

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Problem-Solving Model Pilot

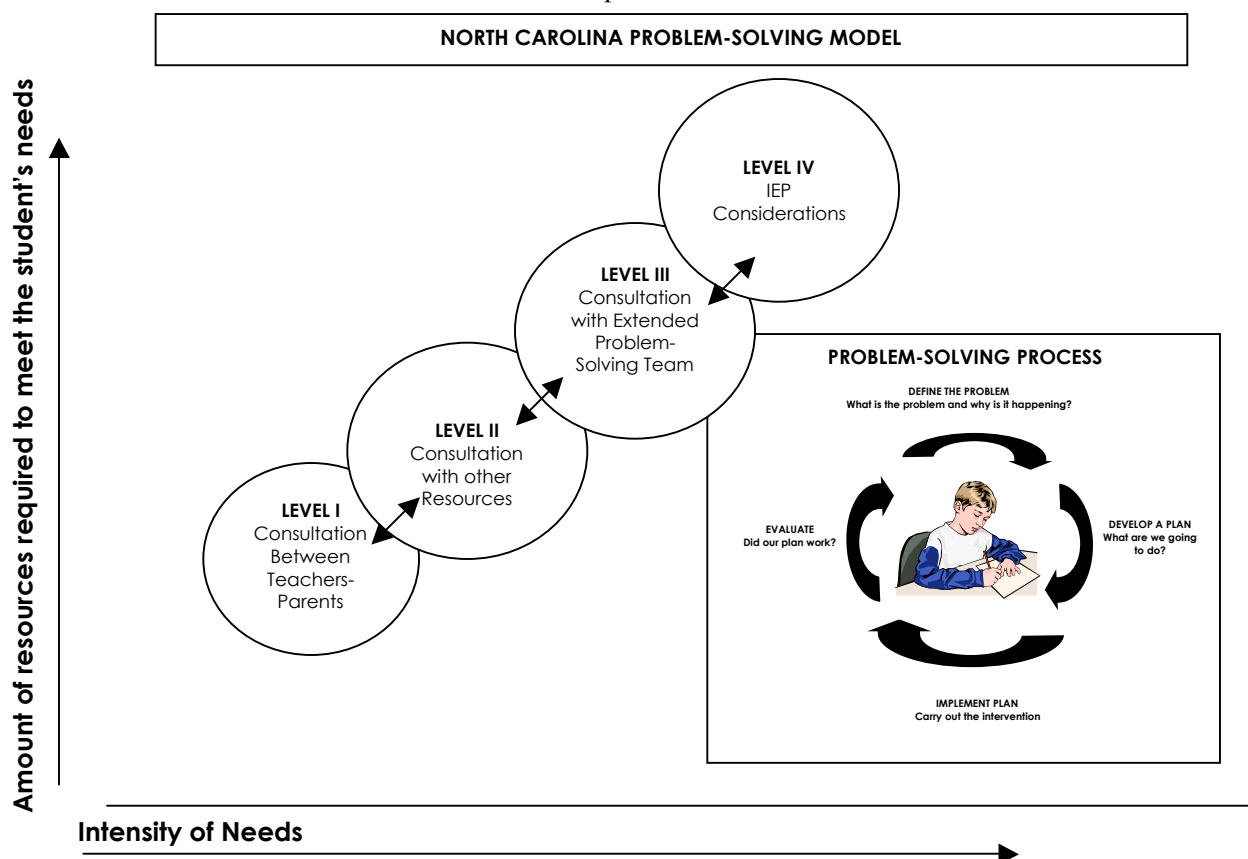
The Problem-Solving Process

Problem solving is defined as a process that includes a systematic analysis of a student's behavior or academic difficulties that uses this analysis, and any assessment activities, to provide the foundation for a planned, systematic set of interventions. These interventions are then monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness, also as a part of the problem-solving process.

