Gria Davison, School Social Work Consultant

“I don't want my life to be defined by what is etched on a tombstone. I want it to be defined in what is etched in the lives and hearts of those I've touched.”
– Steve Maraboli

The student services, school social work, and educational communities lost an articulate voice and passionate advocate when Gria Davison, School Social Work Consultant and respected member of the Student Support Services team, unexpectedly died in September. Gria was an inspirational leader who dedicated nearly 30 years of service advancing the welfare of children and families; first, as a school social worker in Duval county and later as the state School Social Work Consultant with the Student Support Services Project.

Born in New Orleans, Gria graduated from Xavier University with a B.A. in Social Work and subsequently earned a Masters of Social Work (MSW) degree from Louisiana State University in 1982. After completing her Masters degree, Gria moved to Jacksonville, Florida, and began her school social work career with the Duval County School District. Gria moved to Tallahassee in 1995 to join the Student Support Services Project (USF) as the state consultant for school social work in the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education. The move was mutually beneficial; the project was enriched by Gria’s professionalism, energy, and charisma and it was through a work-related activity that Gria met her husband Rick. Tallahassee and the Student Support Services Project became Gria’s “home,” and she served as the School Social Work Consultant for more than 18 years.

In her tenure as School Social Work Consultant, Gria embraced numerous leadership roles at the Florida Department of Education serving as the Department’s representative on the Florida Death Review Committee, multiple interagency workgroups, and various School Social Work Boards and Councils including the Florida Association of School Social Workers. Gria played instrumental roles in planning the state and national attendance symposium, developing the Child Abuse Prevention Sourcebook, and developing state-approved evaluation models for student services and specialized ESE personnel. Her recent collaboration with the Department of Children and Families to facilitate access to educational records of foster care children received national recognition. Gria is the voice of MTSS for Florida families at http://www.florida-rti.org/parentResources/videos.htm.

Though an accomplished professional, Gria’s life was not defined by what she did, but by who she was... a woman of character, strength, and faith... a dedicated mother and wife... a cherished colleague, co-worker, confidant, and friend. A valued member of the Student Support Services “family,” her voice and contagious laughter would light up the office and our lives. Full of life, she lived a life that shined on her family, friends, and colleagues. Gria had a “presence” about her that evoked admiration and respect. When she was in a room, everyone knew she was there without her speaking a word; but to be truthful, she didn't go long without speaking and when she spoke it was worth listening to. For those who were privileged to know her, Gria was one of those once in a lifetime individuals who blessed each person she touched and whose touch is etched in the lives and hearts of many.

In fond memory of our friend, colleague, and children’s advocate:
“The song is ended, but the melody lingers on...” – Irving Berlin
What is “Special” about Special Education

Well, this question has been expressed, received, and answered with a variety of interpretations since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 2004. The IDEA made it clear that students with disabilities are to be considered first, foremost, and always as general education students who may or may not (depending on evidence of need) be eligible for special education and related services and receive specially designed instruction. But have you ever wondered, in light of all students having their behavioral and academic needs met within an effective multi-tiered system of support, what exactly is meant by specially designed instruction and how it is alike or different from core instruction (Tier 1), supplemental (Tier 2), and intensive interventions (Tier 3)?

We did! At first we wondered to ourselves, then we wondered in whispers among each other, later we became bold and wondered out loud at the Administrators’ Management Meeting (AMM) 2012. During that meeting, several of us committed to working through this question and publishing clarifying guidance for district and school implementation. The question certainly seemed simple enough, yet it was one full year later that we were able to actually deliver the product at AMM 2013. As it turned out, this simple question opened the floodgate of interpretations, REinterpretations, and, even plain old MISinterpretations of IDEA, MTSS, RtI, special education eligibility requirement, scheduling, placement, teacher qualifications, IEPs, assessments, and state standards. And so it goes with this ever-evolving and complex profession that we love...

We became so unruly and chaotic in our attempt to sort this out that we eventually became silent and drifting. Then, thank the educator spirits, one brave voice among us said, “We need an anchor. Let’s go back to the definition of specially designed instruction in IDEA.”

