THE I&RS TEAM PROCESS

A PROACTIVE PROCESS

Comprehensive and well-coordinated prevention and early intervention approaches have proved to be effective in enabling school communities to decrease the frequency and intensity of youth behavior problems. Approximately five to twenty percent of students, however, will need more intensive interventions to decrease their high-risk behaviors. Many of these students can be detected and helped through the I&RS process.

Intervention - Intervention is a proactive process that interrupts, alters or prevents the progression of a condition. The intervention *process* is comprised of all of the actions and steps a team takes to intercede with a problem. An intervention *event* is only one step in the process of intervening with and ameliorating an identified concern.

One of the keys to success for both I&RS team interventions and operations is the maintenance of an emphasis on the dynamics of the intervention *process*. The I&RS model is specifically referred to as a process because it is a *continuous* operation.

The concept of the I&RS team process pertains to:

- The institutionalization of I&RS program operations for rendering a contiguous system of services and support; and

- The implementation, evaluation and modification phases of the I&RS action plan. That is, the work of the I&RS team is not completed when an I&RS action plan is formalized, but is an integral part of all phases of the process.

Since the ultimate goal of every I&RS action plan is to maximize the chances for short-term success, a well as long term change of the individuals' involved, the team *continues* the I&RS process for each case, as necessary, to achieve the desired outcomes. A plan that does not achieve the intended results is not a failure, but provides additional information for team consideration, and it indicates that additional work must be done; this is the nature of the I&RS *process*.

A Proactive Process, continued

The steps of the process are sequential and linear, but the overall process for achieving success is cyclical. Team members waste valuable time and energy and are unrealistic in their expectations if they act as if every plan will be a “home run,” rather than value incremental changes toward the desired objective.

Successful I&RS teams view each action plan as a work in progress, rather than an end product, while attempting to achieve the best results with each strategy. Healthy teams guard against negative thinking and low expectations and remain positively challenged by each new opportunity to provide assistance for growth.

PHASES OF THE I&RS TEAM PROCESS

Research indicates that change is most likely to occur when interventions are culturally appropriate, family-supported, individualized, coordinated and monitored. Furthermore, interventions are more effective when they are designed and implemented consistently over time in cooperation with implementers (e.g., appropriate professionals) and the recipients of services (e.g., students, families). I&RS teams should make sure that their operating procedures address the full context in which identified problems occur.

The results of a study on elements for successful work groups sponsored by the Rand Corporation, as reported by Super Teams Ltd., indicate that one of the common reasons groups fail is due to their inability to consistently follow a *systematic process* or set of procedures for achieving group goals. This section features descriptions of the following standard steps of the collegial intervention process for teams to observe and the procedures school staff and parents engage in once a request for assistance has been submitted to the I&RS team:

Phase 1:
Request for Assistance

Phase 2:
Information Collection

Phase 3:
Parent/Guardian Notification

Phase 4:
Problem Solve

Phase 5:
Develop I&RS Action Plan

Phase 6:
Support, Evaluate
and Continue the Process

Phase 1: Request for Assistance

Problem Identification

The *overall* process begins when a staff member or parent concludes that he or she needs assistance with a *learning, behavior or health* problem encountered in the general education program.

Complete the Request for Assistance Form

The involvement of the I&RS team only begins when a staff member *completes and delivers* the appropriate request for assistance form to the designated location; verbal requests are not accepted. Individuals making verbal requests are asked to complete the initial request for assistance form. The form should elicit the reasons for the request, observed behaviors and all prior interventions for the behavior(s) of concern. The form should be delivered to a designated, safe place. Parents or concerned community members are also encouraged to request assistance from the I&RS team. It is made clear that requestors are *partners* with the team in the resolution of the identified concern(s).

Review the Request for Assistance Form

The team leader reviews the request for assistance form to make sure it is appropriate and manageable for the I&RS team. Forms that are incomplete or include inappropriate information (i.e., subjective remarks, labels, diagnoses, judgments, generalizations, implied or non-observable behaviors) are returned to the requestor to be either completed or revised. *Supportive* instructions for making the required changes should be provided in either verbal or written form.

