A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports Guidelines

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Introduction

Student achievement is at an all time high in Ohio; however, too many students are still struggling, failing and dropping out. Some, particularly those with accelerated abilities, are not being challenged to reach their full potential. School programs and services are fragmented, duplicated and disconnected, often based on categorical funding sources rather than on individual student need (Achieve Inc., 2007). For far too long, categorical funding and identification of students who qualify for specific categorical funding have driven services to which all children are entitled.

The underlying philosophy of *A Comprehensive System of Learning Support Guidelines* is that every student has a basic right to academic programs and services to meet his or her unique needs to achieve his or her full potential. And, early detection and intervention with students experiencing learning and other problems prevent costly and intensive interventions later on.

In order to ensure that each student achieves to his or her highest potential, schools must provide academic programs and support services that address the needs of all students. In other words, schools should provide "whatever it takes" for each student to be successful on the Ohio Achievement and Ohio Graduation tests. In practice, the majority of students should succeed through the basic academic and support services available to all students. Those students who are not succeeding must be identified swiftly and provided additional academic or support services to remedy their performance problems.

Because of the diverse population in Ohio, the foundation services and the interventions provided will vary from district to district and from building to building. These guidelines provide local district and building leadership teams the flexibility to design their educational services by developing the necessary systems to meet the unique needs of their students. These guidelines are meant to help a district make decisions, not to serve as a prescription.

Further, through appropriate implementation of these guidelines, districts will meet or exceed Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3313.6012 requirements to a) provide diagnostic assessment procedures; b) provide intervention services based on the results of the diagnostics; c) collect data regularly, and; d) use the data to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention(s). The guidelines address the needs of all students, not just those who have failed or who are at risk of failing the state tests.

Special education, limited English proficient and gifted services are embedded within these guidelines. Although each of these categorical funding streams has unique components based on state and federal requirements, the data derived from appropriate implementation of *A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* will be critical in identifying students who qualify for such funding and to plan programming.

Learning Supports and Interventions

A comprehensive system of learning supports is the collection of resources, strategies and practices — as well as environmental and cultural factors extending beyond the classroom — that together provide the physical, cognitive, social and emotional support that every student needs to succeed in school and in life (State of California, SB 288; Adelman and Taylor, 2006). In this guide, the term *foundation* represents the base set of resources, strategies and practices available to all students within the overall system of learning supports.

Within this integrated system of learning supports — supplemental to the *foundation services* — are additional learning supports that Ohio calls *student intervention*. Student intervention refers to supplemental instructional and student support services that are provided by qualified personnel to individuals or small groups of students who have failed or are at risk of failing Ohio's Achievement Tests or the Ohio Graduation Test. These interventions should also be available to students who are not at risk of failing, but are capable of higher levels of performance than exhibited. Taking into account the value-added concept — a statistical method used to measure a school's impact on the rate of student progress from year to year — this means that *every* student is expected to show growth *every* year. In addition, to serve advanced learners, school districts are required beginning in the 2006-2007 school year to implement the ODE Model acceleration Policy or alternative research-based policies approved by ODE.

Supplemental *instructional intervention* provides additional learning opportunities that improve knowledge and skills in the academic content areas for individuals or small groups of students. Student *support intervention* addresses nonacademic barriers to learning that can promote success in school and in life by encouraging and supporting physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

Interventions should be research-based when practical, or evidence-based when no research-based strategy exists. These interventions should be continuously evaluated for effectiveness. They must serve to complement, strengthen and/or enhance foundation services — regular classroom instruction and support services that are available to all students. Interventions may be provided in a variety of settings within or outside the classroom, and they may be offered by the school, by the family, and by community-based and school-linked services and providers.

An integrated system of learning supports includes a strong foundation of quality learning opportunities and support services that are available to *all* students. It is this foundation that assures successful outcomes for a majority of students and reduces the need for intervention services.