The IDEA regulations define specially designed instruction as adaptations to the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction that

- address the unique needs of a child that results from the child’s disability, and
- ensure access to the general education curriculum so that the child can meet education standards that apply to all children (34 Code of Federal Regulations §300.39(b)(3)).

These are guaranteed by IDEA and implemented in accordance with the IEP process.

Once anchored by federal law, several big ideas became important to us:

- Specially designed instruction exists WITHIN the multi-tiered system of supports; it is not above the triangle, below the triangle, or on a separate page.
- The primary purpose of specially designed instruction is to remove and/or reduce barriers to learning that are related directly to a disability.
- The primary purpose of intensive instruction is to remove and/or reduce barriers to learning other than an identified disability (e.g., opportunity to learn, insufficient instruction, barriers that may be contextual or language related).
- The pedagogy required within a multi-tiered system amounts to whatever the student needs—based on his or her
response to instruction/intervention data. Likewise, the pedagogy of specially designed instruction amounts to whatever the student needs. Therefore, the pedagogy may look exactly the same for a student with a disability sitting next to a non-disabled peer when both students have the same instructional/intervention needs.

♦ We MUST stop organizing our professional thoughts, resources, and efforts around categories of students and instead organize around levels/types of instruction and interventions based on intensity of student need. Whether a student has an IEP or not, a certain kind of disability or not, or is learning in a certain kind of room or not, all students are general education students who have varying levels of need and those needs are resourced and documented in a variety of ways and with varying types of procedural requirements (i.e. progress monitoring plans, IEPs).

♦ We have the same goal for all students, which is that they become happy, healthy, and contributing adults in OUR collective world. That means, we had better make sure that teaming to ultimately ensure successful access to general education standards happens early and consistently throughout their schooling experiences.

♦ One more thing...We decided that all of us had better stop haggling over the minutia and focus on identifying and analyzing the big problems, the resources/barriers, planning and doing, and evaluating the impact of our efforts.

♦ If you haven’t already read the document titled What’s Special about Special Education? Specially Designed Instruction for Students with Disabilities within a Multi-tiered System of Support we encourage you to do so at http://sss.usf.edu/resources/format/pdf/specially_designed_instruction.pdf.

Child Abuse Reporting Web-Based Training Course

The Florida legislature revised section 1012.98, Florida Statutes (F.S.) to require teachers in grades 1–12 to participate in continuing education training provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) on identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. The Student Support Services Project (SSSP) team at the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) worked with DCF to develop the content for the course, which follows the FDOE’s Child Abuse Prevention Sourcebook for Florida School Personnel: A Tool for Reporting Abuse and Supporting the Child.

Child abuse is a barrier to students’ learning, mental and physical health, and safety. We suggest that districts take responsibility for preventative, universal supports to schools, such as the child abuse prevention course, in their efforts to reduce and eliminate barriers to learning. Strengthening the effectiveness of universal supports (Tier 1 of a multi-tiered system of supports for learning) decreases the resources needed for more intense levels of support, which is the most efficient way to allocate resources.
for maximum learning outcomes.

To access the Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect online training course, visit [http://www3.fl-dcf.org/RCAAN/](http://www3.fl-dcf.org/RCAAN/).

Since the implementation of this law, several districts have raised questions regarding local implementation issues. Although the law does not provide explicit details for implementation, our SSSP team offers the following responses and suggestions to the most frequently asked questions regarding s. 1012.98, F.S., School Community Professional Development Act.

1. **Is the web-based course developed by the FDOE and the SSSP team and provided by DCF mandated or may a school district use their own training?**

   Section 1012.98(12), F.S., requires the use of the online training course provided by DCF.

2. **How often should educators be required to take the web-based course?**

   FDOE suggests that districts consider a training schedule that would support their districtwide priorities and goals related to child abuse prevention. The schedule of training should ensure at a minimum that all new teachers complete the training during their orientation.

