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AN INVESTIGATION ON IMPLEMENTING AND MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE
AND EFFICIENT SCHOOL-BASED STUDENT INTERVENTION PROGRAM

by
Derek Macchia

A Thesis

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of
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at
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Approved by
Professor,

Date Approved 4-05-04

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Derek Macchia
AN INVESTIGATION ON IMPLEMENTING AND MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE
AND EFFICIENT SCHOOL-BASED STUDENT INTERVENTION PROGRAM
2003/04

Dr. Dennis Hurley
Master of Arts in Educational Leadership

The purposes of this exploratory investigation were to (a) demonstrate how to properly develop an effective student intervention program (known at West Avenue as the Alternative Support Team - AST) and (b) how to maintain its effectiveness throughout the school year. The entire staff at West Avenue School was surveyed inquiring about what attributes are necessary for an effective student intervention program. They were also asked about past experiences with a student intervention program and what they believe makes an effective student intervention program work. Feedback forms were distributed to staff members and parents concerning their experience with the newly formed alternative support team (AST). Organizational meetings were conducted in order to discuss and assign team member responsibilities. Staff surveys, feedback forms, individual interviews, past intervention procedures, cumulative student folders, discipline records, Child Study Team referrals, and the organization of appropriate staff were the important factors involved in developing an effective and efficient student intervention program. The district was informed of the instrumentation and organizational process in order to properly implement a student intervention program in each school.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

This study wanted to demonstrate how an effective student intervention program could be utilized in order to decrease the number of child study team referrals and disciplinary referrals. The Bridgeton Public School District, in particular West Avenue School, in conjunction with parents and the community, was committed to maintaining a comprehensive educational environment where social values and academics are at the heart of developing life-long learners. This commitment demanded that they examine the need for a structured program that successfully identifies academic and behavior barriers to student learning and offers meaningful and accurate intervention techniques to teachers and student support personnel. This study generated data about how academic and behavioral intervention techniques were being used to offer alternative instructional methods to at-risk students and the number of child study team referrals submitted. This project contributed to the development of the schools academic improvement plan. It also identified areas for professional development needed in student intervention techniques for the teaching staff at the West Avenue School.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the importance of a consistent, structured and effective student intervention program in identifying academic and behavioral barriers to student learning and providing alternative instructional techniques to those barriers. The study resulted in a feasibility report to inform teachers, administrators, and board members of their current status regarding child team referrals,

discipline referrals, and alternative techniques employed. The goal of the study was to organize members of the professional teaching and support staff to gather input and to analyze the results. The school will use the findings in its end of the year report.

Definitions

Alternative Support Team (AST): Eight-member team committed to analyzing academic and behavioral referrals and offering meaningful techniques to these referrals. The team meets on a weekly basis with a thirty-minute organizational and planning session before each meeting.

Family Support Team (FST): School-based intervention team mandated by the Abbott vs. Burke decision.

Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC): Another name for a school-based intervention team who analyze academic and behavioral referrals and offer meaningful intervention techniques and to those referrals.

Instruction: Anything that is intended to promote and enhance human learning or development.

Project participants: Vested individuals within West Avenue School.

Factor group: The District Factor Group (DFG) is an indicator of the socioeconomic status of citizens in each district and has been useful for the comparative reporting of test results from New Jersey's statewide testing programs.

Quality Assurance Annual Report (QAR): the district generates This Quality Assurance Report in order to give the local Board of Education an understanding of the goals and objectives set forth by the district. It also gives data on the progress made concerning attendance, test scores, mobility rate, etc.

Child Study Team: School-based group responsible for testing students for both learning and behavioral disabilities. This group consists of a school psychologist, social worker, and a learning disabilities teaching consultant (LDTC).

Alternative academic techniques: Suggested instructional methods given to teachers based on the needs identified in the referral.

Alternative behavioral techniques: Suggested behavioral methods given to teachers based on the needs identified in the referral.

Abbott v. Burke: The New Jersey Supreme Court rules that the inadequate and unequal funding denies students in urban districts a thorough and efficient education and requires

the State to equalize funding between suburban and urban districts for regular and to provide extra or 'supplemental' programs to 'wipe out disadvantage as much as a school district can.'

