

ISP

INTERPERSONAL STRATEGIC PREVENTION:
A TEAM APPROACH FOR PREVENTING
PROBLEMS

AN ACTION PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS

2008-2009
SCHOOL YEAR

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WHAT. Interpersonal Strategic Prevention (ISP)*

WHY. The vast majority of administrators' challenges are rooted in "people issues." Even in well-organized systems and subunits interpersonal issues can subvert the mission. These issues are best addressed while small. Often they cannot and should not be delegated without monitoring by the administrator.

Approach: Team identifies looming interpersonal* issues and then applies corrections while they are still minimal.

Rationale: Leaders draw from the potential of the team. Each team member is at different points in his/her professional development and all have valuable perspectives. An ISP group serves two important functions: 1) it draws upon the team as a means to solve and minimize problems; 2) it helps team members' professional development and encourages them to have a stake in district wide issues.

WHO. Superintendents: Those who report to Superintendent, e.g. Deputy Superintendent, Associate/Assistant Superintendent, etc. In some districts these may include building principals and/or directors.

Size of group: Minimum, 3/Maximum, 9.

WHEN/WHERE/TIME.

- Minimum of five sessions across the school year.
- First session will consume about 90 minutes to establish rules and procedures.
- Subsequent sessions about 60 minutes but can be done in 30/45 minutes during lunch.
- Scheduling is critical. All members must attend. No in and outs. No distractions, e.g. cell phones off. Don't start until all are present! No interruptions.
- Record keeping is important.
- Frequent meetings early in the year. Taper off towards end of school year.

WHERE is important. A private conference room in the district (central office or school building is most desirable).

* See Glossary for context meaning.

HOW.

Procedures:

- Head of Team (Superintendent/Building Administrator) chairs all meetings.
- Rules
 - Each member submits, one day in advance, via email a red flag*
 - Red flags are described not inferred, e.g. telephone call(s) from parents with concerns that have gone without reply; complaints about quality of food; poor building maintenance; complaints about transportation services; unprofessional behavior, etc.
 - These are not yet full blown problems that would normally be addressed by the responsible manager. They are seeds that, if left unattended or dealt with pro forma, may become weeds.
 - The ISP chair prioritizes the submissions using agreed upon rules.
 - Chair reads out the red flag without stating who submitted it.
 - Each participant is required to address the issue within 2–3 minutes following this outline:
 1. Awareness, if any, of the issue
 2. Its potential dimensions
 3. Type of correction needed, e.g. retraining; policy change; personal visit, withhold action, but gather more information for future discussion (next meeting), etc.
- After each team member has responded, team decides the interpersonal approach and **who** will follow-up.
- Notes are recorded on easel paper so all can see. Use these at the next ISP meeting and/or in an email report, which should include the resolution of the issue.
- Create a “lessons learned” record for future reference.

Note: Assistance for starting and maintaining ISPs is available for past and current clients.

Fee: \$150 per session plus travel.

Contact the SSCO/BASA Coach: tstephens@ssco.org
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GLOSSARY

Interpersonal.

Between or among people; verbal and/or nonverbal statements and/or actions that affect the districts' or buildings' services; may have positive and/or negative consequences.

Interpersonal Strategic PREVENTION, ISP.

A procedure used by school and district administrators to minimize people problems through team involvement.

Loom.

To appear indistinctly, or come into view in indistinct and enlarged form.

Looming.

A looming appearance, as of something seen indistinctly at a distance or through a fog.

Red flag.

A potential problem, not yet fully apparent but one where there is some "static" in the system that suggests it could become a problem.