3. **Are districts required to track the training?**

   This law does not require tracking the participation of school staff. However, school districts may track staff professional development in compliance with other sections of law related to professional development and school improvement plans. Since a tracking system is provided with the web-based course, districts may want to consider using this tool for documentation purposes.

4. **How much time do districts have to implement this law?**

   Since the effective date of the law was October 1, 2012, the FDOE suggests that the initial teacher trainings and documentation of completion should have been completed as of June 30, 2012.

5. **Does this law require that school staff (i.e., aides, bus drivers, counselors, office staff) other than teachers receive the training?**

   The law currently specifies that the web-based training is required for teachers in grades 1–12. However, the FDOE suggests that districts consider broadening the child abuse reporting training audience to other school personnel who have high frequency contact with students. This may include pre-kindergarten teachers, kindergarten teachers, media specialists, support services personnel, and other non-instructional personnel.

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**Student Progression**

**Senate Bill 1076**

In order to assist school districts with the implementation of Senate Bill 1076, the FDOE provided the following resources:

- [2013–2014 School Year Information](#) (revised memorandum)
- [K-12 Technical Assistance Frequently Asked Questions for Senate Bill 1076](#)
Academic Advisement Flyers – What Parents and Students Need to Know

◊ Students Entering Grade Nine in the 2010–2011 School Year
◊ Students Entering Grade Nine in the 2011–2012 School Year
◊ Students Entering Grade Nine in the 2012–2013 School Year
◊ Students Entering Grade Nine in the 2013–2014 School Year

We have received several specific questions and we are working closely with all stakeholders to clarify provisions during the 2014 legislative session.

Diploma Designations

Students may earn one or more designations on their standard high school diploma: the scholar designation and the merit designation. Students are encouraged, but are not required, to work toward a designation. The requirements for both designations are in addition to the 24-credit program requirements.

The requirements for a scholar designation include the following:

♦ Meet standard high school diploma requirements based on the year the student entered ninth grade
♦ Pass the ELA Grade 11 Common Core Assessment once implemented
♦ Earn one credit in Algebra 2 and pass the Algebra 2 EOC Common Core Assessment once implemented
♦ Earn one credit in statistics or an equally rigorous mathematics course
♦ Pass the Biology 1 EOC Assessment
♦ Earn one credit in chemistry or physics
♦ Earn one credit in a course equally rigorous to chemistry or physics
♦ Pass the U.S. History EOC Assessment
♦ Earn two credits in the same world language
♦ Earn at least one credit in AP, IB, AICE, or a dual enrollment course

The requirements of a merit designation include the following:

♦ Meet standard high school diploma requirements based on the year the student entered ninth grade
♦ Attain one or more industry certifications from the list established under s. 1003.492, F.S.

Statewide Assessment

The FDOE released a memorandum, dated November 1, 2013, New Postsecondary Education Readiness Test Mathematics Comparative Score for the Algebra 1 End-of-Course Assessment. The new score that may be used to satisfy the Algebra 1 EOC Assessment portion of a student’s graduation requirements is a score of 97 on the mathematics portion of the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT). Additional guidance may be obtained in the Graduation Requirements for Florida Statewide Assessments.

Changes to College Ready Cut Scores

A memorandum, dated October 18, 2013, provides information on the Revision to State Board of Education Rule 6A-10.0315, Common Placement. In part, it revises the college ready cut scores. The following chart is applicable for tests administered on or after 10/22/13:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.E.R.T.</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>440</td>
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<td>Verbal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT (Enhanced)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>English</td>
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Grade 10 FCAT 2.0 Reading score of 262 demonstrates college readiness for college-level course work in reading and writing.

For questions related to student progression, please contact Helen Lancashire at hlancash@usf.edu.

School Safety Leadership Symposium

Notes from our Safe Schools & Student Services Partnership

On November 8–10, 2013, Leon County Public Schools hosted their first School Safety Leadership Symposium in San Destin, Florida. Approximately 250 school safety and security representatives, school-based staff, and district leaders (including several Panhandle Superintendents) from across the state met to bring awareness to issues of school violence and address challenges in responding to school emergencies.