Building a Strong Foundation for Student Success

A comprehensive system of learning supports in a school setting provides a strong basis for student learning. This means that all students have access to standards-based curriculum, differentiated instruction and necessary support services provided by highly qualified personnel in a safe, orderly and supportive learning environment. This foundation will look different in every school, depending on the needs of the students.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has worked to define and disseminate policies, standards, resources and best practices to build the capacity of schools and districts to meet the needs of students. These efforts include the academic content standards, which define what every student should know and be able to do from Grades pre-K through 12 in seven content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, foreign language and technology).

Best practice in meeting these standards is supported through model curricula available within the Instructional Management System. Similar guidance is also available within the state's model acceleration policy for advanced learners, early learning content standards, library standards, career-technical curriculum and technical content standards, which align to the academic content standards. Recognizing the role of a physically and psychologically safe and supportive learning environment to effectively deliver content, ODE has developed School Climate Guidelines and a companion implementation toolkit.

Ohio also has set minimum standards for highly qualified teachers to comply with federal requirements and has developed more comprehensive guidance for growth toward enhanced capacity through the Ohio educator standards. Teacher growth is further supported by standards for high quality professional development.

A solid foundation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for *all* students to succeed. In every school, there are students with challenges or risk factors that require additional time, intensity or specialized services in response to specific academic and nonacademic barriers that interfere with their level of educational progress. Too often, students with accelerated abilities are not considered when designing appropriate interventions because they are meeting minimum standards. These students may need interventions that promote their abilities and challenge them to succeed at higher levels.

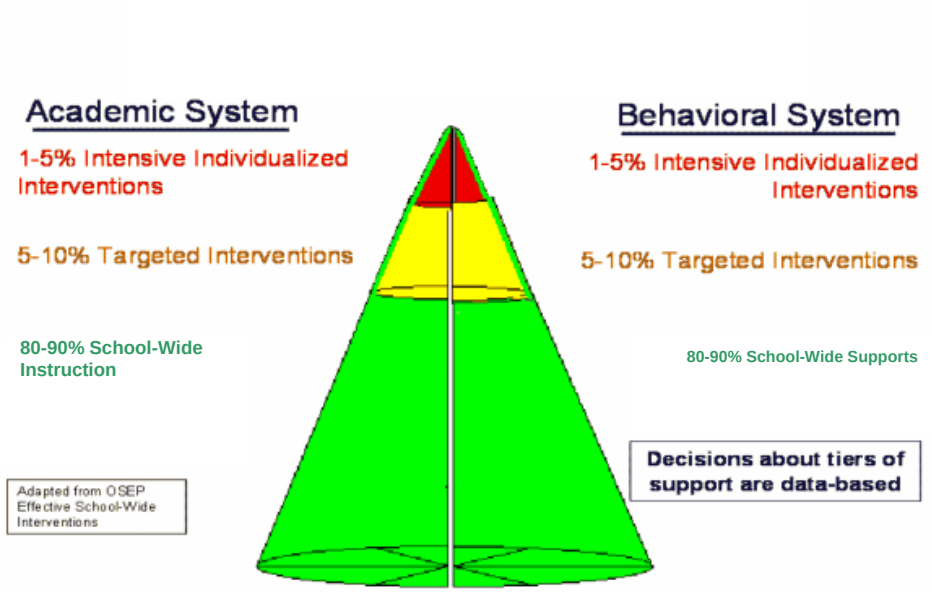
In addition to this foundation, targeted and intensive instructional and student supports designed to meet individual needs constitute intervention. Intervention is mandated for students who have failed to demonstrate proficiency on state tests or those who are "at risk" for such academic failure. Based on current results, there are schools in Ohio where many, even most, students require interventions. As these schools plan for developing a learning support system, they must continue to develop their foundation instructional and support services to ultimately meet the needs of the majority of students and to challenge students with accelerated abilities through the school improvement process. The overall goal is to reduce the number of students who need intervention services by providing a set of quality instructional and support services as the educational foundation.

Research

Research provides multiple learning support systems models that help conceptualize the integration of instructional and support interventions to meet a range of needs. Each of these depictions acknowledges the need for the coordination of academic and nonacademic supports and services. This guidance presents two research models.