Assign the Case Coordinator

The team leader assigns an I&RS team member to be the case coordinator, based upon a predetermined rotating selection method. All team members serve their turns as case coordinator. The case coordinator's role is not to mentor the student, but to facilitate the I&RS process, support the requestor and manage the paperwork for the case. The official I&RS case file, which is separate from, but part of the student's cumulative file, is opened upon assignment of the case coordinator. The file is stored in a locking file cabinet.

Request for assistance, continued

Schedule I&RS Meetings

At the same time, the leader schedules the initial problem-solving meeting (approximately two weeks from receipt of the request) and the first follow-up meeting (approximately four weeks after the initial problem-solving meeting) with the record keeper.

Phase 2: Information Collection

Distribute the Information Collection Forms

The first task of the case coordinator is to manage the collection of comprehensive information on the presenting problem. Only ***Specific, descriptive, objective and factual*** information and data on ***observable behaviors*** regarding ***academics, behavior and health*** are obtained from the person requesting assistance and other staff and community members, as appropriate, to formulate a complete picture of the problem and the context in which it occurs. A comparison of specific, descriptive, observable behaviors to implied, generalized or judged behaviors is provided below.

IMPLIED vs. DESCRIBED BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE #1	
Implied, Generalized or Judged Behavior	***Specific, Descriptive, Observable Behavior***
"Nicole has been sad and depressed for a while; she's just not the happy girl she used to be. Her homework has been incomplete, too."	"For the past two weeks, Nicole has been sitting apart from her classmates, with slumped shoulders and not making eye contact. She stares out the window for most of the class and her eyes appear to tear every day. Her homework continues to be submitted on time, but it has not addressed all assigned criteria."
IMPLIED vs. DESCRIBED BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE #2	
Implied, Generalized or Judged Behavior	***Specific, Descriptive, Observable Behavior***
"Devon has become extremely disruptive. He regularly acts out and mouths off to me. He also has been picking on other students."	"Since the beginning of the marking period, Devon has been spontaneously getting out of his seat during silent reading time on average three times a week, which takes the other students off task. When I instruct him to sit down, he tells me that he can read just as well standing up. When he stands, I have observed and other students have reported that he snaps his fingers in their ears, closes their books or throws their belongings on the floor."

Information Collection, continued

Every person filling out information collection forms (see Appendix E for sample forms) become ad hoc "members" of the team for the case and are bound by all ethical and privacy standards. Information to be collected includes (Note: Due to the volume of forms, it can be helpful to color code them):

Student strengths.	***Academic, discipline and health records.***
Positive characteristics, skills and talents.	***General school performance.***
Successful experiences and interests.	***Other behaviors of concern.***
Resources used to address the problem.	***History of the problem.***
Information from family, friends and concerned community members.	***Attempted strategies.***

The collection of comprehensive information is essential for effective problem solving. Too often I&RS action plans fail because teams begin the problem-solving process before they have all of the necessary information and an understanding of the exact nature of the problem(s). Therefore, extreme care should be given to the information gathering phase of the I&RS process.

Allow one to two weeks for return of all of the information collection forms. If all of the information has been collected before the scheduled meeting, it can be helpful to notify team members that the information is in the official file and available at any time for their review. In all instances, however, the file may not leave the I&RS meeting room.

Conduct Staff & Student Interviews

The case coordinator, at a minimum, *interviews* the person requesting assistance, and where appropriate, other school staff. The team also makes every effort to interview the student and/or collect information from the student' perspective. It can also be useful to couple the student interview with a student self-assessment. The focus of the interviews is always on collecting and recording *only* specific, descriptive, observable and factual *academic, behavior and school health* information.

Information Collection, continued

The interviews should be conducted by the person(s) who has the best chance of being successful in achieving the following purposes:

- Encourage cooperation;
- Develop a supportive relationship; and
- Collect additional academic, behavior and health information.

