Students at the Center: Selected Readings About Student Learning*. (1997). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved 9-11-06 from <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/re-engineering/keyissues/schoolfamily.shtml>.

# ***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **Literacy and Math Interventions for Struggling Students (an emerging practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Approximately six million students in middle and high schools were reading significantly below grade level in 2003. These six million at-risk students, who make up the lowest 25% of achievement, were 3.5 times more likely to drop out than students in the next highest quarter of academic achievement, and 20 times more likely to drop out than top performing students (Left Behind: Six (2003)).

The picture has not changed much in the past three years. Sixty nine percent of eighth grade students who took the 2005 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in math were performing at or above a *basic* proficiency level and 30% were at or above the *proficient* level. In reading, the percentage of eighth graders performing at or above *basic* was higher in 2005 (73%) than in 1992 (69%), but there was no significant change in the percentage scoring at or above *proficient* between these same years. Currently, approximately 800,000 17-year-olds read below the basic level. The average ninth grade student from a low-income family reads three-to-four grade levels below more advantaged students. Nationally, 30% of students do not graduate on time. Of those who do graduate, 68% are unprepared for college and 53% of college students enroll in remedial courses. Every year, 1.3 million students do not graduate with their peers (Study Group, 2005). The issue has grown to epidemic proportion.

Much has been written regarding the state of secondary schools and the need for effective teaching of reading and math. Secondary schools can address the issue of poor achievement in reading and math by taking a systems approach that integrates effective leadership, management, infrastructure, instruction, behavior and discipline, assessment, and transition services to provide a continuum of high quality, effective instruction to all students. This continuum includes **targeted** interventions for students who do not progress adequately given high quality, effective instruction.

Assessment data is used to determine which students are in need of more instruction in specific skill areas. The targeted intervention is then matched to the student's needs and is implemented through small group instruction. The intervention can be implemented by any staff member who has been trained in the specific intervention.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS**

There are key elements associated with implementing targeted interventions for both reading and math. These elements are essential to the effectiveness of any intervention regardless of the program used.

### **Effective Universal Instruction**

Before implementing targeted interventions, instruction and student results at the core (universal) instructional level needs to be examined. An effective core program should result in approximately 80% or more students achieving at or above a proficient level. The instructional program will include: a curriculum that is aligned with state and district standards and benchmarks; formative and summative assessments to determine student achievement; and common learning strategies for reading and math implemented with fidelity throughout content areas. Reading instruction should also include instruction in comprehension, vocabulary (roots, etymology, structural analysis) and writing (grammatical structure, syntax, parts of speech). Math instruction includes instruction in arithmetic skills, problem solving, conceptual knowledge, and reasoning ability while also addressing the contributing functions of application, procedural fluency, number sense and visual-spatial, temporal and language processing (Colorado Department of Education, 2005). If 70% or more of the students are achieving below proficiency on summative assessments, the core instructional program needs to be improved before focusing on a system of intervention.

### **Identification**

A process for measuring student progress in the core program is needed before implementing an intervention program. It is essential that staff have data to determine which students are not progressing and to identify the specific needs of each student. This allows staff to effectively match the specific intervention to the needs of the student. There is no one program that will address low achievement in reading or math for all students due to the complexity of the reading and math learning process.

### **Time**

Additional intervention may be needed in addition to the core instructional program. This is often referred to as “double dipping” where the student continues to receive instruction in the English, language arts, or math class while also receiving a targeted intervention in an additional class. It is essential that the student continue to access the content needed to successfully complete a secondary program while also receiving instruction in the deficit skill area.

In addition, the intervention should use a program that is different from the core instructional program. Providing a student the same instruction in a different setting, or tutoring the student on class assignments, has not been effective in closing gaps in learning. In order for sufficient progress to be seen, an intervention must be specific to the need, and be implemented for a consistent period of time, preferably daily for at least the same time period as the core class. The length of the intervention implementation period is an area being discussed and researched, and may vary from student to student.

### **Group Size**

It is essential that the targeted intervention be provided in a small group setting. The teacher-

student ratio in intervention classes varies from a maximum 1-15 to a minimum of 1-5. Students are grouped based on individual interests, needs, and for benefits to be derived from diversity. Instruction occurs within the smaller groups or individually. The group size works best when it is considerably smaller than the core instructional class.

