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Building Efficacy Of Student Study Teams (BESST)

By

Brenda Carrillo

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Professor Jabari Mahiri
Professor Valerie B. Shapiro

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BUILDING EFFICACY OF STUDENT STUDY TEAMS (BESST)

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By

Brenda Carrillo

Abstract

Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams (B.E.S.S.T.)

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Professor Bernard Gifford, Chair

Minority students underperform academically when compared to their White counterparts. In response to this phenomenon, various prevention strategies have been implemented. Student Study Teams (SSTs) reflect one such strategy. SSTs are site-based proactive problem-solving teams, charged with marshaling systematic, evidence-based interventions and supports for struggling students. Yet, SSTs are vastly misunderstood, affecting efficacy of implementation. Indeed SSTs are often deficit-based and reflect disproportionality in terms of referrals and placement of minority students.

Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams (BESST) is a professional learning series created to improve SST practices by guiding middle school counselors through a reflective and iterative tool development process, resulting in the construction of an SST Handbook. Counselor engagement in the process and task of developing an SST Handbook was expected to enhance understanding of effective SSTs as strengths- based interventions and to raise awareness of effective implementation. Findings of BESST may assist in revealing important information to leverage SSTs as effective interventions for struggling students by increasing counselor awareness and expertise of essential elements of effective SSTs, including how to identify student strengths. This design study is centered on action research and includes two primary research elements, evaluation of the design outcome and assessment of the design process.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

When I was a little girl my father repeatedly encouraged me to attend college and get a good degree. This was important to him as an immigrant to the United States who saw the value in education. I decided early on in life that I would realize this dream and here I am many years later, fulfilling this promise.

This accomplishment was only obtained with a great deal of sacrifice, support and commitment of many, including my family and friends.

I would like to thank my son, Kris, for believing in me and understanding as I spent hundreds of hours at my desk, rather than with him. Thank you for the gift of time and for teaching me invaluable lessons that have made me a better person. I could not ask for a more special son.

I would like to thank Frank, who supported me in many ways throughout this process. Thank you for being at my side for much of this journey, calming me, encouraging me and keeping me focused.

Thank you to my family, who I neglected for the last four years. Mom, dad, sister, brother, nephews and others…your positive energy and support was felt, even across the miles.

I would not be here today without the support of my advisor and committee chairs. Dr. Gifford, my dissertation Chair, provided guidance and structure that informed my writing and thinking in many ways, beyond the scope of my dissertation. Many of the best ideas in this dissertation emerged around Dr. Gifford's kitchen table on Saturday mornings. Thank you Dr. Gifford for your time, support and expertise-I could not have asked for a better advisor. Dr. Shapiro afforded opportunities to expand and share my research in many ways that I could not have imagined. Thank you Dr. Shapiro for the extra time and support that you provided. Dr. Mahiri showed strong interest in my dissertation topic and was supportive of my efforts. I feel fortunate to have been supported by such a wise and expert group of researchers and experts.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

CHAPTER 1: DESIGN CHALLENGE AND THE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE BASE

Introduction

Across the nation, students of color underperform academically when compared with their White counterparts (Valencia, 2010; Walberg, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Over the last several decades, polices such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) have been designed to address differential achievement between students, based on race as well as other factors, by providing additional services and educational opportunities for at-risk student populations (Fusarelli, 2004; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). One strategy commonly used in schools to provide early intervention and support to struggling students are pre-referral teams. These teams, often called Student Study Teams (SSTs), are meant to prevent inappropriate referrals of students to special education programs by meeting their needs in the general education setting whenever possible. SSTs are required in many states, yet minority students continue to be overrepresented in special education programs, and the achievement gap persists. In the following section I frame the problem from a macro level perspective, describe the problem more specifically as it affects practice, and provide a context for how this issue manifests within the particular middle school setting of study, School J.

I. DESIGN CONTEXT: THE NEED FOR B.E.S.S.T.

It is well documented that students of color are overrepresented in special education programs (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado & Chung, 2008; Howard, Dryden & Johnson 1999; Knoteck, 2003a; Harry & Klinger, 2014; Dykes, 2008). Some researchers argue that this disparity is due to deficit-based educational practices and systems that create inequitable learning opportunities for minority students (Harry & Klinger, 2014). Indeed, children are often referred to special education because they are perceived to be too difficult to serve, fail to meet the normative standards, or do not fit into a prescribed schedule of personal and academic development (Barr,

1981; Varenne & McDermott, 1995; Harry & Klinger, 2014; Howard et al., 1999). Once referred to special education programs, students of color make poor academic gains and are exited from those programs at a lower rate than their White peers (Blanchett, 2006).

A recent effort to address minority disproportionality within special education is to offer students who struggle to learn comprehensive and targeted supports within the general education setting, before considering a special education program (Burns & Symington, 2002; Dykes, 2008; Knoteck, 2003b). Targeted interventions are often provided via a pre-referral process, typically called a Student Study Team (SST). An SST is made up of teachers, counselors, the student, and parent or guardian, who meet to problem-solve and create a plan of support for the student. An SST is meant to serve as a positive early identification and intervention process, whereby evidence-based strategies are used to support students. By offering proactive, research validated and strengths based interventions to prevent school failure SSTs can reduce the number of inappropriate referrals and biased placements of students to special education (Knoteck, 2003a; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom & Stecker, 1990 as cited in Myers & Kline, 2001; www.cde.org).

Despite the widespread use of SSTs in schools, and the potential positive influence and impact of SSTs on student outcomes (Gregory, 2010; Lane, Mahdavi, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003; Powers, 2001; Dykes, 2008; Burns & Symington, 2002), some research indicates that SSTs have not significantly reduced the number of students referred to and placed in special education settings (Dykes, 2008; Flugum & Reschly, 1994; Powers, 2001). Three reasons this may occur are: lack of understanding of SSTs, adherence to deficit-based practices, and limited use of evidence-based interventions.

Firstly, while the literature points to the fact that SSTs are most effective when there is a standardized process that is well understood by all stakeholders (Truscott, 2005; Flugum & Reschly, 1994), the function, quality, and implementation of SSTs vary greatly (Truscott, 2005; Flugum &

Reschly, 1994; Powers, 2001), and SSTs tend to be implemented with little standardization or adherence to best practices (Truscott, 2005; Flugum & Reschly, 1994). A nationwide study by Truscott and colleagues found that while 86% of states mandate SSTs, they provide little guidance on best practices for SSTs (2005). In fact, SSTs are described as one of the most inconsistent activities in education (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, & Cook, 2003 as cited in Burns, Peters, & Noell, 2008). Accordingly, an SST tool to build awareness of best practices and promote skill acquisition in implementing SSTs, paired with training, may positively affect efficacy of SSTs.

Secondly, SSTs may not be as effective as desired, as SST members tend to engage in deficit-based practices that locate problems within the student and family rather than within the educational environment (Knoteck, 2003a). Though identifying negative behaviors and risk factors may be a necessary element of the SST process, a sole focus on negative predictors fails to delineate pro-social expectations of students and ultimately may produce ineffective interventions (Benson, 2003 as cited in Edwards, Mumford & Serra-Roldan, 2007). Further, a focus on student deficits fails to consider a wider range of options that identify and foster student strengths (Moore, 1989; Harry and Klinger, 2007; Edwards, et al., 2007). Conversely, a focus on student strengths has the potential to improve outcomes by promoting social emotional competencies that reinforce learning and school success (Edwards, et al., 2007; Huebner & Hills, 2011; Geltner & Leibforth, 2008). Accordingly, identifying and developing student assets in the SST process may reduce the number of students placed in special education programs (Edwards, et al., 2007).

Thirdly, SSTs lack efficacy due to practitioners receiving little training on effective interventions. SSTs are meant to offer targeted and research based strategies, specific to the students needs, and lack of training on such interventions interferes with the intention behind the SST process. Therefore, practitioners need additional information on research-based interventions to inform progress monitoring.

Existing research points to the fact that systemic and comprehensive training protocols can assist SSTs to function more effectively by focusing on intervention and prevention, rather than student failure (Powers, 2001; Bartels & Mortenson, 2006; Flugum & Reschly, 1994). Gravois found that when teachers received assistance and found success in classroom level interventions, they began to see classrooms interventions, rather than students themselves, as key to student success (2006). Further, Donovan and Nickerson found that inclusion of student strengths reduced deficit-based thinking (2007). Despite the fact that a focus on strengths can be positive, there is little guidance on how to integrate social emotional learning assessments and data into school-based interventions (Maras, Thompson, Lewis, Thornburg, and Hawks, 2014). Thus, there is promise in developing a tool that will promote awareness and skill acquisition in the areas of effective SST processes and student strengths as a means to guide more effective implementation.

This study is founded on a tool development process and has three learning outcomes. One learning outcome is to increase counselor understanding and expertise, through engagement in a change process, so that praxis may be shifted to incorporate best practices. The second learning outcome is to help counselors better identify and develop student assets on SST Plans, using a social emotional learning assessment, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). The third learning outcome is to create an SST Handbook to help guide SST practices. The SST tool will serve as an instructional manual and provide a routine for implementation of SSTs so that counselors can exercise greater efficiency and expertise in this area (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Overall, the proposed design aims to help counselors become more knowledgeable about SSTs and more adept at distinguishing student strengths within the SST process. Increased attention to effective implementation of SSTs and a focus on student strengths within the SST process holds promise for shifting deficit practices and improving outcomes for students. Given that SSTs can have a significant impact on student lives, increased attention to efficacy in these areas is critical.

The district of study utilizes SSTs, implemented by school counselors, as a pre-referral process for consideration of placement in alternative or special education programs. However, the problem of practice is that SSTs are inconsistently carried out given that counselors are unfamiliar with the intent of SSTs, do not receive training, and lack tools to guide effective implementation. Preliminary data collected via interviews, surveys, and document review, provide evidence that district SSTs are inconsistently implemented (disproportionately serving minority students) and lack a focus on student assets. For instance, at a counselor retreat in October 2014, counselors discussed the need to establish a formalized SST process, given the variability in understanding and implementation. Counselor teams (by site) completed a questionnaire and based on the results, it was clear that there was little consistency in SST practices. Additionally, several counselors shared that they were confused about what types of meetings qualified as SSTs versus meeting with parents and teachers. Finally, the district lacks SST protocols and training, thus each counselor is responsible for independently developing and implementing an SST process.

There is also evidence that minority students are disproportionately referred to SSTs district-wide. Results of data collected for all secondary schools for the 2014-15 school year, indicated that minority students were over represented across all middle school sites. Table 1 highlights findings by ethnicity, for the school of study (School J) with respect to the twenty-five students referred to SSTs in 2014-15, by ethnicity.

Table 1.1: Students Referred to SSTs at School J

GROUP	Students Referred to SST at School J (2014-15) Population by Ethnicity (#)	Population by Ethnicity (%)	SST's by Ethnicity (#)	SST's by Ethnicity (%)	SST Population by Ethnicity (%)
Black or African American	31	2.7%	4	16%	12.9
Hispanic or Latino	104	9.3%	2	8.0%	1.9
Asian	304	27%	2	8.0%	.6
White	580	52%	15	60%	2.5
Mixed	72	6.5%	1	4.0%	1.3
Pacific Islander	13	1.1%	0	0	0
Am. Indian/Alaskan	10	.89%	1	4.0%	.1
Total	1114	100%	25	100%	2.2

Source: Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) Plan: Published 2014-15

Data in Table 1.1 indicate that while African-American students made up only 2.7% of the school population, they represented 16% of students referred to SSTs during the 2014-15 academic year. Approximately 12.9% of the African-American population was referred to SSTs in the 2014-15 school year, indicating disproportionality. Interestingly, Asian students were under-represented in terms of referrals to SSTs. While they made up 27% of the student population, they made up only 8% of students referred to SSTs. As a group, they were referred to SSTs only .6%. Hispanics were also under-referred to SSTs at School J.

Table 1.2: Students Referred to SSTs-All Middle Schools (District-wide)

Ethnicity	Students Referred to SST District Wide (2014-15) Population by Ethnicity (#)	Population by Ethnicity (%)	SSTs By Ethnicity (#)	SSTs Ethnicity (%)	SST Population by Ethnicity (%)
Black/African American	64	2.1%	6	7.2%	9.3
Hispanic or Latino	291	9.8%	21	25%	7.2
Asian (Filipino 1, Asian Indian 3, Chinese 4, Other Asian 4)	1088	36.9%	8	9.6%	.9
White	1295	43.9%	41	49.4%	3.16
Mixed	178	6.0%	5	6.0%	2.8
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	23	.07%	1	1.2%	4.3
Am. Indian/Alaskan	6	.02%	1	1.2%	16.7
Total	2945	100%	83	98.4%	N/A

Source: Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) Plan: Published 2014-15

Table 1.2 highlights that minority students were over-referred to SSTs across all three middle schools in the district. For example, African-American students made up 2.1% of the population, and 7.2% of all students referred to SSTs. However, 9.3% of the African-American population was referred to SSTs, a disproportionate number given its overall representation in the school population. American Indian/Alaskan students made up only .02% of the population and 1.2% of all students referred to an SST. However, while small in number, approximately 16.7 % of the American Indian population was referred to SSTs in the 2014-15 school year, indicating disproportionality. Conversely, Asian students made up 36.9% of the population and yet only .9% of the Asian population was referred to the SST process. Thus, distinct district referral patterns were found seemingly based on ethnicity.

Finally, there is evidence that SST meetings tend to focus on student deficits, rather than student strengths. In reviewing SST Plans, much of the impetus for change was placed on the child. For example, common recommendations included: the student will attend tutoring or after school homework center, take less rigorous courses, or simply try harder. A focus on the child as the unit of change is counterproductive when considering the function of SSTs as a means of providing more intensive instruction and support for students. Further, items typically captured in SST Plans under the "Strengths" section tended to be character traits and not social emotional competencies. These "strengths" were also subjective and anecdotal. For example, phrases such as "has a nice smile" or "friendly" were representative of the types of character traits noted on SST forms. A more informed focus on social emotional learning competencies (SEL) would leverage the team's ability to provide instruction to increase competencies, while a focus on character traits is generally less constructive. Student Plans, developed in SST meetings, guide the implementation of interventions and outline goals and thus are an important tool in the process. Given the above, the district's SST process would benefit from a tool that would both increase counselor awareness and acquisition of

skills in implementation of effective SSTs and enhance counselor knowledge of student strengths as protective factors in Student Plans.

II. LOCAL CONTEXT

The district of study is located in Northern California and is considered very high performing. The district is situated in one of the most expensive cities to live in within the United States, where the average home costs 1.3 million dollars. The district serves one of the most educated populations in the country, with over 80% of the population having 4 years of college education (www.city-data.com). The estimated median household income in 2014 was approximately $164,000, a significant amount when compared to the California median household income of $52,000. Further, the community is majority White (60%) and Asian (30%), with Hispanics (6%) and other minorities making up the remainder of the population (www.city-data.com). Some students in the district are bussed in from a neighboring community as part of a desegregation mandate. In this neighboring community, only 40% of families have any college education, the median household income is $48,000, and the demographics are 61% Hispanic, 16% Black, and 7% White. Thus, for some minority students, there is significant dissonance between the realities of their neighborhoods and the community where they attend school. In sum, the district of study is nested in a highly affluent community that is primarily White and Asian with extremely high, upper middle class expectations for academic success.

In the district of study, minority students faced two major challenges that supported the need for an SST tool to guide practice. One challenge was that minority students significantly underperformed when compared to their peers. Table 1.3 highlights student performance data reported for 2014-15 at the school of study, School J.

Table 1.3: Percent of Student Scoring Proficient and Advanced (2014-15)

	Percent of Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced-School J			
GROUP	**ELA**	**MATH**	**Science**	**History-Social Science**
Black or African American	34%	36%	46%	29%
Hispanic or Latino	55%	41%	73%	52%
Asian	96%	96%	97%	88%
White	93%	87%	94%	87%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	41%	28%	53%	29%
English Learners	42%	45%	N/A	N/A
Students with Disabilities	48%	44%	50%	38%

Source: Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) Plan: Published 2014-15

The data demonstrate that minority students were significantly underachieving when compared to Asian and White students. For example, only 34% of African-American students and 55% of Hispanic students scored proficient or advanced in ELA, compared to 96% of Asian and 93% of White students. This pattern of underachievement was also true of all subjects tested, as noted above. Of additional note, Black/African-American students made up only 3.8% of the school's population, with Hispanic or Latino children making up 8.5%. Though these minority groups made up a small percentage of the student population, they represent the groups that tended to struggle the most, academically. Therefore, it follows that minority groups would benefit from effective SST processes, as they are most likely to be struggling academically.

The second challenge that minority students faced is that they attended school in a community where socially constructed and normative beliefs about good students are narrowly defined and based on affluent, white standards. The majority of teachers and administrators across the district were White, creating further distance between the experience of minority students and those that educate them. These normative constructs create an environment where differences in race, language, and class are stark and often illuminate structural racism. For example, on April 20, 2011, the math department at one of the two high schools drafted a letter in response to new graduation requirements in mathematics being proposed by the district (See Appendix A). The letter

outlined teacher concerns that less motivated, special education, and struggling students (many of whom were minority students) would be harmed by the proposal of rigorous standards in mathematics, stating, "brain theory supports the reality that confounding student situations interfere with their ability to focus and succeed as they move through advanced mathematics in high school" (letter to Superintendent, 2011). In this example, teachers clearly displayed a deficit view towards struggling students. Delpit & Dowdy's research indicates that school performance can be reduced through low expectations of teachers (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Further, results from surveys completed by teachers and counselors involved in a district wide Response to Intervention (RtI) initiative, indicated feelings of anxiety and unfamiliarity with how to best work with students of color. The cultural mismatch of students and teachers had negative consequences for minority students, as "how teachers feel about their ability to teach students has been shown to actually predict their success in the classroom" (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 147). In a final example, when the Superintendent created a task force to examine disproportionality and the opportunity gap, the following comments were posted on the local newspaper blog:

> Getting the parents of underperforming students involved is the hard part though. When a student doesn't see the parents interested in how they are doing at school it is often hard to get the student themselves to see that they should up their game. When the parents or the lifestyle of the home makes it hard for a student to stay late after school, find time or space to do homework, or belittles a student for wanting to study, then all the task forces in the world are never going to make a difference" (Posted to online blog. Nov. 20, 2014)

Another individual commented:

> It is BEYOND RIDICULOUS to assume that teachers, no matter what they do in the classroom, can overcome, make up for, or compensate for a lack of support for reading at home,-- a lack of support for reasoned conversation at home, and--too much consumption of TV at home--too much consumption of junk food at home--too much use of social media at home--etc. If all kids came to school ready to learn (both physically and psychologically) then it would be reasonable to hold teachers accountable for student achievement. But when so many students do not come to school ready to learn or even close to being ready to learn, it is outrageous to hold teachers accountable if all students do not learn to standard (Posted to online blog, Nov. 20, 2014).

While not reflective of all community resident beliefs, deficit-based thinking can shape the community in important ways. Given that race, language, and socio-economic factors affect the world in which minority student interact on a daily basis, it is reasonable to assume that these negative views may influence their sense of self worth (Goldenberg & Rueda, 2010) and motivation to do well in school. Students who have a low sense of self worth and low motivation are more likely to struggle in school and to need support from an effective SST process.

While the district implemented a number of initiatives to address disproportionality, such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and the creation of an Equity Task Force, these initiatives have not been shown to affect the achievement gap. A primary reason for this continued problem may be that site-based processes, such as SSTs, are ill equipped to support students who struggle academically and behaviorally. Further student strengths are often neglected in SST processes. Thus attention to SSTs via a standardized tool to guide effective practice and promote expertise is critical, especially for minority students who need the most support.

School counselors provide leadership to the SST process in the district of study. School counselors are the primary coordinators and implementers of the SST process, to the extent that administrators and other school staff defer to counselors in this area. While school counselors interact with teachers, parents, and other SST members, it is the school counselor who facilitates and sets the tone for the SST meeting. School counselors guide SST processes, elicit information, reframe comments, document information, and essentially lead all aspects of the meeting. School counselors are also responsible for leading the group in creation of the SST Plan, which outlines interventions and goals. While this work is done in concert with other SST members, it is the counselor who holds the most agency over implementation of the SST process. Hence, school counselors are the focus of intervention of this design study.

III. DESIGN CHALLENGE

It was within this intricate context that I originated my design challenge to develop an operational and purposeful SST tool to guide new learning with respect to SST implementation. Specifically, the design challenge was to develop a tool development series to lead counselors through a change process where new skills and knowledge could be acquired and result in the development of a practical, relevant, and actualizable tool. Specifically, counselors were expected to acquire new skills and knowledge in the areas of effective SST implementation and knowledge of student SEL or strengths. This tool development study drew from research in the areas of tools and routines, deficit-based practices, social emotional learning, effective professional development, and change processes.

IV. CONSULTING THE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE BASE

This knowledge base review consulted pertinent research that informed the components of the design study. The literature review supported the development of a research-based process of tool development to shift SST practices so that they are more closely aligned to best practice, including a focus on student strengths. The literature review includes a discussion of SSTs, including background, purpose, decision making, and elements that make up best practice. The literature on SSTs helped to situate SSTs within the context of the larger education landscape and provided a framework for my design intervention. I consulted the knowledge base on tools and routines, deficit-based practices, and social emotional learning to understand how to modify practices along this continuum. This literature helped me to understand the process of deconstructing deficit practices and shifting practices to a more asset-based paradigm. Finally, I reviewed literature on effective professional development and teacher change to help craft a successful intervention design. This information informed the professional development framework and activities planned.

Student Study Teams

Public Law 94-142, also known as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, was passed in 1975 to provide equal access to children with disabilities and ensure a free and appropriate education (www.Ed.Gov). Public Law 94-142 was initiated to address the fact that children with disabilities were not being appropriately and fairly served by the education system. Subsequently renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004 (IDEA), the updated legislation focused on student outcomes and emphasized the use of pre-referral services to minimize over identification and prevent unnecessary referrals to special education (Klotz & Nealis, 2005). The idea of early intervention services to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education, coupled with rigorous evaluation methods and assessments to promote student success, are core to IDEA.

Student Study Teams (SSTs) are one mechanism that schools use to meet the pre-referral directive of IDEA. SSTs are defined as school based problem-solving teams who work closely with teachers to decrease underachievement of students and promote effective general education supports (Department of Defense Education Activity). SSTs plays a vital role in supporting a culture of collaborative teaching and learning, assisting teachers with effective strategies to better meet needs of students and help students leverage social and academic competencies. (Department of Defense Education Activity). SSTs tend to be nested in larger Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts, which call for a multi-tiered approach for responding to differing needs of students (Duffy, 2007; AAFR Disciplinary Alternative Education: Addressing Disproportionality, 2012). Tiered interventions are identified as effective models of student support, that shift practice from a reactive multiple failures approach, to a proactive data based model, that when implemented with fidelity can address academic and behavioral issues early on for students at risk for school failure (Sprague, Sugai, Horner, Hill, 1999). SSTs can be effective in supporting academic gains, reducing referrals and placements in special education, and increasing teacher collaboration (Powers, 2001; Kovaleski,

Gickling, Morrow, & Swank, 1999). Indeed, Powers conducted a pilot study at a school and found that by implementing strategies to build awareness of the purpose of SSTs, referrals of African-American students to special education decreased (2001). Thus, increased expertise in SST processes is a crucial element that can mitigate referrals to special education.

While SSTs are meant to offer students additional supports to mediate referrals to special education, in fact SSTs are often viewed as the first step in the special education placement process. Often SST referrals and strategies developed are symbolic, as teachers have already determined that students need special education support (Harry & Klinger, 2014; Harry and Klinger, 2007). For instance, in a quantitative study by Algozzine, Christenson, and Ysseldyke, findings were that approximately 90-92% of students referred to the SST were evaluated and subsequently 70-74% were qualified as special education (1983). Interestingly, Algozzine and colleagues repeated this study again, sixteen years later, and results were consistent despite the current policy focus on early intervention strategies. These studies demonstrate that struggling students referred to SSTs were most often evaluated and placed in special education. Accordingly, increased attention and guidance of SST processes appears to be critical if inappropriate referrals to special education are to be decreased.

SST Process

The SST process is meant to be collaborative and positive, with a focus on early interventions to support students in general education settings. Ideally, SSTs examine a wide variety of data and identify areas of intervention based on evidence to create a Student Plan. Indeed, best practices indicate that SSTs follow a protocol that focuses on three elements: organization and management, teamwork, and problem solving (Powers, 2001). However, in practice, SSTs rarely function in this manner; instead, interpersonal dynamics, personal and professional values and beliefs, and formal and informal agendas can affect the process and outcomes (Harry & Klinger,

2014). As a result, SST processes are often driven by ideology and personal experience, rather than by best practice.

Generally, SST meetings tend to be held after the parent, teacher, or counselor identifies the child as struggling academically and/or behaviorally and general education interventions have not been effective. It is expected that when a student is referred for an SST they have received some level of intervention or support, such as tutoring or counseling, and outcomes have not improved. As a result, SST meetings are scheduled on an as-needed basis. The counselor coordinates and leads SST meetings held at the school, that usually include the student, parent, teacher(s), site administrator, and school psychologist. An interpreter tends to be requested if there is a language need. The counselor facilitates the SST meeting using an SST summary form that results in a Student Plan (see Appendix B). The Student Plan provides a basic template that documents student strengths, known information, concerns, interventions, and responsibility for follow up. SST meetings can take anywhere from forty-five minute to an hour, depending on the complexity of the situation. Formal follow-up meetings are rare given that they are time intensive. Instead, counselors tend to follow up with teachers and parents informally. In some cases, students are SST'd multiple times, due to lack of follow up on the initial plan. Counselors have expressed interest in clarifying the SST process via guidance and training, acknowledging that the process is generally ineffective in supporting students.

SSTs are described as one of the most inconsistent activities in education (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, & Cook, 2003 as cited in Burns, Peters, & Noell, 2008). Accordingly, practices vary widely and there is lack of clarity of goals for SST members (Truscott, et al., 2005; Powers, 2001). Not surprisingly, SSTs are often misunderstood as a student-focused process, rather than one that benefits from inclusion of instructional, academic, and social emotional instruction and interventions. In most cases, SST interventions do not result in changes in instructional practices,

despite the reality that these interventions are recognized as the first tier of successful student supports within an RtI framework (Truscott, et al., 2005). Truscott and colleagues conducted a nationwide survey of school and Department of Education staff and found that the five most common interventions offered by SSTs were peer tutors (37%), counseling (33%), out-of-classroom remediation (32%), changed seating (32%), and decreased work (22%); all require the student to take the onus of responsibility for change (2005). Only 12% of respondents reported providing consultation to the teacher as a referral response. In many cases recommendations were common simple treatment-oriented interventions, despite the complexity of issues presented (Truscott, 2005). Additionally, interventions are often absent efforts to build student strengths that promote social emotional competencies.

SST Referrals

While SSTs are meant to be an early intervention and prevention mechanism, teachers tend to refer students selectively; generally, it is when the situation with the student reaches a crisis level. Student referrals tend to be based on teachers' subjective perceptions of appropriate behavior, and once referred, teams tend to engage in confirmation bias. Confirmation bias occurs when teams confirm the teacher's reason for referral without a genuine and un-biased examination of the student's full range of needs (Knotek, 2003). How evidence is interpreted influences how information is understood and the framing of information can be powerful in shaping others' perspective (Coburn, Toure, Yamashita, 2009). In some cases, SST meetings are superficial processes where the team is largely influenced by the teacher's perspective and the decision to place in a specialized placements has in effect already been ensured by the teacher's referral (Knotek, 2003). Given that meaning is gained through interpretation, argumentation, and persuasion, counselors have great agency in setting the tone of SSTs and need guidance in implementation of effective SSTs.

The literature also suggests that each school has a culture of who is referred and for what reason. Harry and Klinger (2014) conducted an ethnographic study of twelve schools and found that schools have a culture of referral. They describe a culture of referral as the attitude towards and beliefs about students who are struggling. These beliefs influence how student needs are identified, how problems are framed and solutions sought, and ideas about special education. Interestingly, Harry and Klinger found that more important than the characteristics of the children were the beliefs of administrators and the policies set in determining who was referred (2014). This hints at the idea that schools define ability and who is disabled within the school culture (Varenne & McDermott, 1995). Indeed Harry and Klinger found referrals were driven by mandates, desire to maintain a positive reputation of the school, and other criteria, rather than on the individual needs of students.

SST Decision-Making

Decision-making can be thought of as a social process that involves attention and interpretation of information in the environment (Spillane & Miele, 2007). Spillane and Miele call this process sense making, whereby individuals notice stimuli based on beliefs, values, and experiences, which guide interpretation of information into evidence. What is noticed depends on knowledge representations, or schemas and mental models that make information relevant (Spillane & Miele, 2007; Khaneman, 2011). Schemas are automatically activated theories about what things are. Mental models are more complex knowledge representations about how things work. As individuals engage in interpretation of stimuli, they assimilate information into existing mental representations or accommodate information. Assimilation leads to little changes in thinking or acting, while accommodation involves restructuring knowledge representations to include new and different information. Accommodation usually occurs when there is repeated exposure to new information. Sense making has applicability for SSTs, as the desired behavior is to have counselors

become more expert in their skills and knowledge relative to better decision making. Thus the building of more sophisticated mental models is beneficial.

While SSTs are meant to include a variety of perspectives from a range of stakeholders, research tends to reflect skepticism about the ability of groups to make appropriate, high-quality decisions, especially when dealing with complex student issues (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997). In certain situations teams may demonstrate narrow decision making patterns, leading to groupthink or conforming of the team to leader opinion and cognitive biases (Houghton, Simon, Aquino & Goldberg, 2000). In fact, groups appear to be most influenced by groupthink when teams are highly cohesive, lack well-defined problem solving guidelines or procedures, and operate under stress to solve problems that are complex and ambiguous (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997). These are all variables that affect SSTs, raising the question of how SST members can protect against groupthink and bias.

SSTs were intended to bring professionals together to problem-solve and develop positive interventions, however SST decision-making is often deficit-based (Knotek, 2003a). SSTs have been found to ignore relevant information and criteria, instead considering teacher complaints and student characteristics such as gender and socioeconomic status, as variables in decision-making (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Dykes, 2008). In a three-year study, Harry and Klinger examined placement processes for Black and Hispanic children to special education, and found that many teachers in the study saw disability as a simple truth for minority students, stating "The children have disabilities, just like some children have blue eyes"(2007, p.21). Harry and Klinger found that minority children did not have more disabilities; instead, institutional and personal biases and beliefs, combined with political pressures, produced patterns of over representation in special education. Therefore, it appears that decisions regarding referrals to special education may be driven by social and political elements, steeped in educator bias and personal judgment towards poor minority students.

Routines and Tools

Administrations use organizational routines as mechanisms to organize proficiency and effectively exercise control of actions of individuals, in order to successfully accomplish work of the organization (Feldman & Pentland, 2005). Indeed, Spillane and Miele assert that the use of tools, routines, and interactions with others can have an impact on how evidence is interpreted and attributed meaning (2007). Tools are externalized representations of ideas, such as protocols or forms, which frame what information to pay attention to and determine how information is collected (Spillane & Miele, 2007). Routines are repetitive and recognizable actions that provide stability and guide what information counts as evidence. Routines and tools shape work practice and determine how groups and organizations collect and interpret data; thus, they are powerful as they mediate how problems are framed, how blame is attributed, and how solutions are framed.

Routines represent a duality, the ostensive and performative aspects (Pentland and Feldman, 2005). The ostensive element represents the standard operating procedure or the process by which work gets done. The performative aspect represents how individuals interpret the routine and act in accord. These two elements are interdependent, as a tool can provide the framework but the actions that bring the tool to life remain under the agency of individual or groups. In order for a tool to be actualized, it must address both the ostensive and performative aspects of practice. Organizational routines are also connected to artifacts, which can enable or constrain the actions of individuals or groups (Pentland and Feldman, 2005).

The SST tool represents a process that attempts to codify the SST routine in order to maximize efficiency and achieve a more successful work process. The SST tool is an artifact of the ostensive element of a routine as it is an attempt to capture and prescribe the standard operating procedure through the creation of a handbook. However, because the handbook will be co-constructed with counselors, the process also attempts to take into consideration the performative

aspects of a routine. Co-construction of the handbook attempts to include the expertise of counselors, as well as maximize counselor agency throughout the process. Importantly, the SST tool represents a mechanism for counselors to acquire new skills and knowledge relative to SSTs.

Certainly, the idea of introducing tools and routines to improve functioning of SSTs has shown promise in the literature (Truscott, 2005; Powers, 2010; Moore, et al., 1989; Kovaleski, et al., 1999; Flugum & Reschly, 1994; Myers & Kline, 2001/2002; Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Burns, et al., 2008). Burns and colleagues found that poor implementation of SSTs occurred due to unfamiliarity with the SST process (2008). Gutkin and Nemeth found that SSTs were more effective when the team developed norms to guide practice (1997). Additionally, Powers' study indicated that teams that followed an outline that included elements of organization and management, teamwork, and problem solving were able to improve their functioning (2010). Thus, attention to and development of tools and routines to guide SST practices appears to hold value in both theory and practice.

Deficit Thinking

Schools socially construct how differences are noticed, identified, and made consequential. These social constructs tend to define deviant behavior based on the normative, white middle class cultural standards (Varenne & McDermott, 1995). This phenomena affects minority children, who are often seen as academically and behaviorally deficient and who often do not fit the normative standard. When a child's behavior appears abnormal or is deemed difficult, they are often seen as different or disabled (Varenne & McDermott, 1995). Disability, often considered innate, is used to explain the child's behaviors and non-achievement. Under a deficit-based model, changes to the school system are rarely considered and instead the victim is blamed (Valencia, 2010).

Deficit thinking, or the idea that educators are unwilling to examine root causes of school failure and instead locate problems within students, families, and communities, is supported in the

literature (Harry & Klinger, 2007; Harry & Klinger, 2014; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Varenne & McDermott, 1995; Valencia, 2010). Deficit thinking rests on the idea that children and families are responsible for perceived failures and thus, they are targets for reform. When children or families do not meet the normative standards, schools feel justified in blaming them for not changing, with little sense of responsibility for examining their own practices (Harry & Klinger, 2014). These socially constructed conceptions of intelligence and value are rarely challenged, and consequently become common sense practice in schools (Howard et al., 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2014).

Counselors and teachers are socialized to the culture of the school and therefore, tend to participate in deficit thinking. SSTs members often locate problems within students as absolute deficits, rather than examining the school environment (Moore, 1989; Harry and Klinger, 2007). The perception of low skill as low ability reflects the social, political, and normative environment in which schools are nested (Howard, as cited in Gordan, 2003). This habit of looking for intrinsic deficit intertwines with interpretation of cultural and racial differences as deficits, disproportionately affecting children of color (Harry & Klinger, 2007). The myth also creates a logic that if deficits are innate, there is little that educators can do to promote higher achievement. A deficit-based lens leads to tracking and stereotyping, based on perceived disabilities of children and families, and denies the fact that all students have inherent strengths (Bernard, 1997). Further, when SSTs focus on student deficits, there is little room for discussions and leveraging of student strengths, despite the fact that the inclusion of student assets may lead to more positive oriented goals and shift focus away from student centered discussions that highlight problems and remediation measures (Geltner and Liebforth, 2008; Edwards, et al., 2007). Therefore, there is value in shifting deficit-based practices through development of a tool that will promote new skills and knowledge acquisition.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Focusing on student strengths can be a powerful approach to engage school communities to

mobilize and support children (Search Institute Executive Summary and Survey Report, 2011). A strengths model instills a sense of objectivity and partnership between parents and school staff and builds towards a collaborative process (Weishaar, 2010). A strengths-based framework also represents a shift from a focus on deficits or pathology to a focus on promotion of student assets (Weishaar, 2010; LeBuffe & Likins) or Social Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL is defined as "the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others" (Zins and Elias, 2007 as cited in Maras et al., 2014). SEL competencies serve as protective factors in students and are linked to academic success; however, currently there is little guidance on how to integrate SEL assessments and data into school based interventions (Maras, et al., 2014).

Developing SEL competencies is important as they support learning and school success (Naglieri, LeBuffe, & Shapiro, 2011; Edward, et al., 2007). Children with strong SEL skills have been shown to excel in school both socially and academically (Haggerty, Elgn, Woolley, 2011). There is evidence that identification and development of student strengths is linked to significant gains in GPA, self-confidence, and declines in absenteeism (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Given the increasing evidence that social emotional competencies are linked to positive academic outcomes, identifying and enhancing student social emotional competencies can support SST efforts to promote academic success (Naglieri, LeBuffe, & Shapiro, 2011).

The inclusion of strengths based data can also improve perceptions of school staff, provide a better focus on the whole child, and more effectively inform interventions and supports. Donovan and Nickerson (2007) examined how adding strengths based data to traditional reports for students with emotional and behavioral disorders impacted pre-referral team member perceptions. They sent surveys to 150 state approved day and residential day schools for students with Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD) across the United States, asking them to predict placement and outcomes for

students based on mock reports. They received responses from those who had received a traditional report (reports that did not include strengths) and 72 combined reports (reports that included traditional data as well as strengths based data). Donovan and Nickerson found that while report type did not have an impact on educational placement and short and long term outcome predictions, those receiving the combined reports predicted more positive academic, social, and overall outcomes for students than those receiving traditional reports (2007). This study demonstrates that the simple inclusion of student strengths can have an impact on perceptions of student outcomes.

Reliable and valid assessment tools are necessary to identify and assess student SEL skills and provide appropriate interventions (Naglieri, LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2014). Because children are often referred to SSTs due to academic and behavioral problems, it is important to identify appropriate assessments and interventions to improve social emotional functioning. The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) is a universal screening and progress monitoring system found to be reliable and valid with middle school students (Haggerty, Elgn, Woolley, 2011). The DESSA is exclusively strengths based and assesses for SEL competencies that serve as protective factors for children in grades K-8. The DESSA identifies five interrelated social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision- making (Haggerty, Elgn, Woolley, 2011). Maras and colleagues (2014) examined how to improve SEL interventions and programs via a tiered response model utilizing the DESSA. They described that integration of SEL into their tiered response model assisted in better identifying student needs and helped to guide interventions. One example noted in the study was that using the DESSA in practice supported, "assets-oriented, competency based conversations" with parents and was useful in establishing shared language that concentrated on particular SEL competencies. The DESSA has also been found to provide meaningful information on student assets to help guide student support plans as required by various regulations (LeBuffe & Likins).

Overall, strengths based assessments provide a more balanced approach to student needs and abilities (Donovan & Nickerson, 2007). By understanding student strengths, SST members are better able to identify and leverage talents to improved student outcomes (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Identifying and developing student strengths is important in assessing student needs from a holistic perspective and may lead to more positive oriented goals (Geltner and Liebforth, 2008; Edwards, et al., 2007). Thus, a student strengths assessment, such as the DESSA, can assist SST members to better identify and develop student assets, leading to better student outcomes.

Professional Learning

Educational leaders who are interested in effectively shifting current practice must concern themselves with effective approaches to professional learning. Professional learning is defined as altering of "professional practices, beliefs, and understandings of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p.2 as cited in Guskey, 2002). Professional learning can be utilized to enhance individual skills and knowledge of effective and culturally responsive interventions, instruction, discipline, and practices (Harris-Murri, King, Rostenburg, 2006). In the following section, I describe counselors as educational leaders and then discuss effective elements for counselor professional learning.

Counselors as Educational Leaders

School counselors play important leadership roles within the school setting. School counselors are student advocates, liaisons who bring stakeholders together to support student educational needs, and experts in student placement. Counselors have expertise is supporting students socially, academically, and with college and career options. The American School Counseling Association describes school counselors as essential members of the education team.

Recently, the counseling profession has experienced a change, whereby the role of the counselor is shifting to a paradigm that more robustly endorses counselors as educational leaders

and social change agents (Clark & Amatea, 2004). During this time of greater school accountability, counselors are being increasingly asked to account for their work with students (Webb, Brigman & Campbell, 2005; Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010; Wingfield, Reese, West-Olatunji, 2010; Dahir & Stone, 2003). While traditionally school counselors have promoted the social and emotional, academic, and college and career counseling goals of students, increasingly the question of how students are different as a result of counselor interventions and programming is being asked (Webb, Brigman, Campbell, 2005). More and more, counselors are expected to use data and evidence based practices to guide their work and evaluate student outcomes in order to close the achievement gap (Militello & Janson, 2014).

The increased accountability on counselors represents an opportunity for counselors to exhibit leadership skills and expertise, especially as related to developing systems of support for students, such as SSTs. Indeed, counselors are in an ideal position to understand and evaluate the school for systemic barriers that hinder educational success for all students and act as change agents (Martin, 2010; Galassi & Akos, 2012). Counselors not only have significant influence over academic assignments of students, they are also in a position to address gaps in services and interventions to support all students. Undeniably, counselors are well positioned to promote school reform and organizational change, as well as design interventions, that can best support all students (Wingfield, Reese, West-Olatunji, 2010; Bemak & Chung, 2005; Martin, 2010; Gibbons, Diambra, Buchanan, 2010). As such, their leadership in designing and strengthening the SST process cannot be over emphasized.

In order to meet new accountability expectations set forth, counselors need support in the form of professional development (Marin, 2010; Bemak, Chi-Ying Chung, 2005; Watkinson, 2013). This shift in practice from an individual student focus to a system wide focus, from case managers to change agents, and from maintainers of individual student records to consumers of data is a

significant shift for counselors (House & Martin as cited in Perkins, Oescher & Ballard, 2010). Wingfield, Reese and West-Olatunji propose that in order for school counselors to effectively, "implant, refine, and maintain leadership skills", counselors will need to take an active part in professional learning activities, such as conferences, in service trainings, and other professional development projects (2010, p. 125). The acquisition of new skills depends on opportunities for counselors to engage in professional learning and support.

Given the above, I have consulted the knowledge base on effective professional learning for educators, which I argue has relevance given that counselors provide educational leadership, are vital participants to educational teams, and work closely with teachers to support student instruction. The following section will address effective professional learning from a best practices perspective as well as from a change process perspective.

Counselors and Effective Professional Learning

There is evidence that counselors' benefit from professional learning that builds knowledge and skills around effective SST processes (Meyers and Kline, 2001/2002). Currently, most states accept SSTs as a means of monitoring placements of students outside of general education settings; however, there is little professional development offered (Truscott, 2005; Flugum & Reschly, 1994). In fact, the literature indicates that SST members lack training on effective group processes and decision-making, as well as information on how to work in cross-disciplinary teams (Moore, Fifield, Spira and Scarlato, 1989). In a nationwide study by Truscott and colleagues, in which a sample of 225 elementary schools were surveyed, they found that while 86 % of states mandate pre-referral teams, states provide little guidance on best practices with respect to composition of teams and how to implement effective strategies (2005). Thus, a review of effective professional development literature is relevant in thinking about improving SST processes.

Research suggests that effective professional development is most impactful when certain elements are in place. These elements include: professional learning that is sustained and intensive, affords educators opportunities to actively work and learn together, is directly connected to daily practice, provides support for new learning, and demonstrates positive benefits (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 2002). Further, professional learning can lead to new practices when educators see positive benefits of the new practices on student outcomes (Guskey, 2002).

Sustained and Intensive

Professional learning that is prolonged over time and consists of a substantial number of hours is more likely to be effective than short-term professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Garcia and Guerra, 2004; Lawrence and Taum, 1997). Ongoing professional development offers increased opportunities to challenge current world-views through discourse (Shields, 2004; Lawrence and Tatum, 1997) and helps to connect information to practice (Warren-Little, 2006). In a study by Lawrence and Tatum, it was found that approximately half of teachers showed evidence of shifting behaviors and attitudes around anti-racism after participating in a semester long professional development course (1997). In comparison, a study by McDiarmid illustrated that teachers who participated in one week of professional development were able to parrot training language, but did not change personal beliefs (1990). Accordingly, effective professional development extends beyond participating in yearly mandated training, to a model of active and ongoing engagement in collective inquiry and dialogue, where learning is connected to everyday practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Bernhardt & Hebert, 2011; Sletter, 1992; Warren-Little, 2006). Intensive professional learning opportunities that engage educators in practical tasks and provide chances to observe, assess, and reflect on new practices can be effective in promoting change. Young, Millard & Kneale describe one middle school's successful experience using professional learning that

incorporated tenets of professional learning communities with counselors (2013). Counselors at this school participated in the professional learning series for three years and found that the power of the professional learning became a daily driving force for providing comprehensive school counseling services to all students.

Collaborative

The literature suggests that collaboration is also an important element of professional learning (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002; Blankstein, 2004; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Collaboration involves a paradigm shift where educators move from a model of independent work to one of genuine partnership. Joint decision-making, shared leadership, and a culture of inquiry become the norm through collaboration. Collaboration can increase relational trust, which is helpful when engaging in difficult conversations, such as those related to equity and access. Professional development that offers opportunities for active learning and is coherently integrated into daily work practice is more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills (Garet et al., 2001). For instance, Garet and colleagues conducted a study to examine what makes professional development effective, using a national probability sample of teacher professional development activities, and found that collective participation of groups of educators from the same site, subject, or grade level was related to active learning opportunities, improvements in teacher knowledge and skills, and change of practice (2001). Educators benefit from professional development that offers opportunities to share, learn, and dialogue with one another.

Collaboration is also central to the work of school counselors (Wingfield, Reese, West-Olatunji, 2010). Counselors bring a unique perspective to their leadership role, as they are trained and skilled in collaboration processes that bring key partners together to serve students. Counselors act as consultants to teachers to help students experience academic success (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Galassi & Akos, 2012) and often act as liaisons to ensure that student needs are met. In this

manner, counselors promote collaboration between various stakeholders (Gibbons, Diambra, & Buchanan, 2010) including students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Given the above, collaborative opportunities during the professional learning series leave counselors well positioned to leverage and develop expertise and skills in this area.

