Chapter 9. *Student and Family Special Assistance*

Of those students who require special assistance, only a small proportion are candidates for special education

Rethinking special assistance is fundamental in revamping school systems to address the needs of *all* learners and reduce learning problems, misbehavior, suspensions, expulsions, grade retention, and dropouts. As with the other elements of a learning supports system, the aim is to enable learning by improving the match between school interventions and a learner's motivation and capabilities.

SPECIAL ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND TEACHING

When many students are not doing well, a logical first step is to address general factors that may be causing problems. For schools, this involves the five arenas of learning supports discussed in previous chapters. Such interventions can be sufficient for addressing conditions that are affecting a large proportion of students, and this reduces the need for further specialized assistance. A few students, however, will continue to manifest learning, behavior, and emotional problems, and they and their families will require extra assistance, perhaps including specialized interventions and possibly special education services.

Most teachers and parents have little difficulty identifying youngsters who manifest problems at school. Given that a school has done as much as feasible to personalize instruction and provide a range of general learning supports for such students, special assistance is the next step. As discussed in Chapter 4, special assistance begins in the classroom. Depending on problem severity and pervasiveness, such assistance involves pursuing the sequence and hierarchy of interventions highlighted in Exhibit 9.1 (reproduced from Chapter 4).

Special assistance often is just an extension of general strategies; sometimes, however, more specialized interventions are needed. In either case, it is essential to provide extra support as soon as a need is recognized and in ways that are least disruptive to the student's whole development. Done effectively, special assistance can reduce unwarranted special education referrals and misdiagnoses. To these ends, the process includes use a wide range of "prereferral interventions" as part of the authentic, multifaceted assessment practice currently designated as Response to Intervention (RtI). Such practices improve screening and planning, and they facilitate appropriate decisions about referral for school-based, school-linked, and community-based specialized services. Exhibit 9.2 summarizes, with examples, the array of special assistance.

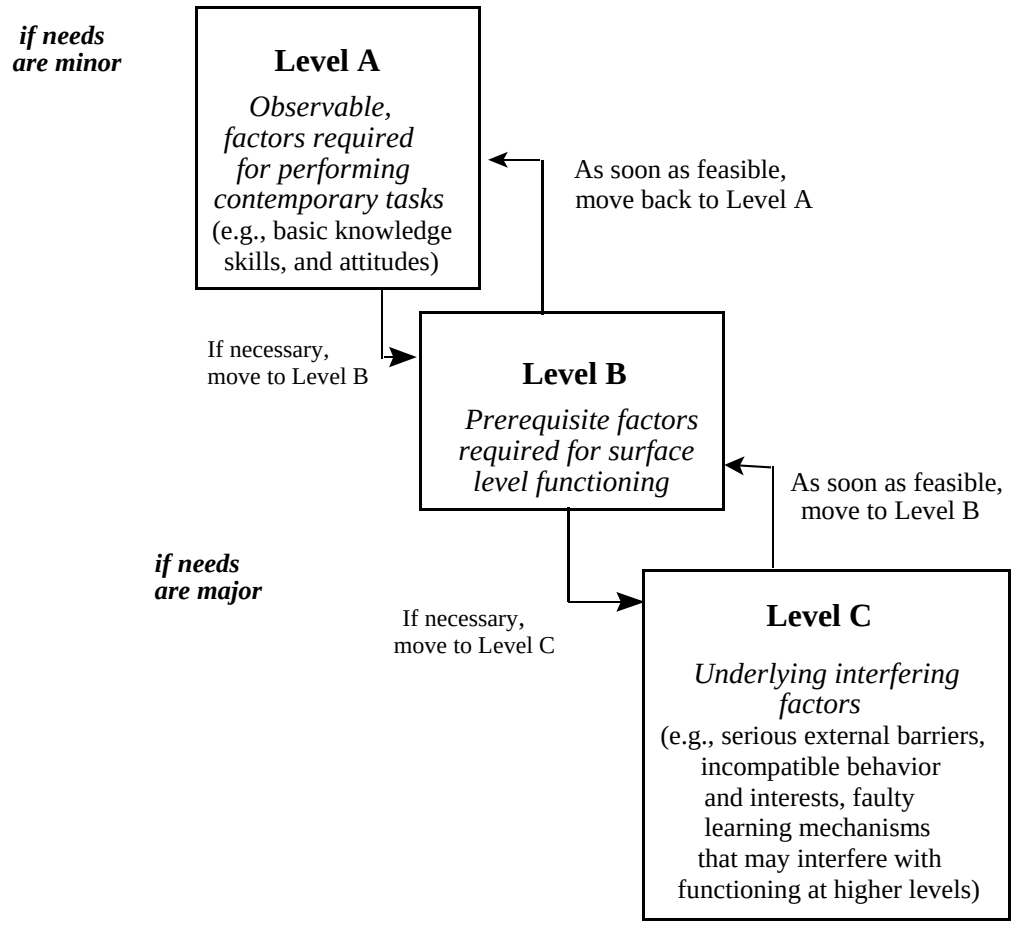
How is Special Assistance Provided Strategically?

