SUPPORTIVE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS for AT-RISK STUDENTS:

A Workshop for Technical Assistance Providers

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Getting to Know One Another

✓ What are your expectations and goals for the workshop?
✓ Introductions
Today’s Objectives

✔ Develop a new understanding of at-risk youth

✔ Develop a framework for understanding Supportive Intervention Programs (SIPs) for at-risk youth

✔ Discuss how to *develop, implement, and evaluate* SIPs in your school districts.
Part I: Who is At-Risk and What are They At-Risk For?
Discussion Points

✓ Who are we talking about when we use the label “at-risk”?

✓ What do we mean when we label youth at-risk? What are we saying they are at-risk of doing (or not doing)?
Traditional Definitions of At-Risk

“At-risk” is often used as coded language for less socially accepted terms such as:

✓ Culturally deprived, impoverished, underprivileged, disadvantaged, disenfranchised
✓ Learning disabled, low performing, low achieving, remedial
✓ Low-income, urban, ghetto
Traditional Definitions of At-Risk

Characteristics of at-risk students

✓ They come from broken homes
✓ They are physically less healthy than their middle-class peers
✓ They lack stable identification figures or role models
✓ They lack stable community ties
✓ Their academic and social development is frequently stifled by the ways in which they navigate personal difference from the “norm” (race, ethnicity, nativity status, etc.)
✓ They lack the “normative” skills of language expression and comprehension
Traditional Definitions of At-Risk

“The term at-risk employs a connotation based in medical or epidemiological sources. (It) suggests that populations of young people are being threatened by a systemic, external danger in the larger community. The fear is that there is a growing menace that is out of control and unless something is done young people will be negatively affected and continue to spread the venomous impact. It is only through proper treatments or positive interventions that at-risk students can be improved and see success.”

All youth are at-risk at some point for some risk factor

Different youth are affected by at-risk conditions in different ways and have widely varying coping mechanisms

The skill that educators must develop is not how to identify *which* students are at risk, but rather *when* each student is at risk and how to address their needs
“Every student is at risk for some reason. We cannot wait until a student is labeled as such to intervene; rather, we must plan for the success of all students.”

The Four Contexts of Student Socialization

- Family/Home
- School
- Peers/Neighborhood
- Community/Society
Four Approaches to Framing “At-Risk”

**Approach 1:**

A student is at-risk based upon characteristics that they bring to the school.

- Examples: Hyperactivity, academically unprepared, Attention Deficit Disorder

- Types of Interventions:
  - *Systems and procedures for identifying students that exhibit characteristics that may put them at risk*
  - *Treatments, programs, and/or specialized environments that seek to modify those characteristics or help the individual to develop compensating strategies.*

Approach 1
Student Characteristics

Family/Home

Peers/Neighborhood

School

Community/Society

Student
Four Approaches to Framing “At-Risk”

Approach 2:

A student is at-risk based upon environmental conditions

☑ Examples: Inadequate support or commitment from family, care givers, schools, peer groups, community

☑ Types of Interventions:
  • Programs and other interventions geared towards changing the student’s environment
  • School reform efforts designed to change school climate and culture
  • Programs aimed at increasing opportunities for positive peer group influences

Approach 2
Environmental Conditions

- Family/Home
- Peers/Neighborhood
- School
- Community/Society

Student
Four Approaches to Framing “At-Risk”

Approach 3:
A student is at-risk based upon their ability to meet some important educational standard

- Examples: cognitive, language, and social skills

- Types of Interventions:
  - *Transitional and remedial programs that help young children succeed*
  - *Supplemental courses and/or programs to help students pass standardized tests or achieve graduation standards*

Approach 3
Educational Standards

Family/Home

Peers/Neighborhood

School

Community/Society

Student
Four Approaches to Framing “At-Risk”

**Approach 4:**

A student is at-risk because adults within the school have determined they will be unable to assume adult roles based upon their behavior in school

- Examples: Not attending school regularly, not engaging in classroom activities, committing disruptive and delinquent acts, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and/or pregnancy

