

## Student Support Teams at Louisa May Alcott (K–5)

CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

**What are Student Support Teams?** Student Support Teams (SST) are dedicated to supporting a school's highest-need students, including identifying relevant academic and/or behavioral interventions, and monitoring progress over time.

**Context:** Principal Eileen Stull and her staff have designed a comprehensive set of tiered interventions to ensure behavioral and/or academic interventions are delivered in a timely way to all students. These supports include use of Direct Instruction as the primary curriculum in literacy, a complementary Response to Intervention (RTI) System, and reliance on an SST.

The SST meets weekly for 50 minutes to address the needs of students who have not responded sufficiently to RTI, and it carefully monitors student progress over time. Currently the team's caseload includes approximately 25 students. This systematic approach to targeted intervention ensures a strong safety net for all students, and helps prevent unnecessary referrals to special education.

### Louisa May Alcott Fast Facts (2015)

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|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| • Student enrollment: 273 | • Budget: \$2.7M   | • Grade 3 ELA proficiency: 75%  |
| • Special education: 17%  | • Dollars per pupil: \$10.0K                               | • Grade 3 math proficiency: 60% |
| • ELL: 2%                 | • Student : Teacher ratio: 17:1                            |                                 |
| • FRPL: 91%               | • Student : Instructional staff ratio (teacher + TA): 14:1 |                                 |

## MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS



### PEOPLE

- **Cross-functional team structure:** To ensure that all relevant staff perspectives are included on the SST, each meeting typically includes the following individuals:
  - *Principal:* Principal Stull is present at every SST meeting to provide input on appropriate interventions and to stay updated on student progress.
  - *Meeting Facilitator/Chair:* Principal Stull relies on a general education teacher with strong organizational skills who has overseen SST efforts for many years. She is responsible for facilitating the meeting every week.
  - *Intervention Teacher:* A teacher certified in special education regularly attends all meetings, and is typically responsible for taking notes.

- *Gen Ed teacher of the student of interest:* This teacher is responsible for bringing relevant data on the student's needs as well as detailed information on what interventions have been attempted to date. In Grades K-2, this teacher is the student's homeroom teacher. In Grades 3-5, where teachers are departmentalized, more than one Gen Ed teacher typically attends.
- *Psychologist:* The Psychologist's role is to oversee key administrative tasks associated with the SST's work, including any relevant testing, data collection, report writing and any follow up with the parent.
- *Attendance Liaison:* Because student attendance tends to play a significant role in their academic growth, the attendance liaison is present to provide relevant data on student attendance over time.

In addition to the above participants, other staff members such as the school nurse, speech therapist or others may be invited if the student's needs relate to their services.

- **Parent involvement:** The SST at Alcott places a high priority on parent involvement. Parents are invited to every meeting that address their child's progress, and efforts are made to accommodate parents' schedules and needs. The first time that a particular student is discussed at an SST meeting, the staff invites the parents for an in-depth discussion of the child's academic, behavioral, and medical history, dating back to pregnancy and infancy. This information is valuable as they determine root causes of the student's needs and brainstorm potential interventions.

It's challenging to ensure consistent parent involvement—roughly half the time, despite repeated invitations, parents do not attend. The SST tries to maximize parent involvement through accommodating parents' schedules whenever possible.

- **Classroom coverage for extended SST meetings:** Sometimes SST meetings run beyond the formal end time, particularly if the team needs to accommodate a parent's schedule. In these cases, Alcott's building substitute will cover the Gen Ed teacher's class for 10 to 15 minutes while he or she closes out the meeting, or the principal of Alcott will leave the SST and provide coverage if the substitute is unavailable. This flexibility in timing helps ensure that the SST meets its meeting objectives and parents' schedules are accommodated.



