

# PROBLEM SOLVING TEAM (PST)

## Table of Contents

A. Definition .....	1
B. Goal.....	1
C. Three Tiered Model of School Supports.....	2
D. Response to Intervention (RtI).....	2
Four-step Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Model (PAIR).....	2
Consider “ICEL” when problem solving using the decision-making rubric .....	2
E. Problem Solving Team Process .....	2
F. Problem Solving Team Attendance .....	3
G. Problem Solving Team and Homeless Students .....	4
H. Parent Interview Screener .....	4
Guidelines for completion of the Parent Interview Screener.....	4
I. Role of the School Social Worker.....	5
J. Assisting Parents with the Problem Solving Team Process.....	5

### **A. Definition**

Problem solving is a research-based strategy that seeks to ensure that individual, class-wide, and school-wide problems are addressed systematically and that important educational decisions are based on data that is collected frequently over time. The foundation of problem solving is to develop positive solutions for every child, not just for those students being considered for Exceptional Student Education. Within this context, Problem Solving Teams (PST) examine all factors in “ICEL” (Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, and Learner) that may be impacting academic success for students.

Volusia County Schools PST are intervention driven/progress monitory teams at each school which assist students, families, and teachers in seeking positive solutions for all students. A critical component of PSTs is the collaboration of all stakeholders within the school community. By tapping into the expertise of these professionals, as well as parents, the team is more likely to accurately determine the cause of the student’s problem and subsequently to develop effective solutions.

### **B. Goal**

The primary goal of the PST is to support teachers and parents by generating effective research-based academic and behavioral strategies for individual targeted students. In addition, PSTs can use school-wide and class-wide data to monitor the success and difficulties of groups of students and can offer academic and behavioral interventions to be applied to class or school-wide issues. The level of supports and resources that are available within the districts and individual schools are often described within a three-tier model of support.

### C. Three Tiered Model of School Supports

Tier 1: Universal Interventions

Tier 2: Targeted Group Interventions

Tier 3: Intensive, Individual Interventions

### D. Response to Intervention (RtI)

“RtI is the practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions. These three components of RtI are essential.” *National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. (NASDSE), 2006.*

#### Four-step Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Model (PAIR)

- Problem Identification *What is the problem?*
- Analyzing the problem/hypothesis statement *Why is it occurring?*
- Intervention Design and Implementation *What do we do about it?*
- Response to Intervention/monitoring of progress *Is the plan working?*

#### Consider “ICEL” when problem solving using the decision-making rubric

- Instruction: how is content presented, including types of materials, grouping, etc.
- Curriculum: content that is taught including scope and sequence
- Environment: where the student sits, physical arrangement of the room, lighting, noise, etc.
- Learner: the actual student

### E. Problem Solving Team Process

The PST is accessed once all school-wide (Tier 1) and targeted supports (Tier 2) have been exhausted and data indicates insufficient response to intervention. The process includes the following steps:

1. Student Data Collection: Data Warehouse and Cumulative Review
2. Student Data Collection: Parent Contact and Staff Consultation
3. Student Data Collection: Staff Input and Observation
4. Student Data Collection: Intervention Profile
5. Request for Problem Solving Team Assistance
6. Problem Solving Team: Problem Identification and Analysis
7. Problem Solving Team: Intervention Design and Implementation Plan
8. Problem Solving Team: Response to Intervention and Recommendations

For more information about the PST process and forms, refer to the [Problem Solving Team Manual](#).

## **F. Problem Solving Team Attendance**

According to Florida Statute [1003.26](#), students who are exhibiting a pattern of non-attendance must be referred to the Problem Solving Team (PST) for assistance with the remediation of the problem. Non-attendance typically negatively impacts academic performance.

Teachers should take every opportunity to notify parents of developing patterns of non-attendance and determine the cause. Parent contact must be made or attempted prior to referral to the Problem Solving Team. [PST 2](#) (form 2009011) can be utilized to document parent contacts and consultation with the school social worker. If the teacher or the designated school staff member has exhausted all attempts to contact the parent (i.e., phone calls, phone messages, letters, notes, etc.), a [Social Work Referral](#) (form 2004261) requesting assistance in communication may be generated.