Problem solving occurs within the school setting at various levels, and is more complex as the resources needed to resolve a problem increase, due to the significance of the problem. The intent of the problem-solving process is to resolve the problem using the necessary resources. The end result could be entitlement to special education, but only after a systematic, data-based decision-making process has clearly demonstrated both the eligibility and the need for special education.

The problem-solving approach focuses on how to resolve the difficulties a learner is experiencing. To understand how best to help a student, information is collected from teachers, parents, and others who best know the child. This information is used to determine what the child needs and how best to assist the child. Student progress is measured frequently to determine what is most effective for each student and decisions are based on the results.

The problem-solving approach emphasizes assisting children. It is an integrated conceptual model of assessment and services incorporating general and special education efforts. Concerns may be expressed by parents, teachers, counselors, school nurses, principals, building assistance teams, community providers, or others in direct contact with students. Assistance can occur at four levels. The first level involves parent and teacher collaboration to address problems. At the second level, other teachers provide expertise to solve the problem. At the third level, more specialized staff guides the assistance. The fourth level addresses entitlement to special education.



Purpose of Level I Problem Solving:

- ◆ Inform parents and teachers of concern.
- ◆ Establish communication between parents and teachers.
- ◆ Attempt initial resolution of problem.

A teacher with a concern regarding a student's performance contacts the parents and engages in a process to resolve the presenting problem. General education interventions are implemented at this level and parents are informed of initial concerns. Problems are frequently resolved at this level, but if problem solving is not successful, other resources within the school-including various support personnel are utilized and included in the problem-solving process. Level II Problem Solving begins when plans at Level I are not successful, or when either the parents or teacher indicates a need for additional resources.

Typical Level I Problem-Solving Activities:

1. Define the problem

The teacher and parent meet informally and focus on behaviors of concern. Outside personnel do not contribute to defining the problem. Documentation of Level I activities is on the Level I Intervention Plan (PSM-1a).

2. Develop a plan

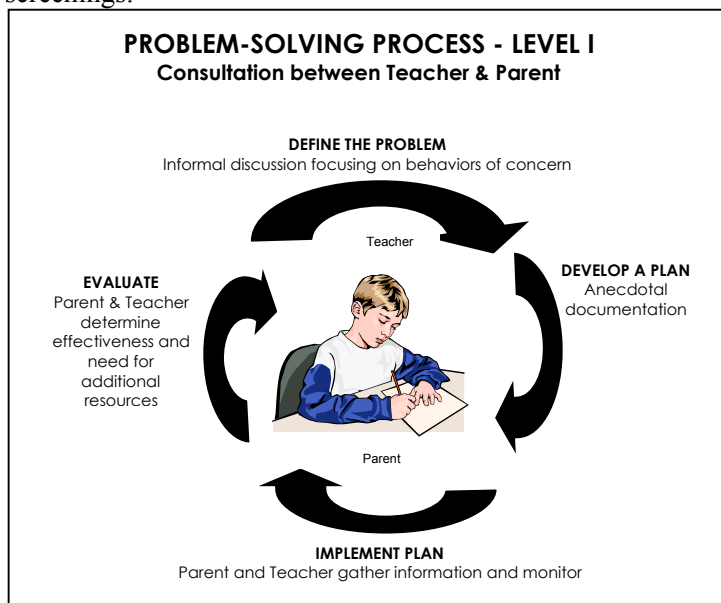
The plan is developed by the teacher and the parent.

3. Implement the plan

The intervention is conducted without assistance from outside personnel. Information is gathered to indicate the success of the intervention.

4. Evaluate effectiveness

Based upon the information gathered, the teacher and parent make a decision about the effectiveness of the intervention. They may continue the intervention if successful, discontinue the intervention when the problem is resolved, revise the intervention, or go to Level II Problem Solving when the intervention does not solve the problem. If the concern is moved to Level II, the teacher should review with the parent the cover letter (PSM-1b) and the Parent Questionnaire (PSM-1c). The PSM-1d form is given to the parent as a notification of possible screenings.