Connected to daily practice

Educators benefit from opportunities to share and learn information that is connected to their daily work practice. Wingfield, Reese and West-Olatunji support professional learning opportunities for counselors that are grounded in real life experiences in order to maximize learning (2010). Effective professional learning elicits participant expertise, encourages discussions of what participants want to learn, and helps participants relate new concepts to current practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Further, application of theory to real life practice provides elements of application and relevance. Effective professional development engages educators in practical activities and provides opportunities to observe, assess, and reflect on new practices. Activities that are linked to educators' experiences, aligned with other reform efforts, and encourage professional communication among educators also appear to support change in practice (Garet, et al., 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Support

Professional learning involves unlearning old behaviors and incorporating new practices. This change process of learning and unlearning can produce anxiety for educators for a variety of reasons (Guskey, 2002; Schein, 2010). Schein describes that learning anxiety, or stress around learning new behaviors or attitudes, can be caused by fear of incompetence, loss, or personal identity or group membership during the change process. Schein proposes that in order for educators to overcome learning anxiety, they need to experience psychological safety, the feeling of security to engage in the change process. Psychological safety is promoted when individuals believe that the

new practice will be beneficial, when they receive training and are actively involved in the learning process, when they receive feedback and role modeling in a supportive environment, and when systems and structures are consistent with new practices. Indeed, when educators have access to successful models of new practice and are engaged in collective problem solving, professional development is more likely to be successful (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Professional Development as a Change Process

Professional development is often used as a mechanism to improve practices and promote change. It is commonly believed that professional development leads to changes in teachers beliefs and assumptions, which then leads to changes in practice and improved student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). However, in reality, it is when changes in practice lead to positive changes in student outcomes, such as improved learning in behavior or attitudes, that educator beliefs and attitudes shift (Guskey, 2002; Schein, 2010). Hence, professional learning is a process that can eventually shift beliefs and attitudes, but only if changes in practice demonstrate positive outcomes for students. In this way, change in beliefs and attitudes are contingent upon proof of effectiveness.

Schein offers a model that explains the stages of learning and change that will be used to frame the professional development series in this study. Schein identifies that there are three stages of learning involved in a change process. The first stage includes creating motivation to change. The second stage includes learning new concepts, learning new meanings for old concepts, and learning new standards and practices. The final stage is concerned with how groups internalize new meanings and practices. Schein's model supports the idea that changing behavior is difficult and is facilitated when new practices are proven to work better than the old ways of functioning.

Stage 1: Creating motivation to Change

Schein's model poses that the first stage in promoting change, or unfreezing, is to provide disconfirming data that causes enough guilt to produce discomfort, but also promotes psychological

safety to overcome learning anxiety. Schein believes that in order for people to change, they need to experience enough disequilibrium to force cognitive dissonance and accommodation of new information. This idea is also supported by work done by Khaneman, who found individuals need ongoing exposure to new and different information in order to shift thinking (2011). Un-freezing is typically initiated by school leaders who provide new information, which disconfirms existing information and produces survival anxiety or guilt. Disconfirming data may generate survival anxiety in which groups either deny or minimize validity of information to avoid having to adopt new ways of thinking and behaving. Survival anxiety involves stress related to maintaining old values. Survival anxiety co-exists with learning anxiety, which involves stress around the notion of changing roles, developing new competencies, and interrupting current power structures. Survival anxiety must supersede learning anxiety in order for change to occur. If learning anxiety is reduced, groups experience psychological safety and can internalize new information. If learning anxiety is not reduced, new learning is stalled.

When discussing professional development, the impetus for change or disconfirming information generally manifests as student outcome data that shows that minority students are underperforming. This data can cause educators to experience survival anxiety and guilt, become defensive, and blame parents for issues (Shield, 1992). Such outcomes are likely when survival anxiety exceeds learning anxiety. Conversely, when survival anxiety is minimized, and learning anxiety is increased alongside psychological safety, educators are more likely to engaging in purposeful professional development, be involved as learners, and change practice.

Stage 2: Cognitive Restructuring

Once a group has been unfrozen, it will begin to engage in cognitive restructuring. Cognitive restructuring describes the development of new learning through trial and error based on scanning the environment or imitation of role models. Individuals learn the new way of being or practicing,

based on examples of what others are doing. While role modeling and imitation is important, individuals who develop their own solutions are more likely to adopt behaviors into their schemas and mental models (Schein, 2010; Spillane & Miele, 2007; Khaneman, 2011). Thus, while it is important to provide a model of new expected behavior, it is also important to afford individuals an opportunity to shape their own means of meeting new expectations of behavior.

Stage 3: Stabilizing Learning

The final stage of the change process involves refreezing or stabilization of new learning. An important element to this stage is the idea that new learning will not be internalized unless it demonstrates results. If it turns out that the new practice does not produce better results, behavior will not change (Schein, 2010; Guskey, 2002). The change process is thus a process of learning and unlearning that reconfigures individual mental models and schemas through accommodation or assimilation based of efficacy of the new practices (Spillane & Miele, 2007; Guskey, 2002).

In summary, for long-term professional development to be effective, it must involve opportunities for collaboration and active involvement by participants; it must be relevant to the participants; and the support it offers must be beneficial. Additionally, it is important to note that professional development involves a change process, where counselors can learn and unlearn behaviors. In order for change in practice to occur, counselors need to be exposed to disconfirming information that they find compelling and valuable in order to experience psychological safety. Cognitive restructuring or new learning becomes embedded in practice when it demonstrates success. Thus, when professional learning is coupled with systemic changes that offer opportunities and time to translate learning, discuss strategies, and evaluate changes, the prospect of sustainable change is increased (Sleeter, 1992; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

CHAPTER 2: THEORY OF ACTION

Introduction

My literature review suggests that the best way to improve SST practices is to increase counselor knowledge and skills via a professional learning process. In this paper, the professional development approach will consist of a tool development process that intentionally engages counselors in a change process. My theory of action posits that if counselors engage in a change process to co-construct an SST tool, then they will acquire new skills and knowledge to more effectively implement SSTs.

A theory of action provides the rationale for why certain actions or interventions create desired results (Argyris & Schon, 1978). The theory of action for this design development study outlines the content and process learning required to shift behaviors of counselors relative to SSTs. In this section, I describe the theory of action behind the proposed tool development series, as well as the rationale for the co-construction of a tool to guide SST implementation (See Appendix C). First, I describe the problem and its causes. Next, I discuss the intended outcome of the design. Then, I provide a theory of change to describe learning that will take place within the design. Finally, I explain the proposed intervention, Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams, BESST. My theory of action was developed based on a review of the literature, alongside my practice as a school administrator.

I. PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Counselors implement SST meetings in order to identify and ameliorate problematic behavioral and academic issues of students. However, counselors do not fully comprehend SST processes, therefore SST processes are poorly implemented and lead to marginal student outcomes. Increased understanding of effective SSTs, including identification of student SEL competencies, may assist counselors to become more effective in leading SST processes that ultimately mitigate

referrals to specialized education programs. In order for this to occur, counselors need to engage in a professional learning experience that promotes change and results in the co-development of a tool to guide practice. The tool must be co-constructed in order to leverage practitioner expertise and adoption of new practices.

Drawing upon a review of the knowledge base, I presumed two main factors underlying the observed problematic behaviors: one factor is related to knowledge, and the other to skill.

Knowledge: Counselors implement SST processes as part of their leadership role. However, they have a very basic understanding of the SST process as one where stakeholders come together to identify problematic behaviors. They lack a holistic understanding of SSTs as a process to support students. They also have a simplistic understanding of how to identify and develop student strengths within the SST process. When identifying student strengths, most reflect anecdotal and subjective character traits, rather than social emotional competencies that act as protective factors. Due to lack of a tool and training to guide practice, they are unable to implement effective SST processes. In sum, counselors lack essential knowledge in SST implementation.

Skill: Given that counselors lack knowledge of effective SST processes, their level of skill in implementing effectual SSTs is compromised. Absent tools and resources to guide effective SST processes, counselors operate in an autonomous fashion, creating silos of practice. These silos thwart the emergence of collective cognition and practice as well as collaborative learning. Counselors require specific situational spaces in which to develop and share skills and knowledge in order to deepen understanding of SST processes. BESST will afford counselors opportunities to engage in group learning and reflection in order to develop an SST Handbook to guide practice.

Local Assessment of Needs

In the district of study, students of color underperform when compared to their peers and are over-represented in special education and alternative education placements. In November 2009,

the California Department of Education identified the district as 1 of 17 having significant disproportionality pursuant to the requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The specific findings were with two groups of students, African American and Latino, identified for special education. While the district committed to corrective efforts, current data on the number of students in special education continues to indicate over-representation (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Special Education Students (District wide, 2014-15)

	Students in Special Education (SPED) by Ethnicity, District Wide			
GROUP	**General Ed. Students**	**% of Student Population**	**Students in SPED**	**Students in SPED by Ethnicity (%)**
Black/African American	278	2.2%	67	24%
Hispanic or Latino	1,419	11.3%	243	17.1%
Asian	4,413	35.2%	198	4.4%
White	5,344	42.7%	495	9.2%
Am. Indian/Alaskan	33	.26%	6	18.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	94	.75%	24	25.5%
Multiple	949	7.6%	59	6.2%
Total	12,530	100%	1092	8.7%

Source: California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, 2014-15

For example, while African-American students make up 2.2% of the student population, they make up 24% of students in special education. Over-representation is also true for Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students. On the other hand, White and Asian students are under-represented in special education programs.

Additionally, over the past two years, all 40 high school students placed in alternative education programs were Latino, African American and Pacific Islander. The district contracts for 20 alternative education placements every year, and these placements have been made up of only minority students for the past two years. While minority student groups make up a small percentage of district students, they make up the majority of referrals to this alternative program. The practice of placing minority students in alternative programs creates inequitable school settings, seemingly based on race.

According to a survey administered at the secondary level to Response to Intervention (RtI) teams and data collected from a sample of counselor and administrator interviews in the 2014-15 school year, educators indicated that teachers do not know how to effectively support struggling students of color, especially those who are low income. Furthermore, counselors, administrators, and staff acknowledged that the district does not have a set tool or protocol to inform SST processes, thus each SST meeting is implemented based on the unique style of each facilitator.

In observing several SST meetings, it was clear that SST members lack a common understanding of the SST process and practice very autonomously. School counselors implemented SST meetings based on their experience and understanding of pre-referral processes, and as such, practices varied widely. For example, implementation of meetings, forms used, and type of information captured, differed within and across sites. Commonly, the purpose of the meeting was absent, interventions were lacking in clarity and solely student focused, and follow up meetings were not held. In some cases, families were not provided an interpreter nor were materials translated into the home language. In conversations about improving support systems, counselors and administrators agreed that an SST tool would help increase understanding and implementation of effective SSTs.

SST meetings also tended to focus on symbolic interventions and neglected the development of protective factors. Positive student attributes, when discussed, were superficial. For example, students were commonly described as "friendly" or "kind." There was little discussion of genuine SEL competencies that served as protective factors. Also, most interventions offered to struggling students, despite their varying needs, related to changing class schedules and encouraging students to try harder. In conversations with administrators, they acknowledged that a focus on student SEL competencies was needed.

While the middle school of study, School J, implemented a number of initiatives to address the issue of over-representation, such as training via the Equity Collaborative and Response to Intervention (RtI), one problem that remains unaddressed is that site-based processes such as SSTs lack a standard protocol to guide effective implementation. Given that SSTs serve as an essential element of the RtI processes, it is important that counselors receive training on how to lead effective SST processes and develop a tool to improve efficacy as one means to address inappropriate referrals to special education.

Outcome of Proposed Design

BESST was designed to meet three learning outcomes. The first learning outcome was to engage counselors in a change process to promote new learning and skills in SSTs processes. The second learning outcome was to increase counselor skill and knowledge in implementing effective SSTs, by engaging them in a change process. The third learning outcome was to shift counselor practice with respect to implementation of SSTs, by affording counselors the opportunity to co-construct an SST Handbook during a professional learning series. At the conclusion of BESST, counselors were expected to have:

- Engaged in change process to acquire increased skills and knowledge to more effectively understand SSTs;
- Demonstrated an increased ability to identify and develop student SEL competencies;
- Co-constructed a tool to more effectively guide SST processes.

I used various tools to measure these outcomes, including the development of an SST tool, review of SST plans, pre- and post-interview data on SST practices utilizing a standardized interview tool, review of participant logs, and review of process data. I proposed that as counselors engaged in professional learning, they would have an increased sense of efficacy to implement SST processes. As a result, they would be able to implement more effective SST meetings and articulate

understanding of student SEL competencies. Counselor skills and knowledge were measured using a model of skill acquisition.

My theory was that BESST would result in both proximal and distal outcomes. First, engagement in reflective thinking and discourse while developing an SST Handbook would aid counselors to develop greater working knowledge of SSTs. Accommodation of this information into their mental models would support them in becoming more knowledgeable in their practice. The tool developed would deepen knowledge and skills through co-construction and use. The tool would also include use of a research-validated assessment, the DESSA, to enhance how counselors identified SEL competencies. Distal outcomes, beyond the scope of this study in terms of evaluation, were anticipated to include shifts in counselor assumptions about students who struggled and a reduction of students referred to specialized settings.

II. DESIGN CHALLENGE

There are several design challenges in meeting the three learning outcomes in this study. Two design challenges exist in meeting the first outcome of increasing counselor knowledge and skill in facilitating effective SSTs. The first is defining effective SSTs based on both practical and theoretical understandings. This particular challenges exist because counselors may have significant knowledge of SSTs based on experience in the field, but may not have theoretical knowledge of SST best practices. Therefore, an effective SST's definition must include elements based on best practices as well as those that capture practice in the field. This design challenge was met by using a model that had credibility in the field as well as encompassed effective SST practices, as per the literature. The second design challenge was to create a tool development process that would successfully engage counselors in all three stages of the change process. Active participation in the change process was hypothesized to equal active learning. Engagement in the change process was accomplished by creating a professional learning series that invited counselors to participate in the

study as practitioners so that they were more likely to engage in the process of reflective learning and change.

The second learning outcome was to improve counselor knowledge of SEL competencies. The design challenge in this area was to introduce an SEL tool, the Deveraux Student Strength Assessment (DESSA), as a research validated measure of SEL competencies that could be easily incorporated into practice. The DESSA would need to prove useful and practical in the field in order to garner counselor support. Creating opportunities for counselors to use the DESSA in the field and using feedback to guide next steps was an important element to meet this design challenge.

Three design challenges were inherent in development of an effective SST tool, the third outcome of this study, including: practicality, actuality, and relevance. Firstly, ensuring the practicality of a handbook to guide practice was critical in designing a tool. Counselors exist within a complex work setting; as such, their time is limited. Therefore, the tool needed to facilitate ease of use, be clear and easy to comprehend, as well as compelling to be used in the field. It had to offer enough information to be useful, yet not so much information to overwhelm users. This was particularly true when introducing the DESSA. The DESSA not only represented a change in practice, but as an assessment with seventy-two (72) questions could be perceived as overwhelming by teachers filling it out. Thus, all elements of the tool, including forms, resources, and assessments, were carefully balanced with the realities of counselors in the field.

Secondly, BESST sought to create a handbook that served as a genuine and efficacious SST guide. Guarding against the tool becoming purely symbolic in use, the tool was co-constructed with counselor input and paired with simple professional learning as a means of promoting usage. Counselor professional learning was an integral part of the proposed design, as a tool that stood alone would have little effect on practice. Additionally, the handbook needed to be perceived as useful and effective. The literature indicates that new beliefs and shifts in practice take place when

individuals experience a process that is more effective that what was used previously. Thus, the tool needed to facilitate more effective practices that better served students, and counselors themselves. The tool needed to serve two needs. One was a reference guide to orient users and guide practice. In this sense, it would be used to train others and calibrate practice. A second use of the tool was to address elements of compliance. The tool was meant to standardize best practice, which could only be facilitated through fidelity as outlined in the handbook. A balance needed to be struck in a manner that support the user in meeting new expectations outlined in the tool. This was done by co-designing the tool with counselors and gathering their input as to what elements of the tool were meant to guide practice and what elements were required. To create psychological safety, the researcher framed the tool within the context of a vision and rationale for improvement of SST processes. Counselors were provided formal and informal training, role modeling, a supportive environment in which to experiment, and development of systemic structures in line with the new way of practicing (Schein, 2010).

Finally, the goal was to develop a tool pertinent to counselors in their daily work. A tool that enthused counselors to advance improved SST practices would be most meaningful if connected to their work in authentic ways. Thus, the challenge was to develop a tool germane to counselors and yet broad enough to support SST members in their respective roles. Accordingly, equilibrium between individualizing the tool for counselors and yet ensuring that it had some bearing and meaning for teachers, administrators, parents, and others SST members. It is within these larger contexts that I formulated my design challenges.

III. THEORY OF CHANGE AND TOOL DEVELOPMENT

A theory of change clearly articulates what learning, processes, or actions are needed for counselors to shift their practices relevant to SSTs. To inform my theory of change, I consulted the professional literature on SSTs, deficit thinking, tools and routines, social emotional learning, and

effective professional development. The theory of change underpinning BESST posits that by engaging counselors in a change process, they will increase skills and knowledge in implementing effective SSTs and co-construct a tool that is practical, actualized, and relevant in practice. In my theory of change section, I outline and describe how and what learning will occur to address key areas as identified above.

IV. OUTCOMES

Schools use SSTs as a targeted intervention to support struggling students. However, there is little guidance or training offered to promote effective implementation of SSTs. With little direction, counselors are left to establish their own practices, leading to inconsistencies and poor outcomes for students. BESST describes how a tool development process that leads counselors through a change process can promote skill and knowledge acquisition, resulting in the development of an effective tool.

V. PHASES OF TOOL DEVELOPMENT-AN OVERVIEW

This design study recognizes that organizational culture rests with individuals; therefore changes to systems require intentional efforts to shift people's practices and routines (Breckenridge Sproat, 2001; Schein, 2010). In this study, the intent was to increase counselor expertise and shift current autonomous practice, by co constructing an SST handbook. The handbook was meant to serve as an intentional artifact that reflected shared knowledge, skills and guidelines of best practice. Indeed, when strong artifacts that fully represent what the organization wants to convey are shared, cultural shifts can be activated (Breckenridge Sproat, 2001). In this way, the SST Handbook was meant to be an artifact that transferred knowledge within an organization and reinforced new ways of practicing (Rafaeli & Pratt, 2013).

Tools are external representations of the work that occurs in organizations, and as such they are powerful artifacts. Indeed, handbooks are influential communication tools that define

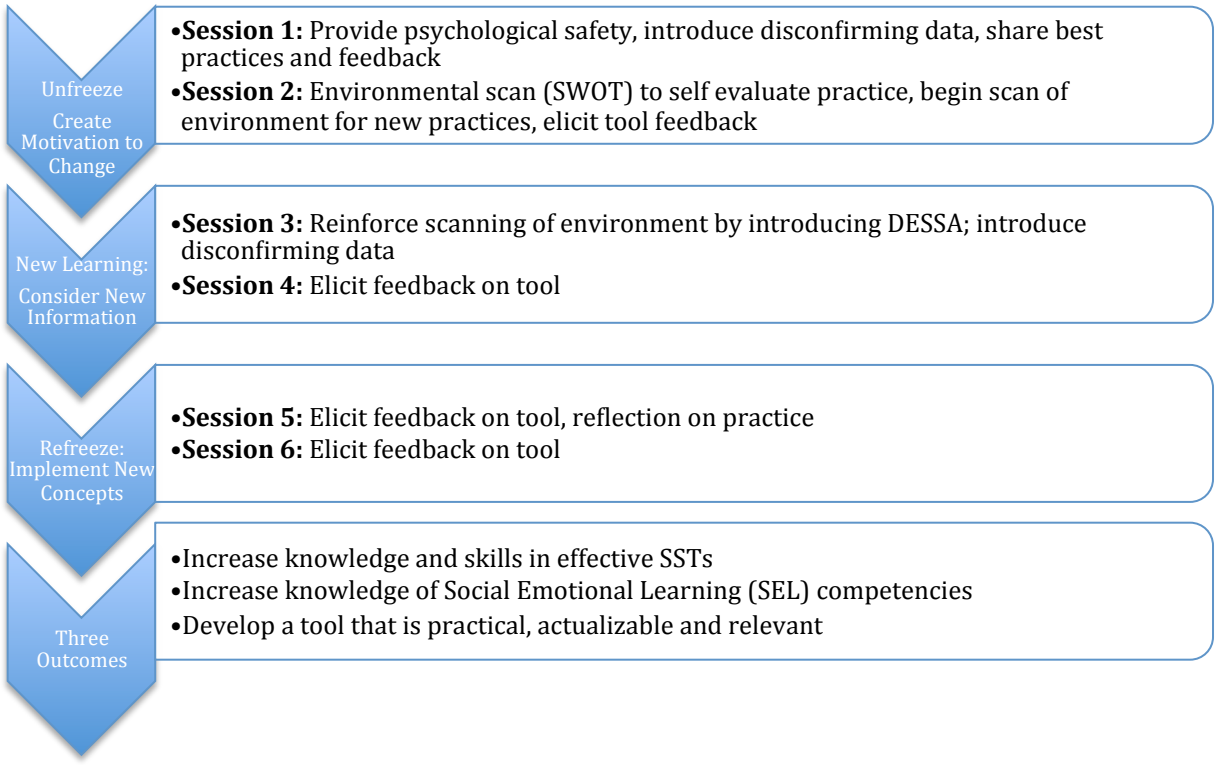
responsibilities and relationships within organizations (Guerin & Delpo, 2015; Breckenridge Sproat, 2001). Therefore, the development of a handbook involves various iterative and intentional steps, including: assessment, construction, and review (Guerin and Delpo, 2015). During the assessment phase information is collected to inform the handbook. In this phase, needs assessment data is gathered to help to understand and articulate problems, challenges, and systems needed to improve work function. In this study, needs assessment data were collected from counselors at all three middle schools to best conceptualize the scope and need of the SST Handbook. Other SST Handbooks were also reviewed and used to create a framework for the desired handbook. The second phase involves construction of the tool, based on the unique needs of the organization. In this study, construction occurred with counselors based on needs assessment data and was iterative in nature. Finally, the handbook needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is practical, actualizable and relevant. In this design study these elements were addressed by involving counselors in the tool development process to provide guidance and feedback.

BESST sought to move counselors through a change process that would result in new learning and development of a tool to guide routines. In order to facilitate the tool development process, BESST afforded unique opportunities for counselors to cultivate a community of practice by drawing on their collective expertise and experience. Given that the tool was co constructed, counselors were able to inform the integration of research and practice into the development an effective SST Handbook. The literature on professional development and change process supports the idea that educator learning is enhanced when information is relevant and applicable to their work, when they contribute to the learning process via discussion and reflective practices, and when they see change as important to their practice. The literature on motivation and learning also points to the fact that educators are motivated by positive student outcomes as well as a sense of professional competency (Finnigan and Gross, 2007). I argue that this experience is also true for

school counselors who are educational leaders, involved in promoting the academic, social and emotional, and career success of students. Given the above, I developed BESST to intentionally plan for the phases of tool development.

In the following section I discuss actions and procedures that formulate BESST and describe how these activities led to the development of a tool as outlined in the theory of action. The professional knowledge base indicates that SSTs are not well understood; therefore, they are poorly and inconsistently implemented. Equally, if counselors are orientated to effective SST practices via a standardized tool, they will acquire new knowledge and skills to guide more effective practice. Accordingly, BESST affords counselors chances to share what they know, discuss what they want to gain in terms of knowledge and skills and link new learning to their own contexts (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The literature also points to the fact that SSTs can have more positive outcomes for students when guided by a tool. Thus, the development of an effective tool was an outcome of BESST. The literature also indicates that SST meetings tend to be deficit focused, and that strengths based-practice can have benefits for students. Conversely, if the DESSA is imbedded in the tool developed, SST Plans may become more assets based. Finally, the literature supports the fact that professional learning is a change process, and that new behaviors emerge when actors are motivated to change and are supported through the process. These discoveries drove the development of BESST.

Figure 2.1: Change Process to Promote Knowledge and Skills and Develop Tool



BESST was implemented over the span of 12 weeks, as professional development that is longer in duration is more likely to lead to shifts in practice (Garcia and Guerra , 2004; McDiarmid, 1990; Shields, 2004; Warren Little, 2006). An outline of the professional development series and agendas is found in Appendix D. BESST sessions were framed utilizing Schein's model of change and incorporated effective professional development elements. Each session is described below.

Creating the Motivation to Change (Sessions 1 and 2)

The literature on learning and change indicate that the first step in shifting practice is to create motivation to change. Motivation to change can be accomplished by providing disconfirming data, which creates a sense of guilt about current practice. Counselors need opportunities to learn new concepts and internalize these new concepts and practices, thus professional learning must allow for discourse and reflective practice. Concurrently, counselors need to experience psychological safety in order to engage in the change process. Psychological safety can be created by describing the new vision, providing formal training, involving the learner in the change process,

providing feedback, coaching, and role modeling, as well as providing group time for members to discuss their experience. BESST also included opportunities to engage with information more than once in order to accommodate new information.

Accordingly, the first two sessions of the professional learning series focused on providing counselors with a context for the work ahead, developing an understanding of the problem, and increasing knowledge of SSTs. The intent was to frame the professional development around their needs and real life experiences. The researcher provided counselors with information on effective SSTs to increase foundational knowledge and engaged the group in discussions regarding current SST functioning, processes and effects on student outcomes. Counselors examined data (qualitative/quantitative) on student referrals and outcomes, to understand how the culture of schools influenced student referrals. Several case studies were used to highlight how the current SST process worked. A case study was presented, based on SST scenarios from another middle school in the district to avoid having the counselors feel critiqued or defensive about their own work. The overall data provided counselors with disconfirming information regarding current practice and outcomes for students. Counselors also engaged in an environmental assessment, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). The SWOT is a planning method to helps counselors understand what is working well, what needs to be improved, what opportunities exist that can be leveraged for change, and what challenges might arise in the work ahead.

The group also discussed the rationale and benefits of a standardized tool to guide practice and considered the various elements of an effective SST using the SST Self Study Guide Checklist. Appendix E describes an effective SST process, as outlined by Powers (2001). This checklist was utilized to orient counselors to the essential elements of an effective SST. Once counselors learned about elements of an effective SST, they identified what elements already existed in their current process and which elements needed to be added. Counselors examined SST handbooks, checklists,

and resources used in other districts and found in the literature to develop a framework that is grounded in best practice. They discussed desired behaviors and provided feedback on essential elements to be included in the tool. The goals of the initial sessions were to help counselors name the problem and be motivated to engage in a learning process, while at the same time, providing psychological safety by offering exemplars. These elements were foundational in engaging in a change process that leads to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and results in the development of a tool.

Internalizing New Concepts, Meanings, and Standards (Sessions 3 and 4)

The second element of BESST focused on two key activities. The first was an opportunity for counselors to more intentionally examine and discuss tools other districts and organizations used to guide SST processes. This helped them to consider how to draft their own tool, taking into consideration the unique needs identified in the SWOT. It was important for counselors to scan the environment for models to guide their own practice. Given that the change process works best when individuals are provided with guidelines to affect their own practice, the goal of the sessions was to provide counselors with models that can inform more effective SST practices. An essential element of these sessions was feedback from counselors on the first draft of the SST tool developed.

The second activity was to train counselors on the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). The DESSA measures student social emotional learning (SEL) competencies, or strengths, that serve as protective factors for children. Counselors were oriented to benefits of the DESSA, learned how it functions and is scored, and discussed the best way to implement the DESSA into their work practice. Given that the SST is meant as a targeted intervention for students who need more instruction, the DESSA can provide data and progress monitoring options that are currently lacking.

The six sessions described in this study were designed to support three overall objectives. The first was to establish a semi-structured environment in which a select group of counselors would be motivated, individually and together as a group, to examine structural, organizational, social, and academic factors identified in the research and professional literature as having played a role in obstructing the educational performance of students from historically disadvantaged sectors of the public school population. This phenomenon has often resulted in over-representation of these students in specialized programs.

The second objective was to encourage counselors to share their perceptions, experiences, and expertise in a welcoming and secure environment. Such an environment would promote psychological safety, encouraging genuine interactions and exchanges as well as deep reflection. A setting in which counselors felt confident and psychologically safe was a prerequisite to participation in the three stages of the change process (unfreezing, new learning and integration of new practices).

The third objective was to afford the researcher ongoing opportunities to examine exchanges between and among counselors participating in the sessions. The hypothesis was that close examination of these dynamic interactions would permit the researcher to capture and recognize the processes by which counselors acquired increasingly sophisticated understanding of SSTs. It was expected that this assessment would lead to the researcher to be able to recognize when the intervention was most and least effective.

Implementation: Internalizing New Concepts, Meanings and Standards (Sessions 5 and 6)

Elements of BESST included guidance of counselors to incorporate new information into their professional self-concept, practice and ongoing relationships. These sessions built counselor efficacy by offering opportunities to practice their skills. Counselors implemented elements of the tool in the field and shared experiences with the group. Counselors reported back on experiences and challenges in the field. The opportunity to discuss their experiences and provide feedback was

essential in promoting continued psychological safety; discussion also offered the group members multiple opportunities to engage in continued discourse about their practice. Additionally, field experience afforded the group opportunities to gauge elements of the tool for practicality, actualization, and feasibility. The group also provided feedback to the researcher on experiences to understand what further iterations were necessary.

Based on these reflective processes, counselors co-constructed a handbook to help guide more effective SST processes. The handbook included ways in which to meaningfully include student SEL in Student Plans. Together these resources provided information needed for a draft version of the SST Handbook, supported by research and counselor expertise. The element of practicality was tested throughout the tool design via intentional feedback loops, to ensure the greatest degree of use in the field. These feedback loops included debrief conversations with counselors to share impressions and experiences, discussions of challenges and benefits of the proposed tool, and analysis of data and reflections on the tool's practicality.

The element of actualization was also intentionally planned throughout the intervention. The tool was co-constructed to ensure that it reflected the needs and realities of counselors in the field. While counselors reviewed tools used by other districts as well as research on effective practices, the tool was also guided by the unique needs that existed with the practice context. Thus, the tool reflected the needs of counselors for actualization and relevance, nested within the larger context of best practices grounded in research. Professional learning was a mechanism in use to guide the tool development and served the function of increasing counselor skill and knowledge, offering opportunities for self-reflection and guidance of the tools development.

Relevance was accounted for within the design by having the counselors co-construct the tool and provide feedback throughout the process. By inviting counselor participation and input, the tool reflected the pertinent work of counselors. While the tool addressed SSTs as nested within

larger tiered intervention frameworks, it remained specific in its scope as a practical, realizable and relevant tool for counselors.

Intervention Design

The intervention design describes activities I implemented with counselors in order to develop an effective SST handbook. Through participation in these activities, counselors acquired skills, knowledge, and competency related to development of an effective SST tool. My goal in designing BESST was to develop a professional learning series that offered counselors a clear research based process to engage in reflective learning and change, resulting in the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and the creation of an effective tool to guide SST processes.

Research Design

In the following section I describe the kind of research conducted to determine the success of my proposed design and interventions in Chapter 3. I first discuss the methodology of design development and action research, then describe the setting and participants, followed by data collection analysis to include impact and process data. Finally, I conclude this section by addressing challenges of rigor and transferability.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study combines Design Development Research (DDR) with Action Research (AR) methodologies. DDR focuses on the study of how one might design, develop, and measure interventions for complex problems in a systematic manner (Plomp, 2007). DDR also seeks to advance knowledge about the interventions applied to a problem of practice in the real life of organizations and to understand the process of change that contributes to the solution of a problem (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). DDR is utilized to examine environments and practices in which there is ambiguity or uncertainty about what interventions are effective. My research is an instance of

design research given that I applied existing knowledge of SST practice to solve real problems of developing more efficacious SST processes, including increasing counselor knowledge and skills, through the development of a tool.

There are three reasons for utilizing design development research in this project. The first is that design research is ideal for addressing issues that are complex or occur in ambiguous settings. This is certainly the case with SSTs, as decision-making practices occur in complex environments that cannot be fully controlled and in which there is limited and vague information about effective behaviors and interventions. Unquestionably, this is true of middle school settings, where a diverse group of individuals make decisions as part of a multi-service support team. Secondly, DDR affords the opportunity to take an action-oriented position and utilize a methodology in which the research revolves around designing, implementing, and evaluating in a formative and summative way. Using DDR, I will have the opportunity to analyze the problem, design an intervention, evaluate results and theories, and revise interventions as needed. In DDR, multiple iterations and feedback are critical. Accordingly, this model will serve my research, as a tool will be co-developed based on feedback loops, field-testing, and solicitation of feedback from intended users. Finally, in DDR, the researcher centers equally on the product as well as the process that leads to the outcome. This perspective offers opportunities to make real life contributions for improvement through documentation, analysis, and critical reflection of the process (Van Den Akker, 1999). The activities and interventions in the professional tool development series I have created are designed to address specific outcomes related to engaging counselors in a change process to promote new learning and co-construct of a tool to guide more effective implementation of SSTs. Discourse, reflection, and feedback loops are included throughout the professional learning series to examine the design development implementation.

I. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH AND ACTION RESEARCH

The DDR was carried out with an Action Research (AR) orientation, given that I was the planner, implementer, and evaluator of the intervention, engaged in shared learning with the participants. Action research utilizes safeguards so that biases due to the multiple roles of the researcher are minimized, such as standardized interventions and critical feedback from practitioners. Action research is similar to design research in that both are focused on research in action as opposed to research about action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007). In action research, the researcher engages in progressive problem solving that is designed to improved practices or interventions. Further, both are interested in developing practical knowledge about the problem of practice and interventions. Action research differs from case studies, in that case studies are largely contemplative. Action research does not stop at examination of an event or person, but instead, is an active problem solving process in which researcher and participants engage in a shared collective learning process. In my research, I am lead developer in creating tools and training, and engage with practitioners to diagnose, plan, initiate, and evaluate the actions of our research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007). Action research methodology informed my design development study because my study intends to accomplish the goal of addressing a problem of practice as a developer and researcher in partnership with school counselors. Action research affords me the opportunity to complete research on SSTs in a naturalistic setting where I am the primary agent of change and to test my own inferences and check my biases throughout the process.

II. DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

My proposed design relies on qualitative methods to measure needs assessment data, impact data and process data. I collected needs assessment data from counselors at all three middle schools to inform my design. Data sources included pre-questionnaires, pre-interviews, pre-SST Self Study Guide, and a strengths based analysis of pre-SST Plans. I collected impact date from questionnaires,

interviews, strengths based analysis of Student Study Plans, and responses to an SST Self Study Guide. Impact data were informed by research, participant logs, select session activities, and field notes. In this section, I describe my data collection strategies for both impact and process data. Table 3.1 provides a summary of all data collection actions.

Table 3.1: Data Collection Strategies for BESST

	Data Collection Strategies		
Three Learning Outcomes	**Needs Assessment Data**	**Impact Data**	**Process Data**
Increase counselor knowledge of effective SSTs by engagement in a change process	• Pre questionnaires • Pre interviews • Pre SST Self Study Guide	• Pre- & post-questionnaire • Pre- & post-interviews • Pre- & post-Self Study Guide • Questionnaire	• Participant Logs • Transcripts of sessions • Field notes
Increase counselor skill in identifying SEL competencies	• Pre analysis of Student Plans to measure type and frequency of strengths	• Pre- and post-interviews • Pre- and post-analysis of Student Plans to measure types and frequency of strengths	• Participant Logs • Transcripts of sessions • Field Notes
Engage counselors in co-construction of a tool to guide a more effective SST process	• N/A	• Pre- and post-interviews • Pre- and post-analysis of Student Plans to measure types and frequency of strengths	• Participant Logs • Transcripts of sessions • Field Notes

Impact Data

1. Questionnaires: Impact data was collected via a short questionnaire administered to all middle school counselors who agreed to participate in the study. Counselors completed the questionnaire during the same time period they participated in individual interviews. This short questionnaire helped to capture demographic information on counselors and informed a broad needs assessment. The questionnaire was administered to focal counselors in School J, pre- and post-intervention. Pre- and post-data informed my design and measured change. The idea was to compare demographic information and responses to questionnaire at the targeted school (School J), along with those of the other middle school counselors, as needs assessment data to better understand how the intervention might have shifted awareness.

The questionnaire asked five questions based on a five point Liker scale (See Appendix F). Questions included, "SSTs are effective in maintaining students in the general education setting," and "I have received training on facilitating effective SST's." The questionnaire scale is structured where "1" indicates "strongly agree" and "5" indicates, "strongly disagree." During the analysis, each specific indicator was analyzed separately. Analysis included comparison data between schools, and pre- and post-results for focal counselors at School J.

2. Interviews: I conducted semi-structured interviews with all middle school counselors who agree to participate in the study, utilizing a standardized tool. Findings for all counselors were used to inform a needs assessment and to generate comparison data. Data were analyzed to reflect findings for all counselors and focal counselors. Data collected for focal counselors helped me to further understand the effect of my intervention and gauge any changes in knowledge and skill.

I drew from research on SSTs to create a standardized interview protocol with 11 questions related to two focus areas: counselor knowledge of effective SSTs and counselor skill in identifying student SEL competencies (See Appendix G). Each question was followed by probes to ask follow up or clarifying questions. I administered pre-interviews to all counselors early in the spring semester. For focal counselors I engaged in pre interviews prior to the first professional learning session to establish baseline data. Post interviews were administered after the last professional learning session to measure change.

Using a rubric to measure skill acquisition, I compared pre and post responses to the interview questions to develop outcome data. Specifically, counselor development of SST skills and knowledge was measured using a model of skill acquisition offered by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2008). This model is developmental and relative in that it focuses on continued

learning over time, across three levels. The model spoke to expertise as developed over time, with skills shifting from theoretical to a more intuitive nature. Specifically, the model described both pragmatic learning and tangible performance in the field as essential elements of developing expertise. In this way, the model was appropriate to describe knowledge and skill acquisition of counselors, as their practice is varied and reflects technical and adaptive elements of learning (Benner, 2005).

While the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model is based on five stages of skill acquisition, including, novice, competent, proficient, expert, and master, in this study I focused on three skill levels, competent, proficient and expert. (Appendix H). The novice stage was not used in this study as all counselors had substantial experience well beyond that of a novice. The master level was also excluded as this level references moments of intense mastery, which would be unlikely to be captured within the confines of this study. Accordingly, counselor acquisition of skills and knowledge was based on a three level model that captured how well knowledge is represented across three relative levels (Chi, 2006).

The first and most desired level of capability was expert. Using this model, expert counselors were described as able to intuitively negotiate between theory and practice to address issues that arise in practice. Expert counselors were nimble in responding to and describing actions in undefined situations. They were also adaptable and could describe integration of technical and adaptive knowledge and skills. Expert counselors were able to explain SST practices and elements in a manner that is thoughtful, insightful and holistic.

The second level of expertise was proficient. A proficient counselor would be described as reliable, able to synthesize information and to predict outcomes based on the situation at hand (Benner, 2005). Proficiency involved a certain level of adaptability in

response and actions. A proficient counselor was described as able to articulate elements and principles of SSTs from a situational standpoint. The proficient counselor was able to depict salient tenets of SSTs, but is not yet able to fully integrate and express a holistic understanding of SSTs.

The third stage of expertise used in this study was competent. A competent counselor was one who relatively new to the field, whose awareness of learning is based on limited experience in the field (Benner, 2005). At this level, knowledge and skill are based on past experiences. A competent counselor was described as an initiate or one who has a basic understanding of SST elements and principles; based on specific measures developed and learned in the field. At this level, counselors were not able to provide a comprehensive appraisal of SSTs, but rather offered a compartmentalized perspective based on limited practice.

These three stages of expertise were used to evaluate the skill and knowledge acquisition of counselors when analyzing interview data. I also triangulated interview data with the individual counselor questionnaires, which was administered during the same period. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with participant consent, to be destroyed after the research is complete.

3. SST Plans: I collected and reviewed SST Plans across all middle schools to analyze how student strengths are identified. I reviewed all SST Plans for the 2014-15 school year at all three middle schools to understand how strengths were identified across middle schools in the district. For focal counselors at School J, I analyzed SST plans for strengths prior to the professional learning series and post to measure any shifts in practice.

SST Plans were blind coded to measure types of strengths noted. Analysis of SST Plans for strengths included examining data on frequency of use and variation of strengths,

especially as related to gender and ethnicity. Strengths on SST plans for all counselors were compared to strengths on SST Plans for focal counselors. Additionally, individual counselor practices of documenting strengths on the SST Plan were explored. I used Dedoose to develop codes for cited strengths. The intent of this outcome data was to determine if counselors changed practice pre- and post-intervention in how they documented strengths, and to understand any differences in how strengths were recorded for students based on gender and ethnicity.

4. SST Check List: I reviewed results of the modified Student Study Team Self Assessment Checklist as impact data (see Appendix I). The Self Study Guide developed by Powers (2001), outlined essential elements of an effective SST and was converted to a 55-item questionnaire with a 3-point scale, in which "1" reflected that the action did not occur at all, "2" reflected that the action occurred occasionally, and "3" reflected that the action occurred consistently. This questionnaire was administered to all counselors (by site) in October 2014, and administered to focal counselors in School J post-intervention. The intent was to see if SST practices shifted as a result of the intervention. Each specific question was analyzed separately to allow for possible improvement within each question.

Process Data

Process data is used capture change that occurs over time as the study is implemented. I used four types of process data to capture observations and descriptions of focal counselors in School J including: research, transcripts of professional learning sessions, participant logs, and field notes. I captured participants' natural responses to the design as well as any changed in practice throughout the study via review of transcripts. The purpose of analyzing process data was to understand how counselors experienced the tool development process, and progressed through the stages of change.

1. Research: The literature review was used to frame and describe findings. Research provides a context for understanding and articulating findings, as well as for describing what was most and least successful in the design.
2. Session Transcripts: Every professional learning session was recorded, transcribed, and coded based on an established rubric. I reviewed transcripts of the professional learning workgroups to further understand the learning process. Coding offered a way to capture and assign summative attributes by using short phrases or words within a visual document to understand patterns (Saldana, 2013). I coded instances that captured specific elements of counselor awareness and knowledge of effective SSTs, as well as comments that illuminated the change process. I used Dedoose to code transcripts and assigned codes to individual counselors to dis-identify them. I also used activities within the sessions to gather data on acquisition of skills and knowledge using a standardized method.
3. Participant Logs: After each professional learning session, I asked counselors to reflect on the tool development process. Participant logs helped document counselor thinking and the learning process. Data was reviewed after each session to further inform the design process. I reviewed participant logs from each session to understand if interventions were successful or where the process could be improved in subsequent iterations. Counselor logs asked two questions: A.) What was the most useful part of our meeting today and why, and B) What was the least useful part of our meeting today and why? (Appendix J).
4. Field Notes: After every session, I recorded field notes to capture my written account of what was seen, heard, and experienced, in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data. Field notes were analyzed to understand the process that unfolded over time. Field notes followed the coding established to protect the identity of individual counselors. Only the researcher has access to these codes to ensure confidentiality.

III. UNIT OF TREATMENT, ANALYSIS AND CASE SELECTION

The setting for this design study was a middle school, School J. The study specifically focused on four focal counselors at School J; however, five counselors from the two other middle schools in the district (School L & T) were also included in the collection of needs assessment data. Pre-data on all middle school counselors were collected to inform a needs assessment, while pre- and post-data for focal counselors were collected to inform baseline data. Together, these data sources informed impact data.

Counselors implement the SST processes in this district, thus they were the targets of intervention. Indeed, this study was centered on counselor practice, as they are the most proximate set of actors needed to enact the intervention. I focused my intervention on the four focal counselors at School J; however, counselors from the two other middle schools (Schools T and L) were invited to participate in pre data collection. These counselors were involved in the study as a means of understanding needs and conditions that currently existed for middle school counselors.

Counselors from Schools T and L, a total of six middle school counselors, were asked to voluntarily participate in the study via a uniform email. The researcher scheduled interviews with all counselors who agreed to participate, during the spring semester. Interviews took place at the school site and include participation in a short questionnaire. The interview and questionnaires combined took between 35-45 minutes to complete. The researcher also collected SST Plans from all three middle schools to analyze documentation of student strengths. Finally, the researcher analyzed data on questions asked on the SST Self Study Guide Checklist, administered to all middle schools in October 2014 and re-administered at School J in May 2015. Together this data made up impact data. Process data was collected for counselors in School J, to understand effects of the tool development series.

IV. VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, AND TRANSFERABILITY

Validity: The researcher must guarantee the design study has validity. Creswell describes validity as the procedural steps taken to ensure correctness and credibility of findings (2007). In a design study, internal validity is demonstrated when the theory of action has an impact and when the researcher illustrates that impact was caused by the design. This study endeavored to establish a relationship between the intervention and counselor change in implementing SST processes. I identified exact outcomes for my design, and my theory of intervention outlined the steps I followed to arrive at these outcomes. External validity is presumed in design development research as the research takes place in the real world and impact occurs through processes taking place in work settings. Construct validity will be addressed by ensuring that tools used are standardized and measure the variables related to the theory and logic model.

Reliability: Reliability is achieved when interventions and activities of the design research are thoughtfully planned and are connected to outcomes of the design. Careful explanation and documentation of the process is important so that duplication of the design study is feasible. I promoted reliability in my study by documenting and detailing procedures to be followed and by using standardized data collection procedures that utilize established methodologies. Each professional development session had an agenda and a clear set of activities informed by a goal and intervention; every activity had a goal, and every goal was clearly connected to a set of activities that flowed from that goal. Interview and observation tools are standardized, and include a rubric, clear goals, and pre-planned activities, that made data collection reliable.

