

# Centerpiece of the Support System: The Ed Staffing

Joe Puggelli  
From SAAS *Watch*

As my grandfather used to say, “The best laid plans of mice and men oft need little adjustments.” A crucial aspect of the “little adjustments” that occur at SAAS is the Educational Staffing (shortened by all to Ed Staffing), a meeting designed to help a student have a more successful and enjoyable educational experience.

Ed Staffings usually occur at lunch, because this is the best time to insure that all of the key people in a student’s life can be in the same room at the same time. (An Ed Staffing held after the school day is over would invariably mean that at least one key teacher, or often the student, is not available because of extra-curricular commitments.)

The “same room at same time” principle eliminates confusion about what is happening or not happening in the student’s life and helps all concerned to see the larger picture, in which the positive usually outweighs the negative (or, as one student said after his first, and much-dreaded Ed Staffing, “I didn’t expect to hear so many good things about me.”). “Key people” include the student’s parents, all teachers, the advisor, me, and often the school counselor and/or the learning specialist.

We prefer to hold Ed Staffings with the student present, because it is a fundamental principle of the school that the student must take responsibility for his/her own life, but I usually decide to include or not include the student based on a case-by-case basis, after soliciting the opinion of the parents, the student, faculty, and the advisor. The student is present approximately 80% of the time.

The impetus for an Ed Staffing can come from anyone involved with the student. The majority of suggestions come from individual teachers or from our learning specialist, who is in constant contact with teachers and advisors in an effort to identify

students with small problems before they become large.

The operating protocol of all Ed Staffings is the same: I begin the meeting by repeating a mantra that is familiar to all faculty, but perhaps new to the parents and student, “We’ll go around the room, giving each teacher a chance to talk about what’s going well and what problems there are, if any; and what can be done to improve academic performance; then we’ll hear the opinions of everyone else present (including the student, who is given a chance to agree or disagree with what has been said and to suggest issues which haven’t been discussed but should be); then we’ll conclude the meeting by establishing a short list of concrete things that can be done in order to make the situation better.”

The ensuing discussion helps everyone to re-focus on the complete student-person, a sense of which can get lost in the compartmentalized world of daily life (I’ve had many parents say that this specific aspect of the Ed Staffing was the most helpful to them because it helped put both the good news and the bad news into perspective.).

The analysis of the areas of difficulty invariably indicates either that “the problem” is limited to one or two classes (We occasionally have students who are math-science stars but who struggle in history or English, or vice-versa) or is rooted in a more generic issue (An example of the latter springs to mind: six different teachers lauded a student’s understanding of the material presented in class, and the same six different teachers pointed out that the student had handed in no homework in three weeks. Our short action list that day was very short indeed and did not require a rocket scientist: do homework).

A more common generic issue is the student’s need to be more organized or to become better at establishing a priority system



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for determining what to study when. As evidence of this issue mounts, I will often ask our learning specialist to meet with the student and prepare a plan to address the most pressing organizational needs.

Of course, as my grandfather also said, "A plan which ain't followed won't work." Follow-through is a key factor in making sure that a situation changes, and some individual, usually the advisor or the learning specialist, is charged

with making sure that what is supposed to happen does, in fact, take place. However, the key to the entire process is, as it should be, the student, who must, for example, "do the homework." Fortunately, in most cases, our students, helped by the short list of suggestions that was created at the Ed Staffing and supported by the appropriate adults, show quick progress.