Purpose of Level II Problem Solving:

- ◆ To gather information about the severity of the problem.
- ◆ To re-define the problem.
- ◆ To develop and monitor new plans to address the problem.
- ◆ To get help from other teachers.
- ◆ To examine how behaviors interfere with school functioning.

When a parent and teacher are not successful at solving the problem, or the problem is determined to be too significant to address at Level I, additional resources are sought. Schools have created teams of teachers and other school personnel that function as a source of assistance to teachers, parents, and students. These are referred to by a variety of names such as Student Assistance Teams or Teacher Assistance Teams. These teams engage in the problem-solving process by defining, analyzing, and generating solutions, and designing interventions. These assistance teams consist of the child's parents and teacher, other teachers in the school, and local support staff (i.e. guidance counselor). Central Administrative staff or the student may also participate on the team, but their participation at this level is considered "Ad Hoc." They provide informal consultation and assistance, but they are not directly involved with development, implementation, or monitoring of the intervention. If more involvement is needed by central administrative staff at this time, or if the problem is considered too significant to address without additional resources, the problem solving should move directly to Level III.

Typical Level II Problem-Solving Activities:

Prior to the initial Level II meeting, the teacher completes the Pre-Conference Worksheet (PSM-2a) and sends the parent the Problem-Solving Team Invitation (PSM-2b). Documentation of Level II activities is on PSM-2d.

1. Define the problem

During the initial Level II meeting, the problem-solving team talks about the child's functioning and gathers information about the child's vision, hearing, health and attendance. Through discussion, the team further defines the problem. Screening information confirms the existence of discrepant academic skills or behavior compared to other children. It also identifies any medical or physiological deficit that may be impacting the problem. The team's screening process helps estimate the severity of the problem.

2. Develop a plan

The team then offers strategies that the classroom teacher can use to address the problem. Parents and teacher agree upon a reasonable intervention for addressing the problem. They determine the intervention by listing possible solutions based on information from the data collected. The team selects a solution that has a reasonable probability of success based on professional expertise and knowledge of effective practice. Solutions should be feasible and acceptable to the teacher and should be able to be implemented with integrity. An intervention plan is developed and should include procedures and strategies, person(s) responsible, objectives with specific criteria, methods of measuring outcomes, date(s) in which activities will occur, and documentation of parental participation.

3. Implement the plan

The teacher and other responsible individuals implement the intervention. At this level, collection of data on a regular basis is useful for decision making. Data collection methods that do not require outside assistance are most feasible at this level.

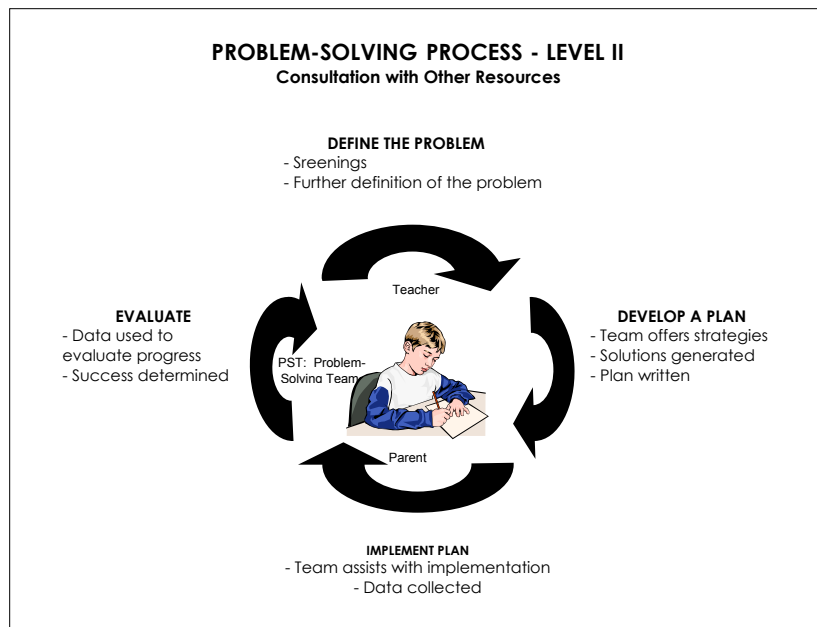
4. Evaluate effectiveness

If performance does not improve, the general education intervention is refined. This process recycles as often as needed. The team may decide to move to Level III Problem Solving if ongoing review of the problem indicates that change has not occurred at desired rates, when parents request involvement of additional resources, or when the team desires assistance in gaining new knowledge regarding the identified concern.