Transferability: Transferability is described as the degree to which an intervention can be transferred to other settings with similar outcomes. In this study transferability may be limited by the fact that counselors made up a small, purposeful sample, bounded by organizational membership. Purposive sampling of a small group of counselors was deliberate, as counselors are

most critical to the testing of my theory (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful sampling of small groups can most effectively elucidate local meaning and contextual factors within a particular setting, such as a high performing, resourced middle school (Maxwell, 2013). Small sampling can also be beneficial to uncover unique meanings from the perspective of the particular group of study (Watters, Biernacki, 1989). In this study, small purposive sampling provided typicality of counselors, affording more confidence in drawing conclusions than other types of sampling methods. While a drawback of small sampling is that findings may not be legitimately generalized across groups, in this case intentional sampling of middle school counselors was intentional as they represented a specialized group whose meanings and common beliefs could be lost with greater sampling (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). To the extend possible, I enhanced transferability by thoroughly documenting the research context and central assumptions guiding the study. The intervention in this study clearly documented the context and guiding assumptions so the design could be replicated in similar middle schools. I also provided clear procedures for each activity, described roles of participants, and outlined theoretical frameworks to enhance transferability of this study.

V. THREATS OF BIAS AND RIGOR

Bias: Since I was involved in the conceptualization, design, development, execution, and evaluation of the study, I must ensure credibility of my findings. Plomb (2010) notes that since the environment is manipulated at the same time it is being studied, the researcher must remain flexible while having a defined conceptual framework, crafting a strong design, and checking data with sources (Plomb, 2010). Given my multiple roles, I protected against possible bias throughout the life of the study by establishing clear research procedures before the design was implemented. The procedures I established included: periodic data review to identify inconsistencies, examination of disconfirming data, and review of data with colleagues. These actions helped me avoid advocacy bias, or drawing conclusions that supported my design interventions.

Rigor: In action research, rigor is described as how data are produced, collected, reviewed, and evaluated within multiple iterations (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In this study, data were collected from a variety of sources, including pre- and post-surveys, interviews, written reflections and artifacts, and observations. I created instruments that are low inference to capture impact data. Relative to process data, I constructed instruments that clearly outlined what I was seeking and captured responses to the intervention. Additionally, I engaged in ongoing self-reflection of my role as facilitator and researcher to protect against bias.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYS OF DATA

Introduction

School J is nested in a high performing, extremely resourced district in Northern California. The district is engaged in efforts to promote greater equity and access for all students, including review of school systems that support struggling students. This effort is reflected in the function of counselors, who oversee various systems of support for students, including Student Study Teams (SSTs). Over the past two years, counselors mentioned needing training in effectively implementing SSTs to create greater levels of alignment and improve outcomes for students. Accordingly, counselor teams at each secondary site participated in an SST Self Study Guide in October 2014 to begin to assess for needs and areas of growth. These organizational conditions generated a research opportunity to explore effective SSTs as an area of study.

It was in this context that the researcher approached counselors in School J to participate in the study. School J was chosen for three reasons: 1) principal support for the research project, including counselor time away from the site to participate in professional learning; 2) counselor interest in the topic and willingness to participate as a team; and 3) research alignment with work School J was already engaged in. All four counselors at School J agreed to participate in the research. Counselors engaged in a six-session tool development series to increase understanding and

skill relative to SSTs, including becoming more efficacious in identifying student strengths and culminating in the development of an SST Handbook to guide more effective practice.

While focal counselors at School J were the primary focus of this intervention, counselors at the two other middle schools in the district (School L and T) also participated in pre-data collection activities. Specifically, they participated in pre-interviews, pre-questionnaires, a pre-SST Self Study Guide assessment, as well as provided SST Plans.. Their participation was intended to help the researcher understand how SSTs were conceptualized across middle schools as part of a larger needs assessment.

The theory of action that guided this study, Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams (BESST), expressed that SSTs were poorly implemented because they were inadequately understood. Equally, if counselors were guided through a change process implemented via a professional learning series, they would acquire new knowledge and skills. This new learning could then be captured in an SST Handbook to guide a more effective process district-wide. Inherent in this theory was the idea that in order for counselors to develop a handbook that would guide both ostensive and per-formative aspects of their work, the tool would need to be co-constructed with them.

The design study strove to meet three specific learning outcomes. The first learning outcome was to increase counselor knowledge and skill in implementing effective SSTs by engaging counselors in a three-stage change process. The theory of intervention was that if counselors engaged in a change process, then they would acquire new knowledge and skills. In this study, engagement in a three-stage change process was a precondition to promote new knowledge and skills about effective SSTs. The change process was conceptualized as the mechanism to promote new learning about effective SSTs, while acquisition of expertise was the outcome. Effective SSTs were defined using a model posed by Powers (2001) in which SSTs have three essential elements: Organization and Management, Team Work, and Problem Solving.

The Organization and Management domain reflects how SSTs are actualized and initiated and is represented by two sub : a) Referral Process and b) Follow up Meetings. The second element of an effective SST, Team Work, represents how actors work together, and was made up of two domains, a) Team Preparation and b) Intervention Goals. The final element, Problem Solving, or how data are collected and used to solve problems, was made up of two domains, a) Data Use and b) Progress Monitoring. These three domains and sub-elements provided the framework for evaluating counselor knowledge and skill in effective SSTs.

The second outcome of this study was to increase counselor skill in identifying social emotional learning (SEL) competencies or strengths that serve as protective factors for students. The theory of intervention posited that engagement in a professional learning series would increase expertise in SEL competencies and promote more positive SST processes. Therefore, an element of this study focused on introducing counselors to the Devereux Student Strength Assessment (DESSA), an SEL assessment tool, as an intervention strategy.

The final outcome of this study was to engage counselors in co-construction of a tool to guide more effective practice. The theory of intervention was based on the rationale that co-construction of an SST Handbook would help to move counselors from autonomous practice based on limited knowledge of SSTs, to a more integrated and aligned practice. The co-development of a tool that was practical, actualizable, and relevant was key to this study.

Findings of this study are based on a purposeful sample of counselors bounded by organizational membership. Purposive sampling of a small group of counselors was deliberate, as counselors were most critical to the testing of my theory (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful sampling of small groups can most effectively elucidate local meaning and contextual factors within a particular setting, such as a middle school (Maxwell, 2013). Small sampling can also be beneficial to uncover unique meanings from the perspective of the group (Watters & Biernacki, 1989). In this study, small

purposive sampling provided typicality of counselors, affording more confidence in drawing conclusions than other types of sampling methods. While a drawback of small sampling is that findings may not be legitimately generalized across groups, in this case intentional sampling of middle school counselors was beneficial as they are a specialized group whose meanings and common beliefs could be lost with greater sampling (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

In this way, the study does not mean to provide findings generalizable to wider populations, but rather speaks to the experiences of middle school counselors in a high performing and affluent public middle school (School J), where parents tend to be highly involved in their child's education. Findings of this study are prototypical in that most research on school improvement is done in urban settings in which school communities have limited resources. While no assurances can be made that findings from this study are generalizable, outcomes may lend themselves to further research on high performing schools.

I. ORGANIZATION OF DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, I engaged counselors in a tool development process to activate change that would enhance knowledge and skills and result in creation of an SST handbook to guide more expert practice. The three learning outcomes this study sought to achieve, included: 1) Increase knowledge and skills of effective SSTs by engaging counselors in a change-process; 2) Increase knowledge in social emotional learning (SEL) competencies; and, 3) Co-construct an SST Handbook.

In the following chapter, I describe findings organized around these three learning outcomes, beginning with a discussion of process data and followed by impact data. Process data were collected from focal counselors as they engaged in the tool development process and include analysis of research, session transcripts, participant logs, and field notes. Data were collected to understand needed adjustments throughout the process and to make recommendations for future

iterations. Subsequently, I discuss impact data findings. To inform impact data, I examined pre- and post-questionnaires, interviews, SST plans for strengths, and select SST Self Study Guide questions. Within the discussion of impact data I also discuss needs assessment data.

II. DATA ANALYSIS: PROCESS DATA

Process data were collected to serve two functions in this tool development study. The first function was to identify needed adjustments and corrections during the implementation process. The second function was to understand and reflect on changes that did or did not occur over time and make recommendations for a second iteration. The tool development process included input-reflection on the effectiveness of the tool at different stages of development, which was simultaneously the means to effect learning orchestrated throughout these six BESST sessions. Feedback on the developing tool was analyzed using the same data sources.

Process data sources were used to inform the three learning outcomes of the design: 1) Increase counselor knowledge and skills of effective SSTs by engaging them in a change-process; 2) Increase counselor skills in social emotional learning (SEL) competencies; and, 3) Co-construct an SST Handbook. The first learning outcome describes counselor engagement in the change process over time to activate learning. Specifically, the change process documents how counselors engaged in a change process of unfreezing, new learning and refreezing, described by Schein (2010), in order to acquire new knowledge and skills. Process data provided little insight into the second outcome of increased skill in SEL competencies. The third outcome, co-construction of the SST Handbook speaks to the tool development process and describes the progression of constructing a practical, relevant and actualized tool.

Process Data Sources

Process data were principally informed by four data sets: 1) Research, 2) Analysis of session transcripts 3) Participant logs, and 4) Field notes. These data were analyzed using a codebook to

measure the change process, new learning, and elements of the tool development process (Appendix K). The relevance of each data set to the tool development process and change process are presented below.

1) Research: Several bodies of research informed the evolvement of the tool development series, Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams (BESST). The literature on effective SSTs was consulted to inform how successful SSTs are defined, structured, and carried out. This information helped to guide conceptualization of an effective SST tool. Research in the area of tools and routines was referenced to understand patterns of thinking and behaving, an area of particular interest when promoting change. Understanding how tools and routines support practice was important when considering how to best develop an SST tool to guide practice. Deficit-based practice literature was also consulted to comprehend how subjective thinking about minority students may influence SST decision-making. Given that SSTs tend to over-represent minority students, research in the area of reducing biased thinking was an important element of BESST. Research in the area of social emotional learning (SEL) was also reviewed to understand how to leverage strengths-based practice in SSTs. Since SEL promotes better outcomes for students, advancing its use in SSTs was essential in developing BESST. Effective professional development literature was consulted to inform the sequence and structure of the tool development process. This information assisted in conceptualizing how to best structure BESST to maximize outcomes. Finally, literature on organizational change was consulted to understand how to shift practice. The research on organizational change was central to designing the BESST intervention process, as the focus of the tool development series was to guide counselors in learning and unlearning . Together these multiple subject areas informed the conceptual framework and design of BESST.

2) Session Transcripts: Every BESST session was recorded in its entirety and transcribed to represent conversations. Transcripts captured reflections of participant perspectives and voice and

were reviewed on an ongoing basis to provide meaning and context to the occurrences being studied. Transcripts also provided rich detail to data analysis relative to participant discussions and actions. Analysis of session transcripts included creating a rubric to capture the change process, where three stages of change were identified, including: unfreezing or motivation to change in the face of disconfirming data, new learning or the concept of looking towards effective models to guide practice, and unfreezing or integration of new practices. The change process described how transformation occurred to shift thinking and actions. Thus, it served this design study, as the intent was to activate change as a means of impacting counselor knowledge and skills.

3) Participant Logs: Participant logs made up one source of process data in this study. Logs were analyzed to inform the tool development process and provided feedback on specific steps that might lead to a specific outcome. Logs were completed after each session. Logs captured what participants found most and least helpful and were analyzed and coded using a rubric that measured change over time. Expressly, the rubric captured whether comments on logs reflected unfreezing, new learning or refreezing.

4) Field Notes: The researcher drafted field notes to document details of each session. Field notes captured descriptions of activities, reflections on occurrences, notes on emerging questions and documentation of future actions. Field notes provided meaning and understanding of the phenomena being studied through researcher self-reflection. Field notes were analyzed using a standardized rubric that captured the three stages of change.

Combined, these process data sources informed the design study. In the following section, I describe findings related to each of the three learning outcomes of this study.

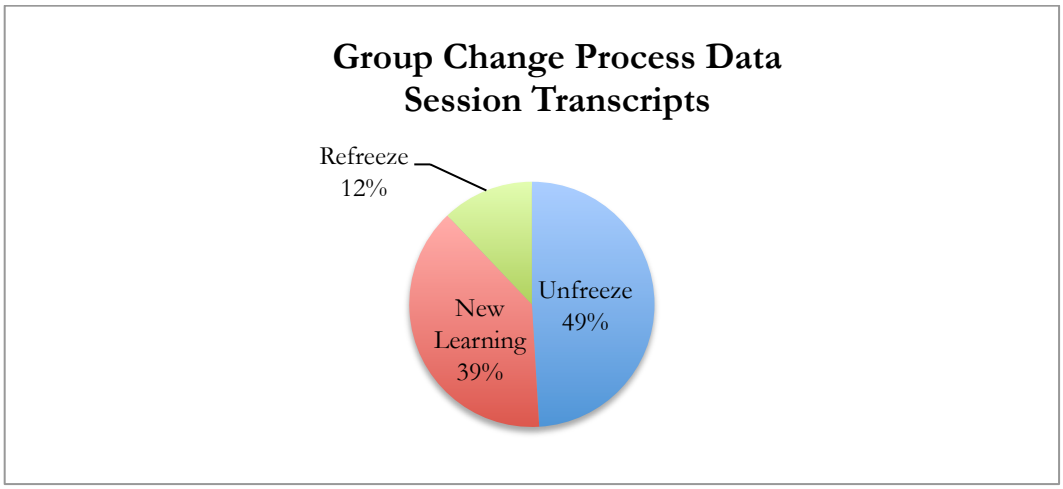
Learning Outcome One: Promote New Knowledge and Skills (Process Data)

The tool development process was meant to move counselors through a change progression over time. The change process was designed to evolve from creating motivation to change to

promoting new learning to internalization of new concepts. In this study, the impetus for new learning was engagement in the change process, which served as the mechanism for acquistion of new knowledge or skills. Thus, the following discussion focuses on how counselors engaged in the change process to activate new learning as a group and individually.

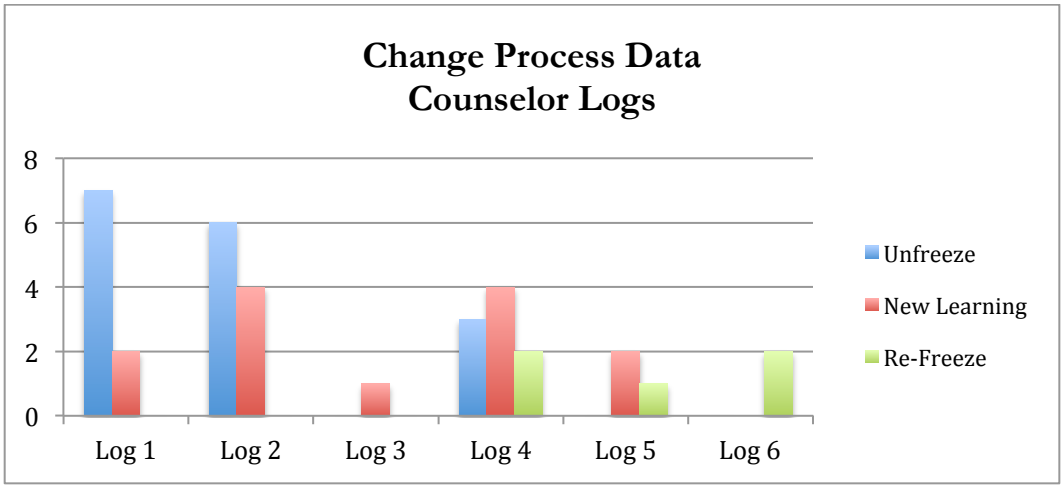
Overall, findings indicated that counselors engaged in the change process and acquired new knowledge and skills relative to SSTs. These findings were supported by analysis of session transcripts, field notes, and participant logs.

Figure 4.1: Session Transcripts Reflecting Change Process over Time



Through analysis of session transcripts, it appears that counselors as a group moved through all three stages of the change process (Figure 4.1). Indeed, data analyzed from all six session transcripts suggests that counselors engaged in unfreezing 49% of the time, followed by new learning 39%, and refreezing 12%. Outcomes from field notes support the idea that counselors engaged in the change process, with unfreezing occurring 44%, new learning 41%, and refreezing 15%. According to these two data sources, counselors as a group appear to have spent most time engaged in unfreezing, followed by new learning, and then refreezing.

Figure 4.2: Counselor Logs Reflecting Change Process



When examining counselor logs, it is interesting to note that unfreezing was most evident in the first two sessions, while new learning occurred throughout, except for session six (Figure 4.2). In contrast, re-freezing took place in the last three sessions. Field notes also supported that the change process was developmental with more unfreezing in the first sessions and refreezing occurring in later sessions, with slight overlaps within the three stages. Thus, the unfolding of the change process can be seen as a progression over time rather than a fully linear process.

In the following section, I describe activities that took place within each session to provide additional context for these results. BESST sessions were intentionally founded on the change process and included multiple opportunities for feedback. This iterative process allowed for counselor needs to be reflected and taken into account throughout the process.

Table 4.1: Stages of Change and Focus for each Session

Session & Change Process Activated	**Activity**	**Focus of Session**
Session 1: Unfreezing	Review Study Data Review	Provide psychological safety Introduce data and elicit feedback
Session 2: Unfreezing	SWOT Review SST Resources	Self evaluate practice Scan environment & elicit feedback
Session 3: New Learning	DESSA Why Students Fail	Reinforce scanning of environment Introduce DESSA & Data
Session 4: New Learning	Review Draft of Handbook Discuss DESSA in the field	Elicit feedback on tool
Session 5: Refreezing	Why Students Fail Review Handbook	Review Handbook Provide feedback
Session 6: Refreezing	Review handbook and provide feedback	Elicit feedback on tool and process

Table 4.1 summarizes the change process each session was founded on. In this table the session, activity and focus of each session is highlighted.

The researcher anticipated that observations and insights generated by this design study and summarized in this chapter would encourage generative professional learning opportunities. In this way, learning acquired by participating counselors would not end up being abstracted or abandoned; instead, knowledge acquired by counselors would be put into practice. Indeed, the author began this study with the expectation that counselor professional development would afford counselors opportunities to engage in addressing challenging problems of professional practice in the field. To fulfill this objective, lessons acquired during sessions would be captured in the form of a handbook to serve as a guide to other counselors.

Session One:

Session one focused on stimulating unfreezing by intentionally introducing counselors to the study, providing them with various forms of disconfirming data and orienting them to literature on effective SSTs. Based on process data, it appears that counselors engaged in unfreezing as well as new learning in session one.

Counselors were provided psychological safety by reviewing the design study and their role in the research as practitioners and collaborators. The group struggled to develop group norms as they reported high levels of respect towards one another at the outset. These comments suggested counselors felt comfortable and safe working together as a team, prior to the intervention.

Counselors shared that they found the data review to be beneficial. Counselor CA shared, "I think it helps us to identify trends. It helps us to see that there's not a lot of consistency...." Counselor CB commented, "I think it's a really helpful tool to have an overall glance of, "Who are we SST'ing? Is it males? Is it certain ethnicities? What are the reasons?" These comments support the idea that counselors found the data review to be valuable.

Counselors were introduced to an effective SST framework (based on Powers' model) and asked to provide feedback via a discussion. Comments captured in this initial meeting unanimously reflected concern about practicality of this ideal SST model. All counselors reported that while the model presented was ideal, the scope and depth outlined was not practical. Specifically, counselor feedback included, "I think this is pretty representative of what we do already. It's definitely broken down in a lot more structure" (Counselor CA). Counselor CB commented, "It looks comprehensive, and once again, standards for excellence. It's like ok, in a perfect world…yes, hire a couple of extra counselors and we'll do all this, no problem." Finally, Counselor CD simply commented, "Detailed" with little expression. These comments seem to indicate that counselors did not see the SST model presented as practical, based on the realities of their practice. Feedback on practicality informed the tool development process to ensure feasibility was a priority.

In sum, the activities in session one appear to have prompted unfreezing and some elements of new learning. These findings are in line with Schein's model of change in which he describes individuals needing to grapple with data that causes some level of anxiety and serves as an impetus for change. While counselors did not disclose feelings of disquiet regarding the data, they did respond with some feelings of trepidation about the model of effective SST's presented. Together these activities appeared to have stimulated unfreezing and new learning for counselors.

Session 2:

Session two was also meant to stimulate unfreezing by having counselors participate in two main activities. Based on process data, it appears that counselors engaged in unfreezing and new learning in session two. The first activity was an environmental assessment of the SST process, called Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). The SWOT asked counselors to independently reflect on their current SST practices and record strengths or what they believed worked about their process, weaknesses or elements they felt presented challenges, opportunities to

improve the process, and finally threats or elements that might get in the way of improvements. Counselors reflected on their practice and then paired up to discuss results and compare ideas. Counselor pairs then shared ideas with the larger group. As a group, counselors generated eight strengths, ten weaknesses, six opportunities, and six threats (See Appendix L). Strengths fell into several categories, including: positive focus, team collaboration, well understood referral process, and effective documentation. Weaknesses included lack of resources, teacher investment and tiered interventions, and inconsistent practices. Opportunities included finding a way to capitalize on student strengths and improving communication. Threats were listed as lack of time to provide progress monitoring and follow up, and deficit thinking of teachers. Counselors identified more weaknesses than strengths and saw room for improvement. This activity afforded counselors the opportunity to assess their current practice and self identify areas of strengths and growth in a non-threatening manner to promote psychological safety.

The second activity that provided critical feedback was participation in a review of SST tools and resources. These materials served as model of alternate practices and included three internal site referral forms, and three external district SST manuals. Counselors worked in pairs to review the materials and consider what elements of these documents might serve as models for the SST Handbook. All pages indicated by counselors were subsequently collated and used to inform content areas of the SST Handbook. These sections were framed against the model proposed by Powers: Organization and Management, Teamwork, and Problem Solving. Once collated, there were fifteen recommended content areas for organization and management, three for teamwork and nine for problem solving. These findings indicate that most needs were indicated for organization and management, such as when and how to make referrals, how to formalize routines, definition of terms, and frequently asked questions. Counselors identified teamwork as an area needing very little content support, and problem solving as needing content to address tiered interventions and follow

up practices. The feedback provided in session two guided the tool development process by providing important information on counselor perspectives on their current process and desires relative to a handbook.

Session 3:

The third BESST session was meant to stimulate new learning. Process data indicate that it did so; however, session three showed least activity relative to the change process. The session focused on two main activities, generating of a list of reasons why students fail as well as an introduction to the DESSA. The first activity, meant to be repeated in a latter session to measure change, focused on brainstorming reasons why students fail in school as a way to explore assumptions about student failure. However, due to time constraints, completion of the activity was postponed for a later session and only a partial list of twelve reasons was generated.

It appears that counselors engaged in new learning in session three; however, the least comments were captured for this session. This may be due to the fact that session three focused on a presentation as well as the fact that only two of the four counselors were present at this session. The majority of session three was dedicated to a guest speaker, a professor from a local university and co-creator of the DESSA, who spoke to counselors about benefits of the DESSA as an SEL tool. This was an opportunity for counselors to hear about a research-validated tool to capture student strengths. After the training, counselors were asked to implement the DESSA in the field and report back on outcomes at the next meeting. Field experiences would be used to inform the next stage of the tool development process.

Session 4:

Session four was structured to offer counselors an opportunity to engage in new learning by giving counselors an opportunity to review the first draft of the SST handbook developed from

feedback from session two. Based on process data outcomes, it appears that counselors not only engaged in new learning, but also unfreezing and refreezing.

Session four was expressly structured to provide counselors with an opportunity to provide input on the proposed table of contents and referral form for the SST Handbook. These two areas were chosen because they provided a framework to guide other handbook sections. Regarding the proposed table of contents, counselors thought that the proposed content was appropriate. However, there was much discussion regarding the referral form.

Counselors acknowledged that the current pre-referral form did not offer a clear way to track data and discussed options. Counselor CA stated that fusing forms made the most sense in order to have all data at hand during an SST meeting. Counselor CC asked the group if they created packets of information for SST's, to which the answer from the group was no. This conversation became intense as Counselor CC felt very passionate about packets as a means of bringing large amounts of information to bear on the SST. For example, Counselor CC shared, " I'm just so confused. By the time you get to an SST, this is like a microscope. You have to have all that information ready. I'm not saying anyone is doing it wrong" (Session Transcript). Counselor CC also made the following comments, "Do you guys put behavior. I would put every single thing...I'm not saying it's better"(Session Transcript) and "I'm in shock…the idea of pulling up that information or not having that information seems pointless to me. Then don't have the meeting" (Session Transcript). The other counselors in the group responded that they did capture relevant information, however not at the depth Counselor CC was referencing. In fact, they indicated that too much information was not always helpful. For example, Counselor CB shared, "If we don't know, we don't know"(Session Transcript). Counselor CD responded that personal family matters, "would not come out in an SST, nor should it"(Session Transcript). Counselor CA added, "I think if there's a specific something I'm looking for, or I want more history that I don't have, then I'll go

and check and do that sort of research." Overall, counselors agreed that a referral form would be helpful in capturing more information, though there was not consensus on how much information was appropriate or that packets of information were essential. The discussion of packets generated a robust conversation about data collection.

As a follow up to this session, Counselor CC sent the group an apology email stating that their interest was not to be critical or offensive, instead comments were driven by intensity and passion about counseling issues. Counselor CC shared, "I'm unclear if the packet method is the preferred method" and "I do appreciate the opportunity to have meaningful discussions on these topics. I wish we had more time for these types of conversations" (Session Transcript). The other counselors did not respond to this email.

Counselors also provided key feedback on the DESSA and its possible role within the SST Handbook during session four. Only one counselor utilized the DESSA in the field, Counselor CB. Counselor CB shared the experience as positive. Specifically shared were the following comments, "Everyone showed some interest in it, even the kids that were around the table and heard about it were like-I want to see" and "The teachers took this without much convincing…and, they got it back to me really quickly, which means that they felt if was important….I had parents do it and they were excited with it" (Session Transcript). The other counselors expressed wonder that teachers had been willing to use the DESSA. Counselor CC shared, "I was surprised to hear from [counselor CB] that teachers were so open to filling out 72 questions"(Session Transcript). Counselor CD seemed skeptical, stating, "I'd like to hear from those teachers" (Session Transcript) and counselor CA added, " I'm thinking of some of the veterans that might be a little more resistant to filling this out"(Session Transcript). Despite their initial misgivings about teacher interest, counselors acknowledged the potential value of the DESSA as part of the SST Handbook. For example, counselor CC shared, " I do think it would be a value add"(Session Transcript). Counselor CD

commented, "One of the uses that it could point out is the negative teachers that you have in groups sometimes. It says it without you having to say it….that there is a measure sitting there that is other than verbal from someone else" (Session Transcript). This statement hints as the fact that counselors saw value in moving from a subjective to objective practice of collecting information.

Overall counselors felt the DESSA could be a conversation opener, teaching tool, and credible instrument. With this being said, counselors did not want the DESSA to replace their current practice of collecting strengths. For example Counselor CD shared, " The strengths column is elicited around the table and it's very personal for the kid…so I would not see replacing that. Augmenting it would be fine" (Session Transcript). Counselor CA added, "I don't see replacing it…but this adds context to those strengths" (Session Transcript). Counselor feedback on the SST Handbook indicated that they found the DESSA relevant to their work and based on field practice could see the tool as practical. This data helped to inform ways in which the DESSA could be incorporated into the handbook.

Session 5:

Session five was meant to stimulate refreezing. Indeed, based on process data results, this session did appear to activate refreezing as well as new learning. Session five focused on an opportunity for counselors to complete two main tasks. One was to complete the activity started in session three, Why Students Fail. Counselors reviewed their original list of twelve reasons why students fail and were then asked to indicate who had agency over the identified reason, the parent, child, or school (Appendix M).

This activity inspired a robust conversation. For example, Counselor CA shared that cultural differences were beyond anyone's control because nobody chooses them. Counselor CB responded by saying:

> That's so funny because when it came to cultural differences, I was like; it's only the school's responsibility. The kid should be who they are, the parents should be who

> they are, it's us that I felt in that instance needs to accommodate to them (Session Transcript).

Counselor CD shared:

> I didn't put school at all. Because it's more who owns it, it's who comes with it. For me, that's the way I put it. Not as who forms it necessarily, but who comes to school with it. And that would be parent and student. I didn't put school in that one at all (Session Transcript).

Counselor CB answered, "But I would hate to ascribe if they failed in school because they came with a different culture" (Session Transcript) to which Counselor CD replied, "No, no, that isn't what I meant"(Session Transcript). Counselor CB summarized their response by stating:

> I have school in every one of them except for divorce/family issues, which easily could be school also,… but other than that, I had school as each one of these. Maybe that's partly because we're school employees and that does mean we have the most control over, and what I feel is the most responsibility to address. Overarching though, I think it's pretty much always collective. It's not just us or them; it's usually us and them (Session Transcript).

Thus, counselors had conflicting ideas about who was responsible for student failure. While this activity was meant to offer counselors a chance to reflect on their responses (based on initial responses in session three) this did not occur as they did not have time to complete the activity in Session 3.

Session five also offered counselors an opportunity to provide input on the latest draft of the SST Handbook. Counselors expressed positivity that the handbook asked teachers to take more initiative in tier one interventions. Counselor CB indicated this would be helpful in keeping teachers accountable, "'Oh! In the district manual we talk about this. Here's the district manual, please go ahead and do it.' Like they're very busy and I'm not. I'm just sitting around twiddling my thumbs" (Session Transcript). Feedback on clear communication was also indicated as important. Counselor CC shared that generally an email was sent to the parent explaining the SST process, "So I would love to have a template that we could just kind of use and fill in the student name and the date and time. Just so they know what's going to happen"(Session Transcript). Counselor CB shared, "I

agree…It makes just a much more welcoming environment instead of a defensive environment. Like all these adults are going to tell me I'm screwing up" (Session Transcript). Counselor CA asked that an FAQ be added and counselor CB added that this would help to standardize the process. These comments reflect feedback on the tools practicality in terms of ease of use, relevance in terms of providing language for teacher accountability and actualization in terms of needing teachers to support the process and creating fillable forms and templates.

Session 6:

Session six was meant to offer counselors opportunities to integrate new information and refreeze. Indeed, refreezing was represented in session six based on process data outcomes. Counselors provided feedback on their experience participating in BESST and completed participant logs and the SST Self Study Guide Checklist. Several highlights of feedback provided by counselors are described below.

Relative to data review in session one, counselors described that they found the data valuable, but not disconfirming. For instance, Counselor CD stated, "I don't think I did. I think since we all pretty much know why and how our teams work." Counselor CB added, "I wouldn't say that anything was surprising or disconfirming, but I don't always have it in my head at one spot…this really brought it home and made it consumable." Counselor CA reported, "I don't think I'm surprised, but it was nice to be able to have it at a glance." Thus, counselors engaged in reviewing data on student outcomes and disproportionality, but did not appear disquieted by the data.

Counselors were also invited to make edits to the individual SWOT they completed in session two, which counselor CA and CB did. Counselors shared that they found the SWOT to be valuable. For instance, Counselor CB shared a benefit of the SWOT was, "You come up with it on

your own instead of someone else telling you what you're doing right or wrong." Counselor CA, commented:

> I think it really makes you look at your process and try to identify what's working, what's not. Versus just kind of talking about it. I think if you really spend the time to break it down, it makes you see the SST in a different light.

Counselor CD shared that the SWOT, "helps people grow without being threatened" These findings indicate that counselors experienced the SWOT activity as valuable and non-threatening in terms of identifying SST needs.

Counselors also described that having a professor describe the DESSA in session three was compelling and lent to credibility: Counselor CB shared, "It was like the white coat syndrome. 'Oh yes, totally believe you.'" Counselors described the Why Students Fail activity as valuable. For instance, Counselor CA shared, "I liked that activity... I think it was helpful to just go through all those reasons… I just realized that all parties are responsible often, or more than one, for many of those reasons. It's not always just the kid."

In sum, counselors appear to have engaged in the change process over the six sessions. The first two sessions were specifically designed to create opportunities for unfreezing, which is reflected in outcomes. Sessions three and four were meant to inspire new learning, which appears to have occurred based on results. The last two sessions were meant to stimulate re-freezing, which also appears to have occurred based on results. What is notable in these findings is the change process was not linear or mechanical, but instead progressive and dynamic. Indeed, the stages of change overlapped at times, indicating that change was developmental.

When examining data on the change process for each counselor, findings varied. Below, I describe process data outcomes for each counselor relative to the change process.

Outcomes for Counselor CA

Process data results suggest that Counselor CA moved through all three stages of the change process. Within the change process, Counselor CA engaged in unfreezing 36%, new learning 42%, and refreezing 22%, as per analysis of session transcripts (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Transcripts-Counselor CA

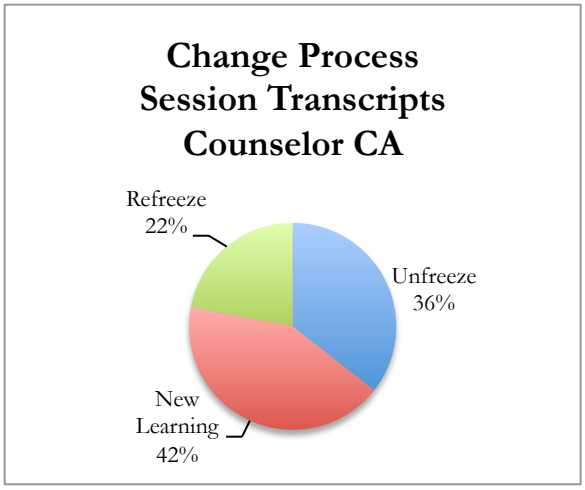
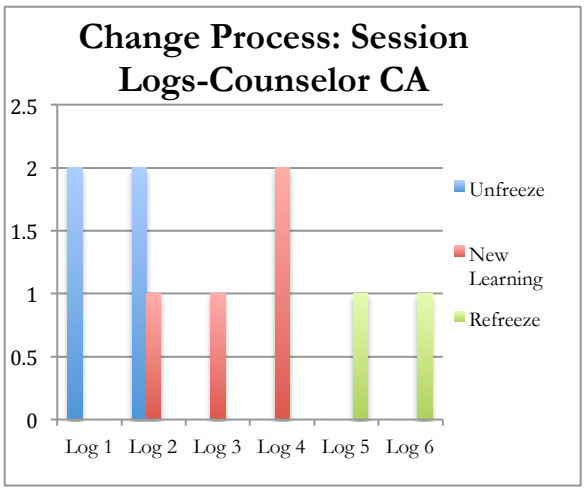


Figure 4.4: Logs-Counselor CA



An example of this shift is highlighted by the following comment that reflects unfreezing: "I mean, I feel like I have my own process and I like to think it's great, you know? That could be considered a threat too if we all feel like we have this down and we don't really need to grow or learn" (Session 2). This comment reflects some level of discomfort with shifting practice, which is typical of the unfreezing stage. This, compared to a comment reflecting refreezing or incorporating new skills and knowledge in Session Six:

> I think I'm really a lot more considerate of the process. I think that there were times where I wasn't quite as formal with the process and I think there were times where maybe I didn't do enough to prepare for the meeting, as far as gathering data, so that's something that I've been doing (Counselor CA)

The idea that Counselor CA engaged in all stages of the change process is confirmed when examining participant log outcomes. Counselor CA completed six of six participant logs, which contained 10 comments overall (Fig. 4.4). On average counselor CA made 1.7 comments per log.

Counselor CA's comments on log one and two tended to reflect unfreezing. Beginning on log two and extending to log 4, Counselor CA's logs begin to reflect new learning. Finally logs five and six capture comments characterized by refreezing. Thus, relative to analysis of logs, it appears that Counselor CA successfully moved through the change process of unfreezing, followed by new learning, culminating in refreezing.

Specific examples of the change progression can be seen when examining log excerpts. For example, in session one Counselor CA shared the following comments to describe what was most useful in the meeting, "I really found the [school] data valuable-I am looking forward to reviewing the updated site data" and "The case study of the 7th grader was valuable-it allowed for valuable conversation around our processes." These comments reflect reactions to disconfirming data as part of unfreezing. The following statement, made about what was least useful in the session, augmented these comments, "I would say reviewing of the national/general data, as although I understand its relevance, I think we [the district] are ahead of such info." These comments suggest that while Counselor CA was open to considering disconfirming data, there may have been some resistance to the idea of comparison to national data. This type of conflict is integral to the unfreezing process as it reflects a natural response to disconfirming data.

Beginning on log two and extending to log four, Counselor CA's comments shift to reflect new learning. New learning is characterized by searching the environment for new ways of practicing and considering other models. Examples reflecting new learning include, "I found looking through other district data to be helpful/useful as well" (Session 2, Log), and positively describing, "Learning about the DESSA and how it can be incorporated to better support students" (Session 3, Log). In session four, Counselor CA shared, "Today I enjoyed the discussion around the SST process and paperwork-it was beneficial to hear about what processes other school sites use and gave me some new ideas on how to make my own SSTs even more productive." These comments

indicate Counselor CA was open to new learning and valued the ability to consider external resources as opportunities for growth. The idea of scanning the environment and considering other models is an integral part of the change process.

As reflected in logs five and six, Counselor CA's comments begin to be characterized by descriptions of how new information will be incorporated into individual practice. For example, Counselor CA describes the most useful part of the meeting was "Going through the SST manual and refining the ideas of what will be most useful and practical in our setting" (Session 5, Log) and in session 6, "I thought it was useful to reflect on the work that we have done so far and how to share it with the rest of the counselors" (Log). These comments suggest that Counselor CA acquired new knowledge and skills to share with colleagues. Counselor CA also demonstrated new learning by revising SWOT results, moving two items from the Strengths category to the opportunities quadrant. Moving of the two items, *documentation is clear and concise* and *process within meeting is positive*, from strengths to opportunities was indicative of Counselor CA engaging in reflection and reconsidering these items as opportunities to be enhanced, rather than as current strengths.

When completing the Why Students Fail activity, Counselor CA was the only counselor who used the wording, "Beyond anyone's control" to indicate responsibility could not be assigned for student failure. Indeed, Counselor CA commented that "Many of the above reasons are due to multiple agencies being responsible" (Session Transcript) and that "There are also circumstances that are outside of control"(Session Transcript). Overall Counselor CA's responses reflect a somewhat shared responsibility between parents, schools, and students. Schools were indicated four times, parents six times and students five times. In some cases, all three groups were assigned responsibility, such as lack of school engagement.

Relative to what did not work well, Counselor CA's logs tended to indicate "non applicable," indicating that overall the sessions worked well. However, there were two instances where logs signaled some critical feedback. Log one indicated national and general data on SSTs seemed irrelevant to site data, given the perception that the district was ahead in SST processes. Log four indicated, "Warm up activities are my least favorite part." This feedback was used to adjust future sessions. For example future sessions focused less on warm up activities.

Outcomes for Counselor CB

Process data indicated that Counselor CB also engaged in all stages of the change process, including unfreezing 33%, new learning 44%, and refreezing 23%, according to session transcript analysis (Figure 4.5)

Figure 4.5: Session Transcripts-Counselor CB

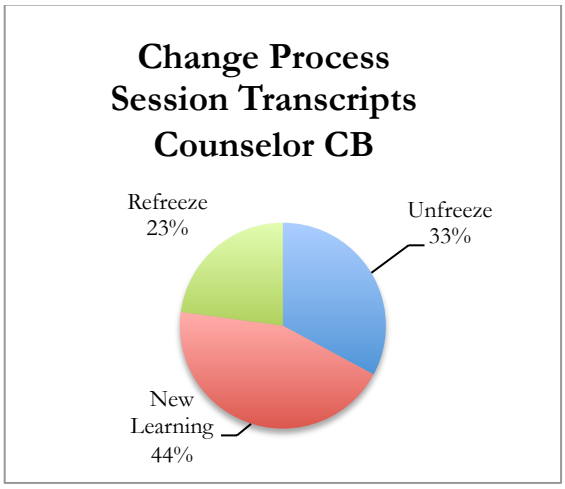
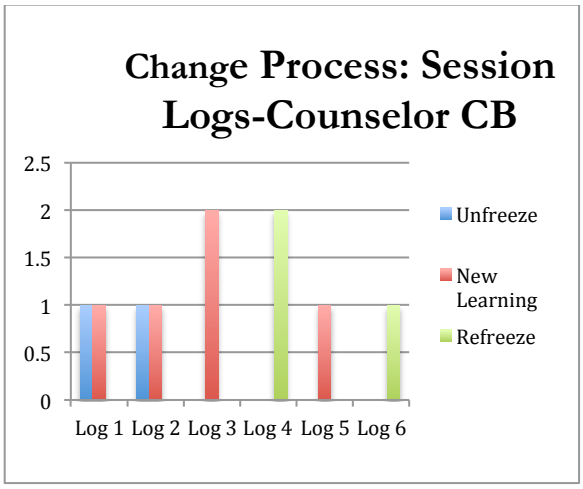


Figure 4.6: Logs-Counselor CB



For example, Counselor CB shared the following comment reflecting unfreezing, "So part of what we are trying to do is say, ok, let's look at it like this, let's change our perspective" (Session 1). Counselor CB demonstrated new learning in a comment made about the DESSA: "This isn't just some new gimmicky thing, it actually has some relevance, and it's all strengths based" (Session 3). This comment hinted at consideration of a new way of practicing by using an assessment tool. Finally, Counselor CB reflected refreezing or demonstration of new knowledge, when sharing use of

the DESSA: "I can totally talk about the benefits of the DESSA at any point" (Session 6). These comments suggested a change from grappling with new information, to consumption to implementation of new information, all preconditions to acquiring new knowledge and skills.

Analysis of logs support the notion that Counselor CB engaged in all three stages of the change process. Counselor CB completed six participant logs which contained ten comments overall. On average Counselor CB made 1.7 comments per log. Counselor CB's comments shifted from unfreezing and new learning as reflected in logs one to three, to new learning and refreezing in sessions four to six (Fig. 4.6).

Logs one and two reflected instances of unfreezing and new learning, whereas log three reflected solely new learning. For instance, the following comment made on log two describes a useful element of the tool development process, "Looking over, and picking out gems/useful tools/documentation from other districts." This comment indicates that Counselor CB was open to information from external sources. Log three provides evidence that Counselor CB was open to new learning, in that value was found in "The explanation of the DESSA was easy to understand and presented as useful in our efforts to support children. I also liked that it is data driven/validated, strengths based, easy to use." This comment points to the notion that Counselor CB was open to the DESSA tool as another model of assessing student needs.

In sessions four to six, Counselor CB's comments reflected a shift to refreezing, with new learning still occurring. For example, on log four, Counselor CB noted it was valuable to have flushed out with the group added components to the referral form to guide new practice. In session five, Counselor CB stated that this session was beneficial because it offered opportunities for, "looking at and reflecting on the SST Handbook." Log six reflected an interest in sharing new learning and the tool developed with colleagues. The idea of sharing the new tool, and new ways of practicing, was seen as an opportunity by Counselor CB. In session six, Counselor CB revised

SWOT results, moving *documentation of goals as quantifiable* from the opportunity quadrant to the weakness quadrant, indicating a change in perception.

Relative to feedback on what was least useful Counselor CB mentioned that establishment of norms in Session one was not needed as the group had, "a solid foundation of trust and mutual respect." Critical feedback provided for session four included some feelings of frustration at having to review previous session information with two counselors who did not attend. All other logs did not contain critical feedback, indicating that overall sessions worked well for Counselor CB. This feedback was used to inform future sessions and make necessary adjustments.

On the activity, Why Students Fail, Counselor CB indicted a high level of shared responsibility between students, parents, and schools. Schools were indicated 12 times, parents ten times and students nine times. In most cases, there was a shared responsibility across domains, for example executive functioning and learning disabilities were marked for school, parents, and students. Counselor CB shared, "It is ultimately a collective effort, yet each component (student, parent, school) holds different skill sets, resources and responsibilities based on individual needs." Counselor CB also shared, "As a school we must exercise our expertise to identify needs and supply resources either directly or through linkages, so the family or students can find their own supports whether they be in the school or outside." These comments indicate that Counselor CB saw a shared responsibility between parents, students, and staff for student failure.

Outcomes for Counselor CC

Process data indicate that Counselor CC successfully engaged in first two stages of the change process (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7: Change Process-Counselor CC

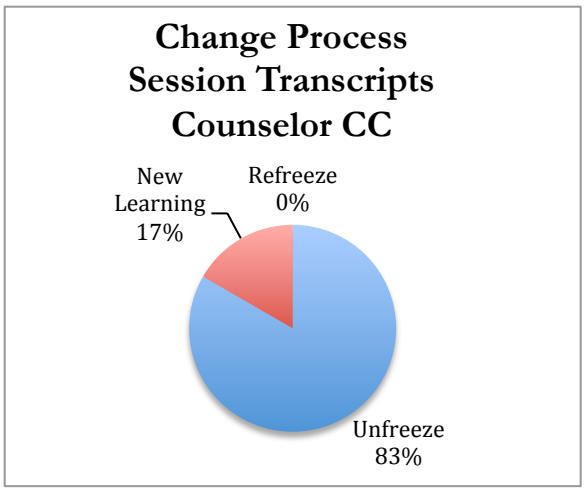
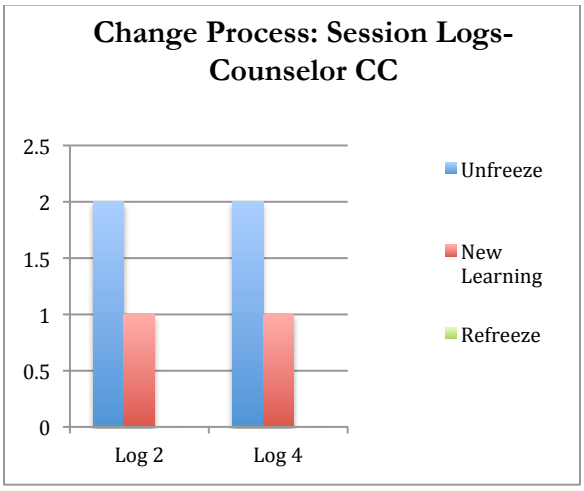


Figure 4.8: Logs-Counselor CC



According to analysis of session transcripts, Counselor CC spent the most time engaged in unfreezing 83%, and the least amount of time in new learning 17%, with no evidence of refreezing. However these findings are limited by the fact that Counselor CC only participated in sessions two and four. Given this, these findings reflect a partial perspective. Nevertheless, Counselor CC engaged in two elements of the change process. Unfreezing was reflected by the following comment on data review: "Tardies, cuts, we were looking at those and I was shocked…. I don't know what's going on with that"(Session 2). This comment reflects responses to disconfirming data. New learning was reflected by the following comments seeking best practices, "I don't know if there's any guidelines for accommodations….what has been seen to be the most successful?"(Session 4) and when discussing the DESSA as a new practice, "I would totally do this (Session 4).

