Claremont Unified School District
Student Success Team (SST)
Frequently Asked Questions

**Just what is the Student Success Team?**
The Student Success Team, formerly Student Study Team, is a positive school-wide early identification and early intervention process. As a team, the student, parents, teachers, school administrator and other related staff, work to identify the student’s learning strengths and needs, upon which an improvement plan can be designed.

As a regular school process, the SST develops recommendations, based on teacher/school concerns, that will facilitate the student’s success within his or her current program. Concerns are seen as obstacles to student success and not descriptors of the student or his or her character. The Team creates a plan with measureable, targeted interventions assigned to the student, the teacher(s), and the parents intended to support and encourage academic growth and a positive learning experience. Follow-up meetings are planned as needed to provide a continuous casework management strategy to maximize the student’s success.

**Is the SST process mandated?**
California Education Code 56303 states, “A pupil shall be referred for special educational instruction and services only after the resources of the regular education program have been considered and, where appropriate, utilized.” The SST develops recommendations that facilitate the student’s success within his/her regular education program. It is only after those interventions have not been successful that the SST would refer for evaluation to determine if the student requires special educational instruction and services.

**Why go through the SST process?**
The SST process supports regular education teachers as they work with struggling students to identify their needs prior to the referral for evaluation of more specialized instructional supports. The 1997 re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) emphasized that students with disabilities should receive the maximum time appropriate in the regular classroom.

The SST also serves as the primary portal of entry to determine the need for evaluation to assess eligibility for Section 504 Accommodation Plans and Special Education services. The SST process helps teachers to develop interventions to assist the student. Specific areas of concern are identified; information is gathered through observation, interview, review of school records and informal assessment.

The SST develops new strategies to help address the concerns. For example, a teacher may implement a behavior contract for a child who has difficulty maintaining appropriate classroom behavior and completing classroom assignments. Classroom teachers and parents implement these strategies for several weeks. The SST then reconvenes to assess the student's progress.
If the interventions are not successful, however, the SST may refer the student to the school Guidance Team who would determine if evaluation for a Section 504 Accommodation Plan or Special Education eligibility is appropriate.

**Who makes up the SST?**
Membership varies from school to school. At the elementary level, there is typically an SST coordinator who leads the meeting, takes notes and makes sure the appropriate staff are present. You, as the parent/guardian, are encouraged to be a part of the SST. Of course, your student’s teacher would be there and perhaps other teachers from previous and/or future grade levels. Most elementary schools will also invite an administrator, usually the principal, and potentially other support staff (such as a school counselor, school psychologist, day-care director, etc.)

At the secondary level, the SST is usually run by your student’s Guidance Counselor as an administrative designee. In addition to you, as the student’s parent/guardian, the student’s teachers may be invited as well as any other support staff that are appropriate to that meeting (such as other teachers, special education teachers, the school nurse or school psychologist).

**Who may request an SST?**
The expertise of the SST is for the benefit of the entire school. Any unresolved problem that impedes learning may merit a request to the SST by a teacher, administrator, parent or student. Typically, the student’s teacher will initiate a meeting with the parent/guardian to discuss his/her concerns about the student’s progress. Other times, the parent/guardian might request a parent/teacher conference in response to a school concern. Together, you will come up with strategies to address those concerns. If, after a sufficient period of time to implement the strategies, the concerns persist, the student’s teacher initiates the referral to the SST for more support.

**What happens at an SST meeting?**
The SST works hard to maintain a positive, student-focused environment. The meeting usually begins with a statement from the parent/guardian (as well as other members present who know the student) about the student’s strengths in any area. Identifying these strengths are extremely important in brainstorming possible intervention strategies; building off of what the student is already good at to increase the chances for his/her success.

Following the conversation about the student’s strengths, relevant background information is discussed. At this time any important education information (like retention or previous school attendance), family information (such as changes in the family structure, primary caregivers, etc.) and health information (any medical conditions that may impact the student’s academic success) is discussed. The parent/guardian is asked to complete a Background Information form prior to the SST meeting so that this information is readily available to the team. Following the SST, all documents including the Background Information form would be placed in the student’s confidential educational record.
At this point, the team members discuss the main concerns that brought the student to the SST. The team brainstorms different strategies to address these concerns and creates a timeline for implementing and monitoring the strategies. The SST will discuss if a follow up meeting is necessary to review the student’s progress and determine the need for future intervention.

**What is my role in the SST as a parent/guardian?**
You know your student best. Therefore, your insight into his/her background and behaviors at home is a critical part of viewing the whole child. Prior to the first SST meeting, you may be asked to complete a Background Information form about your student. Please complete this information and either return it to the school before the meeting or have it ready to share at that first SST; the school will let you know their policy. Next, be prepared to share your perception of your student’s strengths in any area as well as any concerns you have. The SST will ask for your input about what you have successfully tried to help your student. Historically, the SST is most successful when the teacher(s) and parents work together to set similar expectations for behavior and learning for the student. The school will send home a pamphlet for parents/guardians about the SST process prior to the first SST meeting which you can review for additional information.