Abbott district: A school district identified as meeting the criteria developed in the Abbott v. Burke case.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Legislation signed by President G.W. Bush in January 2002. It gave the schools and the country groundbreaking educational reform based on the following areas: accountability, parental choice, state and community freedom, and promoting proven educational methods.

Limitations

One limitation was that the findings only worked for the population being researched and not beyond The Bridgeton Public School District's West Avenue School. This study may not be able to be replicated in all districts because of racial, socioeconomic and cultural differences. Another limitation was the unwillingness of staff to support the on-going changes needed to fine-tune this program. The unwillingness of teachers was reflected in their lack of motivation in referring students to this intervention program and using the resources made available when referrals are received.

Setting of the Study

The study took place in the Bridgeton Public School District. The West Avenue School was the primary source of data for the project. The City of Bridgeton has developed over the past 300 years from a historical colonial settlement into a vibrant residential community. Bridgeton, the county seat of Cumberland County, is located in southern New Jersey in between Philadelphia, PA and Atlantic City, NJ. As of the census of 2000, the total population of Bridgeton was 28,327 people. The median income for a household in Bridgeton was \$26,923. Bridgeton has an unemployment rate of 13.5% (twice that of the state). 27% of the population and 23% of the families live below the

poverty line. Of those living below the poverty line, 33% are under the age of 18 and 18% are above the age of 65. Of the families living below the poverty line in Bridgeton, 38% have a female who is head of household with no husband present. Approximately 20% of the households have an income of \$10,000 or less. The racial make-up, educational attainment of the adult community, and household income levels are reflected in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Table 1
The Racial Breakdown of the Population

Ethnic Group	Total Number	Percent of Population
African American	9,528	33.5%
White	8,854	31%
Hispanic or Latino	5,576	20%
Native American	271	1%
Asian	159	0.5%
Other	3112	11%
<u>2 or more races</u>	<u>827</u>	<u>3%</u>
Totals	28327	100%

Table 2
Educational Attainment (Population 25 Years and Over =14,198)

Grade Level Attainment	Percent
Less than 9 th grade	14.6%
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	27.8%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	34.8%
High school graduate or higher	15.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	<u>7.3%</u>
Totals	100%

Table 3
Household Income Levels

Amount	Total Number	Percent of Population
Less than \$10,000	1,162	18.8%
\$10,000-\$14,999	572	9.3%
\$15,000-\$24,999	1,151	18.6%
\$25,000-\$34,999	849	13.8%
\$35,000-\$49,999	840	13.6%
\$50,000-\$74,999	992	16.1%
\$75,000-\$99,999	329	5.3%
\$100,000-\$149,999	217	3.5%
\$150,000-\$199,999	16	0.3%
\$200,000 or more	<u>45</u>	<u>0.7%</u>
Totals	6173	100%

According to the Bridgeton School District Quality Assurance Annual Report of 2002 the racial breakdown of the student population is outlined on Table 4.

Table 4
Racial Breakdown of Student Population

Ethnic Group	Total Number	Percent of Population
African American	2,236	53%
Hispanic	1,235	29%
White	707	17%
Asian/Pacific Islander	30	.01%
Native American	<u>7</u>	<u>less than .01%</u>
Totals	4,215	100%

According to the Bridgeton School District Quality Assurance Annual Report of 2002, West Avenue School had an average class size of 17.7. The student to faculty ratio is 8.8:1. The student daily attendance rate is 94.6%. On the other hand, the student mobility rate was 27%, well above the state average of 13.4%. The student suspension and

expulsion rates were 20.5% and 0.0%, respectively. Of the fourth grade students who took the ESPA test, 59.7% scored in the proficient range on the language arts section. On the other hand, only 33.8% of those same students scored in the proficient range on the mathematics section of the ESPA test. There were 15 referrals made to the child study team last year.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

The administrative leaders of the Bridgeton Public School District have continued to review and revise its intervention and referral services program. It maintains that all students will succeed and that it is up to the entire team: teachers, support staff, parents, and administration. Each member was responsible for the promotion of a particular student from one grade level to the next. Although each team member had a specific responsibility, it was in the collective realm that true student success was achieved. In theory, within this joint responsibility lies the assurance that assistance from each member was available when needed. “If supplementary programs or personnel are unavailable or teachers believe such programs will not help the achievement levels of at-risk students, teachers become ‘custodians’ and maintain the current low achievement level (Winfield, 1986). To avoid this from happening, schools should have in place an effective and efficient student intervention program. A dedicated team of stakeholders should drive this program. Each team member was given specific responsibilities in order to ensure that at-risk students referred are given a thorough examination and every possible angle is identified, discussed, and recommendations are implemented.

