

Preface

This is the first in a series of information papers that will describe procedures to be used in serving students under the Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS). This paper will describe the basic principles of a problem-solving approach in very broad terms. The sequence of problem-solving steps will be outlined, as will some general procedures for completing these steps. This paper is meant to provide an overview of the entire system. More specific information regarding methods and procedures to be used in each of the problem-solving steps will be provided in each of the subsequent information papers.

INFORMATION PAPER 1

A PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH

BASIC PRINCIPLE 1: A systematic problem-solving procedure should be used to address student performance problems. This problem-solving procedure should involve the following seven steps:

- 1) development of a behavioral definition of the problem,
- 2) generation of hypotheses, predictions and assessment questions related to the identified problem,
- 3) functional and multi-dimensional assessment designed to test the hypotheses and respond to the assessment questions,
- 4) preparation of a goal statement,
- 5) development and implementation of an intervention,
- 6) progress monitoring to determine the effectiveness of the intervention,
- 7) decision-making about the outcome of the intervention.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 2: Collaborative consultation should provide the means by which problem-solving will be conducted. In contrast to an expert model in which one individual makes judgments and recommendations to be carried out by someone else, the collaborative approach emphasizes teamwork among two or more individuals who work through the problem-solving process together. Each member of the team brings to the process their own area of expertise, and team members work together in an egalitarian fashion.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 3: Hypotheses about factors related to the identified problem should be developed. These hypotheses should attempt to explain why the problem is occurring. Hypotheses and their resulting predictions about student behavior can be tested through the development of assessment questions and the resulting collection of data. Hypotheses should be developed collaboratively by the problem-solving team. They should be designed to lead to interventions.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 4: Functional assessment procedures should be used to collect student performance data. Traditional assessment frequently has as its focus the possible determination of a handicapping condition and consideration for special education eligibility. Functional assessment procedures collect information relevant to the behavior(s) of concern. This data collection answers questions about the behavior, confirms or disconfirms hypotheses, and provides information helpful in formulating an intervention. Data collection should provide a baseline against which subsequent student performance can be compared and may also provide information regarding peer functioning.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 5: Multi-dimensional assessment procedures should be used to collect data relevant to the problem. These procedures should be utilized in the recognition that performance

problems may not be due solely to student characteristics. Aspects of the curriculum and environment have an impact on student performance also, and should be assessed as well.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 6: Goals should be written describing the desired change in student performance that should occur as a result of the intervention. These goals should clearly describe student performance in concrete, observable terms, and should also define a specific period of time during which the goal will be in effect. If the intervention requires placement in a special service or program, criteria should be written that will describe how student performance must improve in order to consider a service/program change.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 7: Interventions should be developed that are specifically designed to improve student performance. These interventions should make use of the data collected through functional assessment and should address modifiable variables related to the student, the curriculum and/or the environment. Intervention planning should focus first on identifying the most effective methods, procedures and materials to be used in solving the student performance problem. Planners must also identify a specific service or program that is best suited to provide the identified intervention, but placement issues should not be the initial focus of discussion. Intervention planning should not be synonymous with placement in a special program, although such a placement should certainly be one of a variety of available options.

Occasionally, an intervention may be carried out by one person alone, but more commonly, interventions should be implemented by a team of two or more persons. Some of these people may provide direct service to the student, while others may provide indirect service and support by engaging in on-going consultation with the direct service providers, collecting on-going performance data or providing other types of technical assistance. The intervention plan should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of all persons involved in the problem-solving process.

It is not currently possible to predict with certainty that any given intervention will be successful in improving a student's performance. Intervention design should be treated as a continuation of the hypothesis testing process. Interventions should be viewed as hypotheses about efforts that are likely to result in improved student performance. The relative effectiveness of an intervention should be tested by the on-going collection and analysis of student performance data. When necessary, interventions should be modified if they prove to be less effective than is desirable.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 8: Progress monitoring should be an essential aspect of the intervention phase of problem-solving. Student performance data should be collected on a regular and frequent basis, and this data should be graphed and analyzed in order to determine the relative effectiveness of the intervention. If the data indicates that a student is not making sufficient progress toward the goal, the intervention should be modified in some fashion.

BASIC PRINCIPLE 9: Decision-making about the outcome of an intervention should be based on a review of progress monitoring data in relation to the defined goal(s) of the intervention. When student performance reaches an acceptable level, the problem-solving team should decide whether or not further intervention efforts are necessary. If the intervention plan has involved placement in a special service or program, progress monitoring data should also be useful in making service/program modification or exit decisions.