It is important to note that interventions at Level II need not involve all the specific components described on the following pages. (Those specific components are required for Level III interventions.) The intent at this level is to provide assistance quickly in an attempt to resolve the problem while the student's problem is less severe.

The following are indicators of when to consider moving from Level II to Level III:

- ◆ Anytime the Problem-Solving Team determines a need for more assistance to determine the appropriate resources for a student.
- ◆ If any “Red Flags” appear. A sample list of red flags (indicators of a need for intensive interventions) is included on the next page.
- ◆ If given the current plan, the student is not making anticipated progress and more assessment data is needed to determine the instructional changes that are needed.
- ◆ Problem-Solving Teams are cautioned not to wait too long until problems become very severe and stressful for those implementing the interventions.



Sample “Red Flags” for Going to Level III:

- ◆ Student moves in from another district or area with interventions or services having been provided in the past.
- ◆ Student moves in and appears to have had very different instruction, has gaps in learning, or comes from an area with different standards.
- ◆ Parent requests an evaluation for special education.
- ◆ More specialized assessment data is needed to determine the cause of the problem.
- ◆ Student has been referred to the problem-solving team a number of times and specific strategies or specific instruction has been provided.
- ◆ Student has had significant medical trauma or mental health concerns or issues.
- ◆ Below 10th percentile on standardized group tests or CBM.
- ◆ Student requires excessive individualized instruction, reteaching, and one to one assistance.
- ◆ Student does not meet grade level standards and benchmarks in more than one academic area.
- ◆ Student appears unable to participate in any academic activities.
- ◆ Student is potentially harmful to self or others.
- ◆ Behavior consistently interferes with learning of self or others in the classroom.
- ◆ Behavior significantly disrupts the classroom’s functioning.
- ◆ Severe behavior problems have been exhibited over time.
- ◆ Disciplinary or office referrals occur on a regular basis.

Purpose of Level III Extended Problem Solving:

- ◆ Additional support from administrative staff.
- ◆ Assist teacher(s) in gaining new knowledge regarding the identified concern.
- ◆ In-depth problem analysis requiring assessment and further data collection.
- ◆ Document plans and assist with ongoing data collection.
- ◆ Measure effectiveness of interventions in solving the problem.
- ◆ Assist with decision making and making instructional changes.
- ◆ Determine need for additional resources.

When a problem is complex in nature, it may require additional resources. Support personnel such as school psychologists, educational consultants, school social workers, and direct service personnel (i.e., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and early childhood specialists) may be added to the problem-solving team. The intent continues to be the provision of interventions in order to help the student be successful in the general education environment. A school psychologist, speech-language pathologist or curriculum specialist will act as the primary manager and will assist with documentation, intervention design, implementation, and follow-up. Reviews, interviews, observations and testing will be done to further define and analyze the problem. Interventions are designed and data are gathered frequently to evaluate effectiveness.

Parent input continues to be a critical component at Level III. As illustrated earlier, Levels II and III of the problem-solving model overlap and are connected. There is a primary distinction between Levels II and III problem solving. At Level III, more specialized personnel (both from inside and outside of the school) are significantly involved as members of the extended problem-solving team.

Typical Level III Problem-Solving Activities:

1. Define the problem

At Level III, the Extended Problem-Solving Team reviews all information. Several activities are completed to fully define the problem.

Identify Initial Concern: Derive a general description of the problem or the current difficulty the student is having. All concerns are noted at this time, but if the student is exhibiting multiple problem areas, behaviors should be prioritized and a primary target behavior or behaviors selected. A single behavior of concern should be identified unless a single behavior does not accurately represent the problem.

