

## Student Support Team (SST) and Tiered System of Supports for Students

In light of the Global COVID-19 Pandemic, local school systems have requested additional guidance concerning the implementation of SST and a Tiered System of Supports for Students. If educational services are being provided during school closures, the school system should continue to consider the appropriateness of SST meetings to the extent that is safe, practical and meaningful for the students, teachers, and leaders. Virtual meetings and/or phone conferences may be appropriate alternatives. In some instances, students may continue to benefit from strategies and interventions via the distance learning format. The Team will need to determine the appropriate next steps.

### Background

It is important to know that Georgia SST teams had their origin in a federal lawsuit known as Marshall vs. Georgia (1984). It dealt primarily with disproportionate placement of minority students in Special Education. While the state prevailed in this case, a shortcoming in Georgia education became obvious: there was no standard process for students to obtain individualized help in the regular classroom for learning or behavior difficulties. Instead, the route to such help usually led to placement in Special Education, often involving removal from the general classroom.

As part of its commitment to federal court to remedy technical violations found in the trial, the State of Georgia mandated that a Student Support Team would be established in every Georgia public school, K-12. The court accepted this commitment, thereby making the SST mandate a permanent injunction.

### Should school systems continue Student Support Team (SST) and Tiered System of Supports for Students while schools are closed due to COVID-19?

If educational services are being provided during school closures, the school system and SST team should make every effort to fulfill SST requirements, to the extent that it is safe, practical, and meaningful for students. Modifications will likely need to be made to provide these supports during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Your school system will likely need to make some or many of these modifications based on the safety, capacity, and needs of your students and families. The key point is to ensure that you identify and document where you were in the SST



process prior to the closure of school, any supports you were able to provide during school closures, and consider a plan for filling any gaps upon the re-opening of schools.

Examples of modifications to SST supports include:

- **Meetings** – You can conduct virtual meetings, if necessary. These can occur via video conferencing or telephone conference calls.
- **Instructional Supports** - The frequency and method of instructional support will depend on the requirements of the assignments and the needs and capacity of the students and parents. For example, for students and families without access to digital resources, a strategy may be to mail or provide paper packets and conduct follow-up phone calls for support.
- **Frequency** – You will need to consider and determine how often the student/family need to be contacted. Again, this can occur by phone, email, video conferencing, etc.
- **Interventions** - If interventions were being implemented prior to the school closure, the school system should consider options of how the interventions could be continued using an alternative instructional format if safe, practical and meaningful for the student. If interventions are continued, progress monitoring data would be utilized in data-based decision making.

**Follow-up Steps** – Here are some strategies to support the step in the SST process that did not occur prior to the closure of schools.

- **Identification of learning and/or behavior problems** – Continue to demonstrate open lines of communication among teachers and families to discuss any alternative strategies or processes for identifying students requiring intensive supports during school closures. Alternative instructional learning formats such as distance learning, online learning, instructional phone calls may require additional supports for targeted groups of students but does not necessarily mean that each student must be referred to SST.
- **Assessment** – Consider any appropriate progress monitoring data, distance learning progress reports, and other types of assessments that may support appropriate identification and/or monitoring of students in the Student Support Team process. Assessments can be informal assessments such as class assignments, tasks, activities, etc.