

**Student Assistance Teams**  
**Purpose, Function and Reactions for Instructional Leaders**

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## DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this to my two angels, Maylena and Naomi. Ladies, you are my light and your cheers and motivation will forever be in my heart. I want you to know that no matter what life throws at you, you are conquerors. All things are possible through Christ Jesus. It has been a journey getting to this point-a story that I will share with you one day. Remember that all journeys have a final destination. Like the turtles that surround us, always remember to keep truckin!

To my parents, Ray and Donnajean P. Mobley, words cannot express how grateful I am for you. You were always there, no matter what. I am so grateful for you and your love and prayers. You modeled fortitude and persistence for me. Thank you for always being in my corner! Thank you for being that parents that I want to emulate for my children and grandchildren. Te amo!

To my brothers Raymond and Joseph, I know that you will always be here. Thank you for never giving up on me!

Thank you, Drs. Karen Seashore and Adrienne Hollis, for your encouragement, guidance, push and support. Thank you to my Committee. You have all inspired me to do and be more.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

There are more African American males in higher education than prison or jails (Toldson & Morton, 2011). This auspicious fact is one rationale for the re-examination of educational outcomes of African American males in our education system today—from preschool to institutions of higher education. A closer look is imperative to ensure educational equity and to prevent legal discourse in the future, as the focus on equitable classrooms and school practices over jail or prison are more realistic, profitable and beneficial for scholars and society.

B.J. was a 10-year-old black student who had always done his school work diligently with average results. At the end of third grade, B.J.'s parents were told that he had done well enough to pass. The following September, without notice to his parents, B.J. was placed in a class for children who were either mentally retarded or had learning disabilities. B.J. was disappointed because he no longer went to class with his friends and because the class was boring. After two months in the class just wasting time, B.J. thought that the school was trying to make him act like the retarded children. This belief was reinforced by his friends in regular classes, who now avoided him. B.J. then quit going to school.

An evaluation of B.J.'s counseling file confirmed that he had an IQ of 85 and low aptitude. A puzzling aspect of the folder was the assessments of his teachers, which indicated he was a normal, average student. A great deal of searching

revealed that B.J. had been assigned an IQ score but had never actually been given an IQ test. How this bureaucratic error had occurred was not discovered, although B.J.'s third grade teacher had told his fourth grade teacher that B.J. was a "problem child" and needed to be watched. After B.J. was administered an IQ test, he was returned to a regular class. (Meier, Stewart & England, 1989, p.3)

Historically, there have been many promises and disappointments regarding the education of children in the United States, some of which are irreconcilable. A cursory perusal of the history of schooling reveals that it reflects inherent tensions between values of great significance within the society and competing perspectives about the broader social goals of schooling. The question of who should be educated and for what purposes has been debated for at least two centuries (Delpit, 2012).

On the one hand, both early and later perspectives center on the relationship between schooling and the needs of the economic order. These social relationships that occur in educational settings, usually schools, inculcate the norms, values and habits that benefit the economic system's needs for efficient productivity (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Moreover, linking education to democracy has been a persistent theme reflected in John Dewey's work and current writings about socio-emotional education (Cohen, 2006). Intertwined with these perspectives (and others) is the importance of a universal public educational opportunity.

Horace Mann, often thought of as the founder of the common school movement in the United States (Kaestle, 1983), combined these themes. His rationale, which included taxation to support public education, was rooted in Interest Convergence (Zion

& Blanchett, 2011). The idea was that these common schools would educate the undereducated, helping to create American patriots and good workers (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2013). Per Bowles & Gintis (1976), this perspective on the value of education for all does not imply that each child would have an equal educational opportunity. Kaestle (1983) argues that American education has always met the needs of its most elite and influential citizens, while limiting others to rudimentary tasks or pre-determined paths. Even the post-slavery debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois reflects the tension between focusing on vocational preparation versus an exposure to the more exalted Liberal Arts (Lewis, 2014).

John Dewey's work also contains the historical ambivalence between education for utilitarian purposes and larger social participation. His educational foundations were revolutionary for his time and challenged how Americans viewed childhood, the future of modern education and the concept of a "true" democracy by utilizing American educational systems. Dewey envisioned an educational experience where all cultures, races, and classes could converge and learn from one another utilizing a hands-on approach to learning (Dewey, 1916). These ideals were an integral basis for establishing a true democracy in and outside school walls (Dworkin, 1959; Dewey, 1916). Dewey, considered one of the most liberal writers of this time, was limited, however, in his writings about race and exclusion. Despite his ties to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and financial support for campaigns that attempted to eradicate racial disparities, his actions focused on collaborating with organizations (Stack, 2009).



While the early, and relatively high minded, debates assumed that there would be vocational opportunities for most students, a vision of an inclusive common education typically excluded mention of students of color or students with disabilities of any kind. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's yielded a desegregation of schools with strained implementation, as desegregation did not necessarily yield equity regarding access to quality education and resources. Currently, there is considerable evidence that access to quality teachers and resources remains thwarted for some (Palardy, 2015).

Parental activism and a propensity to enlarge educational equity led to the inclusion of students with special needs in schools. As Yell, Rogers & Rogers (1998) pointed out, courts in some states side with districts that prefer to exclude these children. Ferri and Connor (2005) assert that many promises were advanced with the enactment of special education legislation, services and supports in U.S. Public Law 94-142. These included the recognition of inclusive education and the guarantee of a free and appropriate education in the Least Restrictive Environment, or LRE. However, equal access to schools was provided, but not a guarantee of equitable outcomes, especially for students receiving special education services.

Currently, concerns about educational equity focus on the continuing low performance of some students, particularly students of color and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. These manifestations occur in the underrepresentation of these students in graduation rates, overrepresentation in suspension and dismissal data, and the increase in provision of special education services, particularly African American males, for the Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) disability category (Artiles, 2011; Porter, 1997; Noguera, 2003; Hale, 2001; Bal,

Kozleski, Schader, Rodriguez & Pelton, 2014). These disparities, in student outcome and experience, are acute, and according to research, are caused by a variety of factors such as the mismatch of students and the culture of the typical school building both historically and present day (Porter, 1997; Meier et al., 1989; Semmel, Gerber & MacMillan, 1994; Artiles, 2002), lingering but covert prejudice and discrimination (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Tatum, 2007; Porter, 1997; Blanchett, 2006; Ahram, Fergus & Noguera, 2011) and interpersonal and intrapersonal factors (Bal et al., 2014).

Although indicators of the achievement gap persist, many point to progress in rectifying the exclusion of children with disabilities within the public education system. For some, revealing the opportunity gap with the required reporting of test results after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act was itself a sensitizing event (Fuchs, Fuchs & Stecker, 2010). In addition, positive educational policy development in the past decade has been the expanded provision of special education services (Artiles, 2011; Porter, 1997; Noguera, 2003). The promise of improved services for students with disabilities has led to substantial changes for inclusion and educating students in their least restrictive environment, and the increased educational attainment for students, who in the past, would have been educated “outside” of the general school system (Fuchs et al., 2010).

However successful the modern inclusion policies have been, the uneven implementation of special education procedures in schools has led to increased disparities in educational outcomes for some groups, especially for African American and Indigenous students who are overrepresented in special settings that take them outside of the general classroom (Artiles, 2002; Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher & Ortiz, 2010;

Blanchet, 2006; Bal et al., 2014). The exclusion of children from general classroom settings, because of suspension or expulsion and by placement in self-contained, non-general education classrooms, has been linked with many long term negative consequences, including early dropouts, unemployment, increased involvement in criminal activities, and subsequent incarceration (Artiles, 2011).

These disparities are investigated by The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and this office prepares an annual report to Congress regarding IDEA implementation. The concept of educating scholars in their Least Restrictive Environment centers on the benefit of integration in classrooms and the community (McLaughlin & Novet, 2004). According to the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) for students between the ages of 3-21, considering all disability categories, African Americans and American Indian/Alaskan Native students spend most of their time, nationally, in a more restrictive setting (NCES, 2015).

### **Research Focus**

The purpose of this project is to contribute both to an analytic description and understanding of how students are allocated to various forms of academic support, with attention to decisions that may exclude children from regular classrooms or limit their access to rich educational settings. In doing so, the intent is also to deepen the understanding of possible areas of improvement that would increase equitable allocation of resources and outcomes. As noted above, there is ample empirical evidence that African American, Indigenous and CLD scholars are overrepresented in Special Education. There is a myriad of reasons why this overrepresentation coupled with limited

services exists, and for the purposes of this paper, a sole cause will be examined and discussed. The processes and structure of school-based Student Assistance Teams will be explored, including the beneficial and deleterious effects for students, especially African American males (Pine & Hillard, 1990; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Porter, 1997; McKeemer, 2006; Patton, 1998, Tatum, 2007; National Alliance of Black School Educators, 2002).

The research questions that this project includes are:

1. What are the informal and formal practices and procedures involved in the process of evaluating and referring a student for special education between urban elementary (K-5) and middle schools (6-8) in the Midwestern United States (waiving interventions can be a practice)?
2. What are the consequences of these practices and procedures for students and educational professionals?

For the purposes of this paper, the intervention procedures and practices in two elementary school buildings and one middle school in a mid-size urban district in the Midwestern United States will be investigated. The procedures include District mandated behaviors and processes, while practices include the actions taken by each team. The hypothesis is that part of the answer to the exigency can be found in a resource that is already mandated to exist in all schools today, Student Assistance Teams, or SAT teams. SAT teams are multidisciplinary teams in each school that assist in the development and implementation of academic and behavioral interventions for students who are struggling in general education. This project can help understanding and support, decision making,

accountability and development for instructional leaders. The information gathered during this process may also be used to make judgments and provide information for future programming for Student Assistance Teams.

### <sup>1</sup>**Glossary of Terms:**

**Access to the General Education Curriculum:** The IDEA requires that IEP teams consider how each student who receives special education will access and progress in the general education curriculum, defined as the content and instruction delivered in general education classes. Students with disabilities are to access the curriculum regardless of the setting in which they are being educated

**Behavior Disorders:** Often used interchangeably with emotional disturbance or emotionally handicapped to mean students whose primary disability is in the area of adjustment and social and behavioral skills. Some states and professionals use this term in place of emotional disturbance because they believe it to be more descriptive of the nature of the students' disabilities.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** This is the basic legal entitlement of each child with a disability who is determined to be eligible to receive special education. The term appropriate is interpreted to mean that each child with a disability must have an individual educational plan designed by a team of individuals including the child's special education and general education teacher and parents.

**Individualized Education Program:** Each child with a disability who qualifies for special education or related services is entitled to an IEP. This is a personalized plan that

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<sup>1</sup> McLaughlin, M., & Nolet, V. (2004). *What Every Principal Needs to Know About Special Education*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press

directs the child's education. The IEP specifies annual goals and objectives and a description of the services that will be provided to enable the student to accomplish those goals. The IEP also must include a statement of the student's current educational performance and a description of any accommodations or modifications that may be required to enable participation in district or state assessments. The IEP is not a contract but it is a legal document that holds the school accountable for providing education services that are likely to enable the child to progress in the general education curriculum.

**Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** This is the federal law that governs how special education is to be defined and implemented within individual states. This name is given to PL 94-142 in the 1990. Sometimes individuals refer to *IDEA '97* in reference to the number of new provisions that were added to the federal law when it was reauthorized in 1997. The law is periodically reauthorized and provisions may be altered.

**Least Restrictive Environment:** A requirement in the IDEA that, "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities.... are educated with children who are not disabled; and...removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (6129(a)(5(A))). The federal government measures LRE in terms of the percentage of time that students with disabilities are educated outside of general education classrooms (e.g. more than 60%, 21-60%, 21% or less), or in separate schools, residential facilities, and home or hospitals. The IDEA regulations state that school districts make available a continuum of placements or settings.

**Positive Behavior Supports:** Also referred to as positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). This is a schoolwide approach to dealing with problem behaviors and employs a three-tiered set of interventions. Primary prevention strategies are designed for 80%-90% of students in the school who behave appropriately most of the time but need some basic rules and procedures to maintain order. Secondary level strategies are designed for 5%-15% of students who are at risk of more serious behavior problems and need group oriented specialized interventions. Tertiary strategies include individual strategies such as counseling and behavior plans and are targeted at 1%-7% of the students who have chronic and severe behavior problems.

**Special Education:** Specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet unique needs of a child with a disability.

## CHAPTER 2

### SPECIAL EDUCATION AS A PROMISE AND A DISAPPOINTMENT

“We won’t let them throw the book at our children. Let’s open the book and teach them!”

-NAACP Voter Education Fund

In 1968, Lloyd Dunn questioned the efficacy and reasoning for the separation students with disabilities from their peers (Semmel et al., 1994; Shealey & Lue, 2006). In essence, through his advocacy of questioning if separate classes were justified, especially due to the disproportionate levels of African Americans served under the mental retardation category, he tangentially also created a divarication between special education groups and civil-rights groups. This wedge was manifested in the overrepresentation of students of color in programs for mental retardation in schools during the civil rights era.

In the same vein, the steganography of Dunn’s message was:

in riding the rising tide of antisegregation sentiment spurred by the civil rights movement, he helped drive a powerful ideological wedge between advocates for special education and advocates for ethnic and racial minorities—advocates who should have found common cause in the public school system's chronic lack of tolerance for human differences” (Semmel et al., 1994, p.3).

#### **Special Education History**

According to McLaughlin & Nolet (2004), “special education includes both specifically designed instruction that meets the unique need of a child or youth with a disability and related services” (p.6). Special education is not new, as children with disabilities have been educated in mainstream schools since the inception of compulsory education. Stakes & Hornsby (1997) assert that certain factors are integral parts of



determining if promises or disappointments prevail in the educational outcomes for students identified as needing special education service and support. These factors include societal attitudes, political will, adequate resources and supports, adequate teacher training and management of students with disabilities.

**Societal Attitudes.** During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children with disabilities were thought to be morally and spiritually inferior. Therefore, in many cases, children were considered “dead” and were treated inhumanely as a result of this repudiation (Semmel & Gerber, 1994). Champions during this time included Dorothea Dix, Horace Mann, Maria Montessori and Alexander Graham Bell, who advocated for the humane treatment of individuals who were deaf, blind and mentally retarded (Semmel & Gerber, 1994; Winzer, 1998). Between 1800 and 1900, and following world-wide advocacy, several institutions were established for individuals with disabilities to: 1) to provide a safe place with more humane treatment; and 2) to separate individuals from the general society. The early 1900’s brought more attention to individuals who were considered “slow learners, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed or culturally deprived” (Ferri & Connor, 2005, p.457). This cultural deprivation also included children from immigrant and poor backgrounds (Artiles, 2011).

By 1918, while most states established compulsory school experience, it remained customary for students with disabilities to be excluded (Lanear & Frattura, 2007). School districts accommodated students with disabilities at their convenience and discretion, so most remained uneducated and/or institutionalized (Semmel & Gerber, 1994; Artiles, 2011; Serwatka, Dove & Hodge, 1986). As time elapsed, it also became clear that the criteria for determining if a student had a disability became more and more

subjective, and, “is idiosyncratic to school systems and often occurs in the absence of or in direct contradiction to the requisite data” (Bal et al., 2014, p.4).