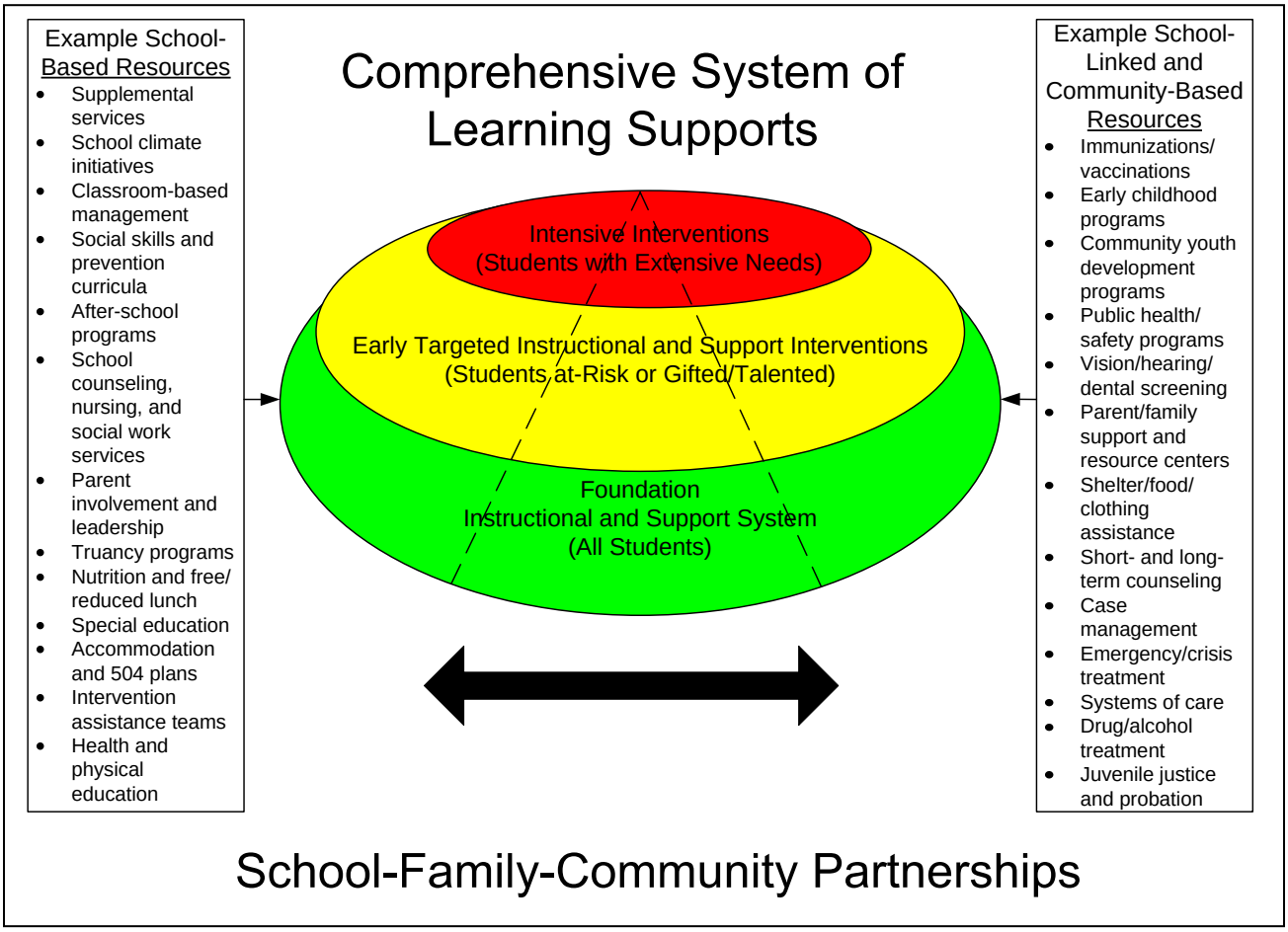
The Integrated Systems Model pictured below in Figure 1 is a school-based model that demonstrates the relationship between the foundation of schoolwide instruction and supports and intervention.

Figure 1



The second model in Figure 2 superimposes this three-tiered model in a broader community context, which utilizes family and community assets and services to create a comprehensive system of learning supports.

