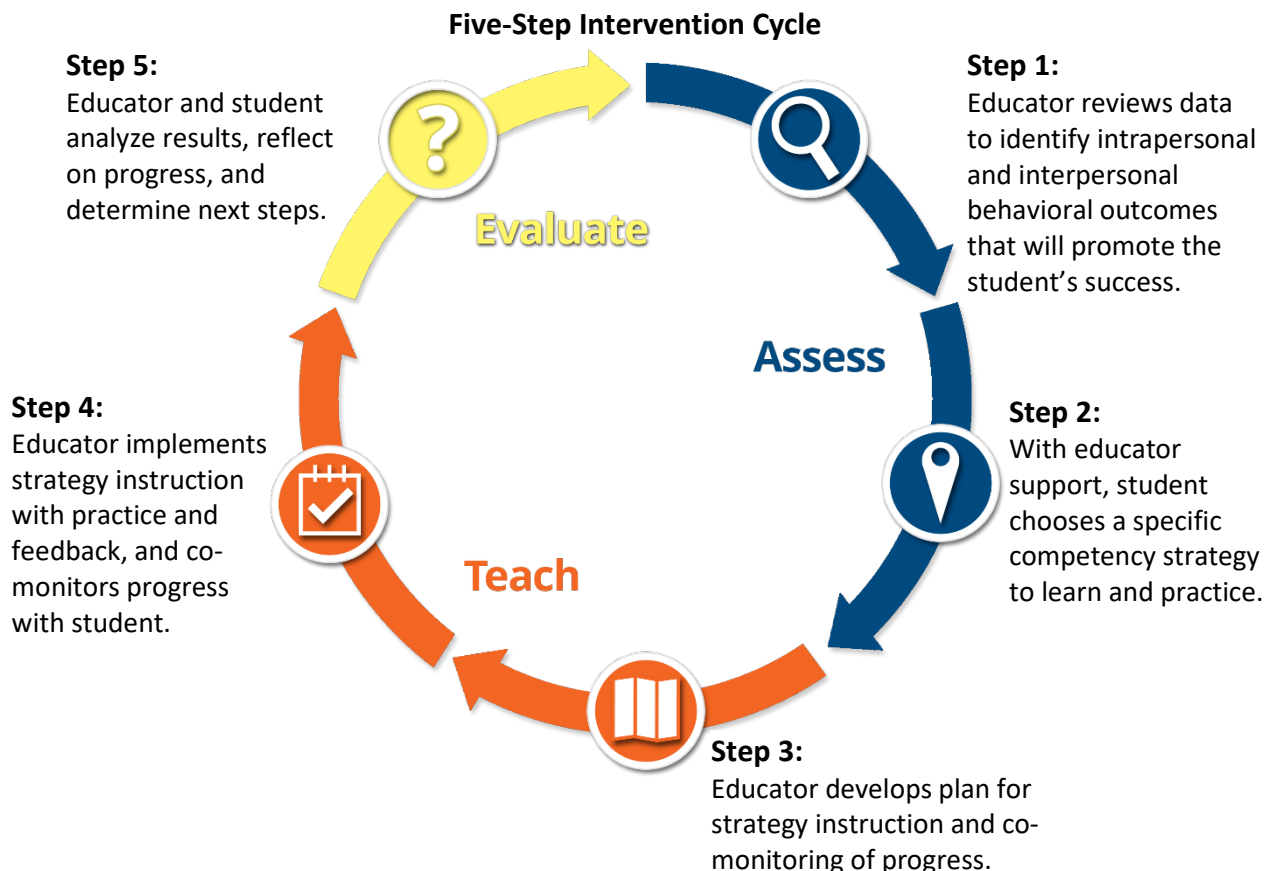# Five-Step Intervention Cycle: Assertiveness Vignette

The College & Career Competency Framework provides K–12 curricula for developing self-efficacy, self-regulation, assertiveness, and conflict management. These curricula, developed by Drs. Gaumer Erickson and Noonan, at the University of Kansas, support educators and families in developing resilient learners who collaborate to expand skills, express their wants and needs respectfully, and apply strategies to self-regulate and persevere. Instructional activities and facilitated practice develop students' self-efficacy, self-regulation, assertiveness, and conflict management. Educators are supported through professional learning and coaching from recognized trainers to structure tiered supports matched to the needs of each student.