**Political Will.** Political Will emerged as social attitudes changed and parents of children with disabilities became more engaged in promoting legislation. This new wave of inclusionary thinking in the United States changed with the enactment of four special education laws: 1) The Rehabilitation Act of 1973; 2) The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; 3) The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974; and 4) The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975/The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensures that individuals with disabilities are given the right to participate in federally funded programs, while noncompliance leads to admonishment of institutions. The most applicable section of this law is Section 504, a civil rights law that mandates that there be an unbiased educational opportunity for scholars with disabilities. Therefore, this Act prohibits discrimination of students, while also providing related service opportunities, if applicable. This law protects individuals who may be discriminated against due to impairments or disabilities (Bateman & Bateman 2001).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 ensures that students with disabilities have access to employment and public programs (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). This law also mandates that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education (National Alliance of Black School Educators, 2002; Safran & Safran, 1996; Huefner, 2008). There were many interpretations of this law by individuals,

one which includes an assistance plan for teachers of children who were difficult to teach (Safran & Safran, 1996). Over time, procedures were put in place to correctly identify if children were eligible for special education services (National Alliance of Black School Educators, 2002). The Office of Civil Rights also investigates districts where the special education enrollment for specific races and ethnicities exceeds the total percentage of District demographics in that respective area (Meier, Stewart & England, 1989).

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, or the Buckley Amendment, highlights the confidentiality of student records. This is not a special educational regulation, however it grants rights to parents and guardians so that they can address inaccuracies in due process paperwork (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). This regulation also protects student information and allows individuals who are involved in a student's education to access their education records. In addition, all information that is obtained from an assessment to determine if a scholar meets eligibility for a disability should be included in a special education file.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 mandates that students with disabilities are guaranteed a free and appropriate education in their least restrictive environment, or LRE (Safran & Safran, 1996). This legislation was in direct opposition to earlier perspectives that purported children who had difficulty learning were inherently to blame. In addition, this hallmark legislation challenges the view that individuals with disabilities are inferior to other individuals. Subsequently, other laws and regulations that demand inclusion, acknowledgement and education for this previously marginalized group were enacted (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). Artiles, et al (2010) highlight six principles that were enacted as a result of this legislation: 1) Zero

Reject Model; 2) nondiscriminatory evaluation methods; 3) Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE); 4) Education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE); 5) procedural due process; and 6) parental and student involvement. These principles are correlated to the research questions described in this study.

It is also noted that policy also supported the need for refinement for what Donovan & Cross (2002) assert as the “paradox of special education”, or disproportionality. For example, the reauthorizations of IDEA in 1997 and 2004, addressed this via a state mandate to report the disaggregated data for all students receiving special education services. If states found evidence of disproportionality, they were then required to implement practices, procedures and provide resources to combat the concerns. In addition, these entities were also given the right to allocate up to 15% of federal education funding for services to alleviate these concerns (Bal et al., 2014).

**Adequate Resources and Supports.** The enactment of IDEA produced funding streams for school districts through formula grants. Parts A and C of this legislation support early intervention for infants, preschool programs and families of children with disabilities (Office of Special Education Programs, 2012). Currently, the largest grant is relegated through Part B, which is designated for children with disabilities between the ages 3-21. More specifically, sections 611 and 619 assist states in ensuring FAPE, however, funding has been inadequate (OSEP, 2013). Moreover, funding for Part B is given to state education agencies that “flow” funds locally (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

From its inception, a major issue facing special education was related to funding. In the United States, the federal government has never made its legislated obligation to

provide a free and appropriate education (OSEP, 2012). At the same time, the number of children referred to special education has increased dramatically. One of the consequences is that school budgets at the District level have been strained, particularly in districts with a large number of students who are eligible for services (OSEP, 2012; OSEP, 2013).

Dewey (1916) describes adequate funding and supports as foundational concepts in teaching and learning: Experience, Free Interchange and Community. Dewey did not believe that thinking was separate from experience, but that they were related. Dewey (1991) also believed that, “Every experience involves a connection of doing and trying with something which is undergone in consequence. A separation of the active doing phase from the passive undergoing phase destroys the vital meaning of experience” (p.214). A trial and error approach behind learning was preferred, thus fostering the “learning-by-doing” process. Since one’s experience was built by which one could test ideals and concepts, it was the foundation to a deeper level of understanding (Dworkin, 1959). In summation, Dewey (1916) believed that thinking coupled with conscious consequences yields genuine experience.

Dewey believed that by introducing different cultures, races and even classes through the educational system, one would gain a deeper level of understanding and respect for others, in and outside school walls. Believing that the home environment was a central part to the values that a child brought to the school environment, he also believed that school participation would only deepen the values and beliefs that were taught at home (Dewey, 1918). Moreover, community was an integral part of society and

an organic union. In *Democracy and Education*, Dworkin (1959) described the importance of a community stating:

There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they have come to possess things in common; What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge-a common understanding-a like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. The communication which insures participation in common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions-like ways of responding to expectations and requirements. (p.5)

Society, as stated above, is about much more than individuals living in close proximity to one another. Sharing in experiences with one another to truly understand what comprises a true and genuine society or school community is imperative. School life, consequently, should be a microcosm of community life to include critical thinking and reciprocity of learning and experience.

**Adequate Teacher Training.** According to Darling-Hammond (2010), there are many teachers who have been well prepared and supported for entrance into the teaching profession, especially those teaching in more affluent states and areas. She suggests adequate teacher preparation is imperative, as "...tens of thousands of teachers are underprepared and undersupported, especially in schools serving low-income students of

color” (p. 208). This lack of support is also compounded by the low expectations and “identity threat” which helps to foster a cycle of negativity which inhibits teacher and student growth (Shnabel, Purdie-Vaughns, Cook, Garcia & Cohen, 2013).

Most novice teachers are faced with enormous challenges as they deal with the variability in knowledge and skills among the students who enter their classrooms. Two areas where new teachers report feeling underprepared are: classroom management and special education (Pasternak, personal communication, November 16, 2013). The extant literature reports that African American youth are more likely to attend large urban schools with high rates of poverty, and also tend to have an overabundance of poor achievement rates (Jordan, 2001; Hale 2001). In addition, “students of color are more likely to be taught by less experienced, less educated, and less enthusiastic teachers, and to attend deteriorating schools that are both racially and economically isolated” (Jordan & Cooper, 2001, p.4).

Hale (2001) also states that changing the model of schooling includes the eradication of certain mantras: 1) There is something wrong with the children; 2) There is something wrong with the parents. Hale’s engagement and dialogue with pre-service teachers regarding the low level achievement for African American *and* low-income scholars usually culminates into two statements that highlight the free and reduced lunch numbers and the single parent household status of children. Sympathy, rather than conversing about the disparities that hinder the outcomes of children, are the norm. Good teachers coupled with impeccable instruction are imperative for all scholars (Delpit, 2012; Hattie, 2003). Teacher support should include a climate and culture of learning-where scholars see themselves in what is being taught and learned (DuBois, 1935) and

the use of ongoing, continued use of formative assessments is in practice (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

**Management of Students with Disabilities.** Some essentials to student learning include classroom management, classroom planning, and the utilization/development of appropriate curricula and formative assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hattie, 2003). Teacher leader aspects that promote acceleration of learning include, but are not limited to: planning, monitoring, implementation, advocacy, communication and support (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Novice teachers can be impressionable, especially when they are socialized by other teachers who may not understand their students culturally. This causes resentment for and stereotyping of students and negative consequences (Shnabel, et al., 2013). In addition, Cook (2002) asserts that pre-service teachers are more positive regarding the perceived outcomes of inclusion models for scholars with Learning Disabilities (LD) versus other disabilities including Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD).

Consequently, the learning that does occur for teachers who are ill-equipped, underprepared and culturally inept is divergent and problematic (Muhammad, 2009; Bal et al., 2014). These teachers place a heavy emphasis on a rote-centered curriculum, harsh punishment and on a learn as you go mentality. Moreover, these environments serve as a repellant for high quality teachers, those who prefer more efficacious environments in which to work (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Special education as a disappointment has embryonic roots established during the inception of contemporary education (Stakes and Hornby, 1997; Blanchett, Mumford &



Beachum, 2005). A concurrent discourse regarding the exclusion of children with disabilities is also a part of this narrative, as the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* highlighted (Meier et al., 1989). Specific to African Americans, the implementation the Supreme Court's Decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* was an update to previous notions that separate was equal. Chief Justice Warren made these comments regarding segregation of African American students: They have, "a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way very unlikely ever to be undone" (Ferri & Connor, 2005, p. 455). While the implementation of this legislation led to increased access for some, it also led to an increase in the marginalization for others.

As the federal law called for increased inclusionary efforts, there was an antipathy that plagued the education system. These consequences included the inception of a new category of special education classifications. Subjective disability classifications based on subjective and comparison criteria became rampant. These categories, known as high incidence disabilities (intellectual, learning, speech language and emotional behavioral disorders) became customary during this time (Artiles, 2011).

Artiles (2011) described the phenomenon as the racialization of ability. This concept highlights educational inequities based on race and perceived ability. He purports that individuals with disabilities did benefit from the attention and focus of the anti-segregation movement. This was evidenced by the enactment of IDEA and the implementation pattern that followed. Social justice aspects and reactions regarding specific laws and regulations were apparent. For example, in the 1919 *Beattie v. Board* case, a student was excluded from the general education environment, even with this

ability to keep up with the classroom work due “to a depressing and nauseating effect on the general sensibilities” (Lanear & Frattura, 2007).

The last two decades have brought disappointment for students in special education, as the mandate for inclusion has marginalized a great deal of students of color (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Moore, 2002; Artiles, 2011).

Circumspectly, an area of focus and contention has been the structure and process of tiered building interventions for students who struggle with academics or behavior. The bias in special education, with academic and curriculum grouping have illuminated the iniquities in the educational system. Meier et al. (1989) assert that desegregation is not enough because educational opportunities are inequitable. Integration, rather, “provides equal status and equal opportunities to excel” (p. 4).

Per Zion & Blanchett (2011):

... American Indian/Alaska Native students experience a risk of 13.7%, African American students 12.4%, White students 8.7%, Hispanic students 8.3%, and Asian/Pacific Islander students 4.6% of being labeled as having a disability. The data also suggest disparities with regard to the placements that students receive and their access to inclusive or general education classrooms. For instance, African American students are least likely to be educated in the general education classroom for 80% or more of the day, at 41% of the time, as compared with 56.8% of White students. (pp.2190-2191)

They assert that special education students need to be supported academically and behaviorally by all teachers. If not, the option of removing a student for all, or part of the day, is not surprising and remains attractive, as Students with Disabilities (SWD)

continue to suffer from low teacher expectations (Sanders, 2002; Tatum, 2007; Shnabel et al., 2013). These lower expectations have a direct correlation to disproportionate levels of African American, American Indian, and emergent bilingual children in special education and can have detrimental effects on student achievement (Sanders, 2002; Bal et al., 2014). The accumulated effect of disproportional representation leads to lowered expectations for students who are not in special education as well (Pollack, 2012). This point is illustrated in the examples below:

I have seen in numerous cases in which “nice” teachers expected less of their students of color, believing that by refusing to place the same rigorous demands on their students of color as they do on white students, they were making accommodations for the students’ difficult home life, poverty, or lack of English-language proficiency. Such “accommodations” for the students’ difficulty may unintentionally give students the message that teachers believe these students are incapable of learning” (Nieto, 2008, p.2)

The 2015 Urban Collaborative Consortium, an annual gathering of special education departments from around the United States, also delved into this topic. The Consortium recently published a paper refuting the claims from an opinion editorial in the *New York Times*. Morgan & Farkus (2015) assert that there are over 6 million children in the United States who receive special education services, of which approximately twenty percent are black children. They argue that the notion that blacks are overrepresented in special education because of the inherent biases of school personnel is a fallacy. Conversely, they believe that the total population of students receiving special education services who are African American is lower than it should be,

given the research. This falsehood, they claim, has even driven the need for erroneous policy changes.

For five disability categories, learning disabilities, health impairments, emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities and speech language impairments, Morgan & Farkus (2015) claim that black children are less likely to be diagnosed and receive services for a disability when controlled for academic performance and behaviors, birth weight and mother's marital status. They assert that some causal factors may include increased responsiveness to white parents by education professionals and low expectations and mindsets. One claim regarding special education evaluation highlighted the likelihood that eligibility criteria is not parent friendly and may hinder parent advocacy for their children. Their opinions were met with criticism and anger from researchers and attorneys across the country, especially given their sample size of 20,000 students, biases and omissions (Phippen, 2015).

### **STUDENT ASSISTANCE TEAMS: A PROMISE AND A DISAPPOINTMENT**

Instead of opening a door to a brighter future, special education is a dead end.

Urban Perspectives, Spring 2015

One of the implementation issues facing districts with complying with new legal frameworks is how to determine who was eligible for special education services, as districts were required to take on responsibility for diagnosing and referring students to the appropriate level of service (OSEP, 2013). Student Assistance Teams are one of the main structural mechanisms used by local schools and districts to determine which children will be eligible for special education services and the area of academic

intervention that they receive. The identification of a student with disabilities also includes the utilization of systematic targeted interventions from a multidisciplinary team coupled with assessment and background knowledge of a student (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

**SAT Team Promises.** In 1975, the federal government enacted regulations that established multidisciplinary teams as a protective measure, as evidenced by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and IDEA (RCSD, 2010; Knotek, 2003; Jordan, 2001). This rationale of a team approach is similar to the benefit of problem solving using individuals who represent a myriad of beliefs and backgrounds. Multiple perspectives were thought to be less biased as opposed to one voice taking precedence (Lane, Givner & Pierson, 2004). In addition, early extant literature focused on the SAT process rather than the student outcomes (Lee & Jamison, 2003). There was also subsequent legislation, such as IDEA amendments that also highlighted the importance of preventative teams and program in schools (Sanddidge, H, n.d.)

According to Safran & Safran (1996), intervention assistance programs and prereferral teams evolved from two sources, Teacher Assistance Teams and prereferral programs. They assert that the teacher assistance concept stresses collaborative problem solving, general education teacher ownership, and immediate classroom assistance. Moreover, this team was charged with supporting and promoting scholars in the general education setting coupled with the need to accede that a student cannot function in the general education setting. This dichotomy, as evidenced by conflicting legal mandates, abounds.

In the early 1980's, the University of Minnesota's Institute of Research on Learning Disabilities and the Regular Education Initiative Prereferral Intervention Programs shed light on dramatic changes in education. These programs focused on data-based measures to reduce the number of special education referrals. This cultural shift placed the interventions under the auspices of general education. Later that same year, there was also a nationwide push to support general education structures and supports, rather than referring students with academic and behavioral concerns to special education (Burns & Symington, 2002).

As a result, Prereferral Intervention Teams, or PITs were created to, "better serve children without disabilities but who were difficult to teach" (Burns & Symington, 2002, p. 1). This concept of the problem inherent with the scholars was in the inception of the teams created (Knotek, 2003). Other names for these teams included: Mainstream Assistance Teams, Instructional Consultation Teams, Pre referral Intervention Teams, Instructional Support Teams, Teacher Assistance Teams, Teacher Support Teams, Student Assistance Teams, Intervention Assistance Teams, and Child Study Teams (Burns & Symington, 2002).

There are four key concepts identified by Buck, Polloway & Smith-Thomas (2003) that are incorporated by the basic prereferral model: it is a preventive process, it utilizes a team-based problem solving approach, its method is based on action research, and the setting is the general education classroom with accompanying curriculum. Truscott, Cohen, Sams, Sanborn & Frank (2005) also identified goals that were consistent with the extant literature and also included increasing student achievement and academic performance to decrease special education referrals.

There were promising findings with this cultural shift. The SAT models that were effective reduced the number of erroneous special education referrals (Burns, Vanderwood, & Ruby, 2005). This shift also changed the arbitrary practice of labeling children and isolating them from their same aged peers. Moreover, a myriad of studies suggested that some approaches had a positive effect on special education service delivery, student performance, teacher ability and attitude, and student classification rates (Burns & Symington, 2002). In addition, early research also compared structure and function to student outcomes, or quality indicators and student performance indicators (Lee & Jamison, 2003).