Define the behavior of concern: Define the problem behavior in concrete, observable, terms. It should be clear and recognizable by observers and should include examples and nonexamples of the behavior of concern.

Validate the problem: This requires the use of a standard so that comparisons can be made between what the student is actually doing in relation to what is expected. This serves as the foundation for determining a discrepancy and the magnitude of the problem.

Analyze the problem: Assessment questions are formulated to find out what we need to know to design an intervention plan. This includes looking at the domains of the learner, instruction, curriculum, and environment. A hypothesis statement is generated. This statement attempts to establish an assumed cause for the problem and answer the question, “why is the behavior occurring?” Predictions about what will reduce the problem are made and assessment procedures are used to validate them until an intervention is indicated. More than one problem may be identified. Interventions must be sufficiently comprehensive to address all of the child’s identified needs.

Write a problem statement: Write a problem statement that includes a specific behavior, a description of the dimensions of behavior, a description of the setting dimensions, and a statement describing the discrepancy and its significance.

2. Develop a plan

The extended problem-solving team develops a written intervention plan based on the assessment data that has been gathered up to this point.

Generate possible solutions: This step requires the team to use the information gathered from the problem analysis. Based on the hypothesis and validated prediction, the team should have specific guidance as to what intervention has the highest likelihood of success.

Evaluate the solutions: Potential solutions should consider alterable variables, feasibility, teacher skills, and the likelihood of success. Resources to conduct the intervention must be considered and a solution must be selected that is reasonable within the general education environment. If special education resources are to be used, very short focused involvement should be planned.

Select a solution: When selecting a reasonable solution, it is important to take into account the feasibility that the teacher can or will implement the plan with integrity. Plans that can not be implemented the way they were designed will not generate much, if any, usable information for decision making at a later time.

Collect Baseline Data: A measurement strategy for collecting data should be identified and used to measure the behavior. Repeated collection of pre-intervention data will be useful in future problem analysis and intervention design.

Set a Goal: Write a goal including the time frame, conditions, behavior, and criterion. Previous data should be considered utilizing a standard to establish expected progress (i.e., peer performance, teacher expectations).

Write an Intervention Plan: The intervention plan should clearly identify procedures and instructional strategies to be used. Arrangements such as where and when the plan will be implemented and the materials needed to carry out the plan should be delineated. Persons responsible for all aspects of the plan are identified. It is essential that this plan is written and available to all individuals directly involved in the implementation of the plan.

Select Measurement Strategy: The earlier measurement strategy should again be utilized with methods of data collection, measurement conditions, and a clearly identified monitoring schedule.

Develop a Plan to Evaluate Effectiveness: A decision-making plan with frequent data collection should be identified also with strategies for summarizing the data for evaluation. The number of data points or length of time before data analysis occurs should be agreed upon and a decision rule should be selected to guide the team in determining the need for instructional changes.

3. Implement a plan

The intervention plan should be implemented as designed with modifications based on data analysis and in collaboration with other implementers. Implementation of the plan will require ongoing support, technical assistance, resource linking, design review,