Consultant Role

In conducting interviews and in communications with colleagues who request assistance of the team, it is important for team members, particularly case coordinators, to consider the nature of their relationships with requestors. Since the focus of the I&RS team process is on the provision of assistance and support to colleagues and the team typically functions in a collaborative mode of operations (for more information on modes of operation see the Scope of Services for Building-based I&RS Teams section of the manual), it is valuable for team members to view themselves as *consultants* to their "clients." Described below are characteristics of effective consultants that should drive team members interactions and the development of effective strategies for working with colleagues:

EFFECTIVE CONSULTANTS

- *Actively listen* to clients' concerns, needs, fears, resistance and defensiveness in order to address clients' issues and better understand and serve clients.
- Make themselves available to clients.
- Model the promoted skills and values or use the promoted product.
- Do not hassle or shame clients to buy their ideas, beliefs or products.
- Try once to influence the client.
- Offer support, encouragement, alternatives and ideas, rather than impose.
- Suggest strategies, solutions and options, rather than demand.
- Share information, experience and knowledge, rather than preach.
- Have facts, figures and well thought out ideas.
- Leave responsibility for change with the client.

Information Collection, continued

Observation of the Problem

The case coordinator, whenever possible and appropriate, conducts or arranges a classroom or *observation* of the problem in the environment in which it occurs. An observation provides an "objective" party with an opportunity to view the problem in its full context and to obtain baseline data on the problem for comparison purposes in the follow-up and evaluation phases of the I&RS process. Examples of issues to observe (e.g., "Managing the Conditions of Learning," "Cooperative Learning Implementation Guidelines," "Guiding Questions for Curriculum-based Assessment") are provided the Innovative Strategies section of the manual.

Problem Charting

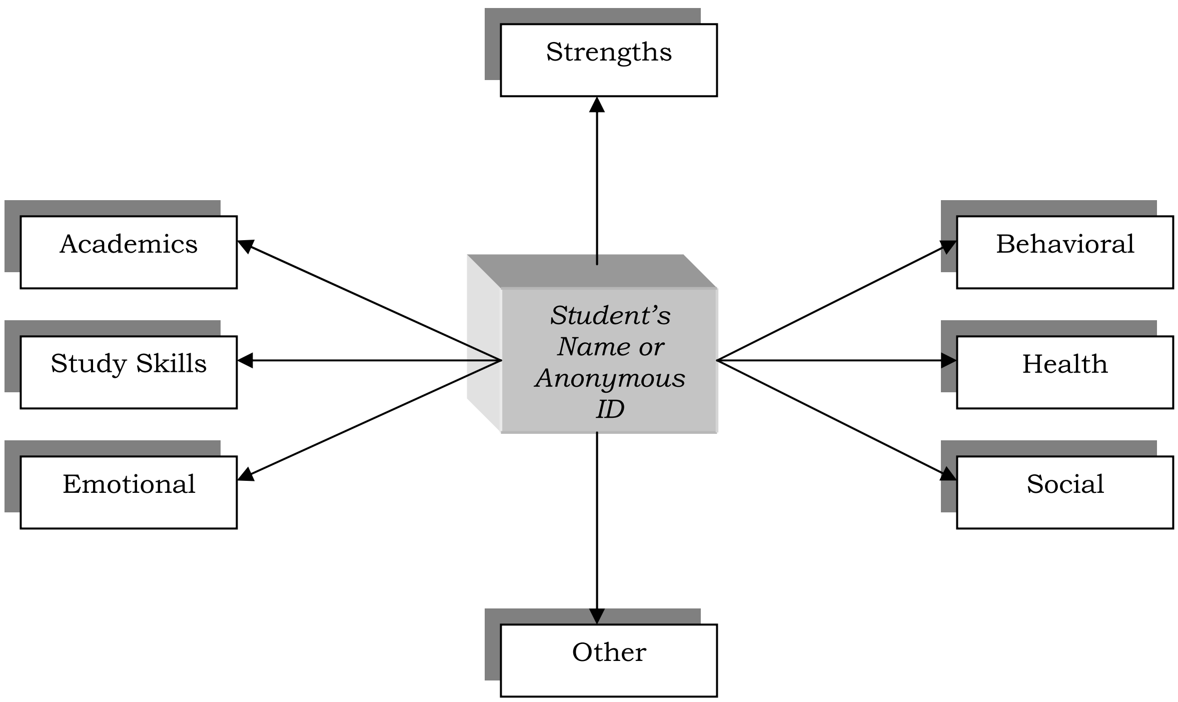
A primary purpose of the information collection phase of the process is to provide the team with sufficient information for problem solving. A key task and challenge of the case coordinator is to compile organize and present the information (see Phase 4: Problem Solve) in a way that will help teams readily identify student strengths and patterns of academic, behavior and health concerns. Case coordinators should consider adopting visual or statisical methods that summarizes all of the collected information and helps the team to easily recognize the priority school-based concerns, rather than getting bogged down in the presentation of individual, and what can seem like endless, pieces of data. The Sample Information Summary Form, which can be found in Appendix E, is one technique for organizing the behaviors of concern that have been reported (see Sample Information Collection Forms in Appendix E) by all staff who are in contact with a student.