Lt. General (retired) Russel L. Honoré set the tone with an opening keynote session sharing a wealth of leadership lessons, along with the benefits of developing a culture of preparedness. His message supports the idea that “waiting until disaster hits and then responding is dealing with problems on the ‘right side’ of disaster and that we should be dealing with the ‘left side’ of disaster—before it happens.” Included in his challenge to all leaders is the idea that sometimes the “rules” prevent us from doing what needs to be done. We need to be willing to take a step back and use common sense instead of strictly adhering to rules without thought. One example he provided illustrated how meaningless compliance with procedures can become in unexpected circumstances.

Equally as compelling were two sessions led by Dr. Dewey Cornell, Director of the University of Virginia’s Virginia Youth Violence Project (youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu). Dr. Cornell is a professor of education and a forensic clinical psychologist who has 30 years of experience in psychological and educational research and has conducted
clinical evaluations of hundreds of violent offenders. Dr. Cornell posed the age-old question: How do we show that prevention works? His ongoing research involves a study of how bullying and youth violence in schools affects student achievement. When it comes to school-based incidents, our failures are public and our successes are private and, typically, nobody wants to hear about what did not happen. Dr. Cornell and his colleagues have developed a behavioral threat assessment tool entitled “Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence,” which has recently been added to the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. The guidelines help educators construct a complete picture of the threat by looking at key factors—social, family, academic—to facilitate a safe school environment and prevent acts of violence. Several key “take-aways” from his sessions include:

♦ Despite what the media promotes, violent crime is really not on the rise (it peaked in about 1993).
♦ Making a threat is not the same as posing a threat.
♦ Liability is determined by the process, not the outcome. Did you meet and follow the standard of care?

As we engage in interdisciplinary partnerships to increase to well-being of school communities and each individual within every community, opportunities to share expertise and systematically problem-solve are crucial. We look forward to the impact that the symposium has on the collective prioritization of positive school climate in Florida.

Welcome...

The SSSP and the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (PS/ RtI) welcomes Dr. Jayna Jenkins as the MTSS Liaison to the FDOE.

In this role, Jayna will be coordinating and facilitating state-wide efforts for implementing a unified, integrated, data-based multi-tiered system of supports for the PS/RtI Project, SSSP, and the FDOE.

Jayna previously served as MTSS Specialist with the PS/RtI Project in collaboration with the FDOE’s Bureau of School Improvement. She worked with Differentiated Accountability teams to provide training and technical assistance to build capacity with district and school leaders in data-based problem-solving, school improvement planning and implementation. Jayna served as a district RtI Trainer and classroom teacher in Brevard County as well as adjunct instructor at Brevard Community College. The experience above has allowed her to collaborate, co-author, and deliver several professional development opportunities for teachers, coaches, administrators, and district and state staff throughout Florida.

We welcome you to introduce yourself to Jayna. She may be reached at jayna@usf.edu or 850-245-7851.
Connections & Integrations

The Problem Solving Process and School Improvement Planning

In an effort to support the capacity of schools to provide a multi-tiered system of supports for all students, the Florida Bureau of School Improvement recently implemented an online application to guide school and district-level problem solving and planning processes throughout the school year. This application also supports improvement planning by providing a way to organize strategies and resources that will lead to increased student achievement.

Rule 6A-1.099811, approved by the State Board of Education July 18, 2013, outlined required district improvement plan components for Focus and Priority schools. The District Improvement and Assistance Plan, a companion document to the School Improvement Plan (SIP), was developed by the State Board of Education as a means to problem-solve and monitor progress toward district and school level improvement goals.

Embedded in the school improvement planning process in the 2013–2014 school year, the eight-step Small Group Planning and Problem Solving process is a structured process designed to assist leadership to

- effectively create and monitor plans that are focused on instructional practices and collaborative systems, through strategic goal identification and associated action plans;
- identify root causes and barriers to assist in targeted action planning;
- bring focus to planning and monitoring by assisting schools to develop a few goals designed to reduce barriers to many instructional targets;
- use both qualitative and quantitative data to measure progress toward goals and action plans throughout the school year;
- connect professional development plans to school improvement planning; and
- monitor fidelity of implementation of plans as well as effectiveness of plans.