## **Instruction**

Targeted interventions are most effective when they provide:

- systematic and explicit instruction;
- a significant increase in intensity of instruction;
- ample opportunities for guided practice of new skills;
- systematic cueing of appropriate strategies in context; and
- appropriate levels of scaffolding (systematic steps of prompting as a student learns a task) as children learn to apply new skills. (Torgeson, 1998).

In literacy, explicit instruction must be provided in the five component skills that are deficient: phonemic awareness; phonics; fluency; vocabulary; and/or reading comprehension strategies. Longitudinal data indicates that explicit systematic phonics instruction results in more favorable outcomes for students with reading difficulties than does a context-emphasis (whole-language) approach.

In math, instruction may need to be provided in any of the seven component skills that are deficient: arithmetic skills; problem solving; conceptual knowledge; reasoning ability; application; procedural fluency; and number sense. In addition, instruction must be more intensive because older students who are behind academically need more repetition and more experience with skills in different contexts.

Ample opportunities for guided practice must be provided. This is where the teacher provides modeling, the teacher and student practice the skill together while feedback and corrections occur, and the student practices the skill independently while the teacher monitors and provides feedback and corrections. This needs to occur over time to ensure that the student has independent mastery.

However, Sustained Silent Reading (SRR) is a practice that is used in many schools throughout the nation, yet the National Reading Panel concluded that there was insufficient support from research to suggest that independent, silent reading can improve fluency (NICHD, 2000). Having students read independently is a good practice; however, using valuable instructional time for sustained silent reading with students who struggle with reading is a poor practice.

## **Progress Monitoring**

Progress monitoring is the process of assessing student performance frequently using short duration tools that are related to end-of-year outcomes. Ideally, these are brief tools that provide highly relevant information on how students are progressing toward long-term goals. Progress monitoring tools that are based upon benchmark goals are aligned to a standard and measure progress toward meeting that standard. Progress monitoring data provides staff with information to respond immediately to student needs by modifying instruction.

During targeted intervention, progress monitoring tools that assess learning during the intervention are used frequently to determine if the student is responding. A student receiving targeted intervention must demonstrate accelerated growth in order to make the gains necessary to reach the benchmark. For this reason, monitoring of the effectiveness needs to be frequent so instructional adjustments can be made to ensure this accelerated growth. While there are progress monitoring tools at the elementary level, there are only a few at the secondary level. AIMSweb is one tool that monitors reading and math through the eighth grade using curriculum based measures ("AIMSweb Progress," 2006). Many effective targeted interventions include progress tools in the materials.

### **Collaboration**

When a student is receiving a targeted intervention in addition to the general education content, it is vital that collaboration occur between the interventionist (the teacher providing the intervention) and the general education teacher. These can be and often in best practice are one and the same person. This collaborative relationship needs to focus on implementing strategies in the general content class that reinforces the learning that is taking place in the intervention. This is particularly important as the student makes progress and needs systematic cueing of appropriate strategies in multiple contexts.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND AVAILABLE EVIDENCE**

### **Reading**

Reading interventions combine modeling, repeated reading and feedback (Shawitz, 2003). There are several intervention programs in reading and just a few are mentioned here. Research that directly compares the effectiveness of these programs has not been completed; however, there is some promising data emerging on some programs. As more research emerges, the effectiveness of other programs may be stronger than those mentioned here.

For reading, results have been seen using *Lindamood Bell* (Sadoski, M. and Willson, V., 2006), *LANGUAGE!* (Sopris West, 2006; Klemp, Hinman, and Allain, 2005), and *Wilson Reading System* (Bursuck, W., and Dickson, S. 1999). For fluency, *Read Naturally* makes the best use of research and has the strongest evidence of effectiveness on fluency (Hasbrouck, 2006). *Read 180* is also a promising program in fluency. The Florida Center for Reading Research website provides information on specific programs in all five components of reading <http://www.fcrr.org>.

