

Using a Case Management Approach to Increase Student Success Building a system for providing support to students in need

Students deserve safe and supportive school environments that are conducive to academic and personal growth – unfortunately not all students experience our school environments in this way. Despite gains since the mid 90's, on average, 15% of students still drop out of high school each year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Student discipline continues to overly rely on suspension and expulsion – particularly for students of color (Kamenetz, 2018). Personal wellness and emotional health issues such as mental health, housing, nutrition, and physical health further contribute to the academic and behavioral difficulties faced by students (Wells & Gifford, 2013). Developing plans to create a supportive school environment can be a daunting task but a case management approach offers schools a solution to this challenge.

While some schools have a dedicated staff member serving as case manager, most schools will rely on case management as a process – meaning existing school staff use a case management approach to intervene and provide support. **Case management centers on helping students overcome obstacles they encounter so that they may be more academically and personally successful.** Case management is a school-based intervention deployed by trained staff relying on a short-term, solution focused approach. Staff using a case management approach meet individually with students to identify their needs, develop a plan for connecting them to resources, and provide regular monitoring of their progress and connection to services. These services are designed to improve a student's wellbeing, reduce behavioral issues, increase student engagement in school, improve academic performance, and address familial issues or concerns.

A case management approach includes the following steps:

- 1. Devise a mechanism by which administrators, teachers, students, and parents can identify a student in need of support and refer them for services.** Schools should develop both a data driven system as well as a person-based system to identify personally and academically at-risk students. Data driven referrals would include students who have poor grades, high rates of discipline problems, poor attendance, etc. Person based referrals include receiving reports from concerned community members when they recognize that a student is experiencing a personal, emotional, medical or behavioral difficult.
- 2. Create a system for connecting identified students with a designated, trained staff member for 1:1 support.** Paramount to a case management approach is 1:1 service delivery. In the initial 1:1 meeting, the staff member should collect holistic information about the student's needs and strengths, focus on building rapport, and develop an action plan for support. A case management approach also requires follow up appointments and continued monitoring of student progress.
- 3. Build a network for referrals and resource coordination.** Case managers serve as a conduit to appropriate resources. Case managers make referrals to community mental health, psychiatry or social work, disability testing services, the IEP team, the school counselor, etc. Additionally, they may also make referrals on behalf of the student's family such as to local food banks, housing resources, family counseling, etc. To build this network of referrals, school staff should familiarize themselves with school and community-based resources available to their students and families.
- 4. Increase communication among key stakeholders in student success and support.** Student support does not happen in a vacuum. As such, a case management approach reduces silos of communication and brings together key stakeholders to increase collaboration and communication. This includes providing guidance to those who are concerned about or who have made a referral for a student, partnering with treatment providers, communicating with parents or other supports in the process, and working with

Using a Case Management Approach to Increase Student Success (cont.)

teachers, and other school administration to ensure continuity of care across the student's areas of interaction and impact.

- 5. Address systemic issues by investing in improving overall school climate.** A case management approach addresses student issues at both the individual and the systemic level. Consider implementing school wide campaigns aimed at improving student mental health, decreasing bullying behaviors, and improving students' willingness to seek help for themselves or others.

References

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