Once it is clear that special assistance is required, the focus turns to determining what type of assistance to provide and how to provide it. In making such determinations, all who work with the youngster must take the time to develop (a) an understanding of why the student is having problems, (b) an analysis of the nature and scope of the problems (current weaknesses and limitations, including missing prerequisites and interfering behaviors and attitudes), and (c) an appreciation of his or her strengths (in terms of both motivation and capabilities).

Learning, behavior, and emotional difficulties are commonly associated with motivational problems. Thus, enhancing motivation is always a primary concern. To this end, intensive efforts are immediately required to ensure a student is mobilized to learn and perform. Such efforts include use of a wider range of learning and performance options, personalized guidance and support, and appropriate accommodations. Particular attention is paid to minimizing threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others and emphasizing ways to enhance such feelings.

Exhibit 9.1
Sequence and Hierarchy of Special Assistance

Step 2. *Best special practices* (special assistance, such as remediation, rehabilitation, treatment) are used differentially for minor and severe problems



Note: The concept of using the least intervention necessary to accomplish results applies to decisions about intervening at Levels A, B, or C. The point is to ensure the right amount of assistance is provided so that, first and foremost, students' needs are addressed. At the same time, the idea is to keep interventions from becoming too life-intrusive and to ensure the costs and benefits are appropriately balanced.

Responses to special assistance are a primary assessment strategy. When motivational considerations are given short shrift, assessments and diagnoses are confounded, and special assistance may just as readily exacerbate as correct a student's problems. When a student's motivation to learn and problem-solve is enhanced, a more valid assessment of special assistance needs and personal strengths is likely. Moreover, among the disengaged, re-engagement enables identification of students misdiagnosed as having internal dysfunctions (e.g., a learning disability, an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

Addressing motivational concerns can be sufficient for assisting a large proportion of students and reducing the need for further special attention. A few, however, may continue to manifest learning and behavior problems and require further special assistance, perhaps including specialized practices.

Exhibit 9.2
Array of Special Assistance

Concern	***In the Classroom***	***Outside the Classroom***
To provide student and learning supports as soon as a problem is recognized and to do so in the least disruptive way.	Where feasible, special assistance is implemented in the classroom. This is best accomplished by opening the door to invite in resource and student support staff and volunteers.	Outside assistance at school is provided as needed and available. Referrals elsewhere are made when necessary.
LEVELS		
Observable Factors Required for Effective Learning at School At this level, the focus remains on *directly* enabling acquisition of the basic knowledge, skills, and interests related to age-appropriate life and learning tasks (e.g., reading, inter- & intra-personal problem solving). It builds on personalized instruction, encompasses what often is called "prereferral" intervention, and uses accommodations and *responses to special assistance.*	A basic strategy at this level includes *reteaching* – but not with the same approach that has failed. Alternative strategies and modification of activities are used to improve the match with the learner's current levels of motivation and capability. To find the right match, a range of accommodations and technical moves are used to enhance motivation, sensory intake and processing, decision making, and output. Other strategies include problem solving conferences with parents and the student, expanding options and opportunities for decision making, and enhancing protective buffers and resilience.	Examples of interventions at this level include out-of-class tutoring, supportive and stress reduction counseling, parent training related to helping a student learn & perform, health and social services as needed for minor problems, enhancing protective buffers and resilience.
Missing Prerequisites **(i.e., the readiness gap)** Special assistance at this level focuses on identifying and *directly* enabling acquisition of developmental and motivational prerequisites (knowledge, skills, attitudes) in order to fill the readiness gap.	The more that a youngster has missed key learning opportunities, the more likely s/he has gaps in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed in the current grade. If the readiness gap is not filled, it grows. Where a readiness gap exists, teaching staff must be able to take the time to address the gap by identifying missing prerequisites and ensuring the student acquire them. Processes are the same as those used in facilitating learning related to current life tasks.	Examples at this level also include tutoring, supportive and stress reduction counseling, parent training, health and social services as needed for mild to moderate problems, and enhancing protective buffers and resilience. Students also may need special counseling to restore feelings of competence. self-determination, and relatedness to significant others.
Underlying Problems and Interfering Factors Special assistance at this level identifies severe and chronic problems (e.g., poor motivation, social and emotional dysfunctioning, faulty learning mechanisms). Then, the focus is on helping students overcome underlying deficiencies by correcting the problems (if feasible) or enabling learning and performance by providing accommodations and teaching strategies for coping and compensating.	Special assistance in the classroom at this level involves assessment of underlying problems and/or serious interfering factors and use of remedial, rehabilitative, and tertiary prevention strategies that are used in conjunction with ongoing personalized instruction.	At this level, the need is for intensive interventions designed to address barriers related to a host of external and internal risk factors and interventions for promoting healthy development (including a focus on resiliency and protective factors). In extreme cases, full time outside interventions may be required for a limited period of time.