- Types of Interventions:
  - *Experience-based career education and work-study programs*
  - *Delinquency prevention programs or alternative programs for delinquents*
  - *Drug education and “student assistance” programs*
  - *Comprehensive health and family education programs that involve students and their families*

Discussion Point:
Identifying At-Risk Students in Your District

Given your knowledge of your districts and what we have discussed thus far:

✓ Which populations of students are most at-risk?
✓ What are the risk factors these students face and why do they face them?
✓ When are they most at-risk?
✓ What role does your district play in producing, reproducing, and diminishing these risk factors within its schools?
PART II
A Framework for Supportive Intervention Programs
Characteristics of Ineffective SIPs

✓ Are designed by outsiders or by district/school administration with little input from teachers, staff, students and their families
✓ Are imported (out-of-the-box) and set into operation without localized adaptations
✓ Are punitive in (often underlying) philosophy toward students
✓ Are staffed by assigned, rather than recruited, personnel
✓ Have a simple, rather than multidimensional, approach to change
✓ Are often no more than “last chance” opportunities for students who are already facing the consequences of their “at-risk” status
Characteristics of Effective SIPs

- Include clearly identify goals to inform both implementation and evaluation of the program
- Foster a student-centered atmosphere
- Include training and support for teachers who work with at-risk populations with or without disabilities
- Provide links to multiple service agencies
- Teach self-management skills
- Provide high rates of positive reinforcement
- Develop individualized behavioral interventions based on functional behavioral assessment
- Use multi-component interventions (social skills, problem-solving, conflict resolution, anger management)
- Provide a low ratio of students to teachers; small and interactive groups
- Include frequent home-school communication; parent education programs, provided either at school or in the community

Source: Land & Sletton, 2005; Tobin and Sprague, 2003
Objectives of Effective SIPs

✓ **Empower youth and their families:** Link the program/intervention to issues that students/families face (economic, social, etc.). Provide empowerment and leadership opportunities and training, build character and sense of social responsibility.

✓ **Engage child’s family in efforts to support:** Joint counseling, case work with social workers, etc.

✓ **Build strong connections between youth and adults:** Pro-active mentoring, In-school suspension programs that are more than warehouses, etc.
Objectives of Effective SIPs

- **Bridge the Social Capital Divide:** Connect youth and their families to the individuals and agencies with the ability and desire to address those issues.

- **Turn Schools into Community Centers:** SIPs should result in the school being seen as a central part of the community, not just as an institution for formal learning, and these schools should be accountable to the communities they serve.

- **Develop High Expectations of All Involved:** Must provide educational and social services based on high standards of quality.
Five Types of Supportive Intervention Programs

- Therapy Programs
- Intervention Team Approaches
- Supplemental Programs
- Community/Home/School Partnership Programs
- Whole School Reform Programs
Therapy Programs

✓ Coordinated services with trained professionals
✓ Tend to focus on psychological or social issues confronting the student
✓ Are most effective when they are tailored to the needs of the individual student

✓ Examples: Multisystemic Therapy (Liberty Resources)
✓ What other types of therapy programs exist in your district?
Intervention Team Approaches

- Provide advanced preparation for students who are lagging behind their peers
- Can focus on academic, social, or psychological risk factors

- Examples: Anti-violence/anti-gang programs, transition classes, smaller classes for students who are behind, accelerated summer school
- What are the types of intervention team approaches in your district?
Supplemental Programs

✓ Focus on adding to the resources and experiences of the most at-risk students
✓ Provide support to peer groups
✓ Enhanced learning opportunities for those students deemed most at-risk

✓ Examples:
  • After school programs, additional tutoring, mentoring, and guidance (before, during, and after school)
  • Upward Bound, Talent Search, GEAR UP

✓ What type of supplemental programs exist in your district?
Community/Home/School Partnership Programs

✓ Home/School Partnerships: Seek to bridge the divide between the family and the school. The best ones develop a sense of ownership and responsibility

✓ Community partnerships:
  ✓ Develop innovative and non-traditional approaches to emphasize academic achievement
  ✓ Create links to future opportunities
  ✓ Blend community services such as health, social services, and recreation into the school environment

✓ Examples: Families and Schools Together, Safe Futures

✓ What are examples of Community/Home/School Partnerships in your district?
Whole School Reform Programs

- Change every aspect of the school’s environment, seek to align all of the school’s cognitive, affective, and social efforts under a single guiding vision.