### **Math**

The research of effective math interventions is considerably less than what is found on reading interventions. A number of briefs on various math interventions are available on the website of *The Access Center: Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8*, [http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training\\_resources/math.asp](http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/math.asp). The *What Works Clearinghouse* (WWC) website, [www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov), has reviewed middle school math intervention programs. The review focuses on interventions based on a curriculum that contains learning goals that spell out the mathematics that students should know and be able to do; instructional programs and materials that organize the mathematical content; and assessments. One program was found to have a study that met evidence standards by WWC: *The Expert Mathematician*, <https://www.expertmath.org>. In addition, *Transitional Math*, <https://www.sopriswest.com>, shows promise.

## RESOURCES AND BACKGROUND READING

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# ***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **Reconnecting Youth (a best practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

***Reconnecting Youth*** (RY) is a school-based prevention program for youth in grades 9-12. The goals are to decrease drug use, emotional distress, and behavior problems, and increase school performance. It is a semester-long intervention that integrates small-group work and life-skills training models to enhance the personal and social protective factors of high-risk youth. It uses a partnership model involving peers, school personnel, and parents.

RY has four key components:

- ***RY Class:*** an 80-lesson curriculum for helping indicated high-risk youth in grades 9-12. This research-based practice is divided into four major units: Self-Esteem Enhancement, Decision-Making, Personal Control, and Interpersonal Communication. The class is offered for 50 minutes daily during regular school hours for one semester (80 sessions) in a class with a student-teacher ratio of 10 or 12 to one. After a 10-day orientation to the program, approximately one month is spent on each of the four units.
- ***School Bonding Activities:*** consisting of social, recreational, school, and weekend activities that are designed to reconnect students to school and health-promoting activities as alternatives to drug involvement, loneliness, and depression.
- ***Parental Involvement:*** required for student participation, is essential for at-home support of the skills students learn in RY class. School contact is maintained through notes and calls from teachers who also enlist parental support for activities and provide progress reports.
- ***School Crisis Response Planning:*** provides teachers and school personnel with guidelines for recognizing warning signs of suicidal behaviors and suicide prevention approaches.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS**

RY operates best in an environment with active supports. Partnerships are described as vital. It is recommended that school administrators secure links with community groups for

involvement such as funding, offering mentoring, in-kind donations, and help with providing drug free activities.

RY offers recommended selection criteria to identify potential participants. From this group, students are invited rather than assigned, and consent is needed from parents. Students expressed willingness to work toward program goals is essential.

**Personnel.** One full-time RY coordinator per every five to six classes is needed to provide teacher support, encouragement, and consultation. The role typically includes bimonthly meetings as well as weekly classroom observation. The RY coordinator is hired and paid by the RY teacher funding source (e.g., school, independent agency). Ideally, the RY coordinator is a skilled RY teacher with supervisory and training expertise. RY teachers are selected, not assigned, using pre-established criteria to ensure the program has teachers who are committed to working with high-risk youth and show special aptitude based on student, other teacher, and administrative recommendations.

**Other resource costs.** A classroom to accommodate the RY teacher and 10-12 students is needed. In addition to the curriculum, teachers will need to prepare student notebooks from handouts. Recreational and school-bonding activities, including transportation, also need to be budgeted.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Designated as a model program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/FactSheets/Reconnecting.pdf>.
- Designated a "Program that Works" by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (1999) <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/1099drug.htm#works>
- Rated AA+ by Drug Strategies in its publication, *Safe Schools, Safe Students* (1998).
- Rated AA+ by Drug Strategies in *Making the Grade: A Guide to School Drug Prevention Programs* (1999).
- Featured in NIDA's video, *Coming Together on Prevention* (1994), NCADI Stock #VHS66, [http://www.nida.nih.gov/NIDA\\_Notes/NNVol10N4/RDAVideos.html](http://www.nida.nih.gov/NIDA_Notes/NNVol10N4/RDAVideos.html).

## AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures was used to test efficacy. Trend analyses compared change for experimental and control groups across pre- and post-tests (five months) and follow-up tests (five to seven months). Findings reported to date:

- >54% decrease in hard drug use
- >32% decrease in perceived stress
- >18% improvement in grades
- >48% decrease in anger and aggression problems
- >23% increase in self-efficacy
- >7.5% increase in credits earned per semester

## RESOURCES

- Contact for more information and training:

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- To obtain a copy of the curriculum, ***Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills*** (2nd edition), contact RY's publisher. Cost is \$300 plus shipping.