Anticipated outcomes when special assistance is effectively implemented as an element of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable student and learning supports system – fewer behavior, emotional, and learning problems, enhanced positive social-emotional functioning, lower rates of unnecessary referral to special education, less visits to hospital emergency rooms, and fewer hospitalizations. Also reported are increased attendance, better grades, improved achievement and promotion to the next grade, reduced suspensions and expulsions, fewer dropouts, and increased graduation rates.

About the Sequence and Hierarchy

Special assistance is an extension of general efforts to facilitate learning. It is the struggle to find an appropriate match for learners having problems that mainly differentiates special classroom assistance from regular teaching. Proceeding in a sequential and hierarchical way emphasizes using the simplest, most direct, and noninvasive approaches whenever problems appear minor. Level, sequence, and specific practices are determined initially and on an ongoing basis by assessing a student's responses to special assistance. This is supplemented, as necessary, with more in-depth assessment to determine external and internal factors that are interfering with a student's learning and positive functioning.

While the focus may be on any of the three levels, the sequence and level differ depending on whether students have minor and occasional problems or have severe and pervasive problems. For learners with minor or occasional problems, the initial focus is on directly facilitating learning and performance related to immediate tasks and interests and on expanding the range of interests. The procedures involve (1) continued adaptation of methods to match and enhance levels of motivation and development and (2) reteaching specific skills and knowledge when students have difficulty.

If problems continue, the focus shifts to assessing and developing missing prerequisites (Level B) needed to function at the higher level. The emphasis is on essential "readiness" skills and attitudes. For example, individuals who have not learned to order and sequence events, follow directions, interact positively with peers, and so forth need to develop such skills to succeed at school. Similarly, if students don't see much point in learning the three Rs or other school subjects, motivational readiness must be engendered. As with all intervention, procedures are adapted to improve the match, and reteaching is used when the learner has difficulty. If missing prerequisites are successfully developed, the focus returns to observable factors (Level A).

If help with missing prerequisites (Level B) is not effective, the focus shifts to underlying interfering factors (Level C). These may be incompatible behaviors and interests and/or dysfunctional learning mechanisms. At this level, intervention stresses intensive and often specialized practices (e.g., clinical remediation, psychotherapy and behavior change strategies, medical and social services). This level includes

- direct actions to address major external/internal barriers to learning and behaving
- helping students strengthen themselves in areas of weakness or vulnerability
- helping students learn ways to compensate, as necessary, when confronted with barriers or areas of weakness
- using a range of ongoing accommodations, specialized techniques and technology

Because the range of empirically-proven practices is so limited, direct action at this level mainly encompasses a continuous process of trial and appraisal to find the best ways to help. This may involve working with family members, peers, and other school staff – counseling them away from actions that interfere with a student's progress and guiding them to helpful strategies. In pursuing underlying interfering factors, the intent is to move back up the hierarchy as soon as feasible.

Specific objectives at any level are formulated in discussions with the student (and key family members) to identify processes and outcomes the student values and perceives as attainable. Interventions are modified based on ongoing dialogues with the student that are informed by analyses of task performance.

Student Motivation Is a Major Consideration at All Times

- *Motivation is an antecedent concern* affecting intervention. Poor motivational readiness often is (a) a cause of inadequate and problem functioning, (b) a factor maintaining such problems, or (c) both. Thus, strategies are required that reduce avoidance motivation and enhance motivational readiness so that the student is mobilized to participate.
- *Motivation is an ongoing process concern.* Processes must elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation so that the student stays mobilized (e.g., strategies to counter boredom).
- *Enhancing intrinsic motivation is a basic outcome concern*. A student may be motivated to work on a problem during an intervention session but not elsewhere. Responding to this concern requires strategies to enhance stable, positive attitudes that mobilize the student to act outside the intervention context and after the intervention is terminated.

Similar motivational considerations arise in providing special assistance to a student's family. And, staff motivation warrants attention as well.

FRAMING AND DESIGNING INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENT AND FAMILY SPECIAL ASSISTANCE

Exhibit 9.3 offers a prototype framework to help schools plan the many learning support activities related to special assistance. As the Exhibit highlights, special assistance in and out of classrooms encompasses a wide range of activities. These include processes for providing all stakeholders with information clarifying available assistance and how to access help, facilitating requests for assistance, identifying and assessing problems, triaging in making referrals, planning and providing direct services, monitoring and managing care, managing resources, and interfacing with community outreach to fill gaps. The work also involves ongoing formative evaluations designed to improve quality, effectiveness, and efficiency.

With specific respect to severe and chronic problems and students mandated for special education programs, special assistance includes connecting what the school offers with whatever is available in the community and facilitating access. In implementing the activity, the emphasis is on enhancing a "system of care" and ensuring the special assistance is integrated with the other facets of the comprehensive system of learning supports.

Exhibit 9.3
Framework for Student and Family Special Assistance

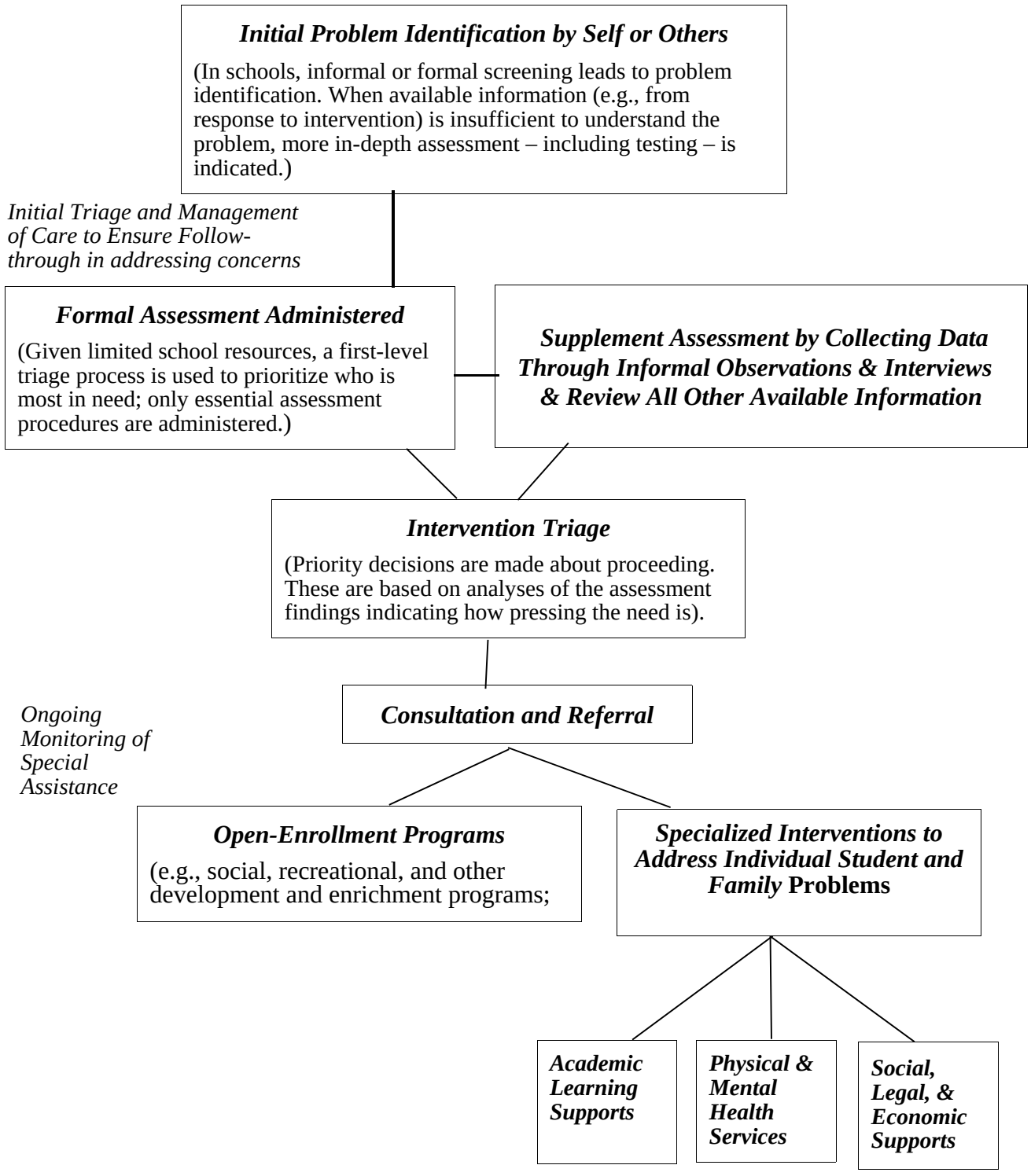
Activities	*Venue* In the Classroom*	Out of the Classroom**
Using responses to intervention (RtI) to initially identify and triage those who need such assistance		
Conducting additional assessment to the degree necessary – including diagnosis and planning of an Individual education program (IEP) when appropriate		
Providing consultation, triage, and referrals		
Conducting ongoing management of care		
Enhancing special assistance availability and quality		

*Provided by the school's teaching and/or student support staff

**Out of class special assistance may be provided at the school, at a district facility, and/or at a community facility. In some schools, professionals from the community have connected with schools to co-locate their agency services.

Efforts related to problem identification, triage, referral to and management of special assistance require developing and connecting each process systematically. Exhibit 9.4 highlights the connections.

Exhibit 9.4
Processes for Problem Identification, Triage, Referral, & Management of Interventions



Note: Proper application of special assistance involves ongoing assessment, information sharing, and care monitoring and management. These processes can be facilitated by a computerized information management system (with effective privacy safeguards).

