

## When Students Are Not Learning

With academic standards dictating *what* students should learn, and *No Child Left Behind* legislation increasing accountability, educators everywhere are putting forth their very best efforts to see to it that all students do learn. And yet every school, everywhere, will still have one or more (or many) students who are not learning. What happens next? There are still some schools where everyone shrugs their shoulders and says, “We did the best we could,” and that’s that. But many more schools are analyzing the problem and trying to find solutions. Research is emerging regarding the most successful of those solutions, and some recent research findings indicate that (among other things) a school must assure that the following four conditions are in place.

1. The school must focus on **intervention** rather than *remediation*. Remediation — in the forms of retention, repeating courses, taking remedial courses, or summer school — occur “after the fact”... after the student has failed. Intervention provides students additional time and support *as soon as they experience difficulty*. The school must have a plan — how can additional time and support be offered throughout the learning process?
2. The school must have a process in place that is **systematic**. Individual teachers have always worked with students needing extra help. However, leaving the response up to the discretion of individuals is not consistent and not enough. There needs to be a *school-wide* plan, with procedures in place for executing it and monitoring it. Staff development must be implemented so that all teachers are aware of the plan and the steps to follow when a student needs the extra assistance.
3. Responses must be **timely**. The school must have a well-defined curriculum (in order to know *what* the student should learn) and *frequent, formative assessments* that provide immediate information about a student who is experiencing difficulty. Teachers can then give the student specific feedback, and immediately follow the steps of “the plan” to provide the time and support necessary for the student to make progress. If assistance is not implemented immediately, problems with learning can be compounded.
4. The school’s plan must be **directive**. This means that students are not “invited” to receive extra help — they are *required* to do so. Some creative thought must be employed to come up with processes that can be — as much as possible — built into the regular school day, or at least *connected* to the regular schedule (such as before and after school). It is very difficult to require students to attend help sessions that are far outside regular school hours, such as evenings or weekends. But research has found that this “insistence” that students get extra help is one of the most essential components of raising student achievement

These four elements are based on the research of Richard Dufour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek.