
New Year's Resolutions – A Time for Renewal; A New Start for Everyone

The beginning of a new calendar year is a time for “taking stock” about what’s been working and what hasn’t. It’s a time to plan how to build on your strengths and make some changes.

Here are five “resolutions” for support staff and teachers to consider.

(1) Resolve to make the first day back special. This is the time for support staff and teachers to take special steps to individually greet and welcome back each student and especially those who need to be re-engaged in the learning process.

- C In every class, identify those students who have been having problems and plan several ways for them to feel that someone at school really cares and wants to provide them with special opportunities and ongoing support.
- C Tell each identified student this is new start and help them actually experience the new opportunities and support so they don’t think you are making empty promises.

(2) Resolve to follow-through.

- C Be prepared to help the identified students re-engage in positive activities and learning. Use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide extra support. *Make them feel cared about and positively special.*
- C Be sure to look at a broad range of contributing causes to problems you are concerned about. Focus on changes in the classroom and school environment that might reduce commonly occurring problems in a cost effective way.

(3) Resolve to reach out to create more collaborative and mutually supportive ways to team with others at the school (in the district, and in the community). Building supportive working relationships is the key to making the rest of the school year go better. Everyone needs others with whom to share successes and concerns. Staff at schools tend to do this informally with their colleagues. Now it is time to develop ways for working together on a regular basis to ensure greater success.

- C Clarify which support staff and teachers will work together as a team to ensure follow-through in providing special opportunities and support for identified students and for making changes in the classroom and school environment.
- C Request time at grade level, department, and staff meetings to discuss ways to team and build capacity for working effectively together – especially with a view to helping identified students.
- C Identify who is most likely to be able to connect with an especially hard to reach student and plan how to make this happen.

(4) Resolve to develop mutually supportive relationships with families. We all want family attitudes about school to be positive, hopeful, and supportive. So, we need to work in ways that can make this a reality.

- C Schools need to assist teachers at this time of year by facilitating time for them to conference individually with the families of each student who has been having problems. In most cases, the students should be included in these conferences. Student support staff can play a role in arranging such conferences and then covering the teacher’s class while the teacher holds the conference. The discussions should cover (a) why there has been a problem (without getting into a “blame-game”), (b) exploring some new ways that everyone agrees could make things better, and (c) arriving at some mutual agreements (not one-way “contracts”) about how to support each other in the coming weeks.

(5) Resolve to take care of yourself. We all say it . . . “This year I will take better care of myself (eat better, exercise more, reduce stress, *yada, yada, yada*).”

- C For some ideas about taking better care of yourself and minimizing staff burnout, go to the Quick Find search menu on the website, find the topic of “Burnout,” and download some of the material.

Help for Turning Resolutions into Actions

If you don’t already have one, you may want to encourage the school to form a **Resource Coordinating Team**. Below are a few points about such a team. If you want more info, go to Center Materials on the website and download “*Resource Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports*.”

>>>Such a group can help enhance how resources are used at the school to make it possible for you to follow through on your good resolve, and it can help the school become more proactive in anticipating and preventing many problems.

The team does this by reviewing all resources the school is using to support learning with a view to analyzing effectiveness, redeploying wasted resources, filling gaps, and mobilizing staff, students, and families to work effectively together.

Who’s on a Resource Coordinating Team?

A Resource Coordinating Team might begin with only two people. It can expand into a group of informed stakeholders that might include an administrator, the school support staff, special education staff, regular education teachers, community agencies, family and student representatives.

As a resource team begins to “map” what the school has, the team may want to download tools for mapping. These are in “*Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning: An Intervention for Systemic Change*.” We have included two mapping tools that may help to get the team started.

Even if the school doesn’t establish a Resource Coordinating Team, the tools highlight the value of having “someone” do this type of mapping so that important info is available to everyone at the school. Such info provides a basis for enhancing access to resources and improving how the school addresses barriers to student learning. Doing such mapping is a good function for any of the school’s student support staff to perform.

Mapping Tool

Some of the Special Resources Available at our School

This tool is designed to provide a “map” of the student support staff – names, roles and functions, schedules, and how to access. These items can be adapted to reflect the personnel at your school. Each person identified should review and revise the description to better clarify what they do. The completed info can be used for purposes of enhancing coordination of resources and to provide staff, students, and families with information about what is available and how to access the resources.