Findings were supported by analysis of session logs. Counselor CC completed two logs, which contained six comments for an average of three comments per log. Counselor CC participated in sessions two and four, corresponding to the logs in Figure 4.8. These findings suggest that Counselor CC remained engaged in unfreezing and new learning during involvement in the study. Counselor CC's comments regarding valuable aspects of the tool development process

on log 2, included, " I appreciated reviewing various SST Handbooks and forms" because, "we could do better-the good news is we can make improvements." Counselor CC also reflected that people come with different viewpoints and this was a, "value-add." Counselor CC also shared enjoying brainstorming with Counselor CA during session two. These comments suggest that Counselor CC was open to new learning and the change process overall. Counselor CC also mentioned finding session four valuable, specifically referencing learning about the DESSA, stating, "I believe that it could be a valuable tool, pre-SST." Again, these comments suggest a willingness to consider new information and growth opportunities.

Relative to critical feedback, Counselor CC stated enjoying all elements of session two. Feedback noted on session four reflected a conflict that arose during the session. During session four, Counselor CC emphasized their own practice of data collection and expressed some surprise that the other counselors did not operate in the same way. The comments shared by Counselor CC on log four reflect this situation:

> The least useful part of today was going over our own practices. I realized for me this is a sensitive subject. I worry about the lack of information being looked at, researched, and brought to the SST practice. It concerns me a great deal--kids are falling through the cracks.

Counselor CC's comment indicate a willingness and interest in promoting changes to the SST process in order to more effectively address needs of students. However, Counselor CC's comments were not well received by all members of the group. Indeed, Counselor CC sent the group an email immediately after this session indicating that comments made were not meant to offend or criticize, they simply reflected a passion for students. The researcher used this information to consider how to best address conflicts in future sessions.

Outcomes for Counselor CD

Process data suggest that Counselor CD engaged in two of the three stages of change, including unfreezing 80%, and new learning 20% (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9: Change Process-Counselor CD

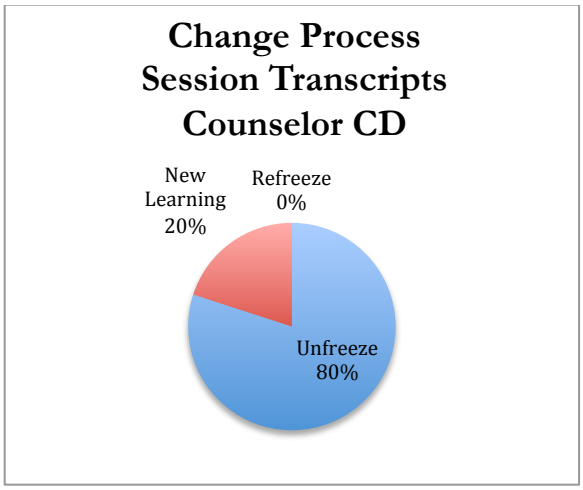
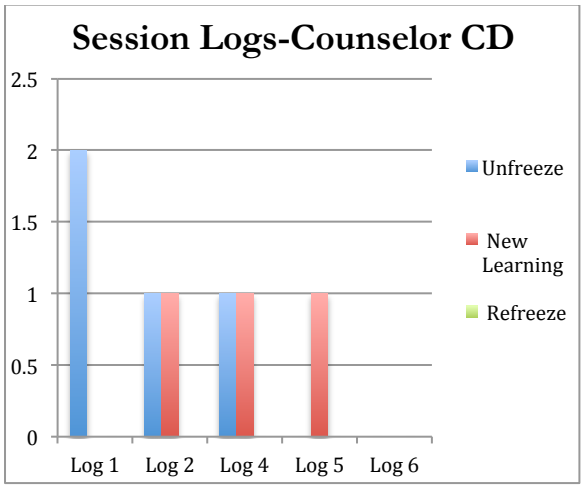


Figure 4.10: Logs-Counselor CD



Evidence of refreezing was not found when analyzing process data. Unfreezing, or responding to new data, was reflected by the following comments "I think our referrals to special education are pretty valid, or they would not be placed" (Session 1). In this example, Counselor CD indicates that the current process is adequate, even in the face of new information. When asked whether data was found to be disconfirming is some way, Counselor CD said, "I don't think I did. I think since we all pretty much know why and how our teams work" (Session 6). Relative to new learning, Counselor CD acknowledged that the DESSA mini might be of some value in parent/teacher meetings, "The eight question one, which is shorter, and I'm assuming still to the point, could be utilized…"(Session 4), reflecting the possibility of a new practice.

These findings of limited engagement in the change process were supported by analysis of logs. Counselor CD completed five of six logs, with an average of 1.4 comments per log. Counselor CD's comments tended to reflect unfreezing and new learning as seen in sessions one to

five; however, there was an absence of comments that reflected refreezing (Fig. 4.10). Counselor CD's comments on what was useful during the tool development sessions included, "Setting the charge and process enables us to move forward with a foundation defined" (Log 1), and "reviewing the work of other districts puts our process in perspective" (Log 2). On log four, Counselor CD commented that there was value in, "Open discussion, we seldom have time to learn from each other." Log five indicates that there was value in discussions about the manual and the chance to process. Counselor CD's comment on log six was, "good review/wrap up", which was not representative of the change process categories. Counselor CD provided critical feedback on session four only. The comment captured on log four was, "Least helpful would be the warm up activity-BUT only because it is not relevant to our ultimate goal." Again, this feedback was used to modify future sessions, especially related to warm up activities.

On the activity, Why Students Fail, Counselor CD indicated that schools were responsible in five areas, parents in five areas and students in ten areas. Counselor CD was the only counselor to attribute as many reasons for failure to students. Counselor CD shared, "Seldom is there ownership in one area. While biology plays the initial role, environment and experiences make huge impacts on whether or not students fail." Counselor CD also shared, "The SST process is a tool that can be used to capture many aspects of a students life; thus enabling the team to move forward with interventions and processes/services that may interrupt the cycle of failure."

An analysis of process data supports the fact that counselors as a group appear to have engaged in the change process. Counselors CA and CB appear to have engaged in all three stages of the change process, while counselors CC and CD engaged in unfreezing and new learning only. Thus, each counselor was unique in how they engaged in the change process. Counselor engagement with the change process likely influenced their ability to acquire new skills and knowledge, with more engagement in the three stages of the change process equaling more

opportunities to adopt new learning. This is true in that engagement in the change process is the vehicle that drives new learning. All counselors provided critical feedback about session four, including mention of warm-up activities and group dynamics. This feedback was used to inform subsequent sessions.

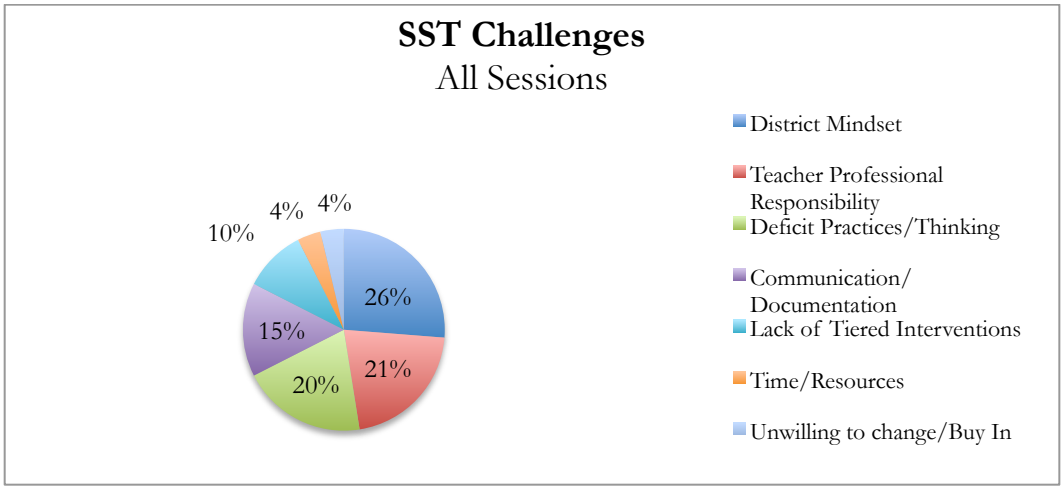
Other Process Data Findings

Within the analysis of process data, two specific and important themes emerged: challenges in effectively implementing SSTs and counselor identified skills and knowledge deemed necessary to implement effective SSTs. These themes speak to counselor experiences in the field and provide valuable context, thus they are described below. I begin with a discussion of SST Challenges, followed by necessary skills identified by counselors.

***SST Challenges*:**

One theme that emerged was challenges in implementing SSTs. Counselors identified seven areas of challenge when discussing SSTs (Fig. 4.11).

Figure 4.11: Identified Challenges with SST Process, Session Transcripts



Counselors described a number of challenges when discussing implementation of effective SSTs. District mindset was the most prevelant grouping in this category, making up 26% of challenges. District mindset referred to comments that captured unique community expectations

and norms. Such comments included, "Sometimes we do an SST just to cover our butts because the parent is relentless and wanting more and more servives….so an SST is like throwing them a bone" (CB, Session Transcript). Counselor CA further exemplified the idea of community norms influencing SSTs, by adding:

> I think a lot of time, in this community, its easier to just give them what they need, instead of helping them find that on their own and just giving them the tools and skills and strategies they need to get there (Session Transcript)

Counselor CA added, "I think there's a lot more parents, the affluent type, that are not minorities, that know our processes and want to get an SST so they can get a 504" (Session Transcript). These types of comments captured counselors' experiences dealing with the complex social and cultural pressures of an affluent and high performing community.

The second most frequently mentioned SST challenge was teacher professional responsibility (21%). This category captured characterizations of teachers with respect to their perspective and actions relative to SSTs. Generally, counselors reported critical experiences in working with teachers on SSTs. For example, Counselor CB shared:

> I think when we ask [teachers], what does this kid do well, they think about how does this kid make me feel and then they talk about the things that they like about the kid-not what the kid does well…….this kid isn't a pain in may ass, so I'm gonna say that they get along with peers (Session Transcript)

Counselor CA also hinted at the idea that referrals were often driven by teacher personal bias, "[teachers] gauge success based on kids doing the right things and making the right choices" (Session Transcript). Counselor CC echoed the idea of teacher partiality by sharing, "There are certain teams, or even certain teachers that would always refer and then there were teachers that would never want to refer [to SSTs]" (Session Transcript). These

comments highlight that counselors experienced teachers as an important, but often biased group.

The third most frequently cited category was Deficit Practices/Thinking, which made up 20% of SST challenges. These comments reflected statements that framed students or parents in deficit-based ways. One example is a comment by Counselor CD when describing why students struggle: "Seldom is there owndership in one area. Biology plays the initial role. Environment and parenting make impacts on whether or not students fail" (Session Transcript). In response to the same question, Counselor CA commented, "Could be lack of motivation or lack of support at home"(Session Transcript). Counselors also shared experiences of families as entitled with signficant social capitol Counselor CB shared that a parent stated "We have spent $5,000 at [assessment location]. I am on the city council. I will call the superintendent if I don't get a 504". Counselors also shared that at parent nights, many parents asked about how to get their child into prestigous universities and sought SSTs as a means to securing more advantages for their children.

Other SST challenges identified were lack of communication or documentation to support the SST process (15%). For instance, "I'm with everybody else here at the table and this is that we do not have consistency from elementary and it's very hard to ferret out the information"(Counselor CD). The category, Lack of tiered interventions (10%) described not having appropriate supports for students. For instance, "Sometimes I feel like some of our referrals to special ed are so kids can access that study skills class and learn those executive functioning skill….but like I said, we don't always offer that class"(Counselor CC). Two additional categories included time and resources (4%). An example included, "And the hardest thing is scheduling for all of that. You go nuts trying to get everybody on the same page at the same day" (Counselor CD). The final category was a general unwillingness

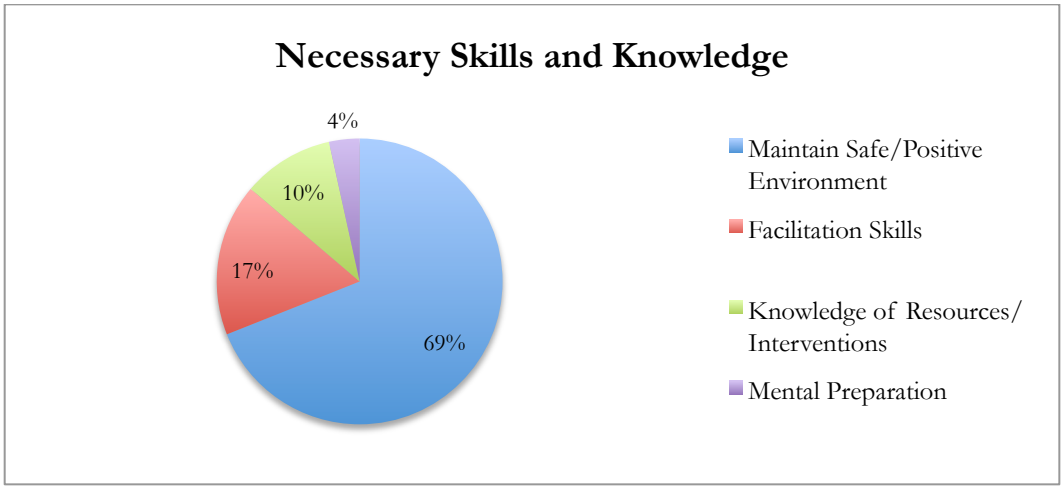
to change (4%), or closed mindset. For example, when describing teachers, Counsleor CC stated, "They are just comfortable with their own interventions, things that they do. They don't want to go outside of the box…."

Altogether, the most frequently cited challenges had to do with human elements, including district mindset, teacher professional responsibility, and deficit thinking. These challenges were followed by technical elements, such as time management and documentaiton. Thus, overwhelmingly counselors identified challenges that had to do with human interactions and decision making rather than procedural elements of SSTs.

Necessary Skills and Knowledge:

A second theme that emerged when analyzing process data was the idea of necessary skills and knowledge to implement effective SSTs (Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Identified Necessary Skills and Knowledge, Session trancripts



Specifically, counselors indicated they had a significant role in maintaining a safe and positive environment. Indeed the role of creating and maintaining a safe environment made up 69% of all groupings in this category. Counselors made comments such as, "we are there because we care. Making sure that everyone knows that it's a positive meeeting, not a punative thing" (Counselor CC, Session Transcript), and "it has to be the role of advocay for

the kid and a partnership with the child in mind" (Counselor CD, Session Transcript). Counselor CB iterated this idea of a safe enviornment when sharing about students attending SSTs: "if they [student] sit at the table, are they going to benefit or not…it's always student focused" (Session Transcript). Thus, counselors saw maintaining a safe and welcoming environment as integral to their practice.

The second most frequently cited grouping was facilitation skills, 17%. Counselors shared that effective SSTs required skill in the areas of managing group interactions. Specifically, counselors mentioned the notion of communication. For example, Counselor CB shared, "Just because someone says A doesn't mean that other person hears A, so our job is partly to make sure that that translation happened….and empower people to learn together" (Session Transcript). Counselors saw facilitating group dynamics as important.

The third most frequently mentioned category was knowledge of resources and interventions,10%. This grouping spoke to being knowledgable about what services existed for students, such as tutoring and health services. Mental preparation for SSTs was also mentioned, though infrequently, 4%. Mental preparation referred to the idea that counselors proactively put thought into faciliation of SST meetings. Indeed, Counselor CA exemplified this idea, sharing, "before I have an SST, I put alot of thought into what could be the potential next steps and interventions" (Session Transcript).

Overall, counselors reported significant efforts to maintain and promote safe and welcoming SST environments. Specifically, they mentioned calling upon their counseling skills of rapport building, advocacy, and communication skills. Skills in effective facilitation of meetings also were described. Thus, people skills or managing of group interactions emerged as one of the most important elements implementing effective SSTs. These

baseline data were valuable in contemplating how to develop an effective tool to meet the challenges described above and leverage the skills and knowledge identified by counselors.

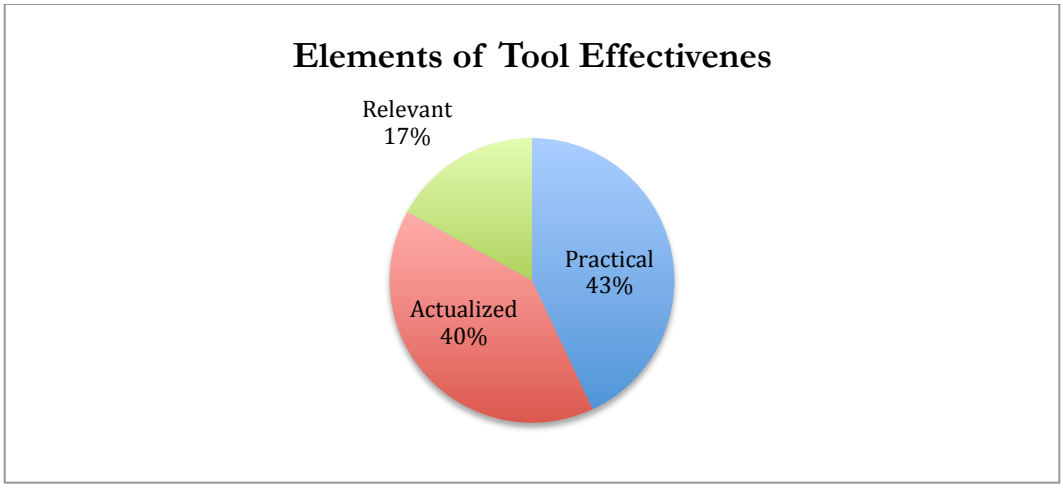
Learning Outcome Two: Enhance understanding of SEL Competencies (Process Data)

Process data sources, including participant logs, session transcripts and field notes did not yield information to inform this learning outcome. However, this learning outcome is discussed in the impact data section**.**

Learning Outcome Three: Co-Construction of SST Tool (Process Data)

The following section describes how the tool development process facilitated co-construction of an SST Handbook. The handbook was centered on three elements: practical, actualizable, and relevant. The handbook was meant to be practical in meeting the needs of counselors in the field, able to be actualized in practice and not simply serve as a symbolic tool, and relevant to counselor work practice. Analysis of the tools development is informed by session transcripts, participant logs, and field notes. A discussion of baseline data is followed by counselor feedback and input on the tool.

Figure 4.13: Elements of Tool Effectiveness, Session Transcripts



Process data outcomes indicated that counselors clearly desired a tool that was practical, able to be actualized, and relevant, in this order of priority. Results from session transcripts (Figure 4.13)

indicated that overall counselor feedback on the tool fell into the practical category most frequently 43%, followed by actualization 40%, and relevance 17%. Analysis of field notes mirrored these priorities in that practical made up 61% of references, followed by actualized 28%, and relevant, 11%. Thus, the primary concern appeared to revolve around ensuring that the tool was practical in their day- to-day work. Their second priority appeared to revolve around actualization, or conditions needed in order for the tool to be utilized. The final element, relevant, was much less frequently mentioned, though still important in ensuring that that tool was germane to their efforts.

Comments that captured the element of practicality included, "I only had one concern…monitoring data collected at least once a week. That's a very short sentence that has a lot of possibilities" (Session Transcript, CB). When asked if this was too much monitoring, the response from Counselor CB was, "I'd have to give up twiddling my thumbs" (Session Transcript). Counselor CB also mentioned "And how time consuming. Is it equitable to our other caseload? Although it might be wonderful for this one kid, when you have 300 plus other ones, you have to divide your time wisely" (Session Transcript). Counselor CA iterated the importance of fillable forms, sharing, "If I get fillable forms, I'm much more inclined to use them" (Session Transcript). Counselors also mentioned actualization as an important element of the tool. When discussing how to share the handbook with other middle school counselors, Counselor CD shared that site data needed to be included, "That kind of factual stuff needs to be there…Simply because it's a context within which we all work and students participate and the expectations are there" (Session Transcript). When discussing how to share the data with colleagues, Counselor CD elaborated by commenting, "I think it is important for people to know what they've done well or right so far. Otherwise, they won't listen" (Session Transcript). Counselor CB shared that the SWOT might be a valuable activity to help other counselors to come to their own understanding, instead of someone else telling them what they have done right or wrong. Counselor CA agreed, "I think it really makes you look at your

process and try to identify what's working, what's not" (Session transcript). These comments were important as they pointed at conditions that need to exist in order for counselors to engage in the learning process.

Counselors also referenced that the tool needed to be relevant to their work. When reviewing the proposed SST Referral Form Counselor CB shared that the detail helped "flesh out responsibility for actions as well" (Session Transcript), highlighting that it was important to designate roles and responsibilities. When discussing the DESSA, Counselor CA shared, "I can see this being used in our IEP's also," highlighting that there was an interest in integrating the DESSA in existing practices (Session Transcript). While infrequently mentioned, relevance was still an important element of the tool development process.

Analysis of participant logs as a sole source of information, yielded limited information on the tool development process. However, when triangulated with other sources of process data, outcomes indicated that practicality was most frequently mentioned.

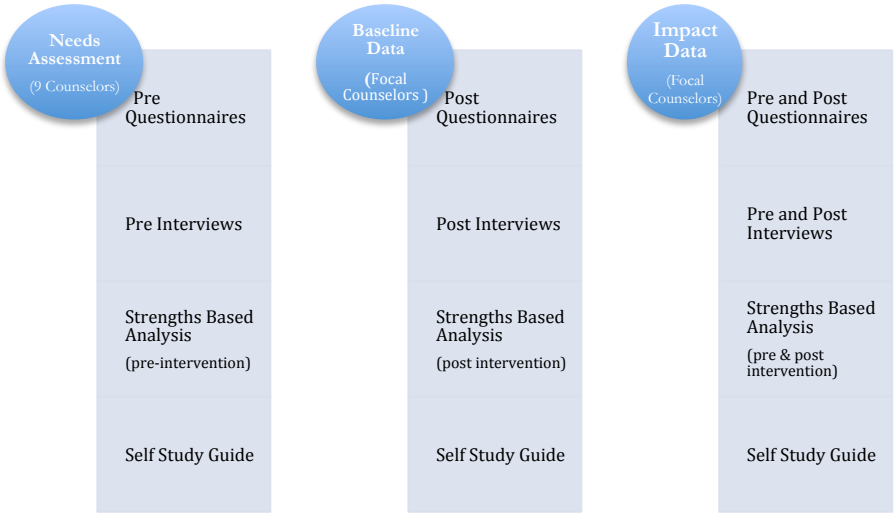
In sum, counselors desired a tool that would be practical to use in the field. They also noted that they wanted a tool that was not merely symbolic, but able to be actualized in practice to guide work efforts. Finally, they also wanted a tool that was relevant to their work scope. These elements emerged in analysis of process data and were used to guide the tool development process and construction of the SST Handbook.

III. Data Analysis: Impact Data

Design research affords the researcher practical instances to study different stages of the design process as they unfold over time. Impact data offer opportunities to assess if, and to what extent, design challenges were met. As such, impact data are collected to determine efficacy of the intervention. In this design study, impact data were principally informed by four data sets, including questionnaires, interviews, strengths based analysis of SST plans, and select questions from the SST

Self Study Guide Checklist. Impact data were analyzed to determine effectiveness of the tool development process in addressing three learning outcomes, 1) increased counselor knowledge and skill of effective SST processes 2) increased knowledge in SEL competencies, and 3) Co-construction an SST Handbook. These three learning outcomes drive the organization of this chapter.

Figure 4.14: Impact Data Elements and Scope



Impact data included needs assessment, baseline, and outcome data (Figure 4.14). Data sources that made up impact data included: interviews, questionnaires, strengths-based analysis of SST Plans, and analysis of elements of SST Self Study Guide. I collected information on current practices across all three middle schools and nine middle school counselors, to foster a broad needs assessment that informed my design intervention. These data sources were analyzed and triangulated to interrogate whether the tool development process would lead to increased knowledge of effective SSTs and whether the intervention would result in increased knowledge and skills in social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. Needs assessment data informed the first stage of my analysis. Baseline data were collected to serve as a comparison with outcome data, while impact data

provided information on outcomes of the study. Together needs assessment, baseline and outcome data inform impact data.

In the following section, I present findings on impact data to examine efficacy of the intervention. I begin by describe data sources and their purposes, present the sequence of actions that composed the data collection process, and explain findings for each outcome. Findings are presented for all middle counselors collectively to inform a broad needs assessment. Findings are then presented for focal counselors as a group and individually.

Impact Data Sources

1) Questionnaires: All nine counselors completed a short questionnaire that collected demographic data and asked five questions on SST skills and knowledge. The questionnaire was based on a five point Liker scale in which "1" represented strongly agree, "2" represented agree, "3" neither agree nor disagree, "4" disagree, and "5" strongly disagree (Appendix N). The five questions asked on the questionnaire were:

Q1: SSTs are effective in maintaining students in general education settings.
Q2: I have received training on facilitating effective SSTs.
Q3: I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies (knowledge, attitudes & skills necessary to understand & manage emotions, set & achieve positive goals, show empathy for others, establish & maintain positive relationships, & make responsible decisions).
Q4: I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs.
Q5: I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs

Data were analyzed to help understand perceptions about SSTs and expertise. Analysis of data illuminated counselor acuity with respect to perceptions of SST knowledge and skill.

2) Interviews: A qualitative analysis was conducted on interview transcripts to examine effectiveness of the tool development processes in promoting greater understanding and skills relative to SSTs. Data were coded and thematically analyzed along the three essential domains of an effective SST Process further dichotomized into six sub elements: 1). Organization and Management: a) Referral

Process and, b) Follow up Meetings; 2). Teamwork: a) Team Preparation and b) Intervention Goals; and, 3). Problem Solving a) Data Use and, b) Progress Monitoring).

Table 4.2: Expertise Levels and Definitions

Expertise Level	Definition
Expert	Reports of awareness and initiation are high. Describes SST elements in detail, providing why and how of actions, concrete examples highlight intersection of experience and knowledge
Proficient	Report some awareness of principles or elements of SSTs. Awareness of SSTs based on tenets, situational examples of grounded knowledge
Competent	Report limited awareness of elements of SSTs, lack details, thinking reflects generalizations, compartmentalized thinking.

Adapted from Dreyfus and Dreyfus model (1980).

Within these six sub elements, data were analyzed using a three-point scale, adapted from research on Dreyfus and Dreyfus' model of skill acquisition (1980). In this adapted model, three categories of proficiency were identified to understand counselor knowledge and skills relative to SSTs (Table 4.2). These categories included expert, proficient, and competent levels. Expert captured descriptions of SSTs as detailed and holistic events, proficient captured an average understanding of SSTs tenets, while competent described novice descriptions of SSTs. These codes made up rubric categories used to analyze changes in pre and post outcomes for focal counselors. Interview data was also analyzed for frequency of mention of each category.

3) Strengths based Analysis of SST Plans: Strengths based analysis of all eighty-three SST Plans were carried out to better understand variability of types of student strengths noted in SST meetings across all middle schools. SST plans were reviewed to determine if the intervention had an effect on how strengths were noted pre- and post- for focal counselors. Within this analysis, patterns related to how strengths interconnected with student gender and ethnicity emerged as important variables.

4) SST Self Study Guide: Counselors in School J completed the guide in October 2014 and again in May 2015 as a means of assessing current practice. Select responses that clearly aligned with this study were analyzed using a three-point scale on a standardized rubric (Appendix O). Level "3"

represented consistent practices, level "2" represented occasional practices, and level "1" represented practices that did not occur at all. Because the SST Self Study Guide was completed as a team, responses were captured by school site, rather than by individual counselor.

Counselor Demographic Data

Demographic data emerged from analysis of questionnaires. Findings indicated that as a group, middle school counselors were made up mostly of females, with the exception of one male counselor. Counselors overall identified as White, with only three of nine counselors identifying as minorities (Hispanic, Asian, and White/Asian). Counselors identified their titles in a variety of ways, such as school counselor, academic counselor, and counselor.

Counselors tended to be highly educated and experienced in the counseling field. All counselors reported having a Master's Degree and a Pupil Personnel Services Credential (PPSC). A third of the counselors had an additional license or administrative credential. Approximately one third of all counselors reported serving in their current position for 10-15 years, though several reported being new to their roles (<5 years). Approximately half of the counselors stated they had between 16-25 years of experience in school counseling, while the other half reported between 4-15 years. Thus, counselors as a group reported high levels of expertise in terms of years of experience.

Focal counselors at School J were made up of three females and one male. Focal counselors identified as White, with a Masters Degrees and a PPSC. Counselor CA was relatively new to the counseling field and a recent graduate, with a reported four years in the profession and three years at School J. Counselor CB reported five years in the profession and three years at School J, with a number of years of experience in related fields. Counselor CC reported fifteen years as a school counselor, 14 of those years at School J. Counselor CD, reported serving as a counselor for over 30 years, with 24 years at School J. On average counselors at School J had 13 years of experience in the counseling profession.

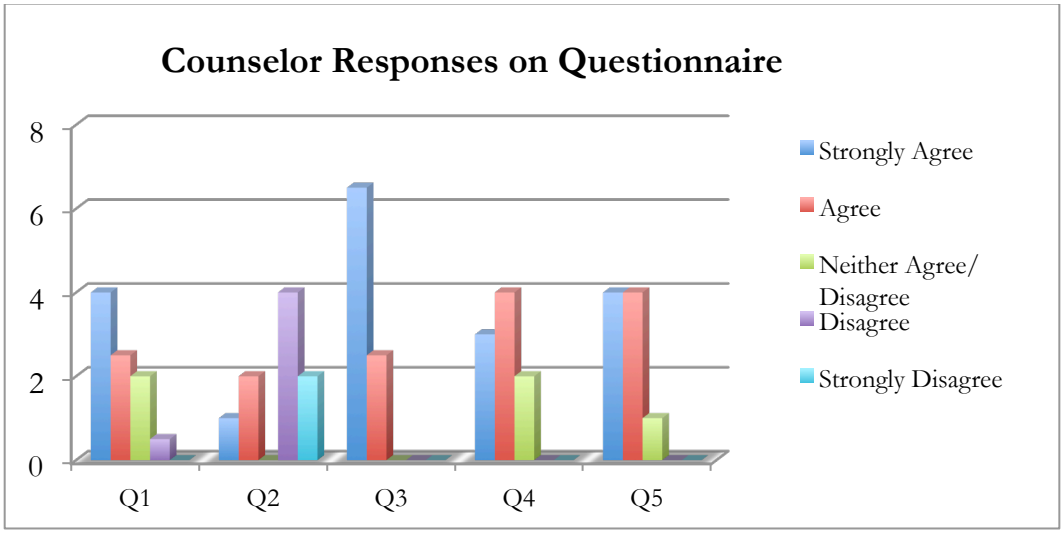
Demographic data is important as it sets a context for counselor group identity and the lens they may bring to their work. In this case, counselors reflected the community at large. Counselors were majority White and well educated. Most had worked in the district for a relatively substantial period. Given the demographic data of counselors, questions of bias and cultural sensitivity were raised as counselors in this study represent the normative culture and navigate an SST process over represented in terms of minority students. The notion of cultural bias is touched upon when examining how counselors identified student strengths and responded to issues of disproportionality.

Learning Outcome One: Promote New Knowledge and Skills (Impact Data)

I begin this section by describing impact data related to the three learning outcomes of this study. Findings are organized by a discussion of results for all nine counselors, across multiple domains, followed by results for each focal counselor individually.

All nine counselors completed the questionnaire, meant to elicit self-reports of competence in understanding SST processes. Results of questionnaires informed needs assessment data.

Figure 4.15: Counselor Responses to Questionnaire



(n=9 counselors) *Q1: SSTs are effective in maintaining students in general education settings; Q2: I have received training on facilitating effective SSTs; Q3: I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies (knowledge, attitudes & skills necessary to understand & manage emotions, set & achieve positive goals, feel & show empathy for others, establish & maintain positive relationships, & make responsible decisions). Q4: I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs. Q5: I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs.*

Questionnaire findings were analyzed using a rubric that captured responses using a five-point Liker scale of: "strongly agree", "agree", "neither agree/disagree", "disagree", "strongly disagree." Results suggest that the majority of counselors believed SSTs to be effective in maintaining students in general education settings (Fig. 4.15). Of the nine counselors, 6.5 reported they strongly agreed or agreed this was true (one counselor gave two scores on the scale, thus the .5 reflects a partial score). Accordingly, in response to question one (Q1) most counselors considered the SST process to meet the purpose of maintaining students in general education settings.

When examining question two (Q2), the majority of counselors disagreed they had received training on facilitating effective SSTs. Indeed, two-thirds reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement, while one-third shared that they had received training. This was the only question in which the majority of counselors cited the "disagree" category. These findings are in line with the literature, which indicate that training on SSTs is often absent or inadequate.

All counselors reported agreeing or strongly agreeing feeling knowledgeable about social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. This finding indicates that counselors overall felt confident in their ability to understand SEL competencies. Notably, question three (Q3) was the only question in which all counselors fell into the "strongly agree" and "agree" category, indicating considerable alignment in this area.

Findings for question four (Q4) indicated that most counselors reported a strong sense of adequate knowledge of SSTs. Only two counselors indicated that they neither agreed/disagreed with this statement. These responses suggest that as a group, counselors indicated feeling confident in their knowledge of SSTs. For question five (Q5), the majority of counselors agreed or strongly agreed they had adequate skills to implement effective SSTs. In fact, only one counselor reported they neither agreed/disagreed with question five. Therefore counselors as a group appeared confident in their skills in the area of SST implementation.

In sum, needs assessment data indicate that middle school counselors as a whole tended to have confidence in the SST process, and in their skills and knowledge. Indeed, counselors reported the strongest sense of assurance in their ability to recognize SEL competencies. Conversely, as a group they reported the least confidence in the area of training on SSTs. Curiously, while their responses indicated low levels of training on effective SST implementation, they reported high levels of skills and knowledge.

Counselor interview data supported the idea that counselors felt competent about their knowledge of SSTs. Counselor interviews were analyzed to recognize counselor capacity levels, using a three-point expertise scale. Using this scale, I analyzed interview data for citations that highlighted counselor knowledge and skill. Comments that captured high levels of awareness and intersections of experience and knowledge were categorized as expert. Comments that exemplified some structural awareness of SST were categorized as proficient. The last category, competent, captured comments that indicated limited awareness of some elements of SSTs. Together these categories were used to illustrate counselor levels of expertise.

In interviews, counselor knowledge of SSTs was infrequently noted; however, when mentioned it tended to fall into the proficient category (72%) followed by competent (21%) and expert (7%). Accordingly, counselors' understanding of SSTs was at a proficient or average level. An example of a comment in the proficient category, demonstrating basic understanding, included:

> Basically, an SST is always a good idea when we've tried many things within the mainstream classroom. Let's say we've even had a parent conference, or the teachers have met and discussed as a team. The teachers meet with the counselors every week, and come up with ideas with the student. But when those are not working, we need a more comprehensive look at the student (CD, Interview).

In this example, the counselor reflected some awareness of effective SSTs, though not a sophisticated representation. Conversely, the comment below reflected knowledge at the expert level:

> I've heard two different things: Student Study Teams and Student Success Teams. I know in the California Dept. of Education Handbook it says "Student Success Teams." So I've changed the form title to Student Success Teams because I want to start this off as a positive thing. It's solving problems, it's not about listing all the problems……I try to assure the parents that it's a positive thing and it's going toward a solution…..And a lot of the onus is on the school….. There may be some things that parents do and it's expected that the school is going to step up and do probably the majority of things because your child is here 7 hours a day. I see it as a solution-oriented process when a child is struggling with some kind of problem. Usually it's academic, but tied in with academic is often behavioral and often attendance (CI, Interview)

This statement demonstrates a strong sense of knowledge about SSTs, both technical and practical, where the counselor was able to articulate facets on an intuitive level.

Overall, needs assessment data indicated that counselors were fairly confident about their knowledge and skills relative to SSTs, and operated on a proficient level of expertise. These findings were supported through analysis of questionnaire and interview data. However, counselors reported little formal training on SST processes, suggesting that their expertise was not based on formal professional learning opportunities.

Focal Counselor Outcomes

Outcomes for focal counselors in the area of knowledge and skills indicate that they gained expertise from pre- to post-intervention.

Figure 4.16: Knowledge of SSTs-School J

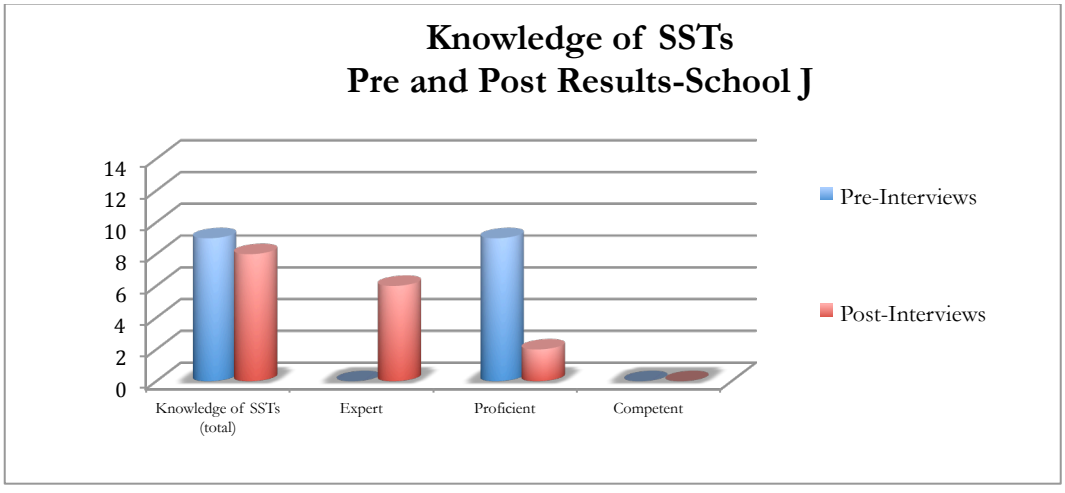


Figure 4.16 highlights that while focal counselors generally described proficient levels of knowledge and skills in pre interviews, they shifted to expert levels in post interviews. Thus, focal counselors demonstrated new knowledge and skills after intervention, based on interview analysis.

In order to more fully understand counselor acquisition of knowledge and skill, counselor proficiency was measured against Power's model of effective SSTs in which there are three domains. For the purposes of this study, two elements within each of these major domains were selected to measure counselor knowledge and skills (Table 4.3).

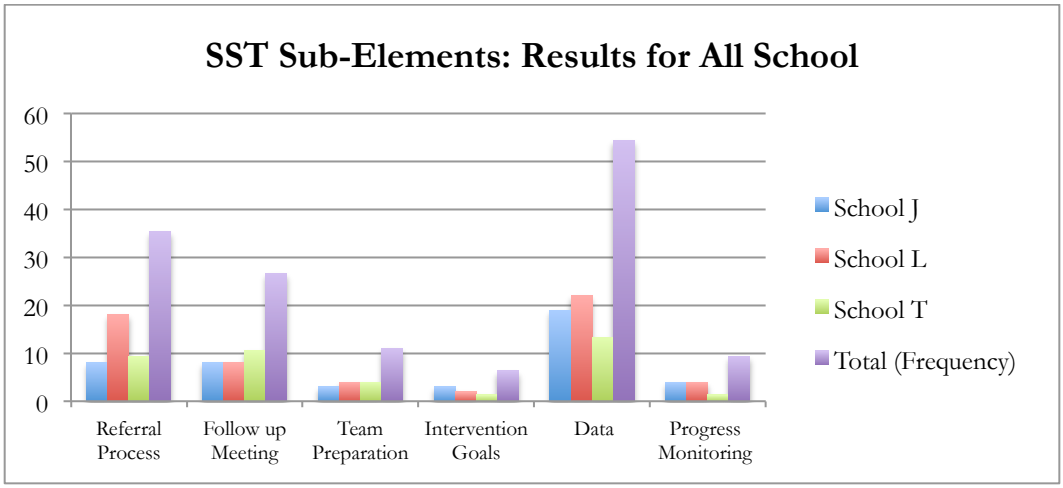
Table 4.3: Elements of Effective SST (Based on Powers Model)

Three Major SST Domains with Sub Elements

1. Organization & Management	2. Team Work	3. Problem Solving
a. Referral Process	a. Team Preparation	a. Data Use
b. Follow Up Meeting	b. Intervention Goals	b. Progress Monitoring

The three SST domains, Organization and Management, Teamwork, and Problems Solving, serve as the framework, with each category representing an area of study. These six areas provide the organizing structure in which findings will be presented within this section.

Figure 4.17 SST Categories by Frequency



Interview data were analyzed to determine how the sub-elements were distributed across all three schools. Figure 4.17 provides needs assessment data for all three middle schools, by each of

the six domains. Needs assessment results will be discussed below, followed by outcomes for focal counselors.

1. Organization and Management

The SST elements, Referral Process and Follow Up Meeting fall within the larger SST domain of Organization and Management. Referral process speaks to how the SST routine is generally understood and implemented. A transparent and well-understood referral process is important as it ensures that the service is accessible to all members. A well-established process also affords opportunities to collect and evaluate data on usage and program effectiveness. Thus, referral process and follow up meetings were the two sub elements used to evaluate counselor knowledge and skills in the Organization and Management domain. These sub elements are discussed below.

a. Referral Process

SST referral process was frequently mentioned in counselor pre-interviews. Indeed, it made up 23% of all SST category references made in pre-interviews. When referenced, referral process tended to reflect proficient levels, indicating that most counselors in the district described having some knowledge and skill in this area. Indeed, of the 55 comments categorized in the referral process category, over 87% fell at the proficient level, followed by competent (11%), and expert (2%). Proficient level were indicated when counselors described elements of an effective referral process but lacked an integrated perspective. For example, a counselor at school L stated:

> Then there are times when I think that there are students under the radar for such a long time that I feel, 'ok, if their name hasn't come up, it's because they are doing well.' Then all of a sudden I look at the grades for the quarter and I'm like, 'Oh my gosh! Why hasn't Johnny's name ever come up in meetings?' Then I say, 'let's have an SST about this.' So it depends on the situation and the teacher. (CH, Interview)

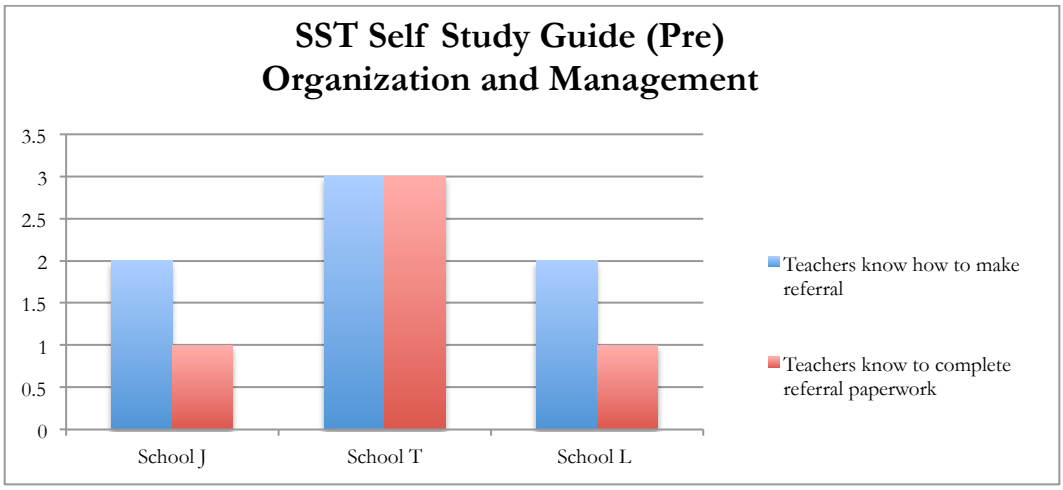
This comment highlights expertise at the proficient level as the counselor does not describe a comprehensive process in which referrals are effectively generated, but rather a reactive response. This idea of situational responses was a theme expressed by counselors. For example, a counselor in

School T shared, "In a way, it depends on their grade level" (CG, Interview), indicating inconsistency. A counselor in School L commented:

> In seventh and eighth grade, it's usually at my behest that I say, 'We need to have an SST.' The seventh and eighth grade teachers do tend to list the problems. Then I'll say, 'Well, it sounds like we should have an SST.' There's a moment of silence and then 'OK.' So we do (CI, Interview)

When Counselor CB was asked if the referral process was effective, the following comment was made: "I would probably say yes, because if they don't know how to complete the referral paperwork then I tell them and they do" (Interview). These comments illustrate that counselors tended to describe the referral process as reactive, rather than a planned SST element.

Figure 4.18: Findings from SST Self Study Guide, by School Site



Categories: Level "3"=Consistent, Level "2"=Occasional, and level "1"=Not at All

Interview results were supported by outcomes of the SST Self Study Guide. The self study guide measured practice using a scale of one to three, where three was consistent and one indicated that the practice did not occur at all. Two sites reported that teachers knew how to make an SST referral as an occasional practice (level 2), while School T reported that this occurred more consistently (level 3) (Figure 4.18). Schools J and L reported less confidence in teacher knowledge

of how to complete referral paperwork, with scores at level 1, while school T reported that this occurred consistently (level 3).