Figure 2



The Comprehensive Systems of Learning Supports model pictured above demonstrates that schools cannot provide all of the services and programs that are available in the community to support students' development. This system relies on involvement of parents and strategic community partnerships. The school, the families and the community partners have shared goals that promote the physical, cognitive, social and emotional well-being of the children in their care.

Families are essential partners with schools. They provide extended support and make decisions for and with their children. They, too, may need support to access assets and services within the community for themselves as well as their children.

Some students and families may need to be connected to health and social services to address barriers that impede learning. Other community-based resources, such as preschools, libraries, supplemental service providers, and after-school and summer school programs can provide extended learning opportunities for improving and enriching the core curriculum. Boys and girls clubs and many faith-based programs are examples of community assets that provide positive youth development experiences and mentoring

programs for students who need to learn to interact with others in positive ways and to feel connected to school and community.

School is the heart of the community. Together with the student's family, all school and community offerings can be coordinated based on the needs of the individual student.

The Process of Building a System for Learning Supports

This new approach to support for student learning will require district and school leadership to be strategic in how the system is introduced to stakeholders and, more importantly, how the development and implementation process unfolds. Attention must be given to a set of steps and activities intended to ensure that the system is truly comprehensive and operates in a collaborative partnership with essential stakeholders.

The following list shows milestones of progress in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the system and its components. These milestones fit with school improvement planning steps and stages.

Planning

1. Engage district and school staff by developing tools and strategies to communicate the learning support system's intentions, assess readiness and structure interventions, if necessary, to address staff concerns.

2. Engage the community by establishing a learning support system team that provides broad school and community representation. The purpose of this team is to set a true community context for the project. It is sometimes referred to as "building a community table."

3. Conduct a current school and community practices inventory. The purpose of this inventory is to establish the program context for the learning support system, especially honoring prior efforts to do collaborative problem-solving. This process will result in program and services alignment focusing on critical outcomes for all students and identify key resources available for the learning support system.

4. Identify the most pressing needs or barriers to learning for students by identifying key constructs that will help organize the needs assessment process (e.g., risk and protective factors, resiliency, depression, academic self-efficacy, assets and stressful life events).

5. Develop instruments and processes to collect and analyze data; instruments can include student and/or staff surveys and conducting of focus groups. Using the data analysis, identify prevention or intervention strategies needed to address key barriers to learning for students.

6. Select evidence-based strategies and/or programs that can effectively address the identified nonacademic barriers and develop implementation strategies to integrate the

selected strategies or programs into the school day.

7. Develop an evaluation strategy for each strategy/program selected and for the overall system identifying key data elements and develop data management, data analysis and reporting capacities for the evaluation system.

8. Develop a team evaluation strategy for the status of district, school and community resources based on the changing needs of students as identified through the program evaluation.

Implementation

9. Identify champions and a diverse group of individuals that will be involved in implementing the strategies or programs.

10. Clarify how the functions will be institutionalized through existing, modified or new infrastructure and operational mechanisms. Examples include changes in school policies, procedures, staff roles and responsibilities, and resource allocations.

11. Clarify mechanisms and change processes that will lead to change in infrastructure and operations and determine members/teams responsible for implementing change processes.

12. Ensure strategies/or programs are implemented with a frequency, intensity and duration sufficient to achieve desired results, providing follow-up booster sessions as needed.

13. Negotiate initial agreements, such as memorandums of understanding.

14. Carefully track the implementation and operation of the system by collecting and analyzing data that measure program operations and processes. These data should include key measures of student success and resource usage.

15. Provide ongoing and embedded professional development that directly supports strategies or programs. Review implementation progress regularly, allowing staff to problem-solve barriers to implementation.

Evaluation

16. Implement evaluation and feedback to ensure that data collected during implementation of a system of learning supports link back to school and community decision making.

17. Ensure that the evaluations are credible and provide balanced feedback on strengths and weaknesses in ways that allow stakeholders and decision makers to make corrections and improvements.

18. Strive to create evaluation designs that, over time, will be able to attribute empirical changes on students' academic achievement scores to the quality and amount of learning supports provided to those students.

19. Review budgeted and actual resource usage in the context of student academic achievement to evaluate the most efficient use of resources.