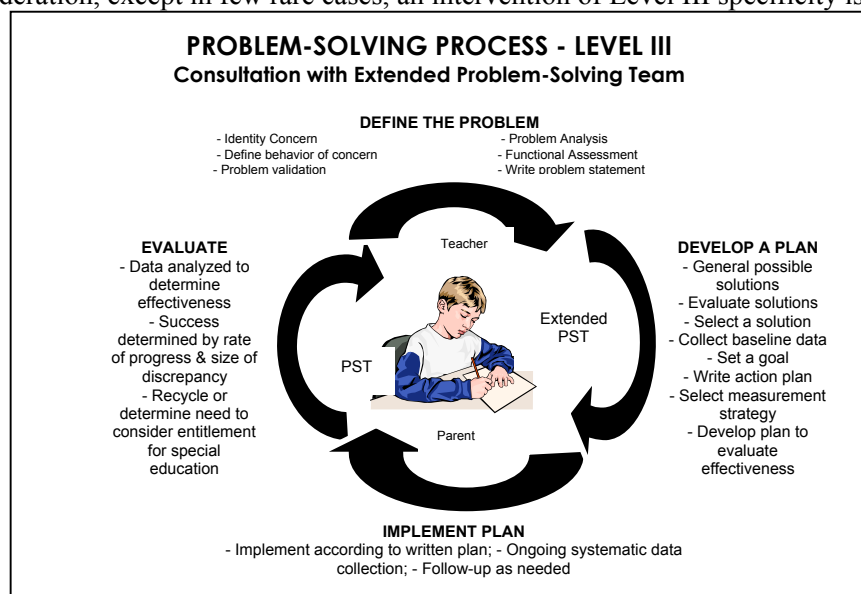
troubleshooting, positive reinforcement for the implementers, and data collection and/or analysis. All implemented plans should be progress monitored. Progress monitoring includes regular and frequent data collection with recording/graphing of the results. Data should be systematically analyzed so that modifications may be implemented as needed. There should also be a planned review of the results to formulate conclusions and outcome decisions.

4. Evaluate effectiveness

To determine the intervention's effectiveness, the decision-making plan should be used at the identified frequency. It is important to consider not only the student's level of performance, but to also consider the rate of the student's progress. Possible outcomes when evaluating an intervention include:

- ◆ The discrepancy between the expected and observed behavior of the student no longer exists. The student no longer needs the instructional strategies identified as components of the intervention plan. The student is expected to benefit from instruction in general education without significant modifications or adaptations.
- ◆ The student is making progress toward the established goal, but continues to need the intervention in order to maintain the current rate of progress.
- ◆ The student is not making progress at the rate expected and the plan needs to be revised or modified in order to obtain the expected rate of progress. The purpose of ongoing, frequent progress monitoring is to provide the necessary data for making instructional changes when they are warranted. A successful intervention may have multiple phases as changes (based on data) are made. It may also be determined that entitlement to special education should be considered.
- ◆ One other possible outcome may be that the intervention is successful but the resources needed to maintain the intervention are beyond what can be reasonably continued in general education. This may also warrant consideration for special education.

When an ongoing review of the problem indicates change has occurred more slowly than needed to "close the gap" with peers or when resources needed for treatment plans are more than can be expected solely through general education, it is time to consider moving to Level IV and entitlement. It is important to note that if entitlement for special education is under consideration, except in few rare cases, an intervention of Level III specificity is used.



The Purpose of Level IV Problem Solving:

- ◆ Ensure student receives due process rights. (Handbook on Parents' Rights)
- ◆ Summarize all information collected and collect any additional information needed.
- ◆ Consider additional interventions or consider entitlement for special education.
- ◆ If entitled to special education, develop IEP, monitor and revise IEP when needed.

When ongoing evaluation of the problem indicates that expected progress is not being made and resources beyond general education are needed, entitlement for special education may be considered. The results of all interventions and any screenings or assessments are summarized. Additional assessments are done to determine appropriate interventions and services.

When moving to Level IV, the extended problem-solving team acknowledges that special education resources may be warranted. Much of the information necessary for the special education entitlement decision has been gathered throughout Problem-Solving Levels I, II, and III. At Level IV, the protections to children under IDEA are provided. One of these protections involves obtaining written permission from parents to have their child evaluated with the intent to determine special education entitlement. After permission is obtained, additional information needed to assist the learner may be gathered. Parents, teachers, and central administrative staff review all of the information to determine eligibility and need for special education.

By law, parents may request a “full and individual evaluation” to determine special education eligibility for their child at any time during the problem-solving process. Each request shall be considered carefully by the extended problem-solving team. A meeting with parents should be held to examine the existing data and determine the interventions needed for the student. More information regarding the response to parent requests for evaluation can be found in the “Parents’ Rights Handbook.”