WHAT ARE PRIORITIES IN ENHANCING STUDENT AND FAMILY SPECIAL ASSISTANCE?

This chapter along with the self-study survey in Appendix D provide aids for a workgroup charged with conducting a gap analyses and setting priorities related to strengthening special assistance. From our perspective, the overriding priorities are to establish strategies for doing less outside and more inside the classroom.

Doing Less Student and Family Special Assistance Outside the Classroom

Currently, most requests for special assistance outside the classroom ask student support staff (e.g., psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses) to address specific problems related to individual students and/or their families. Usually, the request is stimulated because a student is manifesting significant learning, behavior, and emotional problems. In some instances, the request is intended to generate an evaluation leading to special education. Indeed, over the years, such requests have led to an exponential escalation in the number of students designated as having a learning disability (LD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

As noted, transformation of student and learning supports aims at preventing and ameliorating many school-related learning, behavior, and emotional problems. The transformation stresses bringing student support staff into classrooms for part of each day so they can play a greater role in limiting the need for out-of-class services. One aim is to reduce the number of students with commonplace problems who are misdiagnosed and assigned to the special education population.

This is not to say that added assistance outside class is unnecessary. The point is to reduce overuse and misuse of specialized services, while maximizing appropriate attention to both external and internal barriers to learning and performance. Examples of appropriate use are cited in Exhibit 9.2.

Doing More Student and Family Special Assistance in the Classroom

Common priorities in enhancing special assistance in classrooms are expanding options, broadening accommodations, taking a comprehensive approach to response to intervention, and enhancing remedial strategies. A few words about each follow.

About Adding Learning Options. Every teacher knows the value of variety. Varied options are especially important in engaging and finding ways to re-engage students with low motivation for or negative attitudes about classroom learning and performance. Before some students will decide to participate in a proactive way, they have to perceive the learning environment as positively different – and quite a bit so – from the one they dislike.

A valued set of options and the opportunity for involvement in decision making helps foster student perceptions of having real choices and being self-determining and can help counter perceptions of coercion and control. Shifting such perceptions can reduce reactive misbehavior and enhance engagement in classroom learning.

Broadening Accommodations. Besides adding options, it is imperative to accommodate a wider range of behavior than usually is tolerated. For instance, classroom environments can be altered to better account for youngsters who are very active and/or distractable. This includes temporarily easing of certain behavioral expectations and standards for some of these students (e.g., widening limits on acceptable behavior for a time to minimize rule infringement).

Accommodative strategies are intended to enable a student to participate successfully. Such strategies improve the fit between what is expected and what a student values and believes is attainable with appropriate effort (see Exhibit 9.5).

Exhibit 9.5
Examples of Accommodation Recommendations

If students seem easily distracted, the following might be used:

- identify any specific environmental factors that distract students and make appropriate environmental changes
- have students work with a group that is highly task-focused
- let students work in a study carrel or in a space that is “private” and uncluttered
- designate a volunteer to help whenever students becomes distracted and/or start to misbehave, and if necessary, to help them make transitions
- allow for frequent "breaks"
- interact with students in ways that will minimize confusion and distractions (e.g., keep conversations relatively short; talk quietly and slowly; use concrete terms; express warmth and nurturance)

If students need more support and guidance, the following might be used:

- develop and provide sets of specific prompts, multisensory cues, steps, etc. using oral,written, and perhaps pictorial and color-coded guides as organizational aids related to specific learning activities, materials, and daily schedules
- ensure someone checks with students frequently throughout an activity to provide additional support and guidance in concrete ways (e.g., model, demonstrate, coach)
- support student efforts related to self-monitoring and self-evaluation and provide nurturing feedback keyed to student progress and next steps

If students have difficulty finishing tasks as scheduled, try the following:

- modify the length and time demands of assignments and tests
- modify the nature of the process and products (e.g., allow use of technological tools and allow for oral, audio-visual, arts and crafts, graphic, and computer generated products)

As noted, accommodations help establish a good match for learning. For students with significant learning, behavior, and emotional problems, interveners use many special accommodations. In fact, federal law (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) encourages schools to pursue a range of such accommodations when students’ symptoms significantly interfere with school learning but are not severe enough to qualify them for special education. See the following page for examples of the types of accommodations offered.

(cont.)

Exhibit 9.5 (cont.)
504 Accommodation Checklist

Various organizations concerned with special populations circulate lists of 504 accommodations. The following is one that was downloaded from website of a group concerned with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (see http://www.come-over.to/FAS/IDEA504.htm).