**Must a parent/guardian be present at an SST for their child?**
Parents/guardians are invited to all SST meetings regarding their student and strongly encouraged to attend. However, if a parent/guardian cannot attend, the SST meeting can take place without parent consent and the SST plan can be implemented (except where parent consent is required, such as in the case of screenings or evaluation or change to the general education program). When the parent/guardian is absent, SST notes will be sent home and placed in the student’s confidential educational record.

**What kinds of recommendations come out of an SST?**
The SST is a brainstorming process used to generate recommendations for addressing the specific teacher and parent concerns about the student. Therefore, recommendations are unique to the individual student and vary case by case. However, the SST might recommend different instructional strategies not yet tried by the teacher, or homework strategies not yet tried by the parent. Sometimes, the SST will refer the teacher and/or parent to other support systems where available, such as school-based counseling, academic intervention programs or after-school tutoring. On occasion, the SST may recommend that a specialist conduct a screening in the area of concern, such as attention or speech, at no cost to the parent. If there are health-related concerns, the SST may recommend that the parent/guardian look into further supports available through community resources. As a last resort, the SST can refer the student to the school Guidance Team for consideration of a special education assessment.

**Is parental consent required for screenings and evaluations?**
The parent/guardian must give their consent for any screening, evaluation or participation in a program that will remove their student from their regular education program. However, the SST may request additional hearing and vision screenings; because these are given to every student in a particular grade they would not require parental consent.
On occasion, the SST may request a screening of the student’s abilities/skills in a particular area (such as attention or speech). With parent consent, these screenings are conducted by a specialist working for the school district who has expertise in that area. The results are shared with parent/guardian, the SST and become a part of the student’s cumulative educational record. The screening is not an assessment for special education and does not result in a change of the student’s academic placement.

**Can the SST refer students for evaluation for special education consideration?**

Yes, but only after several important decision criteria are met: 1) that reasonable classroom interventions of sufficient duration have been carefully attempted, without success; and 2) that the cause of the problem is suspected to be a disability that cannot be resolved without special education services.

**Do all referrals for special education need to go through the SST?**

Generally speaking, all referrals should go through the SST referral process. The SST interventions can be bypassed for students for whom it would be detrimental or for students whose difficulty is so severe or so unusual as to render the SST of no help. This is a decision to be made by the school with parent input. The referral from the SST goes to the school’s Guidance Team who reviews the student’s records and interventions to date. The Guidance Team informs the parent/guardian of the decision to evaluate for special education (and obtains parent consent for the evaluation) or explains why the referral is not appropriate at that time.

**How do you know that the SST is effective and not just delaying the special education evaluation process?**

Many factors can show success of the SST process, from teacher/parent satisfaction to pre/post student performance. As a problem-solving process, the SST is a crucial step prior to special education referral to make sure all that can be tried within the general education environment, has been tried. Only those students who have not shown a positive response to the SST intervention strategies should be referred for special education assessment. These students are likely to require special education support as all else has been unsuccessful. One way to determine the effectiveness of the SST process at a school site is the placement rate for initial referrals to special education. An eighty percent placement rate is considered extremely good and indicates a highly successful process.

**Glossary of Terms**

**Accommodations** – adaptations made by the classroom teacher(s) and other school staff to enable the student to benefit from their educational program.

**Continuous Casework Management** – On-going monitoring of the student’s response to interventions. A case manager, such as the student’s teacher, Guidance Counselor, or the school’s SST Coordinator, would track the student’s progress and make recommendations about the need for continued support.
Early Identification/Intervention – preventive intervention services for students (typically in the early elementary grades) that are designed to help students be successful in their regular academic program prior to referral to determine eligibility for special education services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the law that provides service and support to children with disabilities throughout the US. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to US children. IDEA, ensures that children with disabilities receive a “free appropriate public education” (FAPE). This means that schools will provide Students who are eligible (have a disability) with specialize supports/instruction that will address their academic needs in the least restrictive environment.

Intervention – a method of academic and/or behavioral support used to provide early, systematic assistance to children who are having difficulty learning.

Section 504 Accommodation Plan - The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that guarantees specific rights in federally funded programs and activities to people who qualify as disabled. Section 504 states, “No otherwise qualified disabled individual in the United States...shall, solely by reason of a disability be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

Special Education - Special education is governed by federal law in most educational jurisdictions. Under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Special Education is defined as: "Specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.”

Specialized Instructional Supports – Services and programs under the auspices of special education intended to meet the specific educationally-related needs of an individual with a disability.