**SAT Team Flaws.** Just as special education regulations were enacted with the best of intentions, Student Assistance Teams are not immune to disappointments. The root of disappointment surfaced albeit implementation. As far back as 1996, there were empirical articles that detailed factors and processes within these teams that contributed system bias. This bias was manifested in an increase in special education referrals and an overrepresentation of services, especially for children of color (Chu, 2013; Knotek, 2003; Buck et al., 2003).

Studies that investigated teacher attitudes, biases, race, ethnicity, and referrals to special education revealed that students of color are referred more often than their peers (Dunn, Honigsfeld, Doolan, Bostrom, Russo, Schiering, Sah & Tenedero, 2009; Alexander, 2012). In addition, African American students were three times as likely as Caucasian students to be labeled mentally retarded and two times as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed (The Council of Exceptional Children, 2002). Unfortunately, many

children are referred inappropriately and erroneously (Noguera, 2003; Shealey & Lue, 2006).

Recent empirical studies also highlight the changes in referral demographics. There has also been discord regarding suspensions and overrepresentation of Hispanic students in special education in EBD (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). These authors purport that preventative measures, including quality interventions, are often nonexistent and call for exigent changes to be made in this area to ensure student success. Moreover, recent statistics from the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRES), also suggest that students of color, especially emergent bilingual scholars are overrepresented in referrals and outcomes for special education services and cultural and linguistic factors are often not taken into consideration (NCCRES, 2009; Hoover, 2012; Bal et al., 2014). This is known as second generation educational discrimination.

Second generation discrimination calls for an increase in educational practices that assists educators in appropriately identifying students who are culturally and linguistically diverse for the consideration of special education services. In addition to the development of assessment practices that accurately reflect cultural norms and influences and the provision of effective interventions for students from diverse cultures is imperative to provide professional development to improve the cultural responsiveness of all educators. This is also shared by the OSEP regarding reducing the number of African American and Hispanic students in special education (Ahram et al., 2011).

Low expectations and bias are the roots to erroneous special education referrals.

Tatum (2007) asserts:



Just as low expectations can prevent honest and constructive feedback in the face of poor performance, they can also prevent the recognition of excellent performance from those from which little has been expected. Consider the example of Gwendolyn Parker, a Harvard graduate and writer, who as a child loved to write poetry. When given a task about writing a poem for a class assignment in high school, she did her very best and expected to receive an A. Instead she received a C- and was brave enough to ask the teacher about the low grade. His response clearly conveyed his expectations: “There is no way that you could have written this poem...I searched all weekend, looking for where you may have copied it from...If I’d been able to find out where you plagiarized it from, I would have given you an F. But since I couldn’t find it, you are lucky I gave you a C-. (p.82)

This examples describe a lack of proficiency in effective learning environment components. Tatum (2007) suggests these components offer environments that, “...acknowledge the continuing significance of race and racial identity in ways that can empower and motivate students to transcend the legacy of racism on our society even when the composition of their classrooms continues to reflect it...A, affirming identity, B, building community; and C, cultivating leadership” (p. 31).

More locally, River City School District (RCSD) has been cited by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) for the over-identification of African American male students referred to and serviced under the disability category of emotional behavioral disorders (RCSD, 2009; P. O'Neill, personal communication, May 29, 2010). River City has had one of the highest special education service numbers in the state at 19%, with a

decrease of 3.1% since 2011 (RCSD, 2015). The percent of initial referrals compared to each racial category is as follows:

American Indian scholars make up 2% of the total district and 3 % of the initial referrals; Asian American scholars make up 31% of the total district and 23 % of the initial referrals; Hispanic scholars make up 14% of the total district and 16% of the initial referrals; African American scholars make up 30% of the total district and 38% of the initial referrals; and Caucasian scholars make up 23% of the total district and 20% of the initial referrals.

Using the River City special education initial referral trends from 2010 to 2015, as a determinant of Student Assistance Team implementation and utility, the numbers of special education referrals have decreased over time and consistently. In addition, the number of referrals for African American students dropped by 23 percentage points from the 2011-12 to the 2012-13 school year. For the 2014-15 school year (specific to Quarters 1-3 reporting) initial referral numbers have increased by 5% from last year coupled with a 15% decrease from two years ago, from 444 in 2012-13 to 358 in 2013-14 to 376 in the 2014-2015 school year. However, when disaggregated by race, another story emerges. When continuing the Quarter 3 trend for the 2014-2015 school year, African American students comprise the largest number of referrals with 142, followed by Asian American students at 87, Caucasian students at 75, Hispanic students at 59, and American Indian students at 13. These numbers represent a decrease in referrals for African Americans, and highlights increases for Hispanic and Asian American students (See Table 1).

When the 2014-2015 referrals are disaggregated by percent of behavior concerns, American Indian scholars make up 3% of the referrals, 8% represent referrals for Asian

American students, 12% of Hispanic, 19% for Caucasians, and 38% for African Americans.

**Table 1. River City Schools Special Education Referrals and Percentages over Time**

Race/Ethnicity	2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
American Indian	21	3	21	3	13	3	14	3	13	3
Asian American	187	24	171	24	117	24	98	24	87	23
Hispanic	91	12	96	14	79	16	57	14	59	16
African American	303	39	252	35	193	40	155	39	142	38
Caucasian	170	22	171	24	81	17	77	19	75	20
Total	772	100%	711	100%	483	100%	401	100%	376	100%

**Implementation of Student Assistance Teams**

Implementation of SAT teams has varied nationally and locally. A number of studies point to the crux of the problem in racial inequities as uneven implementation of SAT teams at the national, state and local levels.

**National.** A nationwide summon for SAT team support was established, however all states did not mandate these teams locally. For example, Beck et al. (2003) found that in 2001, only 43% of states mandated SAT teams to be implemented in local districts. This is compared to 69% of states giving this mandate in 1998-1999. These authors purport that one possible rationale was that although states mandated these teams, only a small number complemented these mandates for inclusion with uniform training. For example, a component of implementation is team composition and the inclusion of school

administrators, parents and community, social workers and mental health professionals should be considered (Rafoth & Forsika, 2006).

**State.** In Minnesota, the State Statute 125A.56 describes differentiated instruction needs to take place before a scholar is referred for a special education evaluation. Districts must conduct at least two researched based instructional strategies in academics or behavior, and the teacher/team must document these results (RCSD, 2010). Also known as pre-referral interventions, the Mutli-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model in buildings focus on tiered interventions for scholars in the areas of academics and behavior.

Statewide, the MTSS outcomes include: Improved rate of academic and behavior performance; significantly reduced disproportionality; reductions in special education referrals and placements; and school improvement efforts clearly defined, monitored and evaluated (RCSD, 2012).

**District.** SAT teams are mandatory and are a component of A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Every building is required to have individuals appointed to serve on these teams. Specific to River City, a SAT Team Guide to the Problem Solving Process was created in 2008 as a resource to teams. SAT teams are required to meet on a regular basis as students are referred by teachers, however this varies per building. This process, updated in 2015, helps to ensure alignment across schools (RCSD, 2015).

A Multi-Tiered System of Support includes: (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student need, (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance, and (3) making important educational decisions to guide instruction (NASDSE, 2005). A Multi-Tiered System of Support also describes an evidence-based

model of schooling that uses data-based problem-solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. The integrated instruction and intervention is delivered to students in varying intensities (multiple tiers) based on student need. “Need-driven” decision-making seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students (and schools) at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of all students to achieve and/or exceed proficiency (RCSD, 2012).

According to RCSD (2015), “Student/Teacher Assistance embody the spirit of helping every student, particularly those who are struggling to succeed” (p.1). The pre-referral team goes by different names in different places. In some schools, it's called the Student Study Team (SST) while in others, the Student Intervention Team, Child Study Team, Teacher Support Team, and Student Success Team. Regardless of its name, the purpose of the team, in phases, is to identify the student’s difficulty in the classroom with the initial referral coming from the classroom teacher to the pre-referral team. The team then attempts to conceptualize the issue at hand, identify possible functions of behavior and offer interventions. The hope is that these interventions work, and if not, the student is referred to a special education assessment (Knotek, 2003).

The problem solving process essentially contains three steps (See Table 2). The third step, after a child is identified, is for the team to assist the teacher with consideration of factors that may contribute to the scholar’s difficulty with learning. This is coupled with suggestions for the factors that hinder learning and increase undesired behaviors. This step is described as the resolution step, in which the team aids in the resolution of the problem at hand (RCSD, 2013).

**Table 2. The Problem Solving Team Approach Process**

<p><b>Step 1.</b> 1. Pre-SAT Meeting Preparation</p> <p>___ Classroom teacher contacts Facilitator to sign up for SAT meeting date</p> <p>___ Facilitator sends a SAT packet to teacher</p> <p>___ Contact is made with parent/guardian to discuss the concerns and complete form prior to the meeting</p> <p>___ Information/data of what has already tried is collected to target areas of concern</p> <p>___ Nurse provides Health Records (if necessary)</p> <p>___ Student data and information is compiled to be shared prior to the meeting</p>
<p><b>Step 2.</b> A SAT team convenes.</p> <p>___ The basis of the SAT process is the problem-solving process. The facilitator ensures that systematic 4-Step problem solving is followed</p> <p>___ Classroom teacher(s) and administrator attend the SAT and participate in problem-solving</p> <p>___ Time keeper and note-taker is assigned to ensure that the material is covered.</p> <p>___ Patterns and trends are considered by analyzing cross category data (e.g., academic, behavior).</p> <p>___ Team analysis applies the ICEL framework</p> <p>___ An equity lens is used when considering student challenges, ie. What does race have to do with the concerns? Possible intervention strategies?</p> <p>___ Interventions that are chosen that are research-based and match the student’s specific need(s)</p> <p>___ A SAT liaison assigned to the case</p> <p>___ The classroom teacher leaves with a definitive plan or next steps, as well as a follow-up meeting date</p> <p>___ The classroom teacher communicates with parents regarding outcome of the meeting</p>

A post meeting and/or professional development is provided, as applicable

According to Stump (2013), “There are no rules for membership on a pre-referral team. Generally, the team includes general education teachers, who are most familiar with the general education classroom and curriculum, and a counselor or administrator. The team may also include a school psychologist, special education teachers, and related service personnel, such as speech and language pathologists. Each school selects team members depending on what works best for them.” (p.1).

**Step 3.** A follow-up meeting is established to determine effectiveness of intervention(s) and next steps.

Teams also:

\_\_\_ Use the Decision Point graphic to consider options for next steps

\_\_\_ Classroom teacher communicates with parents/guardian regarding outcome of the meeting

Adapted from RSCD Student Assistance Team (SAT) Process Checklist (2013).

### **Conclusion**

According to The Council of Exceptional Children (2002) many children are: inappropriately referred and erroneously determined to require special education and related services when, in fact, they do not. When this happens repeatedly and primarily to one group of students in a school district-as is the case for African American students in many districts across the country-it results in a disproportionate percentage of group membership in special education. (p.1)

This over-identification of African American students is also apparent in the state of Minnesota, and more relevantly, in the River City Public School District (Patti O'Neill, personal communication, May 28, 2010; RCSD, 2012; RCSD, 2013, RCSD, 2015).

The noted African American educator, W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) concluded that a proper education for everyone:

includes sympathetic touch between a teacher and a pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group; such contact between pupils, and between teacher and pupil, on the basis of perfect social equality, will increase this sympathy and knowledge; facilities for education in equipment and housing, and the promotion of such extra-curricular activities as will tend to induct the child to life. (p.35)

Du Bois seemed to communicate the following: If a teacher does not take time to get to know his or her students, develop a rapport with them, nor consider that they are intelligent and eager learners, then the teacher will most likely fail to reach the child, no matter the avenue of instruction. This claim is echoed by Tatum's (2007) concept of identity. She suggests that a youth's self-identity, or self-definition, is shaped by those that encompass their surroundings, including how they are received. Highlighted in Cohen's (1998) work, which tackles the misconception of race and intelligence states, "...variations among "races" cannot possibly explain the difference in behavior or intelligence that people think they see. Although black Americans on average receive lower scores on standardized tests than do white Americans, neither "race" is actually a biological group" (p.1). Cohen also relays that, "Besides teaching our students the importance of culture, we need to revive the anthropological concept of cultural relativism" (Cohen, 1998, p.2). Simply put, it is not the teacher's role to judge a student based on a student's perceived ability, disability, ethnicity, race or gender. If a scholar is struggling in any academic area, there are mandated building level supports that should be available.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

A literature review was conducted to determine the most appropriate knowledge to answer the research questions. The methods were subsequently selected (see Table 3) based on best practices per evaluation literature (Posavac & Carey, 1997; Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2011). Moreover, each question was developed with consideration of, but not limited to, legal and ethical considerations, costs of data collection, possible undue disruptions and time constraint considerations (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011).

The two research questions that motivate this study are:

1. What are the informal and formal practices involved in the process of evaluating and referring a student for special education between urban elementary (K-5) and middle schools (6-8) in the Midwestern United States (waiving interventions can be a practice)?
2. What are some of the consequences of practices for students and educational professionals?

The questions suggest a qualitative approach that is sensitive to the unique features of a decision-making context. This approach includes interviews, observations, document analysis and secondary analysis of survey data that were previously collected for other purposes. Qualitative and documentary methods were chosen as the primary driver, largely because the researcher was an employee of the district who had access to

meetings that would be closed to many outsiders. The unique opportunity provided by an “insider-outsider” perspective that included participant observation was a critical opportunity to understand the operations of key decision making processes that allocate students to special education services. Confidentiality measures were taken into consideration for all the above.

<b>Table 3. Project Evaluation Design for Research Questions</b>			
<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Information Source</b>	<b>Recommended Strategies and Sources</b>	<b>Information Needed</b>
1. What are the informal and formal practices involved in the process of evaluating and referring a student for special education between urban elementary (K-5) and middle schools (6-8) in the Midwestern United States (waiving interventions can be a practice)?	SAT team data and copy of practices and procedures  Observation and Structured Interviews	Post-Hoc Survey AND  Structured interview protocol (administrator, SAT team lead)  SAT Team Minutes  SAT Team Agendas  SAT Team Meeting Schedules/Faculty Bulletin  Websites  Procedural Documents/Guidelines	Referral practices and perceptions about SAT team practices
2. What are some consequences of practices for students	Observation and Structured Interviews	Observation and Structured Interviews  School and district records	Referral practices  Quantitative data on SAT team referrals, percent of waived referrals/total referrals, student

and educational professionals ?			demographics
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One SAT team was observed at least twice. In addition, a few SAT team members and building administrators were interviewed regarding the SAT team processes in each building. The concepts of interview preparation, settling and neutral ending talk were used in each structured interview. Ad hoc survey data were also used to establish the research questions by using outcomes to determine further areas of study. The ad hoc data used is based upon the results of a pilot study completed in 2012. Individual interviews and SAT team observations of 3 elementary school Student Assistance Teams. As Fink (2009) noted, “Surveys are used to collect information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, feelings, values and behavior” (p.1). Chosen to gather quantitative data, ad hoc survey allowed for sampling of respondents, measuring variables and the capacity to examine associations within the data collected. Moreover, a closed question approach was utilized to make the tool more effective. In addition, this approach allowed for expedient data analysis and coding (Neuman, 1994). The questions developed were clear, easily understandable and not double barreled. They were tailored in a way in which respondents could answer credibly. The survey was also peer reviewed four times and each question was developed with evaluation design components, such as legal and ethical considerations, costs of data collection, possible undue disruptions and time constraint considerations (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011).

## **Sampling Sites and Participants**

This study was conducted in a mid-size urban school district located in the Midwestern United States. The District educates almost 40,000 students each year, in 58 schools and 35 educational programs, of which 31 were elementary schools (RCSD, 2015). Moreover, 50% of the population received special education services or were English Language Learners (ELL). The overall district demography was predominately Asian American and African American and 72% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. In addition, proficiency data showed that 38% of students were proficient in Reading and 40% were proficient in Math (RCSD, 2015).