- Usually involve the other four SIP types as components of the reform effort.

- Examples:
  - America’s Choice, Coalition of Essential Schools, Accelerated Schools

- What, if any, are the types of whole school reform efforts in your district?
Discussion Point: Supportive Intervention Programs in Your District

✓ What are the Supportive Intervention Programs that are in place in your districts?

✓ Do these programs work as an integrated approach to whole-school reform or as isolated efforts?

✓ How could these programs be improved to better meet the needs of at-risk students?
Part III: Developing, Implementing and Evaluating Supportive Intervention Programs
Developing Supportive Intervention Programs

- Establish a committee at the district level to complete an assessment of schools’ responses to at-risk learners
- Complete an assessment program of the district’s policies, procedures, practices, and programs to determine conditions that improve or exacerbate the problems of at-risk students
- Identify potential resources and options at the building, school district, and community levels to assist at-risk populations and to reduce their propensity toward being at-risk
- Assess and determine requirements in terms of time and expense in terms of changes in policies, procedures, and school climate
- Devise an assessment plan to evaluate the effectiveness of at-risk programs

Implementing Supportive Intervention Programs

✓ Recruitment (students, families, staff, etc.)
✓ Training of staff
✓ Participant buy-in
✓ Participant attendance, participation, and engagement
Evaluating Supportive Intervention Programs

✓ What do we learn from doing an evaluation?

✓ Evaluations of SIPs should assess the degree to which the program:
  ✓ Assisted students in cognitive, social and affective development
  ✓ Identified students’ strengths and weaknesses and helped them understand their agency over both
  ✓ Identified and implemented specific and effective intervention strategies
  ✓ Facilitated program attendance, participation and engagement
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

✓ Occurs regularly throughout the program process
✓ Occurs when students, teachers and others involved feed information back to program staff in ways that improve program services

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

✓ A more formalized method of data collection at the end of the program, or at the end of a cycle (school year, grading period, etc.) within the program, that aims to describe the effectiveness of the program
Characteristics of Good Evaluations

✓ Most effective when:
  • *It reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.*
  • *The program it seeks to improve has a clear, explicitly stated purpose.*
  • *It is an ongoing process, not episodic.*
  • *It is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.*

✓ Requires attention to outcomes (summative) and to the experiences that lead to those outcomes (formative).
Characteristics of Good Evaluations

✓ Evaluation fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

✓ Evaluation makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
Activity: Developing a Supportive Intervention Program for Your District

Scenario:
Your district has just received a large sum of money from a foundation interested in school reform to implement a three-year pilot program to address the needs of at-risk students. As a member of the district SIP pilot team you are charged with the task of developing a program that will prove effective in addressing the needs of your local at-risk students.

✓ What are the primary issues/characteristics in your district that place students at-risk?
✓ What student population(s) are most at-risk? How do you know they are most at-risk?
✓ What interventions are currently available for these (and other) at-risk students in your district?
✓ What interventions need to be provided for them?
✓ What type of a program will you use?
✓ Who will it serve and how?
✓ How will you know it is successful?
Closing Thoughts: Reflecting on What We Have Learned

- How have our understandings of at-risk students changed?
- How has our knowledge of programs geared towards at-risk students improved?
- In what way(s) can we take what we have learned back to our districts to make a positive impact?
Contact Information

For additional assistance in addressing the issues covered in this seminar in your districts please feel free to contact:

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Appendix A: Additional Resources

- Catalogue of Whole School Reform Models (North West Regional Educational Laboratory):
  www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/

- At-Risk Clearinghouse Library (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse):
  http://servicelearning.org/resources/hot_topics/at-risk/index.php

- New York State Office of Children and Family Services
  http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/