Additional helpful techniques include "T" charts, checklists and graphs. Examples of applications of these behavioral charting techniques are provided under Life Skills in the Innovative Strategies section of the manual.

Another simple, but useful, technique for organizing the reported information is problem mapping. In problem mapping, the collected information is inserted under the appropriate school-focused categories, which are identified in the diagram below. In all cases, only *school-based and school-focused* information is recorded.

Information Collection, continued

Problem Mapping*



**Adapted with permission from materials provided by Barbara N. Selikoff, educational consultant.*

Phase 3: Parent/Guardian Notification

Contact Parent/Guardian

A team member or representative notifies parents or guardians about the situation. The purposes of the contact are as follows:

- Provide support to the parents and develop a personal relationship.
- Provide and obtain specific, descriptive, observable and factual academic, behavior or health information.
- Provide specific and meaningful opportunities for participation in the I&RS process.

The case coordinator is typically responsible for *ensuring* that parents are contacted. It might be best, however, for the team to determine who in the school has the greatest chance for a successful dialogue with the parents, and have them conduct the actual conversation. If the interviewer is not a core member of the team, they can become an ad hoc member for the case at hand.

A personal interview is always the preferred method of contact with parents. Even when using an interview form or survey with standard questions as a framework for the discussion, the interview should seek the information in the course of a conversation with the parent, rather than presenting the questions in the rigid and demanding form of a "test." If an interview is not possible, the team may use a standard letter to correspond with parents.

In all cases, the individuals making contact with parents should document the interaction for the file. At a minimum, the following information should be recorded: ***1) The date and time of the contact; 2) Specific, descriptive, observable and factual academic, behavior and health information obtained; and 3) A brief statement of disposition or outcome of the contact.*** Do not record opinions, evaluations or analysis of any kind; only a factual representation of the contact.

It is important to remember that ultimately the reason for the intervention is to help students achieve and grow. Therefore, the team may consider placing limitations on parent contacts if it is the judgment of the team that the contact will place the student in jeopardy.

Phase 4: Problem Solve

Convene Problem-Solving Meeting

The problem-solving process takes place at the pre-scheduled team meeting (one to two weeks following the distribution of Information Collection Forms). The group facilitator oversees the steps of a standard problem-solving model (see below for details on an example of a problem-solving model). The problem-solving session only begins when *all* information on the case is available.

The problem-solving phase is the point at which all information is presented. Prior to the meeting, the case coordinator is responsible for organizing, summarizing and charting all of the information (For techniques to organize the information see Phase 2: Information Collection in The I&RS Team Process section of the manual). The case coordinator presents all of the information in a summative manner (e.g., "Four out of five teachers said…," "Jose has been tardy on 10 of 60 days in the last marking period." "Lamont has been tardy to 12 classes this semester." "Nicole is failing three of her six classes this marking period.")

