

# Developing a Data-Driven Approach to School Problem-Solving

## Introduction

Schools in the present educational environment in Michigan face some daunting challenges. There are ever increasing demands for documented student achievement. No Child Left Behind, various State of Michigan initiatives, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, and other mandates require that we address student needs in a comprehensive fashion to assure academic success. These approaches require the documentation of a variety of efforts that are designed to foment patterns of successful student academic progress. However, we have been placed in an economic environment that provides shrinking revenues and little prospect for relief in the foreseeable future. Essentially, the demand is to do more, do it better, document the effort, and do it for less money.

Doing this requires reallocation of present funds and efforts and a more effective use of existing resources. It requires the assumption of new responsibilities by present staff with accompanying training.

## Developing a Data-Driven Problem-Solving Process

Student failure is generally centered on language development, the development of sufficient math skills, poor student attendance, or student misconduct leading to inability to effectively participate in the educational system. To be consistently effective, problem-solving needs to focus on resolving student academic or behavioral difficulties using systematic analysis. The analysis uses the following steps:

1. Define the problem;
2. Develop an intervention plan;
3. Implement and follow the plan;
4. Evaluate the plan.

This model addresses problem-solving on two levels. The first is a building-wide approach, and the second is a student level approach. Both are problem-solving focused.

## The Building Level Team

The building level team uses large group measures to develop resources and assess general programming to effectively meet the needs of most students. This quantifies decisions on texts, programs, and interventions effectiveness. Presently, many of our elementary teachers have been trained in the Michigan Language Proficiency Program (MLPP) that provides an in-depth assessment of language related student difficulties. Several members of the elementary staff have been trained on the LIFT program which not only provides the MLPP assessment piece, but also provides subsequent interventions to address the deficits that the assessment piece uncovers. The Ingham Intermediate School District (IISD) has training and funds available to provide Curriculum Based Assessment training. This program assesses math and language based deficits in a standardized, time effective format that can provide regular ongoing measures of student progress. Additionally, the School Wide Information System (SWIS) has the capacity to track behavioral problems more effectively if it is used to do so.

Measurement at this level is against school-wide benchmarks. When students are assessed they are generally deemed to have:

1. At-risk progress, meaning they are not meeting benchmarks and need additional intervention;

2. Adequate progress, meaning they are meeting the benchmarks and benefiting from general instruction;
3. Strong progress, meaning that the student is beyond the benchmark and may require enhancements to progress further in the curriculum.

Students with adequate progress require no adjustment in the general educational day to progress. Those who have at risk progress need strategic intervention (Title I, tutoring, etc) that exists in the general school environment. Those with strong progress need strategic intervention to challenge and engage them.

Identification of learning difficulties with secondary students becomes a little more difficult because the focus of education shifts from a single teacher to subject based instruction. Additionally, in most cases, obvious disabling conditions such as cognitive impairment and learning disability have emerged and are being addressed. With these students, the School Wide Information System becomes even more important. It allows us to address failure on several levels:

1. Failing to pass classes
2. Attendance
3. Behavioral difficulties

Concerns in these areas activate assistance from at-risk programming as we subsequently outline.

### **The Student Level Team**

The student level team coordinates concerns regarding individual academic or behavioral concerns. The student level problem-solving model follows four decision-making levels:

- **Level I: Teacher Intervention**  
These are the interventions that teachers try in the classrooms that are not a part of her/his general instructional process, but rather are implemented when the assessment process shows inadequate progress. These generally are “tried and true” interventions that teachers use without much additional preparation. These need to be documented on the Level I Teacher Intervention Form.
- **Level II: Parent-Teacher Interaction**  
Generally, student problems are addressed at this level when persistent behaviors or academic skill deficits do not respond to Level I interventions, and continue to interfere with the student’s educational progress. At this level, student concerns are addressed through communication between the teacher and the student’s parent or guardian. There is a concerted attempt to resolve a problem using low-level interventions by teachers and assistance from parents. Teachers will document this effort on a Level II Teacher-Parent Interaction Form, and submit it, along with any Level I Teacher Intervention Forms completed to the At-Risk Coordinator.
- **Level III: Consultation Plan**  
Level III student concerns are those that were not solved by Level I or Level II interventions. At this level, the student concern is addressed with consultation from other resources available in the building, such other teachers, special education teachers, other professionals, or administrators. An intervention plan is developed and implemented. The teacher documents actions taken on a Level III Consultation Plan, and submits it to the At-Risk Coordinator.
- **Level IV: Problem-Solving Team**  
At Level IV, a student concern is addressed at a problem-solving team meeting. This team may include any, but not necessarily all of the following:

1. General and Special Education Teachers;
2. Administrators;
3. Professional staff;
4. Paraprofessionals;
5. Parents;
6. Student.

At this level, formal and informal assessment and/or observations guide the design of more intensive intervention strategies. The classroom teacher documents these strategies on the Level IV Problem-Solving Intervention Summary Form, and submits them to the At-Risk Coordinator.

The intensity of the intervention and the resource that support it progress from Level I to Level IV. For example, a Level I intervention may be as simple as changing a student's seat in the classroom, while a Level IV intervention may incorporate remedial instruction in reading strategies.

If the team has demonstrated that the student has not benefited from intervention in general education at levels I through IV, a special education referral may be initiated in the context of a Student Study Team (SST).

### **Discussion on Interventions**

An intervention is a plan designed to address the student's identified need. It should include:

- The student's strengths
- Concerns about the student
- A clear statement of the problem that most interferes with the student's educational progress
- The goal of the intervention
- A detailed description of the intervention plan

Interventions at Levels I, II, and III are intended to be low-level. They are most likely things teachers have historically tried in the classroom. Some examples include:

- Changing a student's seat
- Assigning a classroom "buddy"
- Phone calls or notes home to parents
- Modified workload for student
- Increasing teacher proximity to student during certain instructional times
- Increased instruction in problem area of the student

Each level is designed to assist with the effective use of the problem-solving process. The purpose is to document the interventions and address their effectiveness.

### **Resources Needed**

1. K-6 At-Risk Coordinator
2. 7-12 At-Risk Coordinator
3. K-6 LIFT training
4. K-6 Curriculum-Based Measurement training
5. Staff instruction on better use of SWIS



## Proposed Flowchart for At-Risk/Special Education Data-Based Micro and Macro Approaches to Education at Webberville Schools

