

# An Overview of the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST)

Presented by

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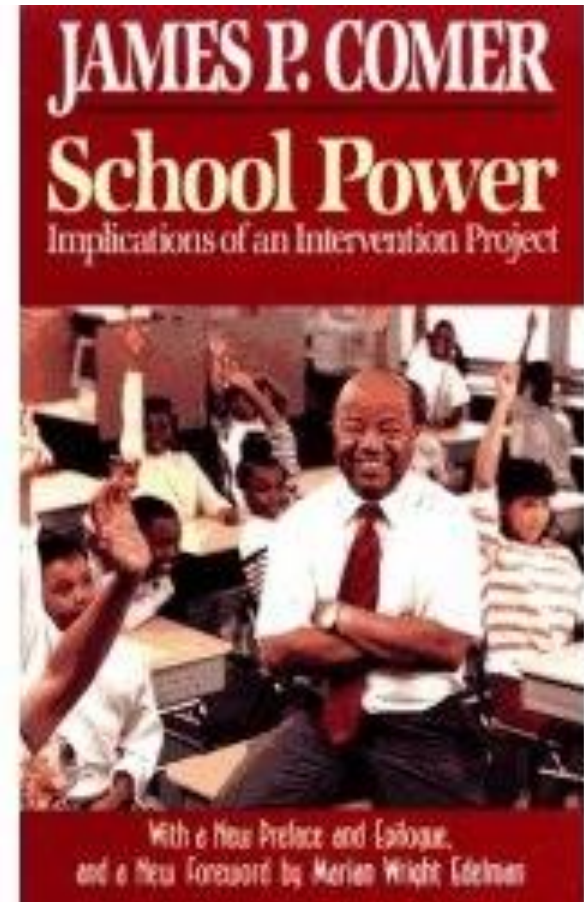
Comer School Development Program



# Origins of the Student and Staff Support Team

Dr. James P. Comer's groundbreaking school transformation work in the late 1960s in two of New Haven's lowest performing schools included the **Mental Health Team** to help create a culture and climate that made development and learning possible.

The Mental Health Team was later renamed the Student and Staff Support Team to broaden the focus of the team's work.



# Roles and Responsibilities of the SSST

- Coordinates and integrates the work of the student support personnel within the school.
- Coordinates the work of outside agencies providing services within the school setting.
- In the Comer model the SSST provides recommendations to the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT) on integrating child and adolescent development principles into all aspects of the school's academic and social programs.

# Roles and Responsibilities of the SSST

- Focuses on individual student referrals and global school and classroom issues.
- Serves to prevent potential problems from developing into crises.
- Intervenes in specific cases referred by teachers, other staff, or parents.
- Provides teachers with strategies for:
  - Managing students' interactions or behaviors; and
  - Creating a positive classroom community.

# SSST Expectations

- Uses a diagnostic/prescriptive model designed to provide interventions for individual students.
- Develop preventive strategies that modify the school setting and create optimal conditions for development, teaching, and learning.
- Involve parents in the development of interventions and strategies for their children that they can reinforce at home.

# SSST Composition

## Key Members

Principal/Administrator  
School Psychologist  
School Social Worker  
Guidance Counselor  
Curriculum  
Coach/Specialist  
Special Education  
Teacher  
Referring Teacher

## As needed

Parents/family member  
Bilingual Specialist  
School Nurse  
Speech and Language  
Specialist  
External service provider  
Others

# SSST Composition

Each member of the SSST—and parents who may participate in the meeting—brings knowledge, skills, and experience to the discussion of a student referred to the team.

Use the SSST Composition Worksheet to jot down what you think each member of the SSST brings to the discussion of a student referral.

# Referrals to the SSST

A clear and structured process for referring students to the SSST is essential.

At a minimum, a referring teacher should provide a non-judgmental description of the student's challenges and strengths along the **Six Developmental Pathways**: social, psychological, cognitive, language, ethical, and physical.



# The Significance of Viewing the Student Developmentally

During the discussion of the student, SSST members should use a “developmental lens” (the Developmental Pathways framework is recommended) and identify areas of appropriate development, “overdevelopment,” and “underdevelopment.”

Specifically, the team should describe and discuss each area of the student’s development and how that level of development may contribute to the presenting problem.

# The Significance of Viewing the Student Developmentally

These development focused discussions are at the core of the SSST's operation resulting in the following benefits:

- First, the team will be more likely to gather important information to inform potential interventions.
- Second, the team will be less likely to judge or label the student and recommend inappropriate interventions as a result of emotionally charged perceptions.