In the case *Abbott v. Burke*, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the inadequate and unequal funding denies students in urban districts a thorough and efficient education and requires the State to equalize funding between suburban and urban districts for regular and to provide extra or ‘supplemental’ programs to ‘wipe out disadvantage as much as a school district can (Abbott v. Burke, 1990, 1994, 1998).’ Bridgeton was

designated as one of these *Abbott districts*. The New Jersey Supreme Court recognized that children who are hungry, sick or lack basic family and neighborhood support systems are at risk of educational failure (*Abbott v. Burke*, 1990, 1994, 1998). To address these needs and to ensure academic success, the Court ordered the State to implement a package of additional programs and services (*Abbott v. Burke*, 1990, 1994, 1998). One of the required programs to be implemented at each school was a Family Support Team (FST). This team is designed to address academic, social, and health-related needs.

In September 2001, West Avenue School was notified by the district special education supervisor of the existing code N.J.A.C. 6:26-2.1. This code states district boards of education shall establish and implement procedures in each school building for the delivery of intervention and referral services for students who are experiencing difficulties in their classes and who have not been determined to be in need of special education programs and services pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A: 46-18.1 et seq. and N.J.A.C. 6:28 (J.Benfer, personal communication, September 17, 2001). The aforementioned code expects the school intervention team to do the following:

1. Identify pupils in need and plan and provide for appropriate intervention or referral services and/or referral to school and community resources, based on desired outcomes;
2. Identify the roles and responsibilities of the building staff who participate in planning and providing intervention and referral services;
3. Provide support, guidance, and professional development to school staff who identify and refer pupils and to school staff who participate in planning and providing intervention and referral services;

4. Actively involve parents or guardians in the development and implementation of intervention and referral plans;
5. Coordinate the access to and delivery of school services for the identified pupils;
6. Coordinate the services of community-based social and health provider agencies; and
7. Review and assess the effectiveness of the services provided in achieving the outcomes identified in the intervention and referral plan.

Even though the law for requiring Pupil Assistance Committees (PAC) in New Jersey was repealed in 1994, the Bridgeton Public School District still requires a process at each school for intervention and referral services for non-classified children (J. Benfer, personal communication, September 17, 2001).

At West Avenue School, the intervention and referral service was known as the Alternative Support Team (AST). At the heart of any intervention and referral service was the actual at-risk student being referred. In published literature, the term *low achieving* was synonymous with *at-risk*. Lehr and Harris (1994) associate the following labels as being interchangeable with the terms “low achieving” and “at-risk.”

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disadvantaged | <input type="checkbox"/> Less able |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culturally deprived | <input type="checkbox"/> Low socioeconomic status |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Underachiever | <input type="checkbox"/> Language-impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nonachiever | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropout-prone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low ability | <input type="checkbox"/> Alienated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slow learner | <input type="checkbox"/> Marginal |

- ❑ Disenfranchised
- ❑ Impoverished
- ❑ Underprivileged
- ❑ Low-performing
- ❑ Remedial

Although these terms assisted in gaining a perspective of why a student was referred for intervention services, they should be used carefully and in a general sense until further, more specific information is provided. Categories and labels are powerful instruments for social regulation and control, and they often are employed for obscure, covert or hurtful purposes: to degrade people, to deny them access to opportunity, to exclude “undesirables” whose presence in society in some way offends, disturbs familiar customs, or demands extraordinary efforts (Hobbs, 1975). It was these “extraordinary efforts” that drove the AST, or any intervention and referral service. Individuals going above and beyond the job description in order to better service the student population. Lehr and Harris (1994) also described the following terms as possible characteristics of the “at-risk, low-achieving” student and are terms used to describe why a student would be in need of intervention and referral services:

- ❑ Academic difficulties
- ❑ Lack of structure (disorganized)
- ❑ Inattentiveness
- ❑ Distractibility
- ❑ Short attention span
- ❑ Low self-esteem
- ❑ Health problems
- ❑ Excessive absenteeism
- ❑ Dependence
- ❑ Discipline problem
- ❑ Narrow range of interest
- ❑ Lack of social skills
- ❑ Inability to face pressure
- ❑ Fear of failure (feels threatened by learning)
- ❑ Lack of motivation

Low achieving students have academic, social, and health related difficulties, but with altered teaching methods and input from an intervention and referral service, such as the AST, many of them are able to succeed. In January 2002, President G.W. Bush signed into affect the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This piece of legislation gave the schools and the country groundbreaking educational reform based on the following areas: accountability, parental choice, state and community freedom, and promoting proven educational methods. Implementing an effective intervention and referral service only strengthens a school's compliance with mandates initiated by NCLB.