In addition to the K–12 curricula designed for all students, individualized support and specialized instruction are provided to students who need additional guidance to build fluency and independence in intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. The following five-step intervention cycle can be applied when teaching a student to apply specific strategies that lead toward a desired outcome. Throughout this guidance, a vignette is included to illustrate how to structure and implement individualized interventions. For each step, students should provide input and be empowered to whatever extent is possible. Additionally, while we illustrate connections to the Individualized Education Program (IEP), the steps apply to planning interventions for any student.

Five-Step Intervention Cycle

Step 5: Educator and student analyze results, reflect on progress, and determine next steps.

Evaluate

Step 1: Educator reviews data to identify intrapersonal and interpersonal behavioral outcomes that will promote the student's success.

Assess

Step 4: Educator implements strategy instruction with practice and feedback, and co-monitors progress with student.

Teach

Step 2: With educator support, student chooses a specific competency strategy to learn and practice.

Step 3: Educator develops plan for strategy instruction and co-monitoring of progress.

Step 1: Educator reviews data to identify intrapersonal and interpersonal behavioral outcomes that will promote the student's success.

Every person has a wide range of intra- and interpersonal skills that they are working to refine. With this first step, we review data from various sources (e.g., our own observations, student self-assessment, and family input) to identify a desired behavioral outcome that will help the student better engage in learning.

Some examples of desired behavioral outcomes include:
- [Name] respectfully expresses feeling and asks for help when frustrated with new learning.
- [Name] demonstrates nonverbal assertive communication when talking with teachers.
- [Name] independently completes math assignments by using examples and notes.
- [Name] self-calms when switching classes.
- [Name] focuses on work during independent work time.

While educator observation alone can identify a desired student outcome, additional data from students and families can help to increase buy-in and target areas for growth. Common data sources include student input, family input, educator observation, and school behavior data. We'll discuss each of these data sources.

Student Input. The College & Career Competency Framework curricula incorporate student reflection measures (K–12) and knowledge assessments (intermediate and secondary levels) for all four foundational competencies (i.e., self-efficacy, self-regulation, assertiveness, and conflict management). These assessments illustrate student input for easy-to-interpret results which can be discussed with students. Assessment technical guides at www.cccstudent.org outline each student assessment and provide instructions for administering and interpreting the results.

Family Input. The *Skills That Matter: Family Reflection* asks parents to reflect on their child's demonstration of intra- and interpersonal behaviors. This reflection can be completed online (see www.cccstudent.org for assessment details) with results that are easily interpreted and can be discussed with the family and student.

Educator Observation. Educators structure their assessment of the student through competency-specific performance-based observations. Data from performance-based observations provide both a baseline and a mechanism for measuring growth over time. Protocols for performance-based observations are included in the College & Career Competency Framework curricula, and data can be entered and illustrated online (see www.cccstudent.org).

School Behavior Data. Behavioral data also support prioritization of intra- and interpersonal skills. Such data may include office disciplinary referrals, attendance, on-time homework completion, behavioral universal screening, and engagement in learning.

Let's walk through an example for our student, Amber. Amber is a strong-willed, expressive student who enjoys school and being with her friends. However, she is often dominant and bossy and has hurt other students' feelings. She at times expresses strong negative opinions about class activities and has difficulty showing empathy for others, which can result in bullying behaviors.

Amber's class is learning assertiveness, and her self-reflection questionnaire showed that she answered *Not Like Me* to the following items:

- I try to understand how others feel even when they feel different than me.
- I am careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings, even when they have been hurtful toward me.

And *Very Like Me* to these items:

- When I have strong feelings or opinions, I blurt them out.
- When someone says something I don't like, I stop listening to them.
- If I need help with something, it's hard for me to wait my turn.

Amber's father completed the *Skills That Matter: Family Reflection* and rated the following assertiveness indicators as low areas for Amber:

- My child respectfully asks for what they want.
- My child listens to the thoughts and ideas of others even when they disagree.