The data collection for this study spanned four years, beginning in 2012 and ending in 2016. The participants in this study included SAT team members/administrators from two elementary and one middle school building. The middle school was added to see what alignment, if any, occurred with SAT teams as students graduated to middle school. Approximately 20 individuals participated in this research project. The recruitment process involved individuals on SAT team committees and building administrators. In addition, some participants were asked to participate in structured interviews.

The structured interviews were critical in order to gather qualitative and quantitative information about the research questions and SAT team practices. This process also identified areas of improvement and allowed for more detailed and open ended responses. Participants were in good standing on their respective SAT teams, and fell into one of the following categories: a general or special education educator,

administrator, district administrator, or team member in the school building where research took place.

An email or verbal communication was sent to the principals of the three respective buildings with an introduction and explanation of the study. A structured interview or meeting was then set up with each principal or administrator, where the Letter of Consent was explained, as well as the goal of the research project. Each principal then relayed the point of contact for future correspondences. Subsequent contacts were then made with the SAT team lead for further communication and solidification of the project. Permission to conduct the study was given by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB) and by the River City District Research, Evaluation and Assessment Department.

For confidentiality purposes, pseudonyms for the three buildings were used:

- **Humphrey Elementary School.** A small elementary school with a specialized focus.
- **Zion Elementary School.** A large elementary school with a specialized focus.
- **Jordan Middle School.** A large middle school with a specialized focus.

## **Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected at the end of a five-year data cycle process and included tools that would best explore the structures and processes at different school buildings and their impact on students in respective buildings. A variety of methods were used to determine SAT practices for each building, as referenced in Table 2 and in relevant appendices. The SAT team at Jordan Middle School was observed twice, and

two members of the team participated in structured interviews. Five team members from Zion Elementary School were interviewed, and SAT team minutes and documents from 2011-2015 were reviewed. The SAT meeting documents for 2014-2015 school year were submitted for review from Humphrey Elementary School. In addition, two members of the team participated in structured interviews.

A running record of the verbal exchanges during regularly scheduled meetings was conducted with the SAT team at Jordan Middle, and was included in the study. A deductive analysis was used and a rubric was created with pre-set categories. The preset categories included process or procedures, scholar talk, family talk, student and teacher supports and school culture (See Appendix A). The structured interview process attempted to answer the research questions by utilizing a variety of study factors. These interviews highlighted comprehensive information about the SAT team process in each building that included: team composition, team process and structures, outcomes, implications and mindsets and laws and regulations. The interviews lasted between 20-40 minutes each and the concepts of interview preparation, settling and neutral ending talk were used in each interview. Table 3 shows the structured interview questions alongside the study factors analyzed.

**Table 4. Structured Interview Questions and Study Factors**

<b>Structured Interview Questions</b>	<b>Study Factors for Analysis</b>
What is the composition of your team? Are there any parents on the team? Does your team include regular and special education teachers/service providers?	Student Assistant Team Composition
Do you know the laws, if any, that relate to SAT team processes?	Student Assistant Team Laws and Regulations
Do you have your SAT team procedures in writing?	Student Assistant Team Process and Structures
Who keeps the SAT data from year to year?	Student Assistant Team Process and Structures
What is done with the SAT data? Anything else?	Student Assistant Team Process and Structures
Do you have follow-up meetings to figure out if the interventions are working, what is working, etc.?	Student Assistant Team Process and Structures

Does your intervention plan specify the person(s) responsible for each intervention component? (Is it specific?)	Student Assistant Team Process and Structures
How does the building administrator impact your team? Do you have more to say?	Student Assistant Team Process and Structures, Student Assistant Team Outcomes and Implications, Mindsets
What is the teacher perspective? Tell me more about that?	Student Assistant Team Outcomes and Implications, Mindsets
Do you know, on average, the percentage of the refereed students who go on to the child study team? Go on to special education? Have waived interventions?	Student Assistant Team Outcomes and Implications
What link, if any, is there between SAT teams and Response To Intervention? PBIS? Your school culture? Tell me more about that?	Student Assistant Team Outcomes and Implications, Mindsets

After structured interviews and observations were completed, the structured interviews were coded using an inductive coding method (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004; Erickson, 2004). In addition, responses from the interviews were entered in a Google Document and descriptive statistics were reviewed and analyzed for qualitative and quantitative purposes. Emergent common response patterns were also used to compare answers and coding categories against the evidence-based practices for Student Assistance Teams. The coding category of Process and Procedures highlights the process and procedural aspects of the observation to include, but not limited to the agenda items, procedures used and determined and the process utilized to gather more information to make informed decisions. The Scholar Talk coding category focused on the conversation components of specific students and the corresponding plans for students. Moreover, the Family Talk coding category highlighted the components of the observation that addressed the family voice or needs from family members, while the School Culture category centered on the conversations and components that highlighted school culture, as defined by the authors that were described in the literature review. In addition, any conversation components that included the specific way a building made informed decisions that were written

and/or understood by members of the specific SAT team were also included in this respective coding category.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter provides an overview of the three schools involved in the study and their SAT processes. In addition, a brief summary of the categories of discourse that were engaged in during the observation period in Jordan Middle School and the review of SAT Team notes for all schools will be explored. Finally, an analysis of structured interviews with teachers and administrators will be presented followed by a review of the implications and outcomes for students that were part of the SAT team process at Zion Elementary School.

#### **Overview of School SAT Processes and Structures**

The SAT process, also known as the pre-referral intervention team process, is used as a collaborative problem solving process in which teachers and other educators can receive intervention advice to provide assistance to students needing differentiated instruction in the following areas: academics, behavior, social/emotional, communication, motor, health, or physical functioning within the regular education setting (Briesch, 2013). These teams help identify, describe and find solutions to school and student needs utilizing a wide variety of data, including test scores, behavior referrals and attendance. The investigation of SAT process and structure in the River City School District was intended to gather more information about how each school included in the study carried out the district's policies and recommend practices. The alignment with practices to recommended practices are imperative to ensure implementation fidelity for teams. Specific school documents submitted were reviewed and the summary of the information is presented below. This investigation was also used to look for similarities in structures

and practices across buildings, as well as compare them to the appropriate practices identified in extant research (Safran & Safran, 1996).

Across all schools, the SAT process is focused on increasing students' learning and considerable attention is paid to available data. Specific to interventions within teams, Mondo Publishing's Building Essential Literacy (BEL) Design and *Bookshop* reading program provides a basic literacy framework for River City. This framework and reading intervention is comprised of standards from core components for literacy improvement, which include: Standards and Targets, Classroom Teaching Program and Resources, Monitoring and Assessment, Professional Learning Teams, School and Class Organization, Intervention and Special Assistance, Home, School and Community Partnerships, Leadership and Coordination, Beliefs and Understanding, and Leadership and Organization (Hill & Jaggar, 2003). The textbook publisher claims that this reading framework is intended for students to access early literacy strategies and interventions in kindergarten to second grade. Because of River City's emphasis on increasing literacy, many of the referrals to SAT teams in elementary grades include attention to this element of student work. Information regarding this area is also a common component included on SAT team referral forms.

The work of the SAT team is also coupled with the standards-based accountability assessment that is used, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, or MCA. Using Minnesota's academic standards, students take one test in each subject that varies per grade (MDE, 2015). In Minnesota, districts also have the option to also administer the Optional Local Purpose Assessment (OLPA) which is used to familiarize students to the formal tests given, rather than for accountability factors (MDE, 2015). Emergent bilingual students are,

in addition, assessed and assigned an English Proficiency level from 1-5. English level development utilizing instruction is provided by specialized teachers that includes, but is not limited to language, accommodations, and differentiation based on specific student needs (RCSD, 2015).

### **Overview of the Schools and their Student Assistance Teams**

**Zion Elementary School.** The total school population was close to 600 students, with the majority of students self-identifying as African American, followed by Asian American, Hispanic and Caucasian. Thirteen percent of the student population were emergent bilingual students, while the students who received special education services was 13%. The Student Assistance Team's goals and mission included the following:

- Establishing systems and processes for progress monitoring and communication; and
- Meeting with teachers to assess root causes of student behavior and academic concerns and to design interventions and progress monitoring strategies.

The referral form for the Student Assistance Team at Zion Elementary mandated that teachers fill out general information about the students that they were referring. A paper pencil and electronic form (Google Docs) was used. Basic information included on the form included the date of referral, student strengths, academic performance, reading level, math level, attendance information, peer and or social information, behavior frequency (place and time), primary concerns, strategies attempted and accommodations utilized. The SAT Template Form was completed prior to the initial meeting, and also included documentation of a cumulative file review, parent contacts and data on two

documented research based interventions. The intervention data included skill focus area(s), a description of the intervention and baseline information, a start date, a date to revisit interventions, a post-intervention data and a summary of student performance.

**Jordan Middle School.** The total school population was around 700 students, with the majority of students self-identifying as Asian American, followed by Hispanic, Caucasian and American Indian. Forty-seven percent of the student population were emergent bilingual students, while the students who received special education services was 18%. The SAT's purpose included:

- A team that reviews referrals from staff for students that are struggling academically and behaviorally.
- The team processes these referrals to discuss and assist in applying Tier 3 intervention strategies for staff to use with students.

The SAT team met once each week before school, and the team discussed up to three children during each meeting. The meetings were held in a designated classroom and lasted between 45-60 minutes. In addition, Jordan Middle School also included specific roles for team member representation, which included, but were not limited to: an administrator, a social worker, a SAT liaison, a special education teacher, a nurse, and intervention specialist, an academic counselor, a school psychologist, a facilitator, attendance clerk, behavior support staff and an intervention specialist.

The Referral Form for the SAT Team was introduced and explained during two staff meetings via a PowerPoint presentation to assist teachers and staff in understanding the process and reviewing needed steps for a referral. The team mandated that teachers fill out a "Process Checklist" form for each student they were referring. Information that

was required included a parent contact date, collection of baseline data on specific areas of concern, and an identification of areas the referring teachers needed assistance with to complete the referral (e.g. cumulative file review). In addition, referring teachers or staff were required to email the counselor about the SAT referral, along with another specified teacher depending on the student's grade. Documentation of the interventions/strategies completed prior to the initial meeting was also collected.

In addition, the SAT team also created more formal referral procedures. First, the referring teacher contacted the facilitator to set-up an initial meeting. The referring teacher then brought the parent information and the request form to the meeting. These forms, filled out via Google Docs, were sent to the facilitator prior to the meeting. During the meeting, baseline data from formative and summative assessments (e.g. behavior data, and work samples) are discussed, as well as student contact information, grade, gender, age, Mondo Level, MCA data, ESL level, the identified area(s) of concern, detailed pre-referral interventions, and an identified goal of the referral.

After the referring teacher attended the SAT meeting to review the data collected, a SAT liaison was selected and a four step problem solving process was completed. The referring teacher then left the meeting with interventions, tracking forms and a plan for next steps. The referring teaching also had the support of the SAT liaison and other team members for subsequent data review and collection. The SAT team members also offered support in the following ways:

- 1) Observation of the student and/or teacher
- 2) Administration of the Cold Read Running Record supports (words/minute, words correct/minute)

- 3) Cumulative file review
- 4) Administration of a formal writing sample (five-minute free write)
- 5) Review of attendance information
- 6) Health Record Review (if necessary)

To help determine if recommended interventions were effective, the Jordon Middle School team then completed the following to ensure the interventions chosen were research based and were connected to the student need(s) identified.

- Patterns and trends were reviewed during the meeting by triangulating data.
- The ICEL Framework (Instructions, Curriculum, Environment and Learner) was discussed to analyze both internal and external factors that impacted student progress.
- In addition, the conversation was centered utilizing a racial equity lens and included how race was impacting student progress, concerns brought forth or possible intervention strategies.

Once the team discussed the answers to the question posed, they then decided how to proceed. If the targeted intervention was implemented and a student made progress, then the team decided to continue with the intervention and/or decreased the intervention to match student progress. Job imbedded professional development was also offered to the teacher or other members of the team, as needed. If the implementation phase yielded little to no results, the team then decided to modify the intervention or began a concurrent intervention. A Decision Point Graphic was used to determine and consider options for next steps. In some cases, if a disability was suspected after two interventions in the same area, then the team possibly moved to a special education

referral. Regardless of the decision, a team member was required to communicate with parents regarding the final outcome.

**Humphrey Elementary School.** The total school population was approximately 600 students, with the majority of students self-identifying as Asian American, followed by Caucasian, African American and Hispanic. Fifty-eight percent of the student population were emergent bilingual students, while the special education students being serviced reached 9%. The SAT team met once each week before school, and the team discussed up to three children each meeting. The meetings were held in a designated classroom and lasted between 45-60 minutes. The SAT Team's mission reiterated the district's documents, stating that the goal was, "a collaborative problem solving process in which teachers can receive interventions advice to provide assistance to students needing differentiated instruction in several areas" (RCSD, 2014).

The Humphrey Elementary School team responsibilities included:

- Establishing systems and processes for progress monitoring and communication;
- Affirming that the interventions are research based;
- Check-ins with teachers to confirm that interventions are done with fidelity; and
- Helping teachers recognize if interventions need to be modified.

In addition, this team also included specific roles team members that included, but was not limited to: an administrator, a social worker, a SAT liaison, a special education teacher, a nurse, and intervention specialist, an academic counselor, a school psychologist, a facilitator, an attendance clerk and behavior support staff. The Referral

form mandated that teachers follow the District form entitled the Student Teacher Assistance Team (SAT) Process Checklist (See Appendix H). Teachers were required to complete two online forms, the SAT Parent Information Form and the SAT Student Information Form. Basic information collected on the SAT included teacher name, student name and grade, race, educational history (test scores, attendance, schools attended and performance), ELL information, parent concerns, baseline data, work samples, learning preferences, behavior information and student challenges. The Student Information Form, completed before the initial meeting, also included a request to bring specific documents to the first meeting, including work samples, behavior tracking data, completed parent information form, data on interventions completed and assessment data were included in the packet for student referral.

One notable feature of this review is that each school developed slightly different procedures and variations on information forms and processes utilized. While the differences were not great, and gave, perhaps, a sense of ownership over the processes, the variation in forms made comparisons across schools difficult, in addition to reduced opportunities for comparison of referrals.

### **SAT Team Observation and Note Review Findings**

The referral procedures give some insight into the way in which teachers and students “entered” the SAT process. The SAT team observations were intended to gather more information about team processes and procedures, including specific team information and an observation of formal and informal practices. These observations sought to gather additional information about the referrals, practices and perceptions surrounding SAT teams. Four coding categories were determined prior to the



observations, and the data were then collected and grouped into one of these four existing categories: Process and Procedures, Scholar Talk, Family Talk, and School Culture.

Formal coding of verbal exchanges and comments was limited to one school, Jordan Middle School. This school was selected as a convenience sample due to easy accessibility to the building and SAT team during the study. Student information was collected, and included a running coding record of two SAT Team sessions during a five-month period (see Table 4).

There were some similarities and differences noted between observations that occurred over 5-month duration of time. Both observations yielded similarities in the Process and Procedures, Scholar Talk and School Culture coding categories with four occurrences each during the first observation. The team members conversed about each of these equally while describing students, procedures and plans of action for students and teachers that were in attendance. The Family Talk coding was also described, but with less frequency than the other categories, with only one occurrence.

The second observation yielded a predominance of Scholar Talk, the most detailed aspect of the conversation, with 7 occurrences. Conversation coded under the Process and Procedures followed with 6 occurrences, as the details were specific to how, when and why individual student success plans would be carried out within context and utilizing existing resources. School Culture was also at the forefront of conversations, but not as much as previously observed, with three occurrences. Family Talk was not evident during the second observation.