As was stated earlier, there are many stakeholders responsible for the success of each individual student. They include administration, teachers, support staff, parents, and the students themselves. The role of administration is critical in promoting student achievement. Teacher perceptions of the principal as an instructional leader are critical to the achievement of students, particularly low achievers (Andrews and Soder, 1987). The successful principal creates an encouraging, supportive atmosphere for both students and teachers that enables them to take risks knowing that they will not be ridiculed if they are wrong, but will be respected for trying (Lehr and Harris, 1994). Although the principal is part of the intervention and referral services team, they ultimately have the final word in how each individual referral is reviewed and decided. What makes the intervention team strong is a principal willing to ask, listen, and take into strong consideration the input from the other professional team members. This role is central in whether or not an intervention team is effective or not.

The role of the teacher is equally important. Aside from being able to identify characteristics of at-risk or low-achieving students, teachers must be willing and able to

collaborate. Many times a team approach is necessary to plan effective programs for these students who are at risk of failing (Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh, 1987). It is in this collaboration that problems exist. At times teachers begin to feel that outside intervention will only exacerbate the problem. They begin to feel that there are “too many hands in the cookie jar.” With an effective school-based intervention and referral service, this could not be more further from the truth. High student achievement is more likely in schools with high faculty morale and a sense of shared responsibility (Bossert, 1985).

Along with the roles of the principal and teacher, is the role of support staff. Because non-academic issues arise, support staff lends a tremendous hand in understanding outside influences that affect academic performance. School nurses and counselors play equally critical roles in creating a comprehensive picture of a family (Weissbourd, 1996). Nurses and counselors pool their collective knowledge about families, piecing together a composite picture (Weissbourd, 1996). It is this composite picture, along with the input of everyone on the intervention team, which helps in developing a coordinated plan of intervention.

Even more important than the role of the teacher, administration, and support staff is the role of the parent. Parents play a major, often understated, role in helping the underachieving student succeed (Lehr and Harris, 1994). Research indicates that during the formative years until the end of high school, parents nominally control 87 percent of a students’ waking time (Walberg, 1984). What better resource than that of an individual who encompasses nearly 90 percent of all contact with a child until roughly the age of 18. The problem lies in getting parents involved in the education of their child. Reasons include; intimidation, negative experiences with the school, and distrust of the school

system and its' philosophy. It is up to the teachers, administration, and support staff to break down the barriers that have been built between parents and the school. Virtually every effective program for dropout prevention, low achievers, underachievers – all students at risk – contains innovative components of parent involvement (Lehr and Harris, 1994).

Once all of these roles were identified and the individuals were properly trained, the true power of collaboration and collective responsibility was seen. In Reflections One Decade After *A Nation At Risk*, Bell (1993) stated that we needed to begin a tradition of parents and schools working together to establish individualized education plans for every student.

In this current study, teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents were questioned through an interview designed to collar their beliefs about what elements need to be included in order for a school to provide an effective and efficient intervention and referral services program. Individual interviews were scheduled with employees of differing backgrounds in order to gather the data. This study then assessed the recommendations discussed by the staff at West Avenue School and integrated the findings into the Alternative Support Team now functioning at the school.

Exit interviews were then conducted in order to see the differences in opinions after recommendations were utilized. The results were also compared with the number of disciplinary referrals received and the number of child study team referrals submitted. A summary was prepared involving the strengths and weaknesses of the Alternative Support Team. This summary was given to teachers, school-based administrators, and central administration. After examining the summary, recommendations were made as to

where improvements should be made concerning the Alternative Support Team in order to better serve the students of West Avenue School.