Solution Tree (formerly NES)  
304 West Kirkwood Avenue, Suite 2  
Bloomington, IN 47404-5132  
Phone toll-free: 1-800-733-6786; Fax: 812-336-7790  
Website: <http://www.solution-tree.com>.

- **Training and Technical Assistance.** A variety of school personnel throughout the nation have been trained by program staff to successfully implement the curriculum. It is recommended that all RY teachers and coordinators receive implementation training. Onsite implementation training for potential RY teachers and coordinators is available from RY personnel. Initial implementation training lasts five days. Follow-up implementation consultation of 1 day every 6 months during the first year of implementation plus phone consultation is recommended. At least one yearly follow-up consultation, to manage implementation challenges and to assess implementation fidelity in subsequent years, is also recommended.

## BACKGROUND READING

- Eggert L.L., Thompson E.A., Herting J.R., & Nicholas L.J. (1994). Prevention research program: Reconnecting at-risk youth. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 15, 107-135. [http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list\\_uids=8169117&dopt=Abstract](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=8169117&dopt=Abstract)
- Eggert L.L., Thomson E.A., Herting J.R., & Nicholas L.J. (1995). Reducing suicide potential among high-risk youth: Tests of a school-based prevention program. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 25, 276-296.
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# ***TOOLS FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND REDUCING DELINQUENCY***

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## ***Step 3. Targeted Interventions***

### **Self-Determination for At-Risk Youth (a best practice)**

#### **BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Adolescence can typically be a time of storm and stress as teenagers push the boundaries for more independence and freedom. They want to make their own decisions, both large and small, regarding where they want to live, which social relationships they desire, what kinds of jobs they want, and how to spend their leisure time. Professionals struggle to allow students to take risks and make decisions, while also holding taut on the reins to keep students safe and learning. Recently, new attention has been given to the concept of self-determination in an attempt to help foster appropriate decisions and choices.

Researchers have been studying self-determination for many years. A common definition of self-determination says that individuals who are self-determined have "a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. Self-determination requires an understanding of one's strengths and limitations and a belief in oneself as capable and effective. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society." (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward and Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2).

Self-determination is not just one skill but is comprised of various attributes. These may include:

- choice-making, decision-making, and problem-solving;
- goal setting and attainment;
- self-regulation;
- self-advocacy;
- self-understanding and awareness; and
- self-efficacy.

Individuals who demonstrate these abilities are found to have more successful academic, behavioral, and social outcomes, all of which lead to greater success as adults.

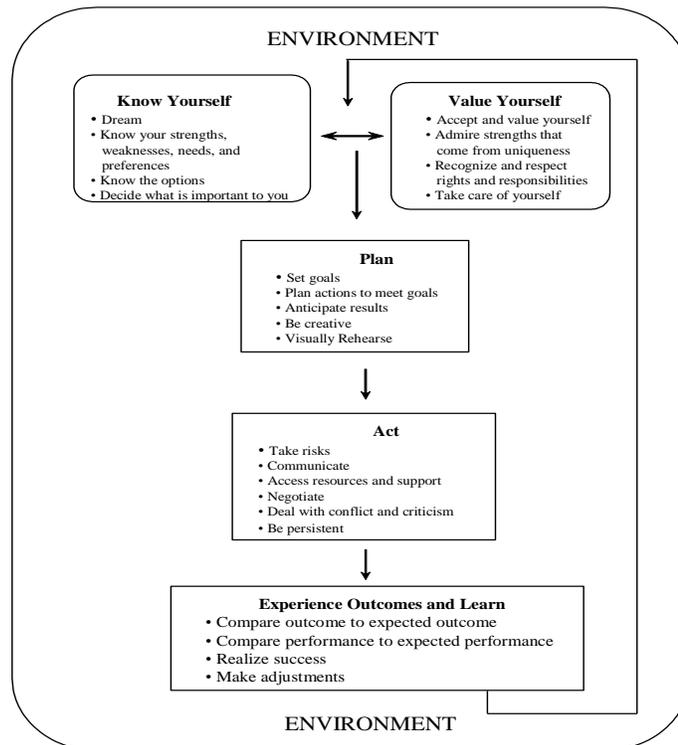
Most educators would concur that developing self-determined students is a worthy goal. However, many times, this process is unconsciously hindered by adults who make many decisions for at-risk youth on the premise that these adolescents have demonstrated a long history of bad choices with little understanding of the consequences. However, until youth are

given both the **opportunity** to practice self-determined behaviors and the **support** from which to reflect and learn from the consequences of their actions, they will not develop the ultimate capacity to become responsible adults.