Since formal observations did not take place in other schools, a review of SAT team meeting notes for two other buildings were completed. For consistency, the meetings that were chosen were approximately 5 months apart, with the first during the beginning of the year and the latter close to the end of the school year. These results yielded that Scholar Talk and Process and Procedures were dominant areas of discussion for the other schools (See Tables 5 and 6). The one notable outlier in these tables was the higher incidence of Process and Procedures for Humphrey Elementary. Regarding Zion Elementary, School Culture was represented was represented.

**Table 5. SAT Team Observations at Jordan Middle School by Occurrence**

	Scholar Talk	Process & Procedures	School Culture	Family
Obs. 1	4	4	4	2
Obs. 2	7	6	3	0

**Table 6. SAT Team Note Coding for Zion Elementary School by Occurrence**

	Scholar Talk	Process & Procedures	School Culture	Family
SAT Note Review 1	2	2	0	0
SAT Note Review 2	2	2	1	0

**Table 7. SAT Team Note Coding for Humphrey Elementary School by Occurrence**

	Scholar Talk	Process & Procedures	School Culture	Family
SAT Note Review 1	2	4	0	0
SAT Note Review 2	1	3	2	0

**Structured Interview Findings**

Responses to the structured interviews for SAT team members elaborated on the differences that were discussed above in summarizing the way in which teams operated within each school. At least one team member from each building was interviewed. The structured interviews also attempted to answer the research questions by utilizing a variety of study factors. The interviews also gave comprehensive information about the SAT team process in each building including, but not limited to, data collection and principal impact of the team culture coupled with information regarding knowledge about legislation surrounding SAT teams.

**SAT Team Composition.** When individuals were asked if SAT teams included both general and special education service providers, all respondents indicated that teams were made up of mufti-disciplinary team members, irrespective of the formal documents specifying team composition in some (but not all) schools, the respondents reported an average of 9 team members, who represented different roles in the school. The most common members on all teams included a special education teacher, a general education teacher, a counselor, a Building Instructional Coach, a social worker and an administrator (e.g. a vice-principal, administrative intern, or principal). Members that were reported

less often included building level academic coaches (e.g. Math Coach), psychologists, speech therapists, ELL teachers, nurses and other related service providers such as occupational therapists and physical therapists. Team composition by school is shown in the table below:

**Table 8. Team Member Composition by School**

	Humphrey	Zion	Jordan
SPED Teacher	X	X	X
Gen. Ed Teacher	X	X	X
Psychologist	X	X	As Needed
Parent			
Social Worker	X	X	X
Related Service Providers (e.g. OT)	As needed	X	As needed
Principal/AP	X	X	X
Counselor	X	X	X
Building Coach	X	X	X
Nurse			X
Behavior Support Staff			X
SAT Liaison	X	X	X
Intervention Specialist	X		X

Parents were not reported on any of the teams represented. Three out of four buildings reported that the rationale for a lack of parent involvement was due to

confidentiality requirements. The team from Jordan Middle reported that parents were welcome to discuss their child and add information to the team discussion, however, this was by invitation only, and parents were not allowed to stay to hear the other students being discussed.

**SAT Procedures in Writing.** When asked the question, “Are your SAT team procedures in writing?”, five out of the six participants in respective schools confirmed the procedures. Of the procedures reviewed, Jordan Middle and Humphrey Elementary were taken from the overall district framework, and could be found on-line. The other building, Zion Elementary, extracted samples of the framework, and also added other information on a building specific procedural sheet. In addition, Jordan Middle relayed that the SAT Team also completed a refresher each year for the entire staff to ensure that all staff were aware of SAT procedural components. It should be noted that when interviewing two administrators in one building, one reported that the school procedures were in writing, while their counterpart provided specific and real time examples of the procedures used in the building.

**Knowledge of SAT Team Laws and Regulations.** In contrast to awareness of written procedures, there was less understanding of the legal basis underlying the guidelines. When individuals were asked about their knowledge of the laws and/or regulations that govern SAT teams, all but one individual reported that they were not aware of them. The building administrators interviewed revealed that they too, were not informed about the specific laws and regulations that govern SAT teams. Three building administrators were unaware that these existed, or could not recall any specific information, while one building administrator recalled that he knew that they existed, but

was unaware of the specific regulations that related to Student Assistance Teams. Only one building administrator recalled the statutes and its specifics, including the mandate for the team to be in place and the duration of time interventions are supposed to take place prior to a referral.

**Data Collection and Utilization.** The responses regarding the SAT team data, which was obtained during structured interviews, indicated a considerable consistency in continuity of data storage and utilization (which is part of the legal underpinnings for SAT teams). All those interviewed indicated that the data are kept in the building by either the SAT team lead, the principal or the social worker. Two buildings, Jordan Middle and Humphrey Elementary, reported that information is stored and shared on Google Docs, while one building team reported that hard copies of all of the data collected are in a designated team member's office at Zion Elementary as well as stored in a Google Document.

Data utilization was, however, less notable. Although data are kept, reviewed and actions that made use of archived data across school years was reported as occurring with less frequency, in part because data retrieval systems were inadequate. Only two teams, Zion Elementary and Jordan Middle, reported that data were available for use each year, but all reported that they wanted an alternative way to keep data for greater accessibility from year to year. One respondent reported that they were unaware of who was responsible for this task in their building.

A follow-up question surrounding what is done with stored data also yielded a myriad of results, as most respondents reported that data are used to review existing resources and areas of intervention, with a specific follow-up over a specified duration of

time. Two respondents reported that the information was used for data collection purposes only. For example, if a former student enrolled outside the district or left the school through natural grade progression, the data were available for current teams.

Furthermore, it appeared that most respondents had not thought much about the issue of data retrieval and utilization. When a probing question of “anything else?” followed, these comments were noted:

“The experts on the team are very valuable. Looking at the data is also beneficial, so the team can review and refine. Time is sensitive and the team reviews that data to meet the needs of the child.”

“It is a way to get better and using data and evidence based practices for future referrals.”

“Once tailored interventions occur, they progress and there is no SPED (special education) referral. Seventy percent of the kids who come to SAT for academics do not go to a SPED education referral.”

**Follow-Up Meetings.** When teams were asked if follow-up meetings took place to review and refine existing goals, all reported that this was completed in each building, although these were confined to the timeframe set by district standards and did not include long term follow-up, which will be discussed below. More specifically, one team member from Zion Elementary commented that the information gathered is shared with key staff working with each child. Once a goal was set, an intervention time frame was set for three to four weeks. This was dependent on the case, however. For high priority cases, this time frame was limited to two weeks. In other buildings, this process included

meeting with other teachers in a follow-up meeting to review the plans created for students. Humphrey Elementary reported that this occurs, but not for all cases. Moreover, when all teams were asked, “Does your intervention plan specify the person(s) responsible for each intervention component?” all building teams reported that this was in place and reported that this process was, as aforementioned, specific and detailed in each building.

**Building Administrator Impact.** For answers to the question, “How does the building administrator impact your team?” respondents described the administrator in the following ways: 1) support or supporting role to the team, 2) a facilitator, 3) the one who holds all accountable, and 4) the communicator (due to the parent requests that need to be approved). Other answers included, but were not limited to, administrator roles as time keepers, those offering best practices in terms of interventions for students and the responsibility for keeping the team action oriented and forward thinking.

Although all respondents saw the principal as having a role, the influence they had on team functioning varied widely. At Jordan Middle, an individual reported that building administrators did not impact the team while in the others their impact was reported as significant enough to shape the culture of the team. One respondent reported that the building administrator set the tone for the entire team, even when this administrator was absent.

In contrast, when administrators answered these questions, they listed the roles that they held, or delegated to the rest of the building and saw themselves as influential. Two administrators asserted that their impact centered on a supportive, facilitative and/or recruitment role. For example, an administrator commented, “I need to be there to



support the team and be there as a team player and the need to be aligned. This helps to show that I take stake in it and I am willing and part of the team. It helps me with background knowledge and dealing with parents. It helps me get to know the kids as well, especially on another level, including behavior.”

**Referring Teacher Perspectives.** For answers to question, “What is the teacher perspective? Tell me more about that?”, the responses varied, in large part due to the varying interpretations of the question. Some interpreted the question as an opportunity to describe how the teachers who referred students felt about the SAT team process. In one case, for example, a respondent reflected on how confident teachers were that the SAT would make a difference, and noted that referring teacher perspectives were better than in the past, “The teacher perspective is part of a teaming process and to see multiple perspectives about a scholar. Especially with departmental grade level teams. There is such a discrepancy with student skills between teachers and needs. Especially with kids who are struggling behaviorally, everyone around the table that works with kids-get tips etc. There is good conversation about this now”. Another respondent reported that the referring teacher perspective was an integral part of the SAT process because it allowed several teachers who had contact with the same child to see multiple perspectives about scholars.

Other respondents interpreted the question as asking about the need for the teacher perspective and commented that it was important to recognize this narrative in SAT conversations in order to encourage referrals. One respondent noted, for example, that the process felt overwhelming to some teachers and expressed concern that this might limit referrals. Another view centered on the importance of teacher input, noting

that teachers are the “first line of defense of support” for scholars, and that the SAT team needed teacher creativity to generate intervention ideas for scholars.

**Follow-up on Student Outcomes.** For the question, “Do you know, on average, the percentage of the referred students who go on to the child study team? Go on to special education? Have waived interventions?”, respondents, overall, reported limited attention to reviewing data related to the outcomes of their work or data collected each year to review building statistics. There were, for example, no respondents who were aware of the percentage of students that were discussed at SAT team meetings were then referred to the building child study teams for the consideration of a special education referral. In addition, there were no respondents who knew the data on the number of students who bypassed the SAT team process with a request for a referral for special education albeit waived interventions.

Although they were not familiar with follow-up data, respondents were able to provide predictions based on their experiences. Their predictions suggested inconsistency within and between teams. Of the respondents, one reported that the percentage referred to special education would be higher due to the specific identification process of the SAT teams with the utilization of data. Three respondents, in contrast, reported that this number would be lower, due to the specific processes for RTI/PBIS in place. Moreover, the question regarding waived interventions also yielded a variety of answers that ranged from, “that is a good question” to “very few based on the referrals that I have signed electronically”.

Building administrator respondents agreed that the question was warranted, and commented on how this should be incorporated into existing practices. There were no building teams that had an existing method of collecting or analyzing this data.

**SAT and Response to Intervention (RTI) Connection.** For questions, “What link, if any, is there between SAT teams and Response to Intervention? PBIS? Your school culture? Tell me more about that?”, the majority of the responses suggested a correlation between SAT team work and the district’s mandated Positive Behavior Intervention Strategy (PBIS) framework that includes systemic and building-wide academic and behavioral interventions. All respondents gave specific examples of these connections in their buildings. Three examples included: There is a huge link between PBIS and RTI; SAT and PBIS are interrelated and involves RTI; and the link between RTI and SAT happens within the SAT team with Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Responses to this question included:

“There is a link. We start with Tier 1 and then kids who need more help may not go to STAT right away. If students still aren't improving, there is a request for a STAT team meeting. The Tier 3 kids for sure, something is not working so it is showing that data within the school. The school culture in SAT teams. If a scholar is struggling, it is a collaborative group. A part of PBIS, everyone is on the same page and wants the same outcomes as for kids.”

“RTI- huge link. Triangle of support. At some point there has to be some interventions and support for all scholars. Tier 3 does not equal special education.

There is an extra scoop, but it is not the same things. Culture-see actions that tells me they are believing in the mission.”

“Counselors are on PBIS and SAT teams. Teams meet on a bi-weekly basis, and use data to make sure that things are in place and document this as well to review with the Behavior Team. We really focus together looking at the behavior piece as well. PBIS helps to focus on the Tiers and putting in the school wide interventions. Who needs more? Who needs more than that?”

**SAT and School Culture Connection.** All respondents reported that school culture had a direct impact on the SAT team practices and procedures, while some respondents reported that cultural aspects are seen in the access and opportunities within the tiered levels of support in buildings, others saw school culture defined in the decisions that were made at respective SAT meetings. Two respondents from Zion Elementary commented that culture was aligned with the school mission. The first respondent stated that, “Culture is highlighted in the actions that are taken by the team, and that the actions that are taken as a part of these meetings should align with the overall mission of the building.” Another respondent reported that culture, “...is what we are and what we do.” School culture is made up of underlying assumptions and espoused beliefs (Kruse & Louis, 2009). These beliefs may be reflected in the predominance of procedural talk and follow-up that was seen with the SAT Teams, as one respondent noted: “ I sent 6th graders out of here last year and we missed them, and have gotten calls from the Middle School regarding their needs, and it haunts me. It is hard to see that happen. We don't want this to happen to our kids.”

## **Retroactive Student Review**

It was beyond the scope of this study to examine the results of SAT deliberations in specific cases of student referrals. Nevertheless, it seemed important to look at the content of discussions and dispositions, which would have the potential of affecting student outcomes. According to Briesch et al. (2013), social emotional and behavior referrals to SAT teams are vague, however they can often cover a range of concerns, from ADHD symptoms to defiance. They also range in definition. Since the goal was not to look at either the presenting problems (as defined by the teacher) or the SAT determination, I looked only at the 2011-2012 referrals in one school, Zion Elementary. This school was chosen due to the immediate access to this data.

Approximately twenty students were referred by members of the school body during the 2011-2012 school year, and the referrals mostly came from classroom teachers. Six students were assessed in greater detail to include race, grade, primary reason for referral, school year referred, child study referral and current special education status based on the details of the referral. All six students had the majority of the referral components completed. In addition, all students selected were students of color, with the majority being African American, followed by Asian. In addition, all students were male. The grade of the students ranged from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade for the academic year reviewed.

**Referral Rationale.** The most frequent reason for referral followed Briesch's (2013) report, and included off task behavior, difficulty following directions, disobedience and other descriptors centered on behavior. Only one referral pointed to academics as the primary presenting issue, but this case also included behavior as a

connected area of concern. The SAT team referral form from the teacher, as well as the online special education referral system, were accessed and confirmed that the appropriate referral form was completed and the primary concerns aligned across systems. The following narratives presented are summaries of the data collected:

- Students B and C were African American males with the primary referral reason being willful disobedience, being off task and disruptive behavior. There were no current special education referrals or special education records that could be accessed for these students.
- Student D was an African American male with a primary referral that included the following descriptors: the student continues to lie and leave the room, stealing, sneaky, will not join the class while in a line or during mini lessons. Interventions were completed for this student prior to him being referred to Child Study. A Special Education referral was started and completed and this student was receiving special education services.
- Student E was an African American male with the primary referral reason being work refusal and avoidance. The form indicated that this student refused to do his work most days. The teacher concluded, “When he does work, he is often off task and seldom finishes his assignments. His work avoidance often leads to confrontational situations with his classmates. He does not take redirection well and would rather take a break or go to buddy room as opposed to sitting and working. He also has a history of inappropriate behavior with other scholars, both verbally and physically.” No additional data was found on this student regarding the referral or special education status.

- Student F was an African American male with the primary referral reasons of being off-task and exhibiting disruptive behavior. The referral noted that this student occasionally appeared to be attention seeking/occasionally appears unintentional. A special education referral was started and completed and this student was receiving special education services.
- Student G was an African American male with the primary referral reason being low academic achievement. His referral form stated that his ability to learn and retain information was low. A special education referral was started and completed and this student currently was receiving special education services.

The aforementioned gives a glance into the referral process and one team's rationale as to why students are referred. In addition, the lack of updated information on the services currently provided for some may shed light on the outcomes that students face after the SAT process and for years to come. These outcomes also highlight how disparate these outcomes can be for students based on perceptions and beliefs and how these beliefs may change the trajectory of a student's educational career.