The problem solving process adapted for the SIP is as follows:

1. Identify goal(s) to help you achieve your targets.
2. Brainstorm available resources and potential barriers; analyze and prioritize barriers.
3. Choose a barrier to address based on alterable elements of curriculum, instruction, environment, organizational system and actionable impact.
4. Brainstorm and prioritize strategies to reduce or eliminate each barrier.
5. Identify action steps (who, what, when, evidence of completion) to implement strategies.
6. Determine how strategies will be monitored for fidelity of implementation (who, what, when, evidence of completion).
7. Determine how strategies will be monitored for effectiveness (who, what, when, evidence of completion).
8. Identify goal(s) to help you achieve your targets.

Repeat 3-7 for each barrier before step 8.

STEP 1. Identify goal(s) to help you achieve your targets

STEP 2. Brainstorm available resources and potential barriers; analyze and prioritize barriers

STEP 3. Choose a barrier to address based on alterable elements of curriculum, instruction, environment, organizational system and actionable impact

STEP 4. Brainstorm and prioritize strategies to reduce or eliminate each barrier

STEP 5. Identify action steps (who, what, when, evidence of completion) to implement strategies

STEP 6. Determine how strategies will be monitored for fidelity of implementation (who, what, when, evidence of completion)

STEP 7. Determine how strategies will be monitored for effectiveness (who, what, when, evidence of completion)

STEP 8. Determine how progress toward each goal will be monitored (who, what, when, evidence of completion)
3. Choose a barrier to address based on alterable elements of curriculum, instruction, environment, organizational systems, and actionable impact.

4. Brainstorm and prioritize strategies to reduce or eliminate each barrier.

5. Identify action steps (who, what, when, evidence of completion) to implement strategies.

6. Determine how strategies will be monitored for fidelity of implementation (who, what, when, evidence of completion).

7. Determine how strategies will be monitored for effectiveness (who, what, when, evidence of completion).

8. Determine how progress toward each goal will be monitored (who, what, when, evidence of completion).

In an effort to support the implementation, staff from Florida’s PS/RtI Project provided training for regional Differentiated Accountability (DA) Teams in facilitating the eight-step Planning and Problem Solving Process. The DA staff are building capacity for problem solving with leadership in Florida’s underperforming schools by assisting the school improvement planning process.

For more information on data-based problem solving, see http://www.floridarti.usf.edu.


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Highlights from the Field

Catch The Civility Wave Of Change

Cynthia Williams, Assistant Principal
St. Johns Technical High School
St. Johns County, Florida

The St. Johns County School District is taking civility seriously and reaping the rewards by piloting a civility program at St. Johns Technical High School (SJTH), a middle and senior high campus. The program is called Operation Hedgehog: Civility for the 21st Century for Teens. The civility education curriculum uses a three-tier approach for teaching civility through reading, manners, and acts of kindness.

Operation Hedgehog was implemented during the 2012–2013 school year and is continuing for the 2013–2014 school year. SJTH Principal, Wayne King, stated “Basically the vision for Operation Hedgehog stems from the idea of creating awareness and appreciation through our curriculum. ... We do many activities in the community that help reflect the values that we see through a lot of the books that we’ve become engaged with through Operation Hedgehog. It’s been a marvelous connection on our campus. It has made themes within those books relevant to what we are doing. And it has in many cases helped with the culture of our campus. It’s been a profound partnership for the last year. Appreciation and awareness are concepts that are very difficult to teach. By utilizing Operation Hedgehog we have accomplished this with students at St. Johns Technical.”

For more information on data-based problem solving, see http://www.floridarti.usf.edu.

Principal King recognized his staff’s contributions to the success of the civility education program at a recent event featuring a personal appearance by author of *Soul Surfer*, Bethany Hamilton (pictured below).