Needs assessment data suggest counselors were aware of the principles of a referral process and could speak to this area at a proficient level. While counselors appeared to have a significant role in activating the referral process, from advocating for SSTs to guiding teachers through the process and filling out referral forms, what appeared to be lacking was reference to a formalized and transparent process, well understood by teachers. These findings also hint at the fact that counselors engaged in quite a bit of work to maintain an informal and fragmented process that could otherwise be formalized, possibly resulting in saved time and resources.

b. Follow Up Meetings

Follow up meetings describe whether or not subsequent SST meetings were held. Follow up meetings are imperative as they are a means of monitoring progress, holding members accountable for interventions, and modifying plans. Overall follow up meetings made up 10% of the total SST category comments analyzed in pre-interviews, thus they were mentioned fairly infrequently. When mentioned, most comments reflected proficient levels of expertise (80%), followed by competent (12%) and expert (8%). Overall there was an average understanding of SSTs. Some examples of comments that made up the proficient category included, "I think we're missing a lot. I do follow-up meetings with students that I've seen the progress from the SST" (CI, Interview). When asked if follow up meetings were held, Counselor CI responded, "Not with everyone. I'd say about a third of the time; and maybe not quite that much" (Interview). These comments reflected that while counselors understood the principles of follow up meetings, they were poorly implemented in practice. These results were supported by SST Self Study Guide outcomes, which indicated that follow up meetings were occasionally scheduled at initial SST meetings. In essence, counselor comments described a practical understanding of follow up meetings, with little implementation in

practice. This is concerning given that when follow up meetings are inconsistently held, the possibility that SST plans are implemented with fidelity is weakened.

Focal Counselor Outcomes

The following section speaks to outcomes for focal counselors at School J relative to referral process and follow up meetings, both elements of the Organization and Management domain.

Figure 4.19: Referral Process-School J

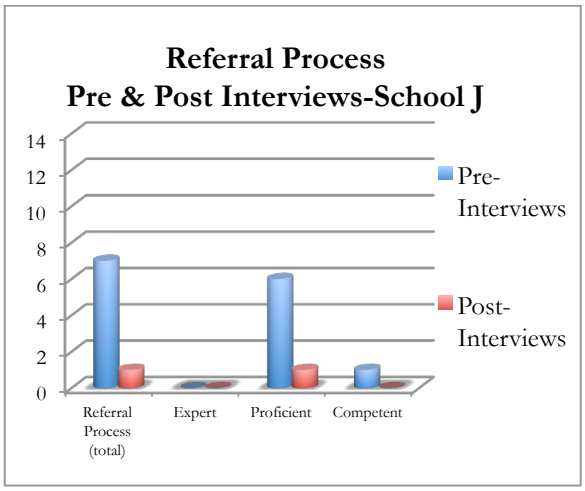
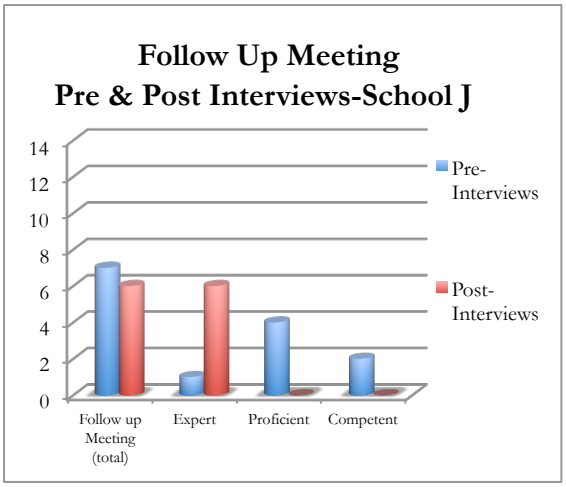


Figure 4.20: Follow Up Meetings-School J



Referral process was mentioned with some frequency during pre-interviews with focal counselors; however, it was much less frequently mentioned in post interviews (Fig. 4.19). When mentioned pre and post interviews, it tended to fall within the proficient level; similar to the pattern found when examining needs assessment data for all counselors. These findings suggest that awareness of the importance of the referral process did not increase for School J when examining post interview data. Indeed frequency of mention went down from pre to post. However, shifts occurred in the area of teacher knowledge of referrals when Self Study Guide data were interrogated.

Table 4.4: Select Questions from SST Self Study Guide (Organization & Management)

Questions on Self Study Guide School J	Pre-intervention	Post-Intervention	Change
Teachers know how to make referral	Occasional	Consistent	+1
Teachers know how to complete referral paperwork	Not at All	Consistent	+2

Scale: Consistent (3), Occasional (2), Not at All (1)

Table 4.4 highlights two questions from the SST Self Study Guide on referral process. For example, focal counselors initially indicated that teacher knowledge on how to make a referral was an occasional practice (level 2) pre-intervention; however post intervention, they reported that this practice was now consistent (level 3). This change reflects a one point increase, based on my three-point rubric. Additionally while counselors reported that teachers did not know how to complete paperwork (level 1) at pre-intervention, at post intervention they reported that this practice was now consistent (level 3). This reflects a two-point increase, from not at all to consistent, based on my three-point rubric.

Follow-up meetings were mentioned with frequency, by focal counselors, in both pre- and post-interviews (Fig. 4.20). On average, counselors in School J described follow up meetings at the proficient level in pre interviews; however, in post-interviews, they described follow-up meetings at the expert level. This indicates an increased awareness and improvement of skill level of one point from proficient to expert, from pre- to post- on a three-point scale. On the SST Self Study Guide, counselors indicated a consistent practice in scheduling follow-up meetings, both pre- and post-. Thus, it appears that follow up meetings were both an area in which counselors felt confident in their practice and where they experienced the acquisition of new knowledge and skills based on interview and SST Self Study Guide outcomes

2. Teamwork

Team Preparation and Intervention Goals are sub elements under the SST domain of Teamwork and will be discussed below. Team preparation describes how SST members (parents, students, teachers, etc.) are oriented to the SST process. Team preparation is important, as SSTs are often intense milieus where difficult issues are discussed and where members feel more at ease if they understand the process.

a. Team Preparation

Team Preparation made up 10% of SST sub-elements analyzed in pre-interviews. Thus, it was mentioned infrequently; however, when mentioned, comments reflected expert or proficient levels. Responses fell into the expert category (42%) and proficient level (58%), indicating fairly strong feelings of competence in this area. Results of the SST Self Study Guide suggested that in practice counselors consistently prepared parents for the SST meeting. Indeed, all schools rated themselves as consistent in this area. These finding suggests that counselors found team preparation to be an important element of the SST process and were confident in their skill in this area. Given the importance of preparing and orienting all members to the often complicated and sensitive nature of SST meetings, this finding is encouraging.

When examining comments at the expert level, counselors expressed more intention around team preparation, for example:

> Before the SST I meet with the student individually for at least a good 30 minutes. I say, we're going to have an SST this week…This is what we're going to cover. We're going to talk about some strengths. We're going to have Miss Whoever or Mr. Whoever in the meeting. They're going to share back how your progress is in class." Then I go through it with them...I do a student worksheet (CH, Interview)

Another counselor comment at the expert level was, "I also would always make sure I talked to the student. If it was initiated by me or not, the student themselves, to let them know it's a positive meeting. Talk about the process with them before starting" (CC, interview). These comments indicated that counselors intuitively understood and described team preparation as an important part of the SST process. Counselors at this level viewed team preparation as an obvious action and were able to describe both technical and practical elements.

Comments categorized at the proficient level included, "Depending on how well I know the student and how much we've talked about what we're going to be doing next, I'll bring them in and prep them. So before the meeting, so they know what question I'm going to ask them" (CD,

Interview) and "Often I give a heads up to the parents about what the SST process is like so they know what they're getting into" (CB, Interview). One counselor commented, "Then I usually talk to the teachers, again depending on the difficulty of the meeting and the sensitivity of things that are going to come up" (CF, Interview). Together these comments indicate counselors perceived strong knowledge and skills in this area.

b). Intervention Goals

Intervention Goals are another important element of the SST process, ensuring that support strategies detailed in the SST Plan are carried out with fidelity over time. Development of intervention goals includes working with the team to identify and construct goals to mediate and ameliorate challenges students face. Development of intervention goals was infrequently mentioned by counselors in interviews, and when mentioned all citations fell into the proficient category. For example, one counselor shared:

> My biggest weakness is intervention goals and follow-up. What would get in the way of myself as a counselor or a teacher is all the other things that are expected. That sounds like an excuse. I don't mean to make it sound like an excuse, but it's like you do it and then you file it away and you hope all the people are going to do their piece…(CG, Interview)

On the SST Study Guide counselors indicated identifying on-going progress monitoring and intervention goals as occasional practices. Data suggest that counselors felt competent in monitoring of intervention goals; however, it was not a consistent practice.

Outcomes for Focal Counselors

The following section describes outcomes in the area of team preparation and intervention goals for focal counselors at School J.

Figure 4.21: Team Preparation-School J

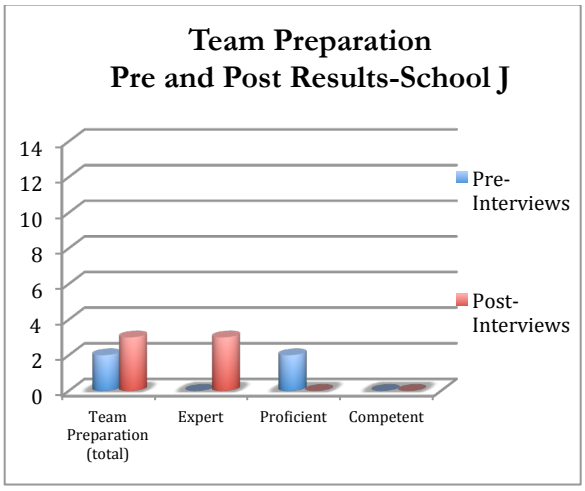
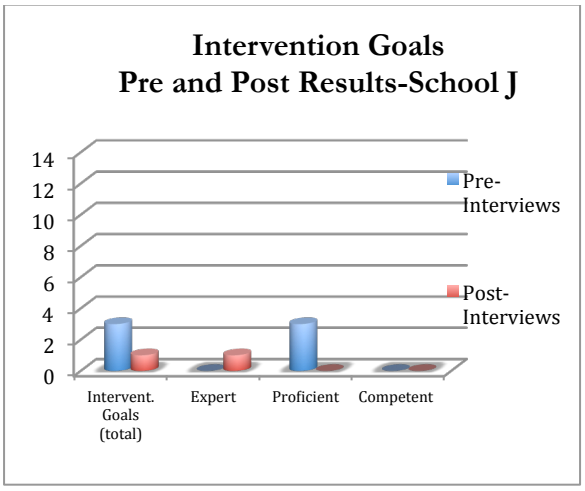


Figure 4.22: Intervention Goals-School J



Focal counselor knowledge and skill in team preparation was described at the proficient level in pre-interviews; however it shifted to expert level in post interviews (Fig. 4.21). This finding is important as it indicates that focal counselor awareness and skill grew one point, from proficient to expert when comparing pre-to post outcomes. Focal counselors as a group had a stronger awareness and skill level in the area of team preparation. These findings were supported by the SST Self Study Guide outcomes in which counselors reported a consistent practice of preparing parents for the SST meeting both pre- and post. These findings support the notion that counselors entered the study with high levels of expertise pre-intervention, and grew in their skills post intervention. Additionally, they reported strong practice of team preparation in the field.

Focal counselors mentioned intervention goals very infrequently in pre-interviews; indeed, they made up only 5% of all SST category comments (Fig. 4.22). When intervention goals were mentioned in pre-interviews, they fell into the proficient category. Thus, comments made in this category reflected some awareness of the principles and importance of intervention goals, including:

> I don't know that they're all effective. I think the lack of follow through is the biggest piece. I think we all come together when we're all really heightened with the sense of urgency to make some sort of change or to figure something out…There are a lot of great interventions, and a lot of times they are great outcomes. But for the times where they're not effective, I think it's because maybe there isn't the

> follow-up piece. Even if we don't commit to a follow-up meeting, and we come up with a list of six new interventions, and maybe only three of them actually get implemented. Maybe three of those help, and the student has got to a better place, but there's not really checks and balances (CB, Interview).

Findings suggest that for focal counselors, awareness of the importance of intervention goals increased from pre- to post-intervention, by one point, from proficient to expert level, based interview analysis. On outcomes of the SST Self Study Guide counselors reported consistently developing progress-monitoring systems, both pre- and post-intervention. Thus, on this measure they maintained a strong sense of practice in progress monitoring.

3. Problem Solving

The third domain of an effective SST process was Problem Solving, which includes Data Use and Progress Monitoring. Data use describes the process by which information informs decision-making and problem solving processes. Data use is central to SSTs as problems, solutions, and outcomes must be contextualized using both formal and informal data sources, such as observations, test scores, interviews, attendance, etc. Data use is important in framing problem behaviors in tangible terms in order to understand what improvement looks like.

a). Data Use

Data use was one of the SST sub-elements most frequently mentioned by all counselors in interviews, making up 38% of all comments. When Data Use was mentioned, it captured counselor knowledge and skill at the proficient level most of the time (72%), with expert level at (13%) and competent level at (15%). Thus, counselors described Data Use within the proficient category with high frequency. Comments that characterize data at the proficient level included, "I'll try to print out the grades or attendance or something like that. But I don't always have all the documents. There's never really been any sort of structure like that" (CA, interview) and "Yes, identify baseline….I would lean towards occasionally"(CB, Interview).

In comparison, data use in the competent category was characterized by comments such as:

> I know other schools do a lot of processes of check boxes and what the team has done, but I've not done that. I know maybe we should have some check–box thing, but I wouldn't have the SST if I didn't think and know the teachers had done it" (CF, Interview).

This comment illustrated minimization of the importance of an evidence-based process and a narrow perspective. Another counselor alluded to the fact that decisions about testing a child for special education were determined pre-SST and then asked that the statement be redacted:

> Like I said, we typically know in what direction we are going, but I have to say that we are also open during the process. So no conclusions are made, but it does make sense that we have a sense of, well we are thinking that we are going to test this child. I want to take that off, because there is nothing wrong with that" (CG, interview).

This comment was interesting as it indicated that the counselor was aware that pre determining outcomes with total lack of data, was not appropriate.

The three schools provided equivalent responses on the SST Self Study Guide regarding data use. All three schools reported consistent practice (level 3) in using multiple data sources within the SST process. Counselors also described feeling confident in data use, therefore there appeared to be solid knowledge and skills, paired with field practice.

b.) Progress Monitoring

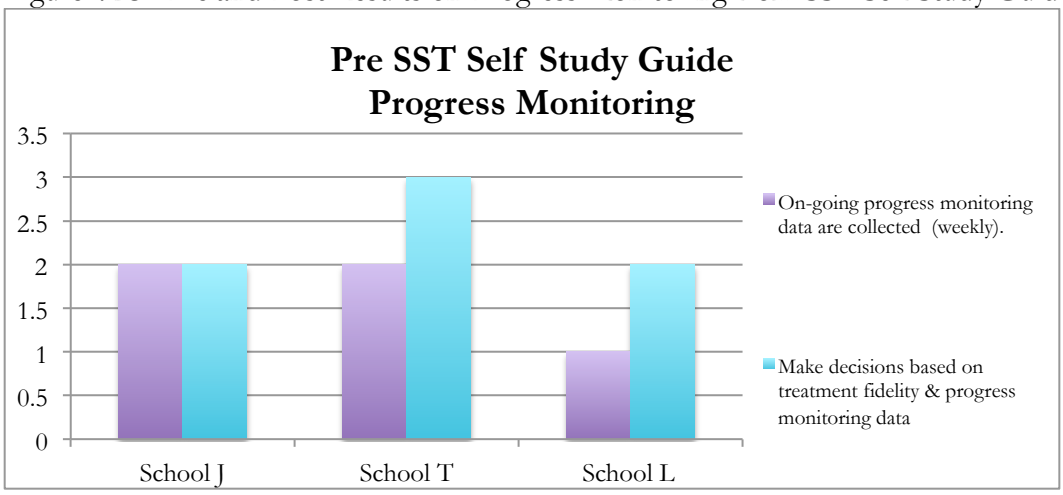
Progress monitoring speaks to the importance of collecting data on an ongoing and consistent basis, to assess progress on intervention plans. Progress monitoring ensures that changes over time can be captured and measured. For example, if the student is struggling academically, progress monitoring promotes data collection to understand if improvements are being made.

Progress monitoring was poorly represented (5%) when compared to other sub-elements analyzed in interviews. When progress monitoring was mentioned in interviews, 90% of the time it reflected counselor knowledge and skills at the proficient level, with 10% at the competent level. Counselor expertise was not represented at the expert level in this category, indicating that

knowledge and skills were at an average level. Comments at the proficient level included some understanding of progress monitoring, for example, "For him [student], he does it every Wednesday because teachers give out homework on Monday and Tuesday, so Wednesday will determine if he's all caught up or still needs more work" (CH, Interview) as well as, "I also think follow-up doesn't happen as often as it should for best practices. It's hard to do the scheduling and to figure out all that. To be quite honest, some SSTs are fairly well wrapped up just with the SST process"(CB, Interview).

In contrast, the following comment represents knowledge and skill at the competent level, made when the researcher asked Counselor CE about how counselors monitored progress: "Well the interventions are not being carried out, or the teacher reports continued concerns" (Interview). This comment reflected little skill in progress monitoring. Instead, the approach to progress monitoring appeared to be isolated to case-by-case determinations.

Figure 4.23: Pre and Post Results on Progress Monitoring from SST Self Study Guide



Level "3"=Consistent, Level "2"=Occasionally, and level "1"=Not at All

Analysis of SST Self Study Guide questions supported the idea that counselors were at a proficient level with respect to progress monitoring. There was variability across schools when examining whether counselors across schools engaged in on-going progress monitoring and made decisions based on treatment fidelity (Figure 4.23). School J ranked at level 2, indicating that they

occasionally engaged in progress monitoring practice. School J was similar to School T in collecting ongoing data (level 2), and similar to School L (level 2) when making decisions based on data. Overall, needs assessment data indicated that middle schools as a group reported average levels of expertise in progress monitoring and did not practice this activity with fidelity.

Focal Counselor Outcomes

When analyzing interview results on Data Use, focal counselors in School J demonstrated positive growth (Figure 4.24).

Figure 4.24: Data Use-School J

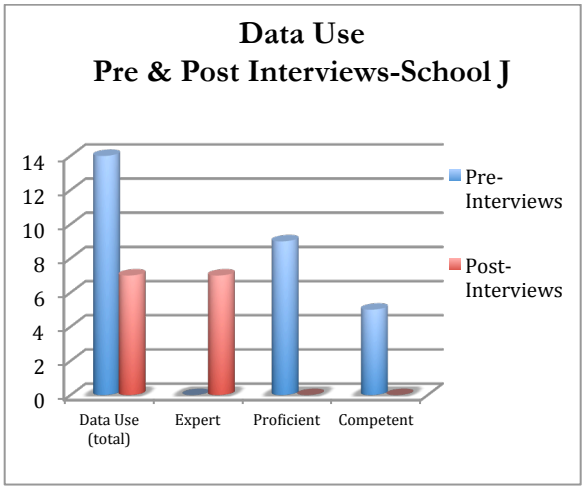
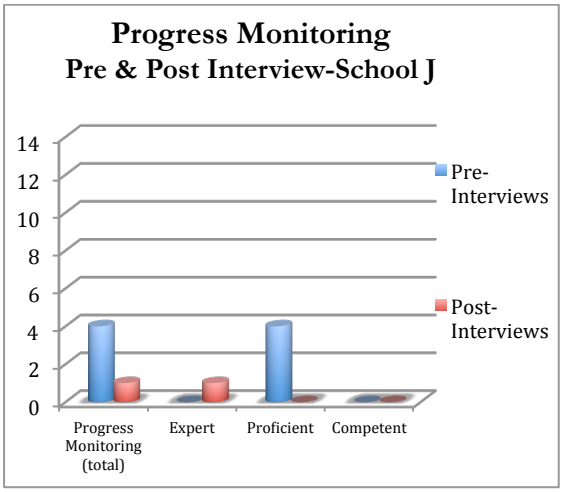


Figure 4.25: Progress Monitoring-School J



While frequency of Data Use decreased in post interviews, all post interview citations fell into the expert category. Thus, focal counselor awareness of the importance of data appears to have increased from competent and proficient skill levels to expert level in post intervention.

It also appears as though counselors in School J experienced increased awareness of the importance of progress monitoring, when comparing outcomes pre- and post (Fig. 4.25). Though progress monitoring was mentioned less frequently in post interviews, it was mentioned only at the expert level after intervention. Thus, there appears to have been a one-point increase in awareness of progress monitoring, from a proficient level to expert, pre- to post. These results were also borne out in results from the SST Self Study Guide (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Select questions from the Problem Solving section of SST Self Study Guide

Questions on Self Study Guide	Pre	Post	Change
Ongoing progress monitoring data collected (at least weekly)	Not at All	Consistent	+2
Based on treatment fidelity & progress monitoring data, make decision to continue/modify intervention, special ed., etc.	Occasional	Consistent	+1

Scale: Consistent (3), Occasional (2), Not at All (1)

Focal counselors reported changes in their practice, pre- and post-, in the area of Progress Monitoring when examining Self Study Guide outcomes. Counselors saw an increase of two levels, from not at all to consistent, in the area of ongoing progress monitoring data being collected at least weekly. Counselors also reported an increase in using data to inform treatment planning, moving up one level.

In sum, needs assessment data indicated that counselors fell at the proficient level of expertise in all six sub-elements defined as elements of an effective SST. Needs assessment data also suggest that counselors had room to grow their knowledge and skills in order to develop greater levels of expertise. Focal counselors also demonstrated proficient level of expertise across all six areas, with the exception of data use in which they were at competent and proficient levels. Outcome data for focal counselors indicate positive growth in the six sub elements measured. Focal counselors revealed expert levels of functioning after intervention in all six sub-elements except for referral process. While focal counselors did grow in this area, they did not reveal expert levels of practice. Results indicate that focal counselor developed greater levels of knowledge and skills across all six areas identified as elements of an effective SST when comparing baseline and outcome data.

Outcomes for Each Focal Counselor Individually

The following section describes outcomes for each focal counselor. This information is important as it further disaggregates results and illustrates how the design intervention influenced each participant. This evidence informed my design research and built appreciation of how BESST

affected change for individual counselors. Impact data is not provided for Counselor CC, as she exited the study early.

Outcomes for Counselor CA

Counselor CA demonstrated most growth of all counselors in knowledge and skill across all areas an. For example, Counselor CA showed positive shifts in knowledge and skill in four of the five questions posed in the questionnaire.

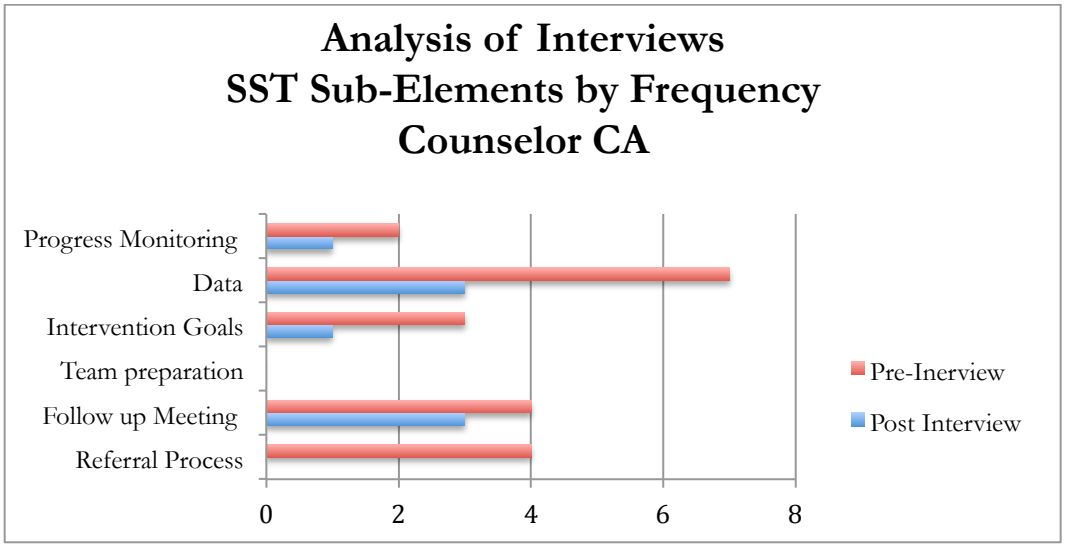
Table 4.6: Questionnaire-Counselor CA

Five Questions on Questionnaire	**Change**
SSTs are effective in maintaining students in general education settings	No change (2/2)
I have received training on facilitating effective SSTS	Increase (5/3)
I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies	Increase (2/1)
I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs	Increase (3/1)
I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs	Increase (2/1)

Categories: "1" strongly agree, "2" agree, "3" neither agree nor disagree, "4" disagree and "5" strongly disagree

Table 4.6 highlights outcomes on the questionnaire for Counselor CA. While Counselor CA did not shift thinking in question one regarding effectiveness of SSTs in maintaining students in general education, there were shifts on all other four questions. Counselor CA improved in reports of receiving training by two points, indicating a stronger agreement about being trained in SSTs. On question three, Counselor CA felt more knowledgeable about SEL competencies by one point. Counselor CA reported an increase in adequate knowledge about SSTs by two points on questions four and reported increased skill in implementing effective SST by one point on question five.

Figure 4.26: Counselor CA-SST Sub-Elements by Frequency



When examining interview data, it appears that Counselor CA referenced five of the six effective SST sub elements in pre-interviews and four of the five post-interview. Figure 4.26 highlights frequency of mention for the six SST sub elements. These findings suggest that Counselor CA mentioned most elements of an effective SST pre and post interview. When these sub elements were analyzed for quality of comments based on the expertise rubric, results indicated that Counselor CA showed increased expertise in four sub-elements: Progress Monitoring, Data Use, Interventions Goals, and Follow Up.

One example of increased expertise was exemplified when examining the area of Data Use. Counselor CA shifted from, "Once we've already done Tier 1, we are like ok, we've tried this this and this." This comment, at the proficient level, points to a perspective of data use as unselective, rather than intentional. Post interview, Counselor CA referenced the importance of collecting and using data, "Having as much data as you can, bringing it to the table. I'm doing packets now, like I said or maybe not always will it be a packet, but having that information, but as long a the information is there" (Interview). Counselor CA began creating packets of information for SSTs and referenced their use in the following comment, "It was really valuable for everyone to look at you know, and I think that helped me to almost prove that we've done all these

things..."(Interview). These comments elucidate a change in data use from proficient level to expert level, pre- and post-.

A second example of acquired expertise can be found when examining outcomes related to Intervention Goals. In this category, all of CA's comments fell into the expert level in post interviews, a shift from pre-interviews where comments fell into the proficient category. This represents a positive shift of one point in acquisition of expertise, from proficient to expert. For instance, pre-interview Counselor CA made the following statement describing follow-up on intervention goals: "I think one of the challenges we have is the follow-up piece….what we are going to do next, and who is responsible for it, oftentimes that gets filed away and I don't know that there is follow up" (CA, Interview). This compared with a more insightful comment demonstrating expertise, post-interview:

> Having all the key players there, so every teacher who feels that they've experienced or is working with the student and is observing the concerns, having the parents there, and then really important is coming up with meaningful interventions and making sure that there is follow up on those intervention goals (Interview).

In this example Counselor CA demonstrated a more holistic and authentic understanding of interventions goals, indicative of more expertise.

Outcomes for Counselor CB

Counselor CB also demonstrated growth in knowledge and skills, though not quite at the same level as Counselor CA.

Table 4.7: Questionnaire-Counselor CB

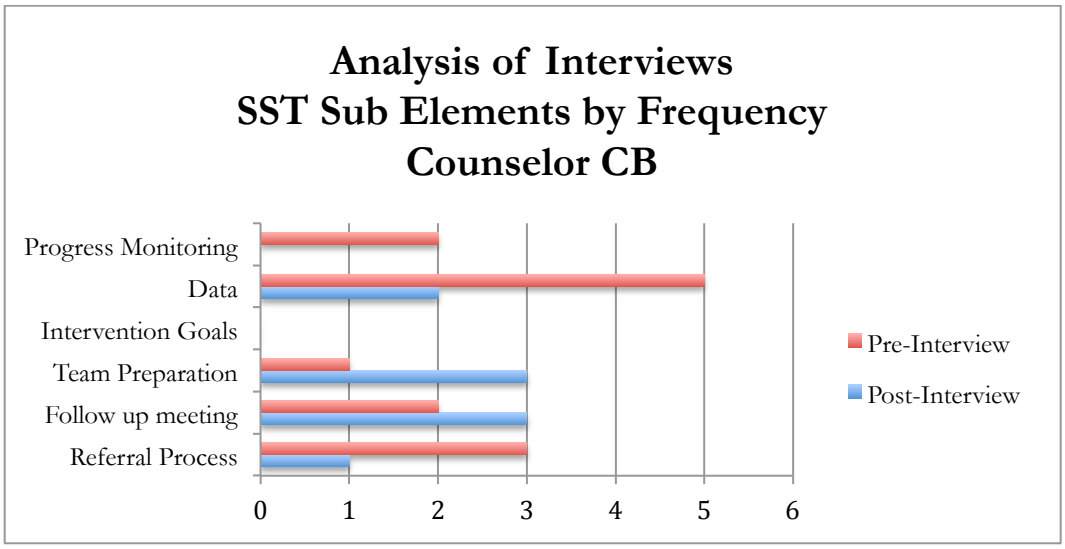
Five Questions on Questionnaire	**Change**
SSTs are effective in maintaining students in general education settings	No change (1/1)
I have received training on facilitating effective SSTS	Increase (2/1)
I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies	No change

	(1/1)
I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs	Increase (2/1)
I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs	Increase (2/1)

"1" strongly agree, "2" agree, "3" neither agree nor disagree, "4" disagree and "5" strongly disagree

Counselor CB saw positive growth in three of the five areas measure on the questionnaire, post intervention (Table 4.7). Like Counselor CA, Counselor CB continued to declare that SSTs were effective in maintaining students in general education settings. Counselor CB also continued to assert knowledge about social emotional competencies, from pre to post on question three. However, there was positive growth with respect to reporting training on SSTs by one point, feeling more knowledgeable about effective SSTs by one point and reporting new skills in implementing effective SST's by one point.

Figure 4.27: Counselor CB-SST Sub-Elements by Frequency



Counselor CB referenced five of six SST categories measured pre interviews, excluding Intervention Goals (Fig. 4.27). Counselor CB also referenced Team Preparation and Follow Up Meetings with more frequency in post interviews, indicating increased awareness of these sub elements. When analyzing quality of comments using the expertise rubric, counselor CB demonstrated increased expertise in Data Use. For example, in the Data Use category, Counselor

CB moved from a competent level to a proficient level, a gain of one point. For instance, pre interview Counselor CB stated "When we see gains, or we see significant enough issues, or peoples' 'spidey' senses are going off then we'll document first what the teachers have done already for RtI in the classroom." In this case, Counselor CB described data use as situational and related to instinct. In contrast, the following post interview comment referenced how often the counselor is using the evidenced based tool (DESSA) in practice to collect strengths: "I'd probably say that it's even more than 80%, but most of the time I was getting it out well ahead of time, getting them back and scoring them, and having them all ready to go for the meeting" (Interview). This comment reflected a proficient level of expertise where there is an appropriate and more holistic reference of data as a research-validated tool.

Outcomes for Counselor CD

Counselor CD demonstrated least shifts in terms of new knowledge and skill based on impact data.

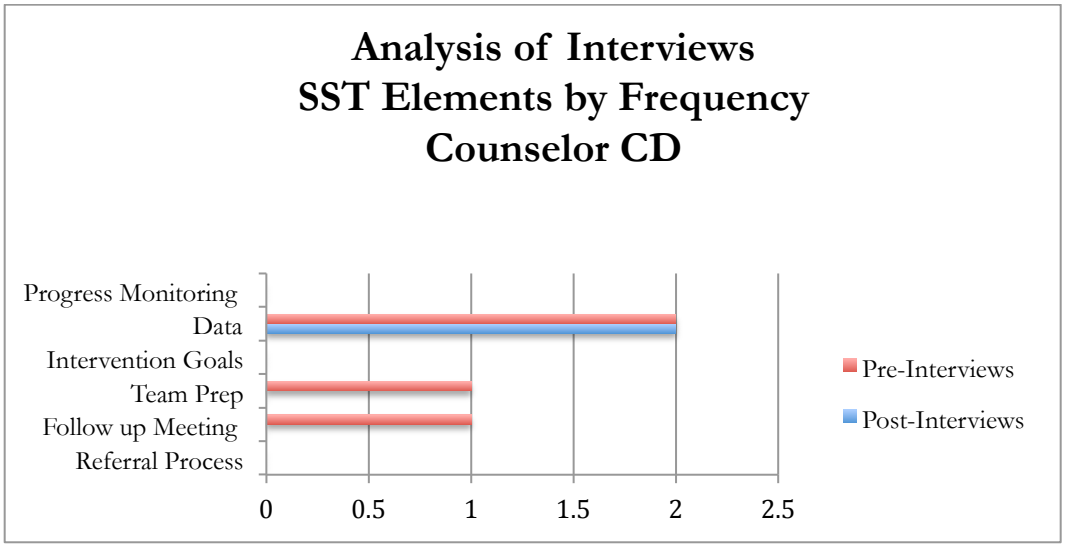
Table 4.8: Questionnaire-Counselor CD

Five Questions on Questionnaire	**Change**
SSTs are effective in maintaining students in general education settings	No change (1/1)
I have received training on facilitating effective SSTS	No change (1/1)
I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies	No change (1/1)
I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs	No change (1/1)
I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs	No change (1/1)

Categories: "1" strongly agree, "2" agree, "3" neither agree nor disagree, "4" disagree and "5" strongly disagree

Counselor CD was unique in that all five questions corresponded with a "strongly agree" response, and this response did not change pre- and post- (Table 4.8). Thus, counselor CD maintained previous beliefs as per questionnaire results, despite participating in the intervention.

Figure 4.28: Counselor CD-SST Sub-Elements by Frequency



Counselor CD infrequently mentioned the essential elements of an effective SST in interviews (Figure 4.28). CD referenced only three SST sub-elements pre-interview and one of the same sub-elements post interview. Of all counselors, CD referenced SST sub-elements least. However, Counselor CB did demonstrate increased expertise in the area of Data Use when comments were analyzed for quality using the expertise rubric.

Figure 4.29: Data Use-Counselors (Pre)

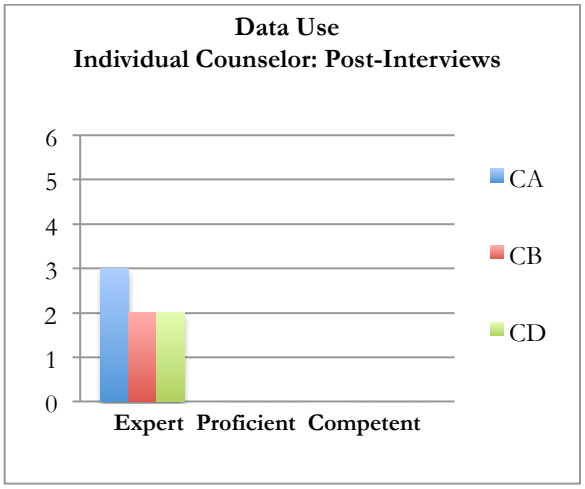
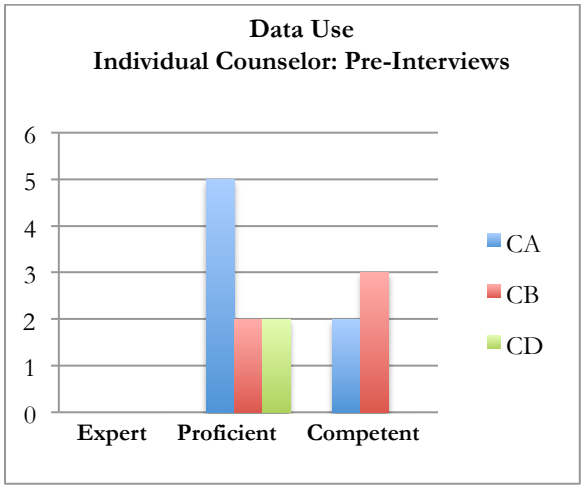


Figure 4.30: Data Use-Counselors (Post)



All three counselors demonstrated increased expertise in Data Use when analyzing quality of comments using the expertise rubric. Figure 4.29 illustrates how data use was referenced pre-

interviews, while Figure 4.30 highlights how data use was referenced post interview. Counselors moved from comments that indicated a competent or proficient level of understanding, pre-intervention: "I think it becomes a conversation. We all just start talking about it. This child is struggling with this. Are you seeing this? Have you tried this?" (CA, Interview), or an inconsistent awareness of the importance of gathering data: "It's rare that I will go and gather ELAC and electives, the Spanish teacher, the French teacher, the PE teacher, music, no" (CA, Interview), to comments reflecting an expert level. Comments at the expert level, captured a stronger and more holistic awareness of the importance of data use, evidenced by shifts from competent and proficient levels, to expert level. An example of a citation at expert level is noted below:

> We've started introducing the DESSA some, but certainly have area for growth there. One, getting the DESSA out early enough so that people can actually fill it out and return it and I can score it and maybe make some sense of it. So at this point, it's gone out about 80% of the time. (CB, Interview)

In summary, all three focal counselors exhibited a positive shift in expertise in the area of Data Use. Individually, counselors demonstrated varied results, with Counselor CA making most positive shifts, followed by Counselor CB and CD.

Learning Outcome Two: Understanding SEL Competencies (Impact Data)

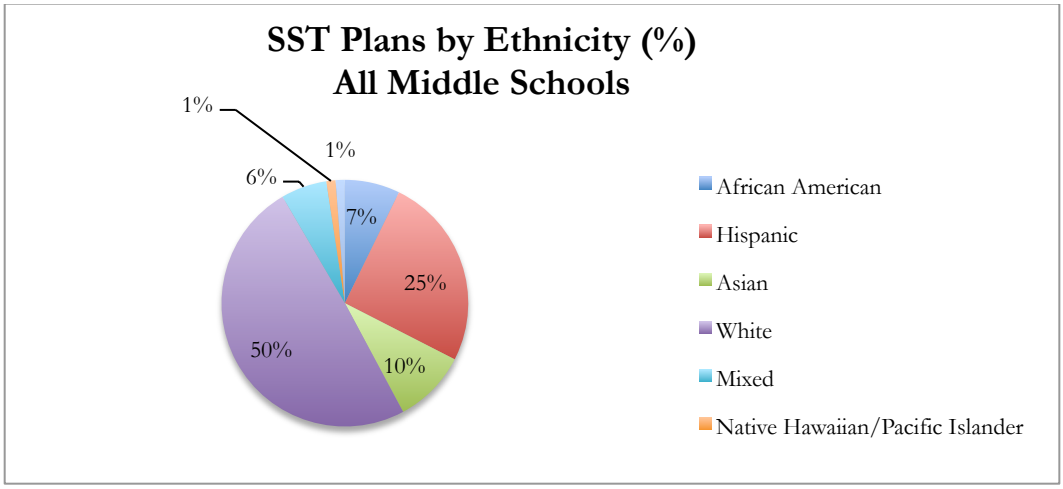
Given that SSTs are meant to be positive problem solving processes in which student strengths are leveraged to support them in ameliorating challenges, attention to how strengths are captured in SST Plans is important. In this section, I examine the extent to which the tool development process shifted counselor practice in documenting strengths on SST Plans and increased understanding of SEL. I also discuss outcomes related to student strengths, gender, and ethnicity.

Needs assessment data indicate that counselors as a group reported great confidence in their knowledge of SEL competencies. Indeed, all counselors reported agreeing or strongly agreeing to feeling knowledgeable about social emotional learning (SEL) competencies on questionnaires. This

was one area is which there was great alignment amongst counselors, indicating that as a group they felt strong levels of expertise.

SST Plans were requested for all middle school counselors for the entire 2014-15 school year. Counselors sent the researcher redacted SST Plans throughout the year to collect information on student strengths. The goal was to examine if the tool development process was effective in shifting counselor understanding and documentation of student strengths. Specifically there was interest in investigating whether the tool developed helped counselors to better identify SEL competencies versus character traits, which typified pre-intervention practices. An analysis to determine whether the quantity and quality of strengths differed by student gender and race was also completed. Data were coded and thematically analyzed, without knowledge of student gender or race, to identify strengths across all reports. Findings are presented for all counselors, followed by specific results for focal counselors.

Figure 4.31: SST Plans for all Middle Schools



(n=83 SST Plans for all middle schools, AY 14-15)

Data included all SST reports produced by nine counselors at three middle schools. Each plan was individually analyzed and coded. Of the eighty-three total reports, 63% of the SSTs represented male students and 37% female students. Figure 4.31 highlights student demographics

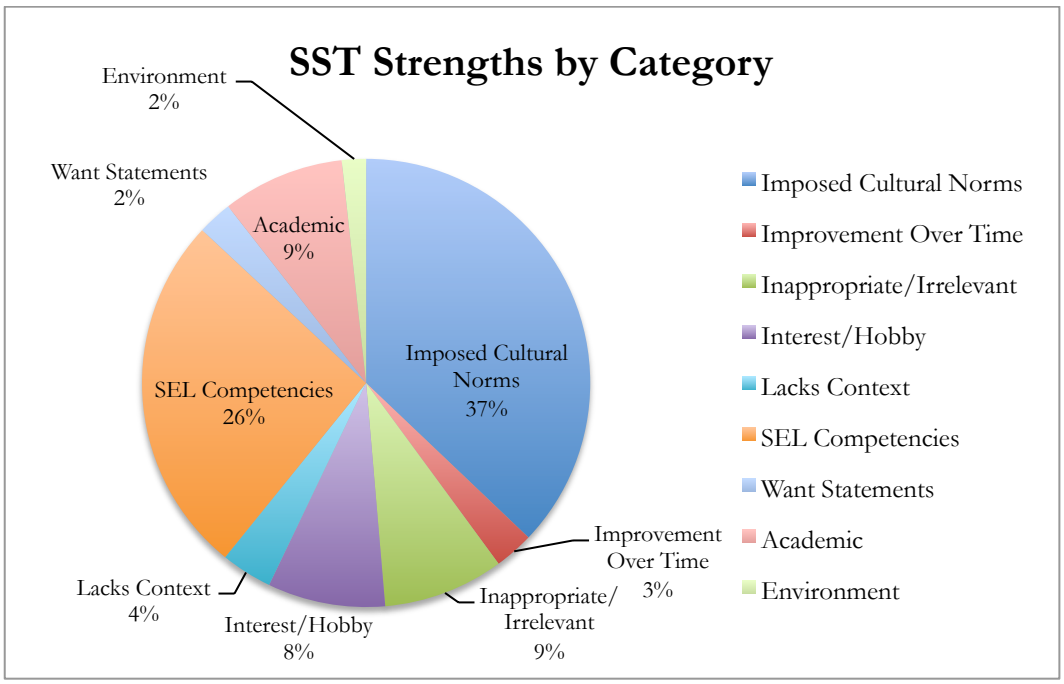
by ethnicity and illustrates that African-American students made up 7% of SSTs, followed by Hispanics 25%, and Asians 10% [(Filipino (1), Asian Indian (3), Chinese (4) and Other (4)]. White students made up 50% of SST Plans, while mixed race students and Native American and American Indian made up 6% and 1%, respectively.

Qualitative analysis of 83 Student Plans resulted in identification of a total of 919 strengths. Analysis of these strengths yielded nine major categories indicating the nature of the strength-based statement, including:

- Imposed Cultural Norms-normative, socially accepted values/beliefs
- Improvement over Time-transitional strength, not fully present
- Inappropriate/Irrelevant -qualifying statements or irrelevant to SST
- Interest/Hobby-talent or extracurricular activity
- Lacks Context-unclear as to meaning
- SEL Competencies-eight research validated areas of learning
- Want Statements-desired or wished for
- Academic-school related
- Environment-support from family, peers or community

Classifications and definitions for each major category can be found in Appendix P. These nine categories were used to analyze strengths on SST Plans.

Figure 4.32: Frequency of Student Strengths (%) by Major Category



(n=919 Student Strengths as captured on 83 SST Plans)

Figure 4.32 highlights the nine major categories of strengths by frequency. Outcomes indicate the majority of strengths fell into Imposed Cultural Norms. Imposed Cultural Norms were defined as comments that reflect the normative, socially acceptable values and beliefs of the dominant school culture. Imposed Cultural Norms included comments that captured appearance, "very fashionable"(SST Plan, J2), "knows how to take care of herself"(SST Plan, J2); disposition, "kind" (SST Plan, L1), "eager to please" (SST Plan, J4), "sweet" (SST Plan, L2); cognitive skills, "smart" "bright" (SST Plans, J20, L2); and external perceptions, "well liked by peers" (SST Plan, T20). This finding was significant as it highlighted that the majority of strengths identified had to do more with how the child fit the normative culture of the school setting, and less about how the child's genuine strengths were used to leverage school success. This finding was also relevant given that most counselors represented the normative culture in the community of study, thus their frame of reference likely reflected dominant values.