### **Interpretive Summary**

Answers from the combined structured interview questions paint a picture of specific components that stand out against the canvas of SAT team information. These themes help to paint a clearer picture of the implications that will be useful to consider both currently and in the future. These include two specific areas, data dependent and culture dependent information, that converge. The data dependent areas, of which there were no data to report, includes the following:

- Referral numbers for students in each building disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender and referring entity;
- The number of waived interventions in each building; and
- The number of students who are submitted and reviewed by the SAT team that go on to receive special education services.

The culture dependent information includes:

- The role and presence of an administrator in the process;
- The collection and utilization of data to determine steps in the SAT process; and
- The purpose and functioning status of the SAT team in each building.

As evidenced by the ad hoc data summarized, a few themes and needs have remained consistent throughout the last five years including areas identified by teams as needing refinement:

- More SAT team training;
- Use and access of data from year to year;
- Information on the laws and statutes regarding SAT teams;
- Assistance with interventions to increase teacher satisfaction and confidence with the process;
- More follow-up from SAT team members with teachers that are in the process;
- Increased knowledge of special education processes; and



- Increased occurrences of conversations between general and special education professionals.

When teams were asked what percentage of students who enter the SAT process are referred for special education evaluation in 2011, the team answers varied: For school 1, the team estimated that 10% of the students referred to SAT are subsequently referred to special education. For school 2, the team estimated that 10% of the students referred to STAT are subsequently referred to special education. For School 3, the team did not know. For School 4, the team was unsure. No teams kept data or could verify their answers. This information was not disaggregated by race.

If SAT teams are functioning as one of the primary vehicles for improving student learning in Tier 1/RTI classroom interventions, these data might appear heartening. On the other hand, the lack of transparency in another function of SAT teams--the process of considering which children should receive special education services--the lack of attention to data is of concern.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

All students in the United States have the right to receive a free and appropriate public education. There have been many interpretations of the law governing what “free and appropriate” means historically, and this study suggests many and varied interpretations of how to meet this legal obligation. As a special education professional working in schools for ten years, my informal observation of the variability in interpreting policies, especially for children of color, related to special education is what prompted me to begin my investigations in 2008, and then to continue through the completion of this dissertation. The question that I continue to ask is: Why is there variability in the process of determining which scholars are referred for special education services? Why am I seeing more black boys being referred and receiving services?

When I first began this journey, I was concerned primarily with patterns that emerged from national studies and surveys of schools within River City Public Schools, but as I continued, I became increasingly interested in bringing my inquiry closer to home. In addition, I also wanted to have access to more data to determine what procedures and processes truly exist within teams outside of a survey, as well as how race impacted the aforementioned. With my initial inquiries, I noted the following promises and disappointments (RCSD, 2015) as well as inherent tensions between values of great significance:

- The MCA proficiency rate of all students in River City District (50%);

- The decreased proficiency rate of students of color in River City District and in the building where I spent the most time;
- The increased number of referrals and placements of students of color, particularly African American males, in special education in River City District (primarily, Emotional Behavioral Disorder or EBD).

One must consider implications for equity in treatment of students, particularly African American students, with the entire process. Howard (2010) concludes that the consideration of the unintended consequences and/or effects of the eugenics movement, deficit-based thinking, Cultural Mismatch Theory and Stereotype Threat need to be considered when looking at the achievement and underachievement of students of color, especially black and brown students. In recent years, there has been a 12% decrease in males of color who are referred to special education in the area of EBD in the River City District, but the larger pattern of racial and gender disparities remains unchanged. For example, there remains a disparity in the percentage of students identified with a disability as compared to the overall students represented certain racial categories in the district (RCSD, 2016). Compared to what I saw before, there have been some shifts in district-wide policies and procedures, as well as specific changes in how racial equity is viewed and discussed district-wide, which may contribute to the overall numbers.

Disappointment manifests itself in the impact of special education on the attainment and life chances of children with special needs (The Council of Exceptional Children, 2002). The professional literature has identified possible causal factors for erroneous referrals, especially for students of color:

- Failure of the general education system to educate children from diverse backgrounds;

- Inequities associated with special education referral and placement procedures;
- Misidentification and the misuse of tests;
- Lack of access to effective instruction in general education programs; and
- Insufficient resources and inadequately trained teachers making learning more difficult (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Moore, 2002; Artiles, 2011).

This study sought to determine if these inherent tensions, promises and disappointments, as articulated in extant literature, can be better understood by examining the practices, procedures and outcomes of adult professionals who are engaged in the earliest stages of student referrals for learning and behavioral problems.

The two research questions that guided this mixed methods research project included:

1. What are the informal and formal practices involved in the process of evaluating and referring a student for special education between 2-3 urban elementary (K-5) and middle schools (6-8) in the Midwestern United States (waiving interventions can be a practice)?
2. What are the consequences of these practices and procedures for students and educational professionals?

### **Summary of Findings**

To answer these questions, this study used four data sources-ad hoc, structured interviews, observation data and review of child study notes and procedures (see Table 4). The findings can be summarized in a few generalizations found below.

**SAT team practices are based on a variety of factors.** While each school believed that it was carrying out the district's policy, there were some differences in how each group operated, some of which were structural (referral procedures, membership and data storage practices, and some of which were related to processes). The best data sources presented proved to be the structured interviews and observations of a SAT team. Observations, in particular, provided useful background information about how a district framework was implemented in practice and revealed the content of what was discussed (which varied between schools). The structured interview information assisted in gathering data that delved into the beliefs behind the observed actions. These methods also provided subjective information regarding team culture and practices that was absent in the stand-alone narrative review and observation notes. In addition, this process highlighted how school and building culture are implicit in decision making and how this may impact the role and responsibilities of instructional leaders. Furthermore, observations allowed the objective data to be humanized, as the students were discussed, including an analysis of the discussion specifics and topics that took place in meetings. In summation, SAT team practices were based both in local interpretations of district policy and in member beliefs.

**Variation in formal structures and practices was limited.** The SAT team practices and procedures were more similar than expected based on the schools represented in an earlier ad-hoc data collection. Continuity and consistency of the district-wide resources for SAT teams was apparent, as well as the system used to collect data. In alignment with the previous research, all teams had the following best practices in place: a multidisciplinary team, established procedures and a data collection, and

artifacts of a data collection method that was evident. As far as the differences, teams varied in terms of their knowledge of the statutes and regulations that guide SAT teams, data collection and utilization of data kept year to year, SAT procedures in writing, the establishment of follow-up meetings to determine if interventions were working or for needed refinement and the review of data to determine outcomes (e.g. waived interventions). In addition, the involvement of parents on SAT teams varied by school, as well as the principal involvement and impact.

**Opportunities for parent voice were minimal.** In all buildings, parent voice during the intervention phase was either inconsistent to nonexistent. Some teams reached out to parents to inquire about student strengths, and needs, but in no team was there follow up by the team (whether referring teachers followed up is not clear, nor was it part of the written procedures or observed expectations). Parents were not included in the SAT team meetings when their child was discussed. In sum, this area proved to be one that needed strengthening in order to be aligned with national best practices. Parent voice was highlighted when teams conversed about waiving interventions, parent requests for special education or in parent interviews that were required to take place prior to the initial meetings in one school. However, the engagement of parents in the SAT process, even in those schools where it occurred, seemed cursory rather than collaborative. Parent voice, in terms of showing up under the coding of “Family” in the observational data, was also less likely to occur with team discussions, except in one school. In contrast, the most common codes across all teams involved the discussion about practices and procedures.

**Data collection and utilization consistency was apparent but limited.** The role of data collection is only as good as the utilization of that same data. In this study, all teams both collected and used data, in addition to storing it for future use. All participants were able to access the data and had access to historical data. However, the integrity of using Google Documents to collect and store private student information was a concern given the ease of gaining access to Google Docs. One must be cautious of who has access to data from year to year, and one must also be cautious of how much is shared, especially in the absence of “solid data”. In addition, although data were stored, there was no evidence that it was consulted. In sum, conformity to best practice “data based decision making” was limited (Schildkamp et. al, 2012). The review of student records in one school for one academic year suggests that referrals for behavior issues among African American males predominated. Only one school explicitly attended to issues of race and culture and included this data in their notes.

**Some important data were not routinely collected.** These data points included the percentage of waived interventions and the students who transitioned to the Child Study Team after principal approval. When asked, all teams made educated guesses, but were not certain of the specific numbers in their respective buildings. The importance of adding this to the data collection process in buildings is imperative now as ever, and aligns with the increasing emphasis on MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) procedures. This study did not answer question two; individuals simply did not consider the perceived consequences for students or for leaders.

## **Implications of the Study**

The motivation behind this project, as argued in the first chapter, was the need to understand why children of color are overrepresented in special education and to consider why this might be the case (Artiles, 2011). Causal factors remain at the center of controversy as evidenced by the following statement about the issue, “In many cases, the answer will lead stakeholders to examine general education program practices and consider strategies-particularly those related to school climate, pre-referral intervention practices, family involvement, and professional development-that may prevent and/or reduce the incidence of over-representation (The Council of Exceptional Children, 2002, p.1).”

States are now reviewing and refining their practices. For example, a recent publication by California’s Task Force on Special Education (March 2015) has a new standard for school districts and states. The recommendations cover a myriad of components with the goal of determining, utilizing and implementing concrete systems, supports and structures to improve the education outcomes and success for students with disabilities. These include:

- A successful marriage of special education and general education, where all students are general education students first and there is reciprocal accountability for all student learning;
- Services are provided from birth until age 22, and all adults work collaboratively to educate students using evidenced based practices in a rigorous environment;



- Families are an imperative component of the special education team, and are included in decision making and outcomes; and
- Class sizes and caseloads are monitored to ensure that fidelity is an expectation.

Instead of the concept of special education as “a place to go,” this Taskforce is centered on ensuring the message continues to be that special education is a set of supports to assist in student success. This has also happened within River City District, with a recent mandated SAT Team training in 2016 for all school buildings. In addition, the Special Education Office now pulls its own data to determine initial referrals every 2-3 months and determine plans of action, if warranted.

Given these changes, what might this project add? *First, it documents that many practices and procedures are in place to support scholars that may be struggling academically and or behaviorally.* This study sheds light on River City District’s aspiration to have instructional leaders become catalysts for change. Principals, for example, review all of the interventions completed for *each* child prior to them being discussed at Child Study, a precursor for a special education referral in most cases.

Moreover, a multidisciplinary team that puts the child at the center of the discussion was apparent in all schools. However, the expertise of parents and the voice that they bring to the team-as the expert of the child at the center of discussion- was largely absent. While issues of confidentiality were given as the reason for the limited parent involvement, it was not viewed as a problem in any of the schools. As parents continue to be involved, their voice regarding the prevention of a special education referral is just as imperative as the plea that is heard by parents for an expedited special

education referral to receive “help” for their child/children. This may contribute to the narrative that special education is a place rather than a service.

One must, however, be cognizant that refinement in an existing structure may also bring messiness and districts, in particular, feel the messiness associated with shaping processes that are culturally equitable when there is evidence that the outcomes of current practices appear inequitable. Louis & Miles (1990) assert that, “Transformational change is messy unclear and circular...At best, changes are based on steady and patient efforts to work within the school as it exists, while maintaining a vision of what can be ...Evolutionary, full of things that could not have been anticipated ahead of time” (p.4).

*However, The River City District should not be developing this understanding on its own, but in the context of increasing pressures toward reshaping the role of principals as instructional and cultural leaders.* As a school leader, particularly a principal, one will need to anticipate some ripples with continued implementation of best practices for SAT teams, but feel confident that with knowledge of the aforementioned coupled with a vision of what an effective leader models, that change is possible. This study suggests that principals still vary in the degree to which they are engaged in the SAT process and suggests that more work may be required to standardize expectations at the elementary and middle school levels, which is when most referrals are made.

Overall, there are a few components that effective principals share (Wallace Foundation, 2000). These include: shaping the vision for scholar success, the creation of an environment that is centered on education, supporting and cultivating teacher leadership, refining and improving instruction and managing people and creating technical and adaptive processes to align with school improvement. These tools, to

accompany the aforementioned, were developed and shared during an Interstate Leadership and Licensure Consortium in 2008 and revised standards that were published by the Council for Chief State School Officers (CSSO) in 2016, which put equity in the forefront. *For principals to be actively engaged in creating equitable schools, they must confront and be increasingly participate actively in the process of referral to special education (as well as monitoring services and supports, which this study did not address).*

I submit that SAT team culture is an extension of building culture, and if centered on the success for all students, then this will be seen in specific practices as well. According to Kruse & Louis (2009), "A function of culture is to provide meaning and self-esteem, but a positive school culture does this as it improves organizational performance" (p.5). Moreover, "...Improving culture is not an end in itself, but the means by which school leaders can address the goals of student progress and achievement"(p.8). In order for change to occur, the issue of culture needs to be addressed fully; change efforts do not happen in silos. One needs to be cognizant of the players at the governance and management roles that are stakeholders in the process (TeamWorks International, 2008). Leadership is contextually and culturally relevant and multidimensional; the recognition of how context matters improves practice (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Childress, Elmore, & Grossman, 2007, Wallace, 2010).

*Intensified leadership is the ultimate goal for the management for a SAT team. Intensified leadership occurs as leaders change the culture and conditions that ultimately have an effect on teaching and learning, so a building's culture must be identified and understood (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Schein (1992) thought of these components as layers-*

"artifacts (what you see), espoused values (what is communicated) and assumptions (underlying, the things that people do not see)"(cited in Kruse & Louis, 2009, p. 47).

Successful schools look different and have positive school cultures (Langer, 2004). This diagnosis of school culture includes the diagnosis of building culture and subcultures.

This also extends to a SAT team, as the practices and processes are an artifact of the overall school culture, and ultimately, as one respondent relayed, part of the overall school mission, including the disaggregation of student data.

Dr. Anthony Muhammad (2009) also characterized individual beliefs that contribute to overall school culture. Believers have a strong foundation in the investment of scholars and believe that all scholars can learn and have a right to a quality education. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, are strong opponents to change, and relay this on a consistent basis in their actions and words. This way of thinking creates mistrust, and “interpersonal mush” (Bushe, 2001). Bushe (2001) relays that, “interpersonal mush occurs when people’s understanding of each other is based on fantasies and stories they have made up about each other” (p.5). He also asserts that, “It is impossible for a group or organization to be anything more than mediocre if it is full of interpersonal mush” (p. 5). This also creates a polarized environment in which individuals operate in silos rather than as a collective body, as free agents rather than team players (Team Works International, 2009). Given the strong feelings that many educational professionals have about special education and the students they refer to SAT teams, we must acknowledge the need to address the “mush” that is involved more directly.

While structural changes may be immediate and visible, cultural changes are less overt. Cultural change is laborious. This also includes a shift in thinking from

remediation to intervention, from isolation to collaboration, from a language of complaint to a language of commitment and to learning by doing (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). Using Tatum's (2007) concept of identity, a youth's self-identity, or self-definition, is shaped by those that encompass their surroundings, including how they are received. Instructional leaders have to ask themselves how and why the aforementioned is important to our children's lives.

*The implications of this study suggest the need for even greater attention to the use of student data and reflective, well documented procedures that will support collaborative instructional systems for student support.* In particular, federal law mandates that special education students have access to general education curriculum. In summation, this collaborative initiative serves to meet federal mandates, prepare special education students for success in mainstream settings, provide training, professional development and support to teachers and support and improve overall school success and student achievement (River City District, 2009).