# Referrals to the SSST

This description of the student should include:

- The frequency, severity, and duration of the challenging behavior, as well as possible triggers.
- A description of what interventions strategies they have tried and the extent to which they have been effective, even if only marginally.
- Relevant background information (e.g., parental report of imminent divorce) or current indicators (e.g., work samples, distressing pictures or drawings).

# Think-Pair-Share Activity

**Think:** Review the Bishop Woods Executive Academy SSST student referral form on your own. How does the form create a snapshot of the “whole child”? What additional information would you find helpful?

**Pair:** Share your analysis with a partner. Combine your list of what additional information you think would be helpful.

**Share:** Large group process

# Referrals to the SSST

- Once a student has been referred to the SSST, they are put on the meeting agenda ASAP.
- Parents or guardians are informed of the referral and invited to attend the meeting at which their child will be discussed.
- If parents cannot attend in person, they can participate by phone.

# Developmentally Appropriate Interventions

The SSST should attempt to generate interventions that are developmentally appropriate and informed. There are at least three possible levels of intervention:

- By the teacher within the classroom;
- Through consultation with other school personnel; and
- Through outside services.

# Developmentally Appropriate Interventions

The first level of intervention is the classroom:

- Members of the SSST should assist the referring teacher in creating and implementing strategies the teacher has not tried or considered; or in modifying interventions already being used.

# Developmentally Appropriate Interventions

The second level of intervention is mobilizing school resources:

- The SSST may request that other school personnel consult with the team and/or the referring teacher. For example, a teacher who has a relationship with the student and/or their family from another time or setting (e.g., had a sibling in another class), may share helpful information.



# Developmentally Appropriate Interventions

The third level of intervention is accessing resources or services outside the school:

- The SSST may determine that the referred student and/or their family might benefit from counseling, substance abuse treatment, a medical evaluation, structured activity outside of the school, or other services the school cannot provide.
- If a family gives their permission to the SSST to communicate with external service providers, the case manager should coordinate these services with those the school provides.

# Developing the Action Plan

The end product of the discussion of a student's case is an action plan that the team develops together. The decisions are made by consensus and made in the best interest of the student.

- The action plan includes strategies a teacher would use in their classroom, and when possible, for parents to use at home.
- In cases where there is DCF involvement, workers may also participate in the development of action plans by phone or in person.

# Implementing the Action Plan

- The team assigns a case manager to follow up and make sure the action plan is implemented with adequate support and fidelity.
- The team schedules a case review that usually occurs 4 to 6 later.

# The SSST Addresses Global School and Classroom Issues

In addition to addressing individual student referrals, the SSST addresses

# The SSST Addresses Global School and Classroom Issues

## Examples of Global School and Classroom Issues

- Behavior/discipline
- Attendance issues:  
truancy/chronic  
absenteeism and tardiness
- Transitions: new students,  
retentions, preparation for  
changing schools (e.g., K-4  
to middle school)
- Staff morale & burnout
- Response to crises or  
trauma
- Student achievement
- Diversity/multicultural issues
- Relationship issues:
  - Staff and students
  - Staff and parents
  - Between and among staff
- Student neglect, trauma, and  
abuse
- Student and staff wellness and  
health promotion

# Addressing Global School & Classroom Issues

The SSST should examine the patterns and trends of individual student cases as well as behavior referral data to identify potential global school and classroom issues to address.

- Are there classrooms with an especially high number of office referrals? The SSST can provide the teacher strategies for classroom management, creating a positive community, etc.
- Are there behavior issues on the bus, in the hallways, the cafeteria, or the playground? The SSST can develop strategies that can be implemented at the school level.

# Addressing Global School Issues

Events, both expected and unexpected, which impact the entire school community.

- Examples of expected or predictable events include many of the transitions associated with the schooling process such as attending a new school; starting the 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Examples of unexpected events include natural disasters like fires, floods, hurricanes, etc. They also include death of a loved one, incarceration of a loved one, a neighborhood shooting, etc.

# Addressing Global School Issues

Another example of a global school issue the SSST can address is relates to children's development. For example, while children are capable of discerning differences between people's physical features, they typically do not begin to exhibit systematic differential attitudes toward people of different races or ethnicities until 6 or 7 years of age.

This is also when students enter school and may observe differential treatment of groups of people.

The SSST may facilitate workshops or other discussions within the school community regarding issues of diversity and equitable treatment.



**For more information about the  
Comer School Development Program, go to:**

[www.schooldevelopmentprogram.org](http://www.schooldevelopmentprogram.org)

[www.youtube.com/comersdp](http://www.youtube.com/comersdp)