Other categories included, Improvement over Time, which reflected comments that captured strengths not fully present, but rather in progress. For example, "Great progress from last school year"(SST Plan, T17) and "currently making progress with organization" (SST Plan, L14). These comments made up 3% of all strengths. Comments in the Inappropriate/Irrelevant category (9%) did not reflect strengths, but instead captured qualifying statements or were irrelevant to the SST process, for example, "Learning is very hard for her"(SST Plan, T8), "Giants fan"(SST Plan, T20), and "Things with pictures interest her more"(SST Plan, T2). Comments reflecting Interests and Hobbies made up 8% of strengths. These types of comments captured talents or extracurricular activities, such as "Fabulous in recent drama play" (SST Plan, J21) or "Enjoys biking, hiking and traveling"(SST Plan, J11). Comments that lacked context were those that were difficult to decipher meaning from, such as "mature" (SST Plan, L32) or "Takes things to heart" (SST Plan, T17). These comments made up 4% of all strengths categories.

SEL competencies were the second most frequently mentioned category, making up 26% of all strengths. SEL competencies were divided into eight categories outlined in the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) and included: Decision Making, Goal Directed Behavior, Optimistic Thinking, Personal Responsibility, Relationship Skills, Self Awareness, Self Management, and Social Awareness. These SEL competencies reflect areas in which students can receive instruction to build SEL competencies. For example, students can receive instruction to help them become better decision makers or take personal responsibility. Comments in this area included, "makes good choices" (SST Plan, J1), "works very hard" (SST Plan, J7), and "good time management at home" (SST Plan, T24). Because SEL competencies are protective factors that can be leveraged, they are an ideal means of identifying strengths.

Comments that captured students wanting to do well made up 2% of all categories. These types of comments included, "wants to be successful"(SST Plan, T23). Academic strengths, or

those explicitly mentioning school made up 9% of all comments. These types of strengths included, "Make A's and B's" (SST Plan, L20) and "High language proficiency" (SST Plan, L18). Finally, the category of environment addressed strengths related to support from family, community, and peer groups. Examples included "Supportive parents" (SST Plan, T13) and "She is involved in positive social/emotional outlets: Church groups, YMCA group, water polo" (J21). Interestingly, environmental strengths, having to do with family and community support, made up only 2% of reported strengths. This is particularly interesting as SSTs are meant to be inclusive team processes in which parents and family are meaningfully included in the process.

Overall findings indicated that Imposed Cultural Norms and SEL competencies were most frequently noted. Academic strengths that specifically spoke to school performance made up less than 10% of all categories, which is important considering that SSTs are meant to address barriers to learning. Of additional note is the fact that comments that were categorized as Inappropriate (9%) were mentioned at the same frequency as Academic strengths (9%), indicating that students were just as likely to receive inappropriate comments as they were to receive academic strengths.

When examining reported strengths by gender, results indicate that both males and females averaged 11 strengths per SST report. On average, white students had 11.5 strengths per report, while non-white students had 10.6 strengths per report.

Figure 4.33: Frequency of Category By Gender from SST Plans (2014-15)

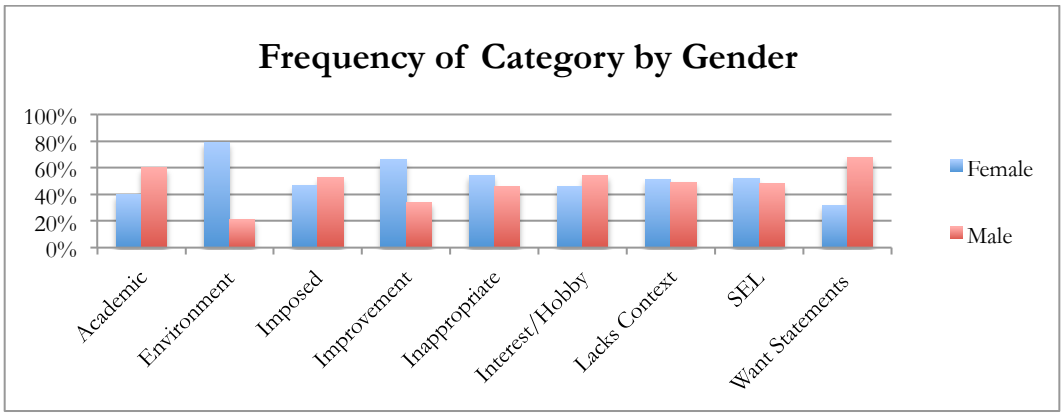


Figure 4.33 captures percent and types of strengths by gender. Results indicate some differences in the number of strengths reported by gender. This phenomenon was most obvious when examining certain categories. For example, males had more academic strengths when compared to females, 60% to 40% respectively; conversely females had many more environment or external strengths than males, 79% to 22%. Types of environmental strengths included, "She is involved in positive social-emotional outlets: Church group, YMCA, water polo"(SST Plan, J21) and "works at events at the University Club" (SST Plan, J21). Want statements, capturing student wishes or desires, were higher for males than females, 68% to 32%. In certain categories, there was less of a differential between males and females, including Imposed Cultural Norms, Inappropriate, Lacks Context and SEL Competencies.

Data were also disaggregated by race to understand how strengths might be influenced by ethnicity. Students were categorized as white and non-white for this analysis, with all minorities placed in the non-white category. Results indicate that more white students were attributed Academic strengths (56%) than were non-whites (44%). In the area of Environmental supports, this strength was attributed to white students more often (55%) than to non-whites (45%). When examining Imposed Cultural Norms and SEL categories, there was near equivalence between whites and non-whites. However, when data on ethnicity was further disaggregated by ethnicity, distinct patterns emerged. For example, African-American students were disproportionately represented in strengths concerning appearance, such as "well put together"(SST Plan, J2), while Asian students represented 60% of all environmental strengths.

These findings seem to indicate that there were distinct patterns that arose when examining strengths by gender and ethnicity. Specifically, males were attributed more academic strengths as well as strengths indicating a desire to do well. Conversely, females were attributed more environmental strengths as well as those having to do with improvement over time. When analyzing

strengths by ethnicity, academic and environmental supports were more frequently attributed to White students. This needs assessment data pointed to the fact that SST members exhibited some bias in how strengths were recorded for students based on gender and ethnicity.

Focal Counselor Outcomes:

All twenty-five SST Plans generated by School J were analyzed to understand changes in how strengths were recorded on SST Plans, pre- and post-intervention. Pre-SST Plans for focal counselors accounted for 20 of 25 documents and 246 of 919 excerpts. Post-SST Plans were only five in number, representing 64 of 919 excerpts. The five post-intervention SST Plans came from counselors CA (1), CB, (3) and CD (1). Data were normalized to account for differences in sample size. Findings indicated four categories were most frequently noted in all SST Plans at School J. The first category, Academic, reflects comments on school related statements. Academics were most frequently mentioned in pre-SSTs as opposed to post-SSTs. The second most frequently mentioned category was Imposed Culture Norms. This category was highest pre- and post-, and reflects comments about social norms. Outcomes indicate that counselors did not demonstrate a change in how they recorded Imposed Cultural Norms after the intervention. Interests and hobbies was also a frequently mentioned category. Finally, SEL competencies were the second most recorded type of strength, both pre and post. These results closely mirror needs assessment data.

Table 4.9: Pre-SST Plans by Race and Gender for School J

Pre-SST Plans=20	**Males (12) by Ethnicity**	**Female (8) by Ethnicity**
	• White=7 • African Am.=1 • Hispanic=1 • Asian=2 • American Indian=1	• White=5 • African Am.=2 • Hispanic=1

Pre-SST Plans were represented by 20 referrals made up of 12 male students and eight female students. Table 4.9 details Pre-SST Plans by race and gender for School J and indicates that

there were more males than females. Relative to gender, females were attributed more strengths in the areas of imposed cultural norms and environment, whereas males were attributed less SEL competencies overall. Relative to ethnicity, there were also some patterns that emerged in how strengths were attributed.

Figure 4.34: Pre-SST Plans for School J by Category and Ethnicity

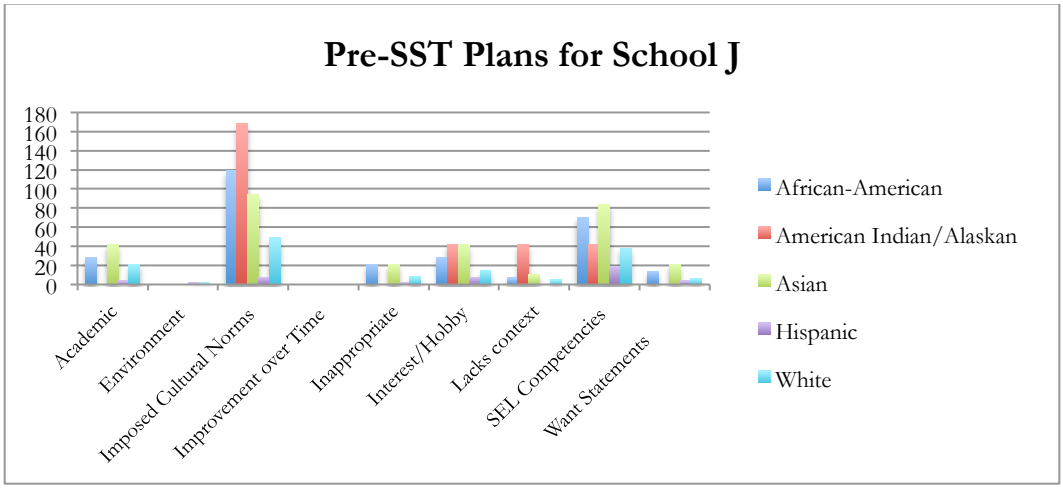


Figure 4.34 highlights some differences in how strengths were noted when cross-referenced with ethnicity. For example, academic strengths were attributed to Asian students more than any other group. In the area of Imposed Cultural Norms, American Indian, African-American and Asian students were most represented. American Indian, African-American and Asian students were also most represented in the Interest/Hobby and SEL category. In the Lacks Context category, the American Indian student was most represented. Hispanic students strengths were lacking across all categories. Further several categories, such as environment and improvement over time, were not represented for any of the student groups.

Table 4.10: Post-SST Plans by Race and Gender for School J

Total Post SST Plans=5	Males (4) by Ethnicity • White=3 • African Am.=1	Female (1) by Ethnicity • White=5

Post-SST Plans were made up four male and one female student (Table 4.10). Three of the males were White and one was African American, while the female student was White. There were some differences in how strengths were recorded with respect to gender. The female student received more comments relative to imposed cultural norms, as well as comments that fell into the debatable, external perception and disposition categories. Males tended to have slightly more SEL competencies attributed. Relative to ethnicity and race, some differences were noted in how focal counselors reported strengths

For example, in post-SST Plans, all Academic strengths were attributed to White students. In the category of Imposed Cultural Norms, the African-American student was attributed 59% of comments, compared to 41% for White students as a group. Of special note is that within Imposed Cultural Norms, 95% of comments related to manners (polite, respectful) were attributed to the African-American student. Findings were similar for the inappropriate/irrelevant category, in which the African-American student received 87% of all comments. These comments included, "tries to stay on task" or "hard worker when engaged and motivated." More SEL competencies were attributed to the African-American student when compared with other students, 60% to 40% respectively. SEL strengths included, "Eager to learn" and "good class participant." These results indicate there were differences in how strengths were attributed based on student ethnicity.

An analysis of strengths was also conducted for each focal counselor, pre and post. Counselor CA's top-three referenced strength categories pre intervention were Academics, Imposed Cultural Norms, and SEL competencies. Counselor CA captured 160 strengths in seven pre-SST Plans, an average of 23 strengths per SST Plan and a total of 24 strengths in the post-SST Plan. Imposed Cultural Norms made up 39% of comments pre-intervention and 41% of comments post-intervention. In terms of Academic strengths, these made up 15% of pre- and 25% of post-SST

comments. SEL made up 19% of all pre-SST comments and 17% of all post-SST comments. Thus, there was little change from pre- and post-.

Counselor CB noted approximately 119 strengths on a total of eight pre-SST Plans, for an average of approximately 15 strengths per pre-intervention SST plan. Forty-two strengths were captured on three post-SST Plans for an average of 14 strengths for post-SST Plans. Counselor CB most frequently cited Academic, Imposed Cultural Norms, Interests/Hobbies, and SEL competencies. Academic strengths made up 11% of total strengths pre-intervention and 2% of strengths post-intervention. Imposed Cultural Norms made up 33% of all comments pre-intervention, and 48 % of all comments post-intervention. In terms of Interests/Hobbies, this category made up 11% of all strengths pre- and 10% of all strengths post. SEL competencies made 32% of pre-intervention comments and 31% of post-intervention comments. Thus, there was little difference from pre- and post-.

Counselor CD's top three categories of strengths referenced were Imposed Cultural Norms, Interests/Hobbies, and SEL Competencies. Counselor CD referenced 224 strengths in five pre-SST Plans, for an average of 45 strengths. In the one post-SST Plan, counselor CD referenced 58 strengths. Imposed Cultural Norms made up 30% of all strengths pre-intervention and 45% of all strengths post-intervention. Interests/Hobbies made up 18% of all strengths pre-intervention and 9% of all strengths post-intervention. SEL competencies made up 31% of all strengths pre-intervention and 27 % of all strengths post-intervention. There was little change from pre- and post-; however, Counselor CD demonstrated the highest number of strengths per SST Plan when compared to peers.

A strengths-based analysis of SST Plans indicates that there was little change in how counselors recorded strengths after participating in BESST. All three counselors referenced Imposed

Cultural Norms and SEL categories most frequently in post-SST Plans, with no discernable change in post-SST Plans. These findings are supported by session transcript analysis.

An analysis of interview transcripts indicates that counselors infrequently mentioned SEL competencies. However, when they did describe SEL competencies, they demonstrated a proficient level of SEL understanding (66%), followed by expert level (23%), and finally, competent level (11%). Therefore, focal counselors described a high level of expertise in the SEL arena. Only Counselor CA moved from proficient to expert in SEL understanding. An example of counselor SEL understanding at the proficient level of expertise included:

> Well, probably the social/emotional learning hopefully can change some character traits that come with the child. Character traits, they may come through the door with who they are specifically, but you can teach skills. And that's the social/emotional learning component for me. That's maybe not a full answer at all, but I think that we need to deal with people as they are, character traits and all. Then help them expand their horizon (CD, Interview)

Conversely, at the expert level, a counselor was able to naturally describe SEL competencies as related to academics:

> As a counselor, talking about strengths, working from a strength-based starting point is a positive place. But starting with strengths that actually can relate. You can talk about those extra ones a little bit, but talking about the ones that really relate to their academics. How we can pull from those strengths and get the student connected and excited, so they can be a successful student with the support (CC, Interview).

Together these findings suggest that overall counselors did not appear to acquire new knowledge and skills in SEL competencies, except for counselor CA who moved one level from proficient to expert. Additionally, counselors did not shift practices in documenting

strengths on SST Plans. Thus, BESST had limited effect in shifting counselor understanding or practice with respect to social emotional learning (SEL). However, important information on how student strengths were documented when cross- referenced by gender and ethnicity did emerge from the analysis of SST Plans.

Learning Outcome Three: Co-Construct an SST Handbook (Impact Data)

Through implementation of BESST, counselors successfully co-constructed an SST Handbook to guide more effective practice. The design of the tool development study afforded counselors opportunities to provide feedback via intentional feedback loops built around activities to promote change. Outcomes suggest that counselors identified the most important element of the tool to be practical, followed by easily actualized in practice and finally relevant.

Counselors consistently expressed a desire to create a tool that was practical in their daily work. While they did appreciate learning about the literature and models available, they were clear that due to time constraints, daily tasks, and responsibilities they were not able to fully commit to the ideal models of practice shared. The notion that the tool needed to be practical above all else was sensible in that counselor work is varied and complex, requiring tools that facilitate getting work done.

The draft SST Handbook constructed by counselors was organized around three main areas, Organization and Management, Teamwork, and Problem Solving, in addition to two other sections, SST Resources and SST Forms (Appendix Q). Interestingly, the section that received most attention was Organization and Management. This section included SST background information, definitions, membership, purpose and benefits, and a flowchart. The second section on Teamwork included information on group norms, member roles and responsibilities, and helpful suggestions for effective meetings. The third section, Problem Solving, included information on how to identify and analyze problems, and implement and evaluate SSTs. The final two sections dealt with SST

Resources and Forms. These sections contained information on frequently asked questions, a parent brochure, teacher preparation checklist, a strategies list, and tips on facilitation skills. The final section included all forms to support the process. The SST Handbook continues to be edited for distribution to all counselors in the district.

Impact Data Summary

Impact data were collected to determine efficacy of the tool development process and evaluate whether the design challenge was met. Needs assessment data suggest that as a group, counselor knowledge of the six sub elements of SSTs tended to reflect a proficient level of expertise. Focal counselors also tended to be categorized at the proficient level of expertise pre intervention, though they grew in expertise across all sub domains as a result of participating in BESST. As a group, focal counselors demonstrated growth in one particular area, Data Use. Individually, counselors demonstrated acquisition of new learning and skills, with Counselor CA demonstrating most growth, followed by Counselor CB, and finally Counselor CD. These findings suggest that BESST was effective in promoting a change process that activated new learning for counselors at various levels.

Relative to impact data on SEL it appears that there was little change in how counselors recorded strengths from pre to post. This may be due to the fact that there were very few post SSTs in the sample. A larger sample size might have offered greater opportunities for comparison analysis. However, findings generated in this area are of value in terms of understanding the types and frequency of strengths captured in SST Plans across middle schools in this district. The data point to some interesting patterns in terms of how gender and ethnicity interplay with strengths. Findings suggest that there are distinct differences in how strengths are conceptualized and documented for males and females, as well as for minority students. As a result of BESST, counselors completed a draft SST Handbook to guide future practice.

Conclusion

SSTs are a common practice across the nation, yet there is little evidence that they are well understood or implemented based on best practices. Further, there is limited evidence that student SEL competencies are identified and developed in student plans, despite the fact that SSTs are meant to be a positive and early intervention practice to support student success. I conducted research to add to the knowledge base by co-constructing a tool with counselors to guide more effective SST practices. The design of the tool development process was intentional in engaging counselors in a change process to promote new learning and skills. A tool that raises awareness of SSTs, builds organizational coherence and action, and promotes counselor learning may positively impact SST efficacy and ultimately student outcomes. Given that SSTs can have a significant impact on student lives, increased attention to what makes them effective is imperative.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Minority students are over-represented in special education settings. This longstanding issue has spurred various prevention efforts, including implementation of Student Study Teams (SSTs). SSTs are school based proactive problem-solving teams, charged with marshaling systematic, evidence-based interventions and supports for struggling students. Yet, SSTs are poorly understood and implemented, affecting efficacy of implementation. Indeed, SSTs are often deficit-based and reflect disproportionality in terms of referral and placement of minority students to specialized educational settings. Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams (BESST) was a tool development process that attempted to improve SSTs practices through engagement of counselors in a change progression to promote new learning while developing an SST Handbook. In this study, I describe actions that contributed to the tool development design and modification and examine whether design elements were successful in raising awareness of effective SSTs and in developing an effective

tool.

In this chapter, I review and discuss findings of this study and allege that the theory of action and design of BESST is comprehensive and rigorous. I assert that BESST provided an exploratory look at a tool development processes as a means of raising counselor awareness and expertise in effective SST practices. Additionally, BESST led to a co-constructed SST Handbook to guide best practices. In the following section, I describe fundamental elements of BESST, acknowledge limitations of the study, discuss implications for practice and conclude with recommendations to guide future research. This section closes with my final reflections and thoughts on this design development study.

I. Summary of the Study

Student Study Teams (SSTs) are a widely used method to support struggling students; however, SSTs are poorly understood and thus inadequately implemented. Indeed, while intended to be a strengths-based decision making process, SSTs are often deficit-based and lack consistency. BESST was a tool development intervention developed to co-construct an SST Handbook to guide best practices and address the problem of practice. The tool development process included engaging counselors in the work of co-constructing an SST Handbook, through reflective professional learning that afforded opportunities for thoughtful feedback and input. The goal was to move counselors through a change process to promote new learning and skill acquisition in the areas of SST knowledge and social emotional learning (SEL) and ultimately yield a handbook that was relevant, practical, and actualized for school counselors.

The study took place in a middle school within a district located in Northern California. The study focused on four counselors in one middle school, though needs assessment data from five counselors at the other two middle schools in the district were also captured. The study sought to address three learning outcomes: Increase counselor knowledge of effective SSTs; Increase skill in

identifying SEL competencies; and Co-construct an SST Handbook. Outcomes indicate that BESST was successful in addressing elements within these three areas.

II. Discussion of Findings:

This tool development study was designed to meet three outcomes. The first outcome was to increase counselor knowledge of and skills in effective SSTs. The second outcome was to increase counselor knowledge in identifying student social emotional (SEL) competencies, and the final goal was to engage counselors in the co-construction of an SST tool to guide more effective practices. The following discussion of findings will address each of these learning outcomes based on analysis of needs assessment and process and impact data, explaining possible reasons for shifts in knowledge, skills, or practice based on study variables and within the context of the literature.

Increase Knowledge and Skill in Effective SSTs

The first expected outcome of the tool development process was to increase counselor knowledge and skills in effective SSTs. The theory of intervention postulated that if counselors engaged in a change process and co-constructed an SST Handbook, then they would acquire new awareness, skills, and knowledge. While the co-construction of the tool and integration of new information was the desired outcome, the change process was the mechanism to promote change. Accordingly, the design was meant to move counselors through a change process in order to arrive at the development of a handbook and acquisition of new skills and knowledge. The following section begins with a description of the change process and then describes findings for each of the domains being measured, Knowledge of SSTs, Organization and Management, Teamwork, and Problem Solving.

Focal Counselors and the Change Process

Focal counselors engaged in a three-stage change process to facilitate acquisition of greater awareness, knowledge, and skills in implementing effective SSTs. The theory of intervention

conceived that if counselors were guided through a change process, including review of disconfirming data to compel change, provided psychologically safe opportunities for new learning, and assisted to integrate new learning, then they would acquire new awareness and skills to inform practice. The following discussion describes how counselors moved through the three stages of change: unfreezing, new learning and refreezing.

Outcome data indicate that BESST was successful in guiding counselors through a change process to promote new learning and skills. Indeed, it appears that counselor engagement in the change process was related to their ability to integrate new information into practice and acquire new skills. Counselors who engaged in all stages of the change process were more likely to acquire new skills and knowledge. The change process was not linear, but rather iterative in that data compelled new learning and refreezing cyclically.

However not all counselors moved through the stages of change in the same way. Two of the three counselors successfully engaged in all three stages of the learning process and one counselor engaged in only the first two stages of the change process. Specifically, Counselor CA engaged in all stages of the change process, resulting in the acquisition of additional knowledge and expertise as evidenced by both process and outcome data. Indeed, Counselor CA moved from proficient and competent levels at pre-intervention to expert levels at post intervention in multiple domains. Counselor CB also moved through all three stages of the change process. Counselor CB showed growth in four domains related to new learning about SSTs, shifting from proficient and competent levels at pre-intervention to expert at post intervention. Conversely, Counselor CD only engaged in the beginning stages of the change process, with no indication of refreezing throughout the tool development process. While Counselor CD did shift from proficient to expert level at post intervention when specifically looking at the importance of using data, there was limited engagement in the change process for this counselor.

Some reasons for differences in outcomes between counselors may be related to three reasons: years of experience in school counseling, perspective in participating in the study, and the study design itself. Counselor CA was the least experienced of the three counselors, in fact Counselor CA was a recent graduate, and thus perhaps most open to shifting and integrating new practice. Counselor CB was also fairly new to the counseling field, with some experience in the public service profession before coming to School J. Still, counselor CA and CB reported less than five years of counseling experience and thus might be considered at a competent stage of learning where there exists a strong interest in new learning and positive performance (Benner, 2005). However, Counselor CD reported over 30 years of experience, perhaps identifying at an expert level and seeing little reason to incorporate new learning into a process already identified as strong. In this way, it appears that years of experience in the field were correlated with new learning and skill acquisition. Specifically, experience and expertise in the field seemed to be connected to engagement in the change process, with less experienced counselors indicating more engagement in the change process. A second reason for discrepancies in the change process may have been reasons identified for participation in the study. While Counselor CA and CB saw participation in the study as an opportunity for professional development, Counselor CD held the opinion that participation in the study was purely to help me with my research. Indeed, counselor CD mentioned on several occasions that there was a strong motivation to help me with my study. Thus, there may have been little motivation for personal change felt by counselor CD, perhaps contributing to limited progress in the change process. Finally, these results may indicate that Counselor CD did not experience enough disconfirming data to cause anxiety or disconfirming data was not important enough to create anxiety. Indeed, counselors shared that they did not find the data disconfirming and continued to maintain that SSTs were effective in maintaining students in general education settings. Therefore, it may be that while psychological safety was intact, the data on case studies, referral

rates, and performance data was not compelling enough for counselor CD or did not activate interest in the same way that it did for the other two counselors.

In sum, not all counselors experienced the change process in the same way. The two counselors with the least amount of practical experience demonstrated most participation in the change process, whereas the counselor with the most practical experience showed the least movement in the change process. These differences may be related to existing levels of expertise, motivation for participating in the study, or design elements.

Counselor Knowledge of SSTs

Needs assessment data indicated that counselors felt a high level of proficiency relative to skills and knowledge needed to implement effective SSTs. Indeed counselors described awareness and functioning at the proficient and competent level in this area. This perception existed despite the fact that as a group they reported receiving very little training on effective SSTs. Consequently, it seems that counselor confidence in this area was not founded on having received formal training, but rather on experiential learning. This phenomenon might be explained by using the skill acquisition model of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) in which learning is described as developmental and constructed based on performance and experiences in the field. Under such a model, counselor expertise would be described along a continuum in which they start off at a novice level and move towards an expert level based on experiences afforded in the work setting. Thus, counselors may have received little formal training on SST, but may have developed practical expertise based on daily experiences in the field.

Indeed, needs assessment and baseline data indicated that counselors were acutely able to identify challenges as well as necessary skills and knowledge needed to implement effective SSTs. The identification of barriers and competencies pointed to the fact that counselors had high levels of awareness, skill, and knowledge in implementing SSTs from a practical standpoint at the outset.

Thus, counselors likely defined high levels of knowledge and skills based on practical implementation of SSTs, relevant to their scope of work and experience, and less on the theoretical framework used in the study. This may explain why needs assessment data indicated high levels of skill and knowledge despite the lack of formal training.

Needs assessment data in the area of Organization and Management indicated that counselors had a strong sense of the referral process and follow-up meetings. Counselors expressed awareness of these two elements in some detail and understood the importance of a strong referral process and follow-up meetings. While focal counselors expressed enhanced knowledge of the referral process and follow-up meeting based on results of the self-study guide, they did not describe this same level of growth in interviews. This may be due to the fact that self-study guide responses were directive in asking questions and collective in nature, reflecting perceptions of the group. Therefore, responses might have been influenced by group norms or groupthink. In comparison, interviews were individualized by nature and asked broader questions about these two areas. The types of questions asked and the means in which they were asked may have contributed to the differential responses.

Needs assessment results in the area of teamwork indicated that counselors reported great confidence in the team preparation domain, placing them at the proficient and expert level. Relative to intervention goals, counselors were at proficient levels. In both areas focal counselors moved to more expert levels, indicating the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. However, counselors did not report growth in parent preparation on the self-study guide. This may be due to the fact that counselors generally expressed skill and effort in preparing students and teachers for SSTs, but generally did not speak to parent preparation. In fact, most of the citations on preparing the team for SSTs had to do with student and teacher preparation. Using this narrower definition of team,

counselors did have expertise in team preparation; however, it is probable that they had less experience in preparing parents for SST meetings.

In the area of problem solving, needs assessment data indicate that counselors were at a proficient level in using data and progress monitoring. For focal counselors, awareness of the importance of data appeared to increase from competent and proficient levels to expert level. Post intervention focal counselors moved to expert levels of awareness and functioning This shift may have been influenced by the fact that data was emphasized as an important element throughout the tool development series, from reviewing site data to discussing how to collect student data to inform SSTs. In fact, data was an item of some contention in session four, evidenced by a debate about creating packets of student data for SSTs. Counselor CC voiced a strong opinion that data packets were essential to truly understand students from a holistic standpoint; a practice that counselors were not engaging in. Another example of how data use was promoted was through introduction of and experimentation with the DESSA. The DESSA afforded counselors the opportunity to use a research-validated tool to collect evidence of student social emotional learning competencies. Importantly, the DESSA was well received by teachers and parents in the field as a strengths assessment tool. The DESSA's reception may have contributed to the specific activation of the change process relative to data use, as a premise of the change process is that shifts in behavior occur when a new practice is proven to be successful. Thus, implementation of the DESSA in the field may have endorsed the value of data use.

Overall, focal counselors demonstrated increased awareness and capacity in the six areas measured under effective SSTs. This outcome may be attributed to the fact that each session of the tool development process was deliberately designed to engage focal counselors in the change process and increase knowledge. The design of this study focused on unfreezing in the first two sessions, new learning in sessions three and four and finally, refreezing in sessions five and six. The

design implicitly afforded focal counselors the opportunity to engage in learning via data review, environmental assessments, modeling and reflective discourse. Indeed, counselors reported that they found the process to be supportive via logs, feedback loops, and interview data. In fact, process data supported the design of the study in that counselors demonstrated designed elements of the change process when examining each session. When counselors provided feedback on the process, the design was modified accordingly. For example, when counselors reported that they did not particularly enjoy warm-up activities, modifications were made to edit these activities. The opportunity to provide feedback may have contributed to counselor feelings of efficacy, lending to psychological safety and deeper engagement in new learning.

Importantly, counselors appeared to judge SST skills and knowledge based on practical rather than theoretical understandings of best practice. This is sensible in that counselors likely evaluated their practice based on the function of their daily work and not on theoretical frameworks. However, the dilemma is that without proper training in best practices, counselors operate with a purely functional understanding of SSTs. Consequently, the practical framework currently used by counselors in the field to assess knowledge and skill may be based on a flawed grasp of effective SSTs. In a sense counselors defined successful practice as measured against a rubric almost exclusively based on experiential learning. Accordingly, best practice and theoretical constructs were absent in counselor experiences of effective SSTs in the field. Indeed, counselors tended to agree that SSTs were effective in serving students, despite data on referral patterns, poor student strength identification, and recognition of various SST challenges.

While the tool development process did engage focal counselors in a change process and led to improved learning and expertise in certain areas, counselors did not demonstrate new learning in all areas being measured. This finding indicates that the study design could benefit from additional accommodations. Accommodations may include adapting the design to meet the needs of

counselors with high levels of existing experience and expertise in the field. Additionally, there may need to be more work done to coalesce the more practical definition of expertise as it stands in the field and the more theoretical definition proposed in the literature.

Learning Outcome Two: Increased Skill in Identifying SEL Competencies

A second expected outcome of the tool development study was to increase counselor skill in identifying social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. Specifically, the intervention was expected to affect counselor practice related to how strengths were noted in SST Plans. Needs assessment and baseline data indicated that counselors tended to record anecdotal information and character traits on SST Plans, rather than genuine student strengths. The theory of intervention posited that if counselors engaged in discussion and professional learning on student social emotional learning, expertise levels would increase. Further, the idea was that if counselors used the DESSA to develop student strengths in SST plans, then the process of learning, application and reflection would change practice in conceptualizing and documenting student strengths.

Outcomes suggest that counselors as a group reported a strong sense of competence about SEL prior to intervention. Needs assessment and baseline data indicated that collectively counselors reported proficient and expert levels of capacity prior to intervention. In fact, this was one area where all counselors expressed strong agreement in terms of their collective knowledge.

Focal counselor results varied when examining outcomes in the area of SEL competencies. Counselor CA was the only counselor to report a slight increase in skill based on both questionnaire and interview data. This shift may have occurred due to Counselor CA being the most novice counselor of all three focal counselors. In this way, Counselor CA was perhaps most open to the new learning and expertise initiated by the change process. Indeed, Counselor CA demonstrated most positive shifts in knowledge and skill, across multiple domains. Counselors CB and CD

reported unwavering confidence in their understanding of SEL, with no change from pre- and post-; perhaps this is based on their having more experience in the field of counseling.

Data analyzed to measure focal counselor changes in practice relative to documentation of strengths on Student Plans, indicated a lack of change from pre- and post-intervention. Needs assessment and baseline data highlighted that counselors tended to record student strengths in two major categories pre-intervention, Imposed Cultural Norms and SEL competencies, a pattern that remained unchanged when examining post data. The lack of change pre- and post-may be due to four reasons. First, the tool development design did not specifically focus on activities to promote learning of SEL competencies. While the DESSA was shared with counselors as an assessment tool, there was not an emphasis on deliberately developing counselor skills in SEL. This may have affected counselor skill acquisition. Further, counselors expressed that while they valued the DESSA, they did not understand how to leverage DESSA results within the context of SSTs. Specifically, they did not understand how to use the DESSA results to build on student SEL competencies. Secondly, counselors already saw themselves as having expertise in the SEL domain, thus they may not have been as open to learning in this area. Third, counselors were not provided with disconfirming data on how strengths were recorded on SST Plans as this analysis occurred after the intervention. Perhaps there would have been a greater shift in this area, had counselors had the opportunity to engage in a review and discussion of how student strengths were recorded. Finally, the sample of post Student Plans was small (n=5); therefore it could be hypothesized that with a larger sample size, changes in practice might have emerged.

On the other hand, needs assessment and baseline data indicated that counselors noted SEL competencies as the second most frequent strengths category on Student Study Team Plans. This finding was positive in that SEL competencies are a desired strength category. Additionally, this finding may point to the fact that counselors came into the study with significant existing knowledge

and skills in this area. Post-data indicate that focal counselors did not change practice in recording SEL competencies from pre- and post-intervention. Interestingly, counselor CD was most apt to record the largest number of strengths on plans, both pre- and post-. Again, this may indicate that Counselor CD measured effective SSTs on perceived student validation, rather than effectiveness of the intervention.

Of interest in the analysis of strengths on SST Plans were outcomes that indicate significant differences when examining strengths by gender and ethnicity. An intentional analysis of data highlighted that strengths were attributed to males and females in different ways. For example, girls were attributed more external strengths, while boys were ascribed more academic strengths. Strengths for minority students indicated distinct patterns, such as Asian students being ascribed academic strengths and African-American students more appearance qualities. These results may be related to the fact that students are held to the community's normative cultural values, based on white, upper middle class standards. Indeed the majority of counselors reflected the ethnic background of the larger community, a variable that may have contributed to the often-stereotypical strengths noted on SST Plans. Of additional importance was the fact that counselors reported in interviews that the three greatest SST challenges had to do with district mindset, teacher professional responsibility, and deficit practices. All of these challenges had to do with personal bias, an issue that may play out in how students are viewed based on preconceived notions of gender and ethnicity. The literature supports the fact that individuals lack rational decision making skills and instead interpret data based on personal bias. This phenomenon may have manifested in how individual teachers and counselors conceptualized student strengths based on race and gender.

Learning Outcome Three: Co-construct SST Handbook to Guide more Effective Practice

The tool development study afforded counselors the opportunity to successfully engage in the construction of an SST Handbook to guide more effective practice. The theory of intervention

hypothesized that if counselors co-constructed a tool to guide new practices, then SSTs would be more effectively implemented. The design of the tool development study afforded counselors the opportunity to provide feedback via intentional feedback loops built around activities that would promote change. Outcomes suggest that counselors identified the most important element of the tool to be practical, followed by easily actualized in practice and finally relevant.

Counselors consistently expressed a desire to create a tool that was practical in their daily work. While they did appreciate learning about SST models available, they were clear in sharing that due to time constraints, daily tasks, and responsibilities these resources did not support their work in practice. The notion that the tool needed to be practical above all else was sensible in that counselor work is varied and complex, requiring tools that facilitate getting work done.

Counselors described the handbook as a tool that could have multiple purposes, including serving as a reference guide for SST members and an orientation manual for new counselors. As such, counselors regarded the handbook as a mechanism to categorize expertise and successfully exercise control of actions of individuals to accomplish work of the organization (Feldman & Pentland, 2005). Accordingly, the SST Handbook developed could serve as an artifact of the ostensive element of the SST routine as it captured and prescribed the standard operating procedure. However, because the handbook was co-constructed with counselors, the process also took into consideration the performative aspects of a routine or how counselors would actualize the tool in the field.

In sum, the final version of the SST Handbook co-created with counselors leveraged their expertise and maximized their agency throughout the tool development process to create a manual deemed practical, actualizable, and relevant. Additionally, co-construction of the SST Handbook represented an opportunity for counselors to acquire new skills and knowledge by participating in a change process. Ultimately, the development of the handbook was meant to help SST members by

providing guiding norms, procedures, and routines to improve current and future practice (Gutkin and Nemeth, 1997; Powers, 2010).

III. Meeting the Design Challenge

The design challenge expressed in this study was to initiate a tool development process that would improve counselor knowledge and skills with respect to SSTs, including enhanced understanding of SEL competencies, and produce an SST Handbook to guide more effective practices. Specifically, the design challenge included guiding counselors through a change process and developing a tool that was practical, relevant, and able to be actualized in practice.

Findings indicate that BESST had success in meeting elements outlined in the design challenge. Each of these three measures is expanded upon below:

Improve Counselor Skills and Knowledge

BESST was successful in moving counselors through stages of the change process, unfreezing, new learning, and refreezing. This was true for two of the three counselors who participated in the study. The third counselor only moved through two stages of the change process. However, BESST showed promise as a means of encouraging a change process by designing an intervention that was intentional in providing disconfirming data as a means to creating a call to action, providing supports and resources for counselors to draw up and creating psychological safety, and finally by advancing integration of new information. These elements were promoted through activities, feedback loops, and opportunities for reflective dialogue, lending to an environment where skill and knowledge acquisition could take place.

BESST was successful in promoting the acquisition of new knowledge and skills within certain elements of the SST process. One discovery in meeting the design challenge was the fact that the researcher used measures of best practice to define skills and knowledge relative to SSTs, neglecting the practical elements of skills and knowledge that manifest in the field. For example, an

expert was conceptualized as one who had a strong technical understanding of SSTs (tenets, definitions, and guidelines). Upon reflection, it is possible that counselors had high levels of expertise based on more adaptive skills developed in the field. A broader definition of expertise may have yielded more positive results when measuring counselor skill and knowledge. Nevertheless, the design did capture that counselors reported a proficient level of expertise at baseline, which grew to expert in most of the domains being measured post intervention. In this way, BESST was effective in promoting SST knowledge and skills for counselors.

Enhance Understanding of SEL Competencies

BESST did not appear to have a strong impact on promoting greater understanding of SEL competencies. Indeed, counselors reported strong confidence in awareness and skill in this area at the outset, and this did not change post intervention. Only Counselor CA reported slight higher understanding of SEL post intervention. This outcome is comprehensible given that the design lacked intentional and ongoing efforts to generate new understanding of SEL competencies. In retrospect, the design may have afforded too few opportunities for counselors to actively engage in new learning about SEL competencies.

Further, the data sources developed and used in this study were not the most applicable to measuring SEL knowledge. For instance, session questionnaires captured limited information on SEL competencies. SEL competencies also did not manifest in field notes. SEL competencies were also mentioned very infrequently in session transcripts. Therefore, data sources to capture counselor learning on SEL competencies were limited in this study.

Instead, the design presented opportunities for appreciation of how student strengths were represented when examined by gender and race. These findings were of particular interest and value when considering that this design study concerned itself with issues of disproportionality. Findings in this area lend themselves to further research on how to address issues of bias in SSTs.

Co-construct an SST Handbook to Guide Effective Practice

BESST was successful in ensuring that the tool developed was practical for counselors in the field, because it was co-constructed with them. Feedback opportunities were embedded in the design study as an iterative process to collect valuable input. With counselor input, BESST activated practitioner thinking about clarity, usefulness and real world applicability. Practicality extended to use of the DESSA, which was field-tested as part of the tool development series. In practice, the DESSA was reported to take teachers 15-20 minutes to complete, an amount of time that did not pose a barrier to use. Thus, in all, the tool met the design challenge of practicality.

A second design challenge was creation of a tool that served as a genuine and efficacious SST guide. The intention was to promote genuine use of the tool and guard against it becoming purely symbolic in nature. BESST met this design challenge by integrating counselor participation and feedback as an essential element of the design. Since new beliefs and shifts in practice take place when individuals experience a process that is more effective that what was used previously, counselor engagement in the process of identifying the problem, developing solutions and creating the tool was critical. BESST walked counselors through a change process that motivated new learning and an investment in the handbook. Counselors referenced the handbook as a valuable tool to orient new counselors to the work and calibrate practice. Counselors also found the tool to have value in addressing elements of compliance related to larger district efforts, such as RtI and recommendations of the district's equity task force to serve all students. Thus, systemic supports to bolster the tool's use were also in place to reinforce the tool's actualization.

The final design challenge was to create a tool that was relevant to counselors. This design challenge was met by not only incorporating counselor feedback, but by acknowledging the scope of practice that counselors can influence. Specifically, the tool focused on counselors as the agents of change, even while acknowledging that SSTs are a team process. BESST balanced the reality of

shared responsibility of the SSTs by focusing very intentionally on those areas in which counselors had the most agency and referencing teacher and administrator responsibility as secondary. Thus, the handbook was meant to be consumable for counselors, while still mentioning teachers and administrators as key partners in this work.

IV. UNDERSTANDING FINDINGS WITHIN CONTEXT OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature offers a context in which to understand BESST findings. The following section will describe BESST findings, framed by a discussion of the relevant literature.

Overall data indicate that students of color were over-referred to SSTs and when referred they were ascribed strengths in SST Plans in different ways based on gender and ethnicity. Indeed, Imposed Cultural Norms was one of the most frequently used categories to capture strengths. Imposed Cultural Norms captured socially constructed cultural standards imposed on students based on normative white, upper middle class ideals. Application of these standards leads to stereotyping and limiting perceptions of students (Varenne & McDermott, 1995; Bernard, 1997). Yet, when analyzing student strengths Imposed Cultural Norms made up 37% of strengths categories. Further, counselors identified deficit thinking, teacher professional responsibility and district mindset as the top three major areas of challenge. Inherent in all of these categories were elements of bias, or the notion that the location of problems was within the student or family rather than within the school system (Harry and Klinger, 2007; Harry and Klinger, 2014; Garcia and Guerra, 2004). These challenges pose a risk to effective SSTs, for as long as the student is seen as the problem, little will change in terms of classroom interventions.

Of particular interest in this study was the fact that there was deficit thinking of parents in this study, based on perceptions of parents as demanding based on their privileged status. Indeed, counselors commented that parents were quick to ask for an SST to leverage classroom accommodations, in cases where it was not warranted. In this way, counselors had a deficit view of

parents as over-involved in their child's educational experience. The application of deficit thinking in a high performing and affluent district varies from what is generally found in the literature. While deficit thinking existed in this study, the types of comments made reflected judgment of parent privilege, as opposed to the more typical application of deficit thinking based on lack of social and political capitol.

However, BESST enhanced counselor understanding of SSTs across most of the domains being measured. This positive shift was very likely due to the design of the study, which called upon Schein's model of change as a mechanism to promote shifts in practice. Schein's model of change outlines principles that must be in place to facilitate a change in the organization or practice (Schein, 2010). In this study counselors were strategically guided through a change process where they were first introduced to disconfirming data to create survival anxiety or guilt about current practices and yet psychological safety was in place to overcome this guilt and anxiety. Counselors were provided with disconfirming data for students, which did cause them to wonder about outcomes. Counselors denied that they found the student data disconfirming, yet they did share that it was the first time that they had seen such data and commented that minority students seemed to be most referred. Additionally, through reflective discussions and participation in an environmental assessment activity, they came to recognize that in addition to student data, there were areas of improvement that could be undertaken to improve SSTs. Therefore, a combination of student data and counselor perception data created enough disequilibrium to initiate the unfreezing process. These united elements appear important enough to counselors to feel discomfort, yet there was also a belief that there was a possibility of solving the problem without loss of integrity given that co-construction was at the center of this study.

The researcher was intentional in ensuring that psychological safety was in place by creating a positive vision of the process, providing formal training, involving counselors in the process, and

providing examples of tools. There was also intentionality in providing counselors with opportunities to scan the environment and imitate role models. Specifically, counselors were able to review manuals and resources from other districts to understand how external colleagues had organized SST tools. They were also able to hear from a professor about the benefits of the DESSA, an opportunity that resonated with the counselors in terms of credibility in support of change. Counselors also were able to experiment with the DESSA in the field to integrate both the theoretical and practical aspects of the DESSA. These experiences, alongside their positive experience with the DESSA, exemplified more successful practice and aided in providing cognitive restructuring.

Counselors engaged in the change process in different ways. Counselor CA appeared to deeply engage in the change process and consequently in the new learning. Counselor CA was the more initiate of all three counselors, with least experience in the field and yet the counselor who demonstrated most new learning. Counselor CB was the second most initiate of counselors, who also engaged in all stages of the change process and demonstrated new learning. Counselor CC was the most expert of the counselors relative to experience in the field, and yet the most unchanged. This lack of change might be understood by applying Chi's work on expertise, in which she shares that experts can experience shortcoming in flexibility, bias in terms of fixedness and lack deep understanding of issues (2006). Chi describes that experts can be overly confident, depending on their past practice, similar to what Kahneman (2011) might describe as relying solely on information from System One. In this way, because of the deep wells of expertise reinforced by years of experience practicing the same routines, Counselor CC may have had difficulty considering and integrating new information. In fact, while Counselors CA and CB engaged in refreezing or integrating new practices into their routines (Spillane & Miele, 2007), Counselor CC did not

demonstrate indications of refreezing. Therefore, Counselor CC did not appear to accommodate new information into their existing mental models (Spillane & Miele, 2007).