These 19 milestones are intended to be broad markers of progress. In the next section, we present a set of learning support guidelines that provide more detailed descriptions of requirements, processes and expectations.

The guidelines for *A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* that follow are organized around six interrelated and interdependent systems: systems requirements, instructional management, accountability, data-informed decision making, fiscal resources, human resources and community engagement. There is one guideline for each system, followed by a series of process indicators. A companion document will be available soon to help measure progress toward meeting the guidelines.

Guidelines for a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

1. System Requirements: Planning and Implementation	
District and school culture supports clearly defined, high expectations for all students through a comprehensive learning support system. Continuous improvement planning accounts for the needs of all learners, including students who are below or at risk of being below grade-level expectations and those with accelerated abilities.	
	Process Indicators
1.1	**District and school vision and mission statements** communicate a responsibility to provide a rigorous curriculum in a safe and positive learning environment appropriate to the needs of all students. Specific responsibilities to be acted upon include: • High expectations for student learning and behavior; • Positive learning and working relationships; • Ongoing collaboration with family and community; and • Provision of a physically and psychologically safe and healthy learning environment.
1.2	**District and school policy** ensures an expanding array of foundation services, both instructional and support, within the classroom and through school and community programs, to address the achievement needs of all students so that the need for high intensity interventions is decreased.
1.3	**Collaborative districtwide planning** supports equitable implementation of research-based strategies and interventions for diverse learners and efficient transitions by fostering cooperative relationships among various district and school personnel (including special and gifted education, Title I and fiscal administrators) and family and community representatives.
1.4	**Roles and responsibilities** for district and school leaders (leadership teams), classroom teachers and intervention specialists, support staff, community and family members are defined and supported to ensure the delivery of prompt instructional and student supports to any student in need.
1.5	A **system for collecting, analyzing and using data** from multiple sources informs the development and delivery of learning supports so that instructional and support interventions match the severity, complexity and frequency of need, and can be delivered in a timely and efficient manner. Confidentiality laws should be used at all times, and agreements should be in place with partnering organizations for sharing data.
1.6	**Instructional and support services** for all students are designed to create positive learning environments that include high expectations for student learning and behavior, positive learning and working relationships, and a safe and healthy physical learning environment.

2. Instructional Management: Prompt Learning Supports	
District and schools provide a system of prompt learning supports that includes research- and evidence-based strategies aligned to Ohio's Academic Content Standards, School Climate Guidelines and Educator Standards.	
	Process Indicators
2.1	District and school **curriculum is aligned with Ohio's Academic Content Standards**, scientifically researched and evidence-based to meet the needs of all learners, which include students who are above, below and at grade level.
2.2	**District, schools and parents collaboratively develop** an aligned, comprehensive resource of learning supports across content areas for both school and home, identifying levels of intensity, and addressing the social and physical environment.
2.3	**Multiple approaches to intervention** are available for diverse learning needs (e.g., technological, flexible grouping, responsive to various learning modalities and intelligences) and intensity required for students who fall below or are at risk of falling below grade-level expectations as well as for advanced learners.
2.4	Formative and summative classroom **assessments are differentiated** to meet the needs of learners.
2.5	District and school leaders support instruction with ongoing, **high quality professional development (including coaching)**, **aligned to Ohio's Educator Standards** to ensure implementation of differentiated strategies and alignment with grade level expectations.
2.6	The learning environment is informed by **culturally responsive practice** and **aligned with the School Climate Guidelines** to ensure a safe, healthy and supportive setting for the education of all students.

3. Accountability: Follow-through and Evaluation	
District and schools have a written accountability plan that contains methods and strategies to measure the impact of the foundation services and instructional and student support interventions provided and to correct achievement discrepancies.	
	Process Indicators
3.1	**District leadership teams set expectations for instruction and school climate** to meet the needs of all students, with fewer students needing intense interventions. Leadership teams develop measurable goals to ensure that schools are accountable for achieving these expectations for all students.
3.2	**District leadership teams examine data** from state and local assessments, discipline, attendance and mobility to identify students at risk **and set priorities for improvement**.