While improving the operations of SAT teams in a single district will not resolve the wider implications of race and racism in the U.S., it has become a touchstone in discussions about discrimination. Many believe that there is oppression and racism permeating the processes of referral and treatment of students in special education. This, in turn, contributes to a modern extension of the experiences W.E.B. DuBois recalled while attending Harvard: "... something of a certain inferiorly complex was possibly present: I was desperately afraid of not being wanted; of intruding without invitation; of appearing to desire the company of those who had no desire for me..." (p 18). He credited a nation of hate for the basis of an improper education for a students of color

regardless of their setting and his arguments remain compelling given the history of the United States since the time that he wrote these words.

I leave you with how we look to each of our schools and instructional leaders to change the outcomes for all students, particularly our black and brown males. From our Humphrey Elementary Schools to Harvard, we need to start with our SAT teams-with what we can control- and examine our practices and mindsets. In particular, SAT teams should be more consistent in following up on the disposition and effects of their recommendations with regard to students whose futures they consider. This consistency of data collection will also allow for teams to look at data through a different lens, and consider the trajectory of student lives based on decisions made. These data can also be used to refine practices and policies.

### **Limitations**

For this purposes of this study, several limitations are apparent. First, this study had a limited sample size of less than twenty-five participants. This study was also limited to two elementary schools and one middle school in one mid-size urban district. This sample size is relatively low, so one must be careful not to extrapolate these results to all SAT participants and schools. The external validity, or, “the extent that the results can be generated to other people, places or times” and population validity or, “the degree to which the results of a study done with a particular sample may be generalized back to the population from which the sample was drawn” also need to be taken into consideration (Haller & Kleine, 2001, pp.104-105).

Another implication is that the structured interviews were not conducted all at one

time, as this study spanned five years. To put simply, the data collection plan was more extensive than my capacity. In addition, with closed and open ended questions, there were advantages and disadvantages. Advantages included the ease with scoring and analysis, and the ease of replication. Regarding disadvantages, respondents without an opinion were forced to answer, and misinterpretation of questions can go unnoticed (Neuman, 1994).

Future studies will find this preliminary investigation as a place to begin, however. There is a need to examine additional schools and buildings and also conduct more observations that utilize more formal discourse analysis to determine the structure of thinking around the referral process, and the degree to which this addresses equity as well as “data” objectively. A larger sample and more intensive observations are needed to identify aspects of the structure and processes that were not readily seen in this study. In addition, future research should investigate the experiences of students whose futures are determined, in part, by the referral process. Special education services, and the ability of these services to provide more students with a path back to general education is critical. Thus, a focus that links practices with outcomes is an important next step for examining the implementation of more systematic approaches to student support, particularly among the many students whose experiences in and out of school may require additional support to succeed.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Sat Team Observations: Jordan Middle



The coding categories for the observation was as follows.

1. Process and Procedures
2. Scholar Talk
3. Family Talk
4. School Culture

Time	Data Collection	Coding
8:00 am	Review of the SAT Team Consent Form	1
8:10 am	<p>CSL relayed that there were no new referrals at the present time, but that there were things to clean up. Addendum added to the agenda. There was a new scholar referred by the principal due to “emotional needs”. Counselor asked for the specifics of the behavior, and data was pulled for 4 behavioral incidents for the student, and team described the behavior in detail. BIS talked about interventions that could be used for the student. The team then talked about tools that could assist in scholar being successful. OMT suggested that the interventions also be forwarded to the principal, as he had worked with the scholar over the summer and knew a few family members. OMT relayed a positive about the student to date, and then relayed that the student was now being sent out of the classroom daily, and the conversation shifted to a focus on learning. OMT mentioned a sibling and family strengths and needs. OMT, the special education teacher, also gave the team some additional details about the student. In addition, OMT relayed some academic data about the student. Student was a great reader but had not passed English. They also relayed this student’s absences.</p> <p>Team members relayed some patterns of behavior that were evident. Team problem solved process and talked about reconnecting scholar to a building support person. Plan for scholar to go to counselor admin. Would also look for outside resources. This was a formal staff referral, but a referral from admin.</p>	1,2,4
	The team looked a Google Doc. This doc is used to keep track of the data and the referrals. They looked through referrals from the last 4 weeks, including one specific referral. The data that was being	1, 2. 4

	<p>collected included: referring teacher, data, scholar name and information, baseline data, goal, duties and responsibilities, progress monitoring of the data, data review, result data and next steps. 2 teachers had come before school to refer scholars and bring data to the team.</p> <p>Q: Do we keep doing interventions? There were also questions about the 3<sup>rd</sup> period math class. The team talked about Project Assist through Ramsey County. The parent refused the referral, because she felt that she is doing well in school. The team made mention to the Salvation Army, Service Learning in the library and other social and emotional needs, her schedule and possible changes that needed to be made. The team also talked about other interventions in this area as well. The Ts talked about a few interventions done and how they were trying to figure it out. The T also talked about relationships. This student was highly motivated by spending time with a few key adults in the building that she had been had developed relationships with over time. OTM mentioned that other peer relationships had been formed as well that may hinder her progress and relayed this to the team and the floor that this student may be seen on, and if so, she was off task. OTM mentioned that this student identified with another racial group that was different than her culture. OTM also relayed that she spoke another language at home, so that the team should consider language and linguistics as well and how this may play out in the interventions. OTM mentioned that there were tools that the scholar used and so these may be helpful across settings. These includes Thera putty, modeling clay, yoga. One of these items had been taken away from the scholar that week OTM relayed. OTM relayed a questions about mediation with scholar. OTM relayed that she was invited to play basketball, and she did well. She also did well in basketball practice as well on the A team. OTM asked how they could use the success in basketball to academics since she was so hard working in practice. OTM relayed that she is willing to talk to her about issues at home and school. OTM suggested that the team assist in building the relationship with those that she does not have a relationship with to date. OTM mentioned that students will not work for teachers who they know do not like them.</p> <p>Q: What can we do?</p> <p>OTM mentioned that student was attending math 80% of the time after break and after break this decreased to 5% of the time.</p> <p>Q: What are our action items?</p> <p>To review the plan that was put in place after break with a basketball incentive.</p> <p>Q: Who would like to have a conversation with the student to let her know? OT relayed that she would relay this student (brought this student to the team).</p> <p>OTM relayed that the team should not be fearful with the student.</p>	
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	<p>OTM relayed that words used are important with student</p> <p>OTM relayed I hear add to the plan.</p> <p>OTM relayed a fresh start</p> <p>Q: Why did it work 80% of the time. Start fresh and follow-up after break. Restart and add one class</p> <p>OTM relayed that 4<sup>th</sup> period is the period that the student is struggling the most and to target this period.</p> <p>OTM asked if the student could have a choice in the change in schedule for by-in. Also teachers need to be made aware of the plan, and add the welcoming language to the plan.</p> <p>OTM relayed that student does not like it when teachers yell at her.</p> <p>OTM named a specific teacher and said that this student know that this teacher cares a lot about her and that is why she is so successful.</p> <p>OTM asked if she was ignored in the class that she misses.</p> <p>OTM relayed that 3 passes could be given during a period or after a certain time to allow for a break. They would be laminated.</p> <p>OTM member mentioned that student likes to move and tactile. The passes would work and some things need to be tight and some things loose. OTM mentioned how the team needs to be tight on this piece as well as rewards and consequences.</p> <p>OTM mentioned that there was a forced choice survey from her.</p> <p>Q: Do we have that information from her? That would be great?</p> <p>Q: Can she earn tickets?</p> <p>OTM mentioned that not all key players were in attendance and that there should be another meeting where teachers are invited.</p> <p>FINAL: Give teachers new plan, set up meeting with all teachers and connect scholar to community service. Compiled a list of teachers.</p>	
8:50 am	<p>Review of goals for another student on the agenda. Teacher was not in attendance.</p> <p>Q: Can the teacher come next week? Team reviewed data</p> <p>OTM relayed that the student passed algebra, but was missing 3 assignments already.</p> <p>Team discussed notebook with interventions and work completion. A goal was set using SWIS data. Team reviewed referrals for the year and the last dismissal was in Dec. Team looked up time that was the most difficult (5<sup>th</sup> period). Team talked about scholar interests-robotics, student wants to go to college and understand the concepts. The team also talked about attendance, and saw that the student was leaving math second period, and the present recommendation is Johnson High School. OTM made a recommendation to sit and talk with the student about BAG's: Behavior, Attendance and Grades. The team also talked about the behavior from scholar as well using Campus and SWIS. OTM recommended that the team connect him with a mentor. OTM relayed that he was told that he was bright but his grades do not reflect this at all. There was work referral for him as well.</p>	1, 2, 4, 3

	<p>Q: How is he bright? What are the specifics? These need to be relayed to him. The team talked about having to have him focus on rigor, differentiation and engagement. The team also talked about how this scholar is reached. “This is not stand and deliver or sit and get”. This does not work. The team talked about doing things bold and innovative. OTM mentioned this scholar does not see what the rest of the team sees and work was needed to happen at this point.</p>	
	<p>Scholar 2. OTM mentioned that this scholar does not like to be responsible. The team discussed this student’s race and if he was an EL student (yes). The team talked about the skill that this student needed-persistence.</p> <p>Q: How do we teach persistence in a child?</p> <p>The student is persistent, but not for learning. The team talked about how the student worked in the community, 7<sup>th</sup> period, he leaved school and misses classes. If we give him what he wants we are messaging that it is ok and decreased accountability.</p> <p>OTM recommended that he turn in a sheet each week with the goals from work/school evident. Include employer, father and principal in the plan to ensure. Plan: 40% of work completion for intervention to be implemented. Teachers will check in during 6<sup>th</sup> hour to ensure that 40% of his work is completed prior, and if so, scholar will be excused to work. Goal: 40-50% each week.</p> <p>Q: How do we tell him and keep track of the time. Reintroduce it as a new goal? Who will talk to the student and the principal?</p>	2, 4, 3
9:10 am	<p>Team talks about the plans and the data that needs to be collected.</p> <p>Set next meeting</p>	1
9:15 am	Meeting ends	

<b>Time</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Coding</b>
8:07	<p>Meeting started. Team reviewed business for SAT and teacher review. Review of the notes. Communication to 9<sup>th</sup> grade team of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who have been brought to SAT was discussed. Review of scholar feedback and follow through.</p>	1
	<p>Review of a plan with scholar and delegation duties.</p> <p>Q: What is the plan? Maintain classes/behavior/work. Discussed peer helper 7<sup>th</sup> hour. No scholar did not want to do. Team discussed objective for scholar. Q: What do we do now? Goal is 60% of the time. Not meeting goal due to behavior. Q: What does he need to show you to go to WR?</p> <p>A: In class for all classes</p> <p>Turn in passes that each is teacher initiated</p> <p>In class with behavior-the interventions is behavior or in class?</p>	1,2

	<p>Behavior in class. Q: Do we focus on what happens in class? Can we use 40%?</p> <p>Team discussed how a chart can be uses and collect the percentage of everyday could be used. The team will create the form. SW will lead the work and focus on building PBIS: Respectful, Responsible, Safe and Punctual.</p> <p>This will be send electronically to teachers. The team discussed plan for the next year and how they need to have an implementation plan. All teachers will receive students who are listed. Students will need to go over the plan with scholars and need to know that this is true.</p>	
	<p>The team also discussed checking out with this scholar at the time when he leaves the building. The team needs to check out with 4 people-2 were arrowed down. They make the decision. OTM member discussed that scholar may leave the room even if he does not have permission.</p> <p>Q: Then what?</p> <p>OTM relayed that the team will follow rules and procedures, and they come with consequences. “He wants to be dismissed, so let’s stay away from suspensions and dismissals for this student” The team discussed how parents should be notified Q: Who needs to know? The team discussed security guards and other persons. The team discussed that there will be a form in place to assist with this process. The team also talked about when the plan will be implemented and how they could not give up on the scholar. “We gotta let him know that we are not going to give up on him”</p> <p>Q: When will this be implemented?</p> <p>The team discussed a few options, including W, however some team members felt as if this were too soon. They then discussed 5/7/14.</p> <p>Q: What is the goal for the day? What are the illustrations for the forms?</p> <p>The team discussed how they needed 1 week to collect data and then review data to determine alignment with the goal. The team also talked about the implementation phases, when the student should turn in the form from and to home?</p>	2,1

	<p>The team discussed another student. “SPED is not going to fix this young lady. Mom has asked us to evaluate. Her behavior has escalated.” OTM mentioned how this student wanted to be here, however she is not following the school routines. Q: Should be table this discussion until all members are present?</p>	4,2
	<p>The team went on to discuss a previous scholar. Q: Does he need a break in the middle of the day? The team then talked about clarifying adult behaviors and professional development for teachers. OTM discussed the need for PD next year. Q: What are our options? The team discussed assessments that lead to SPED referrals. The process was reviewed as well, and the function of the team, to assist the teachers in developing interventions was discussed. The team discussed that that SAT is not the gateway or gatekeeper to SPED. OTM discussed that if the team has tried everything, and that there is a need to discuss adult behavior.</p>	2,4
	<p>The team started discussing another scholar. OTM relayed that if the team assessed her for SPED, then they have dropped the ball, and discussed need to look at data more closely.</p>	2,4
	<p>The team also discussed the previous scholar moving to another building. OTM conversed about behavior may be masking academic behavior. There will be a 4 week review and the team will reconvene.</p>	2
8:30 am	<p>The team discussed the scholars that were in need of a 4 week review and the agenda for the next meeting. 8:30 or 8:40 am. One scholar had fluency as the goals. Writing fluency included writing 15 words for baseline data. With one minute writing, the student wrote 8 words. The team discussed the importance of the student showing his work independently and work being done without assistance. Q: What are the concerns? OTM discussed the need to determine if it was work completion or time on task. Student needs maximal verbal cues for all writing prompts. The team discussed how parents should be notified Q: Who needs to know? OTm talked about functional writing versus another style of writing. TOM discussed level 4 scholars. There were questions from the teachers as well.</p>	1,23
	<p>SPED concerns: The team discussed the need to know what has been done by other SAT team previous to a</p>	2,1

	<p>student coming from another building.</p> <p>Q: What has been done previously? For this scholar a co-taught class was rarely beneficial. Q: Should lessons be taught in other spaces? Q: How do we make smaller more possible for students. The team discussed needed to figure this out. How do teachers work with other scholars given the other things mentioned? The team discussed collaboration and servicing kids in a small group setting.</p> <p>The team discusses working with what we know we have, and give a double dose in math and in reading or related content. Otm member discussed the need for small groups and for teachers to try them in the classroom setting, especially if they may be unaware of the benefits. The team discussed the benefits and disadvantages to the co-teaching with ELL students. The team also discussed also connecting with the lower level to determine what is needed as students move to another level, especially if the concern is related to language and linguistics as well.</p>	
	<p>The team plan included a review of math for the student and grades as well. OTM relayed that supporting language goals will be the most helpful for students in the SAT process. A 4 week review will be completed.</p>	1,2
	<p>Meeting ended at 9 am</p>	1

Appendix B: SAT Team Note Review: Humphrey and Zion Elementary



The coding categories for the observation was as follows:

1. Process and Procedures
2. Scholar Talk
3. Family Talk
4. School Culture

School: Humphrey Elementary 1&2

Data Collection Notes	Coding
Student named and notes taken about plan and follow-up	1, 2
SWIS Data Review and Student presented with Behavioral data. Target behavior (preliminary) defined and action plan created for student.	1,2
Review of 7 other students who are listed by name. No other information is listed other than names except for one student. The questions next to her name was involving	1, 2
The last note entry highlighted a team member reaching out to teachers to complete referrals by re-sending SAT information.	1

