Prereferral Interventions

School violence, poor academic performance, misbehavior in class -- with increasing numbers of students identified as troubled or in trouble, schools must design systems for intervening prior to referral for special assistance. Otherwise, the system will grind to a halt. A prereferral intervention process delineates steps and strategies to guide teachers. The following is one example:

(1) **Formulate an initial description of the problem.**

(2) **Get the youngster's view of what's wrong and, as feasible, explore the problem with the family.**

As every teacher knows, the causes of learning, behavior, and emotional problems are hard to analyze. What looks like a learning disability or an attentional problem may be emotionally-based. Misbehavior often arises in reaction to learning difficulties. What appears as a school problem may be the result of problems at home. The following are some things to consider in seeking more information about what may be causing a youngster's problem.

(a) Through enhanced personal contacts, build a positive working relationship with the youngster and family.

(b) Focus first on assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the youngster likes at school and in class).

(c) Ask about what the youngster doesn't like at school.

(d) Explore the reasons for “dislikes” (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the youngster embarrassed because others will think s/he does not have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)

(e) Explore other possible causal factors.

(f) Explore what the youngster and those in the home think can be done to make better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.).

(g) Discuss some new things the youngster and those in the home would be willing to try to make the situation better.

(3) **Try new strategies in the classroom** -- based on the best information about what is causing the problem.

(4) **If the new strategies don't work, talk to others** at school to learn about approaches they find helpful (e.g., reach out for support/mentoring/coaching, participate with others in clusters and teams, observe how others teach in ways that effectively address differences in motivation and capability, request additional staff development on working with such youngsters).

(5) **If necessary, use the school’s referral processes** to ask for additional support services.

(6) **Work with referral resources to coordinate your efforts with theirs** for classroom success.