- At-Risk Youth Resources (Center for Youth Studies):
  http://www.centerforyouth.org/page.aspx?id=49380
Appendix B: Warning Signs for Identifying At-Risk Students

- Lower Achievers
- School Drop-Outs
- Students with Exceptionalities
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs
- Juvenile Delinquency and Criminal behavior
- Poverty and Lower Socioeconomic Status
- Suicide
At-Risk Indicators to Recognize

Lower achievers

✓ Achieving one or more grade levels behind
✓ Achieving below one’s potential regardless of grade-level performance
✓ Failing to demonstrate motivation or interest in schoolwork or in academically related activities
✓ Failing to complete homework, classwork, and projects on time
✓ Demonstrating “ups and downs” or periods of low and high academic achievements without a plausible reason for the difference
✓ Being homeless, either temporarily or for an extended period of time

At-Risk Indicators to Recognize

School dropouts

- Low self-esteem and/or psychological immaturity
- Rebelliousness and aggressive behavior
- Single-parent family
- Behavior problems
- Excessive absences
- Low academic achievement
- Compulsive behavior
- Low reading levels
- Short attention span
- Social isolation, lack of friends, and few school contacts
- Lack of participation in extracurricular activities
- Retained in elementary or middle school

At-Risk Indicators to Recognize

Students with Exceptionalities

✓ One or more disabling conditions requiring the professional attention of school personnel

✓ Lower academic achievement or reduced socialization clearly resulting from disabling conditions

✓ Learners who, for one reason or another, are not having their needs met in accordance with legal mandates

✓ Labels that may miscategorize learners or may not be in their best educational interests

✓ Learners who do not participate in school-related activities to the point disabling conditions allow

Teenage Pregnancy

- Physical indicators of pregnancy such as unexplained weight gain and abdominal growth
- Emotional indicators of pregnancy such as crying, undue anxiety, irritability, and mood swings
- Explicit knowledge of sexual relations
- Unusual curiosity about sex or “what happens when one is pregnant”
- Inordinate concern with pregnancy, adoption, abortion, or becoming a mother
- Other females in the family being pregnant as teenagers

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

- Erratic behavior, unexpected outbursts of behavior, and emotional “ups and downs”
- Knowledge of alcohol, drugs, and drug paraphernalia
- Loss of motivation or interest in school
- Long absences from school or home
- Poor muscle coordination
- Sleepiness
- Restless and talkative
- Sharp drop in school performance

At-Risk Indicators to Recognize

Juvenile Delinquency and Criminal Behavior

✓ Open hostility toward authority- school parents and family, and law enforcement
✓ Excessive wealth for the family’s SES
✓ Association with gangs or older individuals known for delinquent behavior
✓ Vandalism, minor or major, committed against school property
✓ Knowledge of methods associated with crime and juvenile delinquency: threats, blackmail, stealing, extortion, criminal sexual conduct, fighting, and so forth

At-Risk Indicators to Recognize

Poverty and Lower Socioeconomic Status

✓ Outward signs of poverty: old and disheveled clothes,
✓ Hunger; fatigue from lack of sleep, lack of motivation, listlessness
✓ Apparent lack of health care and evidence of poor health: fatigue, dizziness, anxiety problems, irritability, headaches, ear infections, frequent colds, unwanted weight loss, inability to concentrate, and increased school absenteeism
✓ Unable to pay for school-related items such as lunch, textbook materials, paper and pencils, class photographs, or field trips
✓ Living with single-parent who provides sole economic support

At-Risk Indicators to Recognize

Suicide

✓ Direct suicide threats or comments
✓ A previous suicide attempt, no matter how minor
✓ Preoccupation with death
✓ Loss of a family members, pet, or boy/girl friend through death, abandonment, breakup
✓ Family disruptions such as unemployment, serious illness, relocation, divorce,
✓ Disturbances in sleeping and eating habits and in personal hygiene
✓ Declining grades and lack of interest in school or hobbies
✓ Drastic changes in behavior patterns, such as quiet, shy person becoming extremely gregarious
✓ Feelings of gloom, helplessness, and hopelessness,
✓ Giving away prized possessions