3.3	**District leadership teams develop feedback mechanisms for students, families and personnel** regarding school climate and uses the data to monitor and improve the environment.
3.4	**District and school leadership teams implement a variety of formative measures to monitor** ongoing progress toward achieving the goals for student engagement and school climate and to ensure adequate intensity of intervention services.
3.5	**District and school leadership teams monitor progress in priority areas,** to determine the need for modifications and adjustments to curriculum, instructional strategies, interventions and supports.
3.6	**District leadership team monitors quality of instructional and student support interventions** to ensure resources, strategies and practices used by district and school staff are differentiated and include multiple measures of student performance to help all students meet grade level, or accelerated, expectations.

4. Data-Informed Decision Making: Knowing What Students Need	
District and schools collect and use assessment data — including assessment of nonacademic barriers — to identify students and to provide appropriate interventions in the intensity required to ensure academic success for each student.	
	Process Indicators
4.1	District and school leadership teams **collect data** including academic indicators and nonacademic barriers to learning such as absences, particularly unexcused absences, discipline incidents, mobility and health status to identify appropriate interventions. Effective data systems **provide ready access to all decision makers** (e.g., teachers, administrators)
4.2	A team of district personnel and community and family representatives **collaboratively identify challenges based on data** and devise solutions to ensure a comprehensive approach to resolve issues.
4.3	Use of data to determine strategies reflects **an active role for all stakeholders**, an understanding of the complexity of the factors that influence each student **and use intensive instructional and student support interventions to address the most critical factors**.
4.4	District leadership team develops and implements **a system to document and maintain records** of instructional and student support interventions provided to each student.
4.5	District and school leadership teams **identify key performance indicators and regularly monitor them** so that building administrators and teachers can determine progress toward meeting goals and individual need for intervention.
4.6	District and school leadership teams establish an integrated assessment and data collection system that defines regular progress **monitoring for all students and more frequent monitoring for those students receiving additional intensive interventions.**
4.7	School leadership teams **evaluate student progress as it relates to the implementation of instructional and student support interventions** and determine the effectiveness of the intervention and the need to modify the intervention strategy and/or intensity.

5. Fiscal Resources: Budgeting Based on Student Needs	
District leadership team uses individual building data and collaboratively plans to allocate and leverage appropriate resources to schools for supporting and implementing effective instructional and student support interventions.	
	Process Indicators
5.1	Leadership teams use school and student **data to determine priorities for resource allocations**, including adequate levels of fiscal support for interventions, appropriate placement of highly qualified staff, ongoing staff development and development of intervention options.
5.2	District leadership teams leverage **multiple fiscal resources to implement intervention** services, which may include general revenue funds, federal funds, restricted state funds and other grants.
5.3	**District leadership teams ensure collaborative and inclusive cross-district planning** that supports prompt allocation to ensure efficient and effective use of resources.
5.4	District and building leadership ensures that instructional and student support **interventions are adequately staffed with highly qualified personnel with access to staff development** and intervention options based on the needs of students.
5.5	District and building leadership teams ensure that staff providing instructional and student support **interventions have access to adequate equipment and materials** (e.g., technology and assistive technology, computer programs, texts, supplies) to carry out intervention goals.
5.6	Appropriate personnel, services and materials are available to ensure that **students develop needed academic and social skills while learning appropriate grade-level content**.
5.7	District strategic planning for use of resources ensures that the **highest level of resources go to those buildings with the highest level of need**.

6. Human Resources: Qualified Personnel	
District and community-based providers are appropriately degreed and/or licensed/certificated to provide appropriate intervention programs and services.	
	Process Indicators
6.1	District leadership team regularly assesses the qualifications of intervention personnel and **matches qualifications to the needs of students.**
6.2	District leadership team acts on a plan to **build and maintain capacity to promptly provide highly qualified personnel** in areas of concentration aligned to the needs of students in the district.
6.3	**Personnel** (district and external service providers) **have appropriate license and/or degree for the intervention services they provid**e and continually complete coursework and training to expand and enhance their skills.
6.4	District provides **ongoing professional development** so that all staff members understand the interaction among academic and nonacademic barriers, how to develop solutions, and involve community and family representatives.