Include the Person Requesting Assistance

As a partner in the I&RS process, the person requesting assistance is always a participant in the problem-solving meeting for his or her case. While the case coordinator takes the lead in organizing and presenting the information, the requestor assists with the presentation by either offering additional facts or clarifying information and concerns for team members.

It is important to note that the I&RS team can continue to have a role to play with the person requesting assistance in situations where the case has been referred for evaluation of educational disabilities. Students who are being evaluated for special needs typically remain in their general education classroom of origin until the final results of the special education evaluation are complete and implemented. Therefore, the staff member requesting assistance often needs relief and support pending the outcome of the evaluation. The I&RS team can play a crucial role in assisting the staff member during this time.

Phase 4: Problem Solve, continued

Involve Parents/Guardians

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)6, parents must be actively involved in the development and implementation of I&RS action plans. Parents can be involved in the process in a number or a combination of ways:

- While parents *may* be included in the first problem-solving meeting, teams should consider the appropriateness of including parents in the initial meeting on a case-by-case basis. For example, there may be instances where a teacher requesting assistance is uncomfortable speaking forthrightly or completely about a student problem when the parents are present.

  Whether or not parents are included in the first team meeting, provisions must be made to provide meaningful opportunities for parent involvement throughout the process. Some teams choose to invite parents to the school prior to the meeting for an interview and to review I&RS team purposes and practices, as well as after the meeting to review the status of the case. Additional ideas for parent involvement are provided under Working With Parents in the Coordination of Home, Community and School Resources section of the manual.

- Parents may be re-contacted either before or after the meeting or the before or after the first contact with them to discuss appropriate actions.

- Parents should be included as implementers of selected strategies contained in the I&RS action plan.

Include Other Participants

Think of the I&RS team as a form of "ad hocracy," where appropriate ad hoc team members from the school and/or community are also included in the process, as necessary, to help resolve the problem.

Phase 4: Problem Solve, continued

PROBLEM-SOLVING GUIDELINES

STEPS OF THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

Once *all* information has been obtained for a case, the team should be very businesslike in completing the steps of the problem-solving process within 30 to 45 minutes or less. The problem-solving model to analyze and strategize requests for assistance should incorporate the following basic steps, which are described below:

Step 1:
Describe the Problem

Step 2:
Select and State the Priority Problem

Step 3:
Develop a Behavioral Objective

Step 4:
Review Prior Interventions

Step 5:
Brainstorm Solutions

Step 6:
Analyze and Evaluate Brainstormed Solutions

Step 7:
Mutually Agree Upon a Solution

Phase 4: Problem Solve, continued

Step 1:

Describe the Problem

The case coordinator presents the case information. Rather than read each single piece of information, time can be saved and comprehension improved by presenting *trends and a summary* of the data (e.g., Carlos was tardy five times in the last semester; Syreeta is failing two of six subjects and has a "D" grade in two other subjects this semester, but has been a "B+" student her entire school career; Sam has violated the school's drug policy twice since the beginning of the school year; Five of six teachers have reported changes in Lauren's personal hygiene within the past month, as well as a failure to submit any homework assignments; Su Lin has four unexcused absences this semester). Presenting information in this manner facilitates problem solving by giving members a quick view of the substantiated, prevailing concerns.

Step 2:

Select and State the Priority Problem

The aggregate information tends to provide insight into the *nature* of the problem. Based on an analysis of the information, the team agrees upon a clear statement of the basic issues or *categories* of problems (i.e., learning, behavior or health) to be addressed. For example, John's seven class cuts, nine tardies, two fights and use of profanity with teachers, strongly indicates the existence of a *behavioral* problem.

The identification of categories for the presenting problem(s) can rule out other concerns and provide focus for the development of a behavioral objective, increase the effectiveness of team strategizing during the problem-solving process and provide clarity for monitoring progress. This is the stage where the team distills from among all of the case information the primary issues to be addressed. In selecting the key behaviors, the team should consider what *can* and what *must* be changed.