BESST's created a situational specific space for counselors to engage in dialogue and engage in a change process, beyond what is generally offered in professional learning sessions. BESST offered six sessions, founded on a change process and meant to stimulate new learning. In this way each session was intentional and unique in moving counselors through a three-stage change process to promote new learning. BESST took place over 12 weeks to provide counselors with adequate time to engage in the change process, engage in collective cognition and build associations with the concepts being shared. BESST was founded on the idea that professional learning is best fostered when it is sustained and intensive over a prolonged period of time (Garcia & Guerra, 2004) and that changes in practice occur when individuals are able to grapple with dissonant ideas repeatedly (Kahneman, 2011). Counselor expertise was elicited and leveraged throughout the process and activities were structured to relate to their work in the field (Darling Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

In sum, the literature on change processes and professional learning helps to explain why BESST was successful in engaging counselors in the tool development process. It also helps to explain why counselors were able to acquire new skills and knowledge relative to SSTs. Conversely, the literature review may assist in understanding why one counselor did not engage in all three stages of the change process, perhaps pointing at improvements that need to be made to the design within these areas.

BESST was also meant to enhance understanding of SEL competencies. In this regard it appears that BESST was least successful. The tool development process was not effective in promoting new knowledge in SEL competencies as measured by data sources in this study. Instead, it appears that counselors came in with a strong sense of SEL competencies. However, what

remains unknown is how counselors defined SEL competencies. Given that strengths on the SST Plans tended to capture character traits and varied between Imposed Cultural Norms, Academic and SEL competencies, it may very well be that counselors rated themselves with great confidence in this area based on a narrow understanding of SEL competencies. While counselors valued an introduction to the DESSA, they were unable to meaningfully implement it in the field and discuss the merits of SEL competencies. Given this, there were few opportunities for counselors to assess students from a holistic perspective leading to more positive oriented goals (Geltner and Liebforth, 2008; Edwards, et al., 2007).

Finally BESST was meant to result in the development of an SST Handbook. Handbooks or manuals have been shown to improve functioning of SSTs (Truscott, 2005; Powers, 2010; Flugum & Reschly, 1994; Myers & Kline, 2001/2002). The handbook was intended to serve as a mechanism to efficiently guide actions of counselors in order to successfully implement SSTs (Feldman and Pentland, 2005). In this way, the SST Handbook was meant to be practical to the daily work of counselors. The SST Handbook created was an external representation of ideas that framed what information was important to counselors (Spillane and Miele, 2007), and as such it was relevant to their daily work. Additionally, the handbook was co-constructed with counselors in an attempt to address both the ostensive and performative aspects of work practice. As such, the handbook provided the standard operating procedure for implementation of effective SSTs, or the ostensive element. Moreover, by engaging counselors in development of the tool, there was also attention to the performative element of the tool or how counselors would actualize it in practice. As such, the resulting tool was practical, able to be actualized in practice, and relevant to counselor work.

V. STUDY LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations to this study that may raise issues regarding applicability of BESST beyond the site of study. The first limitation is generalizability given the size of the sample.

There were four counselors who agreed to participate in BESST, though one counselor withdrew in the middle of the study due to a personal issue. Therefore only three counselors completed the entire tool development series. Even while needs assessment data were collected for a total of nine counselors, this is still a relatively small sample size and may raise questions about transferability.

A second limitation of the study was that counselors as a group were fairly homogenous. Indeed, all focal counselors represented a White, upper class perspective, within a high performing and affluent community. The lack of ethnic diversity within the group, and the fact that this study took place in a very resourced and high performing district, may have had some bearing on how counselors responded to the intervention. In turn, this study may not be completely generalizable to other non-similar districts.

A third limitation of the study was that the tool itself was not field-tested. The design of this study focused more deliberately on the process of developing the tool, rather than the efficacy of the tool in practice. Thus, more research is needed to understand the handbooks effectiveness in the field and to analyze the tools reception in practice.

Despite the limitations referenced above, the study was successful in meeting most elements of the design challenge. Accordingly, the tool development process bore encouraging results for understanding how to shift awareness of SSTs through development of a tool.

VI. STUDY STRENGTHS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE TOOL ITERATIONS

A strong point of this design study was that it meaningfully linked research and practice. This connection was of particular importance when co-constructing a tool guided by counselor expertise. The fact that this design study deliberately incorporated current research on SST and paired this information with input from counselors strengthened the tool development intervention. A review of the literature afforded the design of the study to be grounded in current research, while ongoing input from the counselors supported the design of a tool that was practical, relevant, and

actualizable. The element of counselor feedback strongly contributed to the needs assessment and development of an effective SST tool. Moreover, counselor participation fostered an opportunity to engage in reflective thinking that encouraged a shift in perceptions and practices around SSTs. Indeed, the tool development intervention highlighted that counselors engaged in the change process at various levels. Involvement in the change process led to raised awareness and new thinking about SSTs, influencing genuine integration of the tool into practice.

While BESST demonstrated success in raising counselor awareness of effective SSTs and resulted in the development of tool to guide more effectual practice, there are certainly opportunities for improvement. Modifications to the design study and resulting tool may enhance relevance and applicability to other school environments and settings. Explicitly, there are four enhancements identified that may enrich the current edition of BESST. These improvements include: 1) Additional attention to SEL competencies, 2) Feedback on the tool in practice, 3) Scope of BESST, and 4) Further exploration of expertise and the change process.

1) Based on findings SEL competencies was an area in which there was little improvement. More consideration of what SEL competencies are, how they can be leveraged, and how they can be distinguished from character traits warrants more attention. More intentionality in developing understanding of SEL may have shown up in more positive outcomes. While BESST included opportunities for counselors to become familiar with the DESSA, counselors mentioned that once the DESSA was completed, they did not know what to do with the information beyond sharing it with the team. Specifically, they mentioned that they did not know how to transition the DESSA into the SST process in a meaningful and comprehensive manner. Though a list of SEL competencies was developed and included in the resulting handbook, this is an area of continued focus, as teams need guidance on how to

leverage DESSA results if they are going to be asked to use the DESSA as part of the SST process.

2) In a second iteration of BESST, counselors would have the opportunity to field test the SST Handbook and provide feedback to the researcher. This information would then be used to inform adaptations to the design of the tool development process. While counselors were able to provide feedback on the tool as it was being developed, given time constraints they were not able to provide feedback on its implementation. This feedback would offer valuable opportunities to improve BESST. Thus, future iterations of BESST would allocate time for field-testing of the handbook.
3) BESST appeared to meet the needs of counselors who serve as the primary leaders and facilitators of the SST process. However, the SST process extends beyond counselors to include teachers and school staff, students, administrators, and parents. Thus, future iterations of BESST may be improved by expanding the targeted audience to include a broader range of participants. Indeed, counselors mentioned teachers and administrators would benefit from increased awareness of SSTs, and parents and students were also referenced as important stakeholders in the process. Thus, efforts to broaden this lens would undoubtedly enhance the successes of BESST.
4) An important implication of this study was the association of the change process with levels of expertise. Results of this study seem to indicate that counselors with less experience and expertise, engaged more deeply in the change process. Conversely, the counselor with the most years of experience and therefore arguably the most expertise, engaged least in the change process. This finding hints at the idea that experts may be least open to change as a result of their experience, while more novice counselors may be most open. More attention on how to move expert counselors through the change process warrants further

consideration in order to understand how to create effective professional learning opportunities for expert practitioners.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The results of this study point to considerable implications for educators, at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels. Given that SSTs are widely implemented but poorly understood, efforts to address this issue can occur at multiple levels. Below, I discuss the significance of this study's findings as they relate to these various levels.

At the macro level, policy-makers dictate federal and state legislation to support struggling students, many of whom are minority students. While legislation is needed to promote accountability, there is also a need to provide support structures to ensure that such legislation is carried out with fidelity and efficacy within educational settings. Thus, resources in the areas of training, materials, and strengths-based tools are needed. Whenever possible these resources ought to be co-constructed with and informed by counselors to ensure that they are relevant, practical, and able to be realized in practice. Specifically, strength-based assessments, such as the DESSA, ought to be promoted as best practice in leveraging and developing student social emotional competencies. The DESSA's ability to mitigate bias in identifying strengths points to real value. Similarly, these types of assessment tools ought to be paired with training in order to ensure that tools are well understood and used. Finally, resources ought to be widely available to local accountability agencies on state department of education websites or clearinghouses to afford access and dissemination of information.

At the mezzo level, there are two identified implications for practice that will be discussed. First, County Offices of Education and local educational agencies ought to be investing time and effort in training counseling staff on effective SSTs. Improved training for staff may lead to more effective understanding and implementation of SSTs. Counselors require support and resources to

implement effective SSTs. Tools, such as a manual or protocol, can assist counselors to carry out this work with increased fidelity. For example, an SST Handbook may support higher levels of awareness and reliability in terms of SST practices. These types of documents can serve as training and orientation tools, reference materials, and calibration tools.

Secondly, assessment tools, such as the DESSA, can assist with focusing strengths conversations in ways that are meaningful and less deficit-based. Specifically, a tool such as the DESSA can help SST members to discuss and leverage student social emotional competencies, rather than a list of character traits or attributes. Indeed, a shift from a symbolic list of feel good words, to one that outlines competencies that can be leveraged to support students with identified concerns is necessary if SSTs are to be effective. Additionally, given that social emotional competencies appear to militate against bias in identifying strengths, its use holds promise in addressing issues of equity and access.

At the practice level, counselors require support in the form of resources and professional learning in order to increase knowledge and skills in implementing effective SSTs. Increased knowledge and skills will best prepare counselors to support site teams to implement effective SSTs that lead to successful student outcomes. Counselors who are well informed on effective SSTs can provide site-based training to teachers and staff, maintain data on student referrals and outcomes, and work most proactively with parents.

Given that changing behavior takes time and is complex, assigned time and attention to implementing effective SSTs is key. Counselors, teachers, and others involved in SSTs need to be provided time to engage in reflection on their practice, data analysis, and consideration of new information. The change process is supported when there is time to analyze data and consider new information in a supportive manner, when new practices can be introduced and experimented with

and when supports are in place to reinforce new behaviors. Accordingly, SST members need intentional space and time to successfully engage in the change process.

Counselors also need specific training on strengths based assessment tools, such as the DESSA. Indeed, since counselors are educational leaders charged with supporting all students, information and skills on leveraging student strengths and reducing bias are central to their role. This is especially true on account of the fact that strengths are recorded differently based on student ethnicity. Given that counselors have a role in addressing issues of equity and access, evidence based tools and resources to support their work in this area are essential.

Finally, sites need to develop systems of tiered supports to bolster the SST process. Beyond being well articulated and transparent, tiered interventions must be genuinely integrated into the site's culture and practice in order to be leveraged by the SST. When tiered interventions are well understood by teachers, staff, and parents, the SST process can become a powerful mechanism to support student success.

VIII. Conclusions

As educational leaders, counselors are increasingly called upon to provide not only direct services to students, but to implement evidence-based programs to support all students to succeed. This shift from direct services to a multi-tiered approach to student success calls upon counselors to provide a wide range of effective services to students to improve student outcomes, including implementation of processes such as SSTs.

However, counselor understanding of SSTs is lacking, and thus effective implementation is inconsistent. Instead, counselors implement SSTs based on practical understanding of efficacy without the benefit of a theoretical framework. Indeed, counselors are often ill equipped to implement effective SST processes given that they receive little guidance and support. As a result, SSTs tend to be deficit-based, with scant attention to leveraging genuine student strengths within the

SST process. Further, SSTs suffer from chronic inconsistency in implementation, monitoring, and follow up, lending to deficient outcomes for students. The idea of effective implementation of SSTs is critical given that students who struggle tend to be minorities who face serious opportunity gaps and require effective mechanisms of support.

BESST was a tool development study that offered counselors an opportunity to enhance their leadership skills by developing an SST Handbook grounded in best practice and adapted to meet the unique need of their school community. BESST was distinctive in that it guided counselors through a reflective change process of learning and unlearning that ultimately increased awareness of effective SSTs. Further, because counselors were intimately involved in the process, there was increased motivation to engage in the process to create a relevant, practical and actualized handbook.

BESST was effective in moving counselors through a change process and promoting the development of new learning within various domains. BESST was also successful in unearthing information on student strengths as recorded on SSTs that challenge new thinking about how strengths ought to be captured on SST Plans. BESST was less successful in improving counselor understanding of social emotional learning competencies; however, it raised important issues about strengths related to gender and ethnicity. Finally, BESST resulted in a handbook that will guide future practices, orient new counselors, and express expectations for more effective SST efforts.

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APPENDIX A
LETTER FROM TEACHERS

Esteemed Board Members and [redacted]

The purpose of this letter is to respectfully present the reasons for which we, the members of the [redacted] Math Department, do not support raising graduation requirements in math to match the college a-g requirement. We believe a plan requiring every student to pass Algebra II in order to graduate without a waiver, while well-intended, will either stop a significant number of students from graduating or, alternatively, force us to drastically lower standards in our courses as too many other schools have done. Both scenarios would have unintended devastating consequences for many hardworking students, their families, our schools' and our district's reputation.

As teachers and mathematicians, we all work unabatedly with our students supporting and encouraging them to continually deepen and authenticate their mathematical understanding in high school. We know taking advanced math/science classes is the best predictor for success in college. Nothing would make us happier than being able to produce only graduates that have Calculus on their transcripts! However, brain theory supports the reality that confounding student situations interfere with their ability to focus and succeed as they move through advanced mathematics curriculum in high school.

We live in an affluent community. *Most* of our students are fortunate to come from families where education matters and parents have the means and will to support and guide their children in tandem with us, their teachers. Not *all* of them. We are dealing with the same wide range of mathematical preparation, emotional and motivational levels, academic and social backgrounds most other schools face. Although 92% of our juniors and 85% of our seniors are presently enrolled in a math class, some of them are repeating courses. 85 students will graduate this year from [redacted] without having completed Algebra II. A change in graduation requirements could probably motivate some of these students, who have the emotional ability and academic support to do so, to work harder and meet the a-g challenge. We are concerned about the others who, for reasons that are often objective (poor math background, lack of support at home, low retention rate, lack of maturity, etc) can't pass our Algebra II regular line course. Many of these are [redacted] students or under-represented minorities. Others are serious, committed Special Ed students who work very hard throughout high school in order to pass Algebra 1.1, Algebra 1.2 and (some of them) Geometry. In the present system, they graduate proud of their accomplishments, to go on to community colleges or jobs for which [redacted] prepares them better than most districts. Condemning these kids to graduate with a waiver, or not graduate at all, is, we feel, unfair and inequitable. Of 37 SpEd seniors, only 2 will graduate this year having completed Algebra 2. Is it fair to ask 95% of SP Ed students

to graduate through the back door with a waiver? We are concerned we'll create a two-tier system in which special needs, struggling, or less motivated students from affluent [redacted]milies will meet graduation requirements by taking Geometry or Alg2 in expensive but shallow "pay for your units" institutions, while other less-fortunate students lacking the means will not.

The alternative, diluting the standards in our regular lane to basic benchmarks which might allow every student to pass Algebra II would end up hurting the district's reputation and, implicitly, all of our students. Our high schools are recognized and respected by colleges across the state and the nation *because* of our high standards and the ability of our students to *apply* their high school mathematics in subsequent courses successfully. Colleges know *our* graduates are proficient in the courses they show on their transcripts, unlike 45% of CSU/UC students who must take remedial math despite having transcripts that make them college eligible.

This past week, [redacted] and [redacted] competed again in the [redacted] placing 2nd and 3rd in competition with the best schools in the area: [redacted] None of these schools have more than a 2 year graduation requirement in math!

[redacted] *does* require Algebra II for graduation. Their graduation rate, however, is 86% and their schools are nowhere close to ours, so we can hardly use them as a model. [redacted], whose schools are still no competition to ours, requires 3 years of math, but *not* Algebra II. They offer a couple of Integrated Math courses between Algebra and Geometry which count toward graduation.

Raising in a similar manner the [redacted] graduation requirement to 3 years of math *without* requiring Algebra 2 would be a significant step for our district, one we believe *could* be accomplished without sacrificing our lower skilled students *or* our exemplary standards. It would challenge students who until now were graduating with Algebra 1.1 and 1.2 only, to work hard and add Geometry to their repertoire. It would also motivate slackers able enough to pass Algebra 1 in 9th grade to complete Algebra II by their senior year and become UC/CSU eligible. Parents of struggling but hard-working students would not see their kids barred from graduation with a regular diploma or not at all, and our teachers, schools and district would still set an example for our competitor schools.

We hope our plea will convince you again that we are 100% committed to the success of our students, our school and the district.

Respectfully,

APPENDIX B

SST PLAN FORM

X Middle School
Student Study Team Preparation and Summary Form
SST date: Place: X MS; Time:; Follow-up Date/Time:
Student: Parent/Guard Name: Grade: 6th; Date of Birth:
Participants: (student), (mother), (father), Jeff (counselor),
Julie (psych), (private psych), (teacher), (teacher),

Strengths	Known Information	Concerns	Interventions (Brainstorm/Prioritize)	Responsibility: Who

APPENDIX C

Theory of Action for B.E.S.S.T.

Theory of Action: Building Efficacy of Student Study Teams (BESST)	
Overarching Problem	While SSTs are meant to be a positive early identification and intervention process to reduce inappropriate placements to special education, they often do not meet this mandate. One reason is that counselors do not receive guidance, training, or tools to effectively implement SST processes. Unfamiliarity with the SST process can lead to poor implementation and outcomes for students.
Problematic Practice	1. Counselors do not implement SSTs as intended because they are unfamiliar with the process, leading to poor implementation. 2. SST meetings often are deficit-based, neglecting identification and development of social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. 3. Counselors lack a tool to guide effective SST processes and operate autonomously.
Explaining the Problematic Behavior	Counselors are unfamiliar with implementing SSTs processes because they lack training and tools; thus they facilitate SST meetings based on their own beliefs, values and experiences. Consequently, SST meetings are inconsistently implemented and ineffective in identifying and developing appropriate services for students. While SSTs are meant to be positive processes, student SEL competencies are not consistently identified or included in Student Plans. Counselors engage in these practices because:
What underlying causes contribute to the problem?	1. They are unfamiliar with the intent of the SST process as outlined in IDEA; 2. They lack professional development or resources to guide practice; 3. SST members have limited skills to identify SEL competencies; instead they rely on identification of character traits. 4. SSTs are often used as a means to track students viewed as special education, but who have yet to be tested, or to remove students who do not "fit" the normative standards of the school environment. 5. SST members do not collect data on student SEL competencies utilizing a standardized assessment, thus discussions of student assets are anecdotal, subjective, and inconsistent.
Unit of Analysis	• Four middle school counselors in School J
Outcome	Counselors will: 1. Acquire new knowledge and skill in SSTs as a result of participating in a change process. 2. Increase understanding of SEL competencies as evidenced by increased inclusion in Student Plans. 3. Increase understanding of intent of SSTs via co-construction of a tool.
Challenge to Design	1. Develop a learning series that effectively engages all counselors in the change process, leading to new knowledge and skills.

	2. Increase counselor understanding of SEL competencies as evidenced by more SEL competencies in SST Plans. 3. Develop a tool that is practical in terms of guiding counselors to implement more effective meeting, utilized to guide practice with fidelity and relevant to work of counselors
Theory of Change ***What learning needs to occur to enact the design?***	If counselors are to change their practice they need to engage in a developmental process of learning that results in development of a tool. The process includes professional learning opportunities to engage in discourse and reflection that acknowledges local expertise, facilitated by a knowledgeable guide to support them through the process of learning. The learning that needs to take place includes: • Increased knowledge and skill in effective SSTs. • Increased understanding and implementation of SEL competencies. • Activation of new learning to create a SST Handbook.
Theory of Intervention	If counselors engage in a tool development process that promotes change, they will acquire new knowledge and skills while co-constructing an SST tool. • ***If*** counselors engage in a change process ***then*** they will acquire new skills and knowledge. • ***If*** counselors learn about SEL competencies, ***then*** they will increase use of SEL competencies on SST Plans. • ***If*** counselors co-construct a tool to guide new positive practices within SST meeting, ***then*** SST processes may be more effectively implemented.
Preconditions for Implementation	Counselors willing to participate in the study, including development of a tool, interviews, and training sessions.

APPENDIX D
BESST AGENDAS (Sessions 1-6)

SESSION 1

Learning Outcomes

Understand the purpose, scope and goals of our work together
Develop a deeper understanding SSTs
Engage in collective problem-solving to better recognize the problem of practice

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
PART 1 **30 MIN**	**WELCOME & INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERIES** Agenda Review Study Review- Researcher shares objectives of professional learning series: Develop understanding of SSTs, deepen understanding of student strengths & develop protocol to guide SSTs. Warm up Activity-**"***Educational Quotes"*-counselors will review Quotes on Education document and choose quote that best reflects their leadership view. Group will share quote why it resonated with them.	Orientation to research project Build counselor community of trust, prepare participants for learning, link to prior experiences Acknowledge agency counselors have as educational leaders
PART 2 **80 MIN**	**BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE** Step 1: Discussion of current SST process by reviewing data. Data will include: 1 middle school case study that highlights process of how a student is identified and referred as well as outcomes; district data on who is referred and for what reasons; district outcome data on students who have had SSTs to understand effectiveness; site data on academic performance as it relates to SSTs. Step 2: Presentation by researcher on (purpose, function, organization, and best practices) grounded in literature and research. Step 3. Activity, *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT).* Counselors will follow SWOT protocol worksheet. Following activity the group will discuss patterns that emerged and what the exercise highlights about the current process and ideal process.	Provide disconfirming data to unfreeze counseling group Activate counselor background knowledge to create foundation for new learning to occur Environmental scan acts as collective assessment of SST process
PART 3 **10 MIN**	**Complete Logs** What was the most useful part of our meeting today? Why? What was the least useful part of our meeting today? Why?	Counselors reflect on their experiences. Logs as con-current evidence of design.

SESSION 2

Learning Outcomes

Understand what tools guide the current SST process
Review tools that may help to guide new process and determine what types of tools would be useful
Develop a basic understanding of strengths based practice

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
PART 1 **20 MIN**	**WELCOME** • Agenda Review & Check In (based on feedback from logs) • Attend to any carry over items from last meeting and summarize learning. • Warm up Activity-Watch, *More Than One Right Answer, (*3 min video) and discuss idea that there is more than one right answer to any problem as it relates to SSTs	• Address questions that may have come up from last meeting • Build counselor community,

		prepare participants for learning, link to prior experiences.
PART 2 **30 MIN**	**DISCUSSION OF WHAT TOOL MIGHT HELP TO GUIDE SST PROCESSES** • Apply SWOT information to discussion of SST tool to frame needs identified • Review tools currently used and discuss value of standardizing tools. • Introduce various tools that exist in the literature and other districts, such as norms, checklists, FAQ's, etc. • Discuss what current tools would benefit from standardization and rationale for recommendations.	• Provide group with artifacts and opportunities to scan environment for new practices to create learning anxiety and psychological safety. • Literature points to benefit of providing SSTs with tools to guide practice • Create collaborative space to engage in dialogue and have agency in process
PART 3 **30 MIN**	**CO-CONSTRUCTION OF TOOL TO GUIDE SST PROCESS** • Have counselors prioritize sample tools/existing tools hold the most value for the group to review in further detail. • Discuss what elements of the tools are most helpful and begin to draft changes to the documents. The researcher will take notes on suggested edits to the documents. • Prepare the group for upcoming training on the DESSA by sharing information on the assessment. Discuss how such an assessment might be valuable in supporting instruction.	• Afford opportunities to determine "how" to engage in new work. • Allow counselors to have agency to develop relevant tools that will guide their practice • Collaborative activities related counselor practice
PART 4 **30 MIN**	• Group will read annotated version of story, *The Country of the Blind* by H.G. Wells and discuss how story relates to SSTs. Prompts: What does the story highlight about ability? How does culture shape how we define ability and disability? How does the district define ability? In what ways can we draw parallels to SSTs?	• Activity will heighten counselor awareness of the culture of schools and how ability is defined. This knowledge is important in shifting paradigms.

PART 5 **10 MIN**	**Complete Logs** What was the most useful part of our meeting today? Why? What was the least useful part of our meeting today? Why?	• Counselors will reflect on their experiences. Logs will be used as concurrent evidence of design.

SESSION 3

Learning Outcomes

Develop a deeper knowledge of social emotional competencies and their benefit.
Improve skills in recognizing social emotional competencies through training on the DESSA.
Discuss and determine how to introduce the DESSA to SST members.
Create a plan on how SEL competencies can be incorporated into the Student Plan.

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
PART 1 **20 MIN**	**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERIES** • Agenda Review and Check In • Review learning from story • Warm up Activity-*"Why do student Fail"*. As a group document reasons why students fail (based on experience and comments hear). Researcher will document all ideas on board. After ideas captured, group will go back and identify if reasons attribute responsibility to students/families/ed. setting. Group will discuss how findings help understand the culture of schools and relationship to SSTs.	• Address questions that may have arisen since last meeting • Build counselor community; prepare participants for learning, link to prior experiences. • Activity helps counselors to begin to understand deficit thinking/practices, an important element in shifting paradigms.
PART 2 **90 MIN**	**ACCESS BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & BUILD NEW KNOWLEDGE** • Discussion of how strengths currently identified and documented in SST meetings. Examine current SSTs highlight how strengths identified. • Introduce concept of SEL competencies and DESSA • Train on DESSA and discuss ways in which the DESSA can fit within SSTs and be documented in Student Plans. • Consider how to introduce the DESSA to SST team and larger school community. • HOMEWORK: Each counselor will ask a teacher to complete a DESSA on a student that they are concerned about. The DESSA on the student will be shared at the next meeting.	• Access local expertise through discussion of current process. • Create psychological safety by scaffolding learning • Engage in collaborative learning and co-creation of process • Deepen learning about SEL as a means of expanding expertise and mental models. • Homework offers safe opportunity to practice new skill.

PART 3 **10 MIN**	**Complete Logs** What was the most useful part of our meeting today? Why? What was the least useful part of our meeting today? Why?	• Counselors will reflect on their experiences. Logs will be used as concurrent evidence of design.

SESSION 4

Learning Outcomes

Finalize plan on how to introduce the DESSA to SST members.
Discuss how the DESSA will be incorporated into the SST process and Student Plans
Finalize tool to be used in SSTs meeting to guide new practice.

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
PART 1 **20 MIN**	**WELCOME** • Agenda Review & Check In • Review learning from last session on DESSA • Warm up Activity-**TBD**	• Address questions that may have come arisen • Build counselor community; prepare participants for learning, link to prior experiences.
PART 2 **70 MIN**	**REVIEW TOOL DEVELOPED** • Review homework and discuss counselor experience (pros, cons, insights, etc.) • Review SST tool drafted in Session 2 and discuss any changes to the tool based on the new information (Training on DESSA and homework assignment) • Make additional edits to the tool based on the group discussion. Researcher will document changes to the tool. • Create second draft of SST tool	• Cognitive restructuring of core concepts to shift practice • Involve learner in change process • Literature indicates that professional learning that offers opportunities to practice new skills is beneficial • Iterations of tool will help to understand learning and needs.
PART 3 **20 MIN**	**STEPPING BACK** • Review SWOT and identified POP • Have we addressed POP via training and tool • Determine if there are other elements that require attention (additional PD, outreach, etc.)	• Involve learner in the change process
PART 4 **10 MIN**	**Complete Logs** What was the most useful part of our meeting today? Why? What was the least useful part of our meeting today? Why?	• Counselors will reflect on experiences. Logs used as concurrent evidence of design.

SESSION 5

Outcomes

Establish level of comfort in presenting new tools in upcoming SSTs
Engage in role-play to practice new knowledge and skills
Identify additional supports

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
PART 1 **20 MIN**	**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERIES** • Agenda Review • Warm up Activity-TBD	• Address questions that may have arisen • Build counselor community; prepare participants for learning, link to prior experiences.
PART 2 **60 MIN**	**STABILIZING LEARNING** • Provide group with final version of SST tool • Share summary of researcher observations of SSTs • Role play-using the new tool and learning (group role play SST based on vignette to practice use of tool in practice) • Debrief and discuss any changes needed to tool or process based on role play/s and feedback.	• Opportunities for unlearning and learning by putting tool into practice and practicing new skills • Elements of refreezing of group through demonstrating new practices
PART 3 **30 MIN**	**MOVING THEORY TO ACTION** • Discuss concerns or needs before implementing in practice. Identify what additional supports are needed	• Opportunity to discuss any concerns or ideas before implementation
PART 4 **10 MIN**	**Complete Logs** What was the most useful part of our meeting today? Why? What was the least useful part of our meeting today? Why?	• Counselors will reflect on their experiences. Logs will be used as concurrent evidence of design.

SESSION 6

Date/Time/Room

Outcomes

Provide closure to the professional learning series
Determine next steps needed to support new practices

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	FACILITATOR NOTES
PART 1 **15 MIN**	**WELCOME** • Agenda Review & Check In • Warm up Activity- **(TBD)**	• Address questions that may have arisen • Build counselor community; prepare participants for learning, link to prior

		experiences.
PART 2 **30 MIN**	**DEBRIEF** • Discuss: What was counselor experience of the process? What worked well, what recommendations for change?	• Unlearning and learning via discussion • Refreezing-setting new expectations
PART 3 **20 MIN**	**DISCUSSION OF NEXT STEPS** • Discussion of tool. How will they use it? How does the tool support their role as leaders? How to ensure that tool becomes formal part of SST process. • Discussion of what work remains and supports needed to continue with new practices. Researcher will capture ideas on board.	• Access local knowledge, what does group see as next steps to share new practice • Establish relevance to daily work
PART 4 **45 MIN**	**CLOSURE ON THE PROCESS** • Complete SST Self Study Guide Questionnaire as a group • Share timeline for outcome of results with the group • Answer any questions	• Closure on the process-refreezing
PART 5 **10 MIN**	**Complete Logs** What was the most useful part of our meeting today? Why? What was the least useful part of our meeting today? Why?	• Counselors will reflect on their experiences. Logs will be used as concurrent evidence of design.

APPENDIX E
SST SELF-STUDY GUIDE CHECKLIST (Powers, 2001)

Organization and Management:

Making a Referral SST coordinator identified ❑ Teachers know how to sign-up/ make referral ❑ Teachers know how to complete referral paper work ❑ Referral paper work takes less than 30 minutes to complete ❑ Equal access: ELL and very young student (kindergarten) and students with disabilities are referred to the SST	Pace and Focus of the Meeting ❑ Agenda is visible to all participants (and translated when necessary) ❑ Time keeper signals end and beginning of problem-solving stages ❑ Meeting space is adequate ❑ Avoid admiring the problem ❑ Focus on a single student at one time
Scheduling ❑ SST scheduled or other assistance offered within one month ❑ Established time and place for meeting. ❑ SSTs held frequently enough to meet the demands of the student population: prior to referral to special education, grade retention; and/or major disciplinary action ❑ Follow-up meeting scheduled at initial SST meeting	Dissemination of the Results ❑ Note-taker identified. ❑ Results of the meeting are recorded on forms ❑ Results are disseminated within 2 days to all SST participants. ❑ Results are translated for the parents as needed.
Length of the Meeting ❑ At least 25 minutes devoted to discussing one student ❑ No more than 45 minutes spent on an individual student	❑ Comments:

Teamwork

Essential People Present ❑ Referring teacher is present ❑ For students with more than one teacher, other teachers either present or there is method to collect their input and inform them on the intervention plan ❑ Parent invited ❑ Parent prepared by school staff member for the meeting ❑ Parent is present ❑ General education teacher(s) act as consultants. ❑ Counselor and/or psychologist is present ❑ Administrator is present ❑ Translator and/or ELL specialist present when appropriate ❑ Other_____	Collaborative Process ❑ Coordinated interdependence – members freely share ideas and resources ❑ Shared vision - focus on intervention rather than disability ❑ Make necessary requests for clarification ❑ Use paraphrasing ❑ Engage in perception checking ❑ Comments:

Problem-Solving

Problem Identification ❑ Prioritize concerns ❑ Consider multiple data sources: interview, observation, student work, etc. ❑ Define the problem in specific, observable terms ❑ Identify baseline ❑ Discuss conditions in which behavior occurs ❑ Identify intervention goal	Plan Implementation ❑ Consultant assigned to assist teacher in implementing classroom-based interventions ❑ Plan implemented and modified as needed ❑ On-going progress monitoring data are collected (at least once per week) ❑ Data charted/visually displayed
Problem Analysis ❑ Generate hypothesis: The problem behavior occurs because of _____ ❑ Consider contributing factors such as the curriculum, instruction, school/classroom environment, home/community, peers, and child characteristics ❑ Develop intervention plan ❑ Identify on-going progress monitoring system, including who will collect the data and how often ❑ Comments:	Plan Evaluation ❑ Hold follow-up meeting (6-8 weeks after the initial SST) ❑ At follow-up meeting, discuss implementation of each intervention (did it occur as planned, what was outcome, etc.) ❑ Examine progress monitoring data ❑ Based on treatment fidelity and progress monitoring data make a decision: continue intervention, modify intervention, refer to special education, ❑ Closure on each student achieved ❑ Re-schedule another SST meeting as necessary.

APPENDIX F
QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:	
Title:	
Ethnicity:	□ White/Caucasian □ Asian □ African American/Black □ Hispanic/Latino □ Prefer not to answer □ Other_____
Gender:	□ Male □ Female □ Prefer not answer □ Other_____
Years in Current Position:	Years_____ Months_____
Primary Counselor Roles (Please list)	
Years in School Counseling:	Years_____ Months_____
Previous Work Experience (List)	
Professional Degree	□ MA Counseling __/___ □ MSW __/___ □ Ed.D.__/___ □ Other:_____
Profession Certificate	□ LCSW □ LMFT □ PPSC □ Administrative Credential □ Other_____

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements below? Select one answer per row.

	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
SSTs are effective in maintaining students in the general education setting.	1	2	3	4	5
I have received training on facilitating effective SSTs.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies (knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions).	1	2	3	4	5
I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs.	1	2	3	4	5
I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs.	1	2	3	4	5
Any Comments:					

APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee: _____
Date/Time:_____

1. Describe your understanding of SSTs.
   - Probing questions: What makes an SST effective?
2. Walk me through your SST process?
   - Probing questions: What works well? Less well? Why? Tell me more.
3. Describe the essential elements of an effective SST?
   - Probing questions: Why are these elements essential?
4. Describe how SSTs support students to remain in general education?
   - Probing questions: Are they effective? Why or why not? What would make them more effective? Tell me about a recent meeting where you think a student was effectively supported….
5. What skills and knowledge do you think are necessary for counselors to implement effective SSTs?
   - Probing questions: Tell me more about these skills? How can you tell?
6. Describe the difference between social emotional learning competencies and character traits or attributes.
   - Probing questions: Is there a difference? If so, why does this difference matter?
7. What do you feel that you do well relative to SSTs and what would enable you to improve?
   - Probing questions:
8. What gets in the way of more effective SSTs?
   - Probing Question: Why? What can be done to address this issue?
9. What tools do you currently use to guide SSTs?
   - Probing Question: What works well about these tools and where are the gaps?
10. What three recommendations do you think would improve the current SST process?
    - Probing questions: Why do you think these recommendations would be beneficial? Tell me more……
11. Describe why minority children make up the majority of referrals to SSTs?
    - Probing questions: What do you think explains this phenomenon?

APPENDIX H
EXPERTISE RUBRIC

Rubric for Interview Analysis			
	Expert (3) Integrates knowledge, skills, & intuition. Describes elements in detail, concrete examples of intersection of experience, knowledge, skills	**Proficient (2)** Some awareness of principles & elements, knowledge & skill based on tenets, thinking generalized, compartmentalized	**Competent (1)** Limited awareness or principals & elements, lacks details, thinking general or compartmentalized
ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT			
Referral Process: Awareness of clear & consistent referral process.	Demonstrates awareness of clear & consistent process. Skills demonstrated by description of holistic & transparent process: how referrals generated, by whom, when.	Demonstrates some awareness of importance of clear & consistent referral process. Some skill in describing a semi-transparent referral process	Demonstrates limited awareness of importance of clear & consistent referral process. Limited skill in describing process
Follow up meeting: Aware of follow up meetings within reasonable time (6-8 weeks) to ensure accountability & fidelity to process.	Demonstrates great awareness of importance of follow up meeting. Skilled in describing detailed process based on technical & practical experience.	Demonstrates some awareness of importance of team preparation. Describes skill in identifying elements of follow up meetings.	Demonstrates lack of awareness of follow up mtgs. Limited skill in describing holistic process.
TEAMWORK			
Team Preparation: Awareness of orienting team to SST process to maximize participation, feelings of competency & safety.	Demonstrates great awareness of importance of team preparation. Skill talking with team members to orient them to process.	Demonstrates some awareness of importance of team preparation. Some skill talking with team members to orient them.	Demonstrates little awareness of importance of team preparation. Limited skill talking with team members to orient them.
Intervention Goals: Awareness of follow through to ensure intervention goals met & modified as needed.	Demonstrates great awareness of importance of follow up interventions. Skilled in describing intentional follow up. Describes high levels of accountability.	Demonstrates some awareness of importance of follow up interventions. Skill characterized by generalized thinking of certain elements.	Demonstrates little awareness of importance of follow up interventions, described as lacking or unimportant. Accountability low or absent.
PROBLEM SOLVING			
Data Use: Awareness of data in defining problems & crafting solutions.	Demonstrates great awareness of importance of data use in problem solving & making decisions. Describes skill in collection & use of qualitative & quantitative data (test scores, observations, reports, etc.)	Demonstrates some awareness of importance of data use in problem solving & making decisions. Describes skill collecting some qualitative & quantitative data.	Demonstrates lack of awareness of importance of data use in problem solving & making decisions. Describes some skill collecting data (qualitative/quantitative).
Progress Monitoring: Awareness of data collection to monitor progress & assess for	Demonstrates great awareness of importance of progress monitoring. Describes process holistically, integrating practice & knowledge.	Demonstrates some awareness of importance of monitoring progress. Describes some skill with ongoing data collection.	Demonstrates lack of awareness of importance of progress monitoring. Little awareness of data collection.

modifications to intervention plan.			
UNDERSTANDING OF SSTs			
Social Emotional Learning (SEL): Understanding of SEL competencies as genuine & teachable skills, versus character traits.	Demonstrates strong awareness & understanding of difference between SEL & character traits. Describes difference with depth, provides examples.	Demonstrates some understanding of difference between SEL & character traits. Describes difference with some depth & examples.	Demonstrates lack of understanding of difference between SEL & character traits. Lack of examples or depth.
Counselor Knowledge of SSTs: Understanding of purpose, function & essential elements of SST.	Demonstrates a strong understanding of SST processes. Describes essential elements, grouping, authorization, etc.	Demonstrates some understanding of SSTs. Inconsistent description of essential elements.	Demonstrates little understanding of SST processes. Poor awareness of essential elements.

APPENDIX I
MODIFIED SST SELF STUDY GUIDE CHECKLIST

ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT (referral, scheduling, length of meeting, pace, focus, & dissemination of results)
SST Coordinator Identified
Teachers know how to make referral
Teachers know how to complete referral paperwork
Referral paperwork takes less than 30 min. to complete
Equal access: EL, very young students and students with disabilities referred to SST.
SST scheduled or other assistance offered within 1 mo.
Established time and place for meeting
SSTs held frequently enough to meet demands of student population: prior to referral to special ed., grade retention; or major disciplinary action
Follow up meeting scheduled at initial SST
Agenda visible to all participants (translated as necessary)
Timekeeper signals end and beginning of problem solving stages
Meeting space adequate
Avoid "admiring" problem (time spent on problem)
Focus on singe student at a time.
TEAMWORK (Essential people present & collaborative process)
At least 25 minutes dedicated to discussing one student
No more than 45 min. spent on individual student
Note taker identified
Results of meeting recorded on form
Results disseminated w/in 2 days to all participants
Results translated to parents as needed.
Referring teacher present
When multiple teachers, other teachers present or there are methods to collect their input & inform them of intervention plan
Parent invited
Parent prepared by school staff member for meeting
Parent present
General education teachers act as consultants
Counselor and psychologist present
Administrator present
Translator and/or ELL Specialist present when appropriate
Coordinated interdependence-members freely share ideas and resources.
Shared vision-focus on intervention rather than disability
Make necessary requests for clarification
Use paraphrasing
Engage members in perception checking
PROBLEM SOLVING (Problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation & evaluation).
Prioritize concerns
Consider multiple data sources: interviews, observations, student work, etc.
Define problem in specific, observable terms
Establish a baseline
Discuss conditions in which behaviors occur
Identify intervention goal
Generate hypothesis: Problem behavior occurs because….
Consider contributing factors: curriculum, instruction, school/classroom environment, home/community, peers, etc
Develop intervention plan
Identify on-going progress monitoring system, including who will collect data and how often
Consultant assigned to assist teacher in implementing classroom-based interventions
Plan implemented and modified as needed
Ongoing progress monitoring data collected (at least 1x per week)
Data charted/visually displayed
Hold follow-up meeting (6-8 weeks after initial SST)
At follow up meeting, discuss implementation of each intervention (did it occur as planned, what was outcome, etc.)
Examine progress monitoring data
Decision based on treatment fidelity & progress monitoring data: continue/modify intervention, refer to special education, etc.
Reschedule another SST meeting as necessary
Closure on each student achieved

APPENDIX J
PARTICIPATION LOG

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reflection Log
What was the most useful part of our meeting today
What was the least useful part of our meeting today?

APPENDIX K
CODE BOOK

Code Book	
Code Title	Code Description
SST Challenges	Issues that get in way of effective SSTs
• District Mindset	Community expectations/norms
• Fidelity	Degree to which there is consistent practices amongst counselors
• Teacher Professional Responsibility	Characterization of teachers within/about SST process
• Deficit Practices/Thinking	Examples of deficit-based comment of students/parents/etc.
• Communication or Documentation	Issues with documentation or communication of SST process
• Tiered Interventions	Issues with types or availability of interventions
• Time/Resources	Issues with limited time, support or human resources
• Unwilling to Change/ Buy in	Examples of closed mindset, set in ways
Change Process	Responses to disconfirming data's relevance, validity, or existence. How counselors demonstrate and incorporate new learning.
• Unfreeze	Responses to disconfirming data. Examples of learning anxiety, survival anxiety, and psychological safety.
• New Learning	Use of role models, scanning environment, consider new learning.
• Refreeze	Incorporate new learning into practice and relationships.
Necessary Skills and Knowledge	Skills and knowledge described as essential for effective SSTs
• Knowledge of available resources/interventions	Services available and appropriate
• Mental preparation	Proactive manner, strategizing ahead of time
• Facilitator	Skill in time management, having voices heard, moving process along, hold people accountable
• Maintain Safe/Positive Environment	Use counseling skills (compassion, relationship building, inclusion, conflict management, etc.)
Team Preparation	Degree to which all stakeholders oriented to process.
• Occasionally: Team Preparation	Counselor spends little time preparing individuals for SST meeting or only prepares some members of team (student/parent/teacher/etc.)
• Not at All: Team Preparation	Counselor spends no time preparing team
• Consistent Team Preparation	Counselor spends time preparing all members of team for SST. Shares information about process, steps, etc. OR acknowledges this is important. Expressed desire to get better.
Counselor Training on SSTs	Describe any training, experience, or professional development engaged in with respect to SSTs
SST Benefits	What works well or is beneficial about SSTs
SST Tool	Information on current/future tools
• Actualization	Genuine use in practice, efficacious, co-constructed, paired with PD, reference guide BUT also accountability tool
• Practical	Clear, easy to use, enough information to inform but not overwhelm, content, structure, etc.
• Relevant	Relates to work/role very specifically
SEL Understanding	Described difference between SEL and character traits
• Consistent SEL Understanding	Strong understanding of difference between SEL and character traits. Acknowledge importance of SEL versus character strengths. Speak to differences with depth and provide examples.
• Not at All: SEL Understanding	Absent understanding of SEL and character traits, do not discuss and/or can't provide examples or depth.
• Occasional SEL Understanding	Limited understanding or ability to differentiate between SEL and character

	traits. May mention importance, but inconsistently or in limited fashion
Data	Collecting and using data to define problems and make decisions
• Consistently: Data	Data described as very important in solving problems and making decisions, evidence based data seen as important, strong desire to grow in data use.
• Not at All: Data Use	Data not described as important in solving problems or making decisions, completely subjective or non-existent, no mention of wanting to grow in this area
• Occasionally: Data	Data described as somewhat important, gathered on some occasions, or is subjective, some interest to grow in this area
Counselor knowledge of SSTs	How counselors describe knowledge of SSTs
• Not at All: Counselor Knowledge	Does not describe elements, legal authorization, limited understanding
• Consistently: Counselor Knowledge	Describes legal authorization, essential elements (organization, teamwork, problem solving stages), key concepts
• Occasionally: Counselor Knowledge	Some ability to describe elements, legal authorization, basic knowledge
Follow up Meeting	Extent to which follow up meetings are understood/described
• Not at All: Follow up	Describes follow up meetings as un-important or does not discuss.
• Consistent Follow Up	Described as very important, some expressed desire to get better at follow up meeting
• Occasionally: Follow up	Follow up meetings somewhat important, describe them happening inconsistently. Little or no desire to grow in this area
Progress Monitoring	Described ongoing data collection to inform progress monitoring
• Consistently: Progress Monitoring	Described collecting data to evaluate progress, believe is important
• Occasionally: Progress Monitoring	Do not describe collecting data on ongoing basis, seen as unimportant
• Not at All: Progress Monitoring	Describe ongoing data as not collected or unimportant
Intervention Goals	Descriptions of follow up on intervention goals
• Consistently follow up Interventions	Described as important, want to improve in this area
• Not at All: Follow up Interventions	Do not describe as important, do not mention improvement as needed
• Occasionally follow up interventions	Described as somewhat important, want to grow in this area
Referral Process	How SST process described and understood
• Consistent: Process	Described clearly, well understood, important
• Occasionally: Referral Process	Described as somewhat important, clear and well understood
• Not at All: Process	Described as inconsistent or unimportant

APPENDIX L
SWOT ACTIVITY OUTCOMES
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Results

Purpose: To increase our understanding of the effectiveness of the current SST process through a comprehensive environmental assessment.
Instructions: Based on your experiences and the group discussion, please write down at least 5 ideas that you have for each of the four areas below. Once you have noted your ideas, turn to a partner and discuss ideas in common and those that are different. Combine common ideas as appropriate. With your partner, write down one idea per piece of paper (half sheets on table) and post on sticky wall under Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The idea is to capture all ideas generated. Once all pieces of paper are on the sticky wall, we will affinity group the ideas to identify patterns. We will also discuss how we can leverage opportunities and strengths to address weaknesses and threats.
STRENGTHS: (*What is working well)*
A. Positive focus (there because we care)
B. Appropriate timing of identification to initiate an SST (teachers understand SST and when to implement)
C1. Team collaboration
C1. Documentation is clear and concise.
C2. Agreed upon goals and responsibilities-due to group being together all at once.
Effective process within the meeting
C2. Process within the meeting
C3. Bringing together various stakeholders
WEAKNESSES: *(What is not working well, or is challenging)*
A. Referrals-more documented interventions prior to meeting-More input from teacher
B. Equal distribution of accountability for new intervention. Can be come counselor focused (info. relayed home)-
C. Not always quantifiable goals
D. Not documented in IC
E. The process can delay student support-red tape
F1. Progress monitoring of interventions- accountability of intervention-Info. not always relayed home.
F2. Not always follow up
F3. Follow up SST meetings
G. Interventions don't always connect to strengths
H. Some teachers can define the problem through their own lens-losing site of the child's perspective/goals
OPPORTUNITIES: *(What is favorable? How can we build on assets?)*
A. Finding a way to capitalize on strengths
A1. Help focus team to identify and work within student/teams strengths
B. Supportive of Staff (teachers, psychologists)-increase creative interventions.
C. It is a great teaching tool for all stakeholders
C1. It synthesizes needs, hopes for the future.
C3. Opportunity to increase communication between grade levels.
THREATS: *(What might get in the way?)*
A. Time for adequate processing
A1. Time for monitoring and follow up
B. No follow through/support at home
B1. Teachers unwilling to implement
B2. Student does not buy in-no motivation
B3. People comfortable in their own processes

APPENDIX M
Why Students Fail Activity Outcomes

Counselor CA-Reasons Why Students Fail

Reasons	School	Parents	Students
Lack of Motivation			X
Lack of Support	X	X	
Lack of Engagement w/School	X	X	X
Executive Functioning			X
Past Trauma	*beyond anyone's control*		
Attendance		X	
Disorganized			X
Mental Health/Health Needs	*beyond anyone's control*		
Divorce/Family Issues	X	X *beyond anyone's control*	
Cultural Differences	X	X *beyond anyone's control*	
Learning Disabilities	*beyond anyone's control*		
Substance Abuse		X	X
Self-Worth/Esteem			

-Many of the above reasons are due to multiple agencies being responsible. There are also circumstances that are outside any ones control

Counselor CB-Reasons Why Students Fail

Reasons	School	Parents	Students
Lack of Motivation	X	X	X
Lack of Support	X	X	
Lack of Engagement w/School	X		X
Executive Functioning	X	X	X
Past Trauma	X	X	
Attendance	X	X	
Disorganized	X		X
Mental Health/Health Needs	X	X	X
Divorce/Family Issues		X	X
Cultural Differences	X		
Learning Disabilities	X	X	X
Substance Abuse	X	X	X
Self-Worth/Esteem	X	X	X

-It is ultimately a collective efforts, yet each component (student, parent, school) holds different skill sets, resources and responsibilities based on individual needs.