School Psychologist (name and times at the school) _____

Provides assessment and testing of students for special services. Counseling for students and families. Support services for teachers. Prevention, crisis response, conflict resolution, program modification for special learning and/or behavior needs.

School Nurse (name and times at the school) _____

Provides immunizations, follow-up, communicable disease control, vision and hearing screening and follow-up, health assessments and referrals, health counseling and information for students and families.

Pupil Services & Attendance Counselor (name and times at school) _____

Provides a liaison between school and home to maximize school attendance, transition, counseling for returnees, enhancing attendance improvement activities.

Social Worker (name times at the school) _____

Assists in identifying at-risk students and provides follow-up counseling for students and families. Refers families for additional services if needed .

Counselors (names and times at the school) _____

General and special counseling/guidance services. Consultation with families and school staff.

Dropout Prevention Coordinator (name and times at the school) _____

Coordinates activity designed to enhance support for at risk students

Title I, Safe & Drug Free Schools, Bilingual Coordinators & Special Grants and Projects

Names and times at the school _____

Coordinate categorical programs, provide services to identified students, implements mandated services and monitoring.

Special Education staff (names and times at the school) _____

School-based Crisis Team (names/titles) _____

School Improvement Team (names/titles) _____

School Site Council (names/titles) _____

Community Resources providing school-linked or school-based interventions and resources:
Who, what they do, when they are available _____

Any of the above personnel might take the lead in ensuring such info is gathered, developed into an information sheet, and then circulated to all staff, students, and families.

Moreover, any of these personnel could be asked to take a lead role in forming a Resource

Coordinating Team. And, any and all of the above personnel can be invited to an initial meeting. As noted above, the purpose is to discuss ways to enhance how resources are used at the school and how the school can become more proactive in anticipating and preventing many problems. To these ends, the team can review all resources the school is using to support learning with a view to analyzing effectiveness, redeploying wasted resources, filling gaps, and mobilizing staff, students, and families to work effectively together.

In addition to the info about who does what in providing learning support at the school, the team can use the following survey tool to explore ways to improve related systems at the school.

Mapping Tool

Surveying Mechanisms Used to Address Barriers to Learning

Assuming the school has a case-oriented/case review team (e.g., a student review team, a study team, a student success team, a student assistance team, a student guidance team, etc.), then you have a group that handles triage, referral, and case management functions. The focus here is on mechanisms to enhance a focus on prevention and improve existing systems and resource use.

1. Who at the school coordinates or could be designated as an administrative lead for the coordination of all the resources used to address barriers to learning?
2. Do the personnel involved in addressing barriers to learning meet together to improve coordination and integration of their resources? (e.g., Is there a resource-oriented team? If not, should a Resource Coordinating Team be established? If so, when should it meet?)
3. Who is or would be on your school's Resource Coordinating Team?
4. Who does or could review/revise/create written descriptions to give staff regarding resources at the school and in the community and information on how to gain access to them?
5. Who does or could review materials and processes used to provide families with info about available resources and how to access them?
6. What changes should be made to improve the referral, triage, and care management systems? (How can such changes be accomplished?)
7. What processes allow the school staff to make recommendations for improving the way the school addresses barriers to student learning? (If such processes don't exist or need improvement, who is responsible for making this happen?)
8. What processes allow your school to work with the other local schools in mutually beneficial ways? (If such processes don't exist or need improvement, who is responsible for making this happen?)
9. With which community resources do you have formal relationships (on site, in the community)?
10. What processes allow the school to coordinate and link with community resources in mutually beneficial ways? (If such processes don't exist or need improvement, who is responsible for making this happen?)

If you are interested in learning more about the above matters, go to the Quick Find search menu on the website, and choose from among the following:

- >>Collaboration
 - >>Environments that support learning
 - >>Mapping School and Community Resources
 - >>Needs and Assets Assessment and Mapping
 - >>Prevention for Students “At Risk”
 - >>Resilience/Protective Factors
 - >>Safe Schools & Violence Prevention
 - >>School and Community Collaboration
 - >>Social and Emotional Development and Social Skills
 - >>Staffing Student Support Systems
 - >>Youth Development
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