The implementation of an effective intervention and referral services program can have a profound affect on the lives of the students, parents, and staff. In accepting the belief that educators can influence and redirect lives, we must continue to ask, “what are the roads we can take with our students, what is the final destination, and when the journey is over, what indelible memories do we hope have been stored by our students to serve as road maps for their future journeys (Brooks, 1991)?”

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

General Description of the Research Design

This study surveyed the entire staff at West Avenue School to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the schools current student intervention service, known as the Alternative Support Team (AST). This survey also inquired about possible enhancements needed in order to make these services more effective and to maintain its durability. The survey was given to all professional teaching staff, support staff, instructional assistants, administration, and parents. The surveys were the driving force in the implementation of the AST. Participants in an AST meeting were then given a feedback questionnaire. The feedback questionnaires greatly influenced the maintenance of the AST. The data gathered gave valuable insight into how the aforementioned persons viewed the practice of student intervention at West Avenue School.

Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

This research plan was discussed with the school principal in May 2003. The principal wanted the entire staff at West Avenue School to have input in improving the student intervention program. The AST survey was developed in association with the principal. The survey was designed to gain insight into important program development areas. It was broken down into four sections: These included beliefs about student intervention services, prior participation, overall experience, and suggestions for improvements. The four sections individually addressed the following:

1. The Belief section addressed the individual opinion about the importance of having an effective and efficient student intervention program properly in place to address at-risk students.
2. The Prior Participation section addressed whether or not a staff member has participated in a student intervention program in the past.
3. The Overall Experience section addressed whether or not a staff member has had a positive experience with a student intervention program in the past.
4. The Suggestion section addressed if the staff member had any additional suggestions in order to improve the performance of the student intervention program.

The feedback form was used after staff and parents completed their scheduled AST meeting. This feedback form inquired about helpfulness, alternative suggestions, follow-up, and any additional suggestions. The four sections individually addressed the following:

1. The Helpfulness section addressed the individual's opinion about how helpful the meeting was and if the staff member was in agreement with the determination.
2. The Alternative Suggestion section addressed whether or not a staff member thought that other suggestions could have been addressed in order to determine a more effective solution.
3. The Follow-up section addressed whether or not a staff member believed that a follow-up meeting in the near future was necessary in order to check on the progress of the discussed referral.

4. The Suggestion section addressed if the staff member had any additional suggestions in order to improve the performance of the student intervention program.

The results from the AST survey were discussed with the principal and assisted in organizing an Alternative Support Team. The results from the feedback form were discussed with the team at the beginning of each weekly AST meeting.

Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

This study utilized a survey design and a focus group to investigate the use of an effective and efficient student intervention program in assisting the identification of at-risk students and promoting their success. The West Avenue School Staff completed the survey during a mandatory staff meeting. Although the meeting was mandatory, the completion of the survey was strictly voluntary. The importance of the survey with regards to this research project was explained at this staff meeting. The population targeted for this research was the entire staff in the Bridgeton Public School District's West Avenue School. The participants sampled in the study were forty K-8 teachers, two instructional assistants, and fourteen support staff members from West Avenue School. The feedback form was strictly administered to staff members who completed a scheduled AST meeting.

Description of Data Collection Approach

During a mandatory faculty meeting, the staff at West Avenue School completed the Administrative Internship Survey (Appendix A). After finishing a scheduled AST meeting each participant in the meeting, excluding the team members, were asked to complete an Alternative Support Team Feedback Form (Appendix C). The results from

this survey were divided into categories of strengths and weaknesses and were used to assign job responsibilities within the team (Appendix B). The results from the feedback form were presented to the AST team that included an administrator, guidance counselor, special education teacher, social worker, parent liaison, and parent. The AST team reviewed the findings and utilized the feedback on a regular basis.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

The survey results were reviewed and organized into two categories: strengths and weaknesses. An area was considered “weak” if it received a “disagree” response. An area was considered “strong” if it received an “agree” response. The information further provided insight into the strengths and areas that needed improvement within the school. The research findings were presented to the team and administration. The stakeholders used the findings to assist in implementing effective and efficient student intervention program throughout the district in schools where no student intervention program was currently in place.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Research Findings

Introduction

The results of the AST survey are presented next. The survey items and responses are included in Appendix A. Responses were tallied for each survey item. The responses offered were either “agree” or “disagree” (“N/A” was also used to represent “no experience” and/or “not applicable to current teaching responsibilities) and correspond to the following:

1. The Belief section addressed the individual opinion about the importance of having an effective and efficient student intervention program properly in place to address at-risk students.
2. The Prior Participation section addressed whether or not a staff member has participated in a student intervention program in the past.
3. The Overall Experience section addressed whether or not a staff member has had a positive experience with a student intervention program in the past.
4. The Suggestion section addressed if the staff member had any additional suggestions in order to improve the performance of the student intervention program.