-As a school we must exercise our expertise to identify needs and supply resources either directly or through linkages, so the family or students can find their own supports whether they be in school or outside

Counselor CD-Reasons Why Students Fail

Reasons	School	Parents	Students
Lack of Motivation	X		X
Lack of Support	X	X	
Lack of Engagement w/School	X	X	
Executive Functioning			X
Past Trauma			X
Attendance		X	X
Disorganized	X		X
Mental Health/Health Needs		X	X
Divorce/Family Issues			X
Cultural Differences		X	X
Learning Disabilities	X		X
Substance Abuse			X
Self-Worth/Esteem			

-Seldom is there ownership in one area. While biology plays the initial role, environment and experiences make huge impacts on whether or not students fail.
-The SST process is a tool that can be used to capture many aspects of a student's life; thus enabling the team to move forward with interventions and processes/services that may interrupt the cycle of failure.

APPENDIX N
QUESTIONNAIRE RUBRIC

Rubric for Counselor Questionnaire IMPACT DATA					
	Strongly Agree (1)	**Agree (2)**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)**	**Disagree (4)**	**Strongly Disagree (5)**
Q.1 SSTs are effective in maintaining students in general education settings.	Convincing belief that SSTs are effective.	General belief that SSTs are effective.	Uncertain belief that SSTs are effective.	Disbelief that SSTs are effective.	Convincing disbelief that SSTs are effective.
Q.2 I have received training on facilitating effective SSTs.	Affirmative consent of receiving training.	Consent of receiving training.	Uncertain consent of receiving training.	Lack of consent of receiving training.	Non-consent of receiving training.
Q.3 I feel knowledgeable about social emotional competencies (knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions).	Convincing belief of knowledge about SEL.	General belief of knowledge of SSTs.	Uncertain about knowledge about SEL.	Lack of knowledge of SEL	Complete lack of knowledge about SEL
Q.4 I have adequate knowledge about effective SSTs.	Convincing belief about adequate knowledge.	General belief about adequate knowledge.	Uncertain belief about adequate knowledge.	Lack of belief about adequate knowledge.	Complete lack of belief in adequate knowledge.
Q.5 I have adequate skills to implement effective SSTs.	Convincing belief about adequate skills.	General belief about adequate skills.	Uncertain belief about adequate skills.	Lack of belief about adequate skills	Complete lack of belief in adequate skills.
Any comments:					

APPENDIX O
SELF STUDY GUIDE RUBRIC

SST Checklist Rubric IMPACT DATA			
ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT (referral, scheduling, length of meeting, pace, focus, & sharing results)	**Not at All (1)**	**Occasionally (2)**	**Consistently (3)**
SST Coordinator Identified	Not identified	Sometimes identified	Always identified
Teachers know how to make referral	Do not know how to make referral	Sometimes demonstrate knowledge	Always demonstrate knowledge
Teachers know how to complete referral paperwork	Do not know how to complete paperwork	Sometimes know how to complete paperwork	Always know how to complete paperwork
Referral paperwork takes less than 30 min. to complete	Paperwork exceeds 30 min.	Paperwork sometimes exceeds 30 min.	Paperwork always exceed 30 min.
Equal access: EL, very young students and students with disabilities referred to SST.	Equal access not provided	Equal access sometimes provided	Equal access always provided
SST scheduled or other assistance offered within 1 mo.	Not offered within 1 mo.	Sometimes offered w/in 1 mo.	Always offered within 1 mo.
Established time and place for mtg.	Lack established time/place	Time and place inconsistent	Time and place well established
SSTs held frequently enough to meet demands of student population: prior to referral to special education, grade retention; or major disciplinary action	Meetings not held frequently enough to meet demands of student population	Sometimes held frequently enough to meet demands of student population.	SST meetings are always held frequently enough to meet demands of student population
Follow up meeting scheduled at initial SST		Follow up meetings sometimes scheduled	Follow up meeting always scheduled.
Agenda visible to all participants	Agenda visible/translated	Visible/prepared sometimes	Agenda always shared with group
Timekeeper signals end and beginning of problem solving stages	Does not signal stages	Sometimes signals stages	Timekeeper always signals stages
Meeting space adequate	Space not adequate	Sometimes space adequate	Space always adequate
Avoid "admiring" problem (time spent on problem)	Majority of time spent considering problem	Some time spent considering problem at great length.	Avoid considering problem at great length.
Focus on singe student at a time.	Lack of focus	Some focus	Always focus
TEAMWORK (Essential people present & collaborative process)	**Not at All (1)**	**Occasionally (2)**	**Consistently (3)**
At least 25 minutes	Does not occur	Sometimes occurs	Always occurs

dedicated to discussing one student			
No more than 45 min. spent on individual student	Does not occur	Sometimes occurs	Always occurs
Note taker identified	Not identified	Sometimes identified	Note taker always identified
Results of meeting recorded on form	Standardized form not used.	Sometimes used	Standardized form always used
Results disseminated w/in 2 days to all participants	Not shared w/in 2 days	At times shared w/in 2 days	Results always shared w/in 2 days
Results translated to parents as needed.	Results not translated	Results sometimes translated	Results always translated
Referring teacher present	Not present	Sometimes present	Always present
For students with more than one teacher, other teachers either present or there is a method to collect their input and inform them of intervention plan	Other teachers not present and there is not a method to collect input	Other teachers sometimes present or there is a way to collect input	Other teachers always present and there is a way to collect input
Parent invited	Parent not invited	Parent sometimes invited	Parent always invited
Parent prepared by school staff member for meeting	Parent not prepared by school staff	Parent sometimes prepared by school staff	Parent always prepared by school staff
Parent present	Parent not present	Parent sometimes present	Parent always present
General education teachers act as consultants	General ed. teachers do not act as consultants	General ed. teachers sometimes act as consultants	General ed. teachers always act as consultants
Counselor and psychologist present	Counselor and psychologist not present	Counselor and psychologist sometimes present	Counselor and psychologist always present
Administrator present	Administrators not present	Administrators sometimes present	Administrators always present
Translator and/or ELL Specialist present when appropriate	Not present	Sometimes present	Always present
Coordinated interdependence-members freely share ideas and resources.	Members do not freely share ideas/resources	Members freely share ideas/resource.	Members always freely share ideas/resources
Shared vision-focus on intervention rather than disability	Focus on disability	Sometimes focus on disability	Focus on intervention
Make necessary requests for clarification	Do not make requests for clarification	Sometimes make requests for clarification	Always make requests for clarification
Use paraphrasing	Paraphrasing not used	Paraphrasing sometimes used	Paraphrasing always used
Engage members in perception check	Do not engage	Sometimes engage	Always engage in perception checking
PROBLEM SOLVING (Problem identification and analysis, plan	**Not at All (1)**	**Occasionally (2)**	**Consistently (3)**

implementation & evaluation).			
Prioritize concerns	Do not prioritize concerns	Sometimes prioritize concerns	Always prioritize concerns
Consider multiple data sources: interviews, observation, etc.	Do not consider multiple data sources	Sometimes consider multiple data sources	Always consider multiple data sources
Define problem in specific, observable terms	Do not define problem in specific terms	Sometimes define problem in specific terms	Always define problem in specific terms
Establish baseline	Do not establish baseline	Sometimes establish baseline	Always establish baseline
Discuss conditions in which behaviors occur	Do not discuss conditions	Sometimes discuss cond.	Always discuss conditions
Identify intervention goal (IG)	Do not identify IG	Sometimes identify IG	Always identify IG
Generate hypothesis: Problem behavior occurs because….	Do not generate hypothesis	Sometimes generate hypothesis	Always generate hypothesis
Consider contributing factors: curriculum, instruction, peers school/classroom environment, home/community, etc.	Do not consider contributing factors	Sometimes consider contributing factors	Always consider contributing factors
Develop intervention plan (IP)	Do not develop IP	Sometimes develop IP	Always develop IP
Identify on-going progress monitoring system, i.e. who will collect data, how often	Do not identify progress monitoring system	Sometimes identify progress monitoring system	Always identify progress monitoring system
Consultant assists teacher to implement classroom interventions	Consultant not assigned	Sometimes assigned	Consultant always assigned
Plan implemented and modified as needed	Plan not implemented/modified	Plan sometimes implemented/modified	Plan always implemented/modified
Ongoing progress monitoring data collected (at least 1x per week)	Ongoing data not collected	Sometimes collected	Ongoing data always collected
Data charted/visually displayed	Data not visually displayed	Sometimes visually displayed	Data always visually displayed
Hold follow-up mtg.	Do not hold meeting	Sometimes hold meeting	Always hold follow up meeting
At follow up meeting, discuss implementation of interventions	Do not discuss interventions at follow up meeting	Sometimes discuss interventions	Always discuss interventions at follow up meeting
Examine progress monitoring data	Do not examine data	Sometimes examine data	Always examine data
Make decision based on treatment fidelity & progress monitoring data	Do not make decisions based on data	Sometimes make decisions based on data	Always make decisions based on data
Schedule SST meeting as necessary	Do not reschedule	Sometimes reschedule	Always reschedule
Closure on each student achieved	Closure not achieved	Sometimes achieved	Always achieved

Appendix P
MAJOR CLASSICATIONS OF STRENGTHS

Major Categories including definitions

Category	Definition	Examples
Academic	Strengths that explicitly mention school or academics	*"Solid student in Social Studies. Does quality work and has solid writing skills"* *"He performed 1 of 40 in the Geographic Bee"*
Environment	Strengths that relate to support from family, community, and peer groups	*"Supportive parents"* *"She is involved in positive social/emotional outlets: Church Group, YMCA Group, Water Polo"*
Imposed Cultural Norms	Comments that reflect normative, socially acceptable values and beliefs of dominating culture. Further classified into appearance, disposition, cognitive, debatable, and external perception.	*"Friendly smile"* *"Polite, respectful"* *"Eager to please"* *"Good sense of humor"* *"Sweetheart"*
Improvement over Time	Strengths in progress, not fully present	*"Progress since 5th grade with attendance and friendships"*
Inappropriate	Comments do not reflect strengths, act as qualifying statements, or are irrelevant to SST process. Further classified into non-strengths and qualifying statements.	*"Giants fan"* *"Needs occasional breaks"* *"When she is in a "working mood" she performs well in math"*
Interest/Hobby	Strengths speak to talents or extracurricular activities outside of classroom	*"Enjoys hiking, biking, traveling"* *"Musically talented"*
Lacks Context	Comments interpreted as positive or negative and need context to understand intended meaning	*"Complex writer"* *"Takes things to heart"* *"Very literal"*
SEL Competencies	Strengths reflective of social-emotional learning competencies, defined by Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). Further classified into eight competencies.	*"Cooperates well with peers and teachers"* *"Strong self-advocate, will speak up when he needs help"*
Want Statements	Statements that speak to student wanting to fulfill a strength, but not carrying out inclination	*"Wants to do well"* *"Desire or want to do the right thing"*

APPENDIX Q

DRAFT SST HANDBOOK

STUDENT STUDY TEAM HANDBOO

STUDENT STUDY TEAM HANDBOOK
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

A. District Student Support Structures (Background)

The school district is committed to helping all students experience school success within the general education setting. When students struggle within the learning environment, the district uses Student Study Teams (SSTs) as one mechanism to address the educational needs of the child. SSTs are school based problem-solving teams that work to decrease the underachievement of students and promote effective general education supports. Further, SSTs function as positive, school-wide, early identification and intervention processes, used to support the educational needs of struggling students.

SSTs are nested within larger Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts, which call for a multi-tiered approach for responding to the differing needs of students. Tiered interventions are identified as effective models of student support, that shift practice from a reactive multiple failures approach, to a proactive data based model, that when implemented with fidelity, can address academic and behavioral issues early on for students at risk for school failure. At Tier 1, all students receive high quality, research based instruction, differentiated to meet their needs, and are assessed on a regular basis to identify struggling learners who need additional support. Students who do not making adequate progress in the core curriculum, based on their level of performance and rate of progress, are provided with increasingly intensive instruction at Tier 2. At Tier 3, students receive individualized, intensive interventions and supports to target skill deficits to remediate current issues and prevent further problems.

Generally, SST meetings are held after the parent, teacher, or counselor identify the child as struggling academically and/or behaviorally and classroom level interventions (Tier 1) have not been effective. Appropriate referrals to SSTs are made when the teacher has met with the parent at least once to address concerns, when Tier 1 research based-interventions have been attempted, documented and exhausted, and when the teacher(s) need additional supports to assist students.

The School Counselor coordinates, facilitates and provides leadership to the SST process. The School Counselor also serves as the point of contact for all SST referrals and ensures that SST Plans are monitored and followed up on. The SST is made up of parents, students, teachers, counselors, site administrators (when necessary) and any other person who has knowledge about the student. The SST comes together to problem solve and create positive solutions to address students' educational needs. SSTs examine a wide variety of data, identify areas of intervention based on the evidence, and create a Student Plan to support student academic needs.

B. What is a Student Study Team (SST)?

The SST is a strengths-based problem solving and coordinating process that assists students, families, teachers and school communities to develop effective solutions that support students' educational needs on an individual basis. The SST process provides an opportunity for students, parents, teachers and school staff to share concerns about an individual student, and through discussion and problem solving develop a plan of support that leverages student strengths while acknowledging areas of need. The SST Plan details a course of action, assigns responsibilities to the team, and helps to monitor results and student outcomes.

SSTs are an important educational support process, and are:

- **Strengths-Based:** The SST process is asset based and focuses on developing solutions that

leverage student strengths. Students are seen as needing instruction, rather than having a problem. The SST team uses a strengths based tool, such as The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), to identify student social-emotional learning abilities and needs in terms of areas of instruction.

- **Team Focused:** The SST process is a collaborative process that engages parents, teachers and school personnel in developing solutions to specific student needs**.**

- **Problem Solving:** The SST process considers multiple data sources, assists the group to prioritize concerns and to define the problem in specific and observable terms, so that appropriate interventions may be developed.

- **Coordinated:** The SST plan outlines specific intervention and supports and assigns responsibility to team members to ensure that the plan is successful.

- **Data-Based Decisions:** Decisions about interventions are based on assessments and progress monitoring.

- **Results Oriented:** SST Plans are monitored, and a follow up SST meeting is scheduled to review outcomes of the interventions and adjust the plan as needed.

C. SST Members

The SST is meant to include all individuals whom can support learning and instruction, including:

- Parents/Guardians
- Students (as appropriate)
- Administrators
- Teachers
- School Counselors
- Paraprofessionals
- Parent Liaisons
- Resource staff
- District Nurse/Health Technician
- School Psychologist
- Behaviorist, mental health professional, etc.
- Others who have knowledge of the student

D. What is the Purpose of an SST?

1. To identify and assist students who are struggling;
2. To help teachers support students in the classroom using the collective expertise of the team;
3. To help parents when they have concerns about their child's educational experience;
4. To improve communication and coordination efforts between the home and school;

5. To coordinate services and supports;
6. To better understand the students needs and strengths, and provide instruction in these areas proactively;
7. To bring all stakeholders in the room to create a student support plan based on a hypothesis of the problem and appropriate interventions;
8. To document interventions, supports and student outcomes;
9. To ensure that research-based classroom interventions are implemented with fidelity, before a child is referred for special education assessment;
10. To promote a process whereby all students who struggle may receive access to the curriculum in a manner that promotes equity and inclusivity.

E. What Are the Benefits of an SST?

- The SST process is an effective way to bring together stakeholders and resources to support a student's educational needs.
- The SST is a focused problem-solving process where student data is reviewed and used to create an effective support plan.
- The SST is a process in which student concerns can be addressed.
- The SST affords students an opportunity to become actively engaged in addressing their needs.
- The SST process provides teachers and staff an opportunity to develop effective strategies that may translate to other students struggling with similar issues.
- The SST affords teachers an opportunity for support to better meet the needs of a student, based on the collective expertise of the group.

F. When to Refer a Student for an SST?

The SST is an appropriate intervention after multiple corrective, research-based, Tier 1 interventions and strategies have proven unsuccessful in addressing or improving the students educational needs, including academic, language, social/emotional, health, attendance, and/or behavior concerns. Prior to completing a SST referral (Form A) the teacher/team will have:

- Contacted the parent/guardian to raise awareness of the child's needs
- Met with the parent/guardian to discuss the child's need
- Implemented Tier 1 Interventions (See Form A: Tier 1 Interventions)
- Documented results of interventions

The teacher/team will also consider the following information/data:

1. Health (Development History Form: Form C)
   - When was the student's last physical exam (vision, hearing, etc.)?
   - Is there a physical/mental health concern (past or current)
   - What is the developmental history?
   - Is the student taking medication?
   - Is there a psychological evaluation?
   - What information is needed to rule out a health issue?

2. Academic
    - Has the student had a previous SST? If so, what was the outcome? When?
    - Is the child performing below grade level?
    - Does the child perform poorly on tests?
    - Are academic performance issues recent or ongoing?
    - Are there attendance issues? If so, why?
    - Has there been a referral to the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB)?
    - Has the child been retained?
    - Has the student attended summer school or intervention programs?
    - Is/was the student an English Language Learner?

3. Environmental
    - The child's living situation
    - Recent or frequent moves
    - Special Status (McKinney Vento or Foster Youth)
    - Family Stressors
    - Family

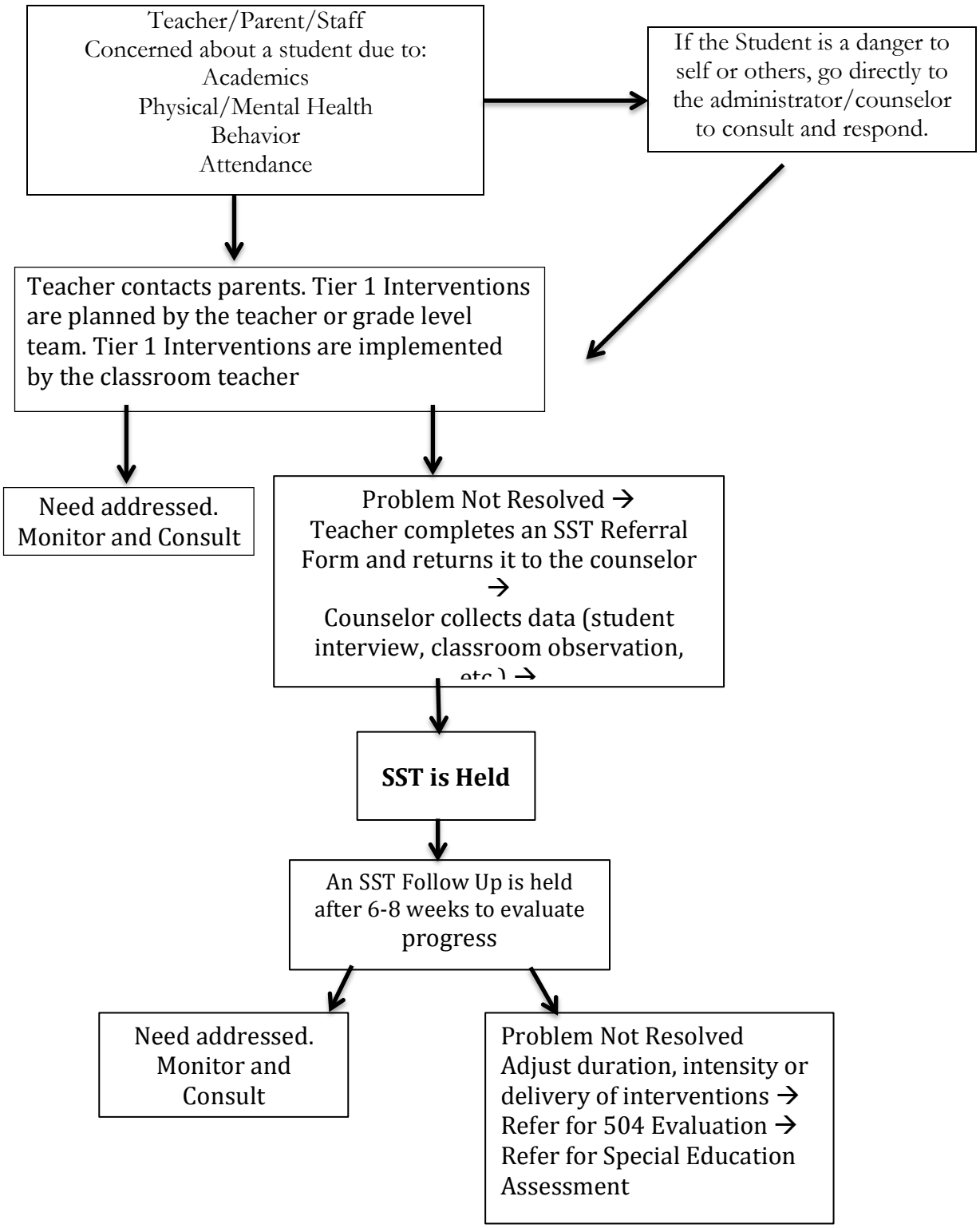
4. Behavioral (Classroom Observation Form: Form D)
    - Number and nature of discipline referrals
    - Changes in behavior
    - Peer relationships
    - Classroom interactions

5. Parent/Student perspective (Student Interview Form: Form E)
    - What is the student perspective?
    - What needs do they identify?
    - What strengths do they identify?

6. Data
    - What data is available to establish a baseline?
    - What progress monitoring data is available?
    - What Tier I interventions have been attempted, documented and measured?

It is only after Tier 1 interventions have been attempted, documented and exhausted, than SST is appropriate. Additionally, SSTs will only be initiated after the teacher has met with the family at least once. The SST Referral Form is filled out by the team and provided to the School Counselor.

G. SST Flow Chart (Figure 1)



B. SST Tier 1 Interventions - Form B

Classroom Environment	
__Change learning groups __Create more physical space __Create special study area __Small group instruction __Model desired behaviors __Establish routine schedule __Clarify school rules __Modify pacing of lesson __Allow verbal or written responses __Lower Noise Level __Use visual aides __Allow students to journal or draw to calm down __Recognize and reward positive behaviors __Review previous lessons __Teach relaxation techniques __Use timer __Provide visual cues __Tape record or write out directions __Set behavioral expectations. __Review several problems before describing current lesson __Set learning expectations. __Use study guide __Provide transition direction __Help students develop their own learning strategies. __Use peer checkers to review completed work ___Provide Activity Break __Change seating __Other:_____ _____ _____	__Assign one task at a time __Provide discussion questions before reading __Use word markers to guide reading __Provide assignment sheets __Post weekly schedule __Use graph paper as needed __Provide anticipation cues __Establish rules and review frequently __Teach key direction words. __Use room dividers. __Provide headsets to muffle noise __Seat child away from doors/windows. __Provide time-out area __Vary working surface __Simplify/shorten directions __Give both oral and written directions __Have student repeat directions __Provide guided practice __Provide more practice trials. __Increase allocated time __ Change reinforcing strategy __Tape paper to desk __Use physical cues while speaking __Change tone of voice __Call student's name before asking question. __Color code materials/directions. __Use hand signals to cue behavior __Reduce distraction __Other:_____ _____ _____

Materials	Other Interventions	Attendance
__Differentiate materials __Use diagnostic materials __Use learning games __Provide computer access to materials __Use Audio-Visual materials __Perform on-going student evaluation. __Help students self-correct own mistakes. __Use manipulatives __Provide list or written materials	__TEAM referral __Counseling referral __Peer tutoring group __Clubs/group referral __Tutoring referral __Parent communications __Collaborate with colleagues __Daily student check-ins __Behavior contract __Home incentive system	__Adjust bed time __Adjust wake time __Address transportation issues __Create attendance contract __Meet with parent/s

A. SST Referral Form A

Please note that SSTs are held when Tier 1 interventions have been taken as an initial step. To refer for an SST, fill out this form (both sides) as well as the DESSA tool and provide to the school counselor. Attachments of schoolwork, exams, evaluations, etc. may be attached.

*****Confidential Information: Please maintain in a secure place*****

STUDENT PROFILE

Student Name:	**Grade:**	**Gender:**
DOB:	**Ethnicity:**	**Previous:** □ **SST** □ **504**
Attendance: **Absences:** _____ **Tardies:**____	**Current Grades:**	**CELDT Scores:**
Parent/Caregiver:		**Home Language:**
Title:		**Relationship to Child:**
Reason for Referral: □Academic □Behavioral □Parent Request □ Attendance □Health □Other:		

Concerns: Describe specific concerns	**Previous Interventions to address concerns**	**Outcome of Interventions**
□Academic_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ □Attendance_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ □Social/Emotional_____ ____ _____ _____ _____ _____ □Environmental_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____		

□Health/Mental Health_____ _____ _____ □Other:_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____		

2. TEAMWORK

A. Group Norms

Group Norms are generally an unspoken set of informal rules that govern individual behaviors in a group setting. Group norms help to ground individuals who are working together by providing a common understanding of the groups guiding principals. Group norms can help to monitor interactions and can be referenced to help the group move forward collectively and positively. The following statements reflect group norms that help to guide SST processes within the district.

SST Group Norms

1. The best education for all students is education provided in the least restrictive environment;

2. Pre-referral interventions can significantly reduce the rate at which a student is inappropriately placed in more restrictive settings;

3. A student's educational problems must be viewed within the context of the school system, and do not reflect an inherent problem within the student;

4. Solutions to a student's problems require changes in educational and related environmental systems, not just changes in individual students;

5. Teachers expected to initiate changes in their classrooms should be substantively involved in the development and delineation of those changes and supports;

6. General education teachers, when provided with appropriate support, are able to serve most struggling students within the general education setting;

7. Dissent among SST members is valuable in order to provoke deep thinking and creative solutions;

8. Data-driven decision-making will promote effective development and planning to meet a student's educational needs.
9. Students have inherent strengths, that when acknowledged and leveraged, can be powerful in promoting success.

Adapted from: *Gutkin & Nemeth (1997)*

B. SST Team Member Roles and Responsibilities

All members of the SST are integral partners and contributors in creating a positive and safe environment in which to address a student's needs. The assignment of special roles to team members, helps to ensure that the process is effective and timely. While team members may change roles, depending on the needs of each SST meeting, during any one meeting it is important that each team member's role is clearly defined and maintained throughout the meeting.

Facilitator

- Sets a positive tone for the meeting and facilitates introductions
- Directs the SST meeting process with respect for all members
- Elicits helpful information from the group
- Accommodates the various needs of the group
- Maintains the group norms
- Is directive in moving the meeting forward and addressing issues that may arise

Recorder

- Documents the SST meeting discussion and plan on the appropriate SST form
- Checks for understanding when capturing information from the group

Team Members

- Contribute to the development and planning process
- Come prepared with information about the student to assist the team
- Help to link interventions to student strengths
- Assist in maintaining a positive group dynamic
- Commit to strategies that can support the child within the school setting

Parents/Caregivers

- Act as full members of the SST process
- Contribute crucial information about the student's needs as they relate to the problem at hand
- Clarify information needed by the team
- Commit to strategies that can support the child in the home

Students

- Shares goals, challenges, and strengths with the group

- Advocates for their needs (within the supportive environment created by the team)
- Commits to engaging in strategies to support their learning.

C. Suggestions for Effective SST Meetings

- Orient the parent/caretaker to the SST process, prior to the meeting, so that they feel most prepared and comfortable with the process.

- Orient teachers to the process and explain their role, so that they have time to prepare information and sample work as needed.
- Provide teacher and parent with DESSA ahead of time so that they have ample time to complete the strengths assessment.
- Have appropriate translation services as needed.
- Assign group roles at the beginning of the meeting.
- Review the group norms.
- Explain purpose of the meeting and expected outcomes.
- Use specific examples of student work when describing strengths, challenges and/or means for improvement.
- Use specific examples of student behavior to describe any issues with discipline, peer relationship problems, or areas of strengths.
- Use well-understood and clear language in the meeting-avoid jargon.
- Be open to different views-avoid coming in with a pre-determined plan.
- Come from a place of inquiry when asking questions and clarifying information to maintain a safe space.

D. Suggested Meeting Steps and Procedures

Welcome and Expectations

- Counselor welcomes group, facilitates introductions, and sets a positive and safe environment.
- Counselor confirms meeting purpose, outcomes, agenda and timelines.

Student Strengths

- Counselor begins the meeting by sharing students strengths and explaining how strengths can be leveraged to build on success
- DESSA results utilized to discuss areas of competency in Social-Emotional Learning.

Need Identification and Clarification

- The requesting teacher and counselor summarize the problem succinctly.
- The requesting teacher and counselor, describe the need for instruction by eliciting what the desired behavior look(s) will like.

Brainstorm Interventions

- Counselor leads focused brainstorming that would support the desired behavior. (Use Form C: Brainstorming Form)
- All present generate as many interventions as possible without critiquing.

Evaluate Interventions

- Counselor leads discussion to analyze interventions, their match to the presenting need, and feasibility of the implementation.

Select Interventions

- Counselor and team select interventions and who will be responsible to carry out.

Write Action Plan

- Counselor leads team to complete Plan including interventions, support to the teacher, person(s) responsible, timelines, data to be collected, and date for follow up meeting.

Summarize and Close

- Counselor verbally summarizes major points of the meeting and prompts next steps.

3. PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving is the method for defining the presenting needs clearly, generating and selecting high probability interventions, and planning and monitoring implementation. In order to best identify the problem, use multi-data sources: interviews, observation, student work, test scores, student records, etc. The following four steps outline the problem solving process.

A. Problem Identification: It is critical to have an objective description of the academic and/or behavioral challenges before the SST can begin to assist the teacher to support the student. A concrete definition avoids confusion and ensures that everyone on the team is talking about the same issues.

- **Review student strengths**: Focus on social emotional learning competencies that can be leveraged to support students (DESSA). Avoid identifying student character traits or attributes; instead, focus on assets that can be leveraged with increased instruction.
- **Isolate the challenging behavior(s)**: Avoid focusing on symptoms and instead probe for the real issue(s) that exist. Instead of identifying the child as "disorganized" or lacking "executive functioning", describe the behavior(s) in ***specific*** and ***observable*** terms.
- **Identify baseline:** How often is the behavior occurring and under what conditions (When, where and why).

- **Prioritize concerns:** Consider the concerns that exist and begin to prioritize. Generally two to three concerns are all that can be successfully addressed at one time. In some cases, focusing on one or two high impact behaviors can have an effect on other challenging behaviors.

B. Problem Analysis: To fully understand the challenging behaviors it is important to consider the antecedents. When or under what conditions the behavior occurs. Review results of observations to assess for environmental variables, activities, or interactions with others that lead to the behavior or concern.

- **Generate hypothesis:** The problem behavior exists because of…. Recognize that all behaviors serve a function. Ask, "Why is the student doing this?" Consider what the student is trying to avoid/or escape or gain/obtain. Assessing the function of the behavior will help to understand if the student is unable or unwilling to do the work.
- **Consider contributing factors:** Curriculum/instruction, school/class environment, home/community, peers or other risk factors.
- **Consider student social emotional learning and strengths** that can be built upon (utilizing data from the DESSA).
- **Identify intervention goal(s).** Based on identified problem and hypothesis, identify alternative or desired behavior and supports needed. Consider interventions that:
    - **teach missing skills (and alternative positive behaviors.)**
    - **recognize or encourage appropriate behaviors.**
    - **intervene and provide consequences.**
- Use Problem Solving Tool (Form C) to identify desired behavior(s) and interventions to support new behaviors.

C. Plan Implementation: Identify how plan will be monitored

- Coach teacher (if needed) in implementing classroom interventions.
- Implement plan and modify as needed.
- Ongoing progress monitoring data collected (at least once per week).
- Chart/visually display data.
- Include student strengths in plan (based on DESSA results).

D. Plan Evaluation: Hold follow-up meeting (6-8 weeks after the initial SST). At follow up meeting, discuss implementation of each intervention (did it occur as planned, what was the outcome, etc.)

- **Examine progress monitoring data-**Does the data indicate that student has made progress? Based on treatment fidelity and progress monitoring data, make decision to continue intervention, revise intervention plan, or refer to special education assessment.
- **Re-schedule another SST meeting** as necessary. Consider continuing or modifying Tier 2 Interventions, adding additional strategies, referral for additional screenings, or referral to special education assessment.

H. Social Emotional Learning Interventions – SST Form H

OPTIMISTIC THINKING-Positive thinker and confident
Strategies to help students develop an open mindset and confidence
1. Teach the child to use a growth mind set. 2. Set short-term goals that the student can work towards. 3. Pair student with older/younger student for confidence building activities.

SELF AWARENESS-Realistic understanding of strengths and limitations **SELF MANAGEMENT-**Success controlling emotions and behaviors
Strategies to help student identify and manage emotions and behavior
1. Help student describe emotions associated with personal experiences using feelings chart or journal. 2. Distinguish between different emotions (e.g., fear and anger, shame and sadness) with feelings chart or journal. 3. Evaluate ways of dealing with upsetting situations (e.g., being left out, losing, rejection, divorce) through role-plays or vignettes. 4. Practice demonstrating emotions in various contexts via role-plays or stories. 5. Practice handling pressure situations (e.g., taking a test, participating in a competitive activity) with student. 6. Help student to identify factors that cause stress (both positive and negative) through class activity, counseling or other intervention. 7. Help student identify physical/emotional reactions to stress (e.g., increased energy and alertness, sweaty palms, etc.). 8. Help student practice stress reducing strategies and self-calming techniques. 9. Help student use "I-statements". 10. Recognize emotions as indicators of situations in need of attention. 11. Practice expressing positive feelings about others through notes or verbally. 12. Help student analyze emotional states that contribute or detract from ability to problem solve.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS-Promote positive connections with others
Strategies to help student identify personal qualities and external supports.
1. Help student identify reliable adults to seek help from in various situations. 2. Practice strategies that support peers through games or activities. 3. Encourage student to demonstrate leadership within the school community (e.g., reading tutor, student council, clubs, mentoring new students etc.) 4. Identify extra-curricular activities available on site. 5. Identify school support person as a point of contact. 6. Encourage participation in extra-curricular activities. 7. Daily check in with student. 8. Engage student in peer tutoring group.

GOAL DIRECTED BEHAVIOR-Initiation and persistence in completing difficult tasks
Strategies to help demonstrate skills related to achieving personal & academic goals.
1. Help student develop and monitor friendship goal with action steps taken by certain dates. 2. Help student develop and monitor academic goal with action steps taken by certain dates. 3. Help student evaluate level of achievement with regard to recent goal. 4. Assist student set a short-term goal to improve some aspect of school performance. 5. Help student evaluate success and analyze what could have been done differently. 6. Help student analyze how better use of supports could help overcome obstacles.

SOCIAL AWARENESS-Capacity to interact with others in way that shows respect and cooperation.
Strategies that support recognition of feelings and perspectives of others as well as recognize similarities and differences.
1. Help student describe others' feelings in a variety of situations. 2. Analyze why literary characters felt as they did via story or reading. 3. Analyze various points of view expressed in historical, political, or social issue. 4. Help student to evaluate how change in behavior of one side of disagreement affects the other side through conflict resolution skill building. 5. Practice asking open-ended questions to encourage students to express themselves. 6. Help student interpret non-verbal communication. 7. Identify feelings and perspective of others during classroom group discussions. 8. Describe how classmates who are subject of rumors or bullying might feel. 9. Describe how responsible students help their classmates by developing a chart or class norms. 10. Have student interview adult on topic of how to develop friendships. 11. Describe ways to express forgiveness by journaling, essay writing or discussion. 12. Demonstrate encouragement of others and recognition of their contributions. 13. Teach positive sportsmanship during PE or recess. 14. Role-play how to report bullying behavior in class. 15. Have student participate in setting and enforcing class. 16. Develop a behavior contract.

DECISION MAKING-Problem solver, learns from experience, accepts responsibility.
Strategies that help students consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions and resolving interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
1. Describe how differing points of view affect decision-making process in class readings. 2. Have student analyze what it means to be responsible with regard to one's family, friends, and school community through reading or journaling. 3. Share need for rules at school, home, and society and explain why it's important to obey them. 4. Define roles of responsibility as a victim, bystander, perpetrator, and rescuer in situation through vignette or role-play. 5. Student to create journal entries on how actions have affected others. 6. Identify challenges and obstacles to solving problems through journaling or class discussion. 7. Evaluate strategies to promote school success (e.g., identifying distractions, managing stress, and putting first things first) through individual counseling. 8. Help student develop and use decision-making model. 9. Use homework organizer. 10. Analyze each step of a decision-making process, used to respond to problem, by writing it out. 11. Help student use decision log for 24 hours to identify influences on your decisions. 12. Help student use checklist to practice steps of refusing unwanted peer pressure. 13. Suggest ways to address personal grievances to avoid conflict using restorative practices. 14. Help student identify how to use different strategies for dealing with conflict situations. 15. Evaluate ways to include everyone in group activities. 16. Practice negotiation skills in pairs, taking the perspective of both parties into account.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY-Careful and reliable in actions and contributes to group efforts
Strategies that contribute to the well being of school and community.
1. Help student identify and gather information on a school/community issue or need. 2. Help student develop a plan with classmates to address a school/community issue or need. 3. Help student work with other students to plan and implement a service project. 4. Help student support activities of various groups at school. 5. Assist student to contribute in positive ways to home environment. 6. Encourage student to join Youth Community Services.

7. Use a timer to help student monitor progress.

Tier 2 Interventions

1. Behavior Contract
http://www.csd.k12.wi.us/cms_files/resources/Behavioral%20Contracts.pdf

2. Classroom Management Plan
http://www.csd.k12.wi.us/cms_files/resources/The%20Good%20Behavior%20Game.pdf

3. Choice of Task
http://www.csd.k12.wi.us/cms_files/resources/Choice%20of%20Task%20Sequence.pdf

4. Reward Systems
5. Small group instruction
6. Peer Tutoring
7. Organizational Tools

Appendix A
SST Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Student Study Team?
The SST is a strengths-based problem solving and coordinating process that assists students, families, teachers and school communities to develop effective solutions that support students' educational needs on an individual basis. The SST process provides an opportunity for students, parents, teachers and school staff to share concerns about an individual student, and through discussion and problem solving, develop a plan of support that leverages student strengths while acknowledging areas of need. The SST Plan details a course of action, assigns responsibilities to the team, and helps to monitor results and student outcomes.

Is the SST Process Mandated?
California Education Code 56303 states, "A pupil shall be referred for special education 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 the general education program. It is only after those interventions have been unsuccessful that the SST would refer the student for evaluation to determine if special education instruction and services are required.

Why go through the SST Process?
The SST process supports regular education teachers as they work with struggling students to identify and meet their education needs. The intention of the SST is to provide resources and supports to maintain students in general education settings whenever possible. The SST process is useful in problem solving and creating a plan of action to support students who struggle.

Who can refer a student to the SST?
Teachers, counselors, school staff or parents can refer a student to the SST process.

Does the parent have to be invited to the SST?
Yes, it is expected that parent/s or guardian be informed of the SST and invited to participate.

Who participates in the SST?
Participants may include: Parents/Guardians, Students (as appropriate), Administrators, Teachers, School Counselors, Paraprofessionals, Parent Liaisons, Resource staff, District Nurse/Health Technician, School Psychologist, Mental Health experts, or others who have knowledge of the student.

How do I know if a referral is appropriate?
It is only after Tier 1 interventions have been exhausted, that an SST is appropriate. The SST Referral Form is filled out and provided to the School Counselor.

Why are hearing and vision screening recommended?
It is important to know if these screenings are current as medical issues could impact a students learning and school experience. Ruling out health issues is an important first step in identifying

student needs.

Is the SST a function of general education or special education?
The SST emphasizes early intervention for struggling students and is a function of general education.

Will the SST process determine eligibility for a 504 or Special Education?
The SST process is not meant to determine eligibility for a 504 or Special Education. The SST is a general education function meant to provide students with supports that address their educational needs within a general education setting.

Why Use the DESSA?
The DESSA is a comprehensive system that supports universal screening, assessment, intervention planning, progress monitoring, and outcome evaluation in the social-emotional domain. It is designed to help schools meet emerging social-emotional learning standards. The DESSA promotes data based decision-making, a key element of Tier 2 Interventions.

What are Tiered Interventions?
Tiered interventions are associated with a Response-to-Intervention (RtI) framework. RtI is an educational strategy meant to close the achievement gap and ensure high-quality instruction/intervention for all students, corresponding to each students needs. Student progress is closely monitored and changes in instruction are based on data collected from on-going assessments. All students receive Tier I interventions, provided in the classroom setting. Tier 2 interventions are provided to students who are not advancing based on school wide screenings, in spite of Tier 1 interventions. These student are recognized a typical children who simply need more targeted intervention by the teacher and other support staff. Students who do not make progress at Tier 2 will advance to Tier 3 interventions, which include intensive instruction, specific to their educational needs. These services are provided by the classroom teacher and specialists.

E. SST Student Interview Sheet - SST Form E

Student Name: _____ Grade:_____

1. At school, activities I really like are:

_____
_____
_____

2. The activities I like most away from school are:

_____
_____
_____

3. The subjects I am best at are:

a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

4. I learn best when:

_____
_____

5. I want more help with these school subjects:

a. _____
b. _____

6. If I could change one thing about school, it would be:

_____
_____
_____

7. My teacher, the principal, my parent(s) and I are having a meeting about me because:

_____
_____

8. When I do things well, I like to do or get:

_____
_____
_____

9. When I grow up, I would like to be a:

_____

10. One of my strengths is:

_____

F. SST FORM

Student:

Grade: **Date of Birth:**

Strengths	Known Information	Concerns	RtI/Pre-SST Interventions	Desired Outcomes	Proposed Interventions	Responsible Individuals (Who)	Intervention Frequency and Timeline (When)

Follow Up Meeting Date:_____ (schedule within 6-8 weeks)

I (parent/caregiver) _____ □ Agree □ Do not Agree to this SST Plan.

Parent Signature: _____ Teacher/s Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____ Counselor Signature: _____

SST Resources

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_00.htm

http://www.escambia.k12.fl.us/pbis/rtib/Tier%202%20Intervention%20Toolbox.pdf

http://www.csd.k12.wi.us/staff/tier2interventions.cfm

http://www.shenet.org/DL_CurriculumLearning/RtI.pdf

https://aggiefaculty.wikispaces.com/file/view/SST_Interventions_Tier_II.pdf

http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Documents/RTI%20document%20Full%20Text.pdf