## TIME

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- **Weekly SST Meeting:** Alcott's SST meets every Thursday morning for 50 minutes, from 8:20 until 9:10 a.m. This meeting occurs before the student school day begins and is incorporated into teachers' 200 minutes of professional time. During this time, the SST either identifies interventions and monitoring for one new student on the caseload or reviews ongoing progress for two to three students. Every six weeks, progress for a particular student is checked.
- **Repurposed parent/teacher conference time:** During the three days per year that Alcott holds parent/teacher conferences, the SST sometimes repurposes a portion of that time for extended meetings. Parent involvement tends to be higher because they are typically already at the school to meet with their child's teacher(s). This approach enables the SST to work through progress monitoring for two to three times the number of students they would typically be able to discuss in the weekly 50-minute meeting.

Teachers who participate in extended SST meetings on parent/teacher conference days communicate to the parents of their students ahead of time their availability on that day, and schedule additional conference time on a different day if necessary.

- **Individual prep time:** In order for SST meetings to be effective, the Gen Ed teacher(s) and psychologist are responsible for preparing relevant data. Before a new student is brought to the SST, the Gen Ed teacher is responsible for compiling student assessment data, including NWEA scores, synthesizing any data relevant to behavioral challenges, and reviewing the student's permanent record. After a child is on the SST's caseload, the Gen Ed teacher is responsible for collecting the data that the SST agreed upon as part of progress monitoring.

Meanwhile, the psychologist is responsible for collecting and synthesizing data on the child's performance from the teacher after new interventions are agreed upon, and preparing that data for the SST when they re-convene six weeks later on the child's progress. He or she is also responsible for drafting Evaluation Team Reports, communication with the parent, and if necessary, the student's doctor.



## MONEY

- **Direct Instruction curriculum:** Alcott relies on Direct Instruction as the primary literacy curriculum in K-2. This curriculum has comprehensive secondary interventions built into it, so teachers are able to try a variety of different supports for students in these grades before requesting more intensive intervention support through the SST. This approach helps ensure that the SST's time is protected for students who have the most significant needs.
- **Assessments and data systems:** Alcott relies on NWEA assessment results to shed light on how the students in their caseload compare to other students nationally, as well as to identify which skill areas require the most support. The NWEA's data systems produce reports that require limited additional time from teachers to interpret. Assessments and accompanying reports are provided by CMSD and come at no direct cost to the school.

## PROCEDURES

- **Clear meeting agendas and protocols:** Alcott's SST relies on clear agendas and protocols to ensure their discussion results in decisions and action plans. The typical structure of a meeting in which a new student is presented to the SST follows this format when the parent is not present:
  - Define the student's needs (8:20-8:35 a.m.)
    - Homeroom teacher explains student's needs, and cites relevant data. A key data point in this discussion is the student's national NWEA ranking: If the student falls in the bottom 10 percent nationally, that typically indicates that the student requires intensive intervention.
    - Gen Ed teacher describes the interventions that have been attempted to date.
    - Attendance liaison brings to bear data on the student's attendance, focusing on the past 150 days.
  - Determine appropriate interventions (8:35-8:50 a.m.)
    - All members of the SST brainstorm what types of future interventions are needed and how they should be administered.
    - Any outstanding questions for the student's parent or doctor are recorded.
  - Determine how progress will be monitored (8:50-9:05 a.m.)
    - The SST determines exactly how progress will be monitored, what type of data will be shared with the school psychologist, and the schedule for doing so.
  - Close the meeting and summarize next steps (9:05-9:10 a.m.)

If the parent can attend the SST's first meeting on a particular student, they typically spend roughly 30 minutes collecting a detailed history of the child (see Alcott's SST Parent Interview Guide for details). The remaining agenda items are then covered either through an extended meeting that morning, which requires classroom coverage for the teachers who remain, or are carried over into a future SST meeting.

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION

- **Defining roles:** The SST has learned over time how important the Psychologist's role is to ensuring progress monitoring occurs, necessary follow up takes place, and relevant information is prepared prior to the meeting. The team has focused the psychologist's role on these activities rather than meeting facilitation, given he or she tends to work across multiple schools and is less familiar with the school's staff and parents than the full-time teacher who acts as the facilitator and meeting chair.

## RESULTS

Louisa May Alcott is National Blue Ribbon School, and has consistently earned *Excellent* or *Effective* ratings from the Ohio Department of Education. In 2015, the school earned a *B* in Ohio's K-3 Literacy Improvement indicator.