In general, the results suggest that West Avenue School was making an effort in assisting at-risk students and their teachers. Several areas needing improvement, however, were also noted.

Percentages for the AST survey are shown in Table 1. Overall, the percentages indicated several strengths. Specifically, the teacher’s responses suggested that, at the

school level, the teaching staff at West Avenue believe that having an effective and efficient student intervention program properly in place promotes student success. Further, most of the school’s teaching staff had prior experience working with a student intervention program and found their experience to be positive. A number of suggestions for improvement also emerged. They included the following:

- 1.) Providing additional follow-up.
- 2.) Having appropriate personnel present.
- 3.) Time limit on cases discussed.
- 4.) Provide additional information concerning students.
- 5.) Provide more teacher support.
- 6.) Notify teachers of progress.
- 7.) Provide orientation for new staff members.
- 8.) Perform student observation prior to meeting date.
- 9.) Involve parents as much as possible.

Table 1
AST Survey

Section	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	N/A (%)
1-The Belief Section	98.2	01.8	00.0
2-The Prior Participation Section	58.3	30.0	11.6
3-The Overall Experience Section	54.3	31.5	13.3
4-The Suggestion Section	see above		

The responsibilities for all of the members of the AST are shown in Table 2. A more detailed explanation was included in Appendix B. After reviewing the AST survey results, an organizational meeting was held in order to develop the team who would be

reviewing all of the referrals received. Team members were selected based on availability and principal approval. In addition, each member was assigned specific responsibilities as suggested by both the team and those taken from the completed “suggestion” section of the AST survey. This organizational meeting was held prior to any referrals being processed and great thought was taken in developing the team and the responsibilities assigned. After the team was assembled and the responsibilities were assigned, the following logistics concerning the team were then discussed and implemented:

1. The meeting would be held every Tuesday morning depending on school calendar.
2. A planning meeting (one half hour in length) would be utilized to discuss team business and upcoming schedule prior to first scheduled referral.
3. Referrals would be scheduled in thirty-minute intervals.
4. Updates of past referrals would be scheduled on an as needed basis.

Table 2
AST Members and Responsibilities

Member	Responsibilities
1- Principal	Oversee meeting
2- Assistant Principal	Oversee meeting
3- Guidance Counselor	Organizer/Facilitator of meeting
4- School Facilitator	Referral follow-up/Prof. Dev.
5- Parent-Liaison	Scheduling/Parent notification
6- School Social Worker	Parent contact after meeting/minutes
7- Special Education Teacher	Child Study Team contact
8- Nurse, Child Study Team Social Worker	As needed
9- Referring teaching, Parent	Referral information

Responses from the AST Feedback Form are shown in Table 3. The items from the AST Feedback Form are included in Appendix C. The feedback form was used after staff and parents completed their scheduled AST meeting. The responses offered were either “agree” or “disagree” (“N/A” was also used to represent “no experience” and/or “not applicable to current teaching responsibilities) and correspond to the following:

1. The Helpfulness section addressed the participating individual’s opinion about how helpful the meeting was and if the staff member was in agreement with the determination.
2. The Alternative Suggestion section addressed whether or not a staff member thought that other suggestions could have been addressed in order to determine a more effective solution.
3. The Follow-up section addressed whether or not the staff member/parent believed that a follow-up meeting in the near future was necessary in order to check on the progress of the discussed referral.
4. The Suggestion section addressed if the staff member had any additional suggestions in order to improve the performance of the AST.

Overall, the responses from the feedback form suggested the following strengths: The AST provided an effective means to discuss at-risk students prior to Child Study Team referral. The AST provided the appropriate personnel to be present in order to thoroughly and accurately discuss the received referral. Also, teachers appeared to be satisfied with their overall experience concerning the AST process. It appeared as though their initial apprehensions of the student intervention process were changed once they

realized that each referral was given the utmost attention by every member of the team. A number of positive comments for the AST also emerged. They included the following:

- 1.) Additional follow-up may be needed.
- 2.) Appreciation for the quick action taken by the AST.
- 3.) Appreciation for running the meeting smoothly.
- 4.) Helpful advice was given.