Physical Arrangement of Room

- seating student near the teacher
- seating student near a positive role model
- standing near student when giving directions/presenting lessons
- avoiding distracting stimuli (air conditioner, high traffic area)
- increasing distance between desks

• Lesson Presentation

- pairing students to check work
- writing key points on the board
- providing peer tutoring
- providing visual aids, large print, films
- providing peer notetaker
- making sure directions are understood
- including a variety of activities during each lesson
- repeating directions to student after they are given to the class: then have him/her repeat and explain directions to teacher providing written outline
- allowing student to tape record lessons
- having child review key points orally
- teaching through multi-sensory modes, visual, auditory, kinestetics, olfactory
- using computer-assisted instruction
- accompany oral directions with written directions for child to refer to blackboard or paper
- provide model to help students, post the model, refer to it often
- provide cross age peer tutoring
- to assist the student in finding the main idea underlying, highlighting, cue cards, etc.
- breaking longer presentations into shorter segments

Assignments/worksheets

- giving extra time to complete tasks
- simplifying complex directions
- handing worksheets out one at a time
- reducing the reading level of the assignments
- requiring fewer correct responses to achieve grade (quality vs. quantity)
- allowing student to tape record assignments/homework
- providing a structured routine in written form
- providing study skills training/learning strategies
- giving frequent short quizzes and avoiding long tests
- shortening assignments; breaking work into smaller segments
- allowing typewritten or computer printed assignments prepared by the student or dictated by the student and recorded by someone else if needed.
- using self-monitoring devices
- reducing homework assignments
- not grading handwriting
- student not be allowed to use cursive or manuscript writing
- reversals and transpositions of letters and numbers should not be marked wrong, reversals or transpositions should be pointed out for corrections
- do not require lengthy outside reading assignments
- teacher monitor students self-paced assignments (daily, weekly, bi-weekly)
- arrangements for homework assignments to reach home with clear, concise directions
- recognize and give credit for student's oral participation in class

Test Taking

- allowing open book exams
- giving exam orally
- giving take home tests
- using more objective items (fewer essay responses)
- allowing student to give test answers on tape recorder
- giving frequent short quizzes, not long exams
- allowing extra time for exam
- reading test item to student
- avoid placing student under pressure of time or competition

Organization

- providing peer assistance with organizational skills
- assigning volunteer homework buddy
- allowing student to have an extra set of books at home
- sending daily/weekly progress reports home
- developing a reward system for in-schoolwork and homework completion
- providing student with a homework assignment notebook

Behaviors

- use of timers to facilitate task completion
- structure transitional and unstructured times (recess, hallways, lunchroom, locker room, library, assembly, field trips, etc.)
- praising specific behaviors
- using self-monitoring strategies
- giving extra privileges and rewards
- keeping classroom rules simple and clear
- making "prudent use" of negative consequences
- allowing for short breaks between assignments
- cueing student to stay on task (nonverbal signal)
- marking student's correct answers, not his mistakes
- implementing a classroom behavior management system
- allowing student time out of seat to run errands, etc.
- ignoring inappropriate behaviors not drastically outside classroom limits
- allowing legitimate movement
- contracting with the student
- increasing the immediacy of rewards
- implementing time-out procedures

Besides individual accommodations, schools can make changes in how classrooms and instruction are organized. Looping is an example. This strategy involves the teacher moving with students from one grade to the next for one or more years. This accommodation can reduce student apprehension about a new school year and enables schools to provide more time for slower students. And, it ensures more time for relationship building and bonding between teachers and students and teachers and parents and among students. Other examples of procedural changes that can help accommodate a wider range of learner differences in motivation and development include blocking, blending, and flipping instruction and various uses of technology. Both academic and social benefits are reported for such practices.

About Response to Intervention (RtI). As a special assistance approach, RtI becomes a strategy for improving understanding of a student's problem and what to do about it (see Exhibit 9.6).

Exhibit 9.6
Example of Steps in a Special Assistance Approach to Response to Intervention

- Use individual conferences to find out more about the causes of a student's problems and what interventions to try.
- Keep the initial focus on building a positive working relationship with the youngster and family.
- Move on to ask about assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the student likes at school and in class).
- Ask about what the youngster doesn't like at school.
- Explore the reasons for "dislikes" (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the student embarrassed because others will think s/he doesn't have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)
- Clarify other likely causal factors.
- Explore what the youngster and those in the home think can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.).
- Discuss some new strategies the youngster and those in the home would be *willing* to try to make the situation better.
- Introduce some new learning and enrichment options with an emphasis on those that fit the student's specific interests and a deemphasis on areas that are not of interest. Analyze the response.
- If peers dislike the student, find ways for the youngster to have special, positive status in class and/or in others arenas around the school/community. (This not only can help counter a negative image among peers, but can reduce behavior problems and alleviate negative feelings about self and others.) Analyze the impact on learning and behavior.
- Enhance use of aides, volunteers, peer tutors/coaches, mentors, those in the home, etc. not only to help support student efforts to learn and perform, but to enhance the student's social support networks. Analyze the impact on learning and behavior.
- After trying all the above, add some tutoring specifically designed to enhance student engagement in learning and to facilitate learning of specific academic and social skills that are interfering with effective classroom performance and learning.

