

Hopkinton Public Schools

Learning Support Teams & Learning Support Process

Introduction

The Hopkinton Public School System is committed to providing an excellent education to all students. We recognize that students have diverse learning styles and needs. Instruction needs to be varied according to these diverse learning styles and needs. For some students, particular instructional styles or classroom accommodations can be identified as helpful or an important support. The Learning Support Team at each school is a group of professional staff members that comes together to identify strategies and accommodations that will assist a teacher or teachers and a student when a learning or school difficulty has been identified that cannot be sufficiently addressed by the teacher alone. The team may consist of teachers, administrators, specialists, counselors, or any staff member who either knows the student or has expertise in the suspected area of difficulty or knowledge of the types of regular education assistance available.

A New Name and New Concept

Learning Support Team is a name adopted by the school system in February 2002 to represent a process that has changed in order to encompass new Massachusetts laws (Ch. 71, Section 38Q1/2 and Ch. 71, Section 59C). These laws require each school district to identify how it will make regular education accommodations and resources available to students with diverse learning needs who do not qualify for services or accommodations under special education law or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Similar processes have existed in this district and in other districts for many years. These programs have been named Pre-referral, Child Study, Building-Based Support Teams, Student-Teacher Assistance Teams and, in Hopkinton, TACT Team and STEP Process.

Accommodation Plans

Learning Support Teams are part of a program that includes a District Accommodation Plan and a Building Accommodation Plan in each school. The new laws cited above require these plans. These plans detail the regular education resources, programs, and accommodations available to students at each school. The plans also describe how the District is providing continuous training to teachers and other staff in the art and skills of teaching students with diverse learning styles and needs. The School Council must be an active partner of the school in developing the Curriculum Accommodation Plan, reviewing it regularly, and helping to match it to the needs of students.

Consistency

The Learning Support Team and the Learning Support Process will be essentially consistent among all of our schools. There will be some variations on forms and process only when it makes good educational sense due to the different developmental needs of students in different age groups. The process will be the same for all elementary schools (K-5). An important product

of consistency will be easier and more effective communication for parents, students, and staff as students move up through the school system.

Purpose

The Learning Support Process (LSP) is a framework that:

1. provides an opportunity to differentiate between students who can be helped through accommodations, strategies and resources in the regular classroom and those who may require the more comprehensive evaluation, and specialized instruction and other resources provided by special education or the accommodations and modifications or services required by a §504 plan.
2. provides strategies and resources necessary to reduce or avert learning difficulties or behavioral problems, lessening their impact and preventing them from becoming a disability to the student
3. provides needed accommodations and strategies to students who have learning needs and do not qualify under Special Education or §504. Additionally, the LST process can help students with different learning styles and/or preferences to better succeed in the classroom
4. helps to identify learner characteristics, learning strengths and weaknesses, and helpful accommodations that will be valuable if and when the student needs to be evaluated for a suspected disability
5. supports parent/school communication and collaboration around learning and school difficulties by sharing school and home observations and other information
6. makes effective referrals for evaluation of disabilities under the special education laws or Section 504 when needed and strengthens these evaluations by contributing information, observations and the results of collaboration among staff and parents around the learning or school issues

Referral to the Learning Support Team

Learning difficulties are usually identified first by the classroom teacher and parent. Very often, the teacher, working with the parent, can adjust instruction or make accommodations that help to remedy a problem. Teachers will also seek advice from administrators and specialists, other teachers and sometimes mentor teachers when they identify a student who is having difficulties. Parent and teacher can determine the success of adjustments and accommodations.

If these initial efforts prove unsuccessful in helping the student, the teacher, in consultation with the parent, will refer the issue to the school's Learning Support Team. The parent will provide information to the school staff that may be needed as part of the LST process.

How Is A Referral Made?

There is a standard referral form used by school staff. The form provides the reason for referral and other basic information. An initial meeting of the LST is scheduled within fifteen school days from the date of referral. The gathering of information begins immediately. The parent/guardian will be asked to complete a Parent Input Form. This form provides information

that the school may not have, including health information, and gives opportunity for the parent/guardian to fully describe parent observations and concerns. Parents/Guardians may be asked to come to an initial or subsequent LST meeting. The teacher or staff member completes a Teacher Input/Referral Form that includes educational history, classroom observations, and information about performance and learning. It includes a reason for referral if the teacher is making the referral. The teacher will also provide information about the strategies that have been tried and which seem to be at least partially successful in resolving the problem. In some instances, a specialist may be asked to do a screening for a disability or an achievement test in order to get current objective information about the student. Parent/guardian permission for screening or testing will be obtained in these instances.

What Happens at a Meeting of the LST?

The LST may have three or more team members. Staff with particular expertise may be asked to attend only selected meetings or to provide written reports about screening results or test results. Parents and guardians are invited to participate in LST meetings. An LST may have a preliminary meeting to assemble data before a parent is invited, but no educational decisions will be made until there is a meeting in which the parent has opportunity to be present.

Initially, all the information that has been gathered will be reviewed and discussed. Team members and parent, if present, will seek to determine causes of the problem if this is possible. The team will then discuss possible solutions or interventions in the form of accommodations. The team will consider what additional information is needed presently and what additional information may be needed at a later point.

Each LST meeting will have one or more of the following outcomes:

1. Implement (try) one or more accommodations for a set period of time– set meeting date to evaluate success.
2. Arrange for additional information to be gathered that is needed for decision-making– set meeting date to receive information and take further action.
3. Determine that accommodations have been successful and problem is resolved or progressing toward resolution– set meeting to confirm continued progress.
4. Determine that problem has resolved– student is “released” from LST process. An LST Plan may be written at this time and a review date may be assigned to it.
5. Determine that accommodations and strategies have not been successful and that the student will be referred for evaluation (disability under special education or §504).
6. Determine that a student who has been evaluated for a disability but has not qualified under special education or §504 should have an LST Plan and write that plan incorporating helpful accommodations. A review date may be set.

A record of all LST meeting decisions is made and kept for the duration in which the student is involved with the process. Decisions are kept on the form titled *Learning Support Team Summary Sheet*. A summary is provided to the parent/guardian after each meeting.

Time Frame

The LST process does not have a prescribed time frame. Generally speaking, six to eight weeks are required to try and to assess new accommodations. Some students may be referred immediately for evaluation when a disability is suspected and its impact is substantially affecting

progress. For other students, slow but steady progress with accommodations may warrant a period somewhat longer than eight weeks.

Under Massachusetts law, a parent or guardian can request a special education evaluation at any time. The school district must then comply with timeframes established by regulation (See Parents' Rights Brochure available from the Student Services Office or at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/parents/prights.pdf>).

Forms and Records

Forms are used to maintain consistency in the Learning Support Process and to ensure that needed information is available. This is a list of forms that may be used as part of the process. The student's LST record will include the forms that are used and any additional information that is gathered, including reports by educational practitioners, medical practitioners, grade reports, letters requested of others and other pertinent information. All such records are part of the student's temporary record and governed by state and federal (FERPA) laws and regulations pertaining to student records.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, P.L. 93-380,

Amended P.L. 113-382, 1994

M.G.L. 66:10 71:34A,B,D,E

Board of Education Student Record Regulations adopted 2/10/77
and June 1995.

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