Table 3
AST Feedback Form

Section	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	N/A (%)
1- The Helpfulness Section	100.0	00.0	00.0
2- The Alternative Suggestion Section	00.0	91.6	08.3
3- The Follow-Up Section	58.3	41.6	00.0
4- The Suggestion Section	see above		

Descriptive statistics for the End of Year referral numbers are shown in Table 4. Overall, the numbers suggested numerous strengths. In particular, a school with an effective and efficient AST in place lowered the amount of Child Study Team in relation to a school without a student intervention program.

Table 4
End Of Year Reports For School Years 2001-2004

School Year	# of intervention referrals	# of CST referrals
2001-2002 (no official AST in place)	42	13
2002-2003 (no official AST in place)	45	15
2003-2004 (AST officially in place- numbers as of February 2004)	12	2

The numbers also indicated that having an effective AST in place enabled the professional teaching staff and administration to use the time and resources necessary to properly assess every referred student who appears at-risk. This enables every angle to be viewed in order for the appropriate interventions to be determined. With an effective AST in place, referrals to the Child Study Team and other Special Education Services were utilized only when needed and not as an easy remedy.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Introduction

The results of the AST survey of the West Avenue School teachers were presented to a focus group comprised of the West Avenue School Principal, the members of the AST, and two other teachers. The members of the focus group were interviewed to solicit their reactions to the findings of the AST survey and to assess the implications on the Bridgeton Public School District, and in particular, West Avenue School. The conclusions reached as a result of the interview, the implications of the study on organizational change, and the implications of the study on leadership skills follow.

Conclusions

The most pronounced weaknesses and strengths indicated by the AST survey results were presented to the focus group. The discussion focused on the areas of weakness since a need for improvement was suggested.

The focus group first addressed the survey results that indicated that the teachers had not utilized the services of a student intervention program in the past. The focus group participants explained that before the development of the current AST program teachers managed their own academic and behavioral concerns on their own. Since there was no effective intervention program in place, teachers did not have the option of referring students to a team for support. Instead, they either dealt with their concerns in the classroom or they were told to immediately refer the student to the Child Study Team.

The second area of weakness addressed prior positive experiences with a student intervention program. The focus group explained that there were many concerns associated with past experiences. According to the group, prior problems with a student

intervention program included: 1.) There was no follow-up after the initial meeting, 2.) The appropriate personnel were not present which led to inappropriate recommendations, 3.) Parents were not notified of the referral which led to them not being an active participant in the entire referral process, 4.) Too much time elapsed between the submission of the referral to the actual time of the first meeting, and 5.) The duties, responsibilities, and actual meeting times and locations were not made known to the teachers. They believed that if these concerns were addressed and corrected than the overall relationship between the teachers and the AST would be much more positive. The group believed that the aforementioned areas are some of the major points that needed adjustment in order for the AST to be an effective tool in assisting teachers with at-risk students.

Implications of Study on Organizational Change

The findings of this study provided a snapshot of West Avenue School's current student intervention program. The current AST took the results under consideration as they modified and improved the current status of its student intervention services. The focus group expressed that although they do not think the survey is completely representative of the district's student intervention program status, the survey did provide insight as to how teachers at West Avenue School perceive student intervention. The focus group stated that they would like to improve the communication between the AST and the teachers in order to better serve the needs of the students. West Avenue School strongly considered additional surveys to determine student intervention needs. This enabled the team to keep the teachers informed of any changes that may occur and it

allowed the teachers the opportunity to inform the team of concerns they may have with the effectiveness of the services.

Implications of Study on Leadership Skills

Many leadership opportunities were made available during this study. This research tracked the development, implementation, and stewardship of a study involving an effective and efficient student intervention program guided by the Bridgeton Public School District's vision of facilitating student achievement. This study was an example of how West Avenue School fully utilized its student intervention services.

The research supported the student intervention program and attempted to improve both student achievement and staff satisfaction. To this end, the study assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of a student intervention program in promoting student achievement within the Bridgeton Public School District, in particular, West Avenue School.