Student records show that Amber's attendance is good. She has no disciplinary referrals; however, she has been referred to the counselor on multiple occasions for disrespectful communication in class and interactions where peers felt bullied by Amber. She is an active participant in class and is highly engaged. However, if she doesn't like an activity, she blurts out her opinion with statements like "This is stupid." Three of Amber's friends have cried and talked to the school counselor about Amber saying mean things like "I'll only be your friend if … " or "You look ugly in that outfit."

Amber's language arts teacher rated her proficiency in assertive behaviors on the *College & Career Competency Framework Performance-Based Observation*. Indicators for which Amber's behavior was rated at the *Beginning* stage (not yet able to demonstrate without scaffolding) included:

- Respectfully expresses basic feelings and preferences (Strategy 4, **voice my feelings**).
- Demonstrates assertive communication during collaborative learning (Strategy 9, **do my part**).

After reviewing the data, Amber's counselor identifies the desired behavioral outcome: *When sharing opinions, Amber will pause to think about how her words might make others feel, and then share her perspective while respecting the opinions of others.*

To summarize, Step 1 focuses on reviewing data to identify behavioral outcomes that will promote the student's success. Data from educator observations and other available sources are reviewed to determine the desired student behavioral outcome. If the intervention is part of a student's IEP, a synopsis of the data is added to the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) section.

Step 1 Task List:

- Gather and review intra- and interpersonal data.
- Identify the desired student behavioral outcome.

Step 2: With educator support, student chooses a competency strategy to learn and practice.

In Step 2, educators consider the data gathered in Step 1, prioritize one competency which is likely to lead toward the desired behavioral outcome, and review the ten strategies for that competency (i.e., self-efficacy, self-regulation, assertiveness, conflict management). While the competency is chosen by the educator, to best impact the desired behavior, the competency strategy should be selected by the student, with support if needed.

The educator and student discuss the student's strengths and the desired behavior outcome from Step 1. Then they discuss the strategies for the targeted competency, and the student identifies one strategy for focus (e.g., *focus on my effort*, *try again*, *calm myself*). While several competency strategies may emerge as important, the student should begin with focusing on one strategy. With educator support, the student then creates an I-statement, articulating the strategy they will learn and the situation in which they will apply the learning.

Some examples of student I-statements include:
- I will *voice my feelings* respectfully when frustrated with new learning.
- I will *show respect without words* when talking with teachers.
- When learning gets hard in math, I will *try again* with different ways to solve a problem.
- When switching classes, I will *calm myself*.
- During centers, I will *break it down* and think about steps I can take to stay focused.

Amber's self-reflection, the parent's assessment, and Amber's behavior in class show a priority for the interpersonal competency assertiveness. In a discussion with the counselor, Amber explains that she is frustrated when others get mad at her—she is just telling the truth. The counselor shares some of Amber's strengths, including actively participating in class and being friends with many students. The counselor explains the desired behavioral outcome: *When sharing opinions, Amber will pause to think about how her words might make other feel, and then share her perspective while respecting the opinions of others*.

Amber agrees that she wants this outcome. Together, they review the Assertiveness Strategies, and Amber decides to start by focusing on *show empathy*, and once she feels confident in this strategy, she will also include the strategy *speak my mind and be kind*. With support from the counselor, Amber writes the Assertiveness I-statement:
When I want to share my opinion, I will first *show empathy* [Assertiveness Strategy 3].

Interventions do not replace classroom instruction—interventions are additional instruction and support specially designed to meet a student's needs. Class-wide instruction should continue to guide all students in learning and practicing intra- and interpersonal strategies. Additionally, when classroom issues emerge, class-wide reteaching and guided practice (sometimes referred to as class-wide interventions) will support all students. For example, if you hear students using negative self-talk, focusing on reteaching the Self-Efficacy Strategy *say, "I haven't learned _____ yet"* will benefit all students. Learning about growth versus fixed mindsets and ways to reframe negative self-talk increases students' confidence in themselves. A class-wide We-statement might be *When learning gets hard, we will say, "I haven't learned it yet."*

As mentioned earlier, Amber's class is learning Assertiveness Strategies. Amber's teacher plans to continue to guide students in all strategies, but she wants to particularly focus class-wide on the strategy *identify communication types*. The class will identify situations where they or their classmates have difficulty being assertive, and then they will discuss and act out passive, assertive, and aggressive responses to these situations. As a class, they will discuss the benefits of assertive communication. When a student communicates passively or aggressively, she will ask the student to pause and rephrase the statement to be assertive. The teacher thinks this will help all students be more aware of their communication, and in particular, she thinks this increased awareness will help Amber think about and adjust her communication to be more assertive.