If interventions to improve attendance, including parent/teacher conferences, are unsuccessful and further support is needed, the teacher or designated person (i.e., school counselor at secondary level) may refer the student to the Problem Solving Team by completing [PST 5](#) (form 2009014) and forwarding the PST packet to the PST Chairperson.

The PST Chairperson schedules a PST meeting inviting the parent and/or student and the school social worker, as well as other relevant professionals. The [PST Parent Invitation](#) (form 2009021, English or Spanish) letter is utilized. Every attempt shall be made to include school social workers in PST meetings when attendance is the concern.

At the PST Attendance meeting, [PST 6 A/H](#) (form 2009060) is completed. An [Attendance Contract](#) (form 2001042, English and Spanish) may be initiated and agreed upon at this time, if appropriate, and a signed copy given to the parent. In addition, parents should be advised of their right to appeal if they believe that the interventions recommended are inappropriate or unnecessary, and should be provided a signed copy of the [Notice of Right to Appeal](#) (form 2001097, English or Spanish). Original forms must be retained for the record. If a parent chooses to exercise their right to appeal, they should be given a copy of the [Notice of Intent to Exercise Right to Appeal](#) (form 2007188, English or Spanish).

If academic or behavioral concerns also exist, forms [PST 6](#) (form 2009015), [PST 6B](#) (form 2009016), [PST 7](#) (form 2009017), and [PST 8](#) (form 2009018) may also be completed at the PST meeting. Data is to be reviewed in order to hypothesize if the poor academic performance is the result of lack of exposure to instruction (i.e., from lack of attendance) or from other factors that would be appropriately addressed with other relevant professionals.

If the parent is not in attendance at the PST meeting, the PST Chair will provide the parent with a copy of the PST forms, indicating recommended strategies, and a [Notice of Right to Appeal](#) form.

After the initial PST meeting, the student's attendance should be monitored by the school designee. If attendance continues to be a concern despite the interventions, a referral to the school social worker for additional follow-up may be generated or another PST meeting may be requested. School social workers are to follow-up to assist parents in complying with the recommended interventions and offer additional services, if needed (i.e., individual case management, parent/student education, group work, referrals to appropriate agencies). If further PST involvement is needed, the problem solving process should continue, including implementation and progress monitoring of additional interventions that best address the problem. These interventions may include (but should not be limited to) a referral to the school social worker, if not previously initiated. These further interventions should also be documented on the PST 6 A/H.

*For more information about addressing non-attendance issues, refer to the [Compulsory School Attendance Manual](#) or [Guidelines for Handling Cases of Excessive Absences from School](#).*

## G. Problem Solving Team and Homeless Students

The [McKinney-Vento Homeless Act](#) ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Upon identification of a student who appears to meet the definition of a homeless student, school personnel should refer the situation to the designated homeless education school contact and to the appropriate members of the Student Services Team (school social worker, school counselor, and/or school nurse). [PST 6 A/H](#) (form 2009060) is an appropriate tool to use for determining areas of concern and need, and should be used for this purpose. For students who are having academic and/or behavioral concerns, targeted interventions should be implemented.

## H. Parent Interview Screener

The [Parent Interview Screener](#) (form 2010004) was developed to be used during the problem solving/response to intervention process. It elicits information to assist in ruling out any contributing factors that may impact the student's performance at school: health concerns, social issues, change in family dynamics, unusual events, attendance issues, etc. This tool is the most appropriate place to document environmental factors which provides a holistic view of the student. The goal is to obtain information that may necessitate early intervening services or resources. The form should be kept in the student's PST folder in the cumulative record.

This [Parent Interview Screener](#) form can be completed anywhere in the process when a parent is involved, which is usually at the consultative step (PST 2) or the actual meeting (PST 6). The school social workers will complete the form at the meetings. If the school social worker is unavailable at the meetings, the form should be completed by the school counselor.

Depending on availability and time limit of PST team schedule, the [Parent Interview Screener](#) may be completed before or after the meeting or at another time convenient for the parent. There are times when a parent would feel more comfortable discussing certain information with one person as opposed to a group. The information may also be obtained via telephone conference with the parent or a home visit.