Data Collection Notes	Coding
Data Collection Phase details for student. Clarification needed regarding data collection and intervention. Specific team member actions were then highlighted to include following –up with another team member, indication of who will complete the parent interview and follow-up with student. In addition, a follow-up meeting was also noted for future organization.	1, 2
SAT Team Planning bullet points were listed to include current and anticipated future members of the team. The notes indicate planning for meeting for the upcoming school year to include what day and time works best for all that were identified.	1,4
The agenda for the next meeting was noted at the bottom of the notes. Some of the topics noted for refinement for the upcoming school year included, but was not limited to: Streamlining the SAT referral form to make it more teacher fidelity. The creation of a template for classroom intervention implementation so the tat teachers have a clear process to follow and teacher requirements for interventions. The questions of requiring a minimal of two teacher sot compete the set interventions was discussed.	1,4

Zion SAT Team Notes Review 1 & 2: 9/15 and 12/15

Data Collection Notes	Coding
<p>Data Collection Phase details for student 1: Student strengths, reading level, math level, attendance, peer and social concerns, behavior, strategies attempted were also fields included in the notes. The interventions were also noted in 3 areas for memory/attention and focus, following dictations and phonics. There were not any accompanying notes that were submitted.</p>	1, 2
<p>Data Collection Phase details for student 2: Student strengths, academic performance, math level, attendance, peer and social concerns, behavior, primary concern, frequency and time of behavior, strategies attempted were also fields included in the notes. The interventions were also noted in 1 area for task completion. There were not any accompanying notes that were submitted.</p>	1, 2

Data Collection Notes	Coding
<p>Data Collection Phase details for student 1: Student strengths, academic performance, reading level, math level, attendance, peer and social concerns, behavior, frequency and time of behavior, primary concern and strategies attempted were also fields included in the notes. The interventions were also noted in 1 area for handwriting. There were not any accompanying notes that were submitted.</p>	1, 2
<p>Data Collection Phase details for student 2: Student strengths, academic performance, math level, attendance, peer and social concerns, behavior, primary concern, frequency and time of behavior, strategies attempted were also fields included in the notes. The interventions were also noted in 2 areas for appropriate behavior and math work completion. A description, start date, baseline information, a date to revisit and post data were noted. There were not any accompanying notes that were submitted.</p>	1, 2, 3

## Appendix C: Principal Letter

**Principal x,**

**I am writing to see if I can set up a 15-30-minute interview with you regarding Student Assistance Teams. I am taking time this summer to interview administrators, SAT leads and central office staff that are knowledgeable and participate in the SAT team process. The purpose of this short interview is to:**

**Gather information administrator and team member understanding of the referral process, functioning and outcomes, and the role of the SAT team in establishing a positive school culture.**

**Please be open to share, as all interviews are confidential. In addition, your voluntarily involvement is appreciated.**

**I am available on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 am -2 pm until June 30, 2012. Let me know what day and time works best for you, and I am also open to meeting in the community as well. Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you soon.**

**With gratitude,**

**Alecia M Carter**

**I need to:**

- 1. Collect data without identifiers**
- 2. Remove all direct identifiers as soon as possible**
- 3. Substitute codes for identifiers**
- 4. Maintain code lists and data files in separate secure locations**
- 5. Use accepted methods to protect against indirect identification, such as aggregate reporting or misleading identifiers**
- 6. Use and protect computer passwords**

**Questions that this will answer:**

**The results of this study will be used to answer the following research questions, thus including benefits of this research for society.**

**What are the federal, state and local regulations concerning SAT teams?**

**What practices are involved in the process of evaluating and referring a student for special education between 2-3 urban elementary schools in the Midwestern United States (waiving interventions can be a practice)?**

**Does the implementation regarding the SAT process and practice vary between schools in the same district?**

Appendix D: SAT Consent Form Script

## Introduction

Before we begin this process, I want to assure you that your participation is voluntary and appreciated. Your feedback will be used to better understand the SAT team, the processes involved with the team and the links to Special Education services. In order to participate, you must be a member of the Student Assistance Team at this building, and be in good standing. In other words, you have to be in regular attendance. In addition, your team has to have individuals from both special and general education. If you have any questions about this process, confidentiality, results or the study itself, please ask them now.

If you are a building or district administrator, you have to be in a building that has an existing SAT team or oversees its processes. In addition, you have to have some involvement with this district-led intervention.

An explanation of the research to be conducted regarding the Student Assistance Team can also be found in your informed consent sheet. I will be the team lead, or the Principal Investigator, on this project. Call or email me and if questions arise. Again, please be assured that all information relayed will be kept confidential to protect privacy and to ensure and that the responses and opinions of the process will be kept confidential

## Appendix E: Structured Interview Questions

## Structural Interviews, Sample and Method of Analysis

### Structured Interview Questions

What is the composition of your team? Are there any parents on the team? Does your team include regular and special education teachers/service providers?

Do you know the laws, if any, that relate to SAT team processes?

Do you have your SAT team procedures in writing?

Who keeps the SAT data from year to year?

What is done with the SAT data? Anything else?

Do you have follow-up meetings to figure out if the interventions are working, what is working, etc?

Does your intervention plan specify the person(s) responsible for each intervention component? (is it specific?)

How does the building administrator impact your team? How does this impact your team? Do you have more to say?

What is the teacher perspective? Tell me more about that?

Do you know, on average, the percentage of the refereed students who go on to the child study team? Go on to special education? Have waived interventions?

What link, if any, is there between SAT teams and Response To Intervention? PBIS? Your school culture? Tell me more about that



## Appendix F: SAT Consent Form

**SAT Team Sample Consent Form, Sample and Method of Analysis**

**SAT Team Consent Form**

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in this research project entitled:

Student Assistant Teams: Purpose, Function and Reactions for Instructional Leaders

The research questions that this project asks include:

What practices are involved in the process of evaluating and referring a student for special education between 2-3 urban elementary schools in the Midwestern United States (waiving interventions can be a practice)?

What are the immediate consequences and action items for students and teachers in this process?

This project will also investigate administrator and team member understanding of the referral process, functioning and outcomes and the role of the SAT team in establishing a positive school culture.

Three SAT teams in this district, site administrators and district administrators will participate in this process during this school year. To maintain confidentiality, all information that will be collected will be locked and identifiers will be used so that you are not identified. If you have any questions about the process or your rights as participants, please contact the Principal Investigator, Alecia Mobley at [mobl0009@umn.edu](mailto:mobl0009@umn.edu).

Thanks in advance for your time,

Alecia Mobley, Principal Investigator

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Sign and date here if you understand the aforementioned and agree to voluntarily participate.

## Appendix G: Minutes Review for Jordan Middle

December 15, 2015

There were 7 members present

The agenda items included a SWIS data review for students to include:

- ***-Referrals by student;***
- ***-Referrals by problem behavior;***
- ***-Triangle Data Report; and***
- ***-Average referrals per day per month***

The team went on to discuss access to data for and by teachers. A review of the notes shows that the team determined that it was important for teachers to have access to accurate data about students. There was a mention of a data gap when it came to teachers and other school staff having access to data about the students that they service. In addition, the team also decided that the need for scholar voice regarding differentiation was imperative. The team wanted to know how student learn best, and what ways students identified their learning styles. The team decide to interview students to determine the answers to the question posed, and the team discussed gathering this information by certain date to best determine how to meet the needs of students. For the following two weeks, the staff used this information to being student voice. The question that was systematized included: ***What is one thing that you would like to work on?***

The team then determined the individuals who were responsible for the follow-up to get the questions to case managers to then send to students. The next meeting was then determined and the action plan was shared via the team via email and a tentative date was set to present the student information to the entire staff.

1. Scholar Talk 2. School Culture

December 16, 2015

Two team members attended the next meeting with the purpose of meeting to gather information about how to get information out to the staff regarding STAT procedures and practices. The goal was to solidify the STAT presentation to present and disseminate to staff in the form of a PowerPoint. Another topic of discussion included why the team was not hearing form teachers in terms of struggling students. The aforementioned was a way to clarify the process to ensure that teachers were knowledgeable of the process. In

addition, the team reviewed the tools that would be helpful to present to assist teachers in providing supports for students in the building.

#### Process and Procedures/ School Culture

The next meeting consisted of a summary of the previous meetings with a particular focus on the STAT PowerPoint and the social worker review of the new referrals form teachers. The team delegated members on the team to follow-up with staff for the subsequent meeting. In addition, a plan for the staff meeting continued to be solidified as evidenced by the information taken from the document below:

#### **“Getting Student Voice” Initiative:**

- Having the counselors interview the students
- Videotape using laptops
- Not only students from the ‘program’
- Do the interviewing in January and present at February staff meeting
- M will check with C. G. about technology needs
- We will present at the February staff meeting
- We are here to teach students, not teach a subject

#### Process and Procedures

December 19, 2016

The meeting minutes summarized the team discussion about the student interviews from two teachers. The preliminary data collected highlighted that students relayed that in co-taught, the differentiation needs to be extended. Students relayed that things go too fast in these classes. The students also relayed that the use of student language in classes was preferred, as the academic language currently being used was not a vehicle to building relationships with students. Separate from the student surveys, the team discussed the

possibility of the Foundations classes to address school climate. The need for more time for co-teachers to collaborate and plan was considered.

Reviewed survey responses from Ms. G's students and Mr. H's students.

#### Scholar Voice / School Culture

The next recorded meeting took place after the staff presentation in January which included four team members and a guest. The meeting consisted of discussing 2 students. The first student discussed was brought to SAT due to absences and a plan was developed to address the concerns. In addition, the team reviewed the PBIS data coupled with the referral checklist to discuss student. It is evident that there were several questions remaining to complete the referral including the parent interview being completed, and the primary target behaviors. There were 7 other students on the list, however, there are no notes to determine next steps for these students. The team also made note of sending out the procedures to staff a subsequent time to illicit accurate and complete referrals. The question that concluded the notes:

Are support staff encouraging staff to do a SAT referral?

2/16/15

There were 5 members present at the next SAT team with one guest. The meeting notes indicate that the team discussed two students JJ and DW. The team highlighted the needs of JJ by illuminating an action plan in its preliminary phase. The plan included steps for the team to take that ranged from the beginning of class to parent communication at the close of each week. The process also included a peer mentor and data collection. The conversation concluded with the need for a member of the team to email the plan created to staff and a review with the student and the adult mentor assigned and parent. The team also decided to review the plan in 4 weeks.

The conversation about the latter scholar included a preliminary plan as well but with a different focus. The team centered on functional communication and county resources offered to this student. The team also considered solidifying language and methods to use with this student. For example, "speak privately with her about her issuers" was identified as an alternative way for staff and teachers to address an area of concern. The same steps for building-wide implementation was used for this scholar.

Process and Procedures Scholar Talk Family Talk

March 3, 2015

The team notes from the month after shows a follow-up for students DW and JJ. The team reconvened to discuss student services outside of the school setting, refinements of the plan and next steps. In addition, SWIS data was used to determine areas of focus for the building in terms of interventions, including ODR reports. The closing notes highlight reviewing the procedures with specific teachers and conducting teacher interviews.

Scholar Talk, Procedures and Process

*4-10-15 SAT Meeting*

The March STAT team meeting minutes reviewed the plan for another scholar and a tentative plan was set for this scholar. The team also came up with a plan for building implementation and a follow-up date for team review. An update was also entered three weeks later to suggest this plan due should be placed on hold due to student attendance.

Scholar Talk, Procedures and Process

May 2015 SAT Minutes

Six members were present for the May meeting, and the team minutes consisted of a review of two students. The first student discussed was inclusive of a current building situation and review of shame vs. guilt and how this can be used as a vehicle for support. A preliminary plan was created and shared with the team that included a student check-in, scheduling a parent interview and building supports.

Scholar Talk and Procedures and Process

May 20 SAT Meeting

Review of the SAT process took place during the meeting as well a fall review planning for the STAT team. The data collection stage was discussed, as well as a need to clarify data collection and interventions for students. Reviews of preliminary plans were also conducted and refined as needed. The areas that were identified to review and change for 2015-2016 included adding the following individuals: Behavior specialist,

General ed teacher (one from each core curriculum area), Assistant principal, Attendance Facilitator, Health office, Special ed teacher, Social worker (both), Counselor (both), School psychologist, ELL Teacher, Literacy Specialist and a Special Educational Lead

Appendix H: SAT Team Form for River City School District



## Student Assistance Team (SAT) Process Checklist

### 1. PreSAT

#### Meeting Preparation

\_\_\_\_ Classroom teacher contacts Facilitator to sign up for SAT meeting date

\_\_\_\_ Facilitator sends a SAT packet to teacher, including:

- Parent Information Form
- SAT Teacher Request Form

\_\_\_\_ Teacher gathers baseline data related to the specific area of concerns

○ Data from assessments (i.e., last math unit test, most recent reading assessment, PALS, standardized scores)

○ Behavioral data if

behavior is a concern (i.e., SWIS, out of room slips, fixit sheets, behavioral logs, anecdotal data)

○ Work Samples (i.e., Writers Notebook)

\_\_\_\_ Contact parent/guardian to discuss the concerns and complete the information form prior to the meeting

- Note the date the parent/guardian was contacted
- Note the key information the parent/guardian shares
- Parent/guardian is invited to the SAT meeting to discuss the student

\_\_\_\_ Information/data of what you have already tried to target areas of concern

\_\_\_\_ Determine what other information is needed that SAT members can help provide, such as:

- Cold Read Running Record (words/minute, words correct/minute)
- Classroom Observation (especially for behavior issues)
- Cumulative File Review
- Formal writing sample (five-minute free write)
- Attendance Information

\_\_\_\_ Nurse provides Health Records (if necessary)

\_\_\_\_ Student data and information is ready to be shared prior to the meeting

### 2. SAT Meeting

\_\_\_\_ The basis of the SAT process is the problem-solving process. The facilitator ensures that the systematic

4Step problem solving is followed. (Note: Adapt to the 6Step process if schools are using this.)

\_\_\_\_ Classroom teacher(s) and administrator attend the SAT and participate in problem-solving.

\_\_\_\_ Time keeper is chosen for the meeting to ensure that the material is covered.

\_\_\_\_ Notetaker is assigned to take notes on the components of the discussion.

\_\_\_\_ Patterns and trends are considered by analyzing cross category data (e.g., academic, behavior, attendance). SAT members with expertise in data help build the capacity of the team to work with cross category data.

\_\_\_\_ Team analysis applies the ICEL framework (Factors affecting outcomes: instruction, curriculum, environment and learner) so external and internal factors affecting student learning are considered.

\_\_\_\_ An equity lens is used when considering student challenges, ie. What does race have to do with the concerns? Possible intervention strategies?

\_\_\_\_ The interventions that are chosen are research based and match the student's specific need(s). Team members with expertise in research based strategies help build the capacity of the team in choosing Tier 3 effective, targeted strategies.

\_\_\_\_ SAT liaison assigned to the case.

\_\_\_\_ The classroom teacher leaves with a definitive plan or next steps, as well as a followup meeting date.

\_\_\_\_ The classroom teacher communicates with parents regarding outcome of the meeting.

### **3. Post SAT**

#### **Meeting Implementation and Followup**

\_\_\_\_ SAT facilitator, or designated person, provides the teacher with intervention(s) details and tracking

form(s) to gather information (i.e., baseline data, observation, and interview).

\_\_\_\_ Job embedded PD is provided, as needed, to the classroom teacher and/or person implementing

the intervention to assure effective implementation of the strategy.

\_\_\_\_ SAT liaison check-ins with referring teacher to assure implementation and discuss any plan modifications.

### **4. Follow-up**

#### **SAT to Review Intervention Data**

\_\_\_\_ Determine effectiveness of intervention "Did student meet the goal?"

\_\_\_\_ Use the Decision Point graphic to consider options for next steps

\_\_\_\_ Classroom teacher communicate with parents/guardian regarding outcome of the meeting

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