Step 2 Task List:
- Facilitate student reflection on their strengths and challenges.
- Support the student to identify one competency strategy for focus.
- Guide the student to determine how the competency and strategy apply to them personally by determining the situation in which they will use the strategy.

Step 3: Educator develops plan for strategy instruction and co-monitoring of progress.

In Step 3, educators think through how they will teach the student the competency strategy. Like any content, students learn strategies through a process of initial instruction, guided collaborative learning, and independent practice with feedback. This step also includes creating ways to co-monitor student progress, such as student logs and daily check-ins. When planning to teach a competency strategy, educators need to consider skill acquisition, skill performance, skill fluency, and the environmental contexts that promote the skill. We'll discuss each of these elements.

Skill Acquisition. First the student must learn the strategy—what it looks like, how to do it, when to use it. If we look at Amber's I-statement, we'll need to help Amber learn techniques to *show empathy*. Amber will also need to notice when her communication lacks empathy. The [Assertiveness Lessons](#) include numerous instructional activities that teach students the strategy *show empathy* (see the [Assertiveness Strategies—Instruction Guide](#)). Similar instruction guides are available for self-efficacy, self-regulation, and conflict management.

Skill Performance. The student will need guided practice of the strategy with skill demonstration. At this practice phase, the student requires modeling and prompting. For example, Amber could analyze a scenario each day and discuss what she could say or do to *show empathy*. When Amber shares opinions in class, her teacher will remind her to be assertive and when needed will ask Amber to rephrase aggressive statements to be assertive.

Skill Fluency. A skill isn't a competency until we can apply the strategy when we need it. For Amber, once she knows techniques for *showing empathy* and can apply these techniques when prompted, she is ready to independently determine her empathy responses. This is easier said than done. Think of it this way—we know what healthy eating looks like, but we still often make choices that don't fit our own definition of healthy eating. All behavior changes are challenging,

and perfection isn't the standard that we should hold ourselves to. Incorporating student self-monitoring will increase the student's ownership and build the student's ability to apply other strategies in the future.

To build Amber's skill fluency, we can help her set up a daily log where she records her empathy responses. In this log, she will describe the situation; rate herself as *Showing Empathy*, *Sort of Showing Empathy*, or *Not Showing Empathy*; and then describe what she did well or will do differently next time. Adults can provide prompts and model empathy. Amber's teachers can also provide reinforcement by noting when Amber ***shows empathy***. Daily check-ins and reflection will help Amber be more aware of her progress.

Skill fluency should also be monitored through performance-based observation and other performance metrics. For Amber, these metrics might include teacher observation, the number of prompts from teachers asking Amber to rephrase statements to be more assertive, and referrals to the counselor for behavior that hurts the feelings of others.

Environmental Context. The environment can promote strategy performance and fluency, or it can hinder independence. We'll talk more about fidelity of implementation in the next section, but at the planning stage, we need to make sure that the educators are on board and that the environment is conducive to the planned intervention.

Part of skill development is helping Amber notice when her communication is aggressive or disrespectful and then asking her to rephrase the statement to ***show empathy***. Educators can support individual students in applying the techniques and may even find that guiding all students to ***show empathy*** can help students by creating an environment that honors the perspectives of everyone.

To help notice the incremental learning and application, consider outlining benchmarks of progress. For Amber's I-statement, benchmarks might include:
- Amber pauses and thinks about the feelings of others before stating her opinion.
- Amber identifies at least three techniques for ***showing empathy*** after thinking about others' feelings (e.g., asking others about their thoughts and feelings, identifying the feelings of others, summarizing what others have shared, asking for clarification).
- Amber identifies ways to ***show empathy*** within common scenarios.
- With prompting, Amber rephrases aggressive statements to be more assertive by ***showing empathy***.
- Amber increases her independence in ***showing empathy***, resulting in fewer teacher prompts and fewer complaints from peers.
- Amber progresses in ***showing empathy*** as measured by
  - self-monitoring completed by Amber daily and discussed with the school counselor (daily check-ins until she reaches the skill fluency stage and then weekly check-ins) and
  - performance-based observations conducted by the classroom teachers every week until Amber reaches the skill fluency stage.