In the event that the [Parent Interview Screener](#) is completed before or after the PST meeting, the school social worker should discuss the findings or any relevant information with the appropriate team member(s), such as the PST Chair, teacher, school counselor, psychologist, etc., via the existing communication method. The written information will be available in the PST folder for review by any other team member. It could also be discussed at the follow-up PST meeting.

Sensitive information should be included only to the extent that it is educationally relevant. Any information in a student's cumulative record is considered confidential information and subject to [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA) regulations. Be sensitive to the school's "need to know" versus the family's "right to privacy." The interest of the student must supersede all other purposes. If the parent shares specific information that they do not want to be recorded, but wanted us to know, do not record the information. Written records are kept to assist the school in offering appropriate educational services to the student.

### Guidelines for completion of the Parent Interview Screener

- Explain to parents that information from the [Parent Interview Screener](#) will be a part of the student's PST folder. Inform parents that any information they share is confidential. The Parent Interview Screener is part of the data gathering process.
- If a student has been a victim of any type of abuse, identify it only as "a traumatic event." **Do not include details about the abuse.** Ask the parent if the abuse had been reported and if not, act according to the legal mandate.

- Communicable diseases are not to be put in writing, even if the person gives consent. You may state “child/family member has a health condition.”
- School personnel do not diagnose or assign labels. Document only diagnoses that the parent reports has been made by a medical/mental health provider.
- It is appropriate to share names of community resources/agencies.

## **I. Role of the School Social Worker**

School social workers are an integral part of the problem-solving process. Regular attendance at PST is recommended. The role of the school social worker is as follows:

- actively identifying and addressing systemic barriers to learning
- serving as change agents to bring stakeholders together in collaborative efforts to create an environment that is conducive to effective problem-solving and learning
- conducting needs assessments, such as the [Parent Interview Screener](#) (form 2010004)
- developing, implementing, and evaluating programs that address educational and behavioral concerns
- assisting administrators and staff to understand the familial, cultural, and community components of students’ responses to instruction, learning, and academic success
- evaluating student progress specific to behavioral, emotional, and mental health concerns and the effects on academic progress
- continuing the traditional school social work role of serving as the liaison to families, the community, and other stakeholders to ensure open communication and continuing dialogue
- facilitating and coordinating the delivery of educational and mental health services with and by community agencies and service providers
- assisting with remediation of attendance problems and the development of an [Attendance Contract](#) (form 2001042, English or Spanish) for the student and the parent/guardian (when appropriate)
- providing guidance in the decision-making process regarding the appropriateness of a [Social Work Referral](#) (form 2004261) or a [Social History Referral](#) (form 2007189)

## **J. Assisting Parents with the Problem Solving Team Process**

When the legislature mandated that the PST take the lead in resolving attendance issues, it became a certainty that more and more parents would become involved in this process. With the expanded number of parents interacting with the PST committee, it is very likely that school social workers will have to take a more active role in helping parents to understand the process. School social workers can be instrumental in helping parents to have a positive experience with this process by:

- being informed liaisons to parents, assisting them to effectively participate in their child’s education, and strengthening their parenting skills
- helping parents to understand their child’s developmental and educational needs and expand their knowledge base of RtI practices and strategies
- helping parents understand the compulsory attendance law and their requirements as parents, helping them alleviate barriers to attending school regularly, and assisting schools/parents/students with preventative strategies in addressing the attendance concerns

- consulting with all stakeholders to ensure that the intervention plan devised is appropriate to the needs of the targeted student or students
- ensuring that the team process and decisions are implemented in accord with the goals and desired outcome of the team and the evidence-based strategies chosen
- assisting team members to understand mental health and behavioral concerns of students identified as needing assistance and the potential impact of chosen interventions
- serving as a resource to educators and other team members on understanding the process and requirements of RtI initiatives
- serving as an advocate for the parent and student
- assisting the parent with following-up on the recommendations of the team
- helping parents to understand their rights
- facilitating communication between the parent and school
- helping parents to understand any legal obligations they may have, as well as the school's legal obligations to them
- assisting parents with accessing other services within the community

Note: These roles are based on excerpts from the white paper [\*Response to Intervention: New Roles for School Social Workers\*](#).