It was a surprise visit for students participating in the program from Clay County and St. Johns County. Bethany inspired students to persevere through difficult times and to never give up on their dreams. Principal King honored Success Coach Tammy Hardin, the vision and passion behind the activities, like acts of kindness; Media Specialist Jeanine Livingstone, who supported the importance of the Operation Hedgehog books to motivate students to read; and language arts teacher Cindy Stinson, who designed lesson plans aligned with Common Core Standards incorporating the Operation Hedgehog books, and who taught students the program’s professional etiquette skills for the business world. (pictured on the right, a group of student participants).

Currently, Denise Faulk, Director of Guidance and Choice, St. Johns County School District, is exploring ways to implement the Operation Hedgehog civility education program at additional schools in the district. The Clay County School District is expanding the civility program for 2013–2014 by making Operation Hedgehog available to all their middle schools.

This year SJTH is pleased to continue this partnership as we strive to remove all obstacles to learning for our students.

Operation Hedgehog Contact:
Amy Barnett
amy@edgeonbusiness.com
904-612-5031
http://www.21stedge.com

**Upcoming Events**

**Northeast Florida Educational Consortium (NEFEC), Annual Counselors Forum, January 14, 2014, Gainesville, FL, contact:**
Anna Rossano-Arnold, 386-329-3855, arnolda@nefec.org
Connecting Research on Language and Literacy to Practice, January 24–25, 2014, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, for more information visit http://rel-se.fsu.edu/

Southeast Research to Practice Bridge Event

Connecting Research on Language and Literacy to Practice

January 24–25, 2014

Fort Lauderdale Marriott Coral Springs Hotel
11775 Heron Bay Boulevard
Coral Springs, Florida 33076

Bridge Event Goals
1. Examine research findings on the causes and identification of reading disabilities;
2. Review evidence based reading, writing, and language interventions;
3. Discuss the measurement of reading growth; and
4. Provide opportunities for participants to interact with researchers about the needs of their students, schools, or districts.

Sessions are chaired by REL Southeast members of the research alliance on improving literacy. Presenters are Florida State University faculty members and former FSU faculty members funded by IES Reading for Understanding grants and by an NICHD Learning Disabilities Center grant: Drs. Chris Lonigan, Rick Wagner, Barbara Foorman, Carol Connor, Stephanie Al Otaiba, Jeannie Wanzek, Young-Suk Kim, Beth Phillips, Chris Schatschneider, Yaacov Petscher, Hugh Catts, Kenn Apel, Sara Hart, and Deborah Reed. Teachers in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach County School Districts may submit for inservice points from their district for participation in this event.

To register for this cutting-edge bridge event on applying literacy research to practice, please visit rel-se.fsu.edu.

Student Services Week—February 3–7, 2014

We are pleased to announce that February 3–7, 2014, is established as Student Services Week in the state of Florida. This provides an opportunity for school personnel to focus attention on the support services that are provided by school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, school psychologists, and career education staff.

Student Services programs are an integral part of the total public education system and support the state’s multi-tiered system of support. Student Services professionals work together to assist students in acquiring the knowledge, understandings, and competencies needed to master the state standards and make well-reasoned and healthy lifelong decisions. It is important to recognize that academic performance is impacted by developmental factors (i.e., readiness and parental involvement) and school and community factors (i.e., safe school environment, learning environment, teachers, and staff). Removing or reducing barriers and providing learning supports are necessary to ensure that students can access and engage in effective instruction.

An extensive and growing body of research demonstrates the value of providing supportive programs and services in order to increase student achievement. In turn, addressing the mental, emotional, behavioral, social, and physical health needs of students enhances school attendance, reduces behavior problems, and improves interpersonal skills. This enables students to learn and teachers to teach, and strengthens the bond between families and schools, thus maximizing student achievement.

Student Services professionals have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to reduce barriers to learning and assist classroom teachers, parents, and community agencies in providing a safe and positive learning environment for all children. School teams can use Student Services resources to facilitate the school and/or district improvement plans, by engaging in data-based planning and problem-solving to improve system-wide supports and individual student outcomes.