Step 3 Task List:
- Plan the instructional process, including skill acquisition, skill performance, skill fluency, and environmental contexts.
- With the student, plan how the student will log strategy use and debrief with an adult.
- Outline how incremental progress will be monitored.

Step 4: Educator implements strategy instruction with practice and feedback, and co-monitors progress with student.

In Step 4, educators focus on providing quality competency instruction on the strategy. Over time, they facilitate student understanding of the competency strategy, guide practice, prompt strategy use in authentic environments, and provide feedback. Throughout the instructional process, educators co-monitor progress with the student and facilitate reflection while reteaching as necessary. In short, in Step 4, you take the actions that you planned in Step 3.

For Amber, aspects of her strategy use are monitored daily and weekly. Daily within the skill acquisition and skill performance stages, Amber meets with the teacher or trained adult at the beginning of her day to review a scenario and how she could *show empathy*. They then meet at the end of the day to review her strategy log and discuss challenges. This check-in is completed alongside skill development instruction.

Weekly, Amber's teacher reflects on Amber's strategy use by determining Amber's level of independence on the performance-based observation rubric for the indicator *Shows empathy for others when opinions differ (Strategy 3, show empathy)*. Together, Amber and her teacher determine completion of each benchmark, reflect on progress, discuss adjustments, and reteach when needed.
- Amber pauses and thinks about the feelings of others before stating her opinion.
- Amber identifies at least three techniques for *showing empathy* after thinking about other's feelings (e.g., asking others about their thoughts and feelings, identifying the feelings of others, summarizing what others have shared, asking for clarification).
- Amber identifies ways to *show empathy* within common scenarios.
- With prompting, Amber rephrases aggressive statements to be more assertive by *showing empathy*.
- Amber increases her independence in *showing empathy*, resulting in fewer teacher prompts and fewer complaints from peers.

As needed, the teacher may adjust the environment or classroom rituals to support the student's strategy development. For example, the teacher might guide all students in *showing empathy* regarding classroom situations at the beginning of class. Or the teacher might create a nonverbal signal with Amber to help her notice when her communication is coming across as aggressive.

Step 4 Task List:
- Provide instruction that facilitates student understanding of the strategy.
- Guide practice in the strategy over time in authentic environments.
- Provide feedback to students throughout their practice of the strategy.

- Co-monitor progress with the student and facilitate reflection.
- Reteach as necessary.

Step 5: Educator and student analyze results, reflect on progress, and determine next steps.

In the final step, the student has learned and practiced the strategy and can demonstrate it in the context outlined in the student's I-statement. It is time to celebrate progress. Educators support the student in articulating what they have learned and how the strategy has helped them. The teacher and student review data together that demonstrates this progress.

Amber reflects on her I-statement, *When I want to share my opinion, I will first* **show empathy** *[Assertiveness Strategy 3]*. She describes how she now tries to pause before sharing her opinion and thinks about what the other person might be feeling. She asks questions to understand and **show empathy**. Amber describes how it's still not easy, but she likes that her friends don't get mad at her very often anymore.

Next, the teacher and student identify supports to help the student sustain use of the strategy with ongoing reflection. They may also consider generalizing the strategy by applying it to additional environments. For example, Amber will reflect on how she **showed empathy** weekly instead of daily. Her teachers will continue to prompt her to rephrase any aggressive or disrespectful statements.

Finally, the teacher and, ideally, the student's family support the student in determining whether another strategy would help the student continue to make further progress in the desired behavior outcome.

Amber and the counselor discuss the desired behavior outcome, *When sharing opinions, Amber will pause to think about how her words might make others feel, and then share her perspective while respecting the opinions of others*. Amber reflects on how **showing empathy** has helped her have better friendships. She says that it's still hard work and that she wants to focus on **speak my mind and be kind** next.

The cycle is ready to repeat, building upon and maintaining the newly learned strategy.

Step 5 Task List:
- Celebrate the student's growth.
- Identify supports to help the student sustain use of the strategy with ongoing reflection. Generalize the strategy to additional environments.
- If beneficial, support the student to determine additional competency strategy for focus.

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