Many parents have difficulty thinking that their children will ever demonstrate appropriate self-determined behaviors. They are fearful of letting their children take risks that will endanger their safety. Indeed, many educators share this fear. It is the responsibility of both family members and educational professionals to recognize that adolescents need to be taught how to demonstrate appropriate self-determined behaviors. Youth need **explicit instruction** in learning how to be self-determined. They need specific examples and scenarios in which to **practice** these skills, and they need the **support** of caring and competent adults to guide them to self-determined actions.

Field and Hoffman (1994) conceptualize self-determination as a process that includes:

- knowing yourself;
- valuing yourself;
- planning to reach goals;
- acting upon those plans; and
- learning from the experience.



From "Development of a Model for Self-determination," by S. Field and A. Hoffman, 1994, Career Development for Exceptional Children, 17, p. 165. Copyright © by CDEI. Reprinted with Permission.

Figure 2-1. Field and Hoffman's self-determination model

Intrinsic to this model is the premise that students must first know themselves and value who they are as unique individuals, and that (with a mentor) they develop plans for self-determined actions. They then act upon these plans, and (with a mentor) reflect on the consequences of their actions and learn from the experiences. This model of support engages youth to understand that they can become self-determined individuals who grow into competent adults.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS**

Hoffman and Field (2005) and other professionals have identified quality indicators for self-determination instruction that will assist youth to become more self-determined. Educators should:

- Ensure that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes promoting enhanced self-determination are addressed in the curriculum, in family support programs, and in staff development. Students will not learn self-determined strategies by osmosis. There are a number of curricular materials that explicitly teach self-determination competencies to students, to family members, and even to educators. Self-determination is a regenerative process that empowers all who practice it, including educators who both teach and practice it.
- Ensure that students, parents, and professionals are equal partners in educational decision-making and planning. One way to examine this parity is to record the amount of time that students are asked to contribute to meetings, as compared to the contributions of parents and educational professionals. Ideally, the three groups should have equal time with equal opinions that are valued and considered.
- Ensure that youth are provided with opportunities for making choices, and that a strong network exists to support the consequences of the action. It is not crucial that an adolescent succeed in every choice or decision, but rather, that learning from the choice occur.
- Encourage youth to take appropriate risks, again with appropriate support. Targeted curriculum along with opportunities to practice self-determined activities can develop positive and strong decision-making skills.
- Ensure that self-determined behavior is modeled throughout the school environment by all professionals. Students need positive role models to demonstrate that proactive adults engage in self-determined actions.
- Ensure that academic and social content is both rigorous and relevant, and is directly related to students' lives and goals. Self-determination arises from the recognition that one can use the tools in one's life to create relevant connections to the demands of adulthood.

Students can practice self-determined activities in their daily school lives, using a strengths-based approach to learning. Examples of practicing self-determination might include:

- allowing students to "dream big" followed by opportunities to experience the realities of that dream through practice, job shadowing, mentorship, and in-depth investigations;

- allowing students to make choices on assignments, grading criteria, and how they would like to demonstrate mastery of concepts;
- assisting students to articulate their learning and behavioral strengths and needs, and to voice their wishes for how they best learn in academic and social situations;
- expecting students to articulate their long-term goals and the short-term strategies by which to achieve them;
- teaching students how to become appropriate self-advocates in school, in employment situations, and in interpersonal relationships;
- having students link applied academic content so that it is relevant in some way to their lives; and
- giving to others in service learning, volunteering, or other mutually reciprocal opportunities so that they are not always the recipients of support, but demonstrate a responsibility to the community at large.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND AVAILABLE EVIDENCE**

Research on self-determination is reported by Bremer, C.D., et al (April 2003), *Self-Determination: Supporting Successful Transition*, in *Improving Secondary Education and Transition Services through Research*, Vol. 2/Issue 1, available at: <http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=962>.