Over time, staff using RtI acquire an appreciation of what is likely to work with the student and what will not. Only after extensive efforts are pursued and proven unsuccessful in the classroom is it time to seek out-of-classroom support services. And, as such services are added, steps are required to ensure they are coordinated with what is going on in the classroom, school-wide, and at home.

About "Remediation." Remediation generally is used when students have difficulty learning or retaining what they have learned. Techniques and materials designated as remedial often appear quite different from those used in regular teaching. However, many remedial practices are simply adaptations of regular procedures and draw on general intervention principles and models. This is even the case with some packaged programs and materials especially developed for problem populations.

So what makes remedial instruction different?

The answer involves the following factors:

- *Sequence of application.* Remedial practices are pursued after the best available nonremedial practices prove inadequate.
- *Level of intervention focus.* Specialized psychoeducational procedures to facilitate learning may be applied at any of three levels noted in Exhibit 9.1.
- *Staff competence and time.* Probably the most important feature differentiating remedial from regular practices is the need for a competent professional who has time to provide one-to-one intervention. While special training does not necessarily guarantee such competence, remediation usually is done by staff who have special training. Establishing an appropriate match for learners with problems is difficult and involves a great deal of trial and appraisal. Additional time is essential in developing an understanding of the learner (strengths, weaknesses, limitations, likes, dislikes).
- *Content and outcomes.* Remedial efforts often add other content and outcome objectives to address missing prerequisites, faulty learning mechanisms, or interfering behaviors and attitudes.
- *Instructional and other intervention processes.* Remediation usually stresses an extreme application of instructional principles. Such applications may include reductions in levels of abstraction, intensification of the way stimuli are presented and acted upon, and increases in the amount and consistency of direction and support – including added reliance on other resources in the clasroom (e.g., paid aides, resource personnel, volunteers, peer tutors). Use of special settings outside regular classrooms is a last resort.
- *Resource costs.* Because of the factors described above, remediation is more costly than regular teaching (allocations of time, personnel, materials, space, and so forth).
- *Psychological Impact.* The features of remediation are highly visible to students, teachers, and others. Chances are such features are seen as "different" and stigmatizing. Thus, the psychological impact of remediation can have a negative component. The sensitive nature of remediation is another reason it should be implemented only when necessary and in ways that strive to produce positive perceptions all around.

In sum, what makes remedial strategies different is their rationale, the extreme degree and consistency with which they must be applied, and their application on levels of functioning other than current life tasks. What may make a remedial procedure work is that it puts aside practices a student has experienced as ineffective and replaces them with strategies that enhance motivation and match current capabilities.

SPECIAL ASSISTANCE FOR ADDRESSING CHRONIC BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

As noted in Chapter 4, a comprehensive approach to addressing misbehavior encompasses:

- efforts to prevent and anticipate misbehavior
- actions taken during misbehavior
- steps taken afterwards

However, because of the frequency with which students may be misbehaving, a school's focus usually is on reacting to deviant and devious behavior and ensuring a safe environment. In doing so, teachers and other school staff increasingly have adopted *discipline* and *classroom management* strategies that model behaviors which foster (rather than counter) development of negative values.

With growing awareness of the lack of effectiveness and the negative effects associated with widely used discipline practices, many schools are moving beyond applications of direct punishment. The trend is toward using positive approaches and "logical" and "fair" consequences in dealing with behavior problems.

From both a prevention and correction perspective, advocates for more positive approaches have called for various forms of special student training programs (e.g., *character education*, *emotional "intelligence" training*, positive behavior support initiatives, social skills training, mindfulness training). Besides reducing misbehavior, some of these approaches aim at enhancing personal responsibility (social and moral), integrity, self-regulation/self-discipline, a work ethic, appreciation of diversity, and positive feelings about self and others. Embedded throughout are calls for more home involvement, with emphasis on enhanced parent responsibility for their children's behavior and learning.

Are Special Training Programs the Answer?

Poor social-emotional development clearly is a widely identified concern (a correlate) and contributing factor in a wide range of educational, psychosocial, and mental health problems. Training programs to improve social-emotional learning and interpersonal problem solving are described as having promise both for prevention and correction. Reviewers of research are cautiously optimistic. Conclusions stress that individual studies show effectiveness, but the range of skills acquired remain limited; and so does the generalizability and maintenance of outcomes. This is the case for training of specific skills (e.g., what to say and do in a specific situation), general strategies (e.g., how to generate a wider range of interpersonal problem-solving options), as well as efforts to develop cognitive-affective orientations (e.g., empathy training). What training programs tend to pay insufficient attention to is the role engagement in instruction plays in determining behavior at school.

Addressing Chronic Misbehavior and Enhancing Engagement as Priorities

Specific discipline practices, training programs, and positive behavior initiatives usually stop short of ensuring the ongoing motivational engagement of students in classroom instruction. Engaging/re-engaging students productively in instruction is key not only to reducing misbehavior but to maintaining positive behavior. And the process requires understanding and addressing the causes of misbehavior, especially underlying motivation. Failure to attend effectively to underlying motivation leads to approaching passive and often hostile students with practices that can instigate and exacerbate problems.

