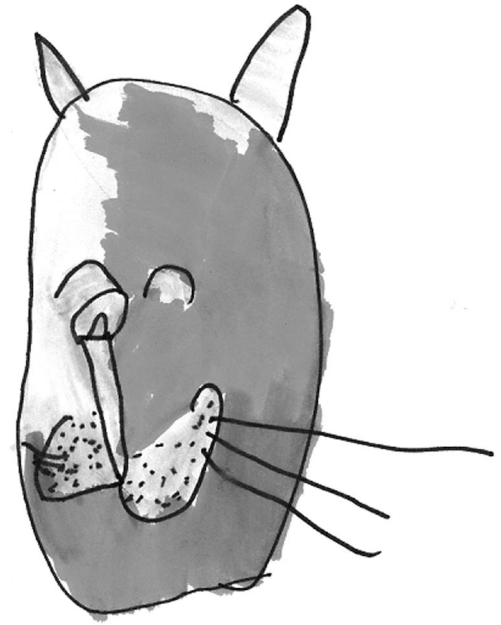


## 7. STUDENT STUDY TEAM (S.S.T.)

A student is usually referred to a Student Study Team whenever the student is referred for assessment for special education. Teachers and parents can also refer a child to the Student Study Team whenever a child continues to have difficulty in a regular classroom, even if the child has no disability.



**Though the Student Study team can be an effective way to identify student needs, the school MAY NOT use the process to delay timelines for assessments.**

The Student Study Team is comprised of the child's teacher(s), other appropriate school staff and parents and/or care providers. The team gathers information about the child's difficulties, strengths and needs. The team then determines if the school can provide accommodations and modifications in the regular classroom to meet the child's needs.

Many children in dependency feel different from their peers and disconnected from their school. The Student Study Team can provide a way to help these children in the least disruptive way, informally within the regular classroom setting.

The overriding goal of the Student Study Team is to build on strengths within the classroom while addressing the student's difficulties. For example, if a child has difficulty with auditory processing (has a hard time remembering or understanding what is said) the Student Study Team may recommend that the teacher provide more written or hands-on assignments to teach the same concepts.

Advocates can be an active part of the Student Study team process by stating their desire to participate in their initial referral letter.

**Many times a child's difficulties are a symptom of other problems. For example, a child with health problems may seem distracted or withdrawn. A child with reading problems may act out to distract the teacher.**

The team gathers information from a variety of sources, including the child's: teachers, parent and/or foster parents, services providers, social worker, CASA, pediatrician, school and health records. The team will use this information to try to determine the cause of the child's difficulties and identify the child's strengths. This information will be used to develop ways to meet the child's needs.

Useful information includes information about any problems the child may have socially, emotionally, physically or academically.

The Student Study Team should also examine behaviors and concerns at home that might not be evident at school.

Examples include:

- Frequent confusion or frustration over homework assignments
- Resistance to attending school
- Appears lonely, withdrawn, isolated
- Seems apathetic (doesn't care about anything) overly passive or cooperative
- During sports or other activities, child is overly aggressive, fearful, or withdrawn

It is important to talk to the child whenever possible to learn about the situation from his or her perspective. The child may have insight about his or her difficulties and what helps when he or she feels challenged.

The team should also examine previous classroom modifications—what worked and what didn't—at current and previous schools.

**Modifications and accommodations:  
Adjustments to teaching style or  
environment to better address the  
student's needs.**

After information has been gathered, the S.S.T. will choose the most important areas to address first. The advocate should be polite but assertive if he or she feels the child has needs that should be addressed.

The team must determine the best way to help the child that is least disruptive to his or her learning experience. Proposed modifications and accommodations must consider the child's academic, social and emotional health and development. For example, a pullout program for reading may be the most effective but could significantly interfere with the child's peer relationships or damage the child's self-esteem. A peer program may be more appropriate in this situation.

The Team can recommend one or many modifications and accommodations in the regular classroom to address the child's needs. The following is only a partial list of options:

- Modify the environment:
  - Change student seating to reduce distractions; create quiet areas for reading and one-on-one instruction
- Modify learning materials:
  - Use different materials such as audiotapes, manipulatives, learning games, or computer
- Modify schedule
  - Reduce work time; provide more breaks, snacks
- Modify way information is presented
  - Limit verbal instruction; teach note taking; use visual or auditory aides
- Modify teaching techniques:
  - Change voice volume; increase eye contact; use touch, or avoid touch; repeat instructions; use behavior modification, visual cues, etc.; provide tutors in or outside the classroom
- Modify assignments

- Simplify, shorten assignments; use contracts, notebooks, etc
- Miscellaneous
  - Communicate with learning staff and caregivers on regular basis; keep work samples and assessment results to monitor progress over time; use daily/weekly reports to keep caregivers and student aware of progress.

**Many schools offer additional services for students in need. These include before- and after-school programs, tutors, intervention programs in math and reading, etc. The advocate can ask the school staff about these resources.**

## Modifications in the home

Caregivers should also explore modifications that can be made in the child’s home that can further address the child’s needs. This could be as simple as setting up a study area in a quiet room, assigning a particular time for homework, and ensuring the child has a regular bedtime and good breakfast before school.

- Once the Student Study Team has developed a list of modifications/accommodations, they must identify the:
  - Provider—who provides services, school staff or outside agency
  - Provision—how child receives help: curriculum adjusted, teaching methods altered, child removed from class, etc.
  - Frequency and Duration—If additional services (i.e., tutoring) is needed, how often child receives services and how long each session will last
  - Location—whether services are offered in classroom or elsewhere
  - Evaluation criteria—how team will determine if services are working

Because many of the child’s difficulties may have developed over time, it may take a period of time for the child to adjust and show positive changes. Professionals recommend a 30-day trial period before determining whether or not the changes are effectively meeting the student’s needs.

## Remember

- The Student Study Team process is not governed by any particular laws, so timeframes, services, etc are open to interpretation by the Team. Advocates need to monitor the effectiveness of modifications and accommodations so that they can determine quickly whether or not the child is getting the help he or she needs
- The advocates should request a written list of expected outcomes clearly related to the recommended modifications/accommodations. The Student Study Team should also establish a timeline for gauging the effectiveness of S.S.T. modifications—30 days
- Ask for objective criteria to gauge the success of modifications. A teacher may believe a child is progressing in reading, but objective assessment results are more accurate and can be compared over time to gauge student progress

- Document the details of all proposed modifications, the expected and actual outcomes. This information will be important for the child's educational record and will need to be a part of a Referral for Assessment if the child is referred to special education.

If the child's performance improves, the Student Study Team process may be all that is required. If, after 30 days, or when appropriate, the child does not seem to be improving, or improving at an expected rate, the advocate should consider referring the child for assessment for possible qualification under special education and Section 504. (See section on "Referral")