Research has supported the view that self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) conducted a study in which they followed up on a group of students who had graduated from high school. The study included 80 students ages 17 to 22 with mental retardation or learning disabilities. Self-determination data were collected prior to their high school exit, using a self-report measure called The Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), a 72-item self-report measure that includes a score for global self-determination and subscales for individual autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. Adult outcomes for the students were assessed using a scale completed by parents.

Nearly one year after graduation, findings showed that students whose scores in high school indicated a higher level of self-determination were more likely to have experienced a greater number of positive adult outcomes, including a higher likelihood of being employed and earning more per hour than those who were not self-determined (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, p. 245). The study showed a "consistent trend characterized by self-determined youth doing better than their peers one year out of school. Members of the high self-determination group were more likely to have expressed a preference to live outside the family home, have a savings or checking account, and be employed for pay" (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, p. 253).

## **RESOURCES**

### **Websites**

- The University of North Carolina at Charlotte Center on Self Determination. <http://www.uncc.edu/sdsp/>  
Contains a wealth of information on self-determination and self-advocacy, including a listing of exemplary sites that implement self-determination practices for youth with emotional and behavioral challenges.

- National Center for Secondary Education and Transition.  
<http://www.ncset.org/topics/sdmhs/>  
Contains information on self-determination principles and resources, including frequently asked questions, concepts, and best practices.
- UPenn Collaborative on Community Integration.  
[http://www.upennrrtc.org/issues/issue\\_selfd.html](http://www.upennrrtc.org/issues/issue_selfd.html)  
Provides resources on self-determination, mental well-being, and community integration for individuals with psychiatric disabilities.

### Curricula

- Hoffman, A. and Field, S. (2005). *Steps to self-determination: A curriculum to help adolescents learn to achieve their goals*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.  
<http://www.proedinc.com/Scripts/default.asp>
- Martin, J., Marshall, L., Maxson, L., Jerman, P., Hughes, W., Miller, T., & McGill, T. (1997-2000). *The Choicemaker series*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.  
(includes *Choosing Education Goals, Choosing Personal Goals, Choosing Employment Goals*, and *Choose and Take Action*.)  
<http://store.cambiumlearning.com/ProgramPage.aspx?parentId=019005526&functionID=009000008&site=sw>
- *Self-Determination Synthesis Project*. Charlotte, NC: University of North Carolina.  
(Provides a complete list of self-determination curricula.)  
[http://www.uncc.edu/sdsp/pdf/curriculum\\_components.pdf](http://www.uncc.edu/sdsp/pdf/curriculum_components.pdf)
- Serna, L., & Lau-Smith, J. (1995). *Learning with PURPOSE: An instructor's manual for teaching self-determination skills to students who are at-risk for failure*. Univ. of Hawaii.  
(Available from: Loretta Serna, Professor, Department of Educational Specialties, College of Education, University of New Mexico; phone: 505-277-0119; e-mail: [rett@unm.edu](mailto:rett@unm.edu).)
- Van Reusen, A.K., Bos, C.S., Schumaker, J.B., & Deshler, D.D. (1994). *The self-advocacy strategy*. Lawrence, KS: Edge Enterprises. <http://www.ku-crl.org/sim/strategies/advocacy.html>

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<http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Publications1&Template=/CustomSource/Products.cfm&ICID=290>
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[http://dcdt.org/pdf/sefl\\_deter.pdf](http://dcdt.org/pdf/sefl_deter.pdf)

- Halpern, A. S., Herr, C. M., Doren, B., & Wolf, N.K. (2000). *Next S.T.E.P.: student transition and educational planning*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.  
<http://www.proedinc.com/Scripts/prodView.asp?idProduct=3485>
- Johnson, M., Bullis, M., Benz, M., & Hollenbeck, K. (2004). *Teaching job-related social skills: Work adjustment for gainful employment success*. Longmont, CO: Sopris-West  
<http://store.cambiumlearning.com/ProductPage.aspx?parentId=019004507&functionID=009000008&site=sw>
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