

Needs Assessment

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Scenario:

A large public school system is under a corrective action by the state for not completing individual assessments of students requested during the special education identification process within the 60 calendar day timeline mandated by the federal government under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The school system has one school year to increase compliance to 100% or risk losing state funding for special education programming. An assessment unit within the school system whose responsibility is to complete speech-language, educational, and psychological assessments for ESOL students referred through the special education identification process has requested a needs assessment. The reasons for requesting the needs assessment include the following:

1. To ensure that students receive appropriate services in a timely manner (60 days from referral) so they can benefit from their academic programs and ultimately become contributing members of society.
2. To avoid lawsuits from parents of students referred for assessment that may ensue if services are not delivered within the timelines.
3. To avoid loss of special education funding from the state if the compliance rate mandated by the state is not achieved by the end of the current school year.

Desired Status:

The desired status is 100% compliance with the federal guideline mandating that recommended assessments be completed within 60 calendar days from the date of the initial referral.

Actual Status:

The actual status is 90% of the cases referred to the assessment unit are being completed within the timelines. We were able to obtain the actual status by using the assessment team's database of referrals and the county's special education database to determine the total number of assessments referred to the assessment unit and the number of assessments completed within the 60-day timeline from August 24, 2008 through the present time. The following steps will be taken to obtain how many cases are completed by the assessment unit within timelines:

Steps to be taken:

1. Examine each individual case that was out of compliance from August 24, 2008 through the present time, noting the date the assessment(s) was requested by the referring school and the date the referral packet was stamped as received in the assessment unit office.
2. If a case was not received by the assessment unit within one week of the school's referral, interview the case manager at the school regarding the reason(s) for the delay in forwarding the packet.

3. If the case was received by the assessment unit within one week of the school's referral, determine whether the support staff of the assessment unit assigned the case to the assessor within one or two days. If the assignment was not made within one or two days, interview the support staff to determine reason for the delay in assigning the case.
4. If the assessor was assigned the case within seven days of the initial referral, interview the assessor regarding the reason the case was not completed within the timeline.
5. Examine the data collected noting trends, (i.e. Are referral packets received late by the assessment unit by a few schools, many schools? Were assignments made to assessors delayed when support staff was missing? How are the late cases distributed over discipline, individual assessors? etc.)

By observing exactly where in the process the "breakdown" occurs in each case and then analyzing the trends in the cumulative data, we will be able to suggest those specific actions that are most likely to improve the compliance rate of the assessment unit.