Typical Level IV Problem-Solving Activities:

1. Define the Problem

The extended problem-solving team summarizes all of the information gathered throughout the problem-solving process. Additional areas of concern may need to be considered at this time. Assessment questions are generated to guide additional assessments and information needed for entitlement decision. This information is sent to parents in a team summary report. The team summary report reflects how the special education assessment is related to the initial concern and the relevance of the concern to the student’s educational need.

2. Develop a Plan

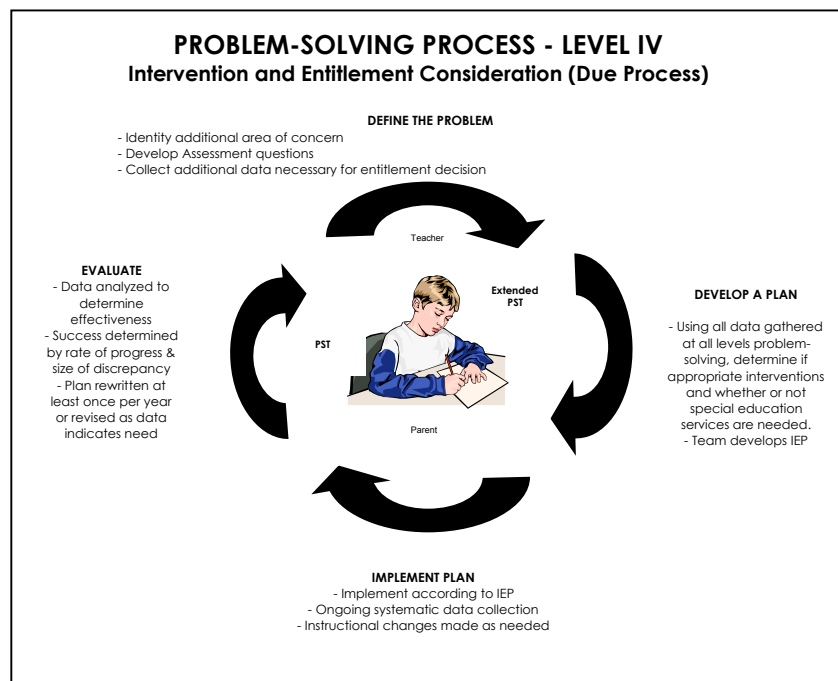
At Level IV, the primary case manager summarizes all of the information gathered throughout problem solving. Qualified professionals and parents meet to discuss the learner’s needs and whether the child is eligible for and in need of special education. If it is determined that the child is entitled to special education, the group of people assembled to discuss the child’s needs must consist of an LEA representative, parent, general education teacher, special education teacher, and someone who can interpret the instructional implications of the evaluation results, who may be one of the other required members. The IEP team must consider a continuum of program services to meet the child’s needs and develop an Individual Education Program (IEP) which outlines the intervention to be implemented. A child cannot, initially, be placed into special education without written consent from parents, nor can his or her special education placement be changed without providing written notice to parents.

3. Implement the Plan

Performance of students in special education programs needs to be monitored frequently. Instructional decisions are based on the data collected. All protections under IDEA and state rules of special education need to be followed whenever significant changes to the student's instructional program are considered.

4. Evaluate Effectiveness

Although performance should be monitored on a regular basis, the student's IEP is reviewed formally at least once a year. Emphasis should be placed on the following: the student's progress toward his or her goal, the level of discrepancy between the student and his or her regular education peers, the student's independence in the goal area, as well as potential revisions to the intervention. Revisions to the student's program are made with an emphasis on determining when the student is ready to exit special education.



Case Coordination/Service Coordination within the Problem-Solving Approach:

Case coordination (or service coordination) begins when resolution of a presenting problem requires the services or involvement of more than one professional or agency. Since the problem-solving approach requires organization of resources to assist learners, case coordination provides a point person to ensure continuity and learner success. Case coordination is critical throughout the continuum of services provided to students and their parents. The case coordinator/service coordinator is the person who (1) identifies and contacts the central staff team members and school team members needed to support the student, (2) serves as the liaison between the school program and outside agencies providing services to the student, and (3) ensures that the required paperwork is completed professionally and in a timely manner. The case coordinator and the activities associated with coordination may change as teams work through the problem-solving process.