Consider students who spend most of the day trying to avoid all or part of the instructional program. An intrinsic motivational interpretation of the avoidance behavior of many of these youngsters is that it reflects their perception that school is not a place they experience a sense of competence, self-determination, and/or relatedness to significant others. Indeed, too often, the experience results in feelings of incompetence, loss of autonomy, and adverse relationships. Over time, the negative perceptions develop into strong motivational dispositions and related patterns of misbehavior.

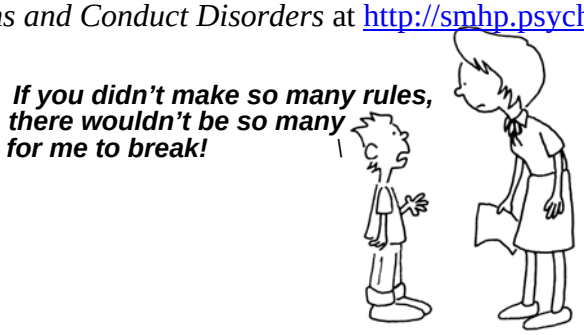
Analyses point to many school conditions that can have a negative impact on a student's motivation. Examples of such conditions include: excessive rules, criticism, and confrontation; processes that the student perceives as unchallenging, uninteresting, over-demanding, or overwhelming; structure that seriously limits options or that is over-controlling and coercive. Misbehavior at school often is reactive to such conditions. That is, individuals can be *expected* to react. This is particularly true for students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

So, it is essential to understand that a great deal of school misbehavior is motivated by students' efforts to cope, defend, avoid, and protest in reaction to aversive experiences (e.g., to protect themselves against situations in which they feel coerced to participate and/or cannot cope effectively). The actions may be direct or indirect and include defiance, physical and psychological withdrawal, and diversionary tactics.

Of course, misbehavior can also reflect *approach motivation*. Noncooperative, disruptive, and aggressive behavior patterns that are *proactive* can feel rewarding and satisfying to a youngster because the behavior itself is exciting or because the behavior leads to desired outcomes (e.g., peer recognition, feelings of competence or autonomy). Intentional negative behavior stemming from approach motivation can be viewed as *pursuit of deviance*.

In addressing students manifesting chronic misbehavior, intrinsic motivational theory suggests different approaches for reactive and proactive actions. In both instances, however, interventions to reduce reactive and proactive behavior problems generally begin with major changes in the school environment designed to minimize reactivity.

Special assistance for those misbehaving reactively require steps designed to reduce reactance and enhance positive motivation for participating in an intervention. For youngsters highly motivated to pursue deviance (e.g., those who proactively engage in criminal acts), even more is needed. Intervention might focus on helping these youngsters identify and follow through on a range of valued, socially appropriate alternatives to deviant activity. Such alternatives must be capable of producing greater feelings of self-determination, competence, and relatedness than usually result from the youngsters' deviant actions. To these ends, motivational analyses of the problem can point to corrective steps for implementation by teachers, student support staff, other professionals, parents, or students themselves. (For more resources on this, see the Center's Quick Find entitled: *Behavior Problems and Conduct Disorders* at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3022_01.htm.)



A Cautionary Note about Special Assistance

Too many schools tend to redefine and constrict the curriculum for individuals identified as needing special assistance. For example, remedial programs often focus primarily on students deficits. Always working on one's problems and trying to catch up can be grueling. It takes tremendous motivation to spend day in and day out mostly working on problems. Moreover, restricting opportunities can delay development in areas not included and risks making the whole school experience rather deadening.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS FOR CHAPTER 9

Transforming how schools provide special assistance to students and families is critical for improving student and learning supports and thus is an essential facet of enhancing equity of opportunity. From the school's perspective, the aim is to provide special assistance in ways that increase the likelihood that a student will be more successful at school, while also reducing the need for teachers to seek special programs and services.

Without a systematic approach to special assistance, referral processes become flooded, and the capability of providing effective help for many students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems is undermined. By developing a systematic approach to special assistance, schools can play a greater role in social and emotional development and embrace a holistic and family-centered orientation.

And in a real sense, special assistance as a facet of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports is fundamental to enhancing classroom and school climate and developing a family- and community-oriented school.

For more specific examples of ways to enhance *Student and Family Special Assistance*, see the self-study survey in Appendix D. (Also accessible at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/studentfamilysurvey.pdf**)**

For Free and Easily Accessed Online Resources Related to
Student and Family Special Assistance

In the Classroom

See *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling*
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/cfe.pdf

Out of the Classroom

See our Center's *Practitioner's Tool Box*
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/toolbox.htm

See our Center's Quick Find on *Case/Care Management*
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/casemanagment.htm

Also see related topics listed on the Quick Find menu
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm

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