6.5	Individualized referral decisions and planning for interventions are the responsibility of **collaborative teams of school staff, family members and community partners** who review student academic achievement to determine academic and nonacademic barriers.

7. Community Engagement: Shared Responsibility and Resources	
District and schools leverage community resources, service providers and families to provide instructional and student support interventions to complement existing school-based foundation services and interventions.	
	Process Indicators
7.1	District and schools have an **identified group of community stakeholders** and staff with the responsibility of coordinating school, family and community resources for students in need.
7.2	District and school leadership teams **recruit and utilize outside resources and referral sites** and other community agencies to provide services to children and families in need of intervention.
7.3	District and school leadership teams identify and link students to local **out-of-school-time programs**, youth service agencies, community-based organizations and informal learning opportunities that can **complement school-day learning and lead to more effective and sustainable educational efforts.**
7.4	**District and school leadership teams deliberately and strategically collaborate with community resource and service providers and families** to identify common goals for instructional and student support interventions that decrease duplication of services and leverage all resources.
7.5	School leadership teams support the building of relationships through **regularly scheduled opportunities for families to engage** informally with educators and other families.
7.6	School leadership teams have **formal systems to ensure ongoing, two-way communication** with families. Schools provide communications to parents in a form and language they understand, with interpreters if needed
7.7	A formal process exists for **involving families in developing goals and targets** for the building and students.
7.8	**Families are an integral part of all planning** and decision-making efforts at the student, building, district and community levels.

Definitions

Intervention: Within an integrated system of learning supports, intervention means intentional, supplemental instruction and student support services that are provided by qualified personnel to individuals or small groups of students who have failed or who are at risk of failing Ohio's Achievement Tests or the Ohio Graduation Test. Interventions should also be available to students who are not at risk of failing, but are capable of higher levels of performance than exhibited.

Targeted Intervention Strategies: Approaches that identify and address the early onset of risk factors and/or nonacademic barriers to learning among students at risk for academic failure and other problem behaviors; also called selected and/or secondary prevention approaches. These strategies encompass the second tier of a learning support continuum (Anderson-Butcher, 2007).

Intensive Intervention Strategies: Approaches that address the intensive needs of students who are experiencing severe and/or chronic problems and needs; also called indicated and/or tertiary prevention approaches. These strategies encompass the third tier of a learning support continuum (Anderson-Butcher, 2007).

Response to Intervention (RtI): The practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions including general, compensatory and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction/intervention guided by child outcome data (NASDSE, 2006).

Integrated Systems Model: A three-tiered model of prevention (foundation) and early and intensive interventions aimed at closing the achievement gap among students with disabilities, at-risk learners and the rest of the student body (ODE, 2006).

Engagement: School involvement viewed behaviorally (e.g., attendance, participation) or affectively (sense of "belonging" or value placed on school related outcomes) (Finn, 1993).

Research-based: Programs, practices and strategies backed by valid, scientifically based research studies that have been proven to be effective (ODE, 2004).

Evidence-based: Use of the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction (USED, 2002). See also more complete criteria related to evidence standards found at: http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/reviewprocess/study_standards_final.pdf

Academic Barriers: Individual or systemic factors that impede the ability to learn materials as typically presented. Examples include cognitive and learning disabilities,

lack of prerequisite knowledge, different learning rates and/or styles. These respond to an instructional component (Adelman and Taylor, 2006).

Nonacademic Barriers: Environmental factors that impede the ability of students to present as "motivationally ready and able to learn." Examples include deficits in home involvement and peer support, medical and nutritional impediments, physical disabilities, transportation, mobility, attitudinal problems. These require an "enabling" component in order to receive benefit from instruction (Adelman and Taylor, 2006).

Accelerated Instruction: Instruction that is provided to a student at a higher grade level than is typical, given the student's age, for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities (ODE, 2006).

Value-added: Value-added analysis is a statistical method used to measure a school's impact on the rate of student progress from year to year. Value-added analysis has the potential to be one of the most important school improvement tools of the last century. Using this growth metric, schools and districts receive valuable diagnostic information that will help determine the impact of their curriculum and instructional practices on student achievement.