



## CASE STUDY: "Student Support Teams That WORK" Training

**The Situation:** Woodstock Middle School in Woodstock, Vermont contracted with CSS to make their educational support team process more effective on behalf of struggling students. Typically 10-15% of the 65 students referred for special education services in their school are ineligible. The lost time and resources involved in making these inaccurate referrals cost the school an estimated \$5,000-\$12,000 annually.

**What CSS Did:** CSS offered its signature training program to a school-based support team of seven educators: two regular classroom teachers, one administrator, one school nurse and three special educators. On-site training consisted of a 3-day workshop and 2 full days of implementation follow-up. Through the process, CSS facilitated a critical examination and upgrading of the school's referral system and processes. The needs of all students referred for support were efficiently and effectively identified. CSS also helped the team utilize practical strategies to help students succeed, by leveraging student's strengths and areas of interest. Key features of the CSS training included:

- Looking at struggling students' breakdowns through a neurodevelopmental lens (eight learning "constructs" of the brain, such as attention, memory and language)
- Problem solving through a collaborative process
- New protocols to promote efficiency, ensure effectiveness and provide ongoing feedback/learning
- Emphasis on students' strengths and affinities when planning strategies

**Impact:** Over the course of 6 months, CSS helped the school:

- Decrease inappropriate referrals
- Save an average of \$800 per student in time, assessment and other referral costs
- Create a process that, over time, will save the school an average of \$8,000-15,000 per year
- Refine the support team's student referral process including updated forms, revised timelines, new meeting protocols and follow-up procedures
- Introduce collaborative approaches to creating and implementing student analysis tools

### Testimonials:

*"I am excited about the outcome of this course. Our process is now more teacher-directed and student-centered."*

*– Glenna/teacher*

*"Our new referral process now provides a more positive, productive approach that focuses on ways to maximize student strengths."*

*– Doreen/Special Educator*

*"I like that our new referral process fits so well with Tier II continuum of the Response to Intervention (RtI) model."*

*–Sherry/Special Educator*

**Why the Course Worked:** For most schools, there's a huge paradigm shift as teams become a collaborative advisory and support team for presenting teachers. CSS has found that adding this neurodevelopmental "lens" enables child study teams to identify and understand the breakdowns in struggling learners. Appreciating the variety of ways students learn provides a common vocabulary and improves the team's ability to address problems with appropriate strategies.

**Changing the System:** Eight teams have engaged in the "Support Teams That Work" training – they have all realized significant shifts in their approach and resulting time and resource efficiencies:

1. Teams and referring teachers now understand and support struggling students learn (using a neurodevelopmental lens), collect data in new ways and document 'responses to intervention' to smooth the referral process.
2. Teams focus on leveraging students' strengths when identifying appropriate strategies
3. Teams analyze data about students collaboratively and from a multi-disciplinary perspective
4. Presenting teachers feel supported by the process and inappropriate referrals decrease
5. Teachers accommodate individual children into their overall approach to teaching, reducing disruptions to other students and simultaneously de-stigmatizing the struggling or referred students
6. Teams document "responses to intervention" through this process, so that if a student does ultimately get referred for special education services, that documentation is in place and can be incorporated into the psycho-educational assessment data