Level I

Consultation Between Teacher-Parent

In most cases the classroom teacher serves as the case manager when parents and teachers share concerns and solutions. The case manager supports the family by defining the problem, the intended results of Level I support, and timelines. The case manager ensures that the Problem-Solving Team paperwork is completed if it appears that Level II support is needed.

Level II

Consultation With Other Resources

A school staff member, designated by the principal or designee, will assume the role of case manager when building level interventions are being conducted. In many cases, the classroom teacher serves as the case manager at Level II.

At Level II, the case manager ensures that vision, health, and/or hearing difficulties are not contributing to the identified problem. The case manager calls the parents, invites the parents to meetings, facilitates parent input, notifies others of meeting times, and of meeting outcomes. The case manager ensures that interventions are documented.

Level III

Consultation With Extended Problem-Solving Team

At Level III, the assistance of staff outside of the school may be used in the process of problem solving. The primary case manager is usually a school psychologist or curriculum specialist who is assigned based on student and family needs using the guidelines listed below. The primary case manager is responsible for:

- ◆ Ensuring that parents, teachers, and central staff know times and locations of meetings.
- ◆ Ensuring that all participants understand the purpose of the meeting.
- ◆ Ensuring that health, vision, and hearing have been screened prior to extended problem solving, and that effects of any corrective action on the problem are monitored.
- ◆ Documenting intervention implementation, monitoring, and decisions made about the effects of intervention.
- ◆ Engaging the other members of the team as needed in problem analysis, assessment, and intervention design.
- ◆ Ensuring that the presenting problem was appropriately and thoroughly analyzed.
- ◆ Facilitating communication and securing appropriate consents for release of information between parents, schools, LEAs, and other agencies.
- ◆ Coordinating completion of documentation so all components of an intervention are reflected. These components include: problem statement (including defined behavior, dimensions of behavior, and discrepancy between expected and actual student performance), goal statement (written in measurable, observable terms), parent participation, level of performance before intervention, procedures and arrangements, measurement strategy, decision-making plan, level of performance after intervention, and summary of outcome data (as documented on the Interventions Summary form).

Level IV

Intervention and Entitlement Considerations

In most cases the staff member who served as primary case manager at Level III will continue those duties at Level IV when entitlement for special education is considered. The duties and responsibilities of the case manager are:

- ◆ Providing the parent the Handbook on Parents' Rights and documenting receipt.
- ◆ Reviewing records and consulting with appropriate staff to ensure that health, hearing, and vision concerns were screened and addressed prior to Level II or III intervention.
- ◆ Facilitating discussions with team members to determine if there are additional assessment questions that need to be answered through Level IV evaluations.

- ◆ Verifying that consent forms are signed, as appropriate, for obtaining reports from agencies or professionals not employed by LEA.
- ◆ Coordinating completion of the Evaluation Plan with all necessary staff.
- ◆ Completing all necessary paperwork for entitlement evaluation including Interventions Summary, Intervention Plan, and Evaluation Plan.
- ◆ Assisting school in coordinating date and time for meeting so that members of the staffing team (including parents) can attend.
- ◆ Ensuring that meeting notice letter is sent to parents and other staff in a timely manner.
- ◆ Ensuring that assessment questions are answered and summarized in a timely manner.
- ◆ Summarizing, as appropriate, the results of the Evaluation report at the entitlement staffing.
- ◆ Attending staffing and facilitating the completion of the Parent Notice form and, when needed, the Individualized Education Program.

Other team members:

- ◆ Participate in plan development for full and individual evaluation.
- ◆ Assist in completion of necessary assessments.
- ◆ Attend staffing if your services are related to a potential goal.
- ◆ Attend staffing if you have information that would assist in IEP development.