Step 3:

Develop a Behavioral Objective

The objective is a *short-term, achievable, observable and measurable* description of the targeted *behavioral* outcome. The objective is stated in the positive and clearly indicates the desired behavior that everyone can see and document. For example, Tanya will be

Phase 4: Problem Solve, continued

sitting in her assigned seat in homeroom by 8:30 a.m. each day and will be sitting in her assigned seat before the second bell rings for all classes in the second semester.

The behavioral objective does *not* attempt to address every problem behavior at once. In instances where there are multiple presenting problems, it can be counterproductive to spend valuable time debating and prioritizing the relative rank of problems. Teams typically are more productive when they start with any of the prominent issues. The key is to begin the intervention process in a meaningful way.

Step 4: Review Prior Interventions

Consider the effects of past efforts, reasons for successes and failures and benefits to the student and others involved for not changing. Sometimes past strategies were good ideas or had elements that were beneficial, but suffered from poor planning, lack of materials, resources and support or were implemented by the wrong individuals. A historical review informs the problem-solving process by helping the team to avoid past mistakes and/or identifying potentially helpful information or resources.

Step 5: Brainstorm Solutions

The facilitator moderates the brainstorming session, with the timekeeper providing assistance. The rules for brainstorming are as follows:

1. Set and adhere to a time limit.	***4. No discussion, evaluation or judgment of ideas.***
2. Identify as many ideas as possible.	***5. Creative and unique ideas are encouraged, in addition to the traditional.***
3. Post each idea for all to see.	***6. Build upon and/or modify posted ideas.***

Phase 4: Problem Solve, continued

Step 6:

Analyze and Evaluate Brainstormed Solutions

This is the stage in which the brainstormed items are evaluated. Consider the *general* feasibility of brainstormed ideas: positive and negative consequences, strengths and concerns, benefits to the student and family, benefits to the person requesting assistance, success orientation and available resources.

Step 7:

Mutually Agree Upon a Solution

The solution can be one or more or a combination of the brainstormed ideas. Consider whether the solution is in a new form, maintains the student's dignity, develops the student's internal locus of control over the problem, is capable of being implemented by the preferred implementers and empowers or provides relief for the person requesting assistance.

The team's goal should be to reach decisions that best reflect the thinking of all group members. Consensus decision making is not a unanimous vote, a majority vote or everyone being totally satisfied. Consensus decision making is finding a solution that is acceptable enough that all members can support it; no member opposes it. Consensus requires active participation of all group members, skills in communication (i.e., listening, message sending, conflict resolution, discussion facilitation) and creative thinking and open-mindedness.

Phase 5: Develop I&RS Action Plan

Agree Upon a Plan of Action

The team develops a written plan for implementing the consensus strategies identified in the problem-solving phase of the process. (See Appendix E for sample action plan forms.) The plan should include, at a minimum, the following information:

Student's name (if appropriate to the issue) or anonymous ID.	***Baseline data on the target behavior(s) for comparison purposes.***
Date the request for assistance was made.	***Selected strategies for achieving the behavioral objective.***
Date of the meeting.	***Persons responsible for each strategy.***
Names of all participants in the meeting.	***Timelines for completion of each strategy.***
Anticipated behavioral outcome (measurable and achievable).	***Beginning, follow-up and ending dates for the plan.***
Target behavior(s).	***Plans for supporting implementers and evaluating progress.***

Implement the Plan of Action

The case coordinator *oversees* the timely implementation of the components of the action plan, the achievement of the objective(s) and the follow-up plan. The case is not discussed again until it is reviewed at the pre-scheduled meeting; in the event there are serious problems that have prevented implementation and have defied attempts at resolution; or when significant information has come to the team's attention that warrants action.

Parents are re-contacted to discuss the plan and to explain the strategies identified in the plan that parents can implement at home to reinforce the activities of the school and help achieve the measurable objective for the student established in the I&RS action plan.

Phase 6: Support, Evaluate and Continue the Process

Provide Support to Implementers

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.2(a)5, schools are responsible for providing "support, guidance, and professional development to school staff who identify learning, behavior, and health difficulties." Support for implementation should be a component of the I&RS action plan. Unless otherwise indicated in the plan, the case coordinator takes the lead in providing technical assistance to individuals responsible for implementing the plan.

