

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1989 Alexandria City Public Schools proposed a School Support Team (SST) model to address chronic absenteeism, academic and behavioral problems in the classroom, and other barriers to school achievement. Further, the SST model was implemented with the objective of diverting from Special Education those students whose needs could be better met with other support services in a general education program. Accordingly, an important role of the SST was the provision of assistance to teachers in developing approaches to enhance learning and classroom management.

The SST evaluation assessed the implementation of the SST model in 2003-2004, thirteen years after its initial adoption by schools. The evaluation elicited the perceived efficacy of the SST by stakeholders, as well as its consistency with original goals, and with current ACPS, State and Federal policies and regulations.

Data collection consisted of four phases: Phase I involved interviews with administrative staff for the purpose of identifying primary evaluation objectives and resources. Phase II consisted of structured interviews with the 18 ACPS School Principals to assess implementation, as well as concerns and best practices. Phase III consisted of a survey (with the opportunity for an interview) of each of the 111 School Support Team staff members. Phase IV consisted of a survey of a random sample of 785 ACPS teachers to assess satisfaction with SST services.

Phase I findings yielded central evaluation questions which guided the construction of interviews and surveys of professional staff. Phase II findings indicated a considerable discrepancy between elementary and secondary schools in the manner in which the SST model has been implemented. There has been a general consistency across elementary schools in the implementation of the SST 'round-table' meeting (the central mechanism for SST case management), with only one of thirteen elementary schools electing not to hold such meetings. In contrast, most secondary schools have abandoned the weekly 'round-table' meeting due to its perceived inefficiency in providing services.

Phase III findings suggest that schools need to improve SST management issues pertaining to meeting attendance, procedural clarity, effectiveness of interventions, and follow-up to teachers. It is recommended that SSTs maintain a database of non-identifying student information for purposes of yearly evaluation of service utilization, and outcome analysis. It is also recommended that a Central Office liaison specialist qualified in each of the SST professional disciplines (social work, school psychology, counseling, and nursing) provide administrative oversight for each SST professional group. In the case of psychologists, it is recommended that a Lead psychologist serve in this capacity, providing consultation to LAB programs, and guidance to new staff and interns. An additional full-time psychologist and full-time psychology intern position should be funded to bring staff-to-student ratios at TC Williams into greater parity with such ratios in other schools. It is recommended that funding be provided to provide ACPS with two additional nursing positions in order to improve the nursing staff-to-student ratios at TC Williams and at both Middle Schools.

Phase III and IV findings indicate that, while School Support Teams have been successful in providing access to short-term counseling and behavioral interventions, they have been less successful in providing instructional consultation to teachers and in diverting students from Special Education who may be well-served in the regular classroom. A recommendation is made to broaden the institution of the Instructional Support Team model of academic intervention and teacher consultation throughout ACPS, and to appoint an IST support teacher to the SSTs in each school.