The literature review in this study outlined growing trends and issues in assisting teachers with at-risk students, which was shared with the staff at West Avenue School. Furthermore, the weaknesses that were expressed within the study were discussed to a focus group to assist in improving its existing student intervention services.

Further Study

In conclusion, the findings of this study illustrate that in order to truly promote student achievement open communication must be utilized between the teaching staff and those involved with intervention services. There was clearly a need to understand why there was some reluctance on the part of teachers when referring at-risk students for intervention services. In addition, year-end reports should be made public to those

involved in order to gain feedback on the influence of the AST. This will strengthen the communication between the team members and the teaching staff. While insight into the current status of the school's student intervention program was provided, there was a growing need to better understand what specific intervention tools could improve the chance for student achievement.

Finally, it was recommended that the AST survey be repeated at the beginning of each academic year in order to gauge the direction the AST needs to take to be successful in promoting student success.

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APPENDIX A
ADMINISTRATIVE INTERNSHIP SURVEY

Alternative Support Team

1. I believe that having an effective and efficient student intervention program, such as the AST at West Avenue, is important in promoting student success and helping teachers with at-risk students.

___ agree ___ disagree

2. I have utilized the services of a student intervention program, such as the AST at West Avenue, in the past.

___ agree ___ disagree

3. I have had positive experiences with an effective and efficient student intervention program, such as the AST at West Avenue, in the past?

___ agree ___ disagree

4. What are some suggestions you have in order to make our student intervention program (AST) more effective and efficient?

NAME (optional):

GRADE:

JOB TITLE (i.e., teacher, instructional aide, support staff, custodian, administration, CST, etc.):

APPENDIX B
ALTERNATIVE SUPPORT TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

West Avenue School Alternative Support Team

TO: All teachers
FROM: Alternative Support Team
RE: AST members, forms, mission statement, state regulations
DATE: 09.09.03

The Alternative Support Team at West Avenue School consists of the following members:

Roy Dawson, Principal
Kriston Matthews, Vice Principal
- oversee meeting
Derek Macchia, Guidance Counselor
- organization of meeting & meeting facilitator
Kim Porch, CFL Facilitator
- referral follow-up, professional development
Jennifer Boyd, Parent-Liaison
- scheduling, parent notification
Dana Spitz, School Social Worker
- minutes / parent letter of recommendations
Bev Bell, 4th grade special education teacher
- status check of any CST referrals
Referring teacher
Parent of referred student

The School Nurse and the Child Study Team social worker will also be on the team on an as needed basis. The AST will meet every Tuesday beginning at 10:00am in Mr. Dawson's office. Updates will be done on an as needed basis.

Attached with this cover letter you will find the state regulations for the delivery of intervention and referral services for general education students. Special education students should be referred to the Child Study Team and not the AST. Along with the regulations, you will also find the AST mission statement and 'request for assistance' referral form. Completed referral forms must be given to Mr. Dawson. Once the referral form is completed it will be reviewed and a meeting date will be set. There will be copies of this form in the office or you can duplicate the one attached. Referrals can be academic, behavioral, and/or medical in nature.

Please complete both sides of the form accurately. Indicate academic and/or behavioral interventions and strategies already attempted and attach any pertinent work or documents. Please do not wait until the 3rd or 4th marking period to refer students who have failed the first 2 marking periods.

c: D. Cleveland, Director of Student Support Services

APPENDIX C

ALTERNATIVE SUPPORT TEAM FEEDBACK FORM

West Avenue School Alternative Support Team

FEEDBACK FORM

To better serve the staff and students of West Avenue School, we need your input. Please complete this brief feedback form and return it to the guidance office. Thank you for your cooperation and honesty.

1.) Person Completing form (circle one): parent / teacher / student

2.) Was the meeting helpful and were you in agreement with the final determination?

3.) Were there any other ways that the AST could have helped with your referral?

4.) Do you feel that a follow-up meeting is necessary for this referral? If so, when?

5.) Additional comments

cc: R. Dawson, Principal
D. Cleveland, Director of Student Support Services

Biographical Data

Name	Derek Macchia
High School	Sacred Heart High School Vineland, NJ
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts Psychology Seton Hall University South Orange, NJ
Graduate	Master of Arts School Administration Rowan University Glassboro, NJ
Present occupation	Elementary Guidance Counselor West Avenue School Bridgeton, NJ