The case coordinator first touches base with implementers within one to two weeks of the scheduled beginning date of the plan. The assistance provided can take the form of conversations, interviews, classroom observations, checklists or other procedures that will ensure full implementation and an objective assessment of the I&RS action plan. Making timely contact with implementers can increase the chances for initiation of the plan and troubleshooting.

Make appropriate arrangements and coordinate essential logistics for ensuring that implementers have the necessary and sufficient *knowledge and skills* (e.g., training, texts, periodicals); access to applicable *resources*, both technical (e.g., equipment, materials) and human (e.g., pupil support or instructional staff, community agency staff); and *support* by the I&RS team and school administrator(s) to achieve the objective.

Evaluate Progress

The case coordinator collects data from implementers and/or records objective observations on progress toward achievement of the outcomes identified in the plan. The data is compared against the baseline data collected on the behavior of concern to provide an objective measure of success and to assist in decision making on the status of the current action plan.

Review Case

The case is included as an agenda item at the pre-scheduled meeting to review progress and make decisions to either *continue, modify or conclude* any aspect of the intervention (e.g., desired outcomes, remedial strategies, support required for successful implementation, implementers of the plan, timeframe for the

Phase 6: Support, Evaluate and Continue the Process, continued

plan), based on achievement of the objective. Since the team establishes short-term behavioral objectives, the follow-up meeting to evaluate the action plan, which is scheduled by the team leader at the beginning of the process, typically should occur two to four weeks after implementation of the plan begins.

The case coordinator and person requesting assistance reviews all relevant information, records and documentation of progress to determine the degree of successful implementation of the action plan and achievement of the *outcomes* identified in the plan. All individuals whose input is necessary to make determinations about the status of the plan are in attendance.

The case is subsequently placed on the agenda only when there is a reason, otherwise the team moves on to other business. The I&RS process continues as long as necessary in current and following grades. An I&RS action plan can last one week or for a student's entire school career, depending upon the documented needs.

TEAM MEETING AGENDAS

The fixed and demanding school schedule makes precious the acquisition of team planning time. The nature and scope of the I&RS process requires efficiency and focus during valuable team meeting time. Therefore, team members should establish procedures and standards for ensuring productivity in all of their I&RS activities.

Teams should not spend time discussing problems for which all data has not been received. The team should be fully prepared and methodical as it problem solves to reach a consensus solution.

Teams should not discuss cases for which there already exists an I&RS action plan until the pre-scheduled follow-up meeting, unless the case coordinator or the requesting staff member specifically requests that the case be considered as a formal agenda item for additional problem solving. A case may come up for review as old business, but only for a concise indication of whether the plan is being implemented, rather than a discussion about *how* the plan is being implemented. If there are problems, the case coordinator should only indicate that *fact*; request that the issue be placed on a future agenda; prepare all information and individuals for the scheduled meeting; and *then* have a focused, purposeful problem-solving discussion about the concerns.

Described below are examples of subject matter for team meetings:

- Review data presented on new requests for assistance, problem solve identified issues and develop action plans.
- Review the status of I&RS action plans.
- Review records of previous requests for assistance in consultation with the case coordinator. Every case is recorded on a case log. The log is updated with any repeat or new behavior problems.
- Consult with service providers to elicit ideas for increased coordination among the school staff and community agencies.
- Discuss strategies for effectively involving parents in the I&RS process.

Team Meeting Agendas, continued

- Discuss strategies for team improvement, evaluation of team activities, team maintenance and other constructive criticism.

- Plan with other school staff (e.g., student support, administrators, program coordinators), community organizations, parents and other appropriate resources.

- Plan future team meetings and activities.

- Plan strategies for formal and informal interventions.

- Learn, review or practice new skills, strategies, information, statutes, regulations and policies and procedures.

- Review or develop instructional and supportive materials.

- Plan and prepare materials for publicizing the program.

- Review school policies and